



IRAN DEMOCRACY MONITOR

The American Foreign Policy Council's Review of
Radicalism and Reform in Islamic Republic of Iran

Iran Democracy Monitor: No. 185

May 8, 2018

Related Categories: Democracy and Governance; Economic Sanctions; Human Rights and Humanitarian Issues; Islamic Extremism; Terrorism; Warfare; Iran

On May 8th, via a televised public address, President Trump formally announced his administration's decision to end American participation in the 2015 nuclear agreement with Iran, formally known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, or JCPOA. The decision, which has been hotly debated within the Administration for over a year, comes on the heels of recent staffing changes at the upper echelons of the White House, and follows the President's announcement, in October 2017, of a new, more "comprehensive" approach toward the Islamic Republic. The decision carries momentous consequences for the future of American policy toward Iran. What follows is a brief snapshot of U.S. decisionmaking relating to the JCPOA, as well as a summary of Iranian reactions and responses.

U.S. POLICY: BACK TO SANCTIONS...

In tandem with his announcement of America's withdrawal from the JCPOA, President Trump signed a national security directive authorizing the re-imposition of all sanctions on Iran that had been waived by the Obama administration as part of negotiations over the 2015 agreement. Pursuant to the U.S. Treasury Department, these will include, *inter alia*, sweeping sanctions on Iran's Central Bank, its shipping and energy sectors, and on foreign companies and entities doing business with broad swathes of the Iranian economy. All of these steps, and others, will be reimposed following a brief grace period (of either 90 or 180 days) designed to allow companies to "wind down" their business dealings in Iran. (U.S. Department of the Treasury, May 8, 2018)

...AND PLANS FOR A BROADER STRATEGY

In tandem with the President's announcement of his administration's withdrawal from the JCPOA, the White House issued an official memorandum outlining its strategic objectives vis-a-vis the Islamic Republic. "It is the policy of the United States that Iran be denied a nuclear weapon and intercontinental ballistic missiles; that Iran's network and campaign of regional aggression be neutralized; to disrupt, degrade, or deny the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps and its surrogates access to the resources that sustain their destabilizing activities; and to counter Iran's aggressive development of missiles and other asymmetric and conventional weapons capabilities," the memo lays out. (White House, May 8, 2018)

MEANWHILE, IN IRAN, OFFICIAL ANGER...

Trump's announcement drew immediate and severe criticism from Iran's leadership. Iran's Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei, called Trump's statement "vulgar and commonplace," and appealed to national unity in resisting America's "threats." "The US wishes to tell the Islamic Republic what to do, but the Iranians are an independent nation and Americans cannot stand this," Khamenei said.

Other Iranian officials have signaled that Iran's response to America's pullout from the JCPOA could include a reinvigoration of the country's nuclear program. "Trump's abandoning of the nuclear deal was a diplomatic show.... Iran has no obligation to honor its commitments under the current situation," Ali Larijani, the speaker of Iran's parliament, or *majles*, has told that chamber. "It is obvious that Trump only understands the language of force."

Larijani's colleagues have been more direct. A number of Iranian lawmakers are reported to have lit an American flag on fire on the podium of the country's parliament hall in a public protest of the Trump administration's decision. (*Radio Farda*, May 9, 2018; *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, May 9, 2018; JNS, May 9, 2018)

...AND GRASSROOTS FERMENT

Ordinary Iranians, by contrast, are expressing worries over the practical consequences of the deal. Some have expressed fears over the potential worrying of Iran's already difficult domestic economic situation, while others have signaled that they plan to emigrate from the Islamic Republic in the face of potential renewed Iranian-American conflict.

Meanwhile, human rights activists and campaigners are seizing the moment to call for better treatment from the Iranian regime. "Mr. Islamic Republic, now that you're under immense external pressure, now that the economy is imploding, treat people well inside the country," one journalist has appealed to Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei via Twitter. "Release political prisoners, respect people's social freedoms, particularly women. Counter systematic economic corruption. This is the only way out." Others have done the same; the regime must "announce a public amnesty, free the [political] prisoners, control the executions, banish the extremists," Iranian human rights activist (and former political prisoner) Emad Baghi has urged via messaging app Telegram. (*Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, May 9, 2018; *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, May 9, 2018)