

The Debate About Iran Is Far From Over

When the Obama administration managed to avoid a congressional vote on its nuclear deal with Iran in the fall of 2015 courtesy of a Democratic Senate filibuster, the argument surrounding the controversial agreement seemed to be over. That's why Democrats are reacting with impatience and skepticism about statements from the Trump administration about re-evaluating the deal.

Yet rather than an impotent gesture designed to distract us from a decision not to tear up the accord that President Donald Trump blasted throughout the 2016 election campaign, the administration's talk of reopening the issue should be taken seriously. Trump's foreign policy team is coming to grips with the fact that everything it hopes to accomplish in the Middle East as well as threats to U.S. security are connected to an Iranian regime immeasurably strengthened—both politically and economically—by Obama's misguided effort to create détente with Tehran.

At best, the pact with Iran merely kicked the can down the road on the nuclear threat, since the accord will expire in a decade. With its advanced nuclear infrastructure and research ability left intact, Iran will soon be in position to achieve its nuclear ambitions while having its economy bolstered by revived ties with the West. Yet by deliberately ignoring Iran's role as the world's leading state sponsor of terrorism, its illegal testing of ballistic missiles and its military adventures in Iran and Yemen, Obama's deal essentially made the Islamist regime even more dangerous to its Arab neighbors, as well as to Israel and the West, while seemingly leaving Trump with no choice but to live with the mess he inherited.

President Barack Obama left office certain that the

unwillingness of America's Western allies and the Russians to think about re-imposing sanctions on Iran essentially foreclosed any effort to revisit the deal. Western Europeans wish to benefit from the lifting of sanctions, while Moscow has worked closely with Iran in Syria as they pursue a joint war to keep the barbarous Bashar al-Assad regime in power. That effort ensures Islamic State will never be defeated, since so long as Assad and his Shi'a Iranian and Hezbollah forces are let loose in the country, the Sunni population will look to the terrorists for protection. Iran's increased ability to deploy its terrorist allies also poses a threat to any effort to promote peace between Israel and the Palestinians, or between Israel and the Arab world.

But those who assumed the Trump administration would give up and deem the problem insoluble may be wrong. Contrary to his critics' assumptions, Trump doesn't need to tear up the deal to attempt to undo its consequences. The pact gave broad leeway to its signatories to interpret its terms. This means Trump can police Iran far more strictly than Obama did. By tightening restrictions on terror groups—such as Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), which has a hand in much of the country's economic activity—the U.S. can start to recreate the leverage over the ayatollahs that Obama threw away in his feckless drive to get a deal at any price.

By designating any company involved with the IRGC as a terrorist entity, the U.S. could use existing American laws to essentially reimpose economic sanctions in a way that would put the brakes on Iran's efforts to reconnect to the global economy. Moreover, though the Europeans and the Russians may not agree, Washington could force the rest of the world to follow its lead by making it clear that those who do business with terrorists won't be able to also conduct commerce with American companies or use U.S. banks.

Support for such a policy should be bipartisan and ought to be strengthened by growing knowledge of Obama's disinterest in

enforcement of the nuclear agreement. Politico's exposé about the prior administration's decision to abandon the curbing of illegal Iranian efforts to procure military and nuclear material makes clear not only the mendacity of Obama's effort to sell the deal, but the need to re-open the issue of sanctions.

Reopening this issue is the only course of action the U.S. can take to curb the growing power of Iran, and to have any hope of creating stability in the Middle East or defeating Islamist terror. Rather than dismissing this as mere Trumpian bluster, those who purport to care about Israel or peace should be applauding the effort to revisit the Iran deal. [eoal}

Jonathan S. Tobin is opinion editor of and a contributing writer for *National Review*.

This article was originally published at . Used with permission.