Salvaging the Iranian Deal

What is the issue?

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- US president Trump has decided to pull out of the Iranian Nuclear Deal.
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- This might unleash a new crisis in the already disturbed middle-east.
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What is the Iranian deal?

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- "Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action – JCPOA" (Iranian Deal) was piloted by the then Obama administration and an agreement was reached in 2015.
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- The agreement was between "P5+1 (Permanent Five in the UN and Germany) and Iran" and was intended to curb Iran's nuclear program.
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- **Significance -** In 2015, Iran was close to building a nuclear bomb and JCPOA will effective stall any progress in that regard for at least 15 years.
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- The agreement placed Iran's nuclear facilities under international radar and curbed any possibilities of it manufacturing weapon's grade uranium.
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- It had also helped in lifting the international sanctions against Iran, which had impacted the country's economy very severely.
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- JCPOA was a significant achievement for Iranian President Rouhani, as he had successfully manoeuvred it through despite strong opposition from hardliners.
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- **Pullout -** US has now pulled out of the deal by violating its own commitment despite the fact that Iran has stringently adhered to the agreed commitments.
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- Trump has stated that Iranian deal needs renegotiations as there aren't

enough checks against Iran’s nuclear program.
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- U.S. has also kicked off new sanctions against Iran, and companies and countries that deal with Iran (more comprehensive than earlier sanctions).
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How has the response to US played out within Iran?

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- **Iranian Response -** Iran has only been voicing rhetoric opposition thus far and hasn’t resorted to any decisive action (like scarping JCPOA completely).
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- Iran has presently secured the support of other JCPOA stakeholders for the continuation of the deal.
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- All other stakeholders to JCPOA have voiced that they seen the deal as a base for negotiating further nuclear concession out of Iran.
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- Efforts for ensure that Iranian trade interests are protected against extensive US sanctions are also being worked out by the stakeholders.
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- **U.S. demands -** Trump administration has unveiled a dozen conditions for Iran to fulfil in order to reconsider removal of sanctions.
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- This includes a permanent clause for ending uranium enrichment (under the current JCPOA, there is only a 10 year ban on enrichment).
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- Additionally, the US wants Iran to end its missile program, and support for Hezbollah, Hamas, and Houthis, along with a complete withdrawal from Syria.
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What are the geo-political currents underlying the deal?

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- Arab spring and the rise of ISIS led to severe uncertainty in the middle-east, and U.S. was clearly short of diplomatic options region.
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- Obama concluded that the JCPOA with its stringent verification provisions would slow down Iran’s nuclear programme, and ease tensions in the region.

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- Additionally, it would strengthen the hand of a moderate leader in Rouhani, thereby enhancing diplomatic options for US in the region.
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- But contrarily, Trump administration (backed by rightist hardliners) seems to be against the rise of Iran as power centre in the region.
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- Notably, the lifting of sanction would've seen Iran emerge as a powerful economy in the region, which is not to the liking of Israel and Saudi.
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- Significantly, Israel and Saudi have been engaging Iranian proxies across various battlefields in the region (Yemen, Lebanon, Syria etc…)
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- In more specific terms, Trump seeks to keep Iran's economy under check and explore possible options to undo the theocratic setup in the country since 1979.
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How does the future look?

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- Domestically, Mr. Rouhani is likely to face pressure from hard-line elements if the deal approaches a collapse.
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- Rouhani has asked other JCPOA members to pitch in to make up for business losses that the US pullout is likely to cause to Iran (especially oil exports).
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- However, the signs are not promising as large European companies cannot afford U.S. sanctions due to their dependence on US markets.
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- While Iran is closing watching developments, there is a good likeliness that JCPOA might be rendered useless.
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- If that happens, then Iran might accelerate its nuclear program, which might unleash a new crisis in the region.
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Source: The Hindu

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