

A WORLD IN MOTION



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THE NUMBERS: IRAN NUCLEAR DEAL



14.07.2015

The date an international agreement on the nuclear programme of Iran was reached



97%

The percentage of Iran's uranium stockpile which was eliminated in accordance with the agreement.



13,000

The number of centrifuges removed



\$32 billion

The amount of liquid assets available after the lifting of the sanctions

IRAN DEAL IN THE BALANCE AFTER US WITHDRAWAL



By Donnelly McClelland

President Donald Trump on Tuesday [8 May] pulled the United States out of an international nuclear deal with Iran, raising the risk of conflict in the Middle East, upsetting European allies and casting uncertainty over global oil supplies. Trump said in a televised address from the White House that he would reimpose US economic sanctions on Iran to undermine "a horrible one-sided deal that should have never, ever been made." (*Reuters*)

What is the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA)?

The JCPOA – or Iran nuclear deal – was struck between Iran and six world powers (the US, UK, Russia, France, China, and Germany) in 2015, after twenty months of negotiations. The deal essentially lifted crippling economic sanctions on Iran in return for limitations to the country's controversial nuclear energy programme, which international powers feared Iran would use to create a nuclear weapon. Under the agreement, Iran's ability to pursue nuclear energy for military purposes would be greatly inhibited for up to two decades, while allowing the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) regular access to all Iranian nuclear facilities.

The agreement was lauded as an international diplomatic success. There was a significant worldwide response following the announcement of the agreement – more than 90 countries endorsed the agreement, as did many international organisations.

Concerns and reactions

US President Donald Trump has frequently expressed deep concern about the agreement

(established by the previous Obama administration), calling it "insanity" and threatening to end the deal. Mr Trump and his administration are convinced that the terms of the accord are too lenient, especially with regard to limiting Iran's nuclear activities for a fixed period only. Meanwhile, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, on 30 April, accused Iran of conducting a secret nuclear weapons programme, presenting thousands of documents that he said proved Iran had lied about its nuclear ambitions before the deal was signed in 2015. After Israel's presentation, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo declared that the agreement "was built on lies". Mr Trump said he had viewed part of Mr Netanyahu's presentation and said the situation was "not acceptable". In January this year, Mr Trump announced he was waiving the US sanctions against Iran for the "last time" and pressed the signatories to agree to "fix the deal's disastrous flaws" before the 12 May deadline.

The UK, France and Germany remain committed to the accord but, in an effort to keep the US in it, wanted to open talks on Iran's ballistic missile programme, its nuclear activities beyond 2025 (when key provisions of the deal expire) and Iran's role in Middle East crises such as Syria and Yemen.

Iran ruled out new talks, calling the current agreement "non-negotiable" and insisting that their missile programme is purely defensive. President Hassan Rouhani has stated emphatically: "We will not negotiate with anyone about our weapons and defences, and we will make and store as many weapons, facilities and missiles as we need." In response to Mr Netanyahu's presentation, Iran's Foreign Minister, Javad Zarif, said it was a "stunt to influence Mr Trump's decision on whether the US should stick with the nuclear deal". He went on to say that the documents were a rehash of old allegations already dealt with by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

Possible consequences of abandoning the Iran deal

Major world players are deeply invested in the deal, clearly evidenced by the tremendous amount of diplomatic scrambling since Mr Trump's

NEWS HEADLINES



Lebanon had its first election in nine years on 6 May, which went relatively smoothly. Turnout was low, and many appeared apathetic because old party bosses still dominate the sectarian quota system that underpins Lebanese politics. Christians, Sunnis, Shi'ites, Druze and members of other religions voted for reserved candidates, guaranteeing that much of the legislature remains the same and that patronage systems dominate. However, there were some surprises.



Islamic State (IS) is conducting a campaign of terror against elections in several countries. Thus far, they have claimed operations targeting election facilities, candidates and officials in Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya. On 22 April a suicide bomber struck a voter registration centre in Kabul, and on 2 May two jihadists assaulted Libya's High National Election Commission (HNEC) headquarters in Tripoli.



The UN said that nearly 4,000 people have been driven out of their homes in **Myanmar** in April as the country's north is gripped with violence. In Kachin, the northernmost state in Myanmar, violence has escalated against an ethnic minority, as in the southern state of Rakhine.

The Kachin are mostly Christian and have fought for greater autonomy in the predominantly Buddhist country since 1961.

announcement in January. Failure of, or abandonment of, the accord could have far-reaching impacts, not only for the Middle East, but for much of the world. Robert Guest (foreign editor for *The Economist*) explained in an interview with NPR: "The Iranians, as far as we can tell – and we really looked very hard – are keeping to the terms of it [the JCPOA]. If we pull out when they're not breaking it, it's incredibly damaging to the global arms control system. It suggests that, you know, America can't be trusted to keep its word. And that's incredibly destabilising."

Since the accord was struck between multiple parties, it would require all parties to alter or amend it, but there are those who believe that despite the US withdrawal, the remaining parties could attempt to keep it afloat. The difficulty with this, however, is the re-instatement of US sanctions, which could impact businesses (and countries) that continue to do business with Iran. Not many global companies are prepared to risk being added to America's sanctions list. The EU and leaders of Britain, France and Germany therefore face one of the biggest diplomatic dilemmas – defy the US and sign a new Iran deal, or fall in line with the Trump administration. A split between the US and Europe would endanger NATO's cohesion, which could cause further shifts in balances of power.

Within Iran too, there are potentially far-reaching ramifications of an end to the deal. President Rouhani's more 'moderate' government is struggling to overcome the country's economic, social and political problems, and should the deal (which he promised would lead to vast improvements to the economy and living

conditions) not be realised, there is the potential for the more hard-line leaders (who have shown little support for the deal) to increase their influence, pushing the nation closer towards a war footing.

FROM A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE

There can be no doubt that decisions surrounding the JCPOA are tremendously important and could impact hundreds of thousands (if not millions) of people. It is therefore encouraging to know that prayer plays a role in the White House's decision-making process. In a recent interview with *CBN News*, Vice-President Pence revealed: "There's prayer going on, on a regular basis in this White House. And it's one of the most meaningful things to me, whether it's public meetings or not, I've lost count of the number of times that the president has nudged me, or nudged another member of the Cabinet and said, 'Let's start this meeting with prayer'."

In a similar way that unprecedented breakthrough has come in relationships on the Korean peninsula, there could be an unexpected, God-inspired breakthrough in negotiations with Iran. However, what we can expect to see is that the Church in Iran (which has been experiencing tremendous growth, under heavy persecution) will continue to grow numerically and in maturity as the Lord builds His Kingdom in the face of adversity and with the blood of His saints.

PRAY > For the signatories of the JCPOA as they consider the way forward > For US leadership as they work on an alternative way to ensure a safer Middle East > For Iranian believers to grow in number and maturity despite stiff opposition

THE COSTS OF FRONTLINE JOURNALISTS



By Andrew Richards

Ten journalists including Agence France-Presse's chief photographer in Kabul, Shah Marai, were among dozens killed in attacks across Afghanistan [on Monday 30 April], the deadliest day for the country's media since 2001. The attacks highlight the dangers journalists face in the war-torn country, where violence is increasing as the resurgent Taliban step up their campaign while the Islamic State group [IS] makes inroads. A double suicide blast in Kabul killed 25 people, including Marai along with at least eight other journalists, and wounded 49. Reporters Without Borders called it the most lethal single attack on the media since the fall of the Taliban. IS claimed the attack. (AFP)

Journalists at risk

The recent attack in Kabul came less than a week after the Afghan Taliban rejected peace talks and announced their 'spring offensive' against the

American-backed government. According to the Islamic State, the attack was not specifically aimed at journalists, but at the Afghan intelligence services. Eye witnesses suggest that the first suicide bomber targeted the Afghan intelligence building, while the second bomber deliberately walked among journalists, intent on killing members of the media.

Whether the journalists killed in the attack were targeted directly or whether they were caught in the 'crossfire', their deaths have again raised the question of how safe journalists are when reporting from war-torn (or dangerous) countries. According to the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), 1,309 journalists have been killed between 1992 and April 2018. 186 were killed in Iraq between 2003 and 2017, and another 119 in Syria since the start of the war. Included in these figures are journalists who were targeted for their coverage of a sensitive story, those who were caught in the crossfire while serving as war correspondents, and those who died while covering a dangerous assignment (such as the criminal gangs in Mexico). CPJ says that hundreds of journalists are imprisoned as well – more than 262 were jailed in 2017 alone. Turkey, China and Egypt are the top three countries where journalists are imprisoned the most.

Emotional costs

In recent years, the emotional costs that certain stories can have on the various people involved in the journalism process – reporters, assignment editors,

NEWS HEADLINES



Deadly clashes in **Central African Republic** (CAR), where state control is breaking down and inter-faith violence has long blighted the country, threatens to flare again after unidentified armed assailants attacked the Notre Dame de Fatima church in Bangui with grenades and guns during morning mass, initially killing 15 and critically wounding scores of others.



China has installed anti-ship cruise missiles and surface-to-air missile systems on three of its outposts in the South China Sea, CNBC reported, citing sources with direct knowledge of US intelligence reports. The move, if confirmed, would mark the first Chinese missile deployments in the Spratly Islands, where several Asian countries including Vietnam and Taiwan have rival claims. China's Defence Ministry did not immediately respond to a request for comment.



An opposition faction controlled by **South Sudan**'s first vice president has said it will join the country's ruling party. This comes just before peace talks led by a regional bloc, scheduled to be held in neighbouring Ethiopia on 17 May. The move is expected to strengthen the position of the government of President Salva Kiir. Previous attempts at peace have failed, with the most recent round of talks in February ending in deadlock.

desk editors, photojournalists, cameramen and others – has been highlighted. According to a 2017 article in Pakistan's Herald publication, journalism was one of the last fields to recognise PTSD (Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder) as a job-related risk, but in 2013, the American Psychiatric Association (APA) expanded the causes of PTSD to include "work-related, repeated and indirect exposure to distressing material". New York's Dart Centre at Columbia University analysed more than two dozen studies that included journalists across the world between 2001 and 2014, concluding that 80-100 percent of journalists have been exposed to "work-related traumatic events".

Hannah Storm, director of the International News Safety Institute (INSI), co-authored a report about the emotional toll on journalists covering the refugee crisis, based on data collected in late 2016. The research showed that many journalists experienced "feelings of guilt at not having done enough personally to help the refugees, and shame at the observed behaviour of others". The report highlights the issue of "moral injury" to journalists – "the injury done to a person's conscience or moral compass by perpetrating, witnessing, or failing to prevent acts that transgress personal moral and ethical values or codes of conduct".

FROM A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE

World-renowned evangelist Billy Graham was known for reading newspapers alongside the Bible – he recognised the need to relate the message of the Bible to what was happening in the world, and to interpret what was happening in the world according to the Bible. And for Christians to know what is happening in the world, there needs to be people who investigate, witness and report,

regardless of the physical and emotional costs involved.

Amy D. Richards, in an essay in *Truth Matters: Knowledge, Politics, Ethics, Religion*, considers the role of frontline journalists as 'truth tellers'. The flawed aspect of this is acknowledged (individuals being limited to a certain angle or personal bias), but despite the imperfect nature of first-person reporting, frontline reporters are able to make "truth claims [that] are contingent on being bodily present".

Richards suggests that there is a "moral weight" that comes with the witnessing aspect of frontline reporting. She references Howard Tumber and Frank Webster who, after interviewing frontline journalists, concluded that many of those interviewed "perceived their journalistic duty of 'truth seeking' as a moral or ethical 'vocation'". For Christian journalists, that may be even more true.

Stuart Allan and Barbie Zelizer, authors of *Reporting War: Journalism in Wartime*, suggest that "the violence, devastation, suffering, and death that inevitably constitute war's underside will somehow be rendered different – more amenable to response and perhaps less likely to recur – just because journalists are somewhere nearby." Richards feels that this, however, is a bit idealistic; journalistic presence does not stop wars or prevent them from happening again. However, she says that "an accurate record [from frontline journalists] better serves public deliberation and those whose stories the journalist retells."

From INcontext's perspective, knowledge is able to inform action and a Christian response. There is therefore a debt of gratitude to those who place their lives, emotions and mental health at risk in order to tell the story from where the wider public is unable (or unwilling) to go.

PRAY > For journalists on the frontline > For those journalists who have been imprisoned for attempting to report the truth > For Christian journalists seeking the truth in challenging environments

RWANDA CHURCH CLOSURES EXPLAINED



By **Donnelly McClelland**

Since early March, the government of President Paul Kagame in Rwanda has ordered the closing of thousands of churches and dozens of mosques, citing unsafe conditions for worshippers. It also banned mosques in the capital, Kigali, from using loudspeakers for the Muslim call to prayer. Kagame insists that there is no reason for so many places of worship in a small, developing country like Rwanda. (*World Politics Review*)

Motivation behind closures and subsequent arrests

The closure of the places of worship was, according to government sources, based on concerns over inadequate infrastructure, hygiene and safety

standards. A government official, Justus Kangwagye is quoted as saying: "Worshiping should be done in an organised way and meet minimum standards. Exercising your freedom of worship should not encroach on other people's rights. They have been asked to halt operations until they meet the requirements." Churches that meet the required safety standards will be reopened, according to government officials.

However, President Paul Kagame apparently stated: "Rwanda doesn't need so many houses of worship, such a high number is only fit for bigger, more developed economies that have the means to sustain them." There are many who do not agree and are concerned about government interference in church affairs. Some human rights groups believe that Mr Kagame's government is clamping down on freedom of expression. The government has strongly denied this. However, six Pentecostal pastors who protested the church closures were arrested and accused of "illegal meetings with bad intentions".

Further proposed legislation

The Rwandan government is currently considering further steps to oversee the religious community in

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www.incontextinternational.org

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If you have any questions or comments relating to the articles in this publication or on the website, please feel free to contact us at any time.

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the largely Christian nation of 12 million people. Associated Press reported a statement by Alexis Nkurunziza, president of the private Rwanda Religious Leaders Forum: "Proposed legislation aims to regulate faith-based organisations separately from civil society organisations. Suggestions from religious leaders will be forwarded to the Rwanda Law Reform Commission for scrutiny and later to parliament." It is anticipated that this legislation will be passed as the ruling party holds a majority of parliamentary seats.

Those familiar with the current discussions around the proposed legislation say it would require pastors to have a theology degree before they start their own churches, so that they teach correct doctrine. The aim is to regulate the Pentecostal churches that often spring up under leaders who claim to have received a call to preach. Not everyone, however, has the money for such a degree, some observers have pointed out.

Mixed response

Some evangelical leaders understand the motivation for the crackdown, saying that protecting churchgoers equates to protecting life. Godfrey Nagungira, a minister at New Life Bible Church, one of Kigali's biggest Pentecostal congregations, favours the crackdown as well, saying (in Christian News): "Churches should be law-abiding, and there must be government supervision to ensure that the practices of church leaders don't affect or harm churchgoers—some of whom are illiterate and could easily be taken advantage of."

Bishop Innocent Nzeyimana, president of the Churches' Forum, which represents 180 congregations in Kigali's Nyarugenge district, understands the government's argument, but expresses concern: "The decision was rushed without warning," he said. "Some church leaders are poor and cannot get money to go for theological training. The government should have negotiated with these leaders, instead of closing their churches."

Not limited to Rwanda

A number of African nations are starting to think that churches should be held accountable to an authority other than God. Of concern to many are the "prophet of God" or "man of God" churches. Concerns have been raised in Uganda, Kenya, Zambia and South Africa.

In South Africa, two churches – Rabboni Ministries and End Times Disciples Ministries – made headlines when they posted images of their leaders feeding snakes and rats to followers and instructing congregants to drink petrol and eat grass. It led to South Africa's Commission for the Promotion and Protection of Cultural, Religious and Linguistic Communities (CLR) launching an inquiry and proposing new legislation that could lead to greater control over religion.

FROM A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE

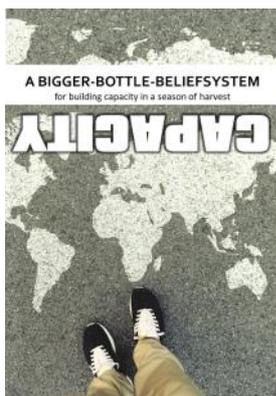
In this context, the challenge becomes the roles of the government and the relevant church bodies. Andrew Selley (founder of Freedom of Religion South Africa) firmly believes that it should be the Church, not the State, that deals with the problem of false prophets and teachers. Selley says: "The problem of false prophets and false teachers claiming to speak in the name of the Lord is not new. Throughout the Bible (Old and New Testament), we see examples of such and therefore, we should not be surprised to find that they are active also in our own day and in our own communities." The Bible warns of false teachers and prophets in 2 Peter 1:1-3 and 2 Timothy 4:1-4.

Not only does the Bible warn of such charlatans – it also guides us in how to respond. 1 Corinthians 5:12 directs believers (not just leaders) to test other believers (including those who claim to be believers), especially those in leadership positions, according to His Word.

It would be difficult for nations that cherish freedom of belief, and have it as a tenant of their constitutions, to maintain this freedom while regulating it. It is important therefore for both government and the Church in these nations to each play their vital role, if people's rights are to be respected and protected. If the government utilises its power to arrest those individuals who break the law (i.e. engage in criminal activities, such as endangering the lives of others, or fraudulently depriving their congregants), and Church leaders correct those who are wilfully misleading their congregations, then the roles of State and Church should compliment one another, and regulation of belief will not be necessary.

PRAY > For government leaders to effectively police illegal activities without infringing on freedom of belief > For church leaders to effectively deal with false prophets and teachers > For believers to be discerning

AVAILABLE PUBLICATIONS



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