

Trump and Netanyahu Walk in Lockstep on Iran

By [Prof. Marjorie Cohn](#)

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During his presidential campaign and throughout his nine-month presidency, Donald Trump has been fixated on ending the Iran nuclear deal, which he called “one of the worst and most one-sided transactions the United States has ever entered into.”

Under the [2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action](#) (JCPOA), Iran agreed to curtail its nuclear program and in return, it received billions of dollars of relief from punishing sanctions.

Iran has allowed 24-hour inspections by officials from the UN International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). “Iran has gotten rid of all of its highly enriched uranium,” Jessica T. Mathews [wrote](#) in the New York Review of Books.

“It has also eliminated 99 percent of its stockpile of low-enriched uranium.... All enrichment has been shut down at the once-secret, fortified, underground facility at Fordow ... Iran has disabled and poured concrete into the core of its plutonium reactor — thus shutting down the plutonium as well as the uranium route to nuclear weapons. It has provided adequate answers to the IAEA’s long-standing list of questions regarding past weapons-related activities.”

Yukiya Amano, director general of IAEA, refuted Trump’s allegation that Iran had kept IAEA weapons inspectors from entering military bases. Amano said,

“So far, IAEA has had access to all locations it needed to visit. At present, Iran is subject to the world’s most robust nuclear verification regime.”

But in spite of the fact that the IAEA has affirmed eight times — most recently in August — that Iran is meeting its obligations under the deal, Trump refused to certify Iran was in compliance and he decided the deal is not in the US national security interests.

The [US Iran Nuclear Agreement Review Act](#) requires the president to determine every 90 days whether Iran remains compliant with the JCPOA and whether the agreement still serves US interests. Trump reluctantly certified Iran’s compliance in April and July. But on October 13, to the consternation of his secretary of state, secretary of defense, and the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, he refused to certify Iran’s compliance with the deal.

France, Britain, Russia, China, Germany, the United States and Iran are parties to the historic agreement. After Trump’s October 13 announcement, the leaders of Britain, France

and Germany said in a joint statement that retaining the Iran deal “is in our shared national security interest.” They stated,

“The nuclear deal was the culmination of thirteen years of diplomacy and was a major step towards ensuring that Iran’s nuclear program is not diverted for military purposes.”

Trump Walks in Lockstep With Netanyahu

Trump walks in lockstep with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who has consistently opposed the Iran deal. The Christian Zionists, who await Christ’s second coming in Israel, constitute a significant portion of Trump’s base.

After his election but before inauguration, Trump inserted himself into US foreign policy by criticizing Barack Obama for refusing to veto a UN Security Council resolution condemning Israel’s illegal settlement-building.

In 2015, before the US joined the JCPOA, Netanyahu staged an end-run around then-President Obama and directly addressed the US Congress, prevailing upon them to oppose the deal.

“That deal will not prevent Iran from developing nuclear weapons,” Netanyahu told Congress. “It would all but guarantee that Iran gets those weapons — lots of them.”

Netanyahu was thrilled with Trump’s refusal to recertify Iran’s compliance with the JCPOA.

“It’s a very brave decision, and I think it’s the right decision for the world,” Netanyahu said on CBS’s “Face the Nation.”

The American Israel Public Affairs Committee also heralded Trump’s attack on the JCPOA.

The White House [fact sheet](#) outlining Trump’s new Iran policy accuses Iran of “unrelenting hostility to Israel.” In his [speech](#) announcing his refusal to recertify Iran’s compliance with the deal, Trump stated that Iran “remains the world’s leading state sponsor of terrorism, and provides assistance to al Qaeda, the Taliban, Hezbollah, Hamas, and other terrorist networks.”

In fact, Iran and al Qaeda, representing different sects of Islam, are sworn enemies. And after JCPOA was agreed upon in 2015, Noam Chomsky [wrote](#) in TomDispatch:

Other concerns about the Iranian threat include its role as “the world’s leading supporter of terrorism,” which primarily refers to its support for Hezbollah and Hamas. Both of those movements emerged in resistance to US-backed Israeli violence and aggression, which vastly exceeds anything attributed to these villains, let alone the normal practice of the hegemonic power whose global drone assassination campaign alone dominates (and helps to foster) international terrorism.

Trump's refusal to recertify Iran's compliance with the JCPOA came one day after the US announced it would withdraw from the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). The United States accused UNESCO — which promotes worldwide literacy, clean water, women's equality, cultural heritage and sex education — of "anti-Israel bias." Israel said it would pull out of UNESCO as well.

UNESCO incurred the wrath of Israel and the United States in July when it declared the core of Hebron, a city in the Israeli-occupied West Bank, an endangered Palestinian World Heritage site. In 2011, UNESCO was the first UN agency to allow Palestine to become a member, which led to Palestine's upgraded legal status at the General Assembly the following year.

In 2015, UNESCO passed a resolution "strongly" condemning "Israeli aggressions and illegal measures against the freedom of worship and Muslims' access to their holy site." The resolution condemned the "continuous negative impact of the Israeli military confrontations" in Gaza as well.

October 12 was also the day that Hamas and the Palestinian Authority, which control Gaza and the West Bank respectively, announced they were forming a unity government. Netanyahu opposes Palestinian unity. Iran is the only major power in the Middle East calling for the creation of a Palestinian state.

"President Trump and Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu are united in a shared agenda of escalation with Iran, with the goal of enabling increased US and Israeli military aggression," [Jewish Voice for Peace's Executive Director Rebecca Vilkomerson wrote in a statement](#). "Trump's hypocrisy is evident when he talks about caring about everyday Iranians, yet continually tries to ban them from entering the US."

Trump Punts to Congress

After he drove a stake through the heart of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) and later, the Affordable Care Act, Trump punted those issues to Congress to clean up the messes he made. On October 13, he followed suit with JCPOA.

Trump did not urge Congress to reinstate sanctions on Iran, which would completely scuttle the JCPOA. But he placed the onus on Congress to add new terms not covered by the JCPOA, including sunset clauses and ballistic missiles.

If Congress fails to so act, Trump threatened that "the agreement will be terminated ... and our participation can be canceled by me, as president, at any time."

In order to enact Trump's requested legislation, GOP senators would have to muster 60 votes, including eight Democrats, which is unlikely.

Former Secretary of State John Kerry, who spearheaded US diplomacy with Iran, called Trump's decision "a reckless abandonment of facts in favor of ego and ideology from a president who would rather play a high-stakes game of chicken with Congress and with Iran than admit that the nuclear agreement is working."

"Breaking the Iran agreement would not only free Iran from limits placed on its

nuclear program,” Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-Vermont) said, “it would irreparably harm America’s ability to negotiate future nonproliferation agreements. Why would any country in the world sign such an agreement with the United States if they knew that a reckless president might simply discard that agreement a few years later?”

This is particularly disturbing in light of the volatile standoff between the United States and nuclear-armed North Korea.

Iran’s compliance with the JCPOA has made the world a safer place. We must apply pressure on both Congress and the White House to retain the Iran deal.

Marjorie Cohn is professor emerita at Thomas Jefferson School of Law, former president of the National Lawyers Guild, deputy secretary general of the International Association of Democratic Lawyers and a member of the national advisory board of Veterans for Peace. The second, updated edition of her book, [Drones and Targeted Killing: Legal, Moral, and Geopolitical Issues](#), will be published in November. Visit her website: [MarjorieCohn.com](#). Follow her on Twitter: [@MarjorieCohn](#).

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