

Bill Kaplan: Trump's showmanship on Iran and North Korea

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"With showman's flair, he (Trump) touts his foreign moves (Iran and North Korea) and waves away scandals" (*Washington Post*). The Trump administration is awash in corruption: Russian interference in the 2016 presidential election, with possible collusion by the Trump campaign and White House obstruction of justice; disgraced cabinet secretaries forced out after inappropriate travel spending; influence peddling and hush payments by Trump's personal attorney (Michael Cohen) and a vicious attack by a White House staffer against Arizona GOP Senator John McCain – "It doesn't matter (McCain's opposition to torture and CIA nominee Gina Haspel); he's dying anyway." Rock bottom for the White House.

Like Nixon, the White House is seeking to distract voters and change the narrative. As Watergate was reaching a crescendo, Nixon flew to the Soviet Union to toast the regime's leaders and discuss arms control. Nixon achieved no arms control breakthrough. Moreover, the dark cloud over Nixon did not dissipate, nor will it for Trump. Still, "Trump seizes chance to alter image" (*Washington Post*).

Trump decided to blowup the Iran nuclear deal, negotiated by the Obama administration, our allies (Britain, France and Germany), China, Russia and endorsed by the European Union plus the United Nations. Trump's recklessness has deepened a rift with our allies, could allow Iran to develop nuclear weapons, set off a nuclear arms race in the Middle East and perhaps lead to war. Iraq was no "cakewalk" and neither will Iran be.

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With no alternative plan, Trump broke an international agreement that closed off multiple pathways for Iran to develop nuclear weapons. Iran had to give up all the building blocks for a nuclear bomb: removal of 98 percent of its enriched uranium, dismantlement of thousands of centrifuges and disablement of a plutonium reactor. All done under strict on the ground inspection.

Now, Trump demands sanctions be reimposed on Iran. Europe might defy Trump. China and Russia will. Maybe that will give Iran an incentive to continue to adhere to the nuclear deal. With Trump “utterly lacking in ... policy depth or strategic vision and patience” (*New York Times*) there will not be a new agreement.

However, House Speaker Paul Ryan supports Trump as always. So do Wisconsin GOP Representatives Mike Gallagher and Glenn Grothman. But Wisconsin Democratic Senator Tammy Baldwin offered wisdom: “It’s a mistake to walk away from this international agreement with no alternative plan to prevent Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapon or hold them to account for destabilizing the region. Our U.S. military leaders have said this international agreement is working in our national security interests and breaking it will not make us safer.”

But what the heck, Trump can’t be bothered by details and facts. Always the showman, Trump “has shifted from warmongering to diplomacy on North Korea and prepares to meet its leader, Kim Jong-un to get him to abandon his nuclear arsenal of 20 to 60 weapons” (*New York Times*). Trump apparently thinks it’s a piece of cake. Will his showmanship lead to nothing or far worse?

— Kaplan wrote a guest column from Washington D.C. for the *Wisconsin State Journal* from 1995 - 2009.