

Now what? Trump could make a deal with Europe regarding Iran

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Ever eager to fulfill a campaign promise to his base, Donald Trump has kept his word: he has announced that the United States would [withdraw from the 2015 Iran nuclear deal](#), formally known by its cumbersome title, Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, or JCPOA. In so doing, he will reimpose the sanctions that were waived as a result of the deal, to include sanctions against third parties doing business with Iran.

The result is a triumph of sorts for Benjamin Netanyahu, [who revealed a new cache of Iranian documents](#) that belied Iran's representations to the International Atomic Energy Agency and its six negotiating partners. Though Trump was Netanyahu's primary audience, the Israeli prime minister also was targeting his country's voting public at a time when his political fortunes seem to be [increasingly mired in a bevy of scandals](#). A jump in his approval ratings indicates that he successfully convinced Israelis of his indispensability as a "security" prime minister as he was urging the president of the United States to back away from the JCPOA.

Two critical factors could well complicate Trump's decision, however. Trump seems to believe that his action against Iran strengthens his negotiating hand against North Korea. The opposite may be the case. North Korea's Kim Jong Un may well conclude that Trump's revocation of the JCPOA is yet another example of American perfidy, as was its treatment of Libya's Muammar Gaddafi, whose willingness to terminate his nuclear weapons program [cost him both his regime and his life](#). America's walking away from the Iran deal thus makes it considerably harder to consummate a similar, or even more restrictive, agreement with the North Korean leader.

Second, America's European allies may well move ahead [to preserve the deal](#) without American participation, much as the 11 members of the Trans Pacific Partnership [retained their agreement](#) even after Trump pulled America out of that deal. Were Trump to impose new and tougher sanctions on third-party firms that would continue to trade with Iran, he can expect a serious backlash from the European Union, especially France and Germany, whose trade with Iran far exceeds that of the United States and whose Airbus, in which the United Kingdom, Spain and China also have a stake, is [poised to seize the Iranian market from Boeing](#).

France and Britain are America's leading security partners, joining American forces in the [attack on Syria's chemical facilities](#) and partnering with the United States in operations against ISIS in Iraq, Syria and Africa. Though its defense budget falls short of NATO's target of 2 percent of its GDP, [Germany remains a NATO lynchpin](#) and key player in any effort to head off a trade war between the European Union and the United States. If Trump carries out his threat to impose sanctions that would ensnare European companies trading with Iran, he could jeopardize NATO's cohesion in the face of an increasingly aggressive Russia.

In any event, it is unclear how terminating the agreement alters the Iranian-Israeli balance of power. Netanyahu's own security officials [were not nearly as vociferously opposed](#) to the JCPOA as he was. Though they rightly criticized it for its early release of funds to Tehran, for sunset provisions that are far too short, and for the absence of both constraints on missile development and access to Iranian military facilities, their primary and immediate focus is on [Iranian activities in Syria](#). In particular, they worry that should Iran succeed in its efforts to establish permanent bases in Syria, it would open a new and dangerous front against Israel. The JCPOA, as bad as it seems to be for Israel, is simply not their most pressing concern.

Trump has yet to implement his withdrawal from the Iran deal. He can rethink how he might avoid a clash with Europe. He could exempt European firms from sanctions in much the same manner as he has exempted several nations from the tariffs on goods they export to America. Beyond that, he should reconsider his rejection of the approach that French President Emmanuel Macron has proposed — which is [to expand the agreement](#) to resolve the issues that the Obama administration, in its zeal to conclude the negotiation with Iran, was reluctant to address.

Iran has said that it will not negotiate over these issues, but that is but an opening gambit. [President Trump](#) claims that he is a master of the “art of the deal.” Now is the time to demonstrate that he is indeed a deal-maker, rather than just a deal-breaker.

Published by The Hill.