On Iran, the U.N. Proves Its Uselessness Once Again

August 30, 2020

By Fred Fleitz

National Review

<https://www.nationalreview.com/2020/08/iran-nuclear-deal-united-nations-proves-useless/>

Given a recent surge in belligerent behavior by Iran and clear evidence that it cheated on the JCPOA, the deeply flawed 2015 nuclear deal, President Trump wants to reimpose U.N. sanctions that were lifted by the prior agreement. To do this, Trump wants to trigger a “snap-back” provision in a 2015 U.N. Security Council resolution. Security Council members — led by Russia, China, and America’s European allies — are blocking this effort because they prefer to appease Iran and protect the worthless nuclear deal.

On August 25, the Security Council’s current president [refused](https://thehill.com/policy/defense/513622-un-security-council-rejects-us-demand-to-snap-back-iran-sanctions) to take up the U.S. snap-back proposal. By doing so, U.N. members are choosing to look the other way on a growing list of dangerous Iranian provocations and JCPOA violations. They also are validating President Trump’s conclusion that staying in the JCPOA and trying to rein in Iran through the U.N. is not in the national security interests of the United States.

When Israel revealed thousands of pages from Iran’s “[Nuclear Archive](https://www.centerforsecuritypolicy.org/2020/08/18/stolen-nuclear-documents-confirm-iran-cheated-on-the-jcpoa/),” obtained by Israeli intelligence in 2018, it proved Iran’s massive cheating on the JCPOA and ongoing covert work on nuclear weapons. This included undeclared facilities that Iran continued to use to pursue nuclear weapons after the announcement of the JCPOA. In response to Israel’s revelation, Iran razed one of these facilities and emptied another before IAEA inspectors could visit them.

Iran’s growing defiance of its nuclear-nonproliferation commitments led to tensions over the last year with IAEA officials and European states. In addition to refusing to cooperate with IAEA investigations of the Nuclear Archive revelations, between May 2019 and January 2020 Iran withdrew from all of its JCPOA commitments. Tehran is now enriching uranium over the agreement’s 300-kg maximum and producing enriched uranium that exceeds a 3.67 percent uranium-235 cap; it has resumed uranium enrichment at its underground Fordow facility and activated advanced uranium-enrichment centrifuges.

There was a new [development](https://www.iaea.org/newscenter/pressreleases/joint-statement-by-the-director-general-of-the-iaea-and-the-vice-president-of-the-islamic-republic-of-iran-and-head-of-the-aeoi) on August 26 when the IAEA released a statement that Iran has agreed to allow IAEA inspectors access to two suspect nuclear sites identified in the Nuclear Archive. This appeared to be an Iranian concession to discourage Security Council members from snapping back sanctions. But the significance of that concession was outweighed by what was essentially an IAEA concession: The statement included language saying that the IAEA had no further questions for Iran or inspection requests beyond these two sites. Although the door was left open for future inspections in response to new information, it was clear that the IAEA did not plan to investigate the dozens of other nuclear sites revealed by the Nuclear Archive. The result was a huge win for Iran and another embarrassing retreat by the U.N.

Iran’s increasingly belligerent behavior, which almost led to war several times over the last year, gives the U.S. further reason to want to snap back U.N. sanctions. In June 2019, Iran shot down a U.S. drone in the Persian Gulf. Last September, drones fired from Iranian soil heavily damaged two Saudi oil facilities. In January, Iran fired 15 ballistic missiles at a U.S. airbase in Iraq.

On April 1, in response to intelligence that Iranian proxies were planning new attacks on U.S. forces in Iraq, President Trump warned in a tweet that Iran was planning a “sneak attack” on U.S. forces and pledged it would pay “a very heavy price” for such attacks. On April 22, after Iranian gunboats made “dangerous and harassing approaches” near American ships in the Persian Gulf, Trump announced that the United States would “shoot down and destroy” any Iranian ships that attempted this in the future. This was followed by a lull in Iranian harassment of ships in the gulf until August 12, when Iran attempted to seize a Greek-owned oil tanker in the Strait of Hormuz.

The threat from Iran’s missile arsenal continued to grow this year with tests of advanced missiles and drones with greater ranges and accuracy. This includes the “358” cruise missile, which is designed to evade defensive measures and shoot down U.S. military helicopters and the tilt-rotor Osprey. Last February, the U.S. Navy [intercepted](https://www.nytimes.com/2020/02/19/us/iran-missiles-yemen.html) two shipments of these missiles sent from Iran to the Houthi rebels in Yemen.

The growing list of dangerous and belligerent actions by Iran and clear evidence of its cheating on the JCPOA more than justify President Trump’s decision to withdraw from the nuclear deal and implement his successful “maximum pressure” strategy, which is limiting Iran’s access to advanced technology it could use in its nuclear weapons and missile programs as well as funds to spend on terrorism and the Iranian military.

The U.N. Security Council’s rejection of U.S. demands to increase pressure on Tehran vindicates President Trump’s judgment that America needed to act alone to counter the growing Iranian threat. For example, on August 14 the council overwhelmingly rejected a U.S. resolution to indefinitely extend a U.N. arms embargo on Iran that is scheduled to be lifted in October. The council is refusing snap-backs because a majority of its members — including all European members — want to protect the moribund nuclear agreement so as to appease Iran’s ruling mullahs.

In response to the Security Council’s recalcitrance, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said: “America will not join in this failure of leadership. America will not appease, America will lead.”

The refusal of Security Council members to agree to increase the pressure on Iran in response to its recent warlike behavior further shreds the U.N.’s already tattered moral authority. But it also shows the urgent need for decisive U.S. global leadership.

President Trump has provided this leadership, which has reduced the threat from Iran and increased stability in the Middle East. These gains will quickly vanish if Joe Biden wins the 2020 presidential election: He has promised to rejoin the JCPOA and work through the U.N. to resolve issues over Iran’s nuclear program. Biden also will restore the weak foreign policies of President Obama such as appeasing Iran and “leading from behind” in the Middle East. It therefore was no surprise when the U.S. intelligence community recently [revealed](https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-08-07/u-s-intelligence-agencies-say-china-iran-want-trump-to-lose) that Iran’s ruling mullahs are rooting for a Biden win this November.