

The EU Will Not Stand by Iran

While European leaders have made noises that they will defy Donald Trump's reneging on the Iran nuclear deal and resist U.S. sanctions, in the end the Europeans will give in to U.S., argues Alexander Mercouris in this commentary.

By Alexander Mercouris



Ever since Donald Trump's announcement that the U.S. would pull out of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action ("JCPOA") with Iran and would unilaterally impose across-the-board sanctions on that country, a procession of European leaders including the leaders of the U.S.'s most powerful European allies – Britain, France and Germany – have publicly declared their intention to stand by the JCPOA.

There is also brave talk of the EU creating safeguards for European companies which in defiance of the U.S. continue to trade or do business with Iran.

President Rouhani of Iran – who has a big personal stake in the JCPOA, which he personally negotiated – has for his part said that Iran will for the time being abide by the terms of the JCPOA whilst it waits to see how Europe will react.

In the meantime the talk of the EU standing up to the U.S. over the JCPOA has increased talk – or hope – that a corner in U.S.-EU relations has been turned, and that the EU will henceforth increasingly defy the U.S., making Donald Trump's decision to pull out of the JCPOA a further step in the decline of U.S. power. These words of Craig Murray's may stand as a good example:

"We are yet to see the detail, but by all precedent Trump's Iran sanctions will also sanction third country companies which trade with Iran, at the least through attacking their transactions through U.S. financial institutions and by sanctioning their U.S. affiliates.

But at a time when U.S. share of the world economy and world trade is steadily shrinking, this encouragement to European and Asian companies to firewall and minimise contact with the U.S. is most unlikely to be long term beneficial to the U.S. In particular, in a period where it is already obvious that the years of the U.S. dollar's undisputed dominance as the world currency of reference are drawing to a close, the incentive to employ non-U.S. linked means of financial transaction will add to an already highly significant global trend.

In short, if the U.S. fails to prevent Europe and Asia's burgeoning trade with Iran – and I think they will fail – this moment will be seen by historians as a key marker in U.S. decline as a world power."

I do not share these expectations or these hopes.

Whilst there is no doubt European leaders are deeply shocked by Trump's announcement of a pullout from an international agreement in negotiating which the EU played a large part, I strongly doubt that they will find the courage or the willpower to defy the U.S. by in effect encouraging their companies to continue to do business with Iran.

Market Size Matters

It should be said that even with such active encouragement it is unlikely in my opinion that big European companies like Daimler or Airbus will risk U.S. fines by continuing to do business with Iran. Even if European governments were to guarantee them against any losses caused by such fines, they would worry about losing access to the U.S. market, which utterly dwarfs Iran's.

Given the head of steam that has built up inside the Trump administration against Iran, only if the EU were to threaten publicly to impose reciprocal sanctions on U.S. businesses doing business in the European Single Market might there be a real possibility of the US being deterred from imposing penalties on European companies which continue to do business with Iran.

Frankly I think there is no prospect of that happening because there is no unanimity within the EU behind it (Poland and the Baltic States would certainly oppose it) whilst I am sure that even the big EU states – Britain, Germany, France, and Italy – would in the end be unwilling to risk an all out rupture with the U.S. on such an issue.

Quite simply, though the Europeans are anxious to trade with Iran and to do business with Iran, Iran is not big enough, and trade with Iran is not important enough, to make the risk of an all-out rupture with the U.S. worthwhile.

I am sure that the Europeans – angry though they certainly are – will therefore in the end knuckle down, and do as the U.S. tells them to do.

That almost certainly means that the JCPOA is doomed. The Iranians have made clear that they will not stick with it if there are no economic benefits to them from doing so. I expect within a few weeks – as it becomes increasingly clear that the EU is not prepared to defy the U.S. – that the Iranian nuclear programme will resume with a vengeance.

At that point the danger of a U.S., Israeli and Saudi attack on Iran will grow.

In fact this episode has been a profoundly humiliating one for Europe, exposing the extent of its powerlessness.

Not only did Trump ignore pleas to stand by the JCPOA from the U.S.'s closest European allies – Merkel, Macron and May – but he apparently did not even inform them in advance of the sweeping sanctions on Iran which he had decided to impose.

The European leader who has come out worst from this affair is France's vain and foolish President Emmanuel Macron.

Macron appears to have genuinely believed that he had forged some sort of personal relationship with Trump, and that France's contribution to the U.S.'s recent strike on Syria had made this bond even stronger.

In reality what Macron's recent trip to Washington has done is simply expose the extent to which Trump and the U.S. take neither him nor France seriously. All his pleas were ignored, whilst his fawning behaviour towards Trump apparently went down badly back home.

As for Angela Merkel, she at least avoided in her trip to Washington the disastrous optics of Macron's visit. She is far too skilled and experienced a politician to be caught out in that way.

However no-one should be in any doubt that it is Merkel's disastrous leadership of Germany and of Europe which has brought Europe to this pass.

Merkel, Macron and May, Not Maggie

Ever since she became German Chancellor she has repeatedly sacrificed European and German interests in order to avoid rocking the boat with the U.S.

In July 2014 she took the fateful step of supporting the U.S.'s demand for sectoral sanctions against Russia even though these were contrary to German economic interests, in effect legitimising the U.S. practice of imposing unilateral sanctions without the agreement of the UN Security Council. That makes it all but impossible to see how she can realistically oppose such sanctions now.

The contrast with Margaret Thatcher – who in the 1980s vigorously opposed unilateral U.S. sanctions intended to block Russian pipeline projects – is instructive.

In fact European behaviour over the JCPOA has been a textbook case of appeasement.

Instead of telling Donald Trump that a unilateral withdrawal from the JCPOA would be contrary to international law – which it is – and that Europe would strongly oppose US withdrawal from an international agreement which was not only

working but with which Iran is abiding, European leaders like Merkel, Macron and May instead told Trump that they agreed with him that the JCPOA was in some way “imperfect” and would have to be “improved”.

Needless to say that not only failed to persuade Donald Trump to stick with the JCPOA; it almost certainly emboldened him, convincing him that he is right to pull out of it.

Trump’s decision to pull out of the JCPOA and to impose sweeping unilateral sanctions on Iran will undoubtedly embitter European opinion against the U.S. It is also likely to make Europe more resistant to any further U.S. pressure to ramp up sanctions against Russia. Unlike trade with Iran, European and especially German trade with Russia is indispensable for the European and German economies, which explains why constant U.S. pressure on Germany to pull out of the Nord Stream 2 project has been resisted.

In the longer term this episode probably will harden further the anti-U.S. trend in voting on the part of European electorates, though it is worth pointing out that some of the right wing ‘populist’ European politicians who have benefitted from this process are not friends of Iran’s.

However in the immediate term Iran’s economic salvation as it finds itself under renewed sanctions pressure will come not from Europe but from Russia and China and the other Eurasian states.

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Trump’s War Against Iran

An apparent coordination between Trump leaving the Iran deal and Israeli attacks on Iranian targets in Syria portend an attack on Iran itself, says Eric S. Margolis.

By Eric S. Margolis



Israel attacked alleged Iranian military positions in Syria on Tuesday, just [one hour](#) after Donald Trump pulled the U.S. out of the nuclear deal with Tehran. Are these big steps forward in the plan by Israel’s leader Benjamin Netanyahu and his ally Trump to provoke a

major war with Iran?

The U.S., Saudi Arabia and Israel all recently suffered a stinging defeat in Syria. Their campaign to overthrow the Assad government in Damascus by using the rag-tag ISIS movement, and other jihadist wild men, was defeated by the Syrian Army, backed by Russian air power, Lebanon's Hezbollah and some Iranian militia groups and army advisors.

The alleged Iranian rocket barrage, supposedly in response to Tuesday's attack, was directed at the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights that were illegally annexed and occupied after the 1973 Arab-Israeli War and are still held, legally, as part of Syria. Israel is very nervous about having world attention drawn to its continued occupation of the strategic Golan Heights from which Israeli heavy artillery can reach Damascus.

Israel now claims to have wiped out more than a score of Iranian positions in Syria. As far as we can tell, these were minor logistics or communications facilities, not the backbone of a supposed Iranian offensive against Israel. Iran is in Syria at the invitation of the Syrian government.

Neocon Takeover Complete

But now that the Trump administration has fallen fully under the influence of the pro-war neocons, an attempt to overthrow the Iranian government appears highly likely, using both military intervention and intensified economic warfare.



Iran has been under siege by the U.S. since the American/British installed shah was overthrown by a popular revolution in 1979. The CIA and Britain's MI6 have mounted numerous attempts to oust the Islamic Republic and re-install a client ruler.

Ironically, the 'democratic' western powers – the U.S., Britain and France – rely on medieval monarchs and dictators to control the Mideast while democratic

politicians and movements are ignored, suppressed or overthrown. Iran, in spite of its many rigidities and failings, remains one of the region's more democratic states. Ask our Saudi or Kuwaiti allies when was the last time they held a real election?

The failure of Western intelligence services to provoke serious uprisings in Iran (or Russia), means that the military option is increasingly tempting. This probably means provoking military clashes with Iran in the Gulf leading to full-scale attacks on its nuclear infrastructure and industry. U.S. warplanes and warships are actively probing Iran's borders. In addition, U.S. forces are getting ever more deeply involved in the Yemen War.

When the U.S. last considered a major attack on Iran during the Bush years, the Pentagon (which opposed the idea) estimated it would need 2,800 air strikes against Iran on Day One alone.

Many of the same war party crowd that engineered the 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq are now running the Trump administration. Their goal is to cripple Iran and leave the Mideast to joint Saudi-Egyptian-Israeli control.

Recall President George W. Bush's assertion that once he had crushed Iraq the next targets of U.S. military intervention would be Lebanon, Syria, Iran and then Pakistan.

No Cake Walk

America controls the skies from Morocco to Afghanistan. Iran is vulnerable to raids and small incursions but subjugating this large, mountainous nation of 80 million would be very difficult.

In fact, as an Iranian Revolutionary Guards commander once told me, 'let the Americans invade. They will break their teeth on Iran.' Over-confidence, of course, but he had a point. Fighting on the defensive in urban areas, Iran could offer fierce resistance.

America's imperial machine, like its British Imperial predecessor, likes small, easy wars against small, backwards nations. Iran would be very different.

As we have just seen with North Korea, Iran's best survival strategy, short of security guarantees by Russia and China, would be to race to produce a small number of nuclear weapons to deter attacks by the U.S. and Israel. Europe, which co-sponsored the Iran nuclear act and is now humiliated by Trump reneging on the deal, is too weak and disorganized to guarantee the pact and stand up to Washington. This is too bad. Now would have been a fine time for the EU to

assert its independence from U.S. hegemony and begin building its own independent European military forces.

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