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U.S. launches economic formula for Middle East peace, Palestinians unhappy



Inside C2

# Southern DAILY

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## Trump threatens ‘obliteration,’ Iran calls White House ‘mentally retarded’

WASHINGTON/DUBAI (Reuters) - U.S. President Donald Trump threatened on Tuesday to obliterate parts of Iran if it attacked “anything American,” in a new war of words with Iran which condemned the latest U.S. sanctions on Tehran and called White House actions “mentally retarded.” Trump on Monday signed an executive order imposing largely symbolic economic sanctions against Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and other senior figures, with punitive measures against Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif expected later this week.

Iran shot down a U.S. drone last week and Trump said he had called off a retaliatory air strike with minutes to spare, saying too many people would have been killed. It would have been the first time the United States had bombed the Islamic Republic in four decades of mutual hostility.

In rhetoric similar to the kind of harsh words he used to aim at North Korea, Trump tweeted: “Any attack by Iran on anything American will be met with great and overwhelming force. In some areas, overwhelming will mean obliteration.”

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In a televised address on Tuesday, Iranian President Hassan Rouhani said the new sanctions against Khamenei would have no practical impact because the top cleric had no assets abroad.

Rouhani, a pragmatist who won two elections on promises to open Iran up to the world, said the White House’s actions were “mentally retarded” - an insult that other Iranian officials have used in the past about Trump, but a departure from Rouhani’s own comparatively measured tone over the years.

“Tehran’s strategic patience does not mean we have fear,” said Rouhani, who with his cabinet runs Iran’s day-to-day affairs while Khamenei, in power since 1989, is the country’s ultimate authority.



FILE PHOTO: Iran’s Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei waves his hand as he arrives to deliver a speech during a ceremony marking the 30th death anniversary of the founder of the Islamic Republic Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini in Tehran, Iran June 4, 2019. Official Khamenei website/Handout via REUTERS

## U.S. consumer confidence dives, trade tensions hurting economy

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - U.S. consumer confidence tumbled to a 21-month low in June as households grew a bit more pessimistic about business and labor market conditions amid concerns about a recent escalation in trade tensions between the United States and China.

The economy’s prospects were further dimmed by other data on Tuesday showing sales of new single-family homes unexpectedly fell for a second straight month in May. Growing risks to the economy, especially related to the trade war between Washington and Beijing, and low inflation prompted the Federal Reserve last week to signal interest rate cuts beginning as early as July.

“The headwinds from the ongoing trade war the economy faces are definitely growing stronger, and it will be a miracle if Fed officials can pull a rabbit out of their hats and keep the economy moving forward,” said Chris Rupkey, chief economist at MUFG in New York.

The Conference Board said its consumer confidence index dropped 9.8 points to a reading

of 121.5 this month, the lowest since September 2017, from a downwardly revised 131.3 in May.

This month’s drop in the index was the largest since July 2015. The index, which was previously reported at 134.1 in May, still remains at lofty levels, suggesting consumer spending remains supported.

The Conference Board blamed the decline on the trade tensions and cautioned that continued uncertainty “at some point, could even begin to diminish consumers’ confidence in the expansion.”

The economy will mark 10 years of growth next month, the longest expansion on record.

President Donald Trump last month imposed additional tariffs of up to 25% on \$200 billion of Chinese goods, prompting retaliation by Beijing. Trump has threatened more duties on Chinese imports if no deal is reached at a Group of 20 nations summit this week in Japan.

Economists polled by Reuters had forecast the consumer confidence index at 131.1 in June.



FILE PHOTO: People shop at an H&M store during the grand opening of the The Hudson Yards development, a residential, commercial, and retail space on Manhattan’s West side in New York City, New York, U.S., March 15, 2019. REUTERS/Brendan McDermid

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# U.S. launches economic formula for Middle East peace, Palestinians unhappy

MANAMA (Reuters) - The Trump administration launched a \$50 billion economic formula for Israeli-Palestinian peace on Tuesday, saying an investment-driven pathway forward for the Palestinians was a necessary precondition for ending the decades-old conflict.

Opening a two-day international meeting in the Gulf kingdom of Bahrain, U.S. President Donald Trump's son-in-law and senior advisor Jared Kushner said prosperity for Palestinians was not possible without a fair political solution to the conflict.

But he added that by working to develop the Palestinian economy, the result could be "a real peace that leads to prosperity". "We see tremendous potential," he said. "What we have developed, is the most comprehensive economic plan ever created specifically for the Palestinians, and the broader Middle East. Kushner: Agreement on economic pathway vital for Middle East peace

Palestinian refugees say Trump cannot bury right of return  
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"We can turn this region from a victim of past conflicts, into a model for commerce and advancement throughout the world."

The Palestinian leadership has previously reiterated its disdain for the plan, which has been almost two years in the making. Saudi Arabia, envisaged as one of its main bank-rollers, has also indicated some reservations.

The meeting has been billed as the first part of Washington's broader political blueprint to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

But the project's political details remain a secret. Neither the Israeli nor Palestinian governments are attending the curtain-raising event in Manama, which Lebanon and Iraq are staying away from.

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, whose Palestinian Authority exercises limited self-rule in the Israeli-occupied West Bank, was scathing about its prospects of success.

"Money is important. The economy is important. But politics are more important. The political solution is more important." Kushner appeared to acknowledge such views, suggesting the politics of the conflict needed more time to address.



White House senior adviser Jared Kushner and Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin arrive at Manama's Four Seasons hotel, the venue for the U.S.-hosted "Peace to Prosperity" conference, in Manama, Bahrain, June 25, 2019. REUTERS/Matt Spetalnick



A Palestinian refugee dances at Yarmouk Palestinian camp in Damascus

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Editor's Choice



A zookeeper uses water to cool off elephants, as a heatwave is expected to reach the city, at Berlin Zoo, Germany June 25, 2019. REUTERS/Anne-gret Hilse TPX IMAGES OF THE DAY



Spectators watch the Germany v Spain football match during the FIFA Women's World Cup in Valenciennes, France, June 12, 2019. Picture taken June 12, 2019. REUTERS/Yves Herman TPX IMAGES OF THE DAY



Federal Reserve Chairman Jerome Powell speaks at the Council on Foreign Relations in New York



White House senior adviser Jared Kushner gives a speech at the opening of the “Peace to Prosperity” conference in Manama, Bahrain, June 25, 2019 in this still image taken from a video. Peace And Prosperity conference pool/Reuters TV via REUTERS NO RESALES. NO ARCHIVES.



U.S. President Trump signs executive order on plan to create affordable housing council at White House in Washington



Ethiopian Army Chief of Staff Mekonnen’s memorial ceremony in Addis Ababa



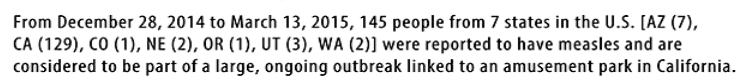
Soccer Football - Women's World Cup - Round of 16 - Netherlands v Japan - Roazhon Park, Rennes, France - June 25, 2019 Netherlands fan before the match REUTERS/Lucy Nicholson



White House senior adviser Jared Kushner gives a speech at the opening of the “Peace to Prosperity” conference in Manama



## U.S. Multi-state Measles Outbreak December 28, 2014 - March 13, 2015



\*Provisional data reported to CDC's National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases



CDC: Centers for Disease Control as of April 22, 2019

“But children are paying the price for complacency. It will take long-term efforts, political commitment and continuous investment — in vaccine access, in service quality and in trust — to ensure we are, and remain, protected together.”  
(Courtesy [axios.com](https://axios.com))

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**VA Mission Act Will Provide New Patient Care Options And More Community Assistance Choices**

**Vets Get Access To Urgent Care And Private Medical Care Under New Law**



Compiled And Edited By John T. Robbins, Southern Daily Editor

The Department of Veterans Affairs MISSION Act has officially launched, working to expand patient access to care and boost community care options.

“The changes not only improve our ability to provide the health care Veterans need, but also when and where they need it,” VA Secretary Robert Wilkie said in a statement on the day of the program’s launch. “It will also put Veterans at the center of their care and offer options, including expanded telehealth and urgent care, so they can find the balance in the system that is right for them.”

The program, which revamps the previous Veterans Choice program, was made official nearly one year ago when President Trump signed the \$5.2 billion MISSION Act into law.

“In every generation there have been heroes like them, patriots who answer the call to serve, who do whatever it takes, wherever and whenever we need them to defend America,” the President said upon signing the bill. “They put everything on the line for us. And when they come home, we must do everything that we can possibly do for them.



**The Department of Veterans Affairs will pay for treatment from non-VA doctors under certain conditions.**

Foremost, the MISSION Act overhauls the Veterans Choice program, which had long received scrutiny from industry leaders. Choice came with long wait times and was too complicated to be functional, many lawmakers agreed.

Under the MISSION Act, veterans will face more simplified parameters to qualify for third-party care. Additionally, the MISSION Act gets rid of some administrative properties tied to the referral process, ideally reducing the amount of time patients must wait between VA referral and connecting with the third-party clinician.

The law expands VA’s community care program and streamlines it into one program.

The MISSION Act also extends caregiver access to veterans who served prior to 9/11; previous to the law, the caregiver programs only applied to post-9/11 veterans.

Ultimately, the MISSION Act was designed to make it easier for veterans to access healthcare and to put those veterans at the center of their care.

“We owe our veterans the best possible care and support that they have earned,” said Senator Johnny Isakson, one of the bipartisan bill’s co-sponsors. “This is a truly meaningful victory for our nation’s veterans, who will benefit from more choice and fewer barriers to care. The signing of this legislation marks the completion of the final piece in a great mosaic of veterans reforms that we set out to accomplish over the last two years.”



allocate funds to community providers who deliver top-notch care.

“So on one hand, VA doesn’t have a clear understanding of how much this Program will cost. And on the other, VA openly states that it would make funding decisions based on whether its facilities are meeting the standards it fails to enforce on the private sector,” Tester said. “What I see is behavior that smacks of a deliberate effort – not to implement the best policy but to carry out a political agenda.”



**The John Cochran VA Medical Center in St. Louis, Mo. (Shown above) New rule changes Thursday have expanded veterans’ ability to seek care from private physicians. (Photo UPI)**

For its part, VA has worked to address concerns about VA privatization, stating that this program is about expanding veteran choice for care access.

“It is important to note that the proposed Veterans Community Care Program does not supplant VA’s mission to provide care in VA facilities to Veterans who have earned it,” Richard A. Stone, MD, VA’s executive in charge, explained during the hearing. “VA’s proposed access standards will complement existing VA care by providing Veterans with greater choice to receive care in the community based on their individual needs and preferences.”

GAO has likewise noted some issues with the MISSION Act, launching an investigation into the VA’s preparedness to roll out the program. Specifically, GAO found that the agency lacked sufficient systems to carry out the Veterans Community Care Program (VCCP) and did not have enough information about referral times. Additionally, GAO stated that VA had now carried out recommendations for improving the VCCP. Other critics have pointed to issues with the VA’s new EHR rollout as a detriment to VCCP, but the agency has noted that the

community care program is not contingent on the revamped EHR software.



**The Department of Veterans Affairs MISSION Act has officially launched delivering expanded patient access to health care while boosting community care options.**

“While electronic health records modernization is an important improvement, it’s not central to the success of the MISSION Act,” VA Secretary Robert Wilkie, said in a recent response to media critics. “No one from the VA has ever said implementation of the new private care option Veterans will have under the MISSION Act is ‘years’ away because of our effort to modernize health records.”

Instead, VA promised fewer bureaucratic hurdles for its veteran beneficiaries upon the MISSION Act’s launch, Wilkie said in an emailed statement to veterans earlier this week.

“What can Veterans expect on June 6?” he posited. “Less red tape, more satisfaction and predictability for patients, more efficiency for our clinicians, and better value for taxpayers.”

Additionally, veterans can expect expanded access to community care options, access to walk-in or urgent care clinics, and what Wilkie said will be a stronger patient-provider relationship.



**The official Urgent Care Provider badge.**

It is difficult to say how the program will impact veterans on only the first day of implementation. If VA can, in fact, overcome the hurdles laid out by its critics, the program has the promise to expand veteran access to care and choice in care. But the challenges are clear, and limited systems for addressing wait times and third-party clinician referrals may prove daunting for the agency. (Courtesy patientengagementthit.com)

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