

OPTIONS FOR THE BIDEN ADMINISTRATION TO PREVENT IRAN FROM DEVELOPING A NUCLEAR WEAPON

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Abstract: *Today, Iran’s nuclear program poses a threat to the United States’ (U.S.) security interests in the Middle East. In 2015, under the Obama administration, the U.S. joined the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), commonly referred to as the Iran nuclear deal. The JCPOA was a multinational agreement meant to prevent Iran from developing a nuclear weapon in return for the removal of sanctions on Iran. However, in 2018, the Trump administration withdrew from the agreement and re-imposed sanctions. Despite the U.S.’ decision to withdraw from the agreement, Iran continued to abide by it until the Trump administration imposed new sanctions against their country. The Biden administration has only two options to address this situation: The U.S. could either rejoin the JCPOA or increase economic sanctions. While increasing sanctions could pressure Iran to negotiate, they would risk the rise of anti-American sentiment and enhance the power of hardliners in the government. On the other hand, if the U.S. rejoins the JCPOA, there is the risk that Iran will continue with its missile program and its dominance in the region.*

Introduction

A Joseph R. Biden presidency renews hope of the United States (U.S.) rejoining the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), commonly referred to as the Iran nuclear deal. The JCPOA was a preliminary framework agreement reached on July 14, 2015, between Iran, the European Union (E.U.), and the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) — the United States, Great Britain, France, Russia, and China — plus Germany, commonly referred to as the P5+1.⁹⁵ The agreement was a transaction in which Iran promised to stop developing nuclear weapons for 15 years in return for the removal of economic sanctions.⁹⁶ However, on May 8, 2018, under the Trump administration, the U.S. withdrew from the agreement and reimposed sanctions on Iran despite strong disapproval from the other signatories.⁹⁷ Trump backed his decision to leave, claiming that it was “defective at its core.”⁹⁸ Trump claimed that the limits of the agreement were “very weak,” “allow[ing] Iran to continue

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⁹⁵ Kali Robinson “What Is the Iran Nuclear Deal?” *Council on Foreign Relations*, 2021, <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/what-iran-nuclear-deal>.

⁹⁶ Kali, “What Is the Iran Nuclear Deal?”

⁹⁷ “The P4+1 and Iran Nuclear Deal Alert, May 16, 2018,” Arms Control Association, 2018, <https://www.armscontrol.org/blog/2018-05-16/p41-iran-nuclear-deal-alert-may-16-2018>.

⁹⁸ “The P4+1 and Iran Nuclear Deal Alert, May 16, 2018.”



enriching uranium and — over time — reach the brink of a nuclear breakout.”⁹⁹ In November 2018, the Trump administration re-imposed economic sanctions on Iran.¹⁰⁰ In April 2019, the U.S. threatened to impose sanctions on any country that continued to buy oil from Iran.¹⁰¹ Two months later, the Trump administration imposed sanctions on the Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei.¹⁰² The U.S.’ decision to not only withdraw from the agreement but also to increase sanctions on Iran discouraged the country from continuing to abide by the limits set by the agreement. On July 1, 2019, Iran violated the terms of the agreement when it surpassed the limit on its low-enriched uranium stockpile.¹⁰³ A week later, Iran breached the 3.67% limit on nuclear enrichment.¹⁰⁴ The potential for political and economic destabilization poses a great risk to the U.S. and its allies in the Middle East — Israel and Saudi Arabia. Therefore, the Biden administration must decide what strategy to pursue to protect U.S. security interests in the region. The Biden administration can pursue two strategies to address this situation: attempt to rejoin the original agreement or increase economic sanctions. The most effective strategy that will fulfill U.S. regional security interests is to rejoin the original agreement.

Background

Iran launched its civilian nuclear program in the 1950s under the Shah, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi.¹⁰⁵ In 1968, Iran signed the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons Treaty (NPT), ratifying the treaty two years later.¹⁰⁶ The NPT had three objectives: to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons, to promote the peaceful use of nuclear technology, and to strive for global

⁹⁹ Donald J. Trump, “Remarks by President Trump on the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action,” Trump White House Archives, 2018, <https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-joint-comprehensive-plan-action/>.

¹⁰⁰ “The P4+1 and Iran Nuclear Deal Alert, May 16, 2018.”

¹⁰¹ Edward Wong and Clifford Krauss, “U.S. Moves to Stop All Nations From Buying Iranian Oil, but China Is Defiant,” *The New York Times*, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/22/world/middleeast/us-iran-oil-sanctions.html>.

¹⁰² Daphne Psaledakis and Humeyra Pamuk, “U.S. imposes sweeping sanctions on Iran, targets Khamenei-linked foundation,” *Reuters*, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/usa-iran-sanctions-int/u-s-imposes-sweeping-sanctions-on-iran-targets-khamenei-linked-foundation-idUSKBN27Y262>.

¹⁰³ Rafael Mariano Grossi, “Verification and monitoring in the Islamic Republic of Iran in light of United Nations Security Council resolution 2231 (2015),” International Atomic Energy Agency, 2019, <https://www.iaea.org/sites/default/files/19/07/govinf2019-8.pdf>.

¹⁰⁴ Rafael Mariano Grossi, “Verification and monitoring in the Islamic Republic of Iran in light of United Nations Security Council resolution 2231 (2015),” International Atomic Energy Agency, 2019, <https://www.iaea.org/sites/default/files/19/07/govinf2019-9.pdf>.

¹⁰⁵ Joseph Cirincione, Jon B. Wolfsthal, and Miriam Rajkumar, *Deadly Arsenal: Nuclear, Biological, and Chemical Threats*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Washington, D.C.: 2014.

¹⁰⁶ “The Iran Primer: Iran and the NPT,” United States Institute of Peace, 2020, <https://iranprimer.usip.org/blog/2020/jan/22/iran-and-npt#:~:text=1968,develop%20or%20acquire%20nuclear%20weapons>.



nuclear disarmament. Following the 1979 Iran Revolution, Iran's nuclear program came to a stillstand as many nuclear scientists had fled the country in the wake of the revolution and Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini opposed the use of nuclear technology.¹⁰⁷ In 1984, the U.S. added Iran to its list of state sponsors of terrorism and gradually imposed economic sanctions and arms embargos on the country.¹⁰⁸ Later that year, Khomeini restarted Iran's nuclear program to defend the Islamic Republic from external threats, such as Iraq.¹⁰⁹ Over time, sanctions were used to address concerns that Iran was using its civilian nuclear program as a cover for nuclear weapons development.¹¹⁰

Almost two decades later, in 2002, the National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI), the political wing of the People's Mujahedin of Iran, a militant opposition organization banned by the Iranian government, revealed the existence of Iran's nuclear program.¹¹¹ Alireza Jafarzadeh, a representative of the NCRI, disclosed that Iran had built two new nuclear facilities in Natanz and Arak.¹¹² The following year, Iran negotiated with the EU-3 — France, Germany, and the United Kingdom — in an attempt to avoid referral to the UNSC.¹¹³ During this time, Iran notified the IAEA that it would suspend nuclear enrichment for the duration of the talks, commonly referred to as the Paris Agreement.¹¹⁴ However, diplomatic progress fell apart in 2005 after Iran rejected the EU-3's long-term framework agreement and decided to resume enriching uranium.¹¹⁵

In June 2006, the P5+1 proposed an agreement that would advance Iran's civilian nuclear technology if it suspended nuclear enrichment and resumed the implementation of additional protocols requiring Iran to declare its nuclear activities and grant the IAEA access to its nuclear facilities.¹¹⁶ Although Iran rejected the proposal, it admitted that it contained "elements which

¹⁰⁷ Gary Samore, *Iran's Strategic Weapons Programmes: A Net Assessment*, London, UK: Routledge, 2005, 9-16.

¹⁰⁸ "Chapter 3: State Sponsors of Terrorism Overview," U.S. Department of State, 2004, <https://2009-2017.state.gov/documents/organization/225050.pdf>.

¹⁰⁹ Micah Zenko, "Iran's Nuclear Program: History and Eight Questions," *Council on Foreign Relations*, 2012, <https://www.cfr.org/blog/irans-nuclear-program-history-and-eight-questions#:~:text=According%20to%20an%20IAEA%20internal.Islamic%20Revolution%20from%20external%20threats>.

¹¹⁰ "Chapter 3: State Sponsors of Terrorism Overview."

¹¹¹ Samore, *Iran's Strategic Weapons Programmes: A Net Assessment*, 16.

¹¹² Samore, *Iran's Strategic Weapons Programmes: A Net Assessment*, 16.

¹¹³ "SECURITY COUNCIL IMPOSES SANCTIONS ON IRAN FOR FAILURE TO HALT URANIUM ENRICHMENT, UNANIMOUSLY ADOPTING RESOLUTION 1737 (2006)," United Nations Security Council, 2006, <https://www.un.org/press/en/2006/sc8928.doc.htm>.

¹¹⁴ "Communication dated 26 November 2004 received from the Permanent Representatives of France, Germany, the Islamic Republic of Iran and the United Kingdom concerning the agreement signed in Paris on 15 November 2004," International Atomic Energy Agency, 2004, <https://www.iaea.org/sites/default/files/publications/documents/infcircs/2004/infcirc637.pdf>.

¹¹⁵ Kelsey Davenport, "Timeline of Nuclear Diplomacy With Iran," Arms Control Association, 2021. <https://www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/Timeline-of-Nuclear-Diplomacy-With-Iran>.

¹¹⁶ "Iran: Nuclear," Nuclear Threat Initiative, 2020, <https://www.nti.org/learn/countries/iran/nuclear/>.



may be useful for a constructive approach.”¹¹⁷ In response, the UNSC adopted Resolution 1737, which gradually imposed economic sanctions on Iran in an attempt to force the country to the negotiation table.¹¹⁸

In June 2008, the UNSC proposed a new, more comprehensive framework agreement.¹¹⁹ Unlike the first proposal, the UNSC’s new proposal included a promise not to impose any additional sanctions on Iran.¹²⁰ A year later, under the Obama administration, the U.S. initiated a “fuel swap” agreement whereby Iran would trade a majority of its 3.5% enriched uranium in return for fuel for the Tehran Research Reactor.¹²¹ Although Iran agreed, the country increased its stockpile of 3.5% enriched uranium, violating the agreement.¹²² In response, the UNSC adopted Resolution 1929, expanding sanctions on Iran.¹²³

Six years later, on April 2, 2015, a general framework agreement was agreed upon, and a date was set to finalize the deal.¹²⁴ However, before the agreement could be completed, the U.S. Congress passed the “Iran Nuclear Agreement Review Act of 2015,” a bill that gave Congress the right to review any nuclear agreement negotiated with Iran.¹²⁵ Congress had 60 days to pass a resolution in support of or in opposition to the agreement.¹²⁶ If Congress could not come to a decision, the choice would be — and ultimately was — left to the President.¹²⁷ On July 14, Iran, the EU, and the P5+1 met in Vienna, Austria, to finalize the agreement.¹²⁸ However, in October,

¹¹⁷ Davenport, “Timeline of Nuclear Diplomacy With Iran.”

¹¹⁸ Rafael Mariano Grossi, “Cooperation between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Agency in the light of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1737 (2006),” International Atomic Energy Agency, 2007, <https://www.iaea.org/sites/default/files/gov2007-07.pdf>.

¹¹⁹ “Updated P5+1 Package,” U.S. Department of State, 2008, <https://2001-2009.state.gov/t/isn/rls/fs/106217.htm>.

¹²⁰ “Updated P5+1 Package.”

¹²¹ Daniel Poneman and Sahar Nowrouzadeh, “The Deal That Got Away: The 2009 Nuclear Fuel Swap with Iran,” Harvard Kennedy School: Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, 2021, <https://www.belfercenter.org/publication/deal-got-away-2009-nuclear-fuel-swap-iran>.

¹²² Poneman and Nowrouzadeh, “The Deal That Got Away: The 2009 Nuclear Fuel Swap with Iran.”

¹²³ Colum Lynch and Glenn Kessler, “U.N. Imposes another round of sanctions on Iran,” *Washington Post*, 2010, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/06/09/AR2010060902876.html>.

¹²⁴ “Parameters for a Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action Regarding the Islamic Republic of Iran’s Nuclear Program,” Obama White House Archives, 2015, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2015/04/02/parameters-joint-comprehensive-plan-action-regarding-islamic-republic-ir>.

¹²⁵ “Summary of the Iran Nuclear Agreement Review Act, as Amended by Committee,” National Iranian American Council, 2015, <https://www.niacouncil.org/resources/summary-of-the-iran-nuclear-agreement-review-act-as-amended-by-committee/?locale=en>.

¹²⁶ “Summary of the Iran Nuclear Agreement Review Act, as Amended by Committee.”

¹²⁷ Jennifer Steinhauer, “Democrats Hand Victory to Obama on Iran Nuclear Deal,” *The New York Times*, 2015, <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/09/11/us/politics/iran-nuclear-deal-senate.html>.

¹²⁸ Michael R. Gordon and David E. Sanger, “Deal Reached on Iran Nuclear Program; Limits on Fuel Would Lessen With Time,” *The New York Times*, 2015, <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/07/15/world/middleeast/iran-nuclear-deal-is-reached-after-long-negotiations.html>.



the U.S. raised concerns to the UNSC for Iran's medium-range ballistic missile tests, a possible violation of Resolution 1929.¹²⁹

In December 2016, U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry reissued sanctions waivers to demonstrate the U.S.' commitment to JCPOA.¹³⁰ In January 2017, Iran tested medium-range ballistic missiles in violation of Resolution 2231.¹³¹ Two months later, the U.S. introduced new sanctions on Iran targeting its ballistic missile program and its support of terrorism.¹³²

The Trump administration announced the U.S.' withdrawal from the JCPOA in May 2018.¹³³ Trump referred to the deal as "defective at its core" and accused Iran of exporting ballistic missiles to fuel proxy wars with Israel and Saudi Arabia.¹³⁴ Many international organizations, countries, and U.S. scholars have criticized the Trump administration's decision to withdraw, while many U.S. conservatives, Israel, and Saudi Arabia supported the move.¹³⁵ Former President Barack H. Obama called Trump's decision "a serious mistake."¹³⁶ He claimed that "without the JCPOA, the United States could eventually be left with a losing choice between a nuclear-armed Iran or another war in the Middle East."¹³⁷

Once again, in July 2019, Iran breached the agreement when it surpassed the limit on its low-enriched uranium stockpile.¹³⁸

Analysis

Iran's nuclear program remains one of the United States' most pressing foreign policy issues. If Iran successfully develops a nuclear weapon, the safety of Israel, Saudi Arabia, and other countries in the Middle East will be in jeopardy. Such a feat would further destabilize the region and threaten U.S. regional security interests. Therefore, it is within the Biden

¹²⁹ Louis Charbonneau, "U.S. confirms Iran tested nuclear-capable ballistic missile," *Reuters*, 2015, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-iran-missiles-usa/u-s-confirms-iran-tested-nuclear-capable-ballistic-missile-idUSKCN0SA20Z20151016>.

¹³⁰ John Kerry, "Statement by Secretary Kerry on Renewing Waivers Related to Extension of the Iran Sanctions Act," U.S. Department of State, 2016, <https://2009-2017.state.gov/secretary/remarks/2016/12/265652.htm>.

¹³¹ "Iran's Compliance with UNSCR 2231: Alleged Violations Must Be Addressed," Iran Watch, 2017, <https://www.iranwatch.org/our-publications/articles-reports/irans-compliance-unscr-2231-alleged-violations-must-be-addressed>.

¹³² Donald J. Trump, "Read the Full Transcript of Trump's Speech on the Iran Nuclear Deal," *The New York Times*, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/05/08/us/politics/trump-speech-iran-deal.html?partner=rss&emc=rss>.

¹³³ Mark Landler, "Trump Abandons Iran Nuclear Deal He Long Scorned," *The New York Times*, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/05/08/world/middleeast/trump-iran-nuclear-deal.html>.

¹³⁴ Landler, "Trump Abandons Iran Nuclear Deal He Long Scorned."

¹³⁵ Landler, "Trump Abandons Iran Nuclear Deal He Long Scorned."

¹³⁶ Barack H. Obama, "REMARKS: Quitting the Iran Nuclear Deal: 'A Serious Mistake,'" Arms Control Association, 2018, <https://www.armscontrol.org/act/2018-06/features/remarks-quitting-iran-nuclear-deal-%E2%80%98-serious-mistake-%E2%80%99>.

¹³⁷ Obama, "REMARKS: Quitting the Iran Nuclear Deal: 'A Serious Mistake.'"

¹³⁸ Grossi, "Verification and monitoring in the Islamic Republic of Iran in light of United Nations Security Council resolution 2231 (2015)."



administration's best interest to prevent such an outcome from occurring by taking proactive steps to ensure that Iran does not develop a nuclear weapon.

Rejoining the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action

Prior to withdrawing from the JCPOA, the Trump administration imposed various sanctions on Iran without compromising the United States' commitments to the Iran nuclear deal.¹³⁹ After withdrawing from the JCPOA, the Trump administration introduced additional sanctions that violated U.S. commitments to the deal.¹⁴⁰ The Biden administration's ability to re-enter the JCPOA is contingent upon addressing four different groups of sanctions: those imposed after May 2018 that violate the U.S.' JCPOA commitments, sanctions imposed between January 2016 and May 2018 that are in line with the U.S.' commitments, and non-nuclear sanctions imposed by the Trump administration in 2019 that prevent efficient re-entry.

By rejoining the JCPOA, the Biden administration would have to address the current sanctions that contradict JCPOA commitments. This category of sanctions would be relatively easy to address because the administration would only need to revert to compliance with the deal. Notably, these are the same sanctions that the Obama administration lifted in 2016 to ensure U.S. compliance with the agreement.¹⁴¹ The sanctions cover Iran's petrochemical development, oil sales, and acquisition of hard currency.¹⁴² The second point of consideration in reentry would be the sanctions prior to withdrawal. As noted above, the Trump administration had imposed various sanctions on Iran that were in line with U.S. commitments under the JCPOA. The sanctions covered terrorist networks, Iran's prison system, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, and Iran's networks for ballistic missile procurement.¹⁴³ In the negotiations phase, Iran might advocate for a total reset to when the deal first went into effect. However, sanctions hereby outlined under the second category were made in compliance with JCPOA regulations, and it is unlikely that the Biden administration will lift them. Iran would need to agree to decrease its nuclear enrichment levels to the negotiated levels and to correct JCPOA restriction violations such as the development of new centrifuges and resuming heavy water production.¹⁴⁴

¹³⁹ Brian O'Toole, "Rejoining the Iran nuclear deal: Not so easy," *Atlantic Council*, 2021, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/in-depth-research-reports/issue-brief/rejoining-the-iran-nuclear-deal-not-so-easy/>

¹⁴⁰ "The P4+1 and Iran Nuclear Deal Alert, May 16, 2018."

¹⁴¹ O'Toole, "Rejoining the Iran nuclear deal: Not so easy."

¹⁴² O'Toole, "Rejoining the Iran nuclear deal: Not so easy."

¹⁴³ O'Toole, "Rejoining the Iran nuclear deal: Not so easy."

¹⁴⁴ Kali, "What Is the Iran Nuclear Deal?"



Increasing Economic Sanctions

The Biden administration has the option to increase sanctions on Iran. Powerful nations and multilateral alliances use economic sanctions to force adversaries to change specific behaviors. The U.S. government has used sanctions on Iran to degrade Iran's military and nuclear powers, influence its decision making, and "promote positive political change in the nature of the Iranian regime."¹⁴⁵ As a coercive instrument of influence, the U.S. and its multilateral partners have used sanctions to discourage Iranian defiance of international community demands. Although sanctions are primarily economic, the overall price of sanctions is the coercive element that necessitates political changes.¹⁴⁶ For example, sanctions proved effective in bringing Iran to the negotiation table, which resulted in the JCPOA. These sanctions created unfavorable economic conditions for the people of Iran and may have slowed the progress of the nuclear program due to economic hardship.

Nonetheless, economic struggles caused by sanctions do not always create positive political changes. In addition, sanctions could accelerate Iran's nuclear program.¹⁴⁷ Sanctions might also increase the population's support for the regime's economic defiance and consequently undermine the efficacy of economic sanctions.¹⁴⁸ This can include building stronger political and economic relationships with U.S. adversaries such as China and Russia. Overall, economic pressure does not always guarantee effective control of the incumbent regime.

In various ways, Iran is not the ideal candidate for the use of economic sanctions by the U.S. In general, the outcomes of economic sanctions are uncertain when it comes to attempting to influence behavior.¹⁴⁹ Sanctions may fail to match their coercive objectives, particularly when imposed on authoritarian adversaries.¹⁵⁰ Although the U.S. has used coercive economic sanctions on Iran for decades, the results have been far from ideal.¹⁵¹ Since the Reagan administration, the U.S. has imposed various sanctions to restrict monetary aid, arms trade, and economic activities between the U.S. and Iran, among other penalties.¹⁵² During the Bush administration, the U.S. restricted Iran's access to the international financial system with the objective of blocking or

¹⁴⁵ Robert Reardon, "Containing Iran: Strategies for Addressing the Iranian Nuclear Challenge," RAND Corporation, 2012. <https://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/MG1180.html>.

¹⁴⁶ Shirley A. Kan, "China and Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction and Missiles: Policy Issues," Congressional Research Service, 2015, <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/nuke/RL31555.pdf>.

¹⁴⁷ Seyed Hossein Mousavian and Mohammad Mehdi Mousavian, "Building on the Iran Nuclear Deal for International Peace and Security," *Journal for Peace and Nuclear Disarmament*, 2018, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/25751654.2017.1420373>.

¹⁴⁸ Mousavian, "Building on the Iran Nuclear Deal for International Peace and Security."

¹⁴⁹ Adam Tarock, "The Iran nuclear deal: winning a little, losing a lot," *Third World Quarterly*, 2016, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/01436597.2016.1166049>.

¹⁵⁰ Tarock, "The Iran nuclear deal: winning a little, losing a lot."

¹⁵¹ Chintamani Mahapatra, "US–Iran Nuclear Deal: Cohorts and Challenger," *Contemporary Review of the Middle East*, 2016, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/2347798916632323>.

¹⁵² Mahapatra, "US–Iran Nuclear Deal: Cohorts and Challenger."

discouraging banks from operating in Iran.¹⁵³ This policy continued in the Obama administration and successfully limited Iran's access to the international financial system.¹⁵⁴ The Trump administration introduced sanctions on Iran's manufacturing, textiles, mining, and construction sectors, as well as imposing additional sanctions on specific companies, individuals, and authorities in a failed attempt to bring Iran back to the negotiation table to negotiate a new agreement.¹⁵⁵

If the Biden administration chooses to tighten U.S. sanctions on Iran, the key challenge will be to prevent a domestic backlash in Iran. Adverse coercive measures such as sanctions on Iranian oil could have negative implications for the Iranian population at large. Although an oil sanction could inflict economic pain on Iran, it could also rally the masses in support of the incumbent regime and strengthen the hardline position to block negotiations with the U.S. This risk is characteristically high, considering that hardliners support both the country's uranium enrichment and missile program.¹⁵⁶ To put it succinctly, it is unlikely that sanctions can be used as an effective way to limit the missile program of Iran, which has been used by hardliners as a tool to secure their dominance in the region.

Conclusion

Although the Biden administration has a variety of intervention options at its disposal, rejoining the JCPOA deal would be the most effective strategy. One option is to continue imposing further economic sanctions on Iran. A drawback of this strategy is an increase in anti-American sentiment and drawing attention away from the oppressive behavior of the Iranian government. The Biden administration should secure re-entry into the JCPOA by renegotiating current sanctions that violate the United States' commitment to the agreement.

Rejoining the JCPOA will not be easy. However, compared to economic sanctions, returning the JCPOA appears to be the most beneficial. Despite the U.S.' withdrawal during the Trump administration, Iran initially continued to abide by the deal. The current U.S. administration can use quiet diplomacy to ensure Iran's commitment to a new bargain agenda that covers various issues after U.S. withdrawal. First, the Biden administration should ensure that all issues regarding compliance to the JCPOA be resolved before beginning re-entry talks.

¹⁵³ Mahapatra, "US-Iran Nuclear Deal: Cohorts and Challenger."

¹⁵⁴ Robert, "Containing Iran: Strategies for Addressing the Iranian Nuclear Challenge."

¹⁵⁵ O'Toole, "Rejoining the Iran nuclear deal: Not so easy."

¹⁵⁶ Ariane M. Tabatabai and Annie Tracy Samuel, "What the Iran-Iraq War Tells Us about the Future of the Iran Nuclear Deal," *International Security*, 2017, https://www.mitpressjournals.org/doi/full/10.1162/ISEC_a_00286; Ali Fathollah-Nejad and Amin Naeni, "What explains the decline of Iran's moderates? It's not Trump," *Brookings*, 2020, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2020/06/15/what-explains-the-decline-of-irans-moderates-its-not-trump/>.



The U.S. would need to remove any sanctions not aligned with the JCPOA and reassure Iran that the U.S. will not leave the agreement. Iran would need to agree to decrease its nuclear enrichment levels to the negotiated levels and to correct JCPOA restriction violations such as the development of new centrifuges and resuming heavy water production.¹⁵⁷ Second, the Biden administration should ensure that there is an agreement from Tehran to engage in discussions regarding its missile program. In summary, the Biden administration should return to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action.

¹⁵⁷ Kali, “What Is the Iran Nuclear Deal?”

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