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US withdrawal from the Iran nuclear deal would spell disaster; EDITOR'S REPLY

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Byline: Robert Fox Defence Editor

DESPITE European efforts to protect the Iran nuclear deal agreed in 2015, its fate remains uncertain. President Trump has until May 12 to determine if the US will stand by or withdraw from the agreement -- a decision that could ignite or prevent yet another crisis in the Middle East.

Notwithstanding Iranian compliance with the terms of the agreement, as verified by the International Atomic Energy Agency, Trump has called it "the worst deal ever". He condemns it for not addressing Tehran's ballistic missile programme, for not curbing Iran's regional involvement beyond its borders, and for not making adequate provision for Iran's nuclear activities beyond the scope of the deal. During his visit to Washington this week, President Macron argued that if the US renews its commitment to the deal, its European allies will be in a strong position to pursue a follow-up agreement on the outstanding issues.

A US withdrawal would have farreaching consequences. It is likely that we would see unnecessary transatlantic tension, a weakening of European leverage in negotiating further with Iran, the wider spread of regional violence and the resumption of Iran's nuclear programme. These are all lose-lose outcomes for the UK, the EU, the US and the Middle East. Dr Sanam Vakil Associate fellow, Chatham House Dear Sanam IT is still unclear which way Trump is going to jump on the nuclear deal with Iran. Renewal offers the prospect of further development of arrangements with Iran by the European powers. Moreover, the IAEA, as you point out, has found no egregious breach of the agreement.

The downside is a cascade of new tensions and confrontations arising from the breakdown of JCPOA. Israel's hawkish defence minister Avigdor Lieberman has also been visiting Washington, full of dire predictions. If Iran threatens Israel from Syria, or anywhere else, he has said his forces will strike Tehran "and every Iranian site in Syria."

This would be a situation America would find hard to handle. It could mark the beginning of a new nuclear arms race, across the Middle East.

For Trump this shouldn't be a matter of his own ego. He denounced the JCPOA as "the worst deal ever" -- but he does not seem to understand what it really means. He should stay his Twitter finger, and think again.

Robert

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