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“America First” as a Foreign Policy: Multilateralism and Security Policy

By

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This thesis is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for Honors in the Discipline in
Political Science and the Elizabethtown College Honors Program

May 1, 2020

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“America First” as a Foreign Policy: Multilateralism and Security Policy

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Abstract

President Donald Trump has redefined America’s foreign policy around his mantra, “America First.” This has led to attempts at renegotiating international treaties and reversing American Foreign policy toward inter-governmental organizations (IGOs). His actions, specifically on security policy issues including Iran and the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), as well as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), have led to multiple short-term as well as potential long-term consequences. These include a level of uncertainty surrounding President Trump’s meaning of “America First” and a difficulty in understanding and/or anticipating his actions and intentions due to the lack of a clear foreign policy direction. Additionally, Trump’s actions have led to a substantial increase in tensions between the US and Iran, which has already caused multiple casualties. This paper aims to address the following questions: What does this mean for the United States? How are foreign leaders perceiving these changes made by the Trump Administration, and how does it help or hurt US interests abroad? Ultimately, Trump has approached foreign policy with his Realist mindset, causing him to question multilateralism and even bilateralism. His tendency to withdraw or threaten to withdraw from agreements and treaties has caused panic and fear amongst our allies who are unsure of the American commitment and has contributed to a lack of trust in America.

Introduction

President Donald Trump has been redefining America’s foreign policy around his mantra of “America First.” This has led to him renegotiating international treaties as well as revising and reversing American foreign policy. Trump has pulled the US out of agreements such as the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), the Paris Climate Accords, the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty, and the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) while threatening to pull the US out of other agreements such as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and renegotiating the North Atlantic Free Trade Agreement into the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement. By using his “superior” negotiation skills to place America on top, Trump has boldly claimed that he is redefining America’s foreign policy. This paper aims to address the following questions: What does this mean for the United States? How are foreign leaders perceiving these changes made by the Trump Administration, and how does it help or hurt US interests abroad? Ultimately, Trump has approached foreign policy with his Realist mindset, causing him to question multilateralism and even bilateralism. His tendency to withdraw or threaten to withdraw from agreements and treaties has caused panic and fear amongst our allies who are unsure of the American commitment and has contributed to a lack of trust in America and shaken the Liberal International Order. The next section will provide an overview of the literature on the concept of “America First” as well as an overview of the literature on theories of International Relations. There will be an overview of US actions relating to Iran and the JCPOA, and an examination of Trump and his relationship with NATO, which is followed by an analysis and conclusion.

Literature Review

The concept of “America First” not only as a phrase but also as a movement began prior to the outbreak of World War II (WWII). The movement originated from the belief America

should remain neutral (Academic Press, 2001). The initial wave of the America First Movement led to a belief in American exceptionalism. More specifically, it meant: 1. America needed to be shielded from foreign threats; 2. America should support the spread of democracy through leading by example (rather than force); 3. accepting protectionism and fair trade (rather than free trade); 4. discouraging international disagreements; and 5. using anti-immigration laws and racist policies to maintain a demographically similar population (Kupchan, 2018). The movement disbanded when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor in 1941 (Academic Press, 2001; Kupchan, 2018). Flash forward to 2016, when Donald Trump became the President of the United States. He won his campaign outlining what he called the “America First” foreign policy in which he highlighted his goal of “put[ting] the interests of the American people and American security above all else” (Trump, 2016).

Trump has shaken up the post-WWII era. Whereas the post-WWII era “focused on creating a more globally integrated world,” he has shifted the focus to blaming the same institutions for harming America (Stiglitz, 2018). Trump blamed the Liberal International Order for all of America’s problems, which resonated with certain groups of individuals in the US. However, some individuals see a return to the liberal order as a good thing for America (Stokes, 2018). The interdependence of the world challenges the concept of “America First” as foreign policy and bilateral and multilateral actions have become the norm (Kupchan, 2018). Trump’s forced change of direction has been worrisome for many international organizations and threatens multilateralism.¹ The Liberal International Economic Order was created through a large number of international organizations and rules that were decided on multilaterally, with the US being the most powerful country at the negotiating table. The goal was to create a framework for an economy that continued to become increasingly globalized with the US as hegemon at the

center (Hopewell, 2017). Some see this departure from the Liberal International Economic Order as a threat to America’s place as the leader in the world (Hopewell, 2017; Mackintosh, 2017). Further, Trump’s claims about the current system not benefiting the US confuses other countries as the US essentially wrote the rules of international trade and has greatly benefited from the current system (Hopewell, 2017).

What Trump claims and what he does are two entirely different things, and his foreign policy is no different. Macdonald (2018) found that in looking at Trump’s first year in office, nine out of nineteen specific policy issues and decisions aligned with previous policies enacted by Obama. On the other hand, six aligned with his campaign promises, appearing as though Trump listened to the guidance of his advisors. Additionally, four directly contradicted his campaign promises relating to “America First.” Macdonald asserts that there were instances of continuity because they were considered high stakes issues and a departure from the status quo was undesirable. Additionally, Congress and “motivated interest groups” have been able to further deter dramatic changes in foreign policy (Macdonald, 2018). Macdonald goes on to state that “although the president’s rhetoric surrounding these issues can be extreme, the combination of structural and domestic constraints has proven to be a surprisingly effective check on dramatic shifts in policy” (Macdonald, 2018, p. 403). By the time that Trump has left office, it is possible that certain structural shifts will have occurred, making it even more difficult, if not impossible, to get back to the way things were before (Stokes, 2018). This noteworthy shift in US policy will most likely impact the leadership of the US moving forward (Edwards, 2018). Kupchan (2018) explains that there is a need for a “new exceptionalism” to take the place of Trump’s failed experiment because using old policy to solve new problems has not and will not work.

I hypothesize that Donald Trump’s “America First” foreign policy has negatively impacted the perception and view of the US in other countries, thus leading to further difficulties and disputes between the US and other nations. I further hypothesize that Trump’s approach to foreign policy has and will continue to have many consequences, some good and many bad, for America and its allies. Good can come from Trump’s foreign policy; however, it remains to be seen if the good will outweigh the bad. The area that I believe will provide great insight into the effects of Trump’s foreign policy, particularly regarding other states, is the area of international agreements, treaties, and organizations, specifically those pertaining to security issues. In this paper, I intend to focus on two cases: the JCPOA and NATO. In determining Trump’s approach to international relations and foreign policy, it is important to understand the different approaches to international relations, as well as why Trump’s approach is different from recent presidents. One of the most important theories to understand when looking at Trump’s foreign policy is the theory of Realism.

Realism

The theory of Realism developed as a reaction to the Idealist movement that occurred between the two World Wars (Goldstein & Pevehouse, 2014). Contrary to Idealism, Realism approaches international relations in terms of power, otherwise meaning “the ability to get another actor to do what it would not otherwise have done” (Goldstein & Pevehouse, p. 45, 2014). The key elements of this perspective are that Realists believe human nature is selfish, that states are the most important actors who are rationally pursuing their self-interest, and that the international system is one of anarchy. This does not mean that there is chaos or a lack of structure, but rather that states have control over their respective territories through their monopoly on violence and as such, there is no need for any overarching government as it

threatens their sovereignty (Goldstein & Pevehouse, 2014). One of the key features of the Realist perspective is seeing everything in terms of zero-sum games, using this perspective to argue against cooperation (Goldstein & Pevehouse, 2014). Zero-sum games represent situations where one side gains at the other's loss, as there is no way for both sides to benefit. The Realist perspective can be used to describe American foreign policy during the Cold War (Goldstein & Pevehouse, 2014; Berg-Schlosser & Badie, 2011).² The concept of power is a hallmark of Realism, and this concept contradicts the concept of cooperation, a hallmark of Liberalism.

Liberalism

Liberalism is characterized by the belief in reciprocity or the idea that states will work together because they will mutually benefit (Goldstein & Pevehouse, 2014). It is based on the work of Immanuel Kant and supports the use of international organizations and rules that facilitate cooperation. Specifically, Kant argued for a world federation which resembles the United Nations (Goldstein & Pevehouse, 2014). Additionally, there is the notion that domestic governments can have a noteworthy effect on the achievement of peace, specifically that republics will be more successful in achieving peace than autocracies. The final tenet of Kant's argument is that trade promotes peace (Goldstein & Pevehouse, 2014).³ Both Liberalism and Realism are relatively modern in terms of approaches; however, one thing that has existed throughout American history is the idea of American Exceptionalism.

American Exceptionalism

The concept of American Exceptionalism is not new, and most presidents believe that America is exceptional, or better than other countries (Edwards, 2018). There are two approaches to American Exceptionalism: exemplarist and interventionist. Exemplarists see America's place as being an example for other countries in terms of what society and political processes should

look like. They want to focus on US institutions, increasing the economic prosperity of the US and the integration of populations into one country, all while striving for more civil rights (Edwards, 2018). Under the Exemplarist viewpoint, it becomes impossible for the US to be heavily involved with both bilateral and multilateral actions (Edwards, 2018). On the other hand, interventionists see the role of the US as an active role, in that they should engage with the rest of the world politically, socially, economically, and culturally. Under this approach, the leadership role of the US is active, and the US is supposed to be a leader in terms of spreading democracy, freedom, human rights, free markets, and so on while supporting nations that already uphold these ideas (Edwards, 2018). Before WWII, the exemplarist approach was the predominant approach. Following the war, however, the interventionist approach became the predominant approach (Edwards, 2018). Either way, American exceptionalism could pose a threat to the US as other countries continue to move forward while the US remains grounded in the idea that America is superior (Sachs, 2018).

American Exceptionalism and “America First” are two distinct concepts. One is the idea that America is better than the rest of the world while the other is the idea that America should put itself before the rest of the world. Moreover, American Exceptionalism highlights America as a role model for other countries, particularly in areas including democracy and human rights. “America First” on the other hand does not concern itself with what other nations ought to be; rather, it focuses on how to put America on top. Other than the broad idea that America should be put first, there is more nuance to “America First” foreign policy. Sachs explains that,

In recent decades, the United States has been seen as the ‘leader of the free world’ and ‘the world’s sole superpower.’ The result has been a kind of hubris, that the United States can dictate the terms of geopolitics and local politics to other parts of the world (p. 5, 2018).

The leadership of the US has been and continues to be an instrumental part of the current Liberal International Order. Sachs further explains, “Trump’s America First doctrine is an especially crass version of this hubris, as it supposes that the United States can reject UN treaties and decisions, break trade agreements, maintain unrivaled military dominance in all parts of the world, and go it alone when it chooses” (p. 5, 2018). Simply put, Trump believes that America is better than all other countries and because of its status, America can act in its self-interest. He believes that America should recognize its status as the best and use that as an excuse to demand whatever is best for the country because he believes that America has to be first. Further, he sees agreements with other nations as weakening America, which he believes to be the most powerful nation.

America First

“America First” is a broad concept for Trump’s foreign policy, which begs the question, what does Trump mean when he says, “America First?” On April 27, 2016, then-candidate Trump gave a speech outlining his foreign policy. He explained, “My foreign policy will always put the interests of the American people and American Security above all else. It has to be first. Has to be” (Trump, p. 161, 2016). He went on to claim that “America First will be the major and overriding theme of my administration” (Trump, p. 161, 2016). This shows that Trump believes that American interests, particularly security interests, should be the top priority, indicating a belief that America should rationally pursue self-interest. He also believes that we have over-extended our resources and that “We’re rebuilding other countries while weakening our own” (Trump, p. 161, 2016). This suggests a belief that trade and other forms of cooperation are not mutually beneficial and that for America to be on top, we have to stop helping other countries. It also suggests a belief that America has been taken advantage of for its generosity, and that must

be changed. Trump further expresses his distrust of international organizations by saying, “I am skeptical of international unions that tie us up and bring America down and will never enter. And under my administration, we will never enter America into any agreement that reduces our ability to control our own affairs” (Trump, p. 165, 2016). This skepticism is that of someone with a Realist approach to international relations and shows a belief in an anarchic international system where states have total control.

Trump also exhibited a preference for the Cold War-era Realist approach to international relations (Trump, 2016), which differs from the more Liberal approach taken by recent presidents. Going along with the preference for a Cold War-era approach, Trump stated that “Our military dominance must be unquestioned, and I mean unquestioned, by anybody and everybody” (Trump, p. 163). Having a dominant military is again important to the Realist approach, and Trump suggests that in order for America to have power, it requires a strong and assertive military. Trump sums up his foreign policy by saying:

Under a Trump administration, no American citizens will ever again feel that their needs come second to the citizens of a foreign country. I will view as president the world through the clear lens of American interests. I will be America's greatest defender and most loyal champion. We will not apologize for becoming successful again, but will instead embrace the unique heritage that makes us who we are. The World is most prosperous when America is strongest. America will continue and continue forever to play the role of peacemaker (Trump, p. 165, 2016).

This suggests that previous administrations have failed to act in a way that serves the interests of the American people and highlights the American people as being more important (at least in this context) than people of other countries.⁴ He also calls out the US for being predictable in terms of foreign policy and says that America must be more unpredictable because everyone knows what we are going to do before we do it (Trump, 2016). Even after he was elected, his foreign policy was not necessarily much clearer.

Trump released his first national security strategy in 2017. Ettinger (2018), in looking at the 2017 National Security Strategy (NSS), explains the so-called “Principled Realism” outlined in the NSS. Specifically, Ettinger explains how it is one of two competing narratives as the Trump Administration seemingly tries to reconcile Trump’s Realist approach with the traditional commitment to Internationalism that both Republican and Democratic presidents have made. While there have been differences in the approach, the general goal has remained the same (Ettinger, 2018). The idea of “Principled Realism” is not a new concept and relies on the Realist principles of being state-centric, having state sovereignty, and the idea that states are rationally pursuing their self-interest. The NSS highlights the belief that American principles are generally good and should be spread throughout the world. That being said, Ettinger points out that the Realist aspects of the NSS are much greater than the principled aspects. Notably, the Liberal Internationalist traditions are still there in some capacity. The NSS is not “appreciably different” from past Internationalist traditions, both liberal and conservative. Instead, Ettinger argues that while the traditions of Liberal Internationalism are still in the 2017 NSS, they are overpowered by the “flashier headlines” of Trump’s “Principled Realism.” The 2017 NSS, Ettinger concludes, is the result of “a deep current of incoherence in US foreign policy under the Trump administration” (p. 482, 2018). Ettinger further asserts that there is an intellectual dissonance within the NSS that results from Trump’s preference for nationalism which competes with the tradition of Internationalism. Ettinger warns that the policy has not yet been tested by a major crisis. When one does happen, it will challenge the policy outlined in the NSS, which Ettinger believes will not be able to remain intact.

One important aspect of Trump’s foreign policy is negotiation, particularly the symbolic aspects. Compared to previous administrations, the focus will be more on short-term benefits that

make Trump look like a “winner” than on the long-term relevant consequences (Wolf, 2017). He prefers transactional relationships based on cost-benefit bilateralism, where he negotiates individually with other countries to get the best deal for America with each actor, each of whom is competing for advantage (Stokes, 2018). Additionally, Trump’s style is characterized by “zero-sum thinking and toughness for toughness’ sake,” meaning America will not make concessions easily or lightly, and will more heavily rely on quid pro quo (Wolf, p. 108, 2017). Trump sees everything as a zero-sum game (Wolf, 2017; Stokes, 2018) which motivates him to make sure that America is on top, meaning America will have a greater willingness to take on risk, especially to protect or build America’s status. This stems not only from Trump’s opinion that America is on top but also from his “prickly temperament and his proven willingness to make hazardous business deals” (Wolf, p. 109, 2017). One example of his need to ensure America is on top is how he has handled relations with Iran.

Iran

There is a tumultuous history between the US and Iran. The first diplomatic relations between the two countries were established in 1883 (US Department of State, 2015). Major highlights of Iranian political history include a limited constitutional monarchy being established in 1906, a coup backed by the US and the United Kingdom (UK) in 1953 that overthrew the Shah, and the Iranian Revolution in 1979 against the Shah (US Department of State, 2015). In 1980, with the start of the Iranian Hostage Crisis, the US broke off relations with Iran and has not had direct diplomatic relations with them since (US Department of State, 2015). Amid growing concerns about the potential for a nuclear program, the Iranian sponsorship of terrorism, and their human rights record, the US, working with other members of the international community, began imposing sanctions on Iran in an effort to bring them to the table to discuss

these concerns.⁵ The US sanctions prohibited trade and investment in Iran by any Americans, with exceptions that allow for the sale of medicine/medical devices and food (US Department of State, 2015).⁶ In 2015, the Permanent Members of the UN Security Council, including the US under President Obama, plus Germany agreed to a deal with Iran that would lift sanctions against the nation in exchange for the limitation of Iran’s nuclear activities as well as allowances for inspections known as the JCPOA (BBC News, 2019a). Prior to the JCPOA, Iran held that their actions regarding nuclear technology were peaceful, but the global community did not believe them and, as a result, imposed major economic sanctions against the country (BBC News, 2019a).⁷ The JCPOA allowed over \$100 billion of frozen overseas assets to be released back to Iran and the country was again able to sell oil in international markets (BBC News, 2019a).⁸ Any violation of the JCPOA on the part of Iran would automatically invoke the sanctions for 10 years with a possible extension of an additional five years (BBC News, 2019a). The deal was a culmination of over 12 years’ work and removed sanctions upon implementation on the part of Iran (Mogherini, July 2018).

Iran Strategy under President Trump

When Trump took office, he authorized a complete review of the strategy for Iran (Trump, 2017). What resulted was a speech outlining why he believed the JCPOA was an ineffective solution (Trump, 2017). Upon conclusion of the review, Trump (2017) outlined his plan moving forward.⁹ The first part was countering Iran’s “destabilizing activity and support for terrorist proxies in the region” (Trump, 2017). The second part was to place additional sanctions on Iran to prevent it from financing terror. The third part was to “address the regime’s proliferation of missiles and weapons that threaten its neighbors, global trade, and freedom of navigation” (Trump, 2017). The final part was to “deny the regime all paths to a nuclear

weapon” (Trump, 2017). Trump also made several announcements during his speech, including sanctioning Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps and asking allies to do the same (Trump, 2017).¹⁰ Trump continued, citing the hijacking of Iran’s economy and seizure of religious endowments to fund war and terror as reasons for his actions (Trump, 2017).¹¹ Next, Trump announced that he directed his administration to work with Congress and other allies to fix the JCPOA to ensure that Iran will never obtain nuclear weapons. He expressed his support for the Iran Nuclear Agreement Review Act that he claimed would strengthen enforcement and make the provisions of the JCPOA permanent under US law. The Act required a presidential certification every 90 days, verifying that Iran is implementing the agreement, that they have not breached it materially, that they have not acted to significantly advance its nuclear weapons program, and that the suspension of sanctions is “appropriate and proportionate” to the measures Iran had taken (Iran Nuclear Agreement Review Act of 2015). On October 13, 2017, the President announced that he could not and would not certify this. He also said that if a new agreement could not be reached, he would pull the US out of the JCPOA (Trump, 2017).

On May 8, 2018, President Trump officially announced that he would be removing the US from the JCPOA. He explained that the deal allowed Iran to continue enriching uranium, eventually to the point they could “reach the brink of a nuclear breakout” (Trump, May 2018).¹² By this point, Iran had reduced its stockpile of uranium by 98% and, under the JCPOA, they could not exceed that figure until 2031 (BBC News, 2019a).¹³ Further, Iran, by signing the deal, agreed “that under no circumstances will Iran ever seek, develop or acquire any nuclear weapons” (JCPOA, 2015, p. 3). Trump further claimed that because Iran would be on the verge of a nuclear breakthrough, we would be very close to a nuclear arms race in the Middle East (Trump, May 2018). Trump felt that the limitations placed on Iran were “very weak” (Trump,

May 2018).¹⁴ The JCPOA began in January 2016 on “implementation day” and was supposed to last until 2026.¹⁵ Trump’s ultimate goal, as he announced in his Iranian Strategy, was to prevent Iran from achieving nuclear weapons, however, by removing the US from the JCPOA, he removed the mechanism that would have prevented Iran from creating them.

Before the JCPOA, Iran was working on a heavy-water nuclear facility which would have given it plutonium which is used in nuclear bombs. This was a target of the international community due to the likelihood of proliferation (BBC News, 2019a). Before the JCPOA there was an interim deal that was signed in 2013. At that point, Iran agreed not to fuel or even commission the reactor (BBC News, 2019a). The JCPOA allowed for modification of the reactor, thus preventing the creation of plutonium.¹⁶ The purpose of the JCPOA was to ensure that Iran could enjoy its right to use nuclear energy for peaceful purposes under the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) (JCPOA, 2015). The IAEA monitors the declared nuclear sites in Iran and the fissile material to ensure that all of it is accounted for. The IAEA can access any site in Iran that they feel is suspicious until 2031 (JCPOA, 2015; BBC News, 2019a). If Iran does not comply with a request from the IAEA, the Joint Commission decides whether or not to take any action, which may include re-imposing the sanctions.¹⁷ As of December 2015, when the IAEA ended its investigation into the possibility of Iran having nuclear weapons, it was determined that “there were ‘no credible indications’ of weapons development” (BBC News, 2019a). While Trump criticized the JCPOA for its potential to allow Iran to create nuclear weapons, it created a situation in which it was difficult for Iran to develop nuclear weapons and required Iran to give up some of its freedom to have the sanctions lifted.

After the implementation of the JCPOA, there were two instances where Iran was found to have more heavy water than allowed under the deal. Both times resulted in Iran exporting the

excess to stay in compliance with the deal (Jahn, 2016).¹⁸ President Trump used these two instances to support his claim that Iran cannot be trusted (Trump, 2017). Trump further claimed that “while the United States adheres to our commitment under the deal, the Iranian regime continues to fuel conflict, terror, and turmoil throughout the Middle East and beyond. Importantly, Iran is not living up to the spirit of the deal” (Trump, 2017).¹⁹ He continued, claiming that the deal gave “a regime of great terror” billions of dollars and that while it was possible for “a constructive deal” to have been struck at the time the JCPOA was signed, that did not happen (Trump, May 2018).²⁰ He had previously stated that the removal of sanctions by the JCPOA prevented what would have been an imminent collapse of the Iranian regime and that by giving them the infusion of cash, the regime was saved as well as handed \$100 billion to fund terrorism upfront, without making sure they follow the deal (Trump, 2017).²¹ Again, President Trump criticized the deal for being ineffective at preventing Iran from creating nuclear weapons, however, he also brought up what seems to be a secondary reason for his decision, which was that Iran could fund terrorism with the money that was returned to them.

Essentially, President Trump believes the JCPOA was ineffective at achieving its goal, and that it was “defective at its core” (Trump, May 2018). When Trump announced that he had decided to remove the US from the deal, he also threatened to sanction any nation that attempts to help Iran achieve nuclear weapons. In his view, his actions are in support of an effort to show the US does not make “empty threats.” He continued to make plans “to find a real, comprehensive, and lasting solution” to this problem, while maintaining “powerful sanctions,” and threatening Iran if they continue their “nuclear aspirations” (Trump, May 2018). One final reason Trump took issue with the JCPOA was it was not a permanent solution, claiming it only solved things for a few years (Trump, 2017).²² President Trump closed his speech by speaking to

the Iranian people directly, offering America’s support, claiming the future of Iran belongs to them. He explained that the leaders of Iran will refuse to work on negotiating a new deal (saying he would do the same in their position), but eventually they will want to make a new (and lasting) deal, and when that happens, he is “ready, willing, and able” (Trump, May 2018).²³ Trump is trying to seem like the good guy here while also destroying a carefully negotiated deal and re-imposing devastating sanctions on Iran. He is narcissistically assuming Iran will come back to the negotiating table, and that he can use his unique set of skills to get the US a better deal. His actions are part of a much larger strategy that aims to isolate Iran, while providing a regional balance of power.

Response to US Withdrawal

As soon as Trump made his announcement, the EU took action. Former High Representative/Vice President (HR/VP) Federica Mogherini announced on May 15, 2018, that she along with the Foreign Ministers of France, Germany, the UK, and Iran met to discuss what would happen going forward. According to Mogherini, while everyone regretted that the US withdrew from the JCPOA, Europe intended to continue to uphold the agreement (Mogherini, May 2018). The European Commission also announced four initiatives they were taking to continue to support the JCPOA.²⁴ The EU feared that any secondary sanctions the US decided to enforce could negatively impact European businesses who conducted business in Iran, which is why the Foreign and Finance Ministers of the UK, France, Germany, and the EU sent a letter to Secretaries Pompeo and Mnuchin asking for exemptions to allow the EU to provide “meaningful sanctions relief,” to continue implementation (Foreign & Commonwealth Office, June 2018). The EU was forced to take on the responsibility of upholding the deal, putting them in a difficult

place between preventing Iran from creating nuclear weapons and staying on the good side of the US and Trump.

Two weeks after Trump pulled the US out of the JCPOA, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo announced the new strategy for Iran. After highlighting the same reasons for withdrawal as Trump did in his earlier speeches, Pompeo discussed the American strategy going forward. The goals center on countering “the regime’s destabilizing activities in the region, block[ing] their financing of terror, and address[ing] Iran’s proliferation of missiles and other advanced weapons systems” (Pompeo, May 2018).²⁵ Pompeo ended his speech with a list of 12 demands for Iran, including that they “stop enrichment and never pursue plutonium reprocessing” (Pompeo, May 2018). In exchange, Pompeo promises that the US will “re-establish full diplomatic and commercial relationship with Iran” and allow them to have advanced technology (Pompeo, May 2018).²⁶ Pompeo called on other countries to join the US and to “join in this effort against the Islamic Republic of Iran” (Pompeo, May 2018).²⁷ Pompeo seemingly put the pressure on Iran, even though the US was the one to withdraw from the JCPOA.

Iran then announced that if the JCPOA failed, they would restart nuclear activities, as it was their right to under the JCPOA (Iran’s IAEA Envoy, 2018). Shortly after this announcement, there was a meeting of the Joint Commission of the JCPOA, in which ministers from China, France, Germany, Russia, the UK, and Iran were in attendance. They released a statement after this meeting, reconfirming their commitment to the JCPOA (Joint Commission, 2018). Later that month, HR/VP Mogherini did say that the US refused to allow any exemptions to their sanctions, even for healthcare, after the letter that France, Great Britain, and Germany sent. She remarked that this was not a surprise as it was in line with the US policy (Mogherini, July 2018).²⁸ Iran then built a new factory that produced centrifuge rotors. They believed that it did not violate the

JCPOA, but also indicated they wanted to get their nuclear enrichment activities “back on track,” claiming it was only for generating electricity and other peaceful projects (Dehghanpisheh & Knolle, 2018). At this point, 10 Senators led by Ted Cruz sent a letter to the French, German, and British ambassadors urging them to comply with US sanctions (Cruz, July 2018).²⁹ At this point, Iran was still on board with the JCPOA as Europe continued to try and keep the deal together. However, Iran made it clear that it was willing and able to restart nuclear activities as soon as the deal failed.

Re-imposition of Sanctions

As the date that the US would begin to re-impose sanctions approached, the EU, German, French, and UK Foreign Ministers released a joint statement not only condemning American actions but also establishing that the Blocking Statute will enter into force on August 7, 2018, to protect European Companies. They concluded their statement by saying, “preserving the nuclear deal with Iran is a matter of respecting international agreements and a matter of international security” (Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 2018). On August 7, 2018, the first round of sanctions was re-imposed (Trump, August 2018). Following this, Secretary Pompeo announced the creation of the Iran Action Group.³⁰ Fifteen Republican Senators led by Ted Cruz sent a letter to Treasury Secretary Steve Mnuchin expressing their support of putting the maximum pressure on Iran, explaining, “we understand that Iran’s leaders are working with American adversaries, and reportedly even with some allies, to circumvent these sanctions” (Cruz, August 2018). They promised to work with their congressional colleagues to ensure the Treasury Department has enough resources to enforce the sanctions (Cruz, August 2018). The following day, the European Commission adopted a support package for Iran (European Commission, August 2018).³¹ What

started as a campaign against Iran expanded into a disagreement with our European allies, who were in a difficult situation when the US pulled out of the multilateral deal.

Shortly after this announcement, hearings at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) began. Iran was suing the US to get the Sanctions lifted, claiming it violated the 1955 Treaty of Amity (Van Den Berg & Sterling, 2018).³² The US felt this suit was meritless, with Pompeo saying that the suit was “an attempt to interfere with the sovereign rights of the United States to take lawful actions, including re-imposition of sanctions, which are necessary to protect our national security” (Van Den Berg & Sterling, 2018). Iran claimed that it tried to solve the dispute through diplomatic methods but was rejected by the US. Both countries have used the ICJ previously; however, they have not always followed the Court’s rulings. Over a month later, the ICJ ruled that the US had to allow for the export of humanitarian goods, which the US argued they already allowed (BBC News, October 2018). The Iranian response was that the ICJ’s decision “vindicates the Islamic Republic of Iran and confirms the illegitimacy and oppressiveness” of the American sanctions (BBC News, October 2018). Secretary Pompeo not only announced the termination of the Treaty of Amity but also accused Iran of abusing the ICJ (BBC News, October 2018).³³ Iran suing the US was a diplomatic way to try and force the US to come back to the deal and ultimately resulted in Iran claiming victory.

In September 2018, China, France, Germany, Russia, the UK, and Iran met in New York to reaffirm their commitments to find practical solutions to the US withdrawal (European External Action Service (EEAS), 2018). The next day Trump gave a speech at the UN and claimed that the Iranian “agenda of aggression and expansion” has led to many Middle Eastern countries supporting the US withdrawal from the JCPOA (Trump, September 2018).³⁴ The following day, Trump chaired a UN Security Council Meeting that was officially about the non-

proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and unofficially about the JCPOA. Soon after Trump spoke, the President of Bolivia accused the President of “contempt for international law, for multilateralism, and for the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations” (UN News, 2018).³⁵

On November 4, 2018 the second round of sanctions restricting the sale of Iranian oil and petrochemical products were re-imposed (Council on Foreign Relations, 2018). The third High-Level Summit on Nuclear Cooperation was held in Brussels from November 26-27. During the Summit, “both the EU and Iran expressed their satisfaction at the progress achieved so far in the areas of nuclear co-operation and governance” and made plans for a follow-up summit organized by Iran in 2019 (European Commission, November 2018).³⁶ At a UN Security Council Meeting on December 12, Secretary Pompeo announced that the US will work with the other Security Council Members to reimpose the ballistic missile restrictions in Resolution 1929 (Pompeo, December 2018). In January, the US Intelligence Community released its Worldwide Threat Assessment, finding that at that point, Iran was not completing the activities that would be necessary to create a nuclear device (Coats, 2019).³⁷ Europe continued to remain committed to the JCPOA and worked hard to ensure that the deal would remain in place.³⁸ Meanwhile, the US continued to attack Iran despite its intelligence saying that Iran was not working towards a nuclear device.

The American “Maximum Pressure” Campaign

The US continued in its efforts to apply maximum force. On March 22, 2019, the US announced further sanctions (Hansler & Cohen, 2019). Then on April 8, President Trump formally announced that his administration planned to designate the Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps as a foreign terrorist organization in order to recognize Iran as a state

sponsor of terrorism (The White House, April 2019). Additionally, Secretary Pompeo announced that the US would not issue any new waivers to increase the pressure on Iran, acknowledging Iranian oil exports had fallen to historic lows (Pompeo, April 2019).³⁹ Then, on May 5, National Security Advisor John Bolton announced that the USS Abraham Lincoln and a bomber task force were going to be deployed to the US Central Command region.⁴⁰

In response, Iran announced it would no longer be bound by stockpile limitations on low-enriched uranium, and, if 60 days passed without economic benefits from the remaining signatories, they planned to cease compliance with other sections (Panda, 2019). The US announced further sanctions (The White House, May 2019), and the EU reaffirmed its commitments while rejecting ultimatums (EEAS, May 2019). By the end of May, Iran announced that it had increased production of uranium; however, officials stressed that it was within the 3.67% limit (Karimi & Gambrell, May 2019). In response, Russian President Vladimir Putin said that Iran should remain in compliance, and if Iran decided to leave, Iran would be blamed for the collapse (Radio Farda, 2019). At the Board of Governors meeting, the director of the IAEA said that he was worried about the increasing tensions surrounding the Iranian nuclear issue (Amano, 2019). The US Ambassador to the IAEA followed by saying Iran violated the JCPOA (Wolcott, 2019). Iran began at this point to push Europe and the other signatories to see how much they could get away with. They felt they had nothing to lose, as the US had already pulled out and the deal was on thin ice as it was. Even Putin warned Iran about what they were doing, and the US tried to create a narrative of Iran being the reason the deal fell apart, not from the American withdrawal.

Only a few days later, several tankers were attacked in the Gulf of Oman, and the US blamed Iran, which Iran denied (Kirkpatrick, Perez-Pena, & Reed, 2019). As tensions rose, Iran

announced they would exceed the limits in the JCPOA on stockpiled uranium within 10 days (Neuman, 2019). Additionally, Iran shot down a US surveillance drone (Karimi & Gambrell, June 2019). The US retaliated by sanctioning the Supreme Leader of Iran with Executive Order 13876 (2019). Iran then announced on July 1, 2019, that they had broken the 300-kilogram stockpile limit on uranium (Gambrell & Vahdat, 2019). France, Germany, and the UK said they still wished to uphold the JCPOA but were concerned by Iran’s actions (Elysee, July 2019). In addition, the IAEA Board of Governors Report (July 2019) found that Iran was enriching uranium up to 5%, above the agreed to 3.67% limit. The US then sanctioned Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif (Department of the Treasury, July 2019).⁴¹ As tensions began to rise in both countries, Iran began to push past limits in the JCPOA, thus weakening the deal even further.

The JCPOA on the International Stage

At this point, France offered a \$15 billion bailout to try and save the JCPOA (Sanger, Erianger, & Nossiter, 2019), with President Macron attempting to arrange a meeting between Trump and Iranian leaders during the G-7 summit in August 2019 (Hinnant, Corbet, & Miller, 2019). The US then sanctioned both the Iran Space Agency (Department of State, September 2019) and the shipping network linked to the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps-Qods Force and Hizballah (Department of the Treasury, September 2019). After these announcements, Iranian President Rouhani announced a third breach of the JCPOA, saying that they would return to their commitments once the other parties do (Office of the President of the Islamic Republic of Iran, 2019). Trump offered to meet with Rouhani at the UN without any preconditions; however, Rouhani said that he would not talk until the sanctions are lifted (Holland & Lambert, 2019). Then Saudi Arabian oil facilities were attacked, and the US blamed Iran (Stewart & Hafezi,

2019). After this attack, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates requested assistance from the US, and the President deployed US forces to provide additional defensive support (Esper & Dunford, 2019).⁴² By this point, the JCPOA was practically non-existent, particularly in the mind of Iran. Not only were they breaking portions of the agreement, but they also refused to talk with the US without the US confirming that they would lift sanctions, which is something that particularly this President would not allow.

Not long after the attacks, President Trump addressed the UN General Assembly on September 25, 2019. He claimed that Iran, “hoping to free itself from sanctions . . . has escalated its violent and unprovoked aggression” (Trump, September 2019).⁴³ He called on the Iranian regime to “finally put the Iranian people first,” and said that “America is ready to embrace friendship with all who genuinely seek peace and respect” (Trump, September 2019). Trump concluded his remarks on Iran by saying that “the United States has never believed in permanent enemies. . . America knows that while anyone can make war, only the most courageous can choose peace” (Trump, September 2019). At this point, Trump is attempting to take the moral high ground while attempting to blame Iran for the deal falling apart, rather than the US withdrawal that he orchestrated.

Meanwhile, during the next session of the UN General Assembly, President Macron attempted to arrange a phone meeting between Rouhani and Trump. Trump agreed, making it clear he would not be lifting sanctions; however, Rouhani would not even meet with Macron after being told that Trump would not lift sanctions (Pennetier, Holland, & Nichols, 2019).⁴⁴ While Rouhani was in New York for the Meeting of the General Assembly, he appeared on Fox News saying Iran wants to use nuclear power peacefully and have remained committed to the NPT, whereas the US has not (Fox News, 2019). He continued to say that if anything will be

accomplished through talks, they must be planned but “prior to that we must create mutual trust, and the trust is something that Mr. Trump took away from this framework” (Fox News, 2019). He also claims that Iran would not have signed the JCPOA if they intended to create nuclear weapons (Fox News, 2019). Rouhani says that it does not matter who the President may or may not be in 2020, because the president represents the will of Americans, it is up to Americans to elect someone who will return to their commitments (Fox News, 2019). Rouhani’s statement about trust is important when looking at what happened with the JCPOA. Why would Iran trust the US again after they backed out of the first deal that they had agreed to? In his mind, Americans have historically not been trustworthy and by removing themselves from the JCPOA they have proven this to be true.

In his address to the UN, Rouhani claimed the US had resorted to “international piracy” of the international banking system (PBS NewsHour, 2019). Iran remained in compliance with the JCPOA for one year after the US pulled out, giving Europe the chance to fulfill their commitments to compensate for the US withdrawal, and Rouhani claims they only heard words but did not see actions. That is why after a year, they began a step by step approach to implement paragraphs 26 and 36 of the JCPOA. He claimed that their “patience has a limit” as the only way forward, after being abandoned by the US and Europe, is to return their national dignity (PBS NewsHour, 2019). He talks about the fact that Iran is being asked to negotiate a treaty; however, the people negotiating have already shown a tendency to pull out of treaties. He announces that Iran will “never negotiate with an enemy that seeks to make Iran surrender with the weapon of poverty, pressure, and sanctions” (PBS NewsHour, 2019). He said that the only way for talks to begin is to return to commitments in the JCPOA.⁴⁵ The next day at the General Assembly Meeting, Britain, France, and Germany warned Iran that any further breaches of the JCPOA by

Iran would trigger a special dispute mechanism (BBC News, 2019b). At this point, Iran was done with the JCPOA, having not received the benefits they thought that they would, and Europe could not be patient any longer.

After the UN General Assembly meeting, French officials announced that both Trump and Rouhani agreed to a four-point plan that had been facilitated by Macron. Ultimately, the US would agree to lift the sanctions that had been re-imposed, giving Iran the full ability to export oil “and freely use its revenues” (Momtaz, 2019). Iran would agree to “never acquire a nuclear weapon” and “fully comply with its nuclear obligations and commitments and will accept negotiation on a long-term framework for its nuclear activities” while refraining “from any aggression and will seek genuine peace and respect in the region through negotiations” (Momtaz, 2019). Even though not expressly stated, it was assumed that talks would include discussions over the Iranian ballistic weapon program. Unfortunately, the talks ended there as Rouhani refused to communicate with the US unless Trump made it clear before the meeting that he would lift the sanctions (Momtaz, 2019). Even though there was the potential beginnings for another deal, the US and Iran could not even get past the first issue of relieving sanctions, as Rouhani insisted the US committed to relieving sanctions and Trump refused to make that commitment, as doing so would force him to give up some of his power in the negotiation.

Increased Pressure

On October 31, 2019, Secretary Pompeo announced that there would be new sanctions and more nuclear restrictions on Iran (Department of State, October 2019). A few days later on November 4th, Iran announced they would start running new advanced uranium centrifuges, a third violation. This increased its capacity to produce nuclear material, with some saying the new capacity means Iran could produce enough nuclear material for a bomb in less than a year

(Sanger & Perez-Pena, 2019). The same day President Trump announced new sanctions aimed at Ayatollah Ali Khamenei (Sanger & Perez-Pena, 2019). On November 5, Iran announced a fourth violation of the JCPOA, as they began to inject gas into centrifuges (BBC News, 2019c).⁴⁶ Iran then began to build a second nuclear power reactor, which they used as a reason to breach the enrichment limit in the JCPOA (Ganji & Vahdat, 2019). As the IAEA confirmed that Iran had restarted uranium enrichment activities at Fordow, the EU called on Iran to uphold their commitments as the EU had, while threatening to trigger the dispute resolution mechanism (Foreign & Commonwealth Office, 2019).⁴⁷ Due to the enrichment of uranium at the Fordow facility, the US announced that they would end the sanctions waiver for that facility.⁴⁸ As the US announced more sanctions, Iran broke the JCPOA another time. The two continued to go back and forth as tensions continued to rise.

On December 4, the USS Forrest Sherman stopped a small wooden boat in the Arabian Sea and searched it, finding guided missile parts they attributed to Iran. The cache was on its way to rebels in Yemen (Baldor, 2019). Tensions continued to rise after a rocket attack on an Iraqi military base that wounded several American soldiers and killed an American contractor (Barnes, 2019). This attack, attributed to Iran and Major General Qasem Soleimani, was used in the explanation for the American action that killed Soleimani on January 2, 2020 (Department of Defense, 2020). In retaliation, Iran announced they would no longer adhere to the restrictions in the JCPOA relating to operational areas (Islamic Republic News Agency, 2020) and launched missile attacks against American military bases in Iraq. While no one was killed, there were at least 109 US troops with brain injuries (Gains & Helsel, 2020).⁴⁹ At that point, Iran suggested that would be the extent of its retaliation for killing Soleimani (Rubin, 2020; Romo, 2020). The tension between the US and Iran culminated in Iran “unintentionally” firing a missile at a

Ukrainian passenger jet, killing everyone on board (BBC News, 2020).⁵⁰ After these events, the EU decided to trigger the Dispute Resolution Mechanism (Foreign & Commonwealth Office, 2020).⁵¹ On January 16, Iran announced that they exceeded pre-JCPOA levels of enriched uranium production (Office of the President of the Islamic Republic of Iran, 2020). Further, Iran threatened to withdraw from the NPT if they were referred to the UN Security Council by the Dispute Resolution Mechanism (Dehghanpisheh, 2020).⁵² The consequences of the US withdrawing from the deal were huge, with the JCPOA ultimately collapsing. In addition to this, heightening tensions ultimately led to the injury and death of both Americans and other foreign nationals.

Ultimately, Trump believes that the JCPOA is a bad deal for the US. His actions to ensure that Iran would never develop nuclear weapons, allowed Iran to be less than a year away from developing them. Additionally, he has not been able to present another viable multilateral or bilateral solution to the problem of Iran achieving nuclear weapons. He was not able to get over his zero-sum game mindset to maintain the deal and has not been able to do so in attempting to reach a new deal. Further, he did not give his administration enough time to renegotiate a deal. The JCPOA took over 12 years of careful negotiation between many parties, and Trump gave his administration less than a year before pulling out of the JCPOA. Further, his withdrawal pushed Iran closer to developing a nuclear weapon. Interestingly, he claims the reason for pulling out of the JCPOA is preventing Iran from attaining nuclear weapons; however, it seems like the underlying reason is actually that Iran is a state-sponsor of terror. Regardless of his reasons for pulling out of the JCPOA, it seems that he has created tensions with our European Allies and has increasingly isolated America from the rest of the world. He wants America to be the dominant power, regardless of the cost. He does not believe it is America's place to compromise, thus

preventing a diplomatic solution and causing rising tensions that have resulted in people being injured or killed. Iran and the JCPOA are not the only areas in American security policy where Trump has used an “America First” mindset. One of the other areas is NATO.

North Atlantic Treaty Organization

When Trump first outlined his “America First” foreign policy, one of his very first topics was NATO, and the inequity surrounding contributions to collective security (Trump, 2016). He claimed that our allies “look at the United States as weak and forgiving and feel no obligation to honor their agreements with us” (Trump, p. 161, 2016). He complained about the fact that only four of the 28 countries in NATO were contributing 2% of their GDP to defense spending, thus leaving the US to defend them and eat the cost (Trump, 2016). In this speech, Trump wanted to revise and “upgrade” NATO for the modern age. As President-elect, Trump said in an interview that NATO is “obsolete” and not able to handle the modern fight against terrorism (Trump, quoted in Gordon & Chokshi, 2017). As his inauguration approached, “there [was] a growing realization in European capitals that Mr. Trump’s acerbic criticism of NATO and the European Union was not just an attempt to win votes” (Gordon & Chokshi, 2017). Trump ultimately has two main critiques of NATO: the other countries are not contributing their fair share, and the organization, by design, cannot meet the modern challenges facing the alliance.

Unequal Contributions

NATO members are expected to spend 2% of their GDP on defense; however, this has historically not been the case. The US far exceeds the rest of the countries in terms of defense expenditure (NATO Public Diplomacy Division, 2019).⁵³ In 2014 only three of the 28 countries were above the 2% threshold, with four countries being above 1.5% (NATO Public Diplomacy Division, 2019). The US was the highest at approximately 3.75%. In 2019, 9 countries were

estimated to reach the threshold, with 7 estimated at above 1.5%. Many countries increased their defense spending, making progress towards the 2% guideline.⁵⁴ The 2% guideline originated in 2006 when the Defense Ministers of NATO countries agreed to commit 2% of GDP spending to defense. According to NATO,

This guideline principally serves as an indicator of a country’s political will to contribute to the Alliance’s common defence efforts. . . Additionally, the defence capacity of each member country has an important impact on the overall perception of the Alliance’s credibility as a politico-military organization. (NATO, 2019a).

The 2% guideline is part of what NATO considers “indirect funding.”

Another way to look at the inequity surrounding defense spending is to look at the combined GDP of the participating European countries and Canada in comparison to the US. In fact, the combined GDP is higher than that of the US, however, they spend less than half of what the US does. This trend has existed more or less throughout the history of NATO and has grown since 9/11 (NATO, 2020). Additionally, the US provides “some essential capabilities, including for instance, in regard to intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance; air-to-air refueling; ballistic missile defence; and airborne electronic warfare” (NATO, 2020). In 2014, after dealing with the effects of the 2008 financial crisis, NATO leaders agreed it was time to stop the trend of shrinking defense budgets (NATO, 2020). They decided that allies who were already meeting the 2% guideline would try and continue to hit the guideline, while those who were not meeting it would try and stop any decline while trying to reach the 2% guideline within a decade. Of those that have not already reached the goal, many have plans in place to reach the goal by 2024 (NATO, 2020).

Trump has spoken at length about this, as it is one of his top criticisms of NATO. When describing his problems with NATO, he said,

We pay far too much. We are spending — you know, in fact, they’re even making it so the percentages are greater. NATO is unfair, economically, to us, to the United States. Because it really helps them more so than the United States, and we pay a disproportionate share. Now, I’m a person that — you notice I talk about economics quite a bit, in these military situations, because it is about economics, because we don’t have money anymore because we’ve been taking care of so many people in so many different forms that we don’t have money — and countries, and countries. So NATO is something that at the time was excellent. Today, it has to be changed . . . It has to be changed from the standpoint of cost because the United States bears far too much of the cost of NATO (Haberman & Sanger, March 2016).

This led him to joke, when asked about defending Estonia, about how “we defend everybody,” saying “when in doubt, come to the United States. We’ll defend you. In some cases free of charge” (Haberman & Sanger, March 2016). Trump claims that because NATO is based on a treaty, the US would defend Estonia against Russia, but Trump also used the question as a means of highlighting the problems (some real) with NATO (Haberman & Sanger, March 2016).

NATO is a treaty alliance, and members do have treaty obligations that stem from their membership in the organization.

In a follow-up interview four months later, then-candidate Trump reiterated this same idea, taking it one step further. He said that if countries we are currently defending do not begin to pay for or reimburse the cost of their protection, the US should choose to allow them to defend themselves, particularly wealthy countries who theoretically have the money to do so (Haberman & Sanger, July 2016). When pressed on the idea of reimbursement and how it relates to the troops we have stationed in other countries, Trump responded with “I think it’s a mutual interest, but we’re being reimbursed like it’s only in our interest” (Haberman & Sanger, July 2016).⁵⁵ He further supported his viewpoint by explaining that “you always have to be prepared to walk” because if you say that you will always be there, the countries will become reliant on that and not feel the need to pay for the services the US is providing (Haberman & Sanger, July 2016).⁵⁶ Again, the topic of the Baltics was brought up, and Trump was asked if (since the states are

NATO allies) the US was called upon to defend them, would he come to their aid. Trump would not directly answer the question. Rather, his response was “have they fulfilled their obligations to us? If they fulfill their obligations to us, the answer is yes” (Haberman & Sanger, July 2016). If they had not “fulfilled their obligations to us” Trump said that he would not say whether or not he would send aid, despite us being treaty obligated (Haberman & Sanger, July 2016). While there have been many questions regarding the commitment of the US to NATO, one way in which the US has shown its commitment to Central and Eastern European Countries is through the European Deterrence Initiative.

European Deterrence Initiative (EDI)

The EDI was created in June 2014 following the Russian annexation of Crimea. Originally called the European Reassurance Initiative, the goal is to assure NATO allies that the US is committed to protecting their national security, namely against Russia (Towell & Kazlauskas, 2019).⁵⁷ The funding for the EDI was dramatically increased under the Trump administration, going from \$789 million in FY2016 to \$3.42 billion in FY2017 (Towell & Kazlauskas, 2018).⁵⁸ The funding allows for the Armored Brigade Combat Team (ABCT) to do a nine-month rotational deployment in these countries (Towell & Kazlauskas, 2018). The 2020 EDI request would support approximately 9,395 personnel in the US European Command who would participate in multiple activities, including additional exercises that enhance the interoperability of NATO (Office of the Under Secretary of Defense, 2019). The hope is that these deployments will increase the readiness of both the US and NATO; however, the cost of the EDI being rotational and not establishing a permanent military presence is a concern (Towell & Kazlauskas, 2018). In May 2018, Poland offered up to \$2 billion to allow the US to establish a permanent presence there and offered state infrastructure to support American forces. Making the American

presence permanent could help Poland and the US develop closer ties and would be a clue that the US is strengthening its resolve to prevent Russian aggression (Towell & Kazlauskas, 2018).

The EDI is just one example of how NATO is an evolving organization that has adapted itself to face the challenges of the modern world.

NATO for the Modern World

The principle at the core of NATO is that of collective defense. As NATO clarifies, “an attack against one Ally is considered as an attack against all Allies” (NATO, November 2019). This principle is enshrined in the Washington Treaty, where Article 5 deals with collective defense. It was invoked only one time in the history of NATO, after 9/11. There have been other collective defense measures that NATO has undertaken, including the crises in Ukraine and Syria. According to Grenda (2018), NATO “has always shown high flexibility and adaptability to the changing world” (p. 15). Further, when NATO has had to transform in the past, it has been in response to threats to international security. Predictions for the future of international security are that it will be “constantly and increasingly changeable, complex, surprising and chaotic” (Grenda, p. 15, 2018).

Initially, Trump believed that NATO out of date, and not able to meet the needs of the modern world. Trump explained why he believed that NATO was “obsolete” by saying

When NATO was formed many decades ago we were a different country. There was a different threat. Soviet Union was, the Soviet Union, not Russia, which was much bigger than Russia, as you know. And, it was certainly much more powerful than even today’s Russia, although again you go back into the weaponry. But, but – I said, I think NATO is obsolete, and I think that – because I don’t think – right now we don’t have somebody looking at terror, and we should be looking at terror (Haberman & Sanger, March 2016).

Trump later took back this statement in April 2017 after he met with the Secretary General of NATO, Jens Stoltenberg, declaring that NATO is “no longer obsolete” (Trump & Stoltenberg, 2017). After explaining the “productive discussion” between him and the Secretary General

which covered “what more NATO can do in the fight against terrorism,” Trump said that he “complained about that a long time ago and they made a change, and now they do fight terrorism” (Trump & Stoltenberg, 2017). Along these lines, Trump continued, saying

Every generation has strived to adapt the NATO Alliance to meet the challenges of their times — and on my visit to Brussels this spring . . . we will work together to do the same. We must not be trapped by the tired thinking that so many have, but apply new solutions to face new circumstances . . . We’re not here to stand on ceremony but to develop real strategies to achieve safety, security and peace. . . Secretary General, I’m honored to have you here today, and to reaffirm our commitment to this Alliance and to the enduring values that we proudly — and I mean, very proudly — share (Trump & Stoltenberg, 2017).

This is very different from the narrative that Trump was touting on the campaign trail. He reversed his previous stance that NATO was not able to live up to modern challenges, and instead described a living, breathing organization. His description of NATO fit with the narrative that it is flexible and able to adapt to new times, which was a complete 180 to his previous beliefs.

Trump’s Threats

In July 2018, Trump headed to Brussels for a particularly notable NATO summit. One of the first things that Trump did at the summit was to have breakfast with Secretary Stoltenberg, where he attacked Germany for their reliance on Russian energy and saying that many European countries, including Germany, were “delinquent” because they historically have not contributed their 2% spending (New York Times, 2018). Later on, during the Summit, Trump reportedly delivered an ultimatum during a closed-door meeting: either the other countries reach the 2% mark by January 2019, or the US would “go it alone” (Erlanger, Davis, & Rogers, 2018). The summit did not conclude without any other dramatic displays by Trump, as he was late to scheduled meetings and insisted on holding an emergency session about spending. By the end of the Summit, Trump signed the Communique which resulted from almost a year of work,

ultimately recommitting the US to the alliance. The Communique set several goals for the alliance, including increasing efforts on cybersecurity, increasing the commitment to act as a deterrent against Russia, and calling for at least 20% of military budgets to be spent on equipment and modernization (Erlanger, Davis, & Rogers, 2018). Trump’s final thoughts on the summit included him saying “I believe in NATO. I think NATO’s a very important—probably the greatest ever done” (Erlanger, Davis, & Rogers, 2018). Still, Trump’s threats to withdraw had reportedly led to scrambling to prevent the meeting from “turning into a disaster” (Barnes & Cooper, 2019).

On January 14, 2019, the *New York Times* published an article stating that it had been informed by senior administration officials multiple times over the course of 2018 that Trump said privately he wanted to withdraw the US from NATO. His national security team at the times⁵⁹ was able to keep this from happening; however, according to Barnes and Cooper (2019), the more times Trump mentioned withdrawing the US, the more his advisors worried. The article also mentioned that the leaders’ meeting that was planned to happen in April 2019 in Washington DC had been changed to a foreign ministers meeting, “as some diplomats feared that Mr. Trump could use a Washington summit meeting to renew his attacks on the alliance” (Barnes & Cooper, 2019).

While Trump theoretically has the authority to remove the US from NATO with very little input from Congress, the likelihood of him going through with it is hypothetically low (Kupchan, 2019). Congress overwhelmingly supports NATO. The Senate passed a resolution in support of NATO in 2018 with 97 Senators voting in favor. Additionally, after the rumors mentioned above began to circulate, the House voted 357 to 22 to prohibit using federal funds to withdraw from NATO (Kupchan, 2019). Congress does not want to leave NATO, and neither do

the people. Fagan (2018) found that 62% of Americans have a favorable opinion of NATO, compared to 53% in 2016. Domestically, NATO is popular and thus makes it less likely that Trump would withdraw the US from NATO. Additionally, the Europeans have been working to increase their defense spending, which is increasing the value of the Alliance to the US (Kupchan, 2019). The increased spending is even something that Trump touted in his 2019 State of the Union address (Kupchan, 2019).

The “Brain Death” of NATO

Despite what Trump may or may not have said privately, he has seemingly begun to defend it publicly. President Macron was quoted as saying NATO is experiencing “brain death” in November 2019, in the context of the questioned commitment of the US. In his mind, the validity of the collective defense function of NATO was in question, and the US was not providing the strategic coordination necessary to maintain the functional capabilities of NATO, thus contributing to its ‘brain death’ (Erlanger, 2019). Specifically, Macron felt that the US was turning its back on the rest of the alliance, particularly as Trump suddenly pulled troops out of northeastern Syria. Macron wants Europe to do more in their interest by limiting their dependency on the US for protection, calling for “strategic autonomy” in Europe (Erlanger, 2019). Macron explained “the brain death of NATO” by saying

The instability of our American partner and rising tensions have meant that the idea of European defence is gradually taking hold. It’s the aggiornamento for a powerful and strategic Europe. I would add that we will at some stage have to take stock of NATO. To my mind, what we are currently experiencing is the brain death of NATO. We have to be lucid (The Economist, 2019).

He elaborated on the problem, describing a lack of planning and coordination between allies. The US specifically, he claimed, has had “no coordination whatsoever of strategic decision-making” between them and their NATO allies. He further said that the interoperability of NATO is

efficient; however, there are strategic and political problems surrounding it that need to be recognized (The Economist, 2019). Macron further said that “the NATO we’ve known since the beginning is changing its underlying philosophy” (The Economist, 2019). The uncertainty of whether or not the US is truly committed to the current alliance caused people to reconsider the strength of NATO and question whether more is needed (The Economist, 2019). Angela Merkel, Chancellor of Germany, made it clear that she does not hold the same view as Macron, saying that she believes NATO is still a vital element of European security (Erlinger, 2019).

Likewise, President Trump said that Macron’s comment was “a very, very, very nasty statement” (Keith, 2019). He began the NATO summit in December 2019 by meeting with Secretary Stoltenberg, whom he praised in his remarks, saying that he thinks Secretary Stoltenberg is “doing a fantastic job.” When asked about Macron’s comments, Trump responded by saying that “NATO serves a great purpose” and that the comment was “very insulting to a lot of different forces” (Trump & Stoltenberg, 2019). Secretary Stoltenberg responded that “NATO is active. NATO is agile. NATO is adapting” (Trump & Stoltenberg, 2019). He pointed to the countries increasing their defense investments, in preparation for the fight against terrorism, while also addressing the consequences of China’s rise. He said that NATO is a success because of its “ability to change when the world is changing” (Trump & Stoltenberg, 2019). Later on, Trump and Macron did a press conference together and Trump said that

So NATO is becoming different than it was, much bigger than it was, and much stronger than it was because people are now fulfilling their commitments. There are some countries that aren’t fulfilling their commitment, and those countries are going to be dealt with . . . So NATO has made a lot of progress over the last three years, and the word ‘flexibility’ is very important. They’re not just looking at one area now; they’re looking at the world. And that’s very important. To me, it’s very important (Trump & Macron, 2019).

This is far different from the opinions Trump expressed before he entered office. He has transitioned from being anti-NATO to appearing to support NATO. He believes his efforts over have transformed NATO and allowed to succeed in a way it previously had not been able to, and he is proud to show-off what his efforts have produced (Trump & Macron, 2019).

Overall, Trump has had a huge change of heart relating to his support of NATO. When he entered office, he was anti-NATO, saying it was “obsolete,” however, now he is defending NATO and its adaptability in response to Macron’s comments. He claims that the reason for his change of opinion is that he was shown that NATO has changed and was newly able to deal with terrorism. He wants the narrative to be that his efforts have been successful in reforming NATO, regardless of whether or not there is evidence to support this claim. His statements have also caused fear for many NATO allies. The biggest fear is that the US is not committed to the alliance, and this combined with the distrust and wariness that resulted from his handling of the JCPOA has put unnecessary strain on its relationship with some of its closest allies. It does not help that Trump was seemingly close to pulling the US out of NATO and insulted countries like Germany. The concerns Trump raised about unequal contributions and NATO’s preparedness for the modern world were valid, however, Trump took them to an extreme, questioning the usefulness of the organization and threatening the stability of the organization.

Analysis

Both NATO and the JCPOA provide valuable insight into the Trump Administration’s Security Policy and how it relates to his mantra of “America First.” One common theme is that Trump does not always paint a realistic picture. Not only does he say things that are not necessarily factually correct, but he twists things to align them with the narrative he wants. Trump said that the reason he pulled the US out of the JCPOA is that it did not prevent Iran from

creating nuclear weapons. However, under the JCPOA, it would have been extremely difficult for Iran to get a nuclear weapon until at least 2026. Now that Iran does not feel bound to the JCPOA, they might be able to create a nuclear weapon in less than a year. He also wants to seem like he is the good guy in this situation, wishing for peace and a better life for Iranian citizens while making Iran seem like the bad guy for not wanting to negotiate with the state that forced them out of the JCPOA. Furthermore, Trump cannot admit that he was wrong. When he reversed his opinion on whether or not NATO is obsolete, he claimed that they changed the organization, making it better, because he complained (Trump & Stoltenberg, 2017).

By rejecting the JCPOA, Trump is showing a preference for the US having complete control as well as a lack of trust in the international body assigned to oversee the implementation of the deal and check that Iran is following its provisions. He claims the JCPOA is a bad deal but has not been able to present another viable multilateral or bilateral solution. The rest of the signatories have supported the deal, and while no one is completely happy with the deal, this is the nature of compromise. This goes back to how Trump sees everything in terms of zero-sum games. In his mind, the only acceptable deal is one where the US wins and Iran loses. This is simply not plausible.

Additionally, when Trump was outlining his foreign policy, he claimed that part of his foreign policy was to ensure America's place as a peacemaker, however, after he withdrew the US from the JCPOA, we have seen both an escalation of tensions as well as Iran returning to their nuclear aspirations. Trump directed his administration to work with Congress and American Allies to “fix” the deal, yet seven months later he withdrew the US from the JCPOA. The JCPOA took shape out of the Joint Plan of Action, which was signed in 2013, with the JCPOA being the product of 12 years of negotiations. While he did say that if they could not

reach a better deal, the deal would be terminated, Trump did not give them a lot of time to try and work something out. It has been over two and a half years since Trump announced that he was directing his administration to work on “fixing” the deal and there still has not been another solution other than returning to the original sanctions. Furthermore, Iran refutes the possibility of another deal, and the only way they are willing to even talk with the US is if sanctions are lifted, which seems unlikely given the current policy of maximum pressure.

Another interesting part of Trump’s policy on Iran is that Trump is claiming that the reason for pulling out of the deal is to prevent Iran from getting nuclear weapons; however, the underlying reasons seem to be more in line with preventing US money from flowing to terrorist organizations. Reinstating sanctions prevents the money from flowing to these organizations. Possible reasons why Trump is leading with the idea of preventing Iran from getting a nuclear weapon include that this idea is easier to comprehend, or that it makes for a better sound bite, as a nuclear weapon can be seen as a direct threat to the people of the US. It is important to stand up to terrorism, and if this truly is his motivation, it is a positive reason for his actions. Whether or not it is the most effective means to fight terrorism is still up for debate and beyond the scope of this paper.

Importantly, the effects of removing the US from the JCPOA were not just bilateral, but multilateral as well. Trump said in his speech outlining his foreign policy that “our friends are beginning to think they can’t depend on us” (Trump, p. 161, 2016). However, his actions have caused distrust and wariness with our European Allies who have expressed their displeasure at our withdrawal from the JCPOA. He continued to say, “we’ve had a president who dislikes our friends and bows to our enemies” (Trump, p. 161, 2016). Yet, he has cozied up to countries like Russia and China while distancing from allies like France, Britain, and Germany. Further, Trump

said, “we’ve picked fights with our oldest friends, and now they’re starting to look elsewhere for help” (Trump, p. 162, 2016). Pulling out of the JCPOA and threatening to pull out of NATO is arguably picking fights with our “oldest friends,” which could push them away at a point in time where it may become extremely important to have them on our side as we continue to isolate ourselves with a “go it alone” strategy.

“America First” is seemingly becoming America alone. Trump’s actions have distanced us from some of our closest allies, particularly France, Britain, and Germany who worked hard to ensure the JCPOA would remain intact after the US pulled out. Trump’s actions have been isolationist in nature, favoring a go-it-alone strategy over a multilateral solution. Additionally, Trump’s actions have caused distrust among our allies and other countries. In terms of making deals like the JCPOA, why would countries like North Korea want to make a deal with the US? If the policy of the US can change so drastically over a relatively short period, what is to say the deal will be long-lasting? Why would they want to go through all of the effort to craft a deal that will not survive? Further, the uncertainty of American commitments to NATO has led to concern among our strongest allies. To put America first in the way that Trump would like, it would be necessary to pull out of most if not all multilateral agreements, treaties, etc. while seriously considering the need for many of our bilateral agreements and treaties. By alienating friends and foes alike, the US winds up alone at the top of the pyramid. Furthermore, Trump seems to be choosing some allies over others, particularly when it relates to Iran where he has picked our Middle Eastern allies (such as Israel and Saudi Arabia) over our European allies. Trump’s foreign policy has favored Israel more so than his predecessors, having important implications on our foreign policy, particularly in the Middle East.

In addition to isolating America, for Trump, “America First” apparently means America strong. America must be seen as the strongest, thus solutions like “maximum pressure” contribute more to the strongman image Trump wants for America rather than diplomatic solutions based on compromise. In Trump’s mind, America is and should be, on top no matter what. While this appears to be Trump’s line of thinking, in reality, destroying the post-WWII Liberal International Order (which has greatly benefited the US) is not only against American interests but most likely would also weaken America and its standing abroad.

On a more positive note, there has been a noticeable increase in GDP spending on defense among NATO allies. While this increase was measured from 2014-2019, it is important to note the potential impact of Trump’s statements and actions regarding NATO have had. Additionally, it supports the idea that his statements have not had the opposite effect. However, further research is necessary to determine whether the changes in contributions have been a result of Trump and his foreign policy or other factors, including the agreement in 2014, to have each of the allies at or above the 2% guideline by 2024. If you asked Trump about this increase, he would surely take credit for it. Regardless of whether or not it was his doing, the increase has seemingly helped convince Trump that it is important to preserve NATO and keep the US committed. Trump’s problems with NATO are critiques that are based on real problems with the organization; however, he arguably takes them to the extreme. The US is currently supporting NATO, but the other allies are working to correct that. Additionally, Trump’s concerns about NATO not being able to meet the challenges of the modern world are valid; still, the organization has survived many challenges since its creation in 1949 and has proven itself to be flexible. Questioning the ability of institutions is fine, as long as it does not lead to actions that may cause irreparable damage, particularly to our relationships with our allies.

Conclusion

Trump’s Realist approach to International Relations has led him to act like a bull in a china shop. Every existing bilateral or multilateral agreement or treaty must be questioned, and if he deems that America did not win, then the agreement must go. He is attempting to destroy the Liberal International Order, which has been of great benefit to the US. Fortunately, the shelves in the china shop have been bolted down, and there are protective measures in place to prevent too much damage. The systems and people who are in place, both internal (like Congress) and external (like our European Allies), can prevent the President from doing anything too drastic that could significantly damage the Liberal International Order (like pulling out of NATO). For example, he does not have Congressional support to withdraw from NATO, but when he withdrew from the JCPOA, he received support from multiple Senators. It is important to note that he still has enough power to damage it, including when he withdrew from the JCPOA. Not only is he damaging relationships with enemies, but he is also damaging them with friends. The fact that there is some resistance to his attempted dramatic policy shifts (both systemic and from his advisors), has allowed him to change his mind on NATO, however, it did not stop him from withdrawing from the JCPOA.

As President Trump tries to dismantle the Liberal International Order, he is both weakening the credibility and trustworthiness of America. The uncertainty he has caused forces our allies to strengthen themselves, which does not inherently make the US weaker, but does mean that they need less of America and its resources. Trump has highlighted flaws in our domestic political systems that make it easy for the President to dramatically change our foreign policy, practically on a whim. In doing so, he has shown our allies and enemies alike our weakness and has discouraged multilateral or bilateral agreements with the US because it is so

easy for one person to dismantle the deal. While he has become a defender of NATO, the chaos caused by his lack of commitment damaged the alliance and our relationships with member states by causing panic and fear that the US would leave. While Trump would probably argue that he was successful in strengthening the organization and take credit for the increase in defense spending, this is just another one of his narratives that are not properly framed. In reality, he is claiming credit for solving a problem that he created.

Trump’s claims of what “America First” means, and what his foreign policy is, make him sound like a Realist. However, he is arguably a Neoclassical Realist. A Neoclassical Realist is based on classical Realist thought, particularly in terms of the importance of power in an international system. However, it takes into account both internal (domestic) and external (international) variables as well. While Neoclassical Realists argue that a state’s foreign policy is driven by the power it has within the international system, they admit that the impact of this power on foreign policy is “indirect and complex” (Rose, p. 146, 1998). While this may not be Trump’s theoretical approach to Foreign Policy, it appears that it is his unintentional approach. Going back to his change of heart on NATO, there were other factors (namely domestic) that affected his decision. While he still believes that power is the ultimate goal, he is willing to submit to domestic variables in making his decisions. In terms of Iran and the JCPOA, the domestic and international variables were not strong enough to keep him from withdrawing the US from the deal. In his mind, the JCPOA was a loss for the US and in order to win, he needed to create a new deal that would recognize the US as the powerful state that it is.

There has been question as to whether or not we have a coherent foreign policy, with Dick Cheney reportedly confronting Vice President Mike Pence about it (Johnson, 2019). While this may in fact be the case, further research is necessary in order to determine whether or not it

is coherent. Looking at these two cases from a Neoclassical Realist approach, arguably it is somewhat coherent. With both the JCPOA and NATO, Trump questioned the necessity of remaining in the agreements. While he was successful in removing the US from the JCPOA, there were barriers that prevented him from removing the US from NATO. Trump’s policy is rooted in zero-sum games and a struggle for power, and in these two cases that is what seemingly influenced his attitudes towards the JCPOA and NATO. He felt America was getting a bad deal and acted to remove it from the JCPOA, and once NATO seemingly fixed the problems that were harming the US, Trump appeared to support it. In all, Trump’s approach to foreign policy differs from that of his predecessors, having important implications on American foreign policy moving forward. Some of the changes are positive, while many are negative. This paper has specifically looked at the US’s security policy, specifically the JCPOA and NATO, but there is a lot more to foreign policy than these two issues. Further research must be conducted into “America First” as a foreign policy both in the short-term and in the long-term. There remains a lot to be learned from this period in American foreign policy and it will be interesting to see the long-term impacts.

¹ As Mackintosh said, “to put it bluntly: carefully constructed mechanisms that foster international cooperation and coordination now face significant challenges going forward, with their effectiveness threatened to varying degrees by the America First dogma and the abandonment of America’s historic global leadership that this policy signifies” (2017, p. 60).

² An example of the application of Realism during the Cold War would be the nuclear proliferation that occurred, as both sides wanted to have the dominant military and saw that it was not within their best interest to limit the proliferation of nuclear weapons. More broadly, Realism can describe the US policy of Containment that the US chose to pursue, as well as why they did not pursue a policy of appeasement similar to the policy used initially with Hitler. The reason the US chose to pursue containment but not appeasement is power. Containing a threat meant that the US would have more power over the Soviet Union, whereas appeasement may have led the Soviet Union to have more power over the US (Goldstein & Pevehouse, 2014).

³ The idea behind this is that since trade is mutually beneficial for both countries (both countries get what they want), they will be less likely to go to war or risk their mutually beneficial relationship that has made them essentially economically interdependent (Goldstein & Pevehouse, 2014).

⁴ “America First,” according to Trump (2016), centers on the idea that what is best for the US has been ignored, and that he intends to change that narrative in order to ensure that America is not only on top, but also that our foreign policy directly benefits us.

5 Aid has been provided to Iranian citizens through both the State Department and USAID (US Department of State, 2015).

6 In lieu of direct relations via an embassy in Iran, the US has used the Swiss Embassy to represent their interests, while Iran has used the Pakistani Embassy in the (US Department of State, 2015).

7 The sanctions the UN, US, and EU imposed cost Iran over 160 billion US Dollars over the course of 4 years (2012-2016) (BBC News, 2019a).

8 Iran also agreed to the UN arms embargo continuing for as long as five years with the option to end it sooner if the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) feels that the nuclear program is completely peaceful. There is also a ban on ballistic missile technology lasting up to eight years (BBC News, 2019a).

9 Before he outlined the plan, he explained that he was going to instruct intelligence agencies to investigate whether or not Iran is dealing with North Korea (Trump, 2017).

10 Trump (2017) described the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps as “the Iranian Supreme Leader’s corrupt personal terror force and militia.”

11 Trump specifically named Iran’s arming of Bashar Al-Assad, supplying of weapons and missiles to both proxies and partners who use them against civilians, and plotting to bomb a restaurant in Washington D.C. as reasons

12 For context, prior to the JCPOA, Iran had two facilities (Natanz and Fordo) that took uranium and separated the isotope U-235. At concentrations (or enrichments) around 3-4% it is used for power plants, however, in order for use in nuclear weapons, it must be at a concentration around 90% (BBC News, 2019a).

13 The stockpile they were allowed to keep must have an enrichment at or below 3.67%, well below the level of enrichment needed to make a nuclear weapon, for 15 years (JCPOA, 2015).

14 At the time of the deal, Iran’s centrifuges totaled almost 20,000 (BBC News, 2019a). As a result of the deal the country could only install up to 5,060 centrifuges at Natanz (one of the two facilities) (JCPOA, 2015). The centrifuges they were allowed to keep were some of the oldest and least efficient (BBC News, 2019a).

15 By the time the policy began, Iran had greatly reduced the number of centrifuges it had, with Natanz and Fordo having shipped a large number of low-enriched uranium to Russia. Furthermore, only Natanz is still allowed to conduct research, and what research it can conduct is limited until 2024. Fordo on the other hand is not allowed to enrich uranium until 2031 and the facility itself is being transformed into a “nuclear, physics and technology centre.” 1,044 centrifuges are stored at this facility and the radioisotopes that they produce will be used in medicine, agriculture, industry, and science (BBC News, 2019a).

16 It also outlined a plan to send spent fuel out of the country throughout the lifespan of the reactor. The JCPOA also prevents Iran from developing additional heavy-water reactors or accumulating excess heavy water until 2031 (BBC News, 2019a).

17 In order to act the eight-member commission must have a majority vote and if the Joint-Commission cannot reach a decision the matter will move to the UN Security Council (JCPOA, 2015).

18 The first violation was in February 2016, with the second being in November 2016. The second violation was relatively small, with Iran only exceeding the limits by 100 kilograms (Jahn, 2016).

19 Another reason that President Trump removed the US from the JCPOA, is due to the fact there were no limits on any other behaviors of Iran, naming Syria and Yemen specifically (Trump, May 2018).

20 He also used intelligence documents published by Israel to support his claims and saying “the fact is this was a horrible, one-sided deal that should have never, ever been made. It didn’t bring calm, it didn’t bring peace, and it never will.”

21 Trump further explained that Iran’s military budget grew by almost 40%, at the same time their economy was not performing. He claimed that after the sanctions were lifted, Iran continued to “build nuclear-capable missiles, support terrorism, and cause havoc throughout the Middle East and beyond” by using the funds they gained from the sanctions being lifted. He also claimed that “Iran’s bloody ambitions have grown only more brazen” (Trump, May 2018).

22 Trump explained himself by saying “in other words, we got weak inspections in exchange for no more than a purely short-term and temporary delay in Iran’s path to nuclear weapons” (Trump, 2017). In his view, there are other countries that “think in terms of 100-year intervals” so why should the US only look a few years ahead (Trump, 2017)?

23 Previously, President Trump expressed that the “proud people” of Iran were forced to “submit to its extremist rule.” Trump further used the fact that the regime uses violence to suppress its citizens to justify his foreign policy (Trump, 2017).

24 The four actions taken by the EU included activation of the Blocking Statute (which protects European countries and forbids them from complying with US sanctions), removing obstacles for the European Investment Bank, increasing the sectoral cooperation with Iran, and encouraging Member States to consider bank transfers to Iran (European Commission, May 2018).

25 Pompeo continues to announce sanctions that will return, in an effort to make Iran choose between fighting “to keep its economy off life support at home or keep squandering precious wealth on fights abroad,” as, ultimately, Iran does not have the power to do both (Pompeo, 2018).

26 Pompeo frames these terms as not being a big ask, since the requests are consistent with global norms, and that the only way the US will consider re-establishing relations would be if Iran would put forth a good faith effort and make meaningful progress towards the conditions the US has laid out.

27 Shortly after Pompeo’s speech, the IAEA released its quarterly report, which found that Iran was in compliance with the JCPOA (IAEA Board of Governors, 2018).

28 She also announced progress in the Blocking Statute Annex

29 While they recognized their opposition to Trump pulling the US out of the JCPOA, they cite the fact that the sanctions were passed by Congress, signed by President Obama, and enforced by President Trump along with the notion that both parties support them, to encourage them to side with the US while warning of potential Congressional action in an effort “to ensure their integrity” (Cruz, July 2018).

30 The Group reports directly to him and is led by the Special Representative for Iran. The Group’s responsibilities include “directing, reviewing, and coordinating all aspects of the State Department’s Iran-related activity” and it will coordinate inter-agency efforts. The Group is a part of the administration’s efforts to “change the Iranian regime’s behavior” (Pompeo, August 2018).

31 The first support package totaled €18 million (€8 million of which went to the private sector), which was part of a total of €50 million for Iran (European Commission, August 2018).

32 the ICJ had ruled previously that the Treaty of Amity was valid (Van Den Berg & Sterling, 2018).

33 In between the ICJ hearings and announcement of the decision, the IAEA quarterly report come out, showing that Iran was continuing to uphold their commitments under the JCPOA (IAEA Board of Governors, August 2018).

34 That same day, United Against Nuclear Iran held their 2018 Summit, at which Secretary Pompeo and Ambassador John Bolton spoke. Most of the attendees were members of the US Government, or ambassadors to other Middle Eastern Countries (United Against Nuclear Iran, 2018).

35 The next day, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu revealed in his speech to the UN General Assembly that he had reason to believe Iran has a secret nuclear warehouse in Tehran in which they are storing equipment and material from their “secret nuclear weapons program,” however there is evidence to the contrary (Netanyahu, 2018). An anonymous US Official went on the record saying the US is aware of that site, and it is being used to store records and archives. A second anonymous official also went on the record and clarified that the US has known about the facility for a while, and again it is full of documents and records relating to the nuclear program (Irish & Mohammed, 2018).

36 Additionally, the next quarterly report found that Iran continued to uphold its commitments (IAEA Board of Governors, November 2018).

37 Specifically, the report said “Iran is not currently undertaking the key nuclear weapons-development activities we judge necessary to produce a nuclear device. However, Iranian officials have publicly threatened to reverse some of Iran’s Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) commitments—and resume nuclear activities that the JCPOA limits—if Iran does not gain the tangible trade and investment benefits it expected from the deal” (Coats, p. 10, 2019).

38 Germany, France and the UK created the Instrument in Support of Trade Exchanges (INSTEX) in order to allow for European Countries to continue trading with Iran (Deutsche Welle, 2019). The quarterly report from the IAEA found Iran was still in compliance (IAEA Board of Governors, February 2019), and at the Joint Commission of the JCPOA meeting, they again reiterated their commitment to the JCPOA (EEAS, 2019).

39 In May, the US announced they would renew five out of seven waivers (revoking the other two) that permitted Russia and other European nations to perform civilian nuclear cooperation (Lee, 2019).

40 The goal was “to send a clear and unmistakable message to the Iranian regime that any attack on United States interests or on those of our allies will be met with unrelenting force” (Bolton, 2019).

41 Zarif was sanctioned under Executive Order 13876 as he acted on behalf of the Supreme Leader

42 The UK, France, and Germany also condemned Iran for the attack (Prime Minister’s Office, 2019).

43 He continued, saying that “as long as Iran’s menacing behavior continues, sanctions will not be lifted; they will be tightened” (Trump, September 2019). He called for other nations to join the US, and pointed to Iran’s hatred of Israel, saying “America will never tolerate such anti-Semitic hate” (Trump, September 2019).

44 Previously in 2017 at the UN General Assembly meeting, Iran reportedly rejected 8 requests from the US to meet (Pennetier, Holland, & Nichols, 2019).

45 He also said that if the US is content with the minimums, they will be too. Rouhani claims that if the singular goal is to make sure that Iran does not achieve a nuclear weapon, then the IAEA supervision should be enough (PBS NewsHour, 2019).

46 Secretary Pompeo spoke out in response to Iran’s actions, asking other nations to reject Iran’s “nuclear extortion and take serious steps to increase pressure” (Pompeo, November 7, 2019).

47 The IAEA confirmed that Iran had been undertaking activities counter to the JCPOA (IAEA Board of Governors, November 11, 2019), including the limit on heavy water (IAEA Board of Governors, November 18, 2019).

48 When making this announcement, Secretary Pompeo (November 17, 2019) said “The right amount of uranium enrichment for the world’s largest state sponsor of terror is zero.”

49 There was also damage to the housing structure of the base.

50 Iran claims that the missiles were fired due to human error, as the jet was mistaken for a cruise missile (BBC News, 2020).

51 Secretary Mnuchin announced that the administration was looking forward to working with France, Britain, and Germany as they triggered the dispute resolution mechanism, and he expected the UN sanctions to be re-imposed (Lambert, 2020).

52 The US then renewed waivers for Russian, Chinese, and European companies to continue working at Iranian nuclear sites, as their presence made it more difficult for Iran to develop nuclear weapons. At the same time, the US did announce sanctions against Iran’s Atomic Energy Organization (AEOI).

53 In 2014, the US spent \$660 billion and the rest of NATO spent \$250 billion combined. It has gotten slightly closer in terms of spending in 2019, however, the US is estimated to have spent \$685 billion and the other countries \$302 billion (NATO Public Diplomacy Division, 2019). The cumulative defense spending in non-US NATO countries is projected to continue to increase to \$400 billion in 2024.

54 The US was estimated to be at 3.42% in 2019, which was the highest again, however, Bulgaria was estimated to be up to 3.25% in 2019 (NATO Public Diplomacy Division, 2019).

55 More simply, he does believe that stationing troops in places like Korea and Japan have a mutual benefit to both countries, but he has a problem with the fact that it comes at the expense of the US, and he believes that the other state(s) should be at least partially responsible for the cost, as they are benefiting from it.

56 Trump clarifies that he does not necessarily want to “walk” and that he “would prefer not to walk” but is prepared in case it is necessary (Haberman & Sanger, July 2016).

57 Under the EDI, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Poland, Romania, and Bulgaria receive additional military support (Towell & Kazlauskas, 2018).

58 The FY2019 funding is \$6.534 billion, with the FY2020 budget request being \$5.91 billion (Office of the Under Secretary of Defense, 2019).

59 General Mattis was Defense Secretary throughout 2018, and John Bolton replaced H.R. McMaster in March of 2018 as National Security Advisor.

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