

# DAILY NEWS

## Correcting course on Iran: Trump has left us painfully isolated; it's time to reorient our foreign policy

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FILE - US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo (L) and US National Security advisor John Bolton speak before a press conference in June 2018. (NICHOLAS KAMM/AFP/Getty Images)

Last week, Germany, France and Britain launched their own payment channel to help European companies bypass U.S. sanctions on Iran. The channel, known as INSTEX (Instrument in Support of Trade Exchanges), is meant to facilitate legitimate trade with

Iran and persuade the country to continue fulfilling its commitments to the nuclear deal. Our own intelligence agencies have once again confirmed Tehran's full compliance with the agreement.

President Trump withdrew from the deal in May 2018 and reimposed sanctions against Iran several months later, opening up a range of negative consequences for U.S. national interests. These consequences are now coming into clear view, shaping a future that carries serious national security implications.

**1. Withdrawing from the deal has left the U.S. isolated and weakened the international consensus on Iran.** In sharp contrast to President Obama's coalition-based approach, today the U.S. stands almost alone. Our major NATO allies — Britain, France and Germany — along with the EU, China and Russia remain committed to the agreement. The re-imposition of sanctions has had a chilling effect, compelling businesses to fall in line with U.S. policy. But the basis for their compliance is better described as an anemic "coalition of the coerced" than a robust partnership with the U.S.

**2. Withdrawing from the deal is seriously damaging the transatlantic alliance.** President Trump is strong-arming our European allies to act against their own economic and security interests. The fact that our allies are actively working to circumvent the U.S. Treasury on sanctions should ring the alarm that something is seriously wrong. The Europeans are coming to view the U.S.'s readiness to sanction and disrupt the interests of its closest partners as a key feature of Trump's "America First" doctrine.

**3. Withdrawing from the deal risks undercutting the U.S. position in the global financial system.** The impact of an overly aggressive U.S. sanctions policy stands to weaken the primacy of the U.S. dollar in world financial markets. In addition to the Europeans' INSTEX, the Chinese and Russians are pursuing alternatives to the dollar-based system to facilitate financial transactions with Iran. Through the misuse of sanctions as a weapon of U.S. foreign policy, we are jeopardizing our own economic interests and influence.

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**4. Withdrawing from the deal has put U.S. credibility on the line.** Reneging on the Iran agreement is impeding efforts to reach a deal with North Korea. Following through on the economic benefits we committed to deliver to Tehran would have clearly demonstrated to Pyongyang that sanctions would be lifted as deal obligations are met. Retreating from our commitments is also hindering the prospects for diplomacy to resolve a range of conflicts in the Middle East, where the U.S.'s strategy has been reduced to principally an anti-Iran, anti-ISIS policy.

Looking ahead, several potential future scenarios need to be considered:

A likely scenario, at least for the near term, sees the Europeans continuing to work with Iran to preserve the deal by providing enough economic benefits to overcome hardline opposition in Tehran. But current indicators show that these economic incentives are bound to fall well short of Iranian expectations. The key question is: Can the deal be sustained until the Trump administration disappears and a new President open to a pro-deal approach is elected?

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In another more ominous scenario, Iran decides to press ahead with its nuclear program, increasing the levels of uranium enrichment and advancing the capacity of centrifuges beyond what's allowed in the agreement. Such developments facilitated by U.S. violation of the deal, would heighten the chances of a military conflict by design or miscalculation. A third scenario involves the U.S. combining escalating pressure with the pursuit of a new deal with Iran, potentially seeking others to join in such an arrangement to control worldwide enrichment as well as limits on ballistic missiles. The problem is that the current U.S. approach of all pressure — and no innovative thinking to reach a mutually

acceptable negotiated outcome that would be acceptable to the Iranians — has no chance of succeeding.

Trump's violation of the Iran deal without a viable backup plan has turned a diplomatic win into an unnecessary crisis, casting us as an unreliable partner and making us less secure. Recent reports that National Security Advisor John Bolton asked the Pentagon for military options on striking Iran, along with Trump's admission that he wants to keep U.S. troops in Iraq to "watch" Iran, make the situation all the more alarming.

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The likelihood of the Trump administration pursuing diplomacy aimed at delivering the only sensible U.S. objective — an Iran without nuclear weapons and part of the international community — is as elusive as ever. It's long past time for Congress to exercise its oversight role and initiate a thorough review of the administration's dangerous Iran policy.

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