

June 2018

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Chair of Foreign Affairs Committee
House of Commons
London
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Thank you for your letter of 22 May about the US decision to withdraw from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPoA).

As the Prime Minister and I have both set out in the House, the UK does not intend to walk away from the JCPoA. The Iran nuclear deal is critical for our security and we remain committed to it for as long as Iran continues to abide by the restrictions set out under the terms of the deal. Turning to the specific questions set out in your letter:

Action to ensure continued implementation of the JCPoA

We continue to work with all the remaining parties to the JCPoA to maintain it. The E3 Leaders statement on 8 May made this clear, as did E3 Foreign Ministers and High Representative Mogherini at their meeting in Brussels on 15 May and all 28 EU Foreign Ministers at the European Foreign Affairs Council on 28 May. A Joint Commission of remaining parties to the deal (UK, France, Germany, China, Russia, and Iran) also convened on 25 May to discuss continuing the agreement without the US.

Continued Iranian compliance with JCPoA commitments

On the same day as the Joint Commission, the IAEA released their latest report which showed that Iran remains in compliance with its key JCPoA limits and obligations. The Iranian response to US withdrawal has, up until now, been measured. President Rouhani has announced that Iran intends to stay in the agreement, while also stating that he has told the Iranian atomic energy authorities to be prepared to resume industrial scale enrichment if necessary.

We expect Iran to continue to abide by its obligations and, in return, we will take necessary steps, with our European and other partners, to ensure that Iran receives the sanctions relief required by the deal. We have encouraged, and continue to press, Iran to show restraint in response to the decision by the US; Iran must continue to meet its own obligations under the deal, cooperating fully and in a timely manner with International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) inspection requirements.

Discussions with the US

We have held many intensive discussions with the US following both President Trump's 12 January speech and his 8 May decision to withdraw from the JCPoA. Our position has not changed – the JCPoA is the successful result of 13 years of tireless diplomacy and we consider that beginning a new negotiation which conflates all of Iran's unacceptable regional behaviour is unlikely to be successful in a reasonable timeframe. The advantage of the JCPoA is that it has a very clear objective: it protects the world from the prospect of an Iranian nuclear bomb and in exchange gives Iran recognisable economic benefits. Addressing the most significant strategic threat from Iran in this way enables us to turn our attention to other issues of concern, such as Iran's regional activities, and human rights abuses.

In his 21 May speech, Secretary Pompeo recognised that we have a different approach and that we intend to carry on implementing the nuclear deal. We, and our European partners, continue to view the deal as important for our collective security, and therefore remain firmly committed to ensuring it is upheld. We will work with the remaining parties to the deal to this end. We have called on the US to preserve the gains that the Iran nuclear deal has brought, avoiding actions that would prevent the remaining parties from meeting their commitments to upholding the deal.

EU blocking statute

As you highlight, following the EU Leaders meeting on 16 May the European Commission were asked to look into increasing the scope of the EU Blocking Regulation.

The EU Blocking Regulation (Council Regulation (EC) No.2271/96) was adopted in 1996. It prohibits residents of Member States, legal persons incorporated in the EU and individuals within the EU acting in a professional capacity from complying with certain US autonomous sanctions that have an extraterritorial effect. The enforcement of the Regulation is the responsibility of EU Member States and could result in fines on those who complied with US sanctions in breach of the Regulation.

The Commission has begun the process of increasing the scope of the Regulation to include those sanctions with extraterritorial effects that the US are planning on re-imposing following their withdrawal from the JCPoA. This is part of a wider package of measures that the EU is looking at in support of the JCPoA. We recognise that there may be an impact on business from this action. We will be engaging at a national and EU level to ensure that business gets as much clarity and guidance as possible.

EU sanctions policy

After Brexit, the UK will remain part of the JCPoA and will therefore continue to work closely with the EU to ensure the measures contained within the JCPoA encourage Iranian compliance, including targeted sanctions relief. We expect to carry over all existing EU sanctions regimes on Iran, including those still in place under the Iran nuclear sanctions regime. This will ensure that the UK remains compliant with the JCPoA.

Talks with France, Germany and the EU

As stated above, the UK and our European partners consider the Iran nuclear deal essential for our shared security, and as such, remain firmly committed to ensuring it is upheld. To this end, we are in close contact with our European partners and have held multiple discussions with them at official and ministerial level, in addition to those discussions outlined above.

We will continue to work with France, Germany, the EU, and others, including Iran, to ensure the continued implementation of the JCPOA and to address wider issues, such as Iran's missile programme and regional activities.

Resources

There are some practical implications of US withdrawal on JCPOA implementation and we are exploring with partners options for managing these.

We continue to make clear our support for the IAEA's crucial verification and monitoring work. In fact, on 4 June our ambassador to the IAEA in Vienna restated our commitment to the JCPOA and announced additional UK voluntary funding contribution to support the IAEA's work in Iran.

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