US, allies must stand in united opposition to Iran’s bad behavior

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The Trump administration is meeting in Warsaw today with leaders from dozens of countries at a critical moment in the effort to stop Iran’s dangerous behavior. Tehran’s support for terrorism and its illegal missile development program are top priorities, but the people coming to Warsaw will face headwinds. The effort to make real and sustainable progress on these matters has been impaired by the European Union’s stubborn adherence to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) – a nuclear framework which didn’t make sense when it was signed and doesn’t make sense today.

Since [President Trump](https://thehill.com/people/donald-trump)’s decision last May to withdraw from the JCPOA, his administration has embarked on a maximum pressure campaign against Iran, re-imposing and strengthening economic sanctions to hold Iran accountable for its unwillingness to abide by international laws and norms. The regime in Tehran has been implicated in [at least four](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2019/01/08/did-iran-plot-attacks-europe-dutch-government-thinks-so/?utm_term=.bed274b3a644) assassinations or bombings in Europe since 2015 alone – the year in which the JCPOA came into being. And last August, the U.S. [arrested two Iranian nationals](https://www.apnews.com/ec9c2b547c5043938d1bdba4a4f724b9) – who allegedly received intelligence training from Iran – for spying on regime dissidents in New York and a Jewish community center in Chicago.

But bureaucrats in London, Paris and Berlin are still determined to preserve a channel for international business with Iran. Through the creation of a Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV) called “INSTEX,” they think they have fashioned an alternative payment channel with the express objective of circumventing U.S. sanctions against those who do business with the extremist regime in Tehran.

History has shown that the best peaceful way to force a malevolent Tehran to change its behavior is to hit their bottom line. Prior to 2015’s JCPOA signing, comprehensive, multilateral sanctions imposed on Iran cost the regime more than [$160 billion](https://www.reuters.com/article/us-iran-nuclear-oil-sanctions-factbox-idUSKCN0PO10920150714) in oil revenue alone.  Iran’s currency, the rial, plunged into the depths of hyperinflation. With companies across the world barred from doing business with the regime, the combined economic blockade of the United Nations, United States, and European Union crippled the Iranian economy and brought Tehran to the negotiating table.

But at the table, the P5+1 yielded to Iran and agreed to the JCPOA, which was an economic lifeline that provided a windfall for Iran to underwrite its terrorist activities and illicit ballistic missile program. In America, the debate over that deeply flawed agreement turned what was once a nonpartisan issue – Iranian nuclear nonproliferation – into one of the most divisive issues of our time. Allegations of [dual loyalty](https://www.timesofisrael.com/us-jewish-group-slams-dual-loyalty-smears-on-iran-deal/) against American citizens and of warmongering against the deal’s opponents politicized the process. The fact was that criticisms of the JCPOA were never motivated by politics. It was simply not a good deal.

The JCPOA created an environment that allowed Iran to increase its military budget and finance terror groups, such as the I.R.G.C., Hezbollah, Hamas and the Houthis with tens of millions of dollars. The creation of the SPV will only expand these Iranian actions. It will embolden the very behavior Europe has proscribed in recent months. The EU last month [sanctioned](https://www.reuters.com/article/us-iran-sanctions/in-shift-eu-sanctions-iran-over-planned-europe-attacks-idUSKCN1P20UA) Iran’s intelligence agency for its involvement in state-sanctioned murder plots on European soil since 2015. And [Iran has continued to detain dual-nationals](https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/09/26/iran-targeting-dual-citizens-foreigners) at home as a means to achieve its illicit geopolitical agenda abroad. One study by Reuters found that as of November 2017, [Iran had arrested at least 30 dual-nationals over the course of the preceding two years](https://www.reuters.com/article/us-iran-arrests/exclusive-irans-revolutionary-guards-arrest-more-dual-nationals-idUSKBN1D90TB).  And Iran continues its march toward being able to use nuclear weapons against the U.S. and our allies with its ballistic missile program.

That’s why the U.S. and our allies must stand together in united opposition to Iran’s behavior. This is why the creation of the SPV by European leaders is so troubling – it undermines trans-Atlantic unity on this issue as well as puts European security at risk. During the most recent Financial Action Task Force (FATF) meeting in Paris, the organization kept Iran on its so-called ‘grey list’ because the regime in Tehran continues to fail to take adequate measures to counteract money laundering and terrorist financing.

The Trump administration should challenge the SPV directly with a firm response – perhaps by sanctioning the supervisory board of the SPV as well as its managing director for any violations of U.S. sanctions. Additionally, the group of nations assembling in Warsaw can form a Global Coalition to Counter Iran – borrowing the framework of the 79 partners which comprise the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS – which would coordinate economic, military and diplomatic efforts to contain the Iranian regime.

Iran must be forced to abandon its nuclear ambitions, ballistic missile program, and support for terrorism. Europeans behind the SPV must shut it down. Allies don’t help adversaries gain strength. Allies stick together to defeat their common enemies. The historic meeting in Poland this month is a chance to reset, build consensus and demonstrate to Iran that their unacceptable behavior carries uncompromising consequences.