

Three steps toward resolving Iran's nuclear crisis

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The underlying assumptions on the part of Trump administration to withdraw from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) were the following: 1) by implementing the “maximum pressure” policy, Iran's oil exports would reach zero; its financial transactions would be fundamentally hindered and Iran's economy would collapse; 2) anti-government protests would erupt to the effect that would pervade all over the country; 3) Iran would lose its regional standing and influence; and 4) all these ramifications would ultimately lead to regime change or would bring Iranians to the negotiation table from a weak position.

Since President Trump was elected, I have repeatedly emphasized that the outcome envisioned for the “maximum pressure campaign” is merely a fantasy and wishful thinking, and that Trump's withdrawal from the deal would necessarily have negative consequences whose deleterious impacts that would go far beyond the two states' bilateral relations.

It been more than two and half years since Trump's election, but none of the objectives of the ill-advised “maximum pressure” policy has been achieved. Iran's economy did not collapse, and the country's influence did not subside. Iran's military capability and technology allowed it to shoot down the most sophisticated drone that the U.S. had ever built. The United Kingdom illegally sized an Iran oil tanker, for which Iran has reciprocated by seizing a British tanker in the Strait of Hormuz. Iran's ally in the region, the Houthis, forced the Emiratis to pull back from their involvement in the Yemeni war. The Houthis were also able to attack Saudi oil pipelines with drones. These are indicators of Iran's power and influence in the region, but they also speak to a broader crisis in the region that has been exacerbated by Trump's withdrawal from the Iran deal.

The political events and developments in the Middle East and elsewhere have so far been unfavorable to Trump's policies and preference; more important, they have been unfavorable to global peace and security. But I believe that there is still a chance to change the discourse. This would require the Trump administration to take a few concrete steps that can be game-changing moves toward ensuring peace and security in the region.

First, upon the invitation of the United Nations secretary general, the United States should agree to attend an urgent meeting with foreign ministers of Iran and the other signatories of the JCPOA (the UK, France, Germany, China and Russia) that aims to reach an agreement on reducing tensions and containing the current developments that could lead to a military confrontation. In this meeting, the illegal economic sanctions that were re-imposed by Trump administration should be temporarily lifted, so that a constructive debate and dialogue can start between Washington and Tehran. Gestures of goodwill, such as exchanging prisoners, by both states can be helpful to facilitate the process of reducing tensions.

Second: The world powers (minus the United States) believe that the world's most comprehensive nuclear agreement, namely the JCPOA, should be revived. By all official accounts, the JCPOA was working swell in achieving one crucial objective: to prevent Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon. President Trump has repeatedly said that he is looking to achieve the same objective, that is “for Iran to remain a non-nuclear state.” The JCPOA is the most robust and comprehensive international mechanism that can prevent Iran—or any other country for that matter—to acquire a nuclear weapon. Therefore, if the United States is serious about nonproliferation, it should work with Iran, the regional and the world powers to regionalize the principles of the JCPOA, which would ensure zero nuclear bombs in Iran and the region. A de-nuclearized Middle East is the only sustainable solution, and the JCPOA has created the new foundation to achieve this goal.

Third, and as indicated in the Article 5 of UN Security Council Resolution 598, to contain the escalating tensions in the Persian Gulf and to secure a steady supply of energy to the world market while preventing any military confrontation, Iran, the Arab countries around the Persian Gulf, and the five permanent members of the Security Council will need to have direct contact. A

sustainable peace and security arrangement in the region will necessarily require the stakeholders to hold *direct* talks. In this respect, direct contact between Iran and Saudi Arabia is all the more necessary.

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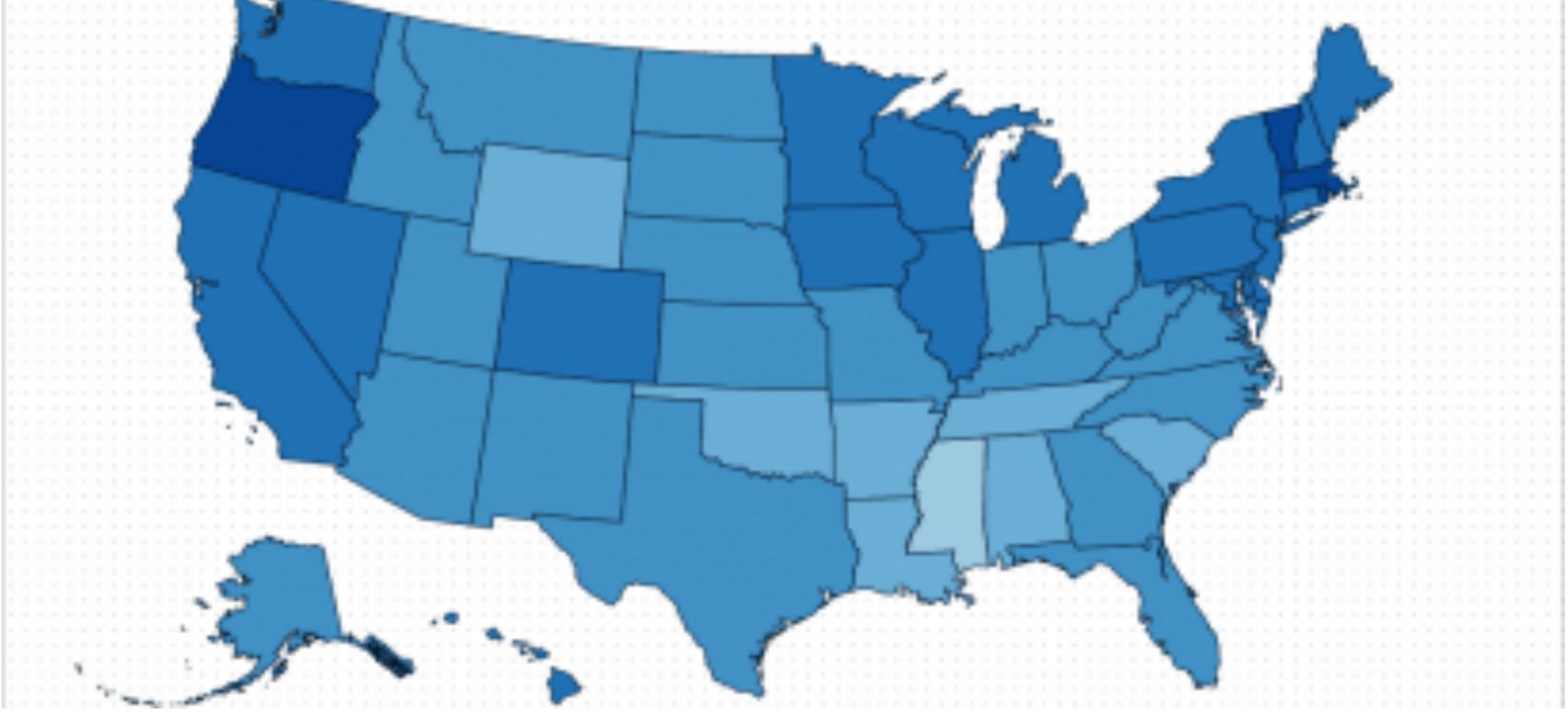
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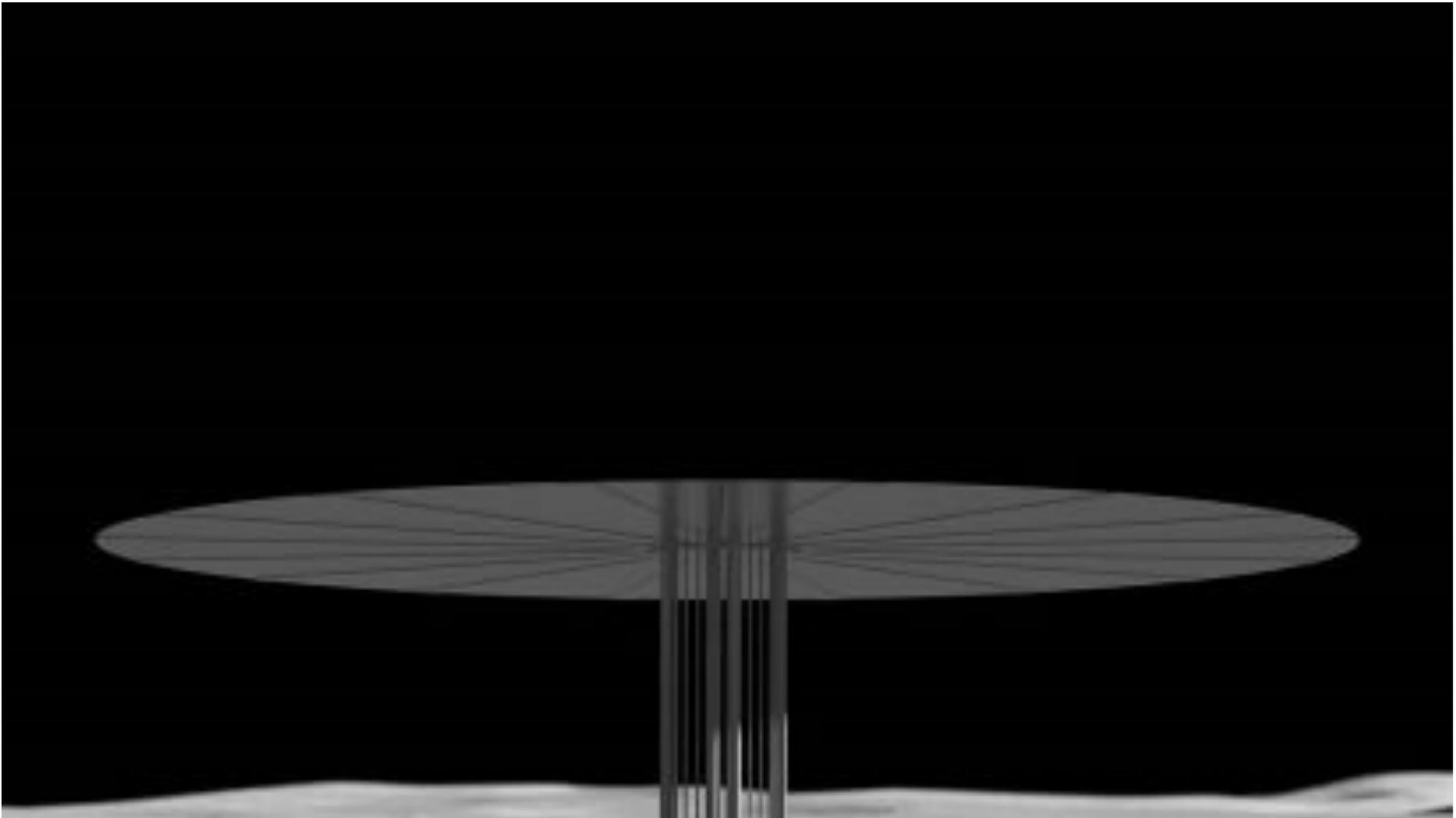
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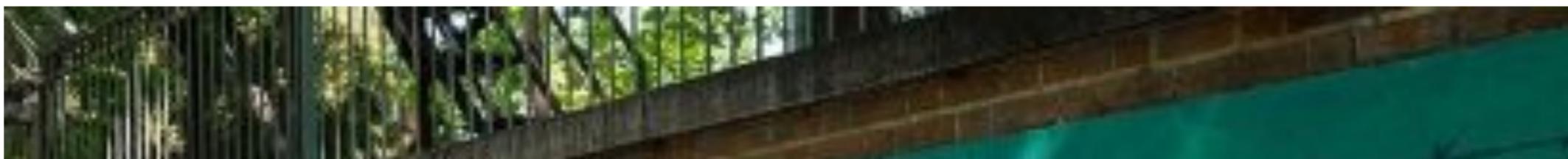
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