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REPORT

JCPOA 2.0: ANOTHER 'DOHA DEAL' IN THE MAKING

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SEPTEMBER 2022



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Even JCPOA 2.0 will not prevent the Iranian regime from actualizing its nuclear goals or stymie the Ayatollahs' ambitions for regional hegemony in the Middle East and across the Muslim world

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Introduction:

The Biden Administration, and European powers (like the UK, Germany, and France, albeit to varying degrees), are pushing for the ratification of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, or JCPOA, a nuclear deal with the Iranian regime. This agreement was first floated during the Obama administration and came close to fruition until it was stalled in the U.S. Congress, and thereafter revoked by the Trump Administration in 2018. At that time, the U.S. and E.U. were joined by Russia and China – in the form of P5+1 – in pursuing the JCPOA with Iran. This time, however, things are much different.

Iran has always been eager for a quick agreement that allows sanctions to be lifted so that the Iranian regime could be welcomed back into the international community and especially into the global economy. Iranian oil might also ease global pressure on energy markets, and induce pressure on Saudi Arabia to reassert its hegemony on global oil supplies.

But even the newest version of the JCPOA will never solve the core problem of preventing Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons capability. Iran is also using the ongoing JCPOA negotiations as leverage to nurture Western acquiescence for its covert activities, particularly those pursued by the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and its Quds Force external operations division to [protect and promote the interests of the revolution](#).

Israel has been squarely against any latitude for the Islamic Republic of Iran that would ease pressure on the Ayatollah's regime without changing its malignant behaviour and malevolent activities in the Middle East and around the world. Israel opposed the JCPOA and continues to criticize ongoing negotiations to achieve the JCPOA 2.0. On August 25 2022, Mossad chief David Barnea called [JCPOA 2.0 a strategic disaster for Israel](#) and derided the U.S. for “rushing into an accord that is ultimately based on lies”. Earlier, in February 2022, then-Prime Minister of Israel Naftali Bennett publicly stated that JCPOA 2.0 is [weaker](#) than its previous iteration and [increases the likelihood of a “more violent, more volatile Middle East”](#).

The Ayatollah's continued desire to destroy Israel is likely to trigger a preemptive response – from Israel alone, if not also from the U.S. and the West as well – that could decimate the Iranian state and ignite the Middle East and the Muslim world as a whole. It is this ‘suicide bombing’ policy of Iran that Israel intends to avoid, but if faced with the existential threat of a nuclear Iran capable of obliterating Israeli cities, then Israel will have no choice but to act, and the blame will lie with Iran and Iran alone. Any degree of [silence from Jerusalem](#) should not be misconstrued as Israeli reluctance to oppose JCPOA 2.0 or to be unprepared for ‘the day after’ any such deal is signed with Iran.

Iran's Perfidy and Malign Influence:

Regardless of whatever agreement is signed with the Iranian government, there is no guarantee that the Ayatollahs will fulfil their side of the bargain. Iranian hardliners, who

control the unelected levers of power in the country, have opposed the JCPOA since 2015. They have promised to frustrate efforts towards actualizing this agreement; even if the agreement is signed, Iranian hardliners are already prepared to hinder and obstruct its implementation and enforcement through all means at their disposal.

Every Iranian government is a puppet in the hands of their supreme leader: an unelected cleric who exercises absolute control through legal channels as well as through the IRGC, a parallel military structure whose sole purpose is to sustain and perpetuate the Ayatollahs' power – including as [a counterweight to the regular Iranian military](#). In effect, the Iranian people and state are held hostage by the extremist Shi'ite ideology that was brought to power in the 1979 revolution: not because of the religious devotion of the Iranians, but because of the insensitive authoritarian policies of the Shah of Iran who actually laid the foundations of the Persian police state.

It did not take long for the Ayatollah's real face and true designs to be exposed, as the 1979 Tehran hostage crisis showed. The core ideology of Islamist supremacy and anti-West narratives has festered since then, and Iran's global isolation due to sanctions have only empowered the Ayatollah's grip on the Iranian nation. Other Muslim nations with Sunni governments or sizable Sunni majorities also failed in moderating and rationalizing the Ayatollah's hardline approach which focuses more on the 'End of Times' than on improving the lives of the Iranian people and nurturing friendly relations with at least the Islamic world if not the West as well.

Due to its stated policies, which it has also pursued practically, Iran has been placed under sanctions a number of times. Most recently, sanctions against Iran were tightened by the United Nations in 2003 over the opaqueness of its nuclear program. Over time, the so-called 'Islamic Republic' of Iran found [kindred spirits in Russia and China](#), both of whom have supported Iran with weapons and finances because they saw it as a counterweight to American and Western influences in the Middle East. Nevertheless, consistent sanctions against Iran have not only isolated the country and devastated its economy, but continue to prevent its normal economic engagement with the international community.

From the outset, the so-called 'Islamic' revolution in Iran was never meant to be confined to the Persian landmass; it was supposed to extend to the entire Muslim world, with [Iran's Ayatollahs in the leadership position](#). The Ayatollah regime in Iran has consistently presented itself as the champion of 'Islamic causes' and of supposedly downtrodden and oppressed Muslims everywhere: it naturally found the perfect boogeyman in the form of Israel. The Iranian regime has consistently amplified Muslim opposition to the state of Israel, as its narratives express the futile hope that it would succeed where Arab armies failed in 1948, 1967 and 1973. As outright military conflict was impossible – and would have delivered dire consequences for the Ayatollahs – Iran engaged in sub-conventional proxy tactics to pressure not just Israel, but Muslim countries who were considering a future of peaceful coexistence with the Jewish state. In this pursuit, the Ayatollahs in Tehran invested decades contributing to the degeneration of the Lebanese state, by empowering and weaponizing Hezbollah as a potent military force, and more recently by supporting the Assad regime in Syria for this purpose. And for this very reason, the Iranian regime is known as one of the main state sponsors of terrorism in the world today.

In the 21st century, Iran assumed the reins of 'Palestinian resistance' to the Israeli state, even though it was included in George Bush's 'axis of evil' along with Iraq and North Korea. The U.S. invasions of Afghanistan in 2001 and of Iraq in 2004 served to [blunt Iran's ambitions for a while](#), especially in terms of openly opposing the West with terror attacks or the possibility of acquiring weapons of mass destruction. It was precisely the allegations of Saddam Hussein possessing weapons of mass destruction which led the Bush administration to topple his regime. But over time, however, [American policy](#) only served to weaken the Iraqi state and ripened it for Shi'ite militias and Iranian proxies that control it today. This also paved the way for an overland 'bridge' from Iran to Syria via Iraq, enabling the Iranian regime to augment its patronage of the Lebanese Hezbollah militant group. And the [messy American withdrawal from Afghanistan has further emboldened Iran](#), which is now [cozying up to the Taliban](#) like never before.

Iran's malign influence is now entrenched within Palestinian militant groups like Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ), and others who continue to threaten Israeli security, which in turn has only worsened living conditions for the Palestinian people who have been [deprived of representative leadership](#) for decades. In complete contrast, Arab Israelis live much better lives than their Muslim brethren who continue to espouse the Palestinian identity and are much better situated to represent the Palestinian cause than the defunct Palestinian Authority led by the aging and mostly irrelevant Mahmoud Abbas. A [recent statement on the Holocaust](#) by this Palestinian 'president', in a country like Germany no less, have caused many to question his mental faculties and legitimacy. It is no surprise that Israel gives neither weight nor credence to any negotiations with a so-called Palestinian leader who has no public mandate and refuses to call elections. In the absence of any peaceful negotiation toward political solutions, asymmetric warfare and terror tactics practiced by Iranian proxies have now become the primary representation of Palestine.



Since 2012, Iran has spent at least \$16 billion to prop up the Assad regime in Syria, and to support its proxies elsewhere in Iraq and Yemen. Map courtesy U.S. State Department & [Wilson Center](#).

Over the past twenty years, [the IRGC successfully established pro-Iran proxies](#) in nearly every Muslim country in the Middle East. The ultimate goal of these groups may be the 'liberation of Muslim lands' from the clutches of the West or the so-called 'Zionist entity', their immediate ambitions are to establish sustainable footholds in the Middle East and do whatever the Ayatollahs in Tehran order them to do. Following the success of Hezbollah in Lebanon, the IRGC formed proxy militias in Iraq under the guise of fighting ISIS, and has extended them deep into Syria to prop up the Assad regime as well. When Bashar al-Assad was about to go the way of the Shah of Iran, the Ayatollahs recruited Shi'ite militiamen from Afghanistan and Pakistan to bolster the Iraqi PMF and sent them into Syria to rescue their anti-Israel ally.

Taking their cue from the Arab Spring, Iranian machinations incited the Shi'ite majority population of Bahrain in 2011 to revolt against their Sunni leadership, and the attempt failed due to [timely military intervention](#) by the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). In Yemen, Iran found the perfect opportunity to foment chaos by supporting the Houthi militias in weakening the Yemeni state, thus threatening Saudi Arabia on its southern borders. The legitimate Yemeni government was [forced to flee Sana'a](#) – while the Houthis continue to [lob ballistic](#)

[missiles at Riyadh and even Abu Dhabi](#) – and now, Yemen faces humanitarian catastrophe in the form of [famine and mass starvation](#) that has persisted for years. Time and again, Iranian proxies only serve as puppets to further the goals of the Ayatollah's regime in the region, as they ignore the legitimate needs and aspirations of their own people.

While most of these militant groups are formed by Shi'ite extremists, the narrative of a united Muslim 'ummah' and the opposition to Israel on the pretext of 'Palestinian resistance' has also magnetized Sunni extremist groups to a closer relationship with the Iranian regime. Previously, Sunni extremists would consider Shi'ites as apostates and disbelievers; now extremists from both sects appear united in the cause of 'Palestinian freedom', in which they are also joined by misguided anti-Semites from around the world. Iran also [exploits faultlines within Muslim countries](#) to promote its agenda as well as to present itself as the global leader of Shi'ite Islam. Its proposition of Muslim unity and opposition to Israel is second only to the protection of Shi'ite minorities in the Middle East.

In effect, this serves the dual purpose of creating a loyal base of pro-Iranian outfits in Muslim countries, which are mostly composed of Shi'ites, but are also joined by Sunnis when it comes to issues like 'Palestinian liberation' and 'jihad against the godless West'. It is obvious that, in order to survive and persist in controlling the Iranian state, the Ayatollahs will always require someone to demonize: whether it is America as the 'great satan', Israel, ISIS (Daesh), or Sunni extremists who attack Shi'ites, or even authors like [Salman Rushdie](#) whose writings animate Muslims towards open-mindedness and rationality, rather than intolerance and the regressive, reactionary extremism that Ayatollah Khomeini's fatwa imposes on them.

Even the [leaders of Al Qaeda](#), the terror group that perpetrated the 9/11 attacks, find [refuge with the Iranian regime](#); this complicates the problem of Islamist extremism to such an extent that groups like Daesh – which categorize their Muslim opponents in the same vein as non-Muslims and apostates – openly espouse anti-Shi'ite rhetoric in order to attract those Muslim extremists who were raised on the narrative of Shi'ites being enemies of Islam. These various branches of Islamist extremism are more of a threat to Muslims in their home countries, or to their adoptive homes in the West than they could ever be to Israel.

This historical analysis of Iran under the Ayatollah regime shows that it cannot be trusted: other, more direct and result-oriented methods must be pursued to empower Iranian moderates and to compel the unelected power centres of the Islamic Republic to surrender power and authority to the real democratic representatives of the Iranian people.

If the JCPOA 2.0 goes through, and both China and Russia join the U.S., U.K., France and Germany in signing the agreement with Iran, any relief at having prevented an Iranian nuclear bomb would be misplaced and short-lived. The deal would vindicate the Ayatollah's regime and neutralize any moderate opposition to their policies or their overarching control of the Iranian state. And the Iranian regime would be proven right, in that their 'strategic patience' wore out the will of the West in preventing yet another state sponsor of terror from acquiring nuclear weapons – just like [North Korea](#). Even without nuclear weapons, the JCPOA will enable Iran to effectively bully and intimidate its neighbours through proxy warfare, missile tests, drone technologies, and strategic communications about

developments regarding its ‘peaceful’ nuclear program. The Iranian regime would no longer be disturbed in pursuing regional Islamist hegemony by destabilizing and overpowering governments across the Muslim world.

Saudi Arabia would intensify its efforts to counter Iran by developing its own indigenous nuclear weapons; the Kingdom may receive [assistance from Pakistan](#) in this pursuit – which may complicate Pakistan’s own status as a responsible nuclear weapons holder. Other countries in the Middle East might also commence (or restart) their nuclear weapons programs to counter future Iranian potential. It could also possibly stimulate the Sunni Islamist Erdogan government in Turkey – a NATO-member country which has always had a [difficult relationship with Iran](#) – to pursue nuclear weapons as the only real method of deterring the Ayatollahs from making further inroads in Syria, Azerbaijan, and Turkey’s geopolitical ‘sphere of influence’. This domino effect will result in countries proximate to the European Union acquiring weapons of mass destruction: all for the JCPOA framework’s weak goals of nominally delaying (but not precluding) Iran in its unrelenting pursuit of nuclear weapons.

Simultaneously, GCC countries (Gulf Cooperation Council nations that cooperate with each other in security and intelligence matters) would face additional pressure from Iran-backed proxies, and the [recent violence in Baghdad](#) is the clearest indication of how Iran uses its influence to exert maximum pressure on regional adversaries and neighbours it wishes to control. By no means will the JCPOA agreement reduce the likelihood of a military confrontation in the Middle East. In fact, it will prompt not just Israel, but also Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Egypt, UAE, and elements in Iraq to counter accentuated Iranian influence and, wherever possible, to combat IRGC proxies already in and around their countries.

Since the JCPOA will allow Iran to reintegrate with the global economy – particularly in terms of oil supplies that could potentially reduce the pressure on energy markets – it will indubitably be used by the Ayatollahs as a tool to compete with Saudi Arabia for global oil supply hegemony. And Iran would undoubtedly be supported by Russia (and perhaps China as well) in utilizing its [oil supplies as a weapon](#), more potent than any leverage, to undermine Western interests in the Middle East region. The Middle East and the Persian Gulf would effectively be held hostage to Iran’s growing financial power through Tehran’s oil supplies to countries in the region and the world over, as sanctions waivers would no longer be required to import cheap, readily available Iranian oil.

It should be no surprise that if the JCPOA goes through, oil will become the most powerful economic weapon in Iran’s foreign policy toolkit; that is, until 2031 when Iran will be allowed by JCPOA to actually start developing nuclear weapons. In comparison to Iran or even Russia, it would be more beneficial for U.S. policy – and for [global economic stabilization](#) – to create conditions for rapprochement with Venezuela: a South American country with substantial oil supplies, and an anti-American regime in power, but no desire or capability to acquire nuclear weapons, or to export its revolution to other countries.

The Abraham Accords:

Israel has, since its inception, faced an existential crisis from all its borders. As a nation, Israel has always been ready to defend its existence from conventional and sub-conventional threats, because the only reason for its existence is that the Jewish people should never face another Holocaust again. Israel's persistence, in spite of its neighbours refusing to recognize it at first, has come to define its statehood and its way of life. Israel never had any reason to 'subjugate' the Palestinians, nor does it wish to do that today; but when presented with a choice of life or death, Israelis choose life, while those who wish Israel harm have already chosen death – for themselves at least.

The state of Israel focused on establishing a strong and robust national security apparatus, but it never compromised on ensuring a vibrant life for its people, so that they could create and live in a prosperous society with a functioning democracy. Unlike other national security states like Iran, Egypt, Pakistan, or Iraq under Saddam, Israel channelled its overarching focus on security into a way of life – mandatory conscription made all Israelis part of the security establishment, rather than the latter being an all-powerful monolith to which society was to be meekly subservient. In essence, Israel's security needs guided its development requirements, leading the Israeli nation towards an emphasis on representing a differentiation from other countries in the region. Though Egypt, and later Jordan, signed peace treaties with Israel, it still faced military threats from Assad's Syria, Gaddafi's Libya and Saddam's Iraq, and was ostracized by Gulf countries like Saudi Arabia and Islamic countries as far east as [Indonesia and Malaysia](#).

The obvious fact that Israel prioritizes peace and life over war and death, has become its greatest strength. Even during times of crisis, such as the recent conflict with Hamas in 2021, Israel sustained the damage and loss of life not just because it had retained the security infrastructure it had built over decades, but also because it persisted in its indomitable will to survive and thrive – neither at its own expense nor at that of its enemies.

It was only natural that the UAE and Bahrain – now joined by Morocco and Sudan – followed in the footsteps of Egypt and Jordan to establish diplomatic relations with Israel, and begin to normalize the Middle East by stepping back from backward irredentist policies that benefited no one. And it is only a matter of time before major Muslim powers like Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Indonesia, and others also follow suit. The [full normalization of diplomatic ties between Turkey and Israel](#) can be considered sufficient reason to be hopeful for this.

The only obstacle to this eventuality is the persistence of Iran's Ayatollahs in demanding the destruction of Israel on a daily basis. In the age of the War on Terror, the so-called Islamic Republic of Iran exploits the Palestinian cause and the narrative of a glorious Palestinian resistance in the face of an overwhelming non-Muslim adversary to incite not just Shi'ite Muslims, but also Sunni Muslims, against Israel. American withdrawals from Iraq, and more recently from Afghanistan, have only [emboldened Iran](#) in its attempt to radicalize and weaponize Muslim extremists, who sharpen their skills by violently attacking their fellow countrymen and their Muslim brethren, in preparation for an all-out war against the West in general and Israel in particular.

In this sense, promoting the ratification of the Abraham Accords by other Muslim countries while continuing to maintain sanctions and maximum pressure on Iran, is a better approach to containing Iran's nuclear desires, as well as to reversing the inroads that the Iranian regime has made in its neighbourhood and beyond. This would develop a common platform for recognizing the security needs of countries threatened by the IRGC's activities, allow for the creation of new and more effective security architecture in the Middle East region, and most importantly, ensure the isolation of the Iranian regime, especially within the Muslim world. It would weaken Iranian hardliners by frustrating their destructive extremist policies and injurious activities in the region, and would further expose the negative impact of the Iranian revolution on the Muslim world at large. However, for this to happen practically, Iran's control of the 'Palestinian liberation' narrative must be wrested; not by another Muslim country, but by the Palestinians themselves, because they suffer the most from conflict with Israel, and conversely stand to gain the most through peace with Israel.

Why the Doha Deal Failed So Miserably:

The U.S. is pushing for quick agreement over the JCPOA just like it promoted a diplomatic agreement or political settlement with the Afghan Taliban to end its longest war ever. The agreement signed between American and Taliban representatives in Doha, Qatar on February 29, 2020 – formally known as the "[Agreement for Bringing Peace to Afghanistan](#)" – was hailed as a [historic](#) victory for the U.S. that it could never achieve on the battlefield. But, as time has shown, the Doha deal was a [mistake](#) and it failed to protect American interests or the Afghan state. In fact, it paved the way for [the reconquest of Afghanistan by the Taliban](#), and a quick reversal of all the gains the Afghan people had made over the course of two decades.

What was hailed by the Trump administration as [a foreign policy victory quickly turned into a quagmire](#), as the Biden administration was '[handcuffed](#)' to implement the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan by the agreed deadline. The failure was assured because only the U.S. committed to the terms of the agreement, whereas the Taliban flouted all except one of the terms – that they would not attack U.S. forces in Afghanistan anymore. American capitulation over the Taliban's demands that the Ghani administration not be included in the talks was the clearest signal about who was running the show and whose demands would ultimately be met as a result of the so-called 'success' of the Doha talks.

While the reasons for the spectacular failure of the Doha deal will be [studied for years to come](#), some factors can be easily and objectively ascertained. The agreement between the U.S. and the Taliban suffered mainly because of a lack of accountability and verifiability through trustworthy mechanisms, such as international or multilateral organizations, or even the Afghan government of the time. While the U.S. government said it would pursue a "[conditions-based approach](#)" in its negotiations with the Taliban and its withdrawal from Afghanistan, it clearly did not do that. The Taliban met only one of the many conditions it agreed to at Doha and were not penalized for their attitude. This exposed the U.S. as weak and militarily ineffective in Afghanistan, and only emboldened the Taliban in their summer 2021 drive to neutralize or eliminate all pro-U.S. elements – including the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF) – across the country.

The Doha deal also exposed how the U.S. government, across Republican and Democrat administrations, did not have a consistent approach toward the Afghan conflict and their adversaries in the landlocked Muslim country. More importantly, U.S. reluctance to truly democratise Afghan society only grew over a period of two decades; American policymakers [privately expressed doubts and reservations](#) over whether such a goal could even be achieved or not. This caused the U.S. to persistently ignore whatever representative quasi-democratic Afghan leadership was nurtured since 2001, and undervalue all segments of progressive civil society that had been cultivated for the first time across Afghanistan. Since the U.S. was unwilling to believe in the strength of the enlightened reformist elements of Afghan society that it had itself built, it thus appeared more convenient for the American military and diplomatic corps to not pressurize the Taliban effectively enough to [negotiate seriously and in good faith](#) with the-then legitimate, internationally recognized Afghan government.

In hindsight, the failure of the Doha deal has less to do with American refusal to acknowledge the [ground realities of Afghanistan](#). The agreement with the Taliban failed because of American unwillingness to pursue what they considered was a “[forever war](#)” in a faraway land of little to no consequence; a fight that was increasingly unpopular at home and deemed a waste of domestic political capital. War fatigue was pervasive across the U.S. in the 2010s and then-President Trump had [promised to end American involvement in wars abroad](#). This decimated American will to continue fighting the good fight in Afghanistan, for their allies and for the Afghan people, resulted in a redefinition of the goals of U.S. military involvement in Afghanistan; a deliberate ‘shifting of the goalposts’ in order to declare the goals as either having been achieved or being unachievable in the first place.

It is these same misguided notions – the eagerness to believe in the lies of the Iranian regime, and the unwillingness to confront Iranian malign activities that only metastasize as time goes by – that guide the current U.S. government in blindly pushing for JCPOA 2.0 as quickly as possible. Perhaps there could also be a sinister desire among elements within the American military-industrial complex to ‘manage’ the Iranian nuclear issue without completely addressing the problem, so as to ensure continued U.S. weapons sales to Gulf and Middle East countries threatened by the Iranian menace.

But Israel suffers from no such delusions: the Israeli state and people have an inimitable clarity of purpose, which guides their desire as well as ability to defend themselves against all threats. Israel will not be invading a foreign land or setting up transnational proxies in the face of a threat from Iran: it will be defending its own sovereign territory and its people from annihilation by any means necessary. For this purpose, it will receive support from the entire Israeli nation and Jewish people around the world, while the hardliners of the Iranian regime will have to depend on their ever-diminishing support base at home, and their paid proxies and puppets abroad.

Fundamental Problems with JCPOA:

Like the Doha agreement, the JCPOA is an attempt to rationalize and moderate the extremist character of the Iranian state with little understanding of the ground realities and true context of the situation. The problem of the Ayatollah's irredentism cannot be solved without an accurate understanding of the nature of this problem, or without a holistic evaluation of the threat posed by the Iranian regime to not just Israel, but the entire Middle Eastern region.

The JCPOA in 2015 was negotiated between Iran and the P5+1, constituted over the five permanent U.N. Security Council member states (U.S., U.K., France, Russia and China) along with Germany. This time, it is extremely ambiguous as to whether China and Russia will cooperate with the West – or promote the interests of Iran instead – when it comes to the JCPOA framework.

China has little reason to cooperate with any U.S.-led initiative, primarily due to [increasing acrimony over the issue of Taiwan](#). The recent U.S.-China tensions have only compounded the standoff on human rights issues in Xinjiang and Hong Kong, China's irregular practices in their internal and global economic relations, President Xi's increasingly authoritarian stance and growing control on the Chinese Communist Party, and an international geo-economic contest precipitated by the Belt and Road Initiative. China's ambiguous position on Ukraine, and apparent support of Russia's policy under President Putin to confront the West and accelerate its apparent decline, could be construed as an advantage for Iran in the ongoing negotiations. China has also [promised to invest \\$400 billion in Iran over the next 25 years](#), in a clear sign that it will ensure Iran's economic survival with or without the JCPOA. In fact, this long-term strategic partnership between China and Iran is primarily designed to [undermine the energy interests of the U.S. and its Western allies](#) in the Middle East.

It is also uncertain whether Russia will push for the JCPOA or create unanticipated hurdles for the West, as both are on opposing sides of the Ukraine conflict which has now entered its sixth month. In early March 2022, [Russia attempted to bargain with the West](#) on JCPOA 2.0, looking to diminish the impact of sanctions it faced after the Ukraine invasion. Indeed, Russia today is the [most sanctioned country](#) in the world and has assumed the mantle that Iran previously occupied.

The JCPOA 2.0 also suffers from a plethora of [elemental flaws](#), both in the process of negotiations and in the outcomes desired by the negotiating parties. The JCPOA framework does not guarantee that Iran's nuclear program will be of a peaceful nature with no military dimensions; in fact, it gives Iran an obvious path to acquiring nuclear weapons capability. The JCPOA restrictions on Iran contain a sunset clause, which allows Iran to pursue uranium enrichment and plutonium processing in whatever manner it wants between 2026 and 2031. This reduces Iran's 'breakout' time to [weeks rather than months or years](#). The negotiating parties to the JCPOA are only prolonging the Iran nuclear weapons problem, rather than ending it in a holistic and sustainable manner.

After 2031, Iran will have an unrestricted, internationally approved industrial-scale nuclear program: the Iranian regime will be able to produce uranium enrichment beyond the 3% civil use limitation, stockpile unlimited amounts of uranium, use advanced centrifuges to hasten uranium enrichment activities, conduct unfettered research and development on uranium enrichment centrifuges, build and operate facilities uranium enrichment facilities without any restrictions, reprocess spent fuel (which has obvious weapons applications) from its heavy-water nuclear reactors, and build new heavy-water reactors, which would annually produce enough plutonium to fuel several nuclear weapons. By failing to prevent Iran from developing nuclear weapons in the long term, and by weakening restrictions on Iran's ballistic missile programs, the JCPOA will ignite a nuclear arms race in the Middle East. Iran's regional adversaries like [Saudi Arabia](#) will most likely seek to counter Iranian ambitions and activities by [acquiring nuclear weapons themselves](#), as they continue enhancing their conventional capabilities to deter Iran's destabilizing role in the region.

Instead of demanding that Iran submit to inspections by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) 'anytime, anywhere', the JCPOA allows Iran to delay such inspections for up to 24 days. This stipulation obviously allows Iran to further conceal its covert violations of the JCPOA at its nuclear and military sites. Furthermore, the JCPOA prematurely (and carelessly) truncated the IAEA investigation into Iran's documented nuclear weapons development efforts and the possible military dimensions (PMDs) of its existing nuclear program.

[Iran's inconsistent and perfidious cooperation with the IAEA](#) makes it impossible to truly verify whether Tehran ever halted its efforts towards attaining nuclear weapons capability. The Iranian regime's consistent cheating makes it impossible to establish a cogent baseline for future inspections or a holistic verification mechanism. The international community can, at best, develop only an inadequate assessment of the true scale of Iran's nuclear program.

In exchange for transitory restrictions on Iran's nuclear program, the JCPOA gives the Iranian regime permanent benefits up-front. United Nations (U.N.) sanctions, along with certain E.U. sanctions, have already been lifted, and the remaining E.U. sanctions would be lifted in 2023. This will allow the Ayatollahs to access Iran's frozen assets. Since the JCPOA was signed in 2015, Iran has tested multiple ballistic missile platforms and systems. [U.N. Security Council Resolution \(UNSCR\) 2231](#), which outlined the implementation framework for the JCPOA in 2015, aided Iran's ballistic missile program with weaker language that merely "calls upon" Iran to not test any ballistic missiles "designed to be nuclear capable", as opposed to previous resolutions which stipulated that Iran "shall not" do so. Moreover, U.N. restrictions on conventional weapons transfers to or from Iran already expired in 2020, and thanks to the JCPOA, U.N. sanctions on Iran's ballistic-missile program would also be terminated in 2023.

The windfall of sanctions relief since 2015 has substantially revitalized Iran's economy – especially those sectors operated by the Ayatollahs directly, or through their proxies – and [granted the regime access to billions of dollars](#) to finance their multifarious destabilizing activities. This, in turn, has diminished the West's leverage and ability to hold the Iranian regime accountable for its subversive policies and disruptive behaviour. Since the original JCPOA deal was signed, Iran secured contracts with foreign companies worth over \$100

billion, until they were jeopardized and ultimately shut down by the [Trump Administration's withdrawal from JCPOA in May 2018](#).

It is painfully obvious that the JCPOA framework has emboldened the Iranian regime: it has enriched that extremist, anti-America, anti-Israel terror state, and has only fostered the Ayatollah's destabilizing activities and expansionist policies. Iran ignominiously retains the pole position as the world's leading state-sponsor of terrorism; the IRGC continues to sponsor, finance and strengthen Hezbollah, Hamas, Iraq's PMU, Yemen's 'Ansar Allah' more commonly known as the Houthis militia, the Al-Ashtar Brigades in Bahrain, and an array of violent extremist organizations and functional militant groups across the Middle East. The Iranian regime also escalated [its patronage of the brutal dictatorship of Bashar al-Assad in Syria](#), who has killed thousands during the Syrian civil war. In addition to Russia's military intervention, it was Iran's unwavering support and practical backing that has sustained the Assad regime; the IRGC's operations in Syria allowed Assad to reverse crucial setbacks and turn the tide of the civil war in his favour.

At home, Iran continues to take Americans and other foreign nationals hostage. Recently, [Iran arrested a 66-year-old German national](#) under dubious pretences, most likely to use him as a 'bargaining chip' in the ongoing JCPOA negotiations. The [Iranian regime continues to brutally repress its own people](#), violating the human rights of the Iranian citizenry as well as of ethnic, national, and religious minorities with absolute impunity.

Iran also aims to [extract maximum concessions](#) from the U.S., in order to allow a placation of the Biden Administration's efforts to secure the [JCPOA 2.0](#) deal. These include removal of the IRGC from the list of designated terrorist organizations, for the JCPOA to be binding regardless of future U.S. policies (a direct intervention into internal U.S. politics), and ending the IAEA investigation into three of Iran's undeclared nuclear sites. However, the [U.S. State Department](#) rightly labelled these additional demands as "extraneous", "unacceptable" and "beyond the scope of JCPOA".

But the hardliners in the Iranian state will not be deterred in their nuclear blackmail of the West. According to Behnam Ben Taleblu, Senior Fellow at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies (FDD), this is the Ayatollah's "[winning formula](#)": to expand their nuclear activities while simultaneously limiting the inspections and monitoring regime that they would be subject to. And it is the JCPOA that allowed the Iranian regime to develop this formula.

To summarize, Iran never fully complied with the JCPOA in the first place and is currently violating it in terms of restrictions on uranium stockpiles, uranium enrichment levels, centrifuge use, and other accounts. The Biden Administration has failed in taking advantage of the strong bargaining position it inherited from the Trump Administration's maximum pressure campaign and sanctions innovations to secure a more restrictive agreement that enhances the security of the United States and its allies. Abasing itself to the Iranian regime's nuclear extortion, and rushing to revive the defective JCPOA framework, only squanders U.S. leverage and generates negative consequences for the Middle East: all it does is allow the Ayatollahs time and space for an eventual nuclear breakout. A much more restrictive agreement is required to permanently and verifiably dismantle Iran's nuclear weapons program. Instead of rewarding and empowering a hostile theocratic dictatorship by

lifting sanctions and squandering U.S. bargaining leverage, a new agreement should include stipulations regarding Iran's ballistic missile program, disclosure of its past nuclear weapons efforts, and better protection for Israel as well as for Arab allies of the West.

Options for Israel:

Israel has been preparing for decades to forestall a nuclear-capable Iran, including large-scale practice for preemptive military strikes against Iranian military capacity and nuclear facilities. This would also include airstrikes on proximate Iranian proxies such as Hezbollah in Lebanon and Syria, and on Hamas and PIJ in Gaza. To protect the Israeli people, Shin Bet would conduct targeted counterterror operations against potential 'lone wolves' among Palestinians and Arab Israelis either inspired or sponsored by the IRGC.

In light of waning American inclinations to engage in wars abroad, Israel has been ready and is capable of undertaking military operations against Iran on its own. In late April 2021, then-Israeli Intelligence Minister Eli Cohen said that [Iran would never have any immunity from the Israeli Air Force](#). Israel has successfully targeted nuclear facilities in the Middle East before and did not face any retaliation on any of those occasions. In 1981, Operation Opera/Babylon [**confirm codename**] saw the IAF destroy Iraq's Osirak nuclear reactor in Diyala, and in 2007, Operation Orchard/Outside The Box [**confirm codename**] resulted in the successful destruction of a suspected Syrian nuclear facility at the al-Kibar site in Deir ez-Zour.

Israel have recently increased their military operations in neighbouring Syria, particularly against IRGC-affiliated ammunition depots and other targets linked to Iran. The strikes have been highly successful and have slowed down the flow and integration of weapons to parties hostile to Israel. Israel have significant military intelligence on Iranian military-related targets in neighbouring countries and could increase the frequency of these attacks. The most [recent strikes](#) were in Damascus and Aleppo, in an attempt to prevent Iranian weapons shipments to Syria.

In case of all-out war, the primary objectives of the IAF would be to degrade any and all nuclear capabilities that Iran has developed, including civilian nuclear capabilities, test facilities, centrifuge development centres, research sites, missile manufacturing plants, and other nuclear-related targets. Israel may or may not have to strike Iran's nuclear reactors, depending on the assessments of radioactive fallout. IAF air assaults would be complemented by strikes courtesy of the Jericho and Shavit missile systems, and 'Popeye Turbo' submarine-launched cruise missiles (SLCMs) deployed from the Israeli Navy's Dolphin-class submarines. The Iranian regime's leaders – the key Ayatollahs, the sycophantic ideologues and the military chiefs of the IRGC and its Quds Force – would also be important targets, but secondary objectives in such missions. In fact, Israel could leave the Ayatollahs to suffer the indignation of bringing shame to the Iranian nation by not being capable of retaliating in a satisfactory manner or, even worse, spinelessly sheltering their own selves from possible Israeli missile strikes and commandos targeting them for assassination.

However, it suits Israel to continue repaying Iran in the same coin, and feeding the Ayatollahs their own medicine through sub-conventional operations against nuclear installations, scientists and targets deep inside Iranian territory. In case such operations lead the Iranian regime to strike back, Israel's response – as outlined above – would be overwhelming and earth-shattering. Israel would also have casus belli to annihilate Hezbollah in Lebanon and Hamas in Gaza. And in case the Iranian regime attacks American targets in the region or attempts to disrupt oil supplies, it would provoke a [military response from the U.S.](#) as well as from other Western powers. But an Iranian nuclear breakout is a 'red line' for Israel, while the U.S. remains ambiguous on their threshold of tolerance.

And there are non-military options that Israel can exercise, such as enforcing its own sanctions regime against commercial enterprises that conduct business with Iranian entities or preventing Iran from accessing the cutting-edge technologies that Israeli companies develop. Israel can also escalate cyberwarfare operations against not just Iranian nuclear facilities, but all dimensions of the Iranian state and economy. Israel is also undeterred from targeting Iranian proxies that are globally designated terrorist organizations, and it would serve Israeli interests to bolster the operational capabilities of countries like UAE and Saudi Arabia which are militarily confronting Iranian proxies like the Houthis. Israel's strategic diplomacy must continue to remind Muslim countries in the Middle East, Persian Gulf and South Asia of the destabilizing influence the Iranian regime exercises in their countries.

Israel must also consistently build up its relations with longtime partners like Egypt, Jordan and Turkey, and enhance connectivity with new partners like the UAE and Bahrain, to pursue greater normalization with the Muslim world. While the U.S. adamantly pursues the JCPOA with Iran, Israel must find ways to utilize its leverage with both Russia and China so as to deter both of them from propping up Iran as part of their anti-U.S. policies for the Middle East. In doing so, Israel must walk a tightrope with its best friend, the U.S., with whom Israel enjoys enormous social, political and cultural ties. Nevertheless, if the U.S. continues to (unwillingly or unwittingly) aggravate the Iranian nuclear threat in the region, then for its own sake, Israel must counteract Russian and Chinese support for Iran, which not only works to Israel's detriment but will also definitely frustrate the U.S. and undermine a host of Western interests in the region.

Of course, there are a plethora of other options and tactics that the Israeli national security establishment has developed to deal with the Ayatollah regime in Iran; many of which could go far beyond the scope of the abovementioned responses that have been publicly discussed and ruminated over for years if not decades.

While a preemptive strike could result in Israel facing international opprobrium, a retaliatory strike against even a conventional attack by Iran would incite Israel to devastate Iran and extinguish whatever vestiges of Shi'ite extremism and anti-Semitic ideologies – as represented by the virulent Ayatollahs – exist in the region. The Israeli people will not suffer as much as the Iranian people, since the former are always prepared for military confrontation. However, other Muslim countries would definitely be engulfed in internecine conflict perpetrated by Iranian proxies that the IRGC has carefully cultivated in their homelands over decades.

Conclusion:

The Muslim world can choose to act as a bystander and watch silently as Iran pushes the Middle East closer to the brink of annihilation, or rational Muslims can realize Iranian intrigues and do what they can to put a stop to it. Alas, this is an optimistic outcome: when asked to join the Abraham Accords, Saudi crown prince Mohammad bin Salman is [reported](#) to have said that it would get him “[killed ... \[by\] my own people](#)”. As all rational and objective observers realized long ago, it was only a matter of time before Islamist extremism began to stymie the interests of Muslim-majority nation-states in an increasingly globalized and interconnected world.

Fearing threats from the Iranian regime, or a backlash from radicalized citizens funded and trained by the Ayatollahs, should not be a sufficient reason for Muslim countries with apparently strong military forces – or even police states, in some cases – to discard reason and abandon the pursuit of a justiciable peace. It should, in fact, form the basis for facilitating broad-based deradicalization and counter-extremism programs in these countries, as a prelude to open and rational debates on future relations with Israel and, more importantly, on how to best promote the real interests of the Palestinians.

Diplomatic recognition of Israel and gradual normalization of ties will be the first step in the restoration of normalcy in the Middle East, as well as for the appropriate representation of the Palestinian cause in a way that best serves the interests of the Palestinian people and future generations. Instead of Israel or even Arab Israelis promoting the Abraham Accords, ways and means for the Palestinians to stimulate a comprehensive rapprochement between Israel and the Muslim world must be developed and pursued in a coherent and sustained fashion.

However, as Muslims navigate between their fear of Israel or of their fellow Muslims, the West must not be blindsided by Iranian perfidy in their reasonable desires to prevent the Ayatollahs from getting nuclear weapons. The JCPOA of the past, and the present, is wholly insufficient in terms of the goals of a peaceful Middle East, and of a responsible and friendly Iran that can be trusted by the Middle East and the international community.

In terms of the way forward – towards a durable and lasting peace in the Middle East and the Persian Gulf regions – the [schematics of a better deal](#) with Iran must, at the very minimum, include:

- Comprehensive inspections of Iran’s nuclear program and nuclear-related activities to ensure objective and unbiased verification that cannot be compromised by Iranian regime double-crossing;

- Thorough investigations and acceptable resolution of the potential military dimensions (PMD file) of Iran's nuclear program;
- Emphasis on the principle of zero enrichment and zero reprocessing, in order to prevent a nuclear arms race in the Middle East;
- Sanctions relief for Iran only as a result of verifiable adherence to agreements, as opposed to sanctions relief for participation in negotiations alone;
- Discouragement and mitigation of Iran's non-nuclear behaviour – particularly the Iranian regime's malign activities in its neighbourhood and beyond, its overt support for terrorist groups and its ballistic missile programs – either as a central component of a nuclear deal with Iran or as part of a complementary, mandatory parallel track to such negotiations;
- Due consideration and deference to the legitimate security concerns of the West's regional allies and partners in the Middle East – especially those who are directly threatened by Tehran's malignant behaviour – when it comes to the U.S. and E.U. conducting their Iran policy;
- The release of all hostages, political prisoners, dissident activists and prisoners of conscience held captive by the Iranian regime prior to the conclusion of any deal with Iran; and
- Persuading Iran, by all means available, to abandon its extremist narratives and anti-Israel policies, and induce it to work towards a sustainable, durable and lasting peace in the Middle East: not just with Saudi Arabia, but also with Israel.

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