DEBATE: The US Withdrawal from the JCPOA: Where Do We Go from Here?

By Dr. George N. Tzogopoulos *May 25, 2018*

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Q: On May 8, 2018, President Donald Trump announced the withdrawal of the US from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, or JCPOA. His intention is to impose the highest possible level of economic sanctions on Iran and perhaps sanction other nations that assist Tehran in its quest for nuclear weapons. The "nixing" of the deal might be followed by a "fixing" of the deal. BESA joins the debate by posing the question: After the US withdrawal from the JCPOA, where do we go from here?

Respondents: Emily B. Landau, Michael Rubin, Benny Miller, Richard Goldberg, Seth J. Frantzman, Doron Itzchakov



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The next chapter in the Iran nuclear saga, after President Trump's withdrawal from the JCPOA, will depend on the decisions made by the parties that agreed to the deal. At present it is clear that Iran desperately wants to keep the deal – not a surprise taking into account that the JCPOA has major benefits for it, while requiring only minimal nuclear concessions – and the European states would like to go along, as would the Russians and Chinese. The Europeans are focused more on business opportunities than nonproliferation, and want the US to allow them to move forward with economic deals with Iran. But this is at direct odds with the aim of President Trump – namely, to implement the harshest sanctions on Iran, with the hope that renewed severe economic pressure will help in ultimately renegotiating a better nuclear deal.

There is one significant piece missing from the puzzle of the past months, and that is what transpired between the US and the Europeans in their attempts to come to

agreement on strengthening the deal. How committed were the parties to this effort? The Europeans only grudgingly agreed to enter discussions in February, after Trump threatened to leave the deal – but then they complained they had done "everything possible" to answer Trump's demands, but he remained set on withdrawing. Is that true? Were the parties close to agreement? What was the content of their "fix"? And what were the remaining sticking points? Unfortunately, the answers are not available. If there's any hope of getting a better deal – either strengthened or renegotiated – the answers to these questions are crucial, and should be public knowledge. Right now it looks like the only party that is focused on nuclear nonproliferation is the Trump administration, while the others are cynically brushing nuclear dangers to the sidelines in favor of economic gain.

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