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Trump and Macron Should Jointly Discourage Businesses from Investing in Iran

**Original Text – As Prepared in English*

Trump et Macron devraient décourager les entreprises d'investir en Iran

<http://www.latribune.fr/opinions/tribunes/trump-et-macron-devraient-conjointement-decourager-les-entreprises-d-investir-en-iran-743944.html>

US President Donald Trump is scheduled to meet with his French counterpart Emmanuel Macron on Friday 14 July. The leaders will have much to discuss. Both men are former business executives who have committed to improving the economic prospects of their countries, while bolstering fledgling industries, and many analysts anticipate the visit will focus on business and economic issues. But there are pressing foreign policy matters for the heads of state to discuss as well.

The meeting marks the two-year anniversary of the nuclear agreement between Iran and the five permanent members of the UN Security Council and Germany, which concluded on 15 July 2015. And with Tehran's blatantly criminal conduct in Syria, support of terrorism, regional destabilization, ballistic missile tests, and domestic human rights violations intensifying, many expect that the Iran threat will top the agenda.

Two years ago the Obama administration marketed the naïve proposition that the nuclear agreement heralded a new dawn in the world's relations with Tehran. It was hoped that the compact would curb the regime's extremism and incentivize good behavior. But the optimism was misplaced and the hopes proved to be delusions.

At the core of the nuclear deal – known formally as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action or JCPOA – is the issue of sanctions levied against the Iranian regime by the international community. Although many sanctions on the regime were lifted consistent with the nuclear deal that both the US and France helped to negotiate, the agreement rightly did not affect sanctions targeting Iran's human rights violations, its support of terrorism, and its ballistic missile program. Iran has also taken no recognizable steps to assuage international concerns related to risks of money-laundering and other sources of instability.

If President Trump is serious about bolstering international opposition to Iran's destructive rise, he should use his meeting with Macron to press for French contributions to renewed sanctions on the Iranian regime. And if President Macron is serious about defending international human rights and democracy, as well as his own country's economic interests, he should join Trump on this issue.

In recent months the Iranian opposition coalition known as the National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI) has held press conferences and released documents that highlight the ongoing growth of a financial empire controlled by the Islamic Republic's hardline paramilitary, the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC).

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The IRGC's terrorist supporting activities and self-serving interventions in foreign combat zones have greatly increased, largely as a result of direct orders from the country's supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. Today the IRGC controls at least half of the Iranian gross domestic product and it is therefore impossible for Western companies to do business with Iran and guarantee that their investment capital isn't funding terrorists or the regime's repressive security operations against academics, journalists, and political activists inside Iran.

President Trump seems to already understand this. In recent months he has signaled his interest isolating the IRGC from the global economy by designating it as a foreign terrorist organization. Now he has a responsibility to convince Macron to join this effort. Together they can convince Western businesses that the Iranian economy is far from the "island of stability" that it is sometimes said to represent in a highly volatile region.

NCRI President Maryam Rajavi in a grand gathering attended by tens of thousands of people and hundreds of American, European and Middle Eastern dignitaries on 1 July argued that the Islamic Republic is vulnerable to a restive population that launched at least 11,000 protests across the country in the past year. Sooner or later, the aspirations of the Iranian people will come to fruition and the popular will for a democratic government will overtake the ability of the Iranian regime to suppress the population. That day will come much earlier if countries like the France and the US agree to discourage their business leaders from supporting and financing Iran's clerical regime.

When a stable and democratic Iran rises from the ruins of the current theocratic dictatorship, those companies that held back their investments will find themselves on the right side of both the markets and history. France and US have always been stronger when they join in solidarity against threats to international order. Trump and Macron should affirm these facts on Friday and convey them to the rest of the world soon thereafter.

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François Colcombet est président de la Fondation d'Etudes pour le Moyen-Orient (FEMO). Sous sa direction un livre collectif vient de paraître : "Où va l'Iran", aux Editions Autrement. Ce magistrat honoraire est un ancien député, un ancien conseiller à la Cour de cassation.

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