

Research Report - Iran Nuclear Deal

RESEARCH REPORT TEMPLATE

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I. Introduction

The situation in Iran can be compared to a fire, in an explosives factory, something that is dangerous enough as is, is compounded by its environment. The idea that an Islamic nuclear power could emerge in the Middle East, leading to a nuclear rivalry between said power and Israel, has long been a fear of the world community. This is illustrated by the invasion of Iraq, which was driven by fear that Iraq may be developing nuclear weapons. So of course when it was revealed that the Iranian government had a secret nuclear program, the world reacted as one would to sparks in an explosives factory; a state of panic. Some countries and international organizations tried to negotiate with Iran while at the same time others (and sometimes the same) nations sanctioned and censured it. After years of negotiation the Iranian government and p5 + 1 governments signed a comprehensive treaty, commonly referred to as the Iran Nuclear Deal. Iran agreed to restrict its nuclear activity to civilian and medical use only as well as monitoring from UN agencies whereas the other nations partaking (and the Security Council by extent) agreed to end the sanctions against Iran. This was seen as one of the major foreign policy successes of the 21st century and was generally speaking widely popular in the international community, this was due in large part due to the fact that a nuclear armed Iran would be emboldened to engage in more aggressive actions which could lead to a conflict with global implications for human life and rights. As such, since the deal's collapse in 2018, the international community has been searching for alternative ways to prevent Iran from developing a nuclear bomb.

II. Definition of Key Terms

A. Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA)

Joint Comprehensive Plan Of Action is the official name⁴ for what is commonly referred to as the “Iran Nuclear Deal”, this term is used in both the text of the deal

and the other documents and articles relating to or about the Iran Nuclear Deal. In this research report however the JCPOA may be referred to simply as the Iran Nuclear Deal.

B. Sanctions

As defined by Merriam Webster a sanction is: “an economic or military coercive measure adopted usually by several nations in concert for forcing a nation violating international law to desist or yield to adjudication”⁵. It is worth noting that although sanctions were a major instrument of pressure on Iran, sanctions in regard to Iran’s nuclear program were entirely economic.

C. P5 + 1

P5 + 1 refers to the 6 six countries that represented the Security Council and by extent the international community in negotiations with Iran¹. These are the permanent 5 members of the security council (United States, Russia, China, United Kingdom, and France) as well as Germany, whose inclusion was due in large part to it’s large economy and thus power in regards to sanctions

D. Joint Commission

The joint commission is a committee of all the parties partaking in the Iran nuclear deal meant to oversee its enforcement and continued effectiveness⁴

E. E3

Group of core european actors including France, Germany, and the United Kingdom, which often acts as leadership and representatives of the EU writ large. As such the Iran Nuclear Deal negotiators are often referred to as the E3+3 .

III. General Overview

A. Effects of the Iran Nuclear Deal

1. Effectiveness

During the three years the Iran nuclear deal was in place it was relatively successful. The Iranian economy grew at a rapid pace due to new oil export opportunities, however the benefits did not necessarily translate into improvements in quality of life for ordinary Iranians. On the nuclear level the deal was also successful with Iran complying with the IEAE's inspections and working to uphold its end of the deal. A general improvement in Iranian relations with the west was also noticeable while the deal was in effect.

2. Politics

In most countries the deal was widely popular, with the notable exception of the United States, where it was extremely divisive, due to the feeling that it didn't effectively stop Iran from getting a Nuclear Weapon in the long term. This culminated in the US' withdrawal from the deal in 2018¹.

B. Specifics of the Iran Nuclear Deal

1. Technicalities of Nuclear Weapons Technology

There are two types of nuclear reactions: fission and fusion, Fission is the older method, and was used in both Hiroshima and Nagasaki. To create a fission reaction, that is one where an atom splits and causes a radioactive chain reaction, one needs the isotope Uranium 235. Uranium that is found naturally is only 0.711% Uranium 235, compared with the 90% purity required for a self-sustaining nuclear reaction, therefore Uranium needs to be enriched to be weapons grade. This enrichment alternatively a more complicated fusion weapon can be created in which deuterium (heavy water) and tritium atoms fuse in a chamber and thus create what is known as a hydrogen bomb. These two bombs can be regulated by preventing Uranium enrichment, and possession of heavy water and tritium, respectively.⁵

2. Concessions by P5 + 1

The major concessions by the p5 + 1 were the lifting of sanctions on both an international and national level. This included unfreezing Iranian assets as well as lifting trade restrictions, particularly in regard to Iranian oil exports. Most of these sanctions had been adopted in the 2000s and 2010s, however some dated back to the direct aftermath of the revolution. Another concession that the p5 +1 made was the inclusion of sunset provisions for restrictions on Iran's nuclear program.^{1,4}

3. Concessions by Iran

Iran agreed to restrictions on how much Uranium it could stockpile as well as what level of enrichment it could have. Furthermore regular inspections would be undertaken by the IAEA of Iranian Nuclear facilities to ensure that the purposes were strictly industrial and medical. Additionally the Joint Commission could with a majority vote gain access to any facility it deemed to be suspicious. ^{1,4}

IV. Major Parties Involved

1) United Nations Security Council

The United Nations Security Council has condemned Iran's Nuclear efforts six times and has levied four rounds of sanctions against Iran. Additionally it has directed other UN organizations to undertake actions aimed at curtailing Iran's Nuclear success. It recognized the P5 + 1 as negotiating on its behalf, and thus made the deal international law. The Security Council has however become more divided since 2015, due to factors like the United States breaking with other nations by withdrawing from the deal and general geopolitical tensions due to the War in Ukraine.

2) International Atomic Energy Agency

The IAEA opened its initial investigation into Iran in 2003, and over the course of this investigation asked to inspect Iranian nuclear facilities. Iran did not oblige, and in response after other investigation and reports the IAEA found that Iran had been attempting to build nuclear weapons until 2003 and may have continued after that. Under the Iran nuclear deal, Iran must comply with regular inspections from the IAEA, which it did while the deal was in place.

3) European Union

The European Union led the 2015 talks and deal, however it acted mainly through the E3. The EU played an important role by imposing and then later lifting economic sanctions against Iran, due to its massive market. Following the deals collapse the European Union attempted to soften the blow to Iran's economy by establishing INSTEX⁷, a network for vital trade not covered under the US's sanctions, despite Europe's willingness and often eagerness to get a deal at all costs, it has often been hamstrung by the US actions and policy, particularly in regard to reviving talks.

4) Iran

As the actor at the center of the situation, Iran's government has been in a position of having a lot to gain and virtually nothing to lose. Although Iran is an Islamic Republic and thus the government is not directly accountable to its people, the government still changes position. In the original deal the Iranian government was relatively willing to concede, as it correctly assumed that it had a lot to gain through a lifting of sanctions, however since the original deal Iran has gotten a new president and thus when talks renewed Iran's demands were more ambitious than they were in 2015. Iran is also criticized for its aiding of terrorist organizations such as Hamas and the Islamic Jihad.

5) Israel

Israel has publicly criticized the Iran Nuclear Deal for being far too weak and for not including Israel in the negotiations. Israel supports increased sanctions and

even military action against Iran. Israel has also made clear its willingness to retaliate to Iranian aggression with Nuclear Weapons.

V. Timeline of Events

Date	Event
1953	US and UK overthrow democratically elected prime minister of Iran and bring Mohammad Reza Shah back to power ²
1970	Shah's government signs the Non-Proliferation Treaty
1979	Shah is overthrown in Iranian revolution, US diplomats are taken hostage ²
1979-81	Although hostages are eventually released, sanctions remained in place significantly affecting Iran's economy ²
2003	The IAEA opens an investigation into Iran over undeclared nuclear activities ³ , E3 countries (Britain, France and Germany) and the EU immediately begin diplomatic efforts to prevent Iran from continuing its nuclear weapons program
2006	Russia, China, and the United States join the E3 in negotiating with Iran
2003-14	Following the discovery that Iran has a nuclear program, Iran is condemned in six Security Council resolutions and has four rounds of sanctions levied against them
2015	After weeks of negotiations Iran and the P5 + 1 sign the Iran nuclear deal, under which Iran

2018	US President Donald Trump withdraws from the Iran Nuclear Deal
2021	With the election of Joe Biden, hopes of reviving the Iran nuclear deal were reignited, however these plans have not gotten off the ground yet

VI. Previous & Possible Solutions

A. Iran Nuclear Deal

The original agreement between the P5 +1, was effective in maintaining the goals of preventing Iran from getting a bomb in the immediate future, however fell apart when the US withdrew, primarily due to sunset provisions. A new summit could try to be organized, however it would not be sufficient to just pick up where the deal ended in 2018, due to the changes the world has undergone in these 5 years¹.

B. Attempts to Revive Talks

With a new US administration taking office, there was hope that a new Iran Nuclear Deal could be forged. And initially all parties expressed interest, however quickly roadblocks emerged, the main one being Iran's insistence on the removal of the Iran Revolutionary Guard Corps, from designation as a terrorist organization, by the United States as well as the closing of an IAEA investigation into unexplained traces of Uranium in Iran. Although Iran dropped the demand to redesignate the Revolutionary Guard Corps, roadblocks remained and since the Russian invasion of Ukraine, international attention and efforts have almost completely receded. The question of whether Iran and the United States (as well as other actors) can reach a new agreement remains open.

C. Sanctions

Although Sanctions have not yielded many results, they were the initial reaction to the discovery that Iran had a Nuclear program, and remain championed by actors such as Israel and Republican US politicians. The idea behind sanctions remains that if you squeeze the Iranian economy enough, the Iranian government will be forced to negotiate with the international community at the risk of being overthrown by their own citizens. An aspect of sanctions, is second degree sanctions by which actors that serve as middle men between countries complying with sanctions and the sanctioned nation, are themselves sanctioned.

VII. Conclusion

Iran, although it is overshadowed by other geopolitical crises, remains the greatest threat to any degree of stability in the Middle East. What was once considered one of the greatest geopolitical achievements of the century is now one of the greatest failures. Perhaps given the nature of global-Iran relations one should not be surprised, but just disappointed. Disappointed at the failure of the United States in keeping its promises. Disappointed in the prospect that every minute, nuclear war in the middle east inches closer. Disappointed in the IAEA inability to effectively regulate nuclear energy. Above all disappointed in the government of Iran which despite the massive gains to its economy following the deal, prioritized protecting its terrorist organizations over the economic well being of the country. While the prospect that Barack Obama said that “time for the Iranian Nuclear Crisis was running out” over a decade ago, it is worth stating that the biggest obstacle to progress in Iran is the international community being preoccupied, not an insurmountable number of roadblocks. With a group of engaged diplomats a solution can be reached. The most important thing about the Iran Nuclear Deal is not that it fell apart but that a deal was reached in the first place, that odds were beaten once, obstacles overcome, and thus that this can be done again.

VIII. Questions to Consider

- What are your country's main goals when crafting nuclear policy, is your policy focused on promoting peace or protecting national interests?
- Does your country and its leadership favor an appeasement or punishment towards Iran?
- Is there a point in separating the economic needs of the Iranian people from that of the Iranian government?
- What caused the original Iran Nuclear Deal to fall apart?
- Would a more open approach to Iran allow for a permanent change in the perception of the west and outside world by Iran, which could be helpful for accomplishing other goals?
- How would a boost to Iran's economy through the lifting of sanctions impact counter terrorism?
- Does your country have economic, political, or cultural ties to Iran, and if so how?
- Are sanctions an effective and just solution?
- Does your country want Iran to get a bomb?
- How could negotiations be kickstarted again?
- What can your country offer to Iran as leverage in negotiations?

IX. Sources for further research

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