The Trump Administration’s Failed Policy toward Iran: Conflicts of Interest

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Abstract

President Trump’s 2016 campaign promises were focused on changes to immigration, trade, taxes and foreign policy. The most important promise that President Trump has not yet been able to deliver on for his supporters is arguably Iran’s dossier. He promised to renegotiate the Iran deal for a “better deal.” Therefore, The United States withdrew from the Iran nuclear deal on May 8, 2018. The Iran nuclear deal, officially named the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), is an agreement between Iran and the P5+1 (the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council—China, France, Russia, United Kingdom, United States—plus Germany) reached on July 14, 2015, during the Obama administration. Under the agreement, Iran dismantled much of its nuclear program and gave international inspectors extensive access to its facilities in exchange for relief from economic sanctions. Although there are disagreements within the Trump administration, what they really seek to advance through a new deal with Iran is limitation of Iran’s nuclear activity, as well as their missile program and regional influence. Whether the United States’ withdrawal from JCPOA advances the goal of a renegotiated agreement or amounts to a setback is not yet clear. In this paper, I argue why President Trump’s policy toward Iran is a failed policy.

There has been a fundamental conflict of interest between President’s Trump’s position on Iran and his other plans for the Middle East. On foreign policy, President Trump promised more initiatives than just renegotiating the Iran deal. President Trump has repeatedly promised to extract the United States from costly foreign conflicts and bring U.S. troops home from conflicted areas in which there were no viable economic benefits for the United States. The plan to pull out troops from Syria, Afghanistan, and probably Iraq would advance Iran’s regional activity and influence. It is also necessary to say that combating and containing terrorist groups
like ISIS in the Middle East needs a level of cooperation between United States and Iran, particularly if the United States wants to leave fighting with terrorist groups to the countries in the region.

Additionally, I compare the Obama and Trump administrations’ policies toward Iran’s nuclear program. I categorize the administrations’ differences into two main issues. First, while President Obama believed in multilateral cooperation among global powers to contain Iran’s nuclear program through tough economic sanctions, President Trump pursues unilateral action to force Iran to come to the table for a negotiation. Second, While President Obama differentiated between Iranian domestic factions and top decision-makers according to their beliefs and interests, President Trump views Iranian top decision-makers as a singular entity without any difference in their interests and desires about Iran’s domestic and regional activities. By pursuing a plan of strategic patience, the Obama administration’s policy toward Iran in general, and particularly on Iran’s nuclear program, engaged with and empowered so-called reformist and moderate figures in Iran. The strategic patience policy was a clear break with the previous U.S. administrations’ robust policy, in which the United States demanded Iran to change its behavior before any serious negotiation. However, the Trump administration’s behavior and policy toward Iran have united Iranian top decision-makers to resist and contain the United States’ pressure by all means, including promoting the nation’s nuclear program to a more advanced level than 2015 when JCPOA was signed. These developments would make more difficult for the Trump administration to reach a “better deal.”