

No Deal Remains Better Than a Bad Deal: Risks of a JCPOA Return



JINSA's Gemunder Center Iran Policy Project - May 2021

Co-Chairs: Ambassador Eric Edelman and General Charles Wald, USAF (ret.)



JINSA

The Jewish Institute for
National Security of America

DISCLAIMER

The findings and recommendations contained in this publication are solely those of the authors.
Cover photo credit: istockphoto.com/ Credit: Racide

Policy Project Members and Staff

Co-Chairs

.....

Ambassador Eric Edelman
Former Under Secretary of Defense for Policy

General Charles Wald, USAF (ret.)
Former Deputy Commander of United States European Command

Members

.....

VADM John Bird, USN (ret.)
Former Commander, U.S. Seventh Fleet

Steve Rademaker
Former Assistant Secretary of State for Arms Control and Nonproliferation

General James Conway, USMC (ret.)
Former Commandant of the Marine Corps

Maj Gen Lawrence Stutzriem, USAF (ret.)
Former Director, Plans, Policy and Strategy at North American Aerospace Defense Command

Lt Gen David Deptula, USAF (ret.)
Former Deputy Chief of Staff for Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance, U.S. Air Force Headquarters

Ray Takeyh
Senior Fellow for Middle Eastern Studies, Council on Foreign Relations

Larry Goldstein
Founder and Director of Energy Policy Research Foundation, Inc.

Roger Zakheim
Former General Counsel and Deputy Staff Director of U.S. House Armed Services Committee

Lt Gen Henry Obering, USAF (ret.)
Former Director of the Missile Defense Agency

Gemunder Center Staff

.....

Michael Makovsky, PhD
President & CEO

Jonathan Ruhe
Director of Foreign Policy

John Hannah
Senior Fellow

Ari Cicurel
Senior Policy Analyst

Blaise Misztal
Vice President for Policy

Erielle Davidson
Senior Policy Analyst

Charles Perkins
Director for U.S.-Israel Security Policy

Table of Contents

I. Executive Summary	7
II. Biden Administration Policy	11
A. Strategic Logic of Rejoining JCPOA	
B. Halting Start to Biden’s Iran Policy	
III. Lessons for Biden Approach	15
A. Goodwill and Conciliation Are Counterproductive	
B. JCPOA Didn’t Buy Regional Stability	
IV. Risks of Current Approach	21
A. Reentering the JCPOA Means Being Stuck with the JCPOA	
B. Reentering the JCPOA Will Enable, Not Prevent, a Nuclear Iran	
C. Reentering the JCPOA Makes Middle East War More Likely	
V. Endnotes	26

I. Executive Summary

The Biden administration professes to want to rejoin the Iran nuclear agreement in order to pursue a better follow-on deal, avert a looming nuclear crisis and stave off major Middle East conflict. Yet reentering the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) will have the exact opposite effects. It will render all but impossible any “longer, stronger” successor agreement, while also paving Tehran’s path to the bomb and raising the risk of another major regional war involving the United States.

Like his two immediate predecessors, President Joe Biden entered the White House on a platform of reducing America’s commitments in the Middle East and refocusing on other pressing issues – in this case, COVID, climate change and China foremost. According to the new administration’s logic, addressing these myriad challenges will be exceedingly difficult, and perhaps downright impossible, if the Middle East continues to command disproportionate U.S. attention and resources. But as President Biden’s predecessors from both parties discovered, trying to put a lid on the region and walk away is much easier said than done, and often quite counterproductive.

That certainly will be the case if the United States rejoins the JCPOA. The choice to reenter the agreement should be evaluated in light of its direct impact on Iran’s nuclear program and, just as importantly, on the administration’s objective of creating the conditions for the United States to pivot away from the Middle East. Based on the lessons of past dealmaking with Tehran, this policy is likely to fail on both counts.

Already, the administration’s initial efforts to revive the agreement threaten to undermine its stated goals for doing so. With neither side making the first move to resume compliance, President Biden has taken multiple measures that demonstrate an earnest desire to build Iranian confidence in U.S. good faith, move beyond Trump-era hostilities and gain momentum toward a mutual JCPOA return. In trying to break through what Iran’s nuclear chief called the “wall of distrust” between Washington and Tehran, the Biden administration declared its readiness to talk, backtracked on Trump-era UN “snapback” sanctions on Iran, ended support for Saudi-led operations against Iran’s Houthi proxy in Yemen, and reversed the Trump administration’s sanctioning of the Houthis as a terrorist organization, among other measures.¹

Unfortunately, these unilateral conciliatory gestures merely encourage Iran to double down on its obstinacy. The lessons of negotiating the JCPOA in 2013-15 underscore how Tehran views diplomacy with Washington not as a forum for reciprocating goodwill and finding common interest, but as a zero-sum competition in leverage-building to extract U.S. concessions. Yet American officials proceed as if diplomatic outreach can moderate Iran’s behavior and stimulate mutually-beneficial cooperation. This is premised on mistaken beliefs, often articulated by the Obama administration during JCPOA talks, that the regime is meaningfully split between moderates and hardliners, that the former genuinely seek better relations with the West and that they can be empowered through U.S. engagement. To be sure, divisions exist within the regime’s highest echelons, but the Islamic Republic remains at its core a revolutionary project dominated by hardliners opposed to comity with America, and whose political power in Iran has only grown since the JCPOA went into effect. As the “moderate” Foreign Minister Javad Zarif said in a recent leaked interview, his own role in Iran’s foreign policy around the JCPOA was “nil” and “in the Islamic Republic the military field rules. I have sacrificed diplomacy for the military field rather than the [military] field servicing diplomacy.”²

Given this misreading of their Iranian interlocutors' intentions, much like today, America's JCPOA negotiators in 2013-15 counterproductively sought to induce Iranian cooperation through goodwill gestures, negotiating flexibility and telegraphing a commitment to reach an agreement. Most notably, President Obama decided in 2013 not to uphold his own redline on Syria after Tehran threatened to abandon talks.³ Rather than bring the two sides closer to a deal, however, conciliatory efforts like these merely encouraged Iranian obstinacy, which in turn prompted further U.S. concessions to keep diplomacy alive. American officials remarked retrospectively how "Tehran's unbending position succeeded in substantially shifting Washington's overall objective for the talks" even before and during the Joint Plan of Action (JPA) interim deal of 2013-15. Ultimately, this produced a deal that met none of the Obama administration's initial objectives for actually preventing a nuclear Iran, but instead produced the JCPOA whose limited and temporary caps on enrichment capacity offer Tehran a legitimated glide path to nuclear weapons capability no later than 2031.⁴

While this first lesson problematizes the Biden administration's process for trying to rejoin the JCPOA, another lesson flags similar caution for the objective that underlies reviving the deal – namely, attempting to put a lid on brewing regional tensions and shifting U.S. efforts elsewhere. Events since the JCPOA was announced in July 2015 show how, rather than promoting Middle East stability and U.S.-Iran rapprochement, the nuclear agreement enables and encourages Iran to ramp up regional aggression. On one level, U.S. eagerness for a deal merely confirmed for Iran that it could throw its weight around the region without reprisal. A parallel situation is playing out now as the Houthis escalate the war in Yemen in response to the Biden administration's recent goodwill gestures efforts on that front. On another level, as President Obama acknowledged in 2015, the JCPOA provided a sanctions relief windfall for Tehran, and "some of that money will flow to activities we object to."⁵

And flow it did, to the tune of some \$75-150 billion as part of JCPOA implementation.⁶ The same month the nuclear deal was announced, Tehran laid out an ambitious five-year defense plan focused on developing new precision missiles and other modern weaponry; in January 2017, it expanded this plan further, contributing to a 40 percent increase in Iran's official defense spending over the first two years of the agreement.⁷ Unofficial defense budgets, including covert support for Hezbollah and other proxies, ramped up in tandem.⁸ Larger military budgets translated directly to Tehran's expanding footprint and increasingly destabilizing influence in Lebanon, Syria, Iraq and Yemen – including using these countries as launchpads for attacking Israel, Saudi Arabia, and U.S. forces in Iraq. Greater defense spending also meant growing arsenals of precision drones and ballistic and cruise missiles. Moreover, and even while the JCPOA still was being implemented, Iran illegally took American sailors hostage at gunpoint, harassed other U.S. naval vessels in the Persian Gulf and began coordinating with Russia on a massive, brutal escalation of the Syria conflict.

These lessons indicate several serious pitfalls that pose serious hurdles to the Biden administration's proposed strategy to rejoin the JCPOA.

1. Reentering the JCPOA Means Being Stuck with the JCPOA

The experience of how the JCPOA was negotiated suggests serious problems for trying to reenter it as a "platform" toward an improved follow-on agreement. Just like it watered down the final terms by exploiting the Obama administration's demonstrated desire for a deal, Iran is working to block any "longer, stronger" accord by leveraging the Biden administration's

evident desire to return to the existing agreement. Specifically, Tehran is responding to Washington's conciliatory efforts to restart diplomacy, most of which entail easing pressure on Iran, by making maximalist demands at the Vienna talks and ratcheting up counterpressure. Like in 2013-15, Iran is coming out ahead in the process, with American diplomats beginning to walk back their bargaining positions in the face of Iranian intransigence. This includes adopting Tehran's depiction of certain U.S. sanctions as being "not legitimately" imposed, thus necessitating greater sanctions relief than the letter of the JCPOA requires.

On this trajectory, a JCPOA return actually will put an improved successor deal further out of reach. With most of its negotiating leverage evaporating through sanctions relief, the United States would lack critical bargaining power to secure greater Iranian concessions than those in the existing agreement. Nor would the threat of reimposing sanctions compel Tehran to negotiate a follow-on deal, given it made no such move in this direction when faced with the Trump administration's "maximum pressure" sanctions campaign intended to achieve precisely the same goal. Instead, Iran likely would wait out the deal's rapidly approaching sunsets, essentially daring the Biden administration to snap back sanctions while Tehran ostensibly complies with the original deal. Compounding matters further, Iran would still have additional counter-leverage from its irreversible nuclear advances not covered by the JCPOA, including new facilities and the invaluable know-how from operating advanced centrifuges and uranium metal production. On top of all this, trying to negotiate a successor agreement would once again signal, as in 2013-15 and currently, that the United States needs a deal more than Iran does, and therefore that Tehran can drag it heels and demand continually more concessions.

2. Reentering the JCPOA Will Enable, Not Prevent, a Nuclear Iran

Iran's escalating JCPOA violations since May 2019 raise the specter of a shrinking window to avert a full-blown nuclear crisis. Yet rejoining the agreement would buy very little time for the United States here, as the terms of the deal soon enable Iran to steadily ramp up its nuclear program. Less than a decade from now, Tehran will face no meaningful constraints on its way to an industrial-scale enrichment program capable of producing multiple nuclear weapons' worth of fissile material annually.

With the U.S. commitment to Middle East stability weakened in the wake of a JCPOA return, and as Iran's nuclear program ramps up in accordance with the deal, U.S. regional partners could be expected to roll out their own countermeasures. The likelihood of Israeli military action to prevent Iran reaching the nuclear threshold would rise markedly, and with it the risks of massive Iran-led retaliation that could draw in the United States and/or lead to a catastrophic high-intensity conflict between Israel and Hezbollah. Rejoining the deal also poses the very real possibility of a regional proliferation cascade, in which Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Turkey, UAE and/or others pursue their own nuclear weapons umbrellas. Rather than promoting strategic stability through mutual deterrence, this would result in an uncontrollable multi-sided nuclear standoff in which everyone would have acute first-strike incentives. This Iran-induced arms race also would be the death knell of the Nonproliferation Treaty, arguably the greatest single achievement in arms control history. Additionally, and despite Obama-era pledges that the JCPOA would be the most transparent nonproliferation agreement in history, returning to the deal would not require Iran to come clean about the "possible military dimensions" (PMD) of its nuclear program. These PMD issues have only become more acute, and more pressing, since the JCPOA was implemented: Israel's covert seizure of Iranian nuclear archives in 2018 revealed previously unknown weaponization activities and progress, and currently Tehran is

dragging its feet when it comes addressing international inspectors' questions about these activities.

3. Reentering the JCPOA Makes Middle East War More Likely

Finally, a JCPOA return would exacerbate Middle East instability and conflict, likely drawing the United States more deeply back into the region. As in 2015-16, windfall sanctions relief would translate to increased Iranian defense spending and support for proxies. Moreover, Iran's ability to produce and proliferate drones and missiles is more advanced today than when the deal first was implemented. Combined with the Biden administration's retreat on "snapback" sanctions, and with it the undisputed lapse of the UN conventional arms embargo on Iran pursuant to the JCPOA, the nuclear deal likely will enable further advances in Tehran's precision strike capabilities and its ability to stand up Shia militias around the region. It also could allow Iran to obtain latest-generation manned and unmanned aircraft, air defense systems and other advanced weapons from Russia and China. More generally, reducing U.S. exposure and commitments in the region sends the signal that Washington, in its desire to focus on other priorities, is willing to leave its interests and allies exposed to heightened Iran-led aggression like what already is playing out in Yemen.

Most worryingly, an emboldened and enriched Iran could increase support for Hezbollah, such as providing the Lebanese group with precision munitions and other cutting-edge weapons that would encroach on declared Israeli redlines. Given Hezbollah's more than 120,000 rockets aimed at Israel and illegally ensconced in Lebanese civilian sites, any ensuing conflict would impose devastating costs on both countries, while also raising the risks of a more general regionwide conflict in which Iranian-supplied drones, missiles and militias target Israel from multiple countries and Israeli counteroperations expand to include Syria, Iraq, Yemen and even Iran itself. Tehran also could try to grow its regional military presence, including by escalating efforts to turn Syria, Iraq and/or Yemen into launchpads for attacking Israel, Arab states and U.S. targets around the region. As in 2015-16, Iranian naval forces already are stepping up their harassment of U.S. ships, and Iranian proxies could ramp up their rocket and other attacks on U.S. installations in Iraq as well. In turn, this raises the risk of escalation spirals like that which led to the 2020 assassination of Qasem Soleimani and Iranian missile strike against U.S. forces, after which Washington sent thousands more troops into the region.⁹

Any of these foreseeable scenarios, and potentially many others stemming from an emboldened and enriched Iran, would threaten America's enduring interest in ensuring no single actor dominates the entire Middle East or threatens U.S. allies and energy flows. Such Iran-led instability and conflict naturally would pull U.S. focus from other pressing issues, at the very least consuming significant American diplomatic attention. As with previous major Middle East conflicts that did not initially involve the United States – the 1973 Arab-Israeli War, Lebanon Civil War, Iran-Iraq War and the Persian Gulf War – heightened conflict also could suck in large numbers of American combat forces, peacekeepers and materiel.

Just when the United States thought it could get out of the Middle East, the JCPOA threatens to pull it back in.

II. Biden Administration Policy

A. Strategic Logic of Rejoining JCPOA

President Biden and key administration officials have conveyed consistently their intent to rejoin the JCPOA nuclear agreement with Iran, ostensibly as the first step toward a “longer, stronger” follow-on deal. The logic of this approach is based on understandable concerns about the sheer number of domestic and foreign policy challenges already confronting the United States, and the corresponding urgency to halt further Iranian nuclear advances and stave off yet another Middle East conflict. The attempt to reenter into the JCPOA should, therefore, be evaluated not only in light of its direct impact on Iran’s nuclear program but also, and just as importantly, on the administration’s goal of creating the conditions for the United States to turn its focus and resources away from the Middle East. Based on the lessons of past dealmaking with Iran, the administration’s policy is likely to fail on both counts, paving Iran’s way to a nuclear capability while once again pushing the region into greater upheaval and violence.

The new administration’s overarching approach shares basic continuities with its predecessors’, chiefly the twin desires to prioritize domestic issues and extricate America from the Middle East. President Obama spoke of getting out of wars in Iraq and Afghanistan to better focus on “nation-building at home,” just as President Trump vowed to end “endless wars” in the Middle East and focus on “America first.”¹⁰ Even before COVID, then candidate Biden and future administration officials already emphasized the urgency of a “foreign policy for the middle class” which requires “first and foremost [that] we must repair and reinvigorate our own democracy.”¹¹

This approach has been reinforced since the election. During the presidential transition, the Biden team downsized the Middle East desk at the National Security Council and selected West Wing and Pentagon personnel to prioritize global health, climate change, human rights and great power competition with China and Russia.¹² A week after inauguration, National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan underscored how “at the end of the day, right now, the most profound national security challenge facing the United States is getting our own house in order, is domestic renewal.”¹³ The following month, an unnamed Biden adviser observed “if you are going to list the regions Biden sees as a priority, the Middle East is not in the top three.”¹⁴ In April, Director of National Intelligence Avril Haines said climate change would be “at the center” of U.S. foreign policy.¹⁵

As a corollary to addressing these myriad priorities, the Biden administration believes the United States must downgrade its overextended presence and commitments in the Middle East. According to President Biden, this would include ending “the forever wars” and bringing “the vast majority of our troops home from the wars in Afghanistan and the Middle East and narrowly defin[ing] our mission” in the region as counterterrorism.¹⁶ Jake Sullivan argued in May 2020 that regional retrenchment would mean replacing President Trump’s “military activism and diplomatic passivity” with “U.S. leverage and diplomacy to press for a de-escalation in tensions and eventually a new modus vivendi among the key regional actors.”¹⁷

More specifically, and despite admitting some of its faults, for the Biden administration the JCPOA – by purportedly constraining Iran’s nuclear program and regional aggression – is a prerequisite for refocusing U.S. attention outside the Middle East. According to then candidate Biden in 2020, the Trump Administration “rashly cast the deal aside, prompting Iran to restart its nuclear program and become more provocative, raising the risk of another disastrous war in the region.”¹⁸ Secretary of State nominee Antony Blinken said in his confirmation hearing that leaving the deal cut Iran’s “breakout time” to a bomb from 12 to between 3 and 4 months, which “potentially brings us right back to the crisis point that we were reaching before the deal was negotiated.”¹⁹ Given this ticking Iranian nuclear clock, Sullivan argued “a critical early priority has to be to deal with what is an escalating nuclear crisis as they move closer and closer to having enough fissile material for a weapon. [W]e would like to make sure that we reestablish some of the parameters and constraints around the program that have fallen away over the course of the past few years.”²⁰ Or as he said last year, “getting off a collision course on the nuclear file is both urgent and essential... Ultimately, finding a more constructive approach with Iran is essential to the sustainable redeployment of U.S. forces from the region.”²¹

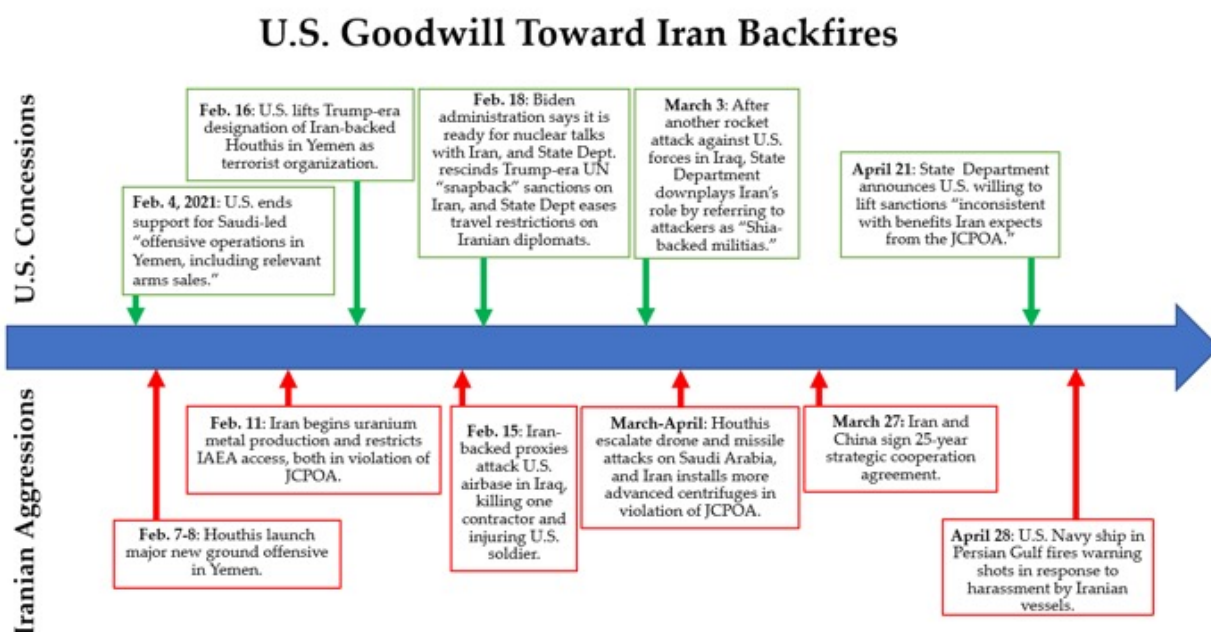
Beyond the immediate goal of reversing Tehran’s march toward the nuclear threshold, the administration also views a JCPOA return as buying the United States some measure of calm in the Middle East. President-elect Biden said in a December 2020 interview that “the best way to achieve getting some stability in the region” is to deal “with the nuclear program.”²² Indeed, rejoining the JCPOA is intended as the first step in negotiating a more comprehensive successor agreement that would, among other things, address Iran’s support for terrorism, its missile programs and other regional meddling. As Jake Sullivan wrote a year ago,

There may also be a way to thread the needle, through a phased approach that delivers nuclear progress up front and creates space to address regional challenges over time. Under such an approach, the United States would immediately reestablish nuclear diplomacy with Iran and salvage what it can from the 2015 nuclear deal, which has been fraying since the Trump administration abandoned it in 2018. The United States would then work with the P5+1 and Iran to negotiate a follow-on agreement. In parallel, the United States and its partners would support a regional track.²³

And as he said earlier this year, “if we can get back to diplomacy and can put Iran’s nuclear program in a box, that will create a platform ... to take on the other significant threats Iran poses, including on the ballistic missile issue.”²⁴ Secretary Blinken said almost exactly the same thing in his confirmation hearing, calling the JCPOA “a platform” for “a longer and stronger agreement to also capture some of the other issues that need to be dealt with regard to missiles, with regard to Iran’s destabilizing activities in the region.”²⁵ Biden’s Special Envoy for Iran, Robert Malley, said in April that “we have concerns about Iran’s ballistic missile program. We have concerns about their activities in the region... But we’re much better off talking about all of that if we could at least put the current nuclear issue on the side...”²⁶ Beyond the intrinsic benefit of promoting Middle East stability, according to Jake Sullivan this would enable the United States to test the premise: “whether by restoring nuclear diplomacy, lowering regional tensions, and forging new arrangements, it can manage the Iranian challenge with fewer forces in the region.”²⁷

B. Halting Start to Biden's Iran Policy

The initial difficulties of testing that premise already have prompted the administration to change tack. As JINSA spelled out in a March 2021 report, just the initial step of getting back into the JCPOA is easier said than done, even if the Biden and Rouhani administrations agree publicly on the need to do so.²⁸ Beyond the technical hurdles to both sides rejoining the deal, each insists the other must be the first to resume compliance. Speaking of Iran's leadership, for months Biden administration officials have insisted "the ball is in their court" when it comes to reviving the JCPOA; Tehran has used nearly identical language to make clear it cannot trust Washington to re-honor the agreement after the Trump administration was the first to depart it.²⁹ Between U.S. election and inauguration days, Supreme Leader Khamenei said "no matter who wins the U.S. election, it won't affect our policy toward the United States," and tweeted "Don't trust the enemy. We saw what the US did under Trump & under Obama against Iran. Hostilities aren't particular to Trump for them to end with him going."³⁰ Or as he said this March, "We trusted the Americans during the time of Obama and did things in accordance with the JCPOA. On paper they said they lifted sanctions, but they scared away investors. Their commitments have no value for us." Shortly thereafter, his nuclear chief called for the United States and Iran to break down their "wall of distrust."³¹



Even as the administration has begun fulfilling other campaign pledges to withdraw from Afghanistan and reduce U.S. troop commitments in the Middle East, the wall of distrust has prevented either side making the first move toward compliance or even substantively softening its insistence that the initiative to rejoin the JCPOA lies with the other side. In response, the Biden administration took several confidence-building measures demonstrating an earnest desire to build Iranian confidence in U.S. guarantees and good faith, move beyond Trump-era hostilities and gain momentum toward a mutual JCPOA return. Thus within weeks of taking office the White House declared its readiness for an "informal meeting" with Tehran; that same day the State Department announced it was backtracking on UN sanctions on Iran that

had been “snapped back” the previous October by the Trump administration in response to Tehran’s JCPOA violations.³² Simultaneously Trump-era travel restrictions on Iranian diplomats at the United Nations were removed.³³ In February President Biden also declared an end to U.S. support for Saudi-led operations against Iran’s Houthi proxy in Yemen, and to “relevant” U.S. arms sales to Riyadh,³⁴ and he reversed the Trump administration’s sanctioning of the Houthis as a terrorist organization.³⁵ That same month, after continued rocket attacks on U.S. interests in Iraq, the White House conducted retaliatory airstrikes against Iranian proxy militias, but struck back in Syria, not Iraq, while conspicuously attributing the initial aggression to “Shia-backed militias” rather than to Iran.³⁶ In April, with support from Washington, Saudi Arabia and Iran began direct talks aimed at tamping down regional tensions, including the war in Yemen.³⁷ In recent months, Iran also has garnered informal sanctions relief from the Biden administration effectively looking the other way as sanctioned Iranian oil exports to China rise appreciably.³⁸

Thus far Iran and its proxies have reciprocated this soft approach with heightened aggression on the ground in the Middle East and further advances in its nuclear program, including expanded Houthi offensives in Yemen and against Saudi Arabia, rocket attacks on U.S. bases in Iraq, operating advanced centrifuges, and naval harassment of U.S. ships in the Persian Gulf, among other escalations.

III. Lessons for Biden Approach

Experience suggests these recent U.S. gestures toward Iran actually undermine the Biden administration's diplomatic objectives, and that any return to the JCPOA will worsen rather than mitigate Middle East instability.

A. Goodwill and Conciliation Are Counterproductive

The first lesson is that Tehran views diplomacy with Washington not as a forum for reciprocating goodwill and finding common interest, but as a zero-sum competition in which it must build leverage to extract concessions from the United States. As part of this standoffish attitude, any unilateral U.S. conciliatory gestures or any softening of its previous negotiating positions merely encourage Iranian negotiators to dig in their heels. This has ramifications beyond the halls of diplomacy, since Tehran views any U.S. accommodation as signaling its unwillingness to take a strong stand against Iranian aggression more generally.

Yet dating back to the Carter era, American officials from administrations of both parties repeatedly have sought diplomatic outreach to try to moderate Iran's behavior and stimulate mutually-beneficial cooperation. In almost every instance, Tehran exploited this U.S. good faith to advance its own objectives at the expense of Washington's.³⁹ The recurring frustration of this U.S. approach derives from the mistaken beliefs that Iran's regime is acutely divided between moderates and hardliners, that the former genuinely seek better relations with the West and that they can be empowered through U.S. engagement.

As President Obama declared in December 2014, "if we can take that big first step," of addressing Iran's nuclear program, "then my hope would be that that would serve as the basis for us trying to improve relations over time."⁴⁰ In April 2015, when rolling out the initial JCPOA framework, he stated "this is a good deal if you think Iran's open to change.... It is possible that if we sign this nuclear deal, we strengthen the hand of those more moderate forces inside of Iran."⁴¹ Or as he said that July when the deal was formalized, "a different path, one of tolerance and peaceful resolution of conflict, leads to more integration into the global economy, more engagement with the international community, and the ability of the Iranian people to prosper and thrive. This deal offers an opportunity to move in a new direction. We should seize it."⁴² The same day Secretary Kerry remarked "President Rouhani had to make a difficult decision. We all know the tensions that exist [but] we were able to approach these negotiations with mutual respect.... We never lost sight of the goal that an agreement could bring and the best long-term interests of all concerned."⁴³

President Obama reinforced his comments the following month, arguing that a possible consequence of the deal is that "Iran starts making different decisions that are less offensive to its neighbors; that it tones down the rhetoric in terms of its virulent opposition to Israel."⁴⁴ Similarly, Secretary Blinken in 2017 wrote of "the accord's main advocate, Hassan Rouhani, who seeks to moderate Iran's international behavior," and cautioned against "increas[ing] pressure on Iran in non-nuclear areas, resulting in a crisis that would give hard-line opponents of the deal in Tehran cause to pull the plug...."⁴⁵

Divisions certainly exist within the highest echelons of the Iranian regime. Yet attempts to empower ostensible moderates at the expense of hardliners overlooks or ignores the basic

fact that, unlike many other non-Western revolutionary regimes that eventually eschewed key elements of their radical ideologies, the Islamic Republic remains a revolutionary project aimed at, among other things, fundamentally upending the existing Middle East order and expelling the United States from the region.⁴⁶ Because the basic identity and foreign policy of Iran's leadership is innately invested in hostility to the West, genuinely improved relations with the United States pose an existential threat to the regime and the revolution.⁴⁷

In this light, President Rouhani and Foreign Minister Zarif are not truly “moderates” seeking to mend historical hostility with the United States, but more accurately “pragmatists” who view engagement with the outside world as a necessary evil to ensure the regime can get out from under sanctions, fill its coffers and secure and export the revolution.⁴⁸ After the domestic upheavals of the 2009 Green Revolution, in which mass protests against the regime's blatant election fraud were brutally suppressed by security forces, anything like true “reformists” were systematically purged from power. In their places came Rouhani who, according to one recent study of the regime, “was neither a rebuke to [hardline Supreme Leader] Khamenei nor an indication that the revolution had finally exhausted itself. The regime had consolidated its power and reached a consensus on important issues. The reformist interlude was all but over, and Rouhani would not shake the foundations of the state by insisting on its liberalization.” Instead of disparate hardline and moderate factions, “on the core issues of regional hegemony and nuclear empowerment, the decision-making institutions of the Islamic Republic have reached a modus vivendi: Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei and President Hassan Rouhani share the same objectives, even though their tactics may at times differ.”⁴⁹ Accordingly, Rouhani-era domestic and foreign policies – including after the JCPOA was implemented – hardly evince a more cooperative or enlightened agenda than that of his predecessor, the Holocaust-denying hardliner Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. Iran under President Rouhani consistently ranks among the world's “least free” countries according to Freedom House, and one of the world's worst human rights abusers according to Amnesty International.⁵⁰

Additionally, and even though they are not truly moderate, these more pragmatic influences over regime policy are circumscribed, including decision-making surrounding nuclear issues. As Foreign Minister Zarif recently revealed about the talks that produced the JCPOA, “in the Islamic Republic the military field rules. I have sacrificed diplomacy for the military field rather than the [military] field servicing diplomacy.” Supreme Leader Khamenei and the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) called the diplomatic shots: “Almost every time I went to negotiate, it was [IRGC Quds Force commander Qasem] Soleimani who said, ‘I want you to make this concession or point. I was negotiating for the success of the [military] field.’” Speaking of Soleimani's visit to Moscow right after the JCPOA was finalized, Zarif claimed his own role in Iran's foreign policy was “nil” and “that trip was made upon Moscow's initiative without the Iranian Foreign Ministry having any control on it. Its objective was to destroy the JCPOA.”⁵¹ Rather than strengthening moderates as the Obama administration predicted, the years since the JCPOA have only witnessed increasing political gains by hardliners.⁵² Given U.S. misperceptions about their Iranian interlocutors, however, Rouhani and Zarif could “convince their American counterparts that they were moderates struggling against the hardliners precisely at a time when such demarcations no longer conditioned Iranian politics. The message from Tehran was that the only manner by which the pragmatists could salvage their position was for the West to support them.”⁵³

Given this misreading of Iranian intentions and attitudes, America's JCPOA negotiators counterproductively sought to induce cooperation and empower “moderates” through goodwill

gestures, negotiating flexibility and telegraphing their commitment to reaching a deal. As far as back his first inaugural address in 2009, President Obama said “to the Muslim world: we seek a new way forward, based on mutual interest and mutual respect ... we will extend a hand if you are willing to unclench your fist.”⁵⁴ In his first foreign policy speech as president, in Cairo later that year, he walked back the preceding Bush administration’s demand that Iran suspend its nuclear program as a condition for negotiations, and instead offered talks “without precondition.”⁵⁵ During Iran’s Green Revolution shortly thereafter, President Obama went out of his way to assure Supreme Leader Khamenei the United States did not seek regime change, nor did the administration meaningfully press Iran on its abysmal human rights record. In response Tehran kept its fist clenched, including cracking down brutally on the 2009 protests in front of the watching world.⁵⁶

In 2012, President Obama articulated that “our goal is to get Iran to recognize it needs to give up its nuclear program and abide by the UN resolutions that have been in place.”⁵⁷ Shortly after clandestine direct talks began that same year senior administration officials, including the president, started translating this objective into specific parameters for an agreement. Their intended deal would not recognize Tehran’s proclaimed “right” to enrich, nor would it permit Iran to work on advanced centrifuges.⁵⁸ Such an agreement also would have to shutter Iran’s deeply-buried Fordo enrichment facility and its heavy water reactor at Arak, address its nuclear-capable ballistic missiles and compel Tehran to come clean on its previous efforts toward building a nuclear weapon.⁵⁹

Obama Administration: Initial Objectives vs. JCPOA End Result⁶⁰		
<i>Parameter</i>	<i>Initial Objective</i>	<i>JCPOA End Result</i>
Enrichment Capacity	Obama (2012): “Our goal is to get Iran to recognize it needs to give up its nuclear program and abide by U.N. resolutions.”	Iran retains enrichment capacity, subject only to limited 10- and 15-year restrictions.
Iran’s “Right” to Enrich	Kerry (2013): “There is no right to enrich. We do not recognize a right to enrich.”	Legitimizes Iran’s “right” by requiring UN to “conclude its consideration of Iran nuclear issue” no later than 2025.
Arak Heavy Water Reactor	Obama (2013): “They certainly don’t need a heavy water reactor at Arak...”	Arak remains as redesigned heavy water reactor still capable of producing fissile material.
Fordo Enrichment Plant	Obama (2013): “We know they don’t need to have an underground, fortified facility like Fordo.”	Fordo remains open as nuclear R&D facility until 2031, after which no restrictions.
Advanced Centrifuges	Obama (2013): “They don’t need some of the advanced centrifuges that they currently possess in order to have a limited, peaceful nuclear program.”	Over duration of the deal, Iran is permitted to ramp up R&D on increasingly capable centrifuges.
Monitoring and Verification	Moniz (2015): “We expect to have anywhere, anytime access.”	No snap inspections; Iran can delay visits to suspected undeclared sites for weeks.
Possible Military Dimensions (PMD)	Kerry (2015): “They have to [disclose] it. If there’s going to be a deal, it will be done.”	Iran did not disclose all past weaponization activities, yet JCPOA implemented anyway.
Ballistic Missiles	Sherman (2014): Shutting down their production “is, indeed, going to be addressed as part of a comprehensive agreement.”	UN Security Council resolution endorsing JCPOA actually weakened ballistic missile prohibitions against Iran.

Yet from the outset American negotiators steadily walked back their starting positions in the face of Iranian intransigence, causing American officials to remark retrospectively how “Tehran’s unbending position succeeded in substantially shifting Washington’s overall objective for the talks” even before and during the Joint Plan of Action (JPA) interim deal of 2013-15. Rather than increasing U.S. pressure on Iran to negotiate in earnest, the Obama administration’s transparent desire for a deal, combined with its mistaken assumption that goodwill could empower Iran’s “moderates,” instead triggered serial U.S. concessions to keep Iran at the table – most remarkably, abandoning their initial insistence that Iran retain no domestic enrichment capability.⁶¹ And yet, despite its assiduously claiming “no deal is better than a bad deal,” the administration’s willingness to progressively water down its demands in search of agreement only encouraged further Iranian obstinance.

At the same time it earnestly accommodated Tehran’s demands, the Obama administration also offered several other goodwill measures that failed to induce any Iranian reciprocity. Most notably, President Obama’s 2013 decision not to uphold his own redline on Syria’s chemical weapons use – reportedly after the Iranians threatened to abandon talks if the United States struck their client Bashar al-Assad – reinforced for Tehran it could use pressure and foot-dragging to extract further U.S. concessions.⁶² President Obama’s letter the following year to Supreme Leader Khamenei, offering cooperation against Islamic State and reassurances that U.S. military operations in Syria would not target Assad-aligned forces in exchange for progress on nuclear talks, did not move Iran. Instead, negotiators had to extend the looming deadline to reach a deal by seven additional months, eventually producing the JCPOA in July 2015.⁶³

In the years before and during negotiations, Obama administration officials also tried to assuage Tehran into agreement by downplaying the viability of military alternatives to diplomacy and proclaiming, as the president did in 2015, “Put simply, no deal means a greater chance of more war in the Middle East.”⁶⁴ Or as Secretary of State John Kerry rhetorically asked Congress for its alternative to the JCPOA, “So, what’s your plan? Knock out their entire capacity? Erase their memory of how to do a fuel cycle? Totally go to war?”⁶⁵

Combined, these attempts to accommodate Iranian demands and demonstrate goodwill ultimately produced an agreement that did not secure any of the administration’s initial metrics for an acceptable deal. Instead, the JCPOA merely delayed temporarily Iran’s ability to amass an industrial-scale nuclear weapons program and did not force it come clean on efforts to build a nuclear weapon, all while enabling it to achieve marked improvements in nuclear-capable delivery vehicles.

B. JCPOA Didn’t Buy Regional Stability

While the first lesson problematizes the Biden administration’s process for trying to rejoin the JCPOA, another lesson holds similar caution for the objective that underlies reviving the deal – namely, attempting to put a lid on brewing regional tensions and focusing U.S. resources and attention elsewhere. As President Obama argued shortly after the agreement was finalized, “there’s no scenario where sanctions relief turns Iran into the region’s dominant power,” and “if we’re serious about confronting Iran’s destabilizing activities, it is hard to imagine a worse approach than blocking this deal.” Indeed, thanks to the JCPOA the United States “will be in a stronger position” to check Iran’s destabilizing activities.⁶⁶ Secretary Kerry backstopped these claims, saying “not only will this deal, fully implemented, make the world safer than it is

today, but it may also eventually unlock opportunities to begin addressing regional challenges that cannot be resolved without this kind of an agreement being in place in the first place.” By taking the Iranian nuclear threat “off the table, this deal makes it far less complicated to address the many other problems that we have with Iran’s regional actions.”⁶⁷

Since the JCPOA was announced in July 2015, however, events show that, rather than promoting Middle East stability and U.S.-Iran rapprochement, the nuclear agreement enables and encourages Iran to ramp up its regional aggression.

In part this stems from the damage to U.S. deterrent credibility from Tehran’s perception that Washington’s primary concern was to preserve the JCPOA, rather than risk fallout by pushing back against Iranian aggression. Indeed, the aforementioned goodwill gestures and other signals of U.S. eagerness for a deal merely confirmed for Iran that it could throw its weight around the region without serious reprisal. The very same month the deal was announced, and before the JCPOA actually lifted UN sanctions on his travel, IRGC Quds Force commander Qasem Soleimani visited Moscow to coordinate escalating Russo-Iranian military operations that would save Assad’s embattled regime.⁶⁸ Furthermore, Iran illegally took ten American sailors hostage at gunpoint in the Persian Gulf even as the JCPOA was being implemented, in response to which Secretary Kerry thanked Tehran when it released the hostages.⁶⁹ During this same period Tehran also conducted multiple tests of nuclear-capable ballistic missiles, despite the UN ban on such activities still being in effect.⁷⁰ Around the same time it also faced no consequence for conducting what American military commanders called “highly provocative” live-fire exercises in close proximity to a U.S. aircraft carrier in international waters of the Persian Gulf, nor for its stepped-up naval harassment in the Persian Gulf more generally.⁷¹

Coming in the wake of multiple years of asymmetric diplomacy, these events further signaled that Washington would not meaningfully confront a more forceful Iranian regional posture. In the ensuing months and years, Tehran worsened Middle East instability by actively expanding its interference in conflicts around the region. It bolstered material support for the Houthis, leading directly to hundreds of missile and drone attacks against Saudi Arabia since 2015 – as well as similar attacks on U.S. Navy ships, allied naval vessels and commercial cargo in the strategically-vital waters around Bab-el-Mandeb – all while exacerbating the world’s worst humanitarian disaster on the ground in Yemen.

Tehran escalated its operations in Syria in parallel. It built Hezbollah into one of the region’s best-armed and most-experienced combat forces, cooperating closely with Russia on ruthless operations generating hundreds of thousands of refugees – which in turn spilled into and destabilized parts of Europe – and attempting to turn Syria into a forward operating base against Israel. This latter effort, combined with Iran’s determination to supply Hezbollah in Lebanon with precision guided missiles and other advanced capabilities, placed new burdens on Israel to conduct more than 1,000 interdiction airstrikes in Syria and Iraq in recent years. More generally, the way in which Iran primarily exercised its growing regional muscles – building and arming brutal Shia militias – deepened many regional conflicts by playing into the violent sectarian narratives of Islamic State and other Sunni extremists.⁷²

Sanctions relief is a related reason the JCPOA, and before it the JPA, did not buy a modicum of regional stability, even short-term. As President Obama acknowledged shortly after the final deal was announced, “some of that [sanctions relief] money will flow to activities we object to.”⁷³ In the six months following the interim JPA’s announcement in late 2013, and while it was

negotiating the final deal, Iran already accumulated at least \$3-6 billion in sanctions relief.⁷⁴ By the time the JCPOA was finalized, Tehran laid out an ambitious new five-year defense plan; in January 2017, this plan was expanded further, contributing to a 40 percent increase in Iran's official defense spending from 2014-17.⁷⁵ Unofficial defense spending – including covert support for Hezbollah and other proxies – ramped up in tandem.⁷⁶ Larger military budgets translated directly both to Tehran's expanding footprint and increasingly destabilizing influence in Lebanon, Syria, Iraq and Yemen, and to its growing arsenals of precision drones and ballistic and cruise missiles.

The Trump administration's subsequent departure from the JCPOA and reimposition of sanctions did not alter this dynamic fundamentally. Tehran spent the following year officially pursuing a policy of "strategic patience," in which it fruitlessly sought European help to offset U.S. sanctions. Beginning May 2019, Iran once again ramped up regional aggression as it became clear Washington's new "maximum pressure" campaign portended nothing more than additional sanctions. Throughout that summer Iran and its proxies attacked tanker ships and energy infrastructure around the region, and even downed a U.S. drone. After that last attack met no U.S. response, in September 2019 Iran launched a major drone and cruise missile strike on some of the world's most important oil facilities in Saudi Arabia – again with no U.S. response.⁷⁷ It also continued proxy attacks on Americans in Iraq, leading ultimately to the January 2020 Soleimani assassination and Iranian retaliatory missile strike on U.S. troops. Reeling from the loss of its most capable military commander, Tehran largely refrained from major kinetic escalations throughout much of the rest of the year, with the exception of continued rocket attacks by its proxies on U.S. interests in Iraq. Even as these events played out on the ground, Iran concertedly continued ramping up its JCPOA nuclear violations.⁷⁸

IV. Risks of Current Approach

These lessons indicate several pitfalls that pose serious hurdles to the Biden administration's proposed strategy to rejoin the JCPOA.

A. Reentering the JCPOA Means Being Stuck with the JCPOA

The experience of how the JCPOA originally was negotiated suggests serious problems for trying to reenter it as a “platform” toward an improved follow-on agreement. Similar to the way it watered down the JCPOA's final terms by leveraging the Obama administration's demonstrated need for a deal, currently Iran is working to block any “longer, stronger” accord precisely by exploiting the Biden administration's evident desire to return to the existing agreement. Specifically, Tehran is responding to Washington's conciliatory efforts to restart diplomacy, most of which entail easing pressure on Iran, by dragging its heels in negotiations and ratcheting up counterpressure. This creates a highly troubling dynamic in which Iran amasses evermore leverage to secure evermore U.S. sanctions relief. The end result would be to put the United States and Iran officially back in the JCPOA, but at the costs of sacrificing most of America's leverage for a better follow-on deal and allowing Iran to retain several key nuclear advances.

To date, and like 2013-15, the Biden administration's unilateral goodwill has only been exploited by Tehran for bargaining power. While the new administration has refrained from imposing additional sanctions on Iran, and has even retreated from its predecessor's “snapback” of UN sanctions and Houthi terrorism designation, since January Tehran has begun and significantly expanded enrichment with advanced centrifuges, producing uranium metal that could be used in a nuclear warhead and enriching uranium up to 20 and then up to 60 percent purity.⁷⁹ Meanwhile Iranian proxies continue attacking U.S. interests in Iraq and elsewhere, and Tehran flouts the U.S. sanctions regime by signing a major strategic cooperation agreement with China and exporting significant quantities of oil to Beijing.⁸⁰ Most recently, amid April talks between Iran and P5+1 members in Vienna – including Britain and Germany – Tehran announced trial dates for dual-national British and German Iranians it took hostage late last year.⁸¹

Again like 2013-15, this counterpressure is working. Most notably, American diplomats appear to be adopting Tehran's depiction of certain U.S. sanctions as being “not legitimately” imposed, thus necessitating greater sanctions relief than the letter of the nuclear deal requires. Specifically, the Biden administration is considering lifting Trump-era terrorism designations on major Iranian financial and energy entities. Though these designations do not contravene the letter of the JCPOA, keeping them in place while lifting every sanction actually covered by the nuclear deal would still be enough, most likely, to scare off significant future foreign investment in Iran. Thus in April a State Department official appeared to be conforming to Tehran's demand for sanctions relief above and beyond the deal when he said “all sanctions that are inconsistent with the JCPOA *and are inconsistent with the benefits that Iran expects from the JCPOA*, we are prepared to lift”(italics added), despite the latter having nothing to do with the terms of the deal itself.⁸² At the same time the United States is preparing to extend greater sanctions relief than the JCPOA requires, any return to the deal would still allow Iran to retain several key nuclear advances. This includes a new facility for mass-producing advanced centrifuges and an expansion of its deeply buried Fordo enrichment plant, as well

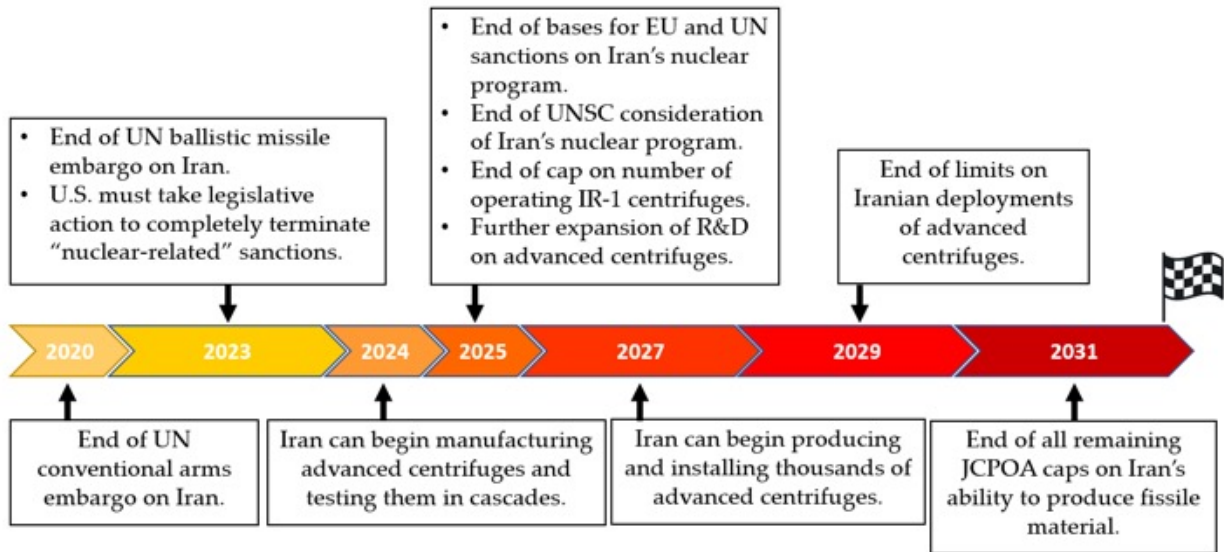
as the irreversible know-how gained from researching, developing and operating advanced centrifuges and uranium metal production.⁸³

Amid this backdrop, a joint JCPOA return would produce exactly the opposite outcome needed to pursue an improved successor deal. It certainly appears the United States would have to relinquish its existing leverage to an even greater extent than in 2015-16 just to get back to the original agreement, given the Biden administration's willingness to entertain Iran's expansive demands for sanctions relief. With those sanctions gone, Washington would lack critical bargaining power precisely when it would need greater leverage to secure correspondingly "longer, stronger" concessions from Tehran. Nor would the threat of reimposing sanctions compel Tehran to negotiate a follow-on deal, given it made no such move in this direction when faced with the Trump administration's "maximum pressure" sanctions campaign designed to achieve precisely the same goal. Instead, Iran likely would wait out the deal's rapidly approaching sunsets, essentially daring the Biden administration to snap back sanctions while Tehran ostensibly is complying with the original deal. Iran would still also have added counter-leverage from its irreversible nuclear advances not accounted for by the JCPOA. On top of all this, trying to negotiate a successor agreement would once again signal, as in 2013-15 and currently, that the United States needs a deal more than Iran does, and therefore that Tehran can drag it heels and demand continually more concessions.

B. Reentering the JCPOA Will Enable, Not Prevent, a Nuclear Iran

Iran's escalating JCPOA violations since May 2019 raise the specter of a rapidly shrinking window to avert a full-blown nuclear crisis. Yet rejoining the agreement would buy very little time for the United States in this regard, as the terms of the deal enable Iran to steadily ramp up its nuclear program beginning in just over two years. At that point the UN ballistic missile embargo on Iran expires, and the deal purportedly requires that Congress remove the legal basis for any sanctions on Iran's nuclear activities; restrictions on advanced centrifuges begin falling away the following year. No later than 2025, the UN Security Council resolution endorsing the JCPOA terminates, as does the Council's consideration of the Iranian nuclear issue, effectively legitimizing Tehran's nuclear ambitions and eliminating any further basis for UN sanctions and, in the process, undermining the official justification for similar U.S. and EU measures. That same year the JCPOA permits Iran to begin expanding its enrichment capacity significantly, including by deploying advanced centrifuges. From 2027-29 all remaining limits on advanced centrifuge R&D vanish, and by 2031 Tehran will not face any meaningful JCPOA constraints on its way to an industrial-scale enrichment program.

JCPOA Sunset Timeline



With the U.S. commitment to Middle East stability weakened in the wake of a JCPOA return, and as Iran's nuclear program ramps up in accordance with the deal, U.S. regional partners could be expected to ramp up their own countermeasures. The likelihood of Israeli military action to prevent Iran reaching the nuclear threshold would rise markedly, and with it the risks of massive Iran-led retaliation that could draw in the United States and/or lead to a catastrophic high-intensity conflict between Israel and Hezbollah. Reviving the JCPOA also poses the very real possibility of a regional proliferation cascade, in which Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Turkey, UAE and/or others pursue their own nuclear weapons umbrellas. Rather than promoting strategic stability through mutual deterrence, this would result in an uncontrollable multi-sided nuclear standoff in which multiple countries would all have acute first-strike incentives. Any such Iran-induced arms race also would be the death knell of the Nonproliferation Treaty, arguably the greatest single achievement in arms control history.⁸⁴

Regardless of its negative regional consequences, rejoining the deal would still leave the United States in the dark about Iran's true progress toward a working nuclear weapon. The JCPOA took effect even though Iran shunned its obligations to answer inspectors' questions about these "possible military dimensions" (PMD) of its nuclear program. This means any return to the original agreement would effectively sweep Tehran's weaponization efforts back under the rug – despite Israel's covert seizure in 2018 of secret Iranian nuclear archives now providing greater clarity about the actual breadth and progress of Tehran's weaponization program, including revelations that it was more advanced than the IAEA or Western intelligence agencies believed, and that such work continued after 2003.⁸⁵ By preventing a full accounting of these past activities, returning to the nuclear agreement would also severely complicate any monitoring of similar activities in the present and future – and with it, any accurate understanding of just how close Iran could be to nuclear weapons capability.

C. Reentering the JCPOA Makes Middle East War More Likely

Finally, a JCPOA return would exacerbate Middle East instability and conflict, likely drawing the United States more deeply back into the region at the direct expense of focusing on other priorities.

As in 2015-16, windfall sanctions relief would translate into increased Iranian defense spending and support for proxies. Moreover, Iran's power projection capabilities – chiefly its production and proliferation of precision drones and missiles, as well as sectarian proxies – are more advanced today than when the deal first was implemented. Combined with the Biden administration's ending of "snapback" sanctions and the UN conventional arms embargo on Iran, this raises the real possibility of a JCPOA return enabling further advances in Tehran's precision capabilities, its obtaining latest-generation platforms from Russia and China and/or its ability to arms and/or equip Shia militias around the region.

More generally, these moves intended to reduce U.S. exposure and commitments in the region send a signal that Washington, in its desire to focus on other priorities, is willing to leave its interests and allies exposed to heightened Iran-led aggression.⁸⁶ Indeed, the Biden administration's recent conciliatory gestures on Yemen, including lifting the Houthis' terrorism designation, already have led to new Iran-backed ground and air offensives against Saudi Arabia and the U.S.-supported Yemeni government.⁸⁷ Meanwhile Iran has responded to the administration's stated willingness to remove American combat troops from Iraq, as part of a broader effort to rebalance U.S. global force posture away from the Middle East, with continued rocket attacks by its Iraqi proxies against American forces and personnel.⁸⁸

Combined with Iran's ongoing development and proliferation of increasingly capable weaponry and militias around the region, this misguided U.S. eagerness to rejoin the JCPOA and "put a lid" on Middle East tensions could actually embroil the region in any number of conflict scenarios – many of which likely would draw back in the United States.

Most worryingly, an emboldened and enriched Iran could increase its material support for Hezbollah, including by providing the Lebanese group with precision munitions and other cutting-edge weaponry that would cross declared Israeli redlines.⁸⁹ Already, Iranian support for Hamas and other Gazan terrorist groups has helped encourage yet another Middle East conflict, but given Hezbollah's more than 120,000 rockets aimed at Israel and illegally ensconced in Lebanese civilian sites, any ensuing conflict would be far more destructive than recent fighting in Gaza. It would impose devastating costs on both countries, while also raising the risks of a more general regionwide conflict in which Iranian drones and missiles target Israel from multiple countries and Israeli counteroperations expand to include Syria, Iraq, Gaza, Yemen and Iran itself.⁹⁰ Such a staggering conflict would naturally pull U.S. focus from other pressing issues, at the very least consuming significant American diplomatic time and attention. However, as with previous major Middle East conflicts that did not initially involve the United States – the 1973 Arab-Israeli War, Lebanon Civil War, Iran-Iraq War and the Persian Gulf War – Israel's next war with Hezbollah and the aftermath could eventually suck in American combat forces, peacekeepers and military resupplies, particularly if the conflict imposes severe costs on Israel and/or raises the prospects of a major Israeli defeat.

Flush with renewed sanctions relief, the end of the UN conventional weapons embargo and a clear-eyed appreciation that America wants out of the Middle East, Tehran also could try to grow its regional military presence as it did in the aftermath of 2015. This might include pushing the Assad regime to expand its territorial control over Syria which, like most recent offensives by Damascus, could generate a new refugee efflux and raise military tensions with Turkey, U.S. partners like the Syrian Kurds and even American troops still stationed in strategically vital stretches of the country's northeast. As it did in the initial wake of the JCPOA, Tehran also could double down its efforts to build forward-operating bases in Syria, Iraq and Yemen for attacking Israel, Saudi Arabia and UAE and threatening nearby U.S. bases and vital strategic chokepoints, with its improving missile and drone capabilities forming the tip of the spear. At base, further Iranian expansionism would threaten America's enduring interest, even as it seeks to draw down from the Middle East, of ensuring no single actor threatens to dominate the entire region. As with a major Israel-Hezbollah war, at the very least this would compel Washington to focus more diplomatic resources on promoting Middle East stability; at worst, it could pull American forces back into the region for deterrence, combat and/or peacekeeping missions.

More immediately, and to hasten America's projected departure from Iraq, Iranian proxies could be expected to ramp up their rocket and other attacks on U.S. installations. In turn, this raises the risk of an escalation spiral like that which led to the 2020 assassination of Qasem Soleimani and Iranian missile strike against U.S. forces, after which Washington sent an additional 3,500 troops into the region.⁹¹

IV. Endnotes

1. Sina Toossi, "Deciphering Iran's Position on Restoring the Nuclear Deal," *Just Security*, April 9, 2021, <https://www.justsecurity.org/75700/deciphering-irans-position-on-restoring-the-nuclear-deal/>
2. Farnaz Fassihi, "Iran's Foreign Minister, in Leaked Tape, Says Revolutionary Guards Set Policies," *New York Times*, April 25, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/04/25/world/middleeast/iran-suleimani-zarif.html>; Kareem Fahim, "In leaked audio, Iran's foreign minister laments interference by Revolutionary Guard," *Washington Post*, April 26, 2021, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/iran-nuclear-soleimani-leaked-audio-zarif/2021/04/26/8a7b3672-a64a-11eb-a8a7-5f45ddcdf364_story.html
3. Pamela Engel, "Obama reportedly declined to enforce red line in Syria after Iran threatened to back out of nuclear deal," *Yahoo News*, August 23, 2016, <https://finance.yahoo.com/news/obama-reportedly-declined-enforce-red-145258316.html>
4. Jay Solomon and Carol E. Lee, "Concessions Fueled Iran Nuclear Talks," *Wall Street Journal*, April 2, 2015, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/concessions-fueled-iran-nuclear-talks-1428021667>
5. White House Office of the Press Secretary, "Remarks by the President on the Iran Nuclear Deal, August 5, 2015," <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2015/08/05/remarks-president-iran-nuclear-deal>
6. Suzanne Maloney, "Major beneficiaries of the Iran deal: The IRGC and Hezbollah," Brookings Institution, September 17, 2015, <https://www.brookings.edu/testimonies/major-beneficiaries-of-the-iran-deal-the-irgc-and-hezbollah/>
7. "Iran's new five-year plan focuses on defense, economy," AFP, June 30, 2015, [https://english.alarabiya.net/News/middle-east/2015/06/30/Iran-s-new-5-year-plan-focuses-on-defense-economy-;_Bozorgmehr%20Sharafedin,%20Iran%20to%20expand%20military%20spending,%20develop%20missiles. idUSKBN14T15L](https://english.alarabiya.net/News/middle-east/2015/06/30/Iran-s-new-5-year-plan-focuses-on-defense-economy-;_Bozorgmehr%20Sharafedin,%20Iran%20to%20expand%20military%20spending,%20develop%20missiles.)
8. Suzanne Maloney, "Major beneficiaries of the Iran deal: The IRGC and Hezbollah," Brookings Institution, September 17, 2015, <https://www.brookings.edu/testimonies/major-beneficiaries-of-the-iran-deal-the-irgc-and-hezbollah/>; Lahav Harkov, "Hezbollah-like groups surged when Iran Deal lifted sanctions, study finds," *Jerusalem Post*, February 11, 2021, <https://www.jpost.com/israel-news/hezbollah-like-groups-surged-when-iran-deal-lifted-sanctions-study-finds-658486>
9. "How Many U.S. Troops Are in the Middle East?" *U.S. News & World Report*, January 9, 2020, <https://www.usnews.com/news/elections/articles/2020-01-09/after-recent-deployments-how-many-us-troops-are-in-the-middle-east>
10. "Full text: Obama's foreign policy speech," *The Guardian*, July 16, 2008, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2008/jul/16/uselections2008.barackobama>; Margaret Talev and Julie Hirschfield Davis, "Obama Says Afghan Pullout Will Aid 'Nation-Building at Home'," *Bloomberg*, June 23, 2011, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2011-06-23/obama-says-withdrawal-from-afghanistan-will-aid-nation-building-at-home?ref=m52Hjoet>; "Transcript of Donald Trump's speech on national security in Philadelphia," *The Hill*, September 7, 2016, <https://thehill.com/blogs/pundits-blog/campaign/294817-transcript-of-donald-trumps-speech-on-national-security-in>
11. Joseph R. Biden, Jr., "Why America Must Lead Again: Rescuing U.S. Foreign Policy After Trump," *Foreign Affairs*, March/April 2020, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2020-01-23/why-america-must-lead-again>; Salman Ahmed et al, "Making U.S. Foreign Policy Work Better for the Middle Class," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, September 23, 2020, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2020/09/23/making-u.s.-foreign-policy-work-better-for-middle-class-pub-82728>
12. Karen DeYoung, "Biden's NSC to focus on global health, climate, cyber and human rights, as well as China and Russia," *Washington Post*, January 8, 2021, https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/biden-nsc-covid-climate-cyber-china/2021/01/08/85a31c8a-5158-11eb-83e3-322644d82356_story.html; Natasha Bertrand and Lara Seligman, "Biden deprioritizes the Middle East," *Politico*, February 22, 2021, <https://www.politico.com/news/2021/02/22/biden-middle-east-foreign-policy-470589>
13. "Passing the Baton 2021: Securing America's Future Together," United States Institute of Peace, January 29, 2021, <https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/Passing-the-Baton-2021-Transcript-FINAL.pdf>
14. Natasha Bertrand and Lara Seligman, "Biden deprioritizes the Middle East," *Politico*, February 22, 2021, <https://www.politico.com/news/2021/02/22/biden-middle-east-foreign-policy-470589>
15. "Biden's intelligence director tells world leaders climate is now 'at the center' of U.S. foreign policy," *New York Times*, April 22, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/live/2021/04/22/us/biden-earth-day-climate-summit?smid=tw-nytimes&smtyp=cur#bidens-intelligence-director-tells-world-leaders-climate-is-now-at-the-center-of-us-foreign-policy>
16. Joseph R. Biden, Jr., "Why America Must Lead Again: Rescuing U.S. Foreign Policy After Trump," *Foreign Affairs*, March/April 2020, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2020-01-23/why-america-must-lead-again>

17. Daniel Benaim and Jake Sullivan, "America's Opportunity in the Middle East: Diplomacy Could Succeed Where Military Force Has Failed," *Foreign Affairs*, May 22, 2020, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/middle-east/2020-05-22/americas-opportunity-middle-east>
18. Joseph R. Biden, Jr., "Why America Must Lead Again: Rescuing U.S. Foreign Policy After Trump," *Foreign Affairs*, March/April 2020, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2020-01-23/why-america-must-lead-again>
19. "Nomination of Hon. Antony J. Blinken to Be U.S. Secretary of State – Part I," U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, January 19, 2021, <https://www.foreign.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/01%2019%202021%20Nominations%20--%20Blinken%20Part%201.pdf>
20. "Passing the Baton 2021: Securing America's Future Together," United States Institute of Peace, January 29, 2021, <https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/Passing-the-Baton-2021-Transcript-FINAL.pdf>
21. Daniel Benaim and Jake Sullivan, "America's Opportunity in the Middle East: Diplomacy Could Succeed Where Military Force Has Failed," *Foreign Affairs*, May 22, 2020, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/middle-east/2020-05-22/americas-opportunity-middle-east>
22. Thomas L. Friedman, "Biden Made Sure 'Trump Is Not Going to Be President for Four More Years'," *New York Times*, December 2, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/12/02/opinion/biden-interview-mcconnell-china-iran.html>
23. Daniel Benaim and Jake Sullivan, "America's Opportunity in the Middle East: Diplomacy Could Succeed Where Military Force Has Failed," *Foreign Affairs*, May 22, 2020, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/middle-east/2020-05-22/americas-opportunity-middle-east>
24. Anne Gearan, "Biden national security adviser suggests fast timeline to rejoin Iran deal," *Washington Post*, January 29, 2021, https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/biden-iran-deal/2021/01/29/9001d8a0-625a-11eb-9430-e7c77b5b0297_story.html
25. "Nomination of Hon. Antony J. Blinken to Be U.S. Secretary of State – Part I," U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, January 19, 2021, <https://www.foreign.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/01%2019%202021%20Nominations%20--%20Blinken%20Part%201.pdf>
26. "Biden Envoy To Iran On What To Expect In Renewed Nuclear Talks," NPR, April 6, 2021, <https://www.npr.org/2021/04/06/984540017/biden-envoy-to-iran-on-what-to-expect-in-renewed-nuclear-talks>
27. Daniel Benaim and Jake Sullivan, "America's Opportunity in the Middle East: Diplomacy Could Succeed Where Military Force Has Failed," *Foreign Affairs*, May 22, 2020, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/middle-east/2020-05-22/americas-opportunity-middle-east>
28. JINSA Gemunder Center Iran Policy Project, *No Going Back Now: The Case Against Returning to the JCPOA*, March 3, 2021, https://jinsa.org/jinsa_report/no-going-back-now-the-case-against-returning-to-the-jcpoa/
29. Arsalan Shahla, Golnar Motevalli and Jonathan Tirone, "U.S. Says 'Ball in Iran's Court' on Reviving Nuclear Deal," *Bloomberg*, February 21, 2021, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-02-21/iran-says-nuclear-talks-possible-once-everyone-returns-to-deal-klew3m6e>; "At Nato meeting, Blinken Says Ball In Iran's Court Over Nuclear Deal," *Iran International*, March 24, 2021, <https://iranintl.com/en/iran-in-brief/nato-meeting-blinken-says-ball-iran%E2%80%99s-court-over-nuclear-deal>
30. Tom O'Connor, "Iran is Hoping for Biden Return to Nuclear Deal – But Trust Will be Hard to Rebuild," *Newsweek*, November 3, 2020, <https://www.newsweek.com/trump-rouhani-biden-iran-deal-1544522>; Tweet by Iran Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, December 16, 2020, https://twitter.com/khamenei_ir/status/1339182312144195589
31. Sina Toossi, "Deciphering Iran's Position on Restoring the Nuclear Deal," *Just Security*, April 9, 2021, <https://www.justsecurity.org/75700/deciphering-irans-position-on-restoring-the-nuclear-deal/>
32. Michelle Nichols, "U.S. rescinds Trump White House claim that all U.N. sanctions had been reimposed on Iran," *Reuters*, February 18, 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-iran-nuclear-un/u-s-rescinds-trump-white-house-claim-that-all-u-n-sanctions-had-been-reimposed-on-iran-idUSKBN2A12Y9>
33. "US eases restrictions on Iranian diplomat's movements in New York imposed by Trump," *AFP*, February 19, 2021, <https://english.alarabiya.net/News/middle-east/2021/02/19/US-eases-restrictions-on-Iranian-diplomat-s-movements-in-New-York-imposed-by-Trump>
34. Ellen Knickmeyer, "Biden ending US support for Saudi-led offensive in Yemen," *Associated Press*, February 4, 2021, <https://apnews.com/article/biden-end-support-saudi-offensive-yemen-b68f58493dbfc530b9fcfdb80a13098f>
35. Nick Schiffrin and Ali Rogin, "In foreign policy shift, Biden lifts terrorist designation for Houthis in Yemen," *PBS NewsHour*, February 16, 2021, <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/in-foreign-policy-shift-biden-lifts-terrorist-designation-for-houthis-in-yemen>
36. David Brennan, "Pentagon Accused of Giving Iran Cover After Iraq Attack as Joe Biden Mulls Retaliation," *Newsweek*, March 5, 2021, <https://www.newsweek.com/pentagon-accused-giving-iran-cover-after-iraq-attack-joe-biden-mulls-retaliation-1573987>

37. Samya Kullab, "Iran, Saudis hold talks in Baghdad, few expect quick results," Associated Press, April 21, 2021, <https://apnews.com/article/jamal-khashoggi-iran-baghdad-middle-east-a046c89b0da8c708978452df9fb72abb>
38. Lara Jakes, "Iran's Oil Exports Rise as U.S. Looks to Rejoin Nuclear Accord," *New York Times*, May 18, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/05/18/us/politics/iran-oil-exports-nuclear-accord.html>
39. Eric S. Edelman and Ray Takeyh, *Revolution and Aftermath: Forging a New Strategy Toward Iran* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution, 2018), pp. 43, 90.
40. "Obama on Iran in 2015," *The Iran Primer* (United States Institute of Peace), January 5, 2015, <https://iranprimer.usip.org/blog/2015/jan/05/obama-iran-2015>
41. "Transcript: President Obama's Full NPR Interview On Iran Nuclear Deal," NPR, April 7, 2015, <https://www.npr.org/2015/04/07/397933577/transcript-president-obamas-full-npr-interview-on-iran-nuclear-deal>
42. White House Office of the Press Secretary, "Statement by the President on Iran," July 14, 2015, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2015/07/14/statement-president-iran>
43. The White House, *The Iran Nuclear Deal: What You Need to Know About the JCPOA* (undated), https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/sites/default/files/docs/jcpoa_what_you_need_to_know.pdf
44. "Full Video And Transcript: NPR's Interview With President Obama," NPR, August 10, 2015, <https://www.npr.org/sections/itsallpolitics/2015/08/10/431244020/full-video-and-transcript-nprs-interview-with-president-obama>
45. Antony J. Blinken, "Why the Iran Nuclear Deal Must Stand," *New York Times*, February 17, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/17/opinion/why-the-iran-nuclear-deal-must-stand.html>
46. Eric Edelman and Ray Takeyh, "The Next Iranian Revolution: Why Washington Should Seek Regime Change in Tehran," *Foreign Affairs*, May/June 2020, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/middle-east/2020-04-13/next-iranian-revolution>
47. Eric S. Edelman and Ray Takeyh, *Revolution and Aftermath: Forging a New Strategy Toward Iran* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution, 2018), pp. 11-13, 41, 90.
48. Lina Khatib, "The myth of hardline-pragmatic division in Iran," *Middle East Eye*, January 28, 2016, <https://www.middleeasteye.net/opinion/myth-hardline-pragmatic-division-iran>
49. Eric S. Edelman and Ray Takeyh, *Revolution and Aftermath: Forging a New Strategy Toward Iran* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution, 2018), pp. 36, 85-90.
50. Freedom House, *Freedom in the World 2021: Iran* (undated), <https://freedomhouse.org/country/iran/freedom-world/2021>; Amnesty International, "Iran Overview" (undated), <https://www.amnesty.org/en/countries/middle-east-and-north-africa/iran/>
51. Farnaz Fassihi, "Iran's Foreign Minister, in Leaked Tape, Says Revolutionary Guards Set Policies," *New York Times*, April 25, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/04/25/world/middleeast/iran-suleimani-zarif.html>; Kareem Fahim, "In leaked audio, Iran's foreign minister laments interference by Revolutionary Guard," *Washington Post*, April 26, 2021, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/iran-nuclear-soleimani-leaked-audio-zarif/2021/04/26/8a7b3672-a64a-11eb-a8a7-5f45ddcdf364_story.html
52. Freedom House, *Freedom in the World 2021: Iran* (undated), <https://freedomhouse.org/country/iran/freedom-world/2021>
53. Eric S. Edelman and Ray Takeyh, *Revolution and Aftermath: Forging a New Strategy Toward Iran* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution, 2018), p. 85.
54. The White House, "President Barack Obama's Inaugural Address," January 21, 2009, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/blog/2009/01/21/president-barack-obamas-inaugural-address>
55. Eric S. Edelman and Ray Takeyh, *Revolution and Aftermath: Forging a New Strategy Toward Iran* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution, 2018), p. 81.
56. Eli Lake, "Why Obama Let Iran's Green Revolution Fail," *Bloomberg*, August 24, 2016, <https://www.bloomberg.com/opinion/articles/2016-08-24/why-obama-let-iran-s-green-revolution-fail?sref=m52Hjoet>
57. Dylan Byers, "Obama: N.Y. Times' Iran Report 'not true'," *Politico*, October 22, 2012, <https://www.politico.com/blogs/media/2012/10/obama-ny-times-iran-report-not-true-139253>
58. Aaron Blake, "Kerry on Iran: 'We do not recognize a right to enrich'," *Washington Post*, November 24, 2013, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-politics/wp/2013/11/24/kerry-on-iran-we-do-not-recognize-a-right-to-enrich/>; White House Office of the Press Secretary, "Remarks by the President in a Conversation with the Saban Forum," December 7, 2013, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2013/12/07/remarks-president-conversation-saban-forum>
59. White House Office of the Press Secretary, "Remarks by the President in a Conversation with the Saban Forum," December 7, 2013, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2013/12/07/remarks-president-conversation-saban-forum>; Tzvi Kahn, "What U.S. Officials Said on Iran, What We Know Now," Foreign Policy Initiative, June 29, 2015, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep07454>
60. JINSA Gemunder Center Iran Policy Project, *Scorecard for the Final Deal with Iran*, July 29, 2015, https://jinsa.org/jinsa_report/scorecard-final-deal-iran/
61. Jay Solomon and Carol E. Lee, "Concessions Fueled Iran Nuclear Talks," *Wall Street Journal*, April 2, 2015, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/concessions-fueled-iran-nuclear-talks-1428021667>

62. Pamela Engel, "Obama reportedly declined to enforce red line in Syria after Iran threatened to back out of nuclear deal," *Yahoo News*, August 23, 2016, <https://finance.yahoo.com/news/obama-reportedly-declined-enforce-red-145258316.html>
63. Jay Solomon and Carol E. Lee, "Obama Wrote Secret Letter to Iran's Khamenei About Fighting Islamic State," *Wall Street Journal*, November 6, 2014, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/obama-wrote-secret-letter-to-irans-khamenei-about-fighting-islamic-state-1415295291>; Laurence Norman, Stacy Meichtry and Inti Landauro, "West Cites Some Progress With Iran in Nuclear Talks," *Wall Street Journal*, November 25, 2014, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/france-senses-momentum-in-iran-nuclear-talks-1416906568>
64. "U.S.: Strike of Iran's Nuclear Facilities May Have Unintended Consequences," Associated Press, November 10, 2011, <https://www.haaretz.com/1.5208449>; White House Office of the Press Secretary, "Statement by the President on Iran," July 14, 2015, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2015/07/14/statement-president-iran>
65. Molly O'Toole, "From 'No Deal is Better Than A Bad Deal' to 'This Deal or War'," *Defense One*, July 23, 2015, <https://www.defenseone.com/policy/2015/07/no-deal-better-bad-deal-deal-or-war/118538/>
66. White House Office of the Press Secretary, "Remarks by the President on the Iran Nuclear Deal," August 5, 2015, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2015/08/05/remarks-president-iran-nuclear-deal>
67. The White House, *The Iran Nuclear Deal: What You Need to Know About the JCPOA* (undated), https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/sites/default/files/docs/jcpoa_what_you_need_to_know.pdf
68. Karen DeYoung, "U.S. raises concern about Iranian's reported visit to Moscow," *Washington Post*, August 13, 2015, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/us-raises-concerns-about-iranians-apparent-visit-to-moscow/2015/08/13/35a75a32-41e1-11e5-8e7d-9c033e6745d8_story.html
69. Eli Lake, "Kerry Thanks Iran for Resolving the Crisis It Created," *Bloomberg*, January 14, 2016, <https://www.bloomberg.com/opinion/articles/2016-01-14/kerry-thanks-iran-for-resolving-the-crisis-it-created?sref=m52Hjoet>
70. Louis Charbonneau, "U.S. confirms Iran tested nuclear-capable ballistic missile," Reuters, October 16, 2015, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-iran-missiles-usa/u-s-confirms-iran-tested-nuclear-capable-ballistic-missile-idUSKCN0SA20Z20151016>
71. Jim Miklaszewski, Ali Arouzi, Courtney Kube and Alastair Jamieson, "U.S. Carrier Harry S. Truman Has Close Call With Iranian Rockets," *NBC News*, December 29, 2015, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/u-s-carrier-harry-s-truman-has-close-call-iranian-n487536>
72. Eric Edelman, "U.S. Policy and Strategy in the Middle East," Statement before U.S. Senate Armed Services Committee, December 14, 2017, https://www.armed-services.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/Edelman_12-14-17.pdf
73. White House Office of the Press Secretary, "Remarks by the President on the Iran Nuclear Deal," August 5, 2015, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2015/08/05/remarks-president-iran-nuclear-deal>
74. JINSA Gemunder Center Iran Policy Project, *Impact of the Interim Deal with Iran*, May 12, 2014, <http://jinsa.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/ImpactOfInterimDealWithIran.pdf>
75. "Iran's new five-year plan focuses on defense, economy," AFP, June 30, 2015, [https://english.alarabiya.net/News/middle-east/2015/06/30/Iran-s-new-5-year-plan-focuses-on-defense-economy-; Bozorgmehr Sharafedin, "Iran to expand military spending, develop missiles," Reuters, January 9, 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-iran-military-plan/iran-to-expand-military-spending-develop-missiles-idUSKBN14T15L>](https://english.alarabiya.net/News/middle-east/2015/06/30/Iran-s-new-5-year-plan-focuses-on-defense-economy-; Bozorgmehr Sharafedin,)
76. Suzanne Maloney, "Major beneficiaries of the Iran deal: The IRGC and Hezbollah," Brookings Institution, September 17, 2015, <https://www.brookings.edu/testimonies/major-beneficiaries-of-the-iran-deal-the-irgc-and-hezbollah/>; Lahav Harkov, "Hezbollah-like groups surged when Iran Deal lifted sanctions, study finds," *Jerusalem Post*, February 11, 2021, <https://www.jpost.com/israel-news/hezbollah-like-groups-surged-when-iran-deal-lifted-sanctions-study-finds-658486>
77. "Special report: 'Time to take out our swords' – Inside Iran's plot to attack Saudi Arabia," Reuters, November 25, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-saudi-aramco-attacks-iran-special-rep/special-report-time-to-take-out-our-swords-inside-irans-plot-to-attack-saudi-arabia-idUSKBN1XZ16H>
78. JINSA Gemunder Center Iran Policy Project, *Leaving the JCPOA Behind: Principles for Preventing a Nuclear Iran*, September 16, 2020, https://jinsa.org/jinsa_report/leaving-the-jcpoa-behind-principles-for-u-s-diplomacy-in-preventing-a-nuclear-iran/
79. JINSA Gemunder Center Iran Policy Project, *No Going Back Now: The Case Against Returning to the JCPOA*, March 3, 2021, https://jinsa.org/jinsa_report/no-going-back-now-the-case-against-returning-to-the-jcpoa/
80. Farnaz Fassihi and Steven Lee Myers, "China, With \$400 Billion Iran Deal, Could Deepen Influence in Mideast," *New York Times*, March 29, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/03/27/world/middleeast/china-iran-deal.html>
81. "Iran sets trial for two imprisoned dual nationals," *Arab News*, April 21, 2021, <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1846671/middle-east>
82. Joel Gehrke, "US willing to lift Trump-era terrorism sanctions 'not legitimately' imposed on Iran," *Washington Examiner*, April 21, 2021, https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/policy/defense-national-security/us-willing-trump-terrorism-sanctions-not-legitimately-imposed-ran?_amp=true

83. JINSA Gemunder Center Iran Policy Project, *No Going Back Now: The Case Against Returning to the JCPOA*, March 3, 2021, https://jinsa.org/jinsa_report/no-going-back-now-the-case-against-returning-to-the-jcpoa/
84. Eric S. Edelman, Andrew F. Krepinevich, Jr., and Evan Braden Montgomery, "The Dangers of a Nuclear Iran: The Limits of Containment," *Foreign Affairs*, January/February 2011, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/persian-gulf/2011-01-01/dangers-nuclear-iran>
85. JINSA Gemunder Center Iran Policy Project, *No Going Back Now: The Case Against Returning to the JCPOA*, March 3, 2021, pp. 15-17, https://jinsa.org/jinsa_report/no-going-back-now-the-case-against-returning-to-the-jcpoa/
86. Charles Perkins and Ari Cicurel, "Biden's Middle East Drawdown," Jewish Institute for National Security of America, April 8, 2021, https://jinsa.org/jinsa_report/bidens-middle-east-drawdown/
87. Dion Nissenbaum, "Iran-Backed Fighters Launch More Attacks in Yemen as U.S. Looks to Cut Ties," *Wall Street Journal*, March 17, 2021, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/as-biden-seeks-to-end-u-s-involvement-in-yemen-iran-backed-fighters-launch-more-attacks-11615992190>
88. Seth J. Frantzman, "Iran's IRGC seizes South Korean tanker in naval piracy," *Jerusalem Post*, January 4, 2021, <https://www.jpost.com/middle-east/iran-news/iranian-state-media-says-revolutionary-guards-seized-vessel-in-gulf-654219>
89. David Makovsky, "With or Without Putin, Israel Is Willing to Enforce Lebanon Redline," Washington Institute for Near East Policy, February 1, 2018, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/or-without-putin-israel-willing-enforce-lebanon-redline>; Yoav Limor, "Israel's red line; 1,000 precision missiles in Hezbollah's hands," *Israel Hayom*, February 25, 2021, <https://www.israelhayom.com/2021/02/25/israels-red-line-1000-precision-missiles-in-hezbollahs-hands/>
90. JINSA Gemunder Center Hybrid Warfare Policy Project, *Israel's Next Northern War: Operational and Legal Challenges*, October 29, 2018, https://jinsa.org/jinsa_report/israels-next-northern-war-operational-and-legal-challenges/
91. "How Many U.S. Troops Are in the Middle East?" *U.S. News & World Report*, January 9, 2020, <https://www.usnews.com/news/elections/articles/2020-01-09/after-recent-deployments-how-many-us-troops-are-in-the-middle-east>



JINSA

The Jewish Institute for
National Security of America

1101 14th Street, NW | Suite 1030 | Washington, DC 20005 | www.jinsa.org