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Progressive Foreign Policy Debrief

Intel for Advocacy

TOPLINE TAKEAWAYS

- *Violating the Iran deal: The world suffers as Trump tries to settle petty grievances with President Obama.*
- *Gina Haspel apparently doesn't think torture is immoral.*
- *NDAA: House "debates"* Pentagon's budget this week. (*The Pentagon will get everything it wants.)*

WE'RE BACK ON THE PATH TO WAR WITH IRAN

In addition to successfully blocking all of Iran's pathways to building a nuclear weapon, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) took an unnecessary deadly war with Iran off the table.

Donald Trump erased all that when he announced he was walking away from the JCPOA.

President Obama explained what a tremendous disaster this decision will be:

1. Violating the deal turns our back on our allies.
2. The JCPOA was working in rolling back Iran's program.
3. The JCPOA is predicated on distrust of Iran, that's why it imposed strict limitations on Iran's program.
4. Iran was in compliance.
5. The Iran deal does not expire (despite misinformation peddled by JCPOA opponents).
6. The JCPOA was never intended to solve all problems related to Iran's behavior.
7. "Without the JCPOA, the United States could eventually be left with a losing choice between a nuclear-armed Iran or another war in the Middle East."

You can read his full analysis [here](#).

But of course, it's not just Obama saying this: [experts across the board](#), [our European allies](#), the [American people](#), [members of Congress](#) (even [those who opposed](#) the JCPOA to begin with) all agree that violating the deal is a huge mistake.

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On top of all that, the Europeans [appear](#) to be talking tough about the U.S. reimposing sanctions on European companies doing business in Iran. The neocons [want Trump to retaliate](#) with economic warfare.

The Washington Post's Jennifer Rubin, herself an original opponent of the deal, [neatly summed up](#) the motivations behind Trump's decision:

What we do see is that a president minimally informed about the world and undoubtedly ignorant about the details of the JCPOA has made a high-risk move **to satisfy his own grudge against the Obama regime and to satisfy his base** — which you remember was promised an end to involvement in Middle East wars.

MESSAGING

By violating the Iran deal and putting us on a path to war, Donald Trump is manufacturing a crisis that could be as consequential as the 2003 invasion of Iraq.

- Trump has no plan B other than escalation with Iran. This is not by accident, but rather by design: Trump is surrounded by advocates for Iran regime-change and war like John Bolton and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo. This, coupled with a drive for a more aggressive approach to Iran in the region, is a recipe for war.
- This move is likely to provoke Iran into restarting now frozen components of its nuclear program or into taking escalatory regional actions that provide excuses for the United States to respond militarily.
- Trump's decision leaves the United States isolated, undermining our alliances and threatening our ability to negotiate future multilateral deals, whether with Iran or other countries like North Korea.
- We forced U.N. weapons inspectors out of Iraq before they finished their work, and that's exactly what we'll be doing if Trump's move kills the JCPOA.

Donald Trump wants to blame anyone other than himself for the consequences of a U.S. exit from the deal, but he and his enablers are solely to blame.

The Iran deal is working to block all Iran's pathways to a nuclear bomb.

- The IAEA has verified 10 times that Iran is complying with the terms of the agreement.
- By abiding by the terms of the JCPOA, Iran is at least a year away from breaking out to a nuclear bomb. Previously, without it, Iran was just weeks away.

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FURTHER ANALYSIS/REACTION

- “How killing the nuclear deal could make it easier for Iran to pursue the bomb in secret,” Washington Post [\[LINK\]](#)
- “How Pulling Out of the Iran Nuclear Deal Could Hurt the U.S. Economy,” Time [\[LINK\]](#)
- “Trump wants to wring a ‘better deal’ from Iran. Here’s why that’s so unlikely,” Washington Post [\[LINK\]](#)
- “Trump Has Wrecked One of the Most Successful Arms-Control Deals in Modern History,” Slate [\[LINK\]](#)
- “Here’s What to Expect Now That Trump Has Withdrawn From the Iran Nuclear Deal,” Foreign Policy [\[LINK\]](#)
- “Anatomy of a Lousy Decision,” the New Republic [\[LINK\]](#)
- “Trump Vindicates Iranian Hardliners And Victimizes Ordinary Citizens,” Huffington Post [\[LINK\]](#)
- “My Iranian Family Was Helpless While My Uncle Died. Thanks To Trump, It Could Happen Again,” Bustle [\[LINK\]](#)
- “Trump axes the Iran deal and creates a new crisis,” Washington Post [\[LINK\]](#)
- “‘It is a very, very dangerous move’: how withdrawal from the Iran deal will affect Iranians,” Vox [\[LINK\]](#)
- “‘All Is Shambles’: The Days After the Iran Deal,” the Atlantic [\[LINK\]](#)
- “Follow The Money: Three Billionaires Paved Way For Trump’s Iran Deal Withdrawal,” LobeLog [\[LINK\]](#)
- “Trump’s decision to pull out of the Iran Deal echoes the lead-up to the Iraq War,” Mic [\[LINK\]](#)
- “Fact-checking President Trump’s reasons for leaving the Iran nuclear deal,” Washington Post [\[LINK\]](#)
- “Mark Dubowitz: You’re on the Hook for Killing the Iran Deal,” LobeLog [\[LINK\]](#)
- “The Art of Regime Change,” Foreign Policy [\[LINK\]](#)
- [WATCH](#): “The Art of the Iran Deal,” Samantha Bee

ONE MORE THING

Don’t forget, buried in this week’s Iran deal news was the [revelation](#) that Trump allies were waging a covert ops campaign using an Israeli private intel firm to dig up dirt on former Obama officials involved in reaching the Iran deal.

“In all the stories swirling around the the Trump Administration, this one cannot be allowed to fall into obscurity,” journalist Dan Rather [tweeted](#). “It needs more attention, and more reporting. Many unanswered questions, but the topic is so serious as to warrant real scrutiny.”

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WE FINALLY HEARD FROM GINA HASPEL; SHE DIDN'T DO HERSELF ANY FAVORS

Gina Haspel's confirmation hearing this week on her nomination to become CIA Director didn't go so great. In fact, her public testimony was a long series of [evasive answers](#) about her role in torture, its efficacy, and its future. Here's a quick run down of some of the lowlights:

- She [refused](#) to say that the CIA's torture program was immoral, and instead tried to justify it.
- She declined to say whether she pushed for the program to be expanded *after* legislative and judicial branch actions that put an end to it.
- Haspel is the one who decides what information about her career at the CIA gets declassified so Senators can make a full assessment of her qualifications. She refused to recuse herself from that process.
- She sowed [more confusion](#) about her role in destroying videotape evidence of the torture of detainees she oversaw, but confirmed her role in the cover up.
- She wouldn't say how'd she'd respond if Trump -- a big supporter of torture, to put it mildly -- ordered her to torture.

Haspel also vowed to never restart the CIA's torture program, which isn't really the most controversial nature of her nomination. We know she won't restart the program because its illegality has (again) been codified in U.S law.

The issue with Haspel's nomination is that we shouldn't *reward* those who participated, or in this case, led the Bush-era torture program.

But even as she vowed never to restart the program, she still, as the New Yorker [put it](#), "left open the possibility that she still viewed torture as someone's proper job" outside the CIA.

WHICH VALIDATORS HAVE MORE CREDIBILITY?

It's not all that surprising that the CIA, and former CIA officials, are backing Haspel's nomination, considering their own role in torture.

So it's probably a bit more noteworthy that more than [100 retired military brass](#) and more than [100 former U.S. ambassadors](#) have signed letters opposing her bid. They have a better

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understanding of the torture program's fall out and don't have a stake in whether the issue is fully probed.

SPEAKING OF VALIDATORS

Sen. John McCain, himself a victim of brutal torture at the hands of the North Vietnamese in the 1960s and 70s, has announced his opposition to Haspel. "Ms. Haspel's role in overseeing the use of torture by Americans is disturbing," he said in a [statement](#) this week. "Her refusal to acknowledge torture's immorality is disqualifying."

And how did Donald Trump's allies respond?

One commentator on Fox [claimed](#) (falsely) that torture "worked on John [McCain]. That's why they call him 'Songbird John'" (nobody calls him that).

And to top it all off, White House staffer Kelly Sadler [mocked McCain](#) and his decision in an internal staff meeting this week, saying, "It doesn't matter, he's dying anyway."

All class.

RESOURCES

- See statements on Haspel's nomination hearing from: [ACLU](#), [The Center for Victims of Torture](#), [Human Rights First](#), [Indivisible](#), [National Religious Campaign Against Torture](#), and [Win Without War](#).
- For more research, resources and talking points, see our past Debriefs [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#).

[AN AUTHORIZATION TO LIGHT SOME OF OUR MONEY ON FIRE](#)

You may have missed it, but this week, the House Armed Services Committee had its marathon 14+ hour markup debating the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for fiscal year 2019 -- which includes a whopping \$708 billion authorization for conventional and nuclear weapons and war, among other things.

While the military budgets of the next [ten countries combined](#) could fit into the Pentagon's \$700 billion+ budget, the committee once again spent its time debating the really important issues -- like waiving Endangered Species Act protections for the sage grouse in the Western United States, even though the military has not asked for these waivers. Indeed, although there were some thoughtful debates over important issues (see below), we could not help but notice the

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relative bipartisan acceptance that the Pentagon budget is neither too large nor too wasteful in spite of [strong evidence to the contrary](#). Some of the debates worth mentioning include:

- **Ranking Member Adam Smith's eloquent takedown of the rationale for "small" nuclear weapons** included in Trump's new Nuclear Posture Review. He argued the new policy -- in attempt to respond to Russia's supposed doctrine -- is too expensive, risks provoking a nuclear arms race, and makes nuclear war more likely. As he puts it, "let's not spend our way into a death spiral." [\[WATCH\]](#)
 - Notable: After the debate, all 28 Democrats on the committee voted against endorsing Trump's nuclear posture review.
- **Representative Ro Khanna's attempt to cut-off unauthorized U.S. refueling of Saudi and Emirati warplanes** that have been indiscriminately bombing Yemeni [civilians](#) and exacerbating Yemen's civil war. As our readers know, the war has been raging since 2015 and has created the world's worst humanitarian crisis, with millions of Yemenis on the brink of famine. [\[WATCH\]](#)
 - While Ranking Member Smith strongly [supported](#) the amendment, it lost by a vote of 19-42.
- **Representative Marc Veasey's amendment to strip language in the bill authorizing the Trump parade.** The amendment, which stated the the parade could only be ceremonial in nature and not feature military hardware that would "undermine readiness," failed by a voice vote. We're watching for this issue to be debated on the House floor during consideration in two weeks.
 - Check out some [talking points](#) on this issue by our friends at Common Defense.

Also debated: banning military funds from being used to build Trump's border wall, ensuring adequate funding for environmental impacts of military bases around the country, animal testing for military training, prohibiting the use national guard troops to enforce immigration laws. (None of the issues won in committee).

BURIED LEDES

[Dick Cheney](#) wants to bring back the Bush-era torture program, even though it's, ya know, illegal and didn't work.

Trump has quietly expanded how the U.S. uses military force around the world and [no one's really paying attention](#).

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On that front, ICYMI, **Army Green Berets are on the ground at the Saudi-Yemeni border** “[battling rebels](#) who pose no direct threat to the United States.”

Meanwhile, an [American citizen is](#) **leading a foreign army accused of war crimes in Yemen.** Time to dust off the War Crimes Act?

VoteVets sat down with Sen. Chris Murphy to [discuss](#) his bill to limit Trump’s first strike authority on North Korea.

Rep. Keith Ellison [wrote](#) to SecDef James Mattis this week **wondering what the military knows about extremist, white supremacist activity within its own ranks.**

Experts are warning that John Bolton’s [push to eliminate](#) a top White House cyber security job **would undo progress and send the wrong signal.**

Russian hackers are posing as Islamic State militants and [threatening the wives](#) of U.S. service members.

Progressives [need](#) **a new way to talk about national security.**

And finally, **remember when the FCC voted to let Big Cable ruin the Internet?** The Senate will now vote on a bill to overturn that decision. Take action [here](#).