

The Iran Nuclear Deal:

A Deal Worth Reviving for International Security and Cohesion?

by

Clara-Hannah Sobouti

**Submitted to the Department of Political Science
School of Social Sciences
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Bachelor of Arts**

**Purchase College
State University of New York**

May 2022

Sponsor: Dr. Shemeem Abbas

Second Reader: Dr. Alfredo Garcia Pardo

TABLE OF CONTENT

Introduction	<i>P. 3-4</i>
PART I: What is the JCPOA?	<i>P. 5-12</i>
PART II: Conflicting sentiments towards the deal	<i>P. 13-36</i>
Part III: History behind the disagreement surrounding the deal	<i>P. 37-46</i>
Part IV: Current endeavors to renegotiate the deal	<i>P. 47-59</i>
Conclusion	<i>P. 60</i>
Index	<i>P. 61-62</i>
Bibliography	<i>P. 63-66</i>

INTRODUCTION

Between 2012 and 2016, the economic sanctions placed on Iran by the UN Security Council, the EU and the US in order to convince the country's leaders to halt Uranium production amounted to 16 billion oil revenue loss for the country. This is an exorbitant loss when an embargo is placed on a country's principal form of revenue (Oil). Finally, the P5+1 (China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States plus Germany: UN security council permanent members) and Iran agreed to negotiate an accord, which would become known as the JCPOA that would benefit both parties: relieve Iran from the dire consequences of economic sanctions while ensuring that Iran would not be able to become a nuclear power. The Western powers' relationship with Iran has always been tempestuous, a reality that was apparent, not only when the original nuclear deal was negotiated, and is still apparent as a revival of a new version of the former deal is attempted. It is important to note that there will always be divided sentiments towards the deal and its existence, especially in the US. Some believe that due to the extent to which the JCPOA prompted conversation and established stable relations between two previously rivaled Iran and the United States, a prompt return to this deal would seem optimal for their mutual relationship as well as the assurance of international security. The other camp disagrees with the fundamental makeup of the deal; convinced that it is impossible and unethical to push for the revival of a deal that overlooks the Islamic government's blatant disregard for the Iranian people, thus putting the world's security over that of individuals who might as well be hostages of their own government. Looking into and bringing to light the minutiae of these opposing views is helpful in better understanding the final decision once reached. Although the ethical concerns surrounding a revival of the JCPOA are as alarming as

they are disconcerting, a revival of the deal remains the best course of action when it comes to ensuring international security.

PART I: What is the JCPOA?

Since its original signing by China, France, Germany, Iran, the United Kingdom, the United States, and Russia, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), more commonly referred to as the Iran Nuclear Deal, and its ability to ensure international security by constraining Iran's nuclear program, has been a strongly contested issue, both within the US, and internationally, more notably by Israel and Saudi Arabia, two of the United States' most prominent allies in the Middle East. Some, such as former President Obama, argue that through improving US-Iran relations in the long run (rebuilding lost trust), and also ensuring Iran's inability to ever become a nuclear power and a threat to neighboring countries or the rest of the world, the JCPOA is crucial to national and international security. Others such as former Vice-President Cheney argue that Iran, more specifically the Islamic regime, cannot be trusted, that the JCPOA is too lenient, that the deal puts the United States, as well as its allies in the world and in the region, in a dangerously vulnerable position, and only hinders national and international security. Although the Iran nuclear deal was and remains to this day a highly contentious issue within the US and internationally, the JCPOA, is a "foreign policy priority;" it is the only element that has the power and potential to reunite two estranged countries through compromise and cooperation, and replace the present skepticism with newfound trust, creating an example to follow for other countries, and thus making the original deal and its reentry "worth the political effort," in order to consequently ensure both a more peaceful and more secure international stage (Rome).

In order to better understand the current situation regarding the Iran nuclear deal and its effectiveness in ensuring international security, one must know the history of the issue. Iran first began developing its national nuclear technology in the 1950s during which time the pro-Western

Monarch, Shah Mohammed Reza Pahlavi was in power, and “received technical assistance under the US Atoms for Peace program” (NTI). In 1968, Iran joined the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), which is the main international treaty that deals with the containment and prevention of nuclear weapon proliferation. Western assistance ended after the 1979 Iranian Revolution, which brought about “the establishment of an Islamic theocratic republic” led by the Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini. Despite this fact, Iran continued to develop its nuclear technology, creating “an extensive nuclear fuel cycle, including sophisticated enrichment capabilities,” which technically violated its commitment to peaceful usage of nuclear materials as a signatory of the NPT (NTI). However, it is Iran’s need to ensure its national security that determined Iranian leadership to pursue a nuclear weapons program for self-defense.

In the early 2000s, the discovery of a clandestine nuclear program in Iran, proving Iran’s technical non-compliance with the NPT, led it to be subject to scrutiny on the global stage (Hill 126). Even though Iran only enriched uranium to 3.5 percent, an amount that can only be used for peaceful purposes, making it still compliant with NPT’s rules, the international community remained skeptical of Iran and its motives because they feared the consequences of Iran having the knowledge and ability to enrich uranium. France, Germany, and the United Kingdom attempted to persuade Iran to dismantle its program through negotiations. The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), responsible for monitoring the country's usage of nuclear material and helping them with peaceful usages, also reprimanded Iran for not cooperating with inspectors. When Iran could not be persuaded to stop enriching uranium, the UN Security Council, alongside the United States and the EU, imposed four sets of economic sanctions on Iran, which “significantly impacted the Iranian economy,” making it “fifteen to twenty percent smaller than it would have been without the sanctions” (Hill 126). Finally, with the election of

President Rouhani in 2013, a politician who ran on a reformist platform, with the goal of opening up Iran to the global economy, allowed for the P5+1 and Iran to meet, compromise and finally agree to terms of the deal that became the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

Firstly, the deal required Iran to give up 97% of its enriched uranium, leaving the country with only 300kg of enriched uranium from the earlier 10,000kg. Then, Iran is only allowed to enrich its uranium to up to 3.67%. When comparing this number to research grade (20%) or weapon grade (90%) enriched uranium, it is obvious that Iran's uranium enrichment will be limited to basic usage (energy grade) and can pose no threat to international security. "Iran [had to] give up most of its centrifuges:" it went from having 20,000 to 5,000 (Harris). The lack of sufficient centrifuges pushed Iranians to prioritize energy and research over nuclear weapons, impeding any potential nuclear weapon creation. The JCPOA was believed to be "good for national security because it entailed the most thorough inspection process ever negotiated," to prevent cheating (Hill 126). Finally, relief from economic sanctions is the one part of the deal that truly benefited Iran and would allow its economy to reintegrate into the international banking and financial system (Harris).

Sanctions were another important part of the original Iran Nuclear Deal, therefore examining them and understanding how they work is crucial. The US has placed sanctions on Iran since 1979; these happen to be the "most complex overlay of authorities ... of any sanctions program that the US government has administer[ed]" in history. Despite their level of complexity, the Iran sanctions can be categorized into primary and secondary sanctions:

Primary sanctions are prohibitions that apply to US individuals and entities (collectively, "persons") and restrict transactions between the United States and

Iran. Secondary sanctions are a bit more nebulous, but for the sake of simplicity can be understood as sanctions that seek to extend US sanctions restrictions (and by extension, US sanctions policy) to non-US persons, with the consequence that those who do not abide by the restrictions are cut off from the United States (O'Toole 3).

The United States “has the authority to impose” either primary or secondary sanctions within the above mentioned parameters for a “wide variety of reasons” including “Iran’s development of a nuclear program, support for terrorism, its development of ballistic missiles and other weapons of mass destruction, abuses of human rights, and destabilizing activity in the Middle East” (O’Toole 3). Such sanctions are imposed through executive order as well as congressional legislation, and specifically in regard to Iran, “more than 1,000 specific individuals and entities have been sanctioned”(O’Toole 3).

Under the original JCPOA, the United States agreed to “certain sanction relief” in exchange for Iran’s compliance to placing constraints on its nuclear program. The United States lifted secondary sanctions imposed over Iran’s nuclear program alongside the United Nations (UN) and EU dropping all nuclear-related sanctions on Iran. The JCPOA did not include any lifting of other US or EU sanctions for non-nuclear related reasons or any US primary sanction. In addition, the deal specifically “allowed the United States and EU to implement and enforce sanctions on Iran for those non-nuclear reasons" (O’Toole 3-4). Before its withdrawal from the JCPOA, the Trump administration imposed several rounds of sanctions related to Iran, none of which violated US commitments under the nuclear deal itself. Even though Trump reimposed “a substantial number of sanctions that violated US commitments under the original deal” by

withdrawing in May 2018, many of the Trump administration's sanctions on Iran after the withdrawal "were consistent with the JCPOA" (O'Toole 4).

There were two things that the original JCPOA didn't focus on. Despite significantly impeding Iran's nuclear ambition, the JCPOA addressed neither **Iran's missile program** nor its **regional activities** (Al-Aloosy). Even though the UN security council resolution 2231 did include language on Iran's missile program directing the Iranian leadership not to "develop ballistic missiles capable of carrying nuclear weapons," there was no official prohibition of the country's missile program (Al-Aloosy). This loophole was taken advantage of and Iranian leadership gave the go ahead to continue "testing and developing medium and long-range missiles;" an endeavor that was conducted at a relatively fast pace: "within a year, the IRGC conducted eight missile tests, some with a range of 2,000 kilometers (Al-Aloosy)." The Iranian missile stockpile was used to further the destabilizing activities in the region. One example of such activities is the alleged Iranian UAV attack on Saudi oil facilities in Abqaiq which forced Saudis to shut down half of its oil production (Al-Aloosy). Therefore, it is to be expected that Iran's missile program and its regional activities will be two crucial focuses of the new version of the Iran Nuclear Deal, despite it being a definite challenge for de-escalation between US-Iran.

Economic aspect impacting JCPOA

Another issue that will have to be a new focus of the revived JCPOA is the unresolved economic issue. At first glance, the original formula of the nuclear deal was straightforward: the US and its allies would lift economic sanctions in exchange for less Iranian nuclear activity. Unfortunately, "the economic benefits didn't really materialize for Iran due to the country's isolation from the international market"(Al-Aloosy). There was inflation and even basic goods became unaffordable. Each time a new round of sanctions was imposed on the Iranian economy,

“unemployment rose and the GDP decreased. These are some numbers to illustrate the dire state of the economy:

- In 2014 (before the signing of the JCPOA) the Iranian economy had a growth of only 3%
- In 2015 (after the JCPOA was enacted) the Iranian economy decreased by 1.3%
 - (Note: The Iranian economy was already in recession before the nuclear deal)

Following the earlier point about the economy within Iran, the reality was that there was a discrepancy between the anticipated and actual economic benefits that the Iranian people were hopeful for after the signing of the JCPOA. One year into the signature of the deal, the Iranian economy saw an increase in growth due to the spike in oil exports. In 2017, the Iranian economy grew less than 4%. One of the principal reasons behind the minimal economic growth even after the signing of the JCPOA is that the oil revenue was kept by the government and thus was prevented from trickling down to the population. “The budget of Iranian households fell in real terms from: \$14,800 in 2007-2008 to \$12,515 in 2016-2017”(Al-Aloosy).

The economic benefits of the JCPOA for the Iranian people were slow to arrive but ultimately, blocked by external factors, one of which is the Iranian inability to “attract foreign investment.” This was due to both “**corruption within the bureaucracy of the Iranian government**” but also and most of all, “**the threatening role of the IRGC in the Iranian economy**”(Al-Aloosy). One piece of evidence that illustrates the lack of foreign investment within Iran is a 2018 World Bank report that was measuring the ease of doing business, registering property and trading across borders, and ranked Iran as 124th out of 190 countries. Another example is that despite the government effort to put in place the **Five-year development plan**, which was supposed to attract \$50 billion in foreign investment, the country was only able to attract 3.37 billion in foreign direct investment in 2016 (Al-Aloosy). Although

both examples could be worse, it's not great either for a country who desperately needs foreign investment and went through the whole ordeal of negotiations with that goal in mind.

Another factor that contribute to the Iranian market's unattractiveness are the sanctions the US and European countries placed against Iran for the role of the IRGC in Iran's economy and in it's support of terrorist groups in the region (Al-Aloosy). There are high risks for doing business with an entity that has the terrorist group sanction placed on it, the penalty being to be forced to pay billions of dollars in fines. Even though the Iranian leadership states that it is trying to straighten out the country's financial sector, the Financial Action Task Force (FAFT) is still skeptical and concerned about the terrorist financial risk (Al-Aloosy). The concern is rooted in the fact that the IRGC is a very powerful part of the Iranian economy and many other sectors of government, therefore avoiding dealing with it directly or indirectly is extremely difficult if not impossible. The truth is that both corruption and the nature of the IRGC are embedded within the fabric of the Islamic regime governing Iran currently. Therefore these two factors will remain irremediable unless there is tangible regime change; until then, the Islamic regime will continue blaming the US and its allies for purposefully hindering Iranian economic benefits.

Below are some points to keep in mind throughout the next portion of this essay.

There are several divergent factors in US-Iran relations which will have strategic ramifications during the Biden administration when it comes to negotiation a new version of the JCPOA:

- Iran's role in the Middle East
- The lack of economic benefits from the original nuclear deal
- Domestic developments in both countries
- The Iranian presidential election which saw the resurgence of the conservative camp that is ardently opposed to the JCPOA

The Repercussions of continued push for more pressure on Iran by Congress are as follows:

- Tensions will persist between the two countries
- Iran will be try to get more concessions from a Biden administration that has shown itself to be more cooperative and conciliatory
- Strained economic situation in Iran with high inflation and unemployment and decreased value of currency is deteriorating the legitimacy of the Iranian government

PART II: Conflicting sentiments towards the deal

The JCPOA is especially relevant nowadays because with the election of President Biden and the open-mindedness of his administration, it is more likely that the US could return to the deal, while the idea of having the crippling sanctions be lifted will be an important determining factor in Iran's return. Although a return to the deal would be beneficial for both countries, they both face domestic and regional considerations that will surely impede an immediate return to the deal. The US faces the coronavirus pandemic, a need to revive the economy and rebuild the country's alliances. In addition, the US's allies in the Middle East oppose the return to the JCPOA because of their belief that the deal is too lenient. The most recent manifestation of this opposition is the electrical blackout at the nuclear site in Natanz, Iran, about 155 miles south of the capital, "which left some older centrifuges damaged" (O'Grady). Iranian authorities blamed Israel for this incident due to Israel's historic endeavors to undermine Iran's nuclear program. Even "Israeli public broadcaster Kan reported [during that weekend], that Israel was behind the attack (O'Grady). Since Israel has always been in ardent "opposition to the nuclear accord, citing concerns about Iran's nuclear capabilities," and continues to see Iran as an aggressor and a terrorist state, it is likely that Israel was indeed behind the attack in an attempt to also undermine the negotiations surrounding the JCPOA and a prompt return to the deal.

On the other hand, Iran may be hesitant to return to the deal due to its renewed skepticism of the US and fear of American duplicity, validated through President Trump's decision to pull out of the agreement. Another element that may be deterring the Iranians from returning to the deal is the "possibility that a Republican could win the 2024 U.S. election and repudiate the agreement once again ..." (Rome). The recent assassination of nuclear scientist Mohsen Fakhrizadeh, who used to be "a driving force behind the Iranian effort to build a nuclear weapon,

[one] that the U.S. intelligence says was abandoned nearly two decades ago, and the Iranian government's pledge to avenge the late scientist with a "definitive punishment ... at the right time," is another element that could keep Iran, the U.S. and other world powers from immediate return to the Iran nuclear deal (Berger).

Iran's gradual increase of uranium enrichment levels from 3.67 percent, to 4 percent, then 20 percent, and the most recent announcement by "Iranian nuclear negotiator Abbas Araghchi, that the country will start to enrich uranium up to 60 percent purity," has proceeded to further create tensions and weaken the chance of a positive outcome from negotiations, if they even occur with the two major parties speaking directly with one another (O'Grady). Despite the resumption of the JCPOA negotiations in Vienna, the US and Iran are still using European intermediaries for negotiation due to Iran's unwillingness to meet the American representatives until some of the disastrous and crippling economic sanctions from former President Trump's maximum pressure campaign are lifted. One can only hope that the US might be able to meet the Iranians half way for the sake of the two countries' relationship in the long run.

When the Iran Nuclear Deal had just been signed, the general American sentiment towards it was far from unanimous. Former President Obama and former Vice-president Cheney, were two individuals whose arguments, for and against this deal, respectively, I found compelling to read and interesting to compare. By defending and advocating for the Iran Nuclear Deal, former President Obama showed his "preference for a peaceful, diplomatic, resolution to the issue," one that would help avoid the costs of another war in the Middle East, the possibility of a nuclear Iran, as well as provide "a more effective, verifiable, and durable resolution," that would maintain "the global commitment to non-proliferation" and international security (Hill 128, 126). Former Vice-president Cheney, on the other hand, is visibly critical of the JCPOA.

His disapproval originates from the idea that the JCPOA was a product of “negotiations based on the premise that the United States had to regain [Iran’s, which he labeled,] the world’s worst state sponsor of terror, trust” (Hill 134). He also believes that “allowing Iran to continue uranium enrichment and missile development,” undermines the NPT’s credibility and instead emboldens the theocratic regime of Iran, which according to him, is an obvious threat to national security (Hill 134). Former Vice-president Cheney also argues that President Obama was too lenient during negotiations, making a number of key concessions even before the actual negotiations such as: “dropping the demand that Iran halt its uranium enrichment, agreeing to provide immediate sanctions relief and paying the Iranians \$12 billion in frozen Iranian assets” (Hill 134). He suggests an alternative deal in which “through the credible threat of military action,” Iran would be forced to “halt its uranium enrichment” entirely, “provide a full and complete accounting of all its past nuclear activities,” and finally, allow “complete go anywhere/anytime access to inspectors” (Hill 137). Only if these obligations are fulfilled would Iran receive economic relief. In his view, such a deal would reassert the United States’ credibility as a “self-respecting power,” as well as ensure “the indispensable elements of serious diplomacy” that in turn will provide global security (Hill 137).

When comparing the two viewpoints, I am inclined to say that I found former President Obama’s willingness to listen to Iranian requests, cooperate and compromise in order to achieve a better relationship with Iran for the sake of world peace and better international security in the long run, to align with the Liberalist lens. On the other hand, I found former Vice-president Cheney’s belief that the US should be stricter on Iran in order to maintain its own credibility and power while forcing Iran’s hand through the threat of military action, in order to ensure that Iran

will not take advantage to bring itself to a position of power, to be extremely self-centered, incriminating and tending to align more with the realist lens.

In accordance with former President Obama's beliefs, I believe that rebuilding trust between Iran and the United States is an important endeavor that must be carried out. In addition, I believe that the JCPOA and the return to this deal by both major parties is essential because in addition to ameliorating the relationship between the two countries, it is a fair compromise that benefits both countries. Until President Trump pulled the United States out of the deal, Iran had been compliant with the terms and there was no proof to suggest otherwise. Reestablishing a good and trusting relationship with Iran is the best way to ensure international security, and the nuclear deal with Iran is a crucial part of that goal.

I disagree with former Vice-president Cheney's point of view because all of his arguments seem to further the needs of the United States and its allies while completely disregarding Iran's needs. The West's aim is to destroy Iran. The world is made up of different individuals, therefore in order for the world to continue to thrive in a peaceful manner, empathy and compromise between different groups is crucial. When former Vice-president Cheney advocates for "serious negotiations," which consist of one country imposing demands and obligations on the other, and claims this will ensure international security, I find it somewhat foolhardy.

It is true however, that by signing the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty, Iran committed itself to solely conduct a peaceful nuclear program and relinquish the right to enrich uranium. Therefore, former Vice-president Cheney is partly justified in criticizing the JCPOA's recognition of Iran's right to enrich uranium, which ultimately does undermine the fundamental principle of the NPT and makes it more difficult to deny the right to enrich uranium to other

signatory countries. Despite these facts, I believe this point of view to be equally hypocritical. If international security and the monitoring of nuclear activity in various countries is truly the main concern, the first step should be to ensure that all countries be part of the NPT and be held to the same universal standard of maintaining peaceful nuclear programs. Until the credibility of the P5 is undermined with exceptions, with the case of countries such as Israel, India and Pakistan for example, who have been allowed to have fully developed nuclear weapon programs with no repercussions, it is to be expected that other countries such as North Korea, Iran, and others will also want to pursue nuclear weapons' programs. Denying some countries the right while confirming others the same right is itself a threat to international security because of the inherent tensions brought about through such decisions. Either all additional countries are allowed to develop a nuclear weapons' program or no additional country should be allowed to do so. Establishing such a rule would already do a great deal to ensuring international security.

At Fakhrizadeh's funeral, Iran's supreme leader Khamenei expressed the fact that "some say through dialogue and negotiations actions can be taken in order to put an end to such hostility, this is not possible, because our enemies oppose the nature of the Islamic Republic's establishment ... they will never put an end to their hostilities towards us"(Berger). This statement is important because it reflects the fragile and potentially dangerous state of the world today. When distrust, fear, and chaos are ubiquitous, how can one expect international security? The Iran nuclear deal was the element that had brought so many countries including Iran and the United States together and facilitated cooperation, and compromise, and overall international stability, and security. One can only hope that the present impediments to the prompt return to the JCPOA will be overcome soon, so that the world can be put back on the path of international security and cohesion.

Biden administration's foreign policy towards Iran vs. Divisions within Iranians

The Trump administration's decision to withdraw from the JCPOA marked a shift in US policy towards Iran, from relying on diplomacy to pressure. Under the "maximum pressure" campaign, as it became to be known, the Trump administration "frequently called for negotiations with Iran that would take into consideration Tehran's foreign policy in the Middle East, imposed additional sanctions on Iran, and ordered the assassination of General Qassem Soleimani (head of the Quds forces). There is also speculation that both Israel and the US were responsible for the attacks against the Natanz nuclear site in 2020.

Some believe that the Trump administration's policies "increased tension between the US and Iran without a tangible change in Iran's behavior, and are hopeful at the prospect of a re-entry into the deal by the Biden administration which could potentially "defuse tension with Iran." However it is evident that not only will the differences between the US and Iran resurface but most importantly "change in US policy will be limited" (Al-Aloosy). One of the main complaints of the Iranian officials is the fact that economic benefits for Iran (a core part of the deal) were limited in the two years after the implementation of the JCPOA; and it's something they are looking to rectify this time around. On the other hand, "the US is under tremendous pressure from its allies in the region" to both "limit Iran's nuclear ambitions" and most importantly "curb its regional influence," a propos that the Iranian government has refused and will certainly continue refusing to consider, thus ensuring tense beginning to what will certainly be a lengthy negotiation (Al-Aloosy).

It can be very confusing and difficult to have an exact understanding of the general sentiment, even within a party. Just within the Democratic party, "despite the reconciliatory tone," there are also many statements made "expressing pessimism and indicative of possible

irreconcilable differences.” But the overarching message from the democratic party platform is that the “JCPOA is the best method to stop Iran’s pursuit of a nuclear bomb, that a return to this agreement is a matter of urgency, [and] that the nuclear deal [is only] a beginning of diplomacy with Iran” (Al-Aloosy). Yet secretary of state Blinken stressed that the US will negotiate a longer and stronger deal in coordination with partners and allies, and other advisors have stated that the Biden administration will require major modifications before rejoining the JCPOA.

The problem arises with the apparent static stance the Iranian leadership is taking by showing that any modification of the deal will be rejected. Three examples of such are as follows:

- Ali Akbar Velayati (a senior adviser to Iran’s Supreme Leader): he stated that any changes will not be accepted
- Javad Zarif (The ex-foreign minister): said that Iran will not move beyond its commitments to the nuclear deal
- Kayhan newspaper (ultra-conservative paper, affiliated with the supreme leader): asserted that Biden’s conditions are not different from the demands set by Trump administration

As evident in these three examples, the Iranian side is not willing to make any compromises, and if anything they seem to want to guilt the Americans and its allies in order to retract more concessions that would benefit them.

Joe Biden’s election was seen by all as a possibility for renewed “effort to rework US Middle East diplomacy, especially in regards to Iran and the infamous and contested nuclear deal” (Brumberg 1). Unfortunately, “the road to a revived or new multilateral US-Iran re-engagement will be long and arduous” due to the challenges, mainly domestic both countries are currently

faced with: “Biden and his advisors will take months to forge a new Iran policy,” and since the presidential election just took place, the Raisi administration also needs time to establish its position on the matter (Brumberg 1). The “enduring strategic realities” are bound to complicate efforts at a “real process of diplomatic engagement” between the United States, Iran, and their respective allies and thus make the revival of the Nuclear Deal take longer to achieve (Brumberg 1).

To understand how the West’s decisions and actions affect Iran, it is crucial to be cognizant of the current political weather within the country. In a diplomatic lense, there are currently “two big interest groups [in Iran]: the *oil development* camp and the *resistance* camp” (Brumberg 1). According to Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman, Saeed Khatibzadeh, the desire of the former (oil development) are the following:

- A return to its oil market share and thus normal trade with the world, which it sees as Iran’s priority
 - It is this camp’s belief that oil and gas production is key to Iran’s political and social stability
 - Nuclear energy cannot substitute for this vast sector
 - Experience shows that the international community will not tolerate any quest by Iran to gain a nuclear program with the means to threaten Israel, however implicit
- Revival of the basic exchanges that was at the heart of the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action
 - Specifically a return to the previously agreed and strictly monitored “cap on uranium enrichment in return for ending nuclear-related sanctions and opening Iran’s economy

The latter (resistance camp) has a completely different view point: the leaders want the benefits of oil exports, but they are weary of a nuclear agreement because of the possibility of it becoming a slippery slope to opening Iran up to what they deem to be the “toxic” western cultural, economic, social, and even political influence. Their biggest fear is that a “nuclear agreement might open the door to normalizing relations with the United States”(Brumberg 1). Therefore for the resistance camp, opposing or attempting to contain the influence of Washington and its regional friends is vital. The resistance camp’s leaders also believe that Iran’s future lies in the East, which is why they support a diplomacy that underscores “this strategic and ideological stance” (Brumberg 2). Since they believe that any return to a version of the JCPOA will produce “another needless detour on the path to resisting the West (and the United States) in particular,” it is safe to say that these leaders do not want Iran to return to the negotiating table.

When it comes to the Supreme Leader, his job is to mediate between these two main camps and the other ones that also exist. Khamenei has historically sided with the resistance camp and his partiality for the latter “intensified after the Trump administration’s repudiation of the JCPOA discredited the oil development camp.” However, Khamenei “appears to believe that Iran has both concrete and ideological interests,” and so must indulge and follow the ideals of both camps (Brumberg 2). Since the country and state of Iran need global oil sales, the Supreme Leader will not permanently shut the doors to a deal with the global community on the nuclear issue.

There is factional fighting across the Development/Resistance divide, among these three groups: 1) reformists, 2) hard-liners, 3) pragmatic conservatives (Brumberg 2). The hard-liner and pragmatic conservative factions both share certain ideological similarities with the two major camps. “In fact some hard-liners believe that they can get the benefits of western investment

while continuing to expand trade and investment eastward [...] while us[ing] a spectrum of tools (ranging from pure force to blocking social media) to limit *contagion* of western influence”(Brumberg 2). Many hard-liners argue that such a belief can be realized by negotiating with a second term Trump administration stressing the fact that “he is a businessman,” who “does not want problems during his second term”(Brumberg 2). Even though Trump did state during the campaign that he would be open to continuing negotiations and making a deal with the Iranian government, it is very unlikely that a re-elected Trump will agree to change his “nearly explicit policy of regime change.” In the unlikely event that he did “abandon his position,” Iranian leaders will not accept key Trump White House demands such as the “zero enrichment, and by implication, agree to the provision of energy grade uranium from outside Iran’s borders” (Brumberg 2). On the Iranian leadership side, endorsing this position would not be possible without committing political suicide.

Going back to the United States, there are also variations of the general sentiment towards the road ahead in regards to foreign policy with Iran and the JCPOA. Some argue that Trump has generated considerable leverage over adversaries and allies alike [and that] Biden would do well to use some of the leverage Trump [left] behind” (Brumberg 3). Some of this leverage comes from the expanded set of sanctions imposed by the Trump Administration, but also the emerging alliance between Israel, the UAE, Bahrain, and Saudi Arabia that “if used smartly, could strengthen [Biden’s] hand”(Brumberg 3). Unfortunately, “some of these assets could also create constraints,” for example, “Israel and Washington’s Gulf friends will most definitely resist US efforts to re-engage Iran.” Tehran’s push for the withdrawal of the many different sanctions set in place by Trump before a resumption of talks, as well as their insistence of receiving “a promise from Washington to compensate Tehran for financial losses it incurred

when the Trump Administration abandoned the JCPOA.” Another possible impediment could arise if the Biden administration, which “seems eager to show US domestic audiences that it is not rushing to an agreement with Tehran,” decides to “remove some sanctions but leave others in place”(Brumberg 3).

Iran’s crumbling economic situation due to the still raging Covid-19 virus is the ultimate source of US and western leverage. Unfortunately, hard-line leadership will not make major concessions merely in return for US promises of sanction relief, something the current leadership fears is unreliable. Iranian government has considerable assets of its own which include an expanded enrichment program that Tehran has openly pursued with the goal of giving themselves a diplomatic advantage. This move seems linked to the Iranian government’s obvious efforts to build an underground enrichment facility at the Natanz nuclear plant. The Iranian government also has a range of lethal military assets in the Gulf, Iraq, and Syria and a complicated if vital relationship with Russia. When it comes to Iran’s domestic politics, a weakened oil development camp will have limited leverage to push for reviving a new version of the nuclear deal (Brumberg 4).

The huge divide between the United States and Iran means that the Biden administration has “little to gain from limiting its Iran policy to resuscitating the ailing JCPOA.” Secretary of State Blinken has signaled that once the Iranian government agrees to return to compliance with the JCPOA, the US would use that as a platform with American partners and allies to negotiate a *longer* and *stronger* deal, which is now the ultimate goal for Western powers. The Biden administration has repeated its intent of paving “a credible path back to diplomacy,” which would not only address the JCPOA but also other issues of concern such as the Islamic regime’s overt funding of terrorist groups in the region such as Hezbollah. Another one is its blatant

disregard for the Iranians' basic human rights with the constant persecutions of societal groups (women, LGBTQ community, etc.) as well as dissidents of the regime. Finally, it also includes Iran's ballistic missile program. All of these topics have been historically taboo because the Islamic Regime adamantly refuses to discuss or expand upon these issues or simply deny their validity. The main difference between the Trump administration and the Biden administration is that the former established the maximum pressure campaign while the latter advocates for more direct negotiations. The Biden Administration sees the maximum pressure campaign as "a self-defeating policy that ... has allowed Iran to stockpile something like 10 times as much enriched uranium as it had under the Obama administration (Brumberg 4). Historically, foreign policy towards Iran and the appropriate and most effective way to deal with Iran has been dealt with differently by the Republican party versus the Democratic party. The Republican presidents have historically been more skeptical of the Islamic regime leaders, while the Democratic presidents have been open to negotiating with the same individuals who go against all the fundamental aspects of the party within Iran. Pushing for regime change has been a partisan issue, one that the Democratic party is not willing and has never shown much initiative to participate in. Nevertheless it is unclear whether or not the Biden administration's method of dealing with Iran now will be easier to pursue or even that effective. Much of it depends on how quickly President Biden repairs the rocky US relationship with its western allies and reaffirms diplomacy with Iran as a key US priority. He will also need to meet with his counterparts in allies in the middle east such as in Israel and the UAE, something that would "signal o the world that the purpose of US diplomacy is not merely to secure transactional deals between states and leaders who share mutual interests, but also to foster peacemaking agreements between long-standing rivals and even bitter enemies" (Brumberg 4).

Experience working with the NUFDI (National Union for Democracy in Iran)

During the fall of 2021, I interned for a non-profit and non-partisan organization located in Washington D.C. called the National Union for Democracy in Iran, or NUFDI for short. The organization's goal is to promote human rights and awareness about issues within Iran, specifically in regards to human rights violations perpetrated by the corrupt and tyrannical Islamic regime, one that has been in power for forty-two years since the Iranian revolution that overthrew Reza Shah, the emperor of Iran. NUFDI gave me my first experience fighting against human rights abuses. One of my very first assignments was conducting research and writing about Toomaj Salehi, an Iranian dissident rapper who was arbitrarily arrested in the beginning of September for his harsh criticism of the Islamic regime and its apologists in the West. Songs such as "Mouse Hole" and "Normal," two of his most critical songs, were most probably the reason for his arrest. As a team, we took to twitter, writing about Toomaj and raising awareness about his story. Quickly the hashtag *freetoomaj* became viral. I also co-wrote an expose about him and his songs to better explain why he had been arrested, which was published on the NUFDI site. Finally, I suggested we translate Toomaj's two well-known raps into English so that interested non persian speakers could also understand what Toomaj is protesting. I contributed to the translation process and then we published two copies of Toomaj's music videos with English subtitles. The goal was to raise as much awareness about the issue and specifically highlight once again the Iranian government's complete disregard for the Iranian people and their well being. One week later, Toomaj shared a video with his followers on Twitter letting everyone know that he was released from prison. I will never forget the thrill I got from knowing that I had contributed to a cause bigger than myself, and most importantly, knowing I had been successful in this endeavor. This experience and other similar experiences showed me that I care deeply

about defending human rights in general and that I will actively seek opportunities to do so moving forward.

I also got the opportunity to meet many important figures while interning a NUFDI. Some of these figures include Secretary Pompeo, Congressman Crenshaw, and Reza Pahlavi (Prince of Iran). Each of these individuals came into the office and spoke to us, sharing their opinions and views specifically in regards to Iran and the future of the country. I found these visits very exciting, firstly because I was in the presence of prominent and well-known figures, but also because I was curious to know how such individuals would be when you sit down and talk to them compared to watching them speak on television with reporters and cameras flashing on them. It is also nice to be able to meet these individuals and discern that they are ultimately humble and down to earth like most of us. I will always cherish the memories of my meetings with these government officials and royalty.

Open source research is a skill I had never been exposed to previously. Thankfully, during my time with NUFDI, I got to try my hand at it and I must say that not only did I enjoy what open source research entails, but that I found that I showed much aptitude for it. As I came to understand, open source research involves being given a singular piece of information (person or thing) and then finding more information about it. In this form of research, one discovery typically leads to another one and another one and so on and so forth. In some ways, it is quite similar to investigative journalism, especially when one amasses sources of information and clues to then compile it all in a written report. In my case I was given four names to research and investigate. These individuals are all successful and wealthy Iranian-Americans. My task was to look into them and try to discover if they have possible ties to the Islamic regime in Iran, dissimulated through their various businesses or other sources of income. My investigation

allowed me to uncover many facts about all four of these individuals, one of them had been accused of embezzling funds from his pistachio trade with Iran, another owns a film production company with no apparent external funding, two others could potentially be involved in facilitating election tampering. Another fascinating and insightful part of my research involved looking through 990 forms. Individuals who own non-profit organizations have to fill out 990 forms in which they declare what organizations they donate money to. Two of the individuals I was researching were in such a position, thus looking through their NGO's 990 form proved very useful in understanding where their loyalties lie as some organizations they donated money to are well known apologist organizations of the Islamic regime. Overall, open source research is a skill I am very grateful to have learned and I hope to have the opportunity to use it again in the future.

One final experience that stood out to me was collaborating with the Iranian Student Association at American University to organize an on campus commemorative event for the November 2019 protests in Iran. The student turnout was great, students gathered and actively listened to our explanations of the heartbreaking facts. I think going to college campuses and sharing important issues with students is a powerful initiative and crucial to any attempt at bringing about effective change. It's a great idea and I hope that NUFDI continues collaborating with student groups on college campuses to raise awareness.

Overall, there was no dull moment during my time with NUFDI, I had the opportunity to partake in numerous activities, accomplish a great deal and add onto my skills and knowledge.

Ethical aspect of revival

To begin with, many firmly believe that the JCPOA, more commonly referred to as the Iran Nuclear Deal, is an effective deal that maintains civil diplomacy and keeps negotiations going among nations rather than allowing rival nations to plunge themselves into hostile

interactions and pose a threat to international security. However, learning about the unthinkable rate of human rights violations intentionally carried out by the Islamic regime and the suffering that the Iranian people have to endure because of this repulsive excuse of a government, opens one's eyes to the other side of the argument regarding the JCPOA. While yes, the JCPOA and its revival would prevent the corrupt government of Iran from having access to such an incredible source of destruction, and sharing it with its terrorist allies in the region, thus making the world slightly safer, with one less problem to worry about, one crucial aspect is neglected in this argument. It is the human rights and dignity aspect that seems to be systematically and conveniently overlooked.

The world may have one less problem: should the Islamic republic of Iran be prevented from developing the country's nuclear program, but at what cost? Why should the Iranian people be allowed to remain in their state of fear, deprivation, and despair while others content themselves with the selfish illusion that the world will be slightly safer for them and their loved ones? It is the US and its allies' responsibility as leading nations of the global stage to lead by example, help promote human rights, and finally hold other nations accountable when they are in blatant violation of such fundamental rights. If the JCPOA is to be revived, it cannot solely focus on the nuclear issue. The US and its allies must at least add a section addressing the human rights issue to the deal. That should be nonnegotiable; it's unthinkable that it's not yet a universal belief. One argument is that addressing the human rights issue would deter the Islamic regime from negotiating. According to those individuals, each issue should be addressed one at a time: first the nuclear issue, that conveniently benefits the world first, and on a separate occasion, perhaps human rights may be addressed as well.

The sad reality is that the Islamic regime is not your typical government, they have shown themselves to be: ruthless, barbaric tyrants time and time again. Why and how any trained politician or diplomat believes that once a deal solely concerning the nuclear issue concluded, and the Islamic regime, having once again access to the country's central bank and many of its frozen assets, would willingly come back to the negotiation table to discuss any other issue, let alone human rights issues, is beyond me. Trusting such an unreliable and fickle government is extremely naive and foolish. As long as it allows individuals to remain in harm's way, the JCPOA is and remains an incomplete and unethical deal. I hope that a new deal can be struck where human rights will be addressed and the Iranian government will be held accountable. Throughout my time at NUFDI, I learned a great deal, and it is thanks to this newfound knowledge that I am able to justify my altered opinion regarding the JCPOA and have become a fervent advocate for human rights especially when faced with ignorance, indifference and worst of all, willful ignorance.

Some Bi-partisan reflection on the future of the JCPOA and US-Iran Policy

In February of 2022, I attended a conference on Iran. There were several panels where specialists explored various issues at hand concerning Iran. I found one panel in particular very pertinent to the topic of this section. This panel was entitled, "Beyond the JCPOA: US-Iran Policy" and had speakers across the political aisle including:

- Morgan Ortagus, former spokesperson for the State Department under the Trump administration
- Saeed Ghasseminedjad, a member of the Foundation of Defensive Democracies and an expert on the Iranian economy
- Ray Takeyh: member of the council on foreign relations and author of the last shah

- Brian Katulis, Center for American Progress & Middle East Institute
- Arash Aramesh, Democratic National Security Analyst

Several questions were posed to these panelists, and the answers, despite coming from individuals with opposing views, seemed quite unanimous. The first one was *what could a return to the JCPOA mean in this day and age?*

According to Ortagus, the 2015 Nuclear Deal was a flawed deal, therefore any new deal made can only be worse because the current negotiators are considering very contradictory things such as terrorism sanction relief when the Iranian government has done nothing to deserve that. Although Ortagus has a point about the Islamic regime sponsoring acts of terror within the region, it is very hypocritical of the US to point fingers at terrorism when its leaders and officials engage in such behavior themselves without repercussions. The assassination of the Iranian general, Soleimani, leaders of the Quds forces as well as the assassination of Iran's top physicist who was in charge of the nuclear enrichment program mentioned earlier. It's very convenient that when the US violates international law and orders assassinations on other countries' soil, as it did most recently in Iraq and Iran, it is not considered an act of terrorism, but when Iranian or Iraqis, or people of any other Middle Eastern nationality, fight for the integrity of their country, their culture and religion, for example, it becomes terrorism. In no way is this opposing view an attempt to condone the acts of terror carried out by certain groups within the Middle East, its sole purpose is to put acts of terror into perspective and highlight the Western powers' hypocritical and condescending tone when speaking of terrorism, when in fact they themselves have a record of perpetrating some of the worst human rights violation and acts of terror in history. Carrying on, Ortagus adds that she believes it a fatal mistake on Obama's end to not take the original nuclear deal before Congress in order to make it a political treaty. Due to that decision, the

JCPOA has become a political football, and despite popular belief, it does not have to be a situation where there is either a deal or war. In reality, there are alternative roads to explore and the ideal thing would be to figure out how to make this issue a bipartisan one. In response to Ortagus's point of view, Takeyh added that neither the Iranian nor the American government leaders are willing to return to the previous deal as it was, therefore by definition any new deal can only be inferior to the previous one. As the negotiations proceed, the nuclear part of the agreement seems to have been settled, however, although it seems that the Iranian government will be receiving substantial sanction relief, the extent of the relief has yet to be decided. The Iranian government wants assurance from the American government that the next administration will not be able to change or pull out of any new deal; they are using that specific talking point to extract more concessions, including the omission of the snap-back provisions that were part of the original deal. It all follows a predictable pattern according to Takeyh: whenever there is a stalemate, the Biden administration reminds its counterparts that they will not negotiate forever.

Another important point that Takeyh made is that the JCPOA was the most radical arms control agreement in the history of American arms control diplomacy because it was the only time America conceded enrichment capability and stipulated that enrichment capability will be industrialized to an adversarial nation (profoundly radical revision of American nonproliferation policy as articulated by successive administrations). The problem nowadays is that the Iranian nuclear deal is no longer the priority for either party that it was in 2015.

Aramesh took over and explained that the "Iranian government is homicidal but not suicidal," and that the last forty two years were characterized by a consistent ideological core as a foreign policy established by the Islamic republic made up of two things: expanding sphere of influence and countering American and Israeli interest. However, there is a "prerequisite" to

establish foreign policy goals: the survival of the Islamic Republic, something announced and repeated by Ayatollah Khomeini, the founder of the regime. The Islamic regime has shown both in action and in rhetoric that they will stop at no cost to ensure the survival of the regime. This means that if they have to shut down the month of Ramadan for protection of the regime, then so it will be. The regime's advantage is that they have consistent messaging coming from the leadership, in all regards but especially for foreign policy contrary to the US, whose foreign policy changes constantly with the changes in administrations and parties in office. According to Aramesh, the JCPOA or any treaty regarding Iran should become a law so that it can remain constant despite changes in government. According to Article 3 section 8, a treaty needs to be passed by 60 senators for it to become the law; unfortunately, there were not enough votes to do that. So in the time being, despite being part of the Democratic Party, he agrees with the Trump administration's decisions to put more pressure on the IRGC and the Islamic government, as well as that of taking out the Quds force commander Soleimani.

Katulis continued by stating that the deal is not even as important as it is made out to be. This is because deal or no deal, the regional security dynamics are ineffective and incoherent since there were a number of activities that constantly undermined security in the region. The US policy towards the Middle East is in general inconsistent and the adversaries know it and exploit it. In the case of Iran, Katulis explains, the US foreign policy towards the country is one of passive appeasement of a regime that actually does things everyday to undermine the stability of the region and to undermine its own people and the basic decency and support of human rights. Therefore, regional security and support for the Iranian people are two main problems and the solution deal or no deal should be to establish a more coherent and consistent regional security approach and address the issue of human rights violations in the region. It is an unspoken reality

that the progressive left turns a blind eye to some of the worst human rights abuses across the board in the middle east and especially in Iran. Questions about the JCPOA have become disconnected with regional security and also the lived experience of the Iranian people. When the green revolution happened in Iran, despite all the talk from the left, nothing was actually done to help the Iranian people. Again during the 2019 protest, some American government officials on the right tried to show support (ex: Secretary Pompeo wrote an op ed). But again nothing concrete was really done to help the Iranian people. The main point Katulis was trying to convey is that until the regional security conditions in the Middle East are improved, with a steadier and long term approach, and the focus is put on the people of Iran and reaching out to them with support against the Islamic regime, then any deal is technically futile.

As for Ghasseminejad, he explains that the regime's goal has consistently been to weaken and destroy the US. Therefore the US should destroy the regime and not allow them to continue getting stronger. He believes that the JCPOA was flawed because it still allowed the Islamic regime the ability to enrich its uranium. According to him, anything other than zero enrichment means the US and its allies in the deal are hostage to the regime and are ultimately prohibited to say anything about terrorism, human rights, regional approach. In addition the sunset clause in the original deal contributes to the flawed nature of the deal since it allows for the possibility of the Islamic regime to do as it likes in the future.

The second question was in response to the Biden administration's insistence that diplomacy works and is the best approach contrary to the maximum pressure imposed by the Trump administration "failure." Therefore, *What are the alternatives to the JCPOA?* Katulis suggested that the US should help its allies in the region defend themselves and be more strategic with its offensive strikes. He called for a stronger defense system within the region,

something he believes requires a holistic and bipartisan sense of interest about the Middle East, and cannot be achieved by sending mixed signals and having a minimum approach. This defense system would work with partners in the region despite their flaws because engagement with partners makes them better and gives them more confidence. He also called for an increase in creativity when it comes to ways of engaging and supporting the Iranian people in times of human security crisis, notably during the pandemic, and water shortages. The problem is that the US has many tools to impose costs on regimes but it doesn't have tools to support people who want a better way of life. There is a very sophisticated full spectrum approach that the US could take. If the IR continues to move forward with its nuclear program and ballistic missiles, there is going to be a lot of uneasiness in the region. That is something the US should be trying to prevent or at least be ready for by improving its own resources and capabilities.

Ortagus pointed out to the public that the Biden administration said it would lead with human rights, but it is failing to fulfill the tangible steps to support the Iranian people who are currently suffering. She highlights the hypocrisy on the part of the Biden administration for silencing the communication effort put in place by the Trump administration to the Iranian people in favor of discussions for the flawed deal. Katulis continues by explaining that the current debate about Iran has become so predictable that AI can replace the views with algorithms. Therefore in some ways it really doesn't matter where the Iran deal goes because the divisions are exploited by regimes like the Islamic Republic in Iran. One frightening reality is that Russia and China were not the only countries interfering with US political debates and elections, Iran also participates in such acts. One example is that the Iranian government documented evidence of trying to shape the debates that Americans have within the US about policy options towards Iran. What makes it more confusing according to Katulis is trying to take

and disentangle legitimate policy differences from already complicated politics, and adding a layer of foreign interference to it. It leads to a confusing mess and a lack of bipartisan consensus on foreign policy towards the Middle East that is easily exploitable by autocratic regimes like Iran and others in the Middle East.

Takey then brings up how there may be no possibility of a deal, that maybe diplomacy in this regard has perhaps exhausted itself and that the era of arms control agreement has closed and we are just unaware of it. According to him, it is common belief that any new nuclear deal with Iran will not pose a threat to the Islamic Regime's nuclear weapon acquisition. Therefore he suggests that people who have a say stop thinking about diplomacy as regulating or tempering Iran's nuclear ambitions, but draw certain explicit red lines such as "there will be no installment of advance centrifuges" or "there will be no surpassing this level of enrichment," and pledge to enforce them with force if transgressed. The problem he says is that no one would really be prepared to fulfill such a promise.

On another note, in regards to the internal state of Iran, Takey brings up how the Islamic regime has established instability in the country and has no constituency to rely on. Since the arms control agreement is an unreliable and unsturdy barrier to Iranian nuclear proliferation two relevant questions arise according to Takey "what can the US do to impact this internal debate" and "what could it do to exacerbate the internal vulnerability of the regime and energize the opposition against the Islamic regime's tenuous hold on power? Takey adds that in 1979, President Carter signed a presidential directive ordering the CIA to change Iranian regime (regime change policy) and Trump reportedly signed a similar directive, so there is hope that regime change may be in the works.

The last question was: *Whether or not the panelists believe that the focus should be the Nuclear issue.* Ghasseminejad led the answer by bringing up the fact that the maximum pressure campaign is more important than the nuclear issue and that the former needs to be resurrected to show the Islamic regime in Iran that the US will stick to a policy of deterrence and use force/ military interference if need be. In addition, the US must do a better job working with its allies among the Iranian people and providing them with support they need. Ortagus continues by saying that “there has to be teeth behind the diplomacy,” and that the assassination of General Soleimani was instrumental in increasing belief and credibility in US’s ability and will to stand up to corrupt regime. According to Ortagus, the Biden administration will get a very flawed deal because they are not prepared to walk away from the negotiating table and despite a myriad of threats, they are not prepared to use any actual force. Katulis continues by stating that “a fundamental mistake in this round of negotiations that was not learned from last time, is the attempt to ignore regional security issues and only focus on the nuclear issue.” Negotiating with the Iranian leaders at a table will not produce effective results according to him. What will produce the desired results is having a more coherent regional security approach and following through on things. A good example of this is Obama’s idea in 2015 to work with partners of the GCC and Israel to strengthen their defenses, there is also the 10 year accord with Israel on their security which the Trump administration implemented and the Biden administration continues to implement (bipartisan consistent consensus approach).

PART III: History behind the disagreement surrounding JCPOA

The 1953 Coup

In August of 1953, in the midst of the Cold War in which the United States was adamantly attempting to contain the spread of Communism and instead promote Democracy, a CIA-led Coup, authorized by the Eisenhower Administration overthrew the democratic government of Iran, ironically setting the country up for years of repressive and undemocratic rule. Although CIA covert operations became a key characteristic of the Eisenhower Administration foreign policy, the administration's involvement in issues such as that of the 1953 Iranian Coup set a negative precedent for the agency, "fanned the flames of anti-Western sentiment," and became the element that set in motion events that led to US-Iran tensions visible to this day(Allen-Ebrahimian).

As with many of the conflicts regarding the Middle East, this one began around the topic of oil also referred to as "black gold" (Powers). Oil was discovered in Iran in the beginning of the 20th century. Britain had no national oil sources, therefore British authorities made a deal with Iranian leaders for the exploitation of Iranian oil. This collaboration became known as the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (today's BP). The financial agreement was overshadowed by creative accounting from the British in which only 16% of revenue would go to Iran, a sum calculated by the British and concealed from the Iranians, who were prevented from looking at the books. In addition, the 16% mentioned above was calculated after taxes, but since the oil company was owned by the British government, the deducted taxes was actually more money going into the British government. This financial agreement was a farce, disproportionately dividing the revenue from, what was originally, an Iranian asset, in a way that mainly benefited the British, and robbed the Iranians of benefiting from their own natural resource, hence the

shrewd display of “creative accounting.” The injustice, disrespect, and patronization, indirectly directed towards Iranian leaders through the financial agreement, led to growing sentiments of resentment among Iranians, against the British (Powers).

Around the same time, the elected parliament selected [Dr. Mohammad Mossadegh, an intelligent and charismatic politician,] as prime minister” (Allen-Ebrahimian). Mossadegh was a natural leader and showed time and again that he had the Iranian peoples’ best interests at heart, characteristics that made the Iranian people very fond of him. Throughout his time as prime minister, he “openly championed democratic values and hoped to establish a democracy in Iran”(Allen-Ebrahimian). Among other things, Mossadegh used his position to “reduce the power of the shah” in order to introduce European political tradition within the country and enforce democracy (Allen-Ebrahimian). In addition, recognizing the injustice of the AIOC and its hindering power on Iran’s national sovereignty, in 1951, Mossadegh defied the British government and nationalized Iran’s oil industry. This action allowed Iran to gain full control over oil production whereas it was divided previously. Controlling oil production, allows a country to increase or lower levels of production and to determine the price for their oil. Therefore, Mossadegh ensured that Iran would be able to make the decisions about: how much oil to produce, who to sell it to, and how to have a greater influence in the market (Kinzer, Ayella).

The British government was obviously outraged and greatly opposed to this endeavor upon learning of Mossadegh’s plans. The primary reason for their reaction, apart from their unwillingness to lose a valuable source of revenue, was that the British were still very much stuck in the colonial mentality of previous centuries, and could not bring themselves to accept that a “poor” country would dare to pressure or dictate terms to them (Kinzer). Following this logic, despite Mossadegh’s attempts at potential negotiation and compromise, Churchill was

adamantly opposed to conceding. Instead he set out on a series of actions to pressure Mossadegh to denationalize the Iranian oil industry. The first solution he thought of was the use of force by sending an army to invade Iran. He was very soon dissuaded from that idea by Truman, who reminded Churchill of the dire consequences of the recent Second World War and the Western powers' duty to maintain the peace. The second solution was the imposition of economic pressures on Iran. First Churchill ordered the closing down of the Iranian oil industry machinery, hoping that their lack of knowledge would lead to economic distress from the lack of a revenue, and convince Mossadegh to denationalize the oil; however they were proven wrong very quickly. The second economic pressure came in the form of a naval blockade. In the hopes that the pressure from the halted source of revenue, caused by the oil embargo placed on Iran, would convince Mossadegh to reconsider his decision; however that plan was equally a failure.

The British government also attempted to appeal to international bodies by submitting a resolution to both the UN security council and International Court of Justice in the Hague about the injustice of the situation. What is important to understand is that the British considered the Iranian oil to be one of their possessions, and therefore Mossadegh's action of nationalizing the oil industry and breaking the agreement, felt as though someone had stolen something of theirs. This argument did not hold in either trial and in both cases, the judges declared that Iran was entitled to its decisions about its own natural resources. The last action the British government tried to carry out was bribery. They hoped that they could get enough members of the Iranian parliament to vote Mossadegh out of his position by bribing them. However, this plan also failed because Mossadegh, having found out about the attempts, and harboring a strong dislike for the British, closed the English embassy in Tehran, blocking the British out of Iran (Ayella).

After exhausting all his options, Churchill, who was not willing to give up just yet,

decided to ask the United States for its assistance in overthrowing the Iranian prime minister. When Churchill first appealed to the U.S. for help, President Truman, who was the president at that time, refused Churchill's request for several reasons. The very first reason was that Truman liked and respected Mossadegh as an individual and a leader. In addition, he sympathized with the Iranian effort to emancipate itself from Britain, like the U.S. had once done. Finally, and maybe most importantly, Truman was, on principle, profoundly opposed to the idea of using the newly founded CIA for covert operations with the purpose of meddling in foreign nations' politics or especially, of overthrowing a government.

Although Truman refused to help Churchill, "eager to find a peaceful solution to the crisis," he enlisted Averell Harriman to act as an intermediary for compromise talks between Iran and Britain(de Moraes Ruehsen). "Much to the Truman administration's dismay, Mossadegh turned down each successive new compromise solution presented to him," most probably because he hoped "that a new American administration might be more sympathetic to the Iranian position"(de Moraes Ruehsen).

In 1953, however, Dwight D. Eisenhower was elected president of the United States. Eisenhower became president during the Cold War and the McCarthy Era, a period mainly characterized by a prevalent sentiment of excessive fear of Communism, in which anything could be justified if Communism was a potential threat (Falk). The communist danger ultimately became the principal discourse of the West, placing tremendous pressure on the Eisenhower Administration to be stricter in regards to Communism. All the Eisenhower Administration's decisions, regarding foreign policy, were made to prevent, what would soon be coined, the Domino Effect, or the continuous fall of countries to Communism such as China and other countries in Southeast Asia (Falk).

When Churchill asked President Eisenhower for help in overthrowing Mossadegh, there were several elements that persuaded Eisenhower to accept helping the British in their endeavor. The first, was that the individuals who controlled both overt and covert sides of American foreign policy, respectively siblings, John Foster Dulles (Secretary of State) and Allen Dulles (Director of the CIA), had been very critical of the Truman administration's "lax" containment policy, and now leaned towards the stricter right in that respect, suggesting "that the situation was so dangerous and unpredictable that it might be necessary to act promptly ... with considerable measure of discretion ..." (de Moraes Ruehsen). Another element that made the Eisenhower administration more prone to coming to Churchill's aid was that at that time, Iran did have a communist party called the *Tudeh Party*. Although many people, including "religious leaders in [Iran], feared [the Tudeh Party's] growing power," and "believed Mossadegh to be too weak to save the country from such a socialist threat," in reality, the Tudeh Party was too small to pose any real threat to democracy and to Mossadegh's democratic rule (Allen-Ebrahimian). Therefore, the truth was grossly misrepresented to President Eisenhower in an attempt to persuade him to take action, making him more inclined to see Dr. Mossadegh, as a potential ally of the USSR (Allen-Ebrahimian). Mossadegh's advanced age, health problems, and potential death, leaving Iran vulnerable to a Communist takeover by the USSR, its northern neighbor, made up another one of the fears that the Dulles brothers conveyed to a skeptical Eisenhower (Kinzer). Finally, having been a military man, Eisenhower was less sensitive to the Iranian cause and more concerned about containing Communism and avoiding war. In addition his military experience left him with an aversion to war, especially of nuclear war, due to its costly and destructive nature, and instead increased his inclination towards solving problems with the use of covert operations, thus using the CIA (Hitchcock).

Ultimately, the Eisenhower administration was more inclined to see Dr. Mossadegh as a potential ally of the USSR. Therefore when Churchill requested American assistance in the British vendetta, after some deliberation, Eisenhower agreed to enlist the CIA in helping the British MI6 overthrow Prime Minister Mossadegh. After the decision was made, Allen Dulles selected Kermit Roosevelt, Theodore Roosevelt's young, well-educated, and dynamic grandson to carry out the coup. This decision was based on the fact that Kermit Roosevelt had been named Chief of the Middle East section of the CIA, and thus being more familiar with the area's culture, would better know how to go about organizing the covert operation that became known as "Operation Ajax" (Kinzer).

"How does one overthrow a government," that is precisely the question Kermit Roosevelt faced upon his arrival in Tehran in August of 1953 to begin setting the coup in motion (Kinzer). This was the first CIA led covert operation to overthrow a government, therefore there was no guide or protocol to be followed. The challenge for Roosevelt was that he had to essentially improvise and figure out the steps as he went along. However, he was a very clever individual and carried out several actions that turned out to be very effective. His first move was to enlist, through bribery, various members of Tehran's citizens, including tribal leaders, newspaper editors, military officers, religious leaders, and members of parliament, to villainize Mossadegh and throw Tehran in a state of chaos with uncontrollable violence and riots in the streets (Abdelfatah and Arablouei). All this commotion was aimed at undermining Mossadegh's power and competence in governing the country (Gasiorowski). In addition, Kermit Roosevelt coerced the then Shah, to abdicate his throne to his son, raising excitement, glamor and hope within Iran, with the arrival of the Reza Shah (relatively young at the time) and his young and beautiful wife. Soon after his coronation, Kermit Roosevelt persuaded the Shah to sign two official orders: the

first one regarded the dismissal of Dr. Mossadegh, as Prime Minister and the second regarded the appointment of Abdollah Hedayat as his (Mossadegh's) successor (Abedelfatah and Arablouei). The Shah's soldiers were supposed to present Mossadegh with these orders at his home, where he was expected to deny the claims and oppose the official orders and thus be accused of treason and most probably put away. When the Shah's soldiers arrived to carry out Kermit Roosevelt's plan, Mossadegh, who had found out about "the coup attempt, swiftly thwarted it through a dozen of arrests." In addition, "General Zahedi, one of the top conspirators went into hiding, [while] the shah fled the country" (Allen-Ebrahimian).

The clever part of this coup was that Kermit Roosevelt arranged for the Shah and General Zahedin to be the faces of the attempted coup, keeping American involvement and his own role entirely unknown, like a puppet-master controlling his puppets' actions (Gasirowski). The failure of the coup and the chaos it generated within Tehran led the CIA headquarters to send an important cable to Kermit Roosevelt on August 18th 1953 : "Operation has been tried and failed and we should not participate in any operation against Mossadegh which could be traced back to US, operations against Mossadegh should be discontinued"(Allen-Ebrahimian). "He purportedly and famously ignored the cease and desist cable claiming "we're not done here"" (Byrne). Kermit Roosevelt's decision to remain in Tehran and carry on the coup attempt was very consequential and marked the turning point in this historical event.

In the four days following the failed coup attempt, Kermit Roosevelt who still had many sources in Tehran, continued to put the city in even more chaos, by paying crowds to declare ludicrous lies such as: "Mossadegh is a communist" or "Mossadegh is an English spy," basically engaging any action that could further create confusion and doubt among the people regarding their leader, further undermining his authority. Roosevelt then ordered the US ambassador to Iran

of the time, Henderson, to speak to Mossadegh about the situation and give him an ultimatum: Either Mossadegh would be able to reestablish order in the city or the US would cease to recognize Mossadegh as the country's prime minister. When meeting Mossadegh, Henderson added that American lives were at risk due to the chaotic state of the city, adding a layer of importance to the request. Mossadegh who saw Americans as his allies, believed Henderson and ordered several actions that ultimately led to his downfall (Abrahamian). These included ordering his supporters off the streets and establishing martial law, ironically opening the way for the key coup plotters, such as General Zahedi and other military men in on the plot, to get access to weapons including tanks. On August 19th, 1953, the soldiers led by the general arrived in Tehran with tanks to arrest Mossadegh. They besieged and destroyed the residence and later that night, Mossadegh and the rest of his family fled Tehran, leaving the leadership of Iran to General Zahedi (Abrahamian).

This coup had many important consequences, most of which ultimately only benefited the United States and Britain. The very first event after the Coup was General Zahedi's deliverance of the Coup de Grace, declaring the overthrow of Mossadegh and the fact that he himself would take Mossadegh place. He was paid five million dollars by the CIA for his role in the Coup. Then, the Shah was brought back to Iran and with the help of the CIA, purged all officers who were considered loyal to the democratic government, formed an army that was loyal to himself (Shah), and created SAVAK, a secret police that has been said to have been worse than the Gestapo during WWII. In addition, the Oil industry, which was the cause of the entire issue, was ultimately denationalized to the detriment of Iranians: 40% of the shares went to American companies and the rest of the profit was shared 50/50 between Britain and Iran but Britain still retained overall control. Finally, the 1953 Coup set the tone for foreign policy under the

Eisenhower Presidency. The success of this operation showed the Dulles brothers, in particular, that the CIA introduced a new way of shaping world events (Ayella).

The consequences of the Iran Coup as well as the Eisenhower Administration's use of the agency for various covert operations including in Guatemala put into question the true purpose of the Central Intelligence Agency. Founded in 1947 as a direct response to the attack on Pearl Harbor, the CIA's original purpose was to prevent war and undetected attacks to the U.S. President Truman, as conveyed earlier, believed that the CIA's role should be limited to intelligence, however the precedent established by the Eisenhower administration's more frequent use of the CIA for covert operation suggests a more active role for the agency. The debate still remains: was the CIA's role, prevention of war and undetected attacks to the US solely through the acquisition of intelligence (stationary role) or through the undertaking of covert operations (active role) (Kinzer, Ayella).

Although the British were originally behind the Iranian, the "Americans quickly replaced the British as the dominant foreign power in Iran"(Powers). The American involvement in the Coup was a deep betrayal to Iranians who looked to the US and as an ally against imperialist Britain. America is a democratic country promoting democracy in the world, yet in 1953 it contributed to the overthrowing of a democratically elected government and the placement of an illegitimate ruler: the Shah. That action left Iran vulnerable to the establishment of the repressive theocratic government visible today. The Shah's reign led to the Iranian Revolution and the Hostage Crisis. It was replaced by 40 years of oppressive rule by mullahs who consider the US the prime enemy.

Unfortunately, neither the 1953 coup nor the CIA involvement is common knowledge in the West, especially in the U.S. Ironically, it is the resentment resulting from that event that

caused the succession of events leading up to the US-Iran tensions visible today. My intention, pointing this out, is not to blame any particular side. What I am trying to convey is that history is two-sided, therefore being aware of, and understanding both sides of a historical event is important. It not only allows for a more holistic image of current events, but also motivates a calling into question of whom one considers *the villain*. As it has been made evident, the identification of a villain changes depending on cultural ignorance, clouding one's perception: the U.S. considers Iran to be part of an "Axis of Evil," and Iran considers the U.S. to be "The Great Satan." Learning about, and accepting the two sidedness behind current events, allows for a more well-rounded vision of the world and more empathetic negotiations, compromise, and ultimately a better chance at peace in the world.

PART IV: Current endeavors to renegotiate the JCPOA

When President Biden took office on January 20th 2021, he began his presidency “facing a litany of daunting foreign policy issues, from another massive cyber hack by Russian intelligence to alienated allies in Europe and beyond to a regime in Pyongyang that continues to proliferate weapons of mass destruction unchecked. Nevertheless, the JCPOA remains arguably the “stickiest and most immediate crisis facing the Biden administration” with respect to Iran. Despite national security advisor, Jake Sullivan’s repeated assurance and pledges of the United States’ plan to rejoin the deal if Iran “returned to compliance on its nuclear constraints and agreed to follow-on negotiations on other issues,” as one can expect, a return to the Iran Nuclear Deal will not be an easy task (O’Toole 1).

One element that contributes to making the return to the deal a quick reality is the existence of a “easy nostalgia to the notion of simply rewinding the clock to 2016,” when the deal was allowed to come into full effect after Iran completed its commitments to roll back its nuclear program and the US and Europe lifted “a significant portion of the multilateral sanctions targeting Iran” (O’Toole 1). Unfortunately, the myriad of new sanctions imposed by the Trump Administration since 2018, including “hundreds of new specific targets and new sectors, both primary and secondary,” which have rendered Iran in a present state of “deepening economic malaise,” which the corrupt leadership has not surprisingly, “compounded matters with an inept response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Sanctions

The Biden administration’s reentry to the JCPOA is contingent upon addressing “four distinct buckets of sanctions.” First, there are the sanctions that were imposed “since the May 2018 withdrawal that violate commitments under the deal. Second there are the sanctions

imposed from January 2016 until May 2018 that are consistent with the US commitments under the deal. Third, there are the sanctions imposed from May 2018 onward that are consistent with US commitments under the deal. Finally there are the non-nuclear sanctions under Trump that would scuttle the effective implementation of the deal (O'Toole 4).

As one can imagine, the bucket of sanctions contrary to JCPOA commitments “is the easiest for the Biden administration to address” since any sanction that directly contradicts US commitments under the JCPOA “would require lifting for the US to come back into compliance with the deal.” The first group of these sanctions were the same sanctions that were lifted in 2016 by the Obama administration in order to bring the US into compliance. In addition they “cover secondary sanctions on Iran’s oil sales, petrochemical development, hard currency acquisition,” and other measures. Finally they include *narrow* relief of US primary sanctions to allow for foreign subsidiaries of US companies to conduct some transactions with Iran. For example, “the export of airplanes and spare parts to Iran and the importation to the United States of Iranian carpets and foodstuffs.” The Trump administration also imposed secondary sanctions on sectors of Iran’s economy that had not been subject to such measures before. Secondary sanctions on the “construction, manufacturing, mining, and textiles sectors” in Iran, as well as “the specific sanctions imposed on companies and individuals under those sanctions authorities, would need to be lifted in order for the United States to return to compliance with its JCPOA commitments (O’Toole 4).

The bucket of sanctions imposed by the Trump administration prior to the withdrawal are the next group that would be interesting to expand upon. In 2017, the Trump administration imposed several rounds of sanctions on Iran that were compliant with the US commitments under the JCPOA. These sanctions targeted “ballistic missile procurement networks, Islamic

Revolutionary Guard Corps- Qods Force (IRGC-QF) terror networks, human rights abusers in Iran's prison system, Iranian malicious cyber actors, etc.” Although the Iranian leaders will request the removal of these specific sanctions, and a “total reset to the day the JCPOA became effective, it is very unlikely that these sanctions “would be lifted to return the United States to compliance under the Biden administration (O’Toole 4)

Finally it is important to discuss the sanctions imposed after withdrawal that are consistent with JCPOA commitments. As mentioned earlier, the Iranian leaders would like to get a complete reset of US sanctions to the original signing of the deal in January of 2016. The more this desire becomes unattainable, the more likely they are to “fall back on a stance that any sanctions taken since Trump’s withdrawal from the JCPOA in May 2018 are illegitimate and contrary to the *spirit of the deal*.” According to O’Toole, this is a phrase Islamic Regime in Iran has consistently used to “denigrate actions it does not like but which technically do not violate commitments under the deal” (O’Toole 5). Although many of the Trump administration’s sanctions since May 2018, against areas covered by the JCPOA’s sanction relief such as Iranian oil sales and mining companies could be easily lifted by the Biden administration, there are many sanctions put in place against “legitimate Iranian targets” by the Trump administration that will not be as easily lifted. The Biden administration, as to be expected, will face strong opposition domestically when it comes to lifting sanctions against targets such as “human rights abusers, Iranians involved in attempted election interference in the United States, or the Iranian intelligence officers involved in the abduction and detention of former US Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) agent Robert Levinson”(O’Toole 5). The set of sanctions imposed toward the end of the Trump administration, which were intended to form a “sanction wall” to tie Biden’s hands, will be easier for the Biden team to dismantle since there is a clearly articulated political

motivation by both the Biden administration and Iran. A negotiated list of removable sanctions is necessary to forge a legitimate path forward for the Biden administration and the Iranian government (O’Toole 6) Unfortunately, such an advancement takes time and willingness on the part of the Iranian government. There was already much skepticism and worry around the Iranian presidential election being a major complicating factor. Since Rouhani, a reformist, lost to Raisi, a hardliner, the chances of compromises at the negotiating tables decreased exponentially.

We have not yet discussed the Trump sanctions that “may be supported by evidence” and abide by the rules of the JCPOA yet would “poison any practical implementation of the deal altogether”(O’Toole 6). There are three major examples from the US side of the negotiation: The counterterrorism sanctions imposed under Executive Order (EO) 13224 on:

- The Central Bank of Iran (CBI)
- The National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC)
- The National Iranian Tanker Company (NITC)

The CBI is responsible for allocating the funds to Hezbollah and Hamas (US-sanctioned and globally-recognized terror groups). The NIOC and NITC provide and ship oil for sale by the IRGC-QF. On a practical level however, secondary sanctions apply to any EO 13224-designated Iranian entity, even under the JCPOA. The CBI controls the majority of Iranian foreign exchange reserves and holds revenues from Iran’s oil sales. In addition, NIOC and NITC are key entities in Iran’s oil industry. Therefore these sanctions would essentially invalidate the entire effect of the JCPOA sanctions lifting. The Biden administration could use the Treasury Department’s licensing authority to invalidate the effects of the EO 13224 designation, just as the Trump administration did to allow for humanitarian transactions via the CBI after great public outcry during the COVID-19 crisis. Unfortunately, the current Iranian government is very unlikely to be

satisfied with this approach and instead would surely “demand formal removal of any counterterrorism sanctions on these entities, a request that would obviously be extremely unpopular in US domestic circles” (O’Toole 6).

The Iranian government will approach any discussion with the Biden team with an extensive list of sanctions it considers “poison pills,” “the two other notable ones being: the designation of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) as a foreign terrorist organization (FTO) by the State Department and under EO 13224 (a tougher issue to deal with since it is mandated by law pursuant to the Countering America’s Adversaries Through Sanctions Act of 2017) and the designations related to the Iranian Supreme Leader’s Office (SLO)”(O’Toole 6). In addition the Trump team imposed sanctions specifically against senior Iranian officials such as foreign minister Javad Zarif for support to the SLO, Atomic Energy Organization of Iran head ALi Akbar SALEhi for nuclear activities, and Oil Minister Bijan Zanganeh under EO 1322 for support to the IRGC-QF. These sanctions enumerated above, although not really impairing the Biden team’s ability to negotiate with these individuals, will most likely be “high on Iran’s list for revocation as part of returning to compliance with the JCPOA’s nuclear constraints. And although these types of personal sanctions are more likely to be removed by the Biden Administration, complications can arise based on “the sanctions authority used” as well as “the personalities of the individuals at play” (O’Toole 7).

The sanctions targeting the SLO bring about another set of complications. They are derived from an EO issues by President Trump after the JCPOA withdrawal, and while they do not directly counter the US commitments under the deal, the Iranian government will “most certainly view them as violating the spirit of the JCPOA, given their breadth; including Bonyad Mostazafan, a multibillion-dollar business conglomerate subordinate to the supreme leader”

(O'Toole 7). It will have to be up to the Biden administration to make a decision on whether or not to “lift sanctions targeting the corrupt financial empire of Iran’s supreme leader that has long standing links to the IRGC and other sanctioned Iranian entities”(O'Toole 7). If the Iranian government objects to all EOs issued after Trump’s withdrawal from the JCPOA, the Biden team will have to decide whether or not to “rescind the EO imposing secondary sanctions on conventional arms transactions with Iran that was issued after the UN conventional arms embargo on Iran expired in October 2020.” Technically the EO does very little, since secondary sanctions apply to any Iranian entity that engages in “conventional arms trade" and would apply under the sanctions constraints in the JCPOA. Lifting the secondary sanctions on Iran’s conventional arms, especially during a time of heightened Iranian military destabilization in Syria and Yemen, may be too toxic politically for the Biden administration to consider (O'Toole 7).

How imminent is a return to the JCPOA

According to Brian O'Toole, given the challenges and complexities, the timing and conditions of accomplishing such a considerable feat are not quite as clear as many would hope. “It may be that the US and Iran need to find some steps short of a full JCPOA return that defuse tension and create the conditions for more fulsome negotiations over what a return means. Both sides need to come to some understanding of a path forward on the negotiations over the litany of other concerns with Iranian malfeasance.” “Both Biden’s Washington and Khamenei’s Tehran face a complicated task” (O'Toole 8).

As discussed at lengths above, the sanctions play a significant role in preventing the negotiations from coming to a close. However in the span of a year, there were three overlying elements that also played a significant role in delaying the flow of the negotiations. The first was

President Biden's arrival into office in January 2021. "Most experts agreed the impetus to restart negotiations was on his new administration," since the US was the first to withdraw from the original deal. The Biden administration's first good-will gesture was appointing Rob Malley, "a respected Middle East diplomat and lead negotiator on the 2015 accord" to lead the negotiations on the American side. It is believed that to show true good will, the Biden administration should have returned to the deal through an executive order during Biden's first days in office, something that the new administration was reluctant to do, "afraid to take any foreign policy risks that could undermine its domestic agenda." Unfortunately, the more the Biden administration took to take action, leaving the maximum pressure sanctions in place, the more they ended up convincing the Iranian leadership that the Biden team's plan was to use the sanctions to continue putting pressure on the Islamic regime, as had been done by his predecessor. Ali Vaez, an analyst with the International Crisis Group, explained that a senior Iranian official even made the remark comparing the Trump and Biden administrations, where he said that if the Islamic regime wanted to negotiate with the implementers of maximum pressure, they would have talked to the Trump administration. After this hurdle, there was one on the Iranian end: the presidential elections in June 2021. One of the principal reasons why it would not have been politically feasible for the US to promptly return to the deal was their concern for the results of the upcoming Iranian elections, which was justified since "ultimately a hardline Iranian government came to power." After the elections, the Iranian team "took its own time coming back to the negotiating table." Some speculate that it was due to their will "to strengthen their negotiating position with a more developed nuclear program." The Iranian team didn't return to Vienna for five months after the elections. By the time both the US and Iran had overcome their apprehension of returning to the negotiation table and the talks were advancing,

the third issue happened: the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. Not only did this event shift the attention onto Russia and Ukraine, but it also threw the nuclear talks with Iran into doubt due to the business Russia does with Iran and the sanctions on the trade Putin accepted in order to not further irritate the West. This possible impediment “shows the delicateness of this diplomacy,” and to what extent “this process is vulnerable to external developments.”

The question that remains now is, what would the new negotiated deal do in a practical sense? The first thing to keep in mind is that the deal, with all its “checks, enforcement mechanisms, and implementation” will likely resemble the one negotiated by the Obama administration in 2015, excluding the exact parameters that may differ due to Iran’s more advanced capacities (having increased their uranium purity level to around 60 percent since the US left the deal). At the time of the original negotiations, it would have taken Iran “a full year ... to develop weapons-grade uranium,” but now it can take “between three to six weeks.” According to the International Atomic Energy Agency, turning enriched uranium into a weapon could take up to another two years. The new deal would “establish new limits” on the amount of uranium Iran will be allowed to enrich and how many centrifuges the country could have. In addition, the leaders would have to agree to send Russia most of the country’s enriched uranium in exchange for sanctions relief. Some other differences will include “some sanctions imposed by Trump that won’t be lifted, or technical changes given that the Iranian program has grown to have more advanced nuclear centrifuges.” Another difference will be the time spent for negotiations: although in 2015 Iran took the first step towards setting the JCPOA in motion by “rolling back its nuclear program first” and accepting the US removal of sanctions only after international inspectors verified the country’s leaders’ compliance, this time around, “the US and

Iran will be acting simultaneously to restore the agreement;” something that can be taken as penance for Trump’s decision in 2018.

Once the outstanding issues are addressed, the negotiations are over and a deal is once again made, there will still be one more hurdle for Biden. This consists of convincing the Senate to adopt the deal as an American law. The technical procedure would involve getting the new deal through the 2015 Iran Nuclear Agreement Review Act (INARA), a congressional review process created in response to the previous deal. Unfortunately, INARA is a negative mechanism, both houses would have to get a veto-proof majority to disapprove of it. The Senate didn’t formally disapprove of the deal in 2015. One of the major impediments of the deal is that the chair of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Bob Menendez, is still skeptical of the deal's significance and utility. Technically, the Biden administration doesn’t need to get congressional approval for a new agreement that so closely resembles the previous JCPOA. The administration is willing to go this extra mile in order to prove their good-will to the Iranian leaders and make it so that the deal could no longer be amended or abandoned so easily. A discussion on the Senate floor “of the merits of the nuclear deal might also build a broader case of the cruciality of diplomacy,” and lead to a potential win for Biden in advance of the midterms, especially if energy prices go down as a result. The biggest ongoing question however is “whether or not the Iranian leaders would trust Americans to fulfill their side of the agreement.” Trump’s withdrawal from the deal badly damaged American credibility and standing in the world. Because the reality is that despite all the incentives that the Islamic regime has to rejoin the deal, as long as the deal is not enacted in the American constitution, the risk of another US president’s withdrawal is possible.

On the Iranian side, foreign minister Hossein Amirabdollahian has stated that Iranian leaders are willing to finalize an agreement, and that the final agreement is only contingent upon the Western powers' consideration of the "red lines," the Iranian leadership brought up which can be divided into two categories: sanctions and nuclear issues (Motamedi). In the sanction category, the Iranian officials ask for three things including: the lifting of the sanction labeling the IRGC a foreign terrorist group, a mechanism to verify the lifting of sanctions, and a guarantee that the US will not abandon the deal once again (Motamedi). In the nuclear related issues, the Iranian leadership demands that the IAEA probe into four nuclear sites be discontinued. This is a difficult one for the Western countries and the IAEA to concede since undisclosed radioactive particles have recently been found in those nuclear sites. The Iranian argument is manifold: they argue that first of all the probe is a political tactic conducted by the West and Israel, those particles date from then years prior and that the possibility of any military dimensions of its nuclear program was resolved as part of the original JCPOA (Motamedi).

After his most recent visit to Tehran, Rafael Grossi, the IAEA's director general stated that the IAEA will never abandon its nuclear investigation into nuclear usage in the country and will continue to require ongoing clarification for any and all activity. It is important to note that the last IAEA report said that Iran currently possesses 33.2 Kilograms of 60% enriched uranium, an blatant increase from the 17.7 Kilograms in November 2021 despite the original JCPOA limiting Iran's enrichment level to 3.67% and its stockpile to 207.8 Kilograms until 2031 (Motamedi). As one can tell, the Iranian leaders gradually abandoned those guidelines after the US withdrawal from the original JCPOA. This is alarming since unless a deal is set, they could continue enriching and reach weapons grade levels (Motamedi).

Currently, the negotiations are being conducted by Iran's chief negotiator, Ali Bogheri Kani, and deputy foreign minister for economic diplomacy, Mehdi Safari. The UK's chief negotiator Stephanie al-Qaq seems optimistic about the advancement of the negotiations: "we must now walk the last few meters," she tweeted. However, based on the demands on the Iranian side, mentioned above, one is compelled to wonder whether or not she is speaking too quickly and slightly naively.

The Consequences of the New Iran Deal:

A year ago, the Biden administration's intentions regarding the urgent revival of the Iran Nuclear deal was clear: Keeping Iran from developing its nuclear capacity. Today, the world is much different than it was a year ago: Russia and China have an important role in the JCPOA revival negotiations yet their intentions are far from pure and in the midst of what is probably the worst "geopolitical crisis of the 21st century," some key nations such as Saudi Arabia and the UAE refuse to answer President Biden's phone calls. Considering the state of things, perhaps the Biden administration would be wise to think through the broader implications of a new deal carefully before re-entering the deal. However as it currently stands "the deal is said to be mostly finalized," the only main issue remaining being the highly contentious debate over the IRGC being taken off the list of sanctioned foreign terrorist organizations.

It is natural to assume that the Russian invasion of Ukraine would affect negotiations at least a little if not drastically. So it is somewhat curious that Secretary of State Blinken continues to confirm that it doesn't because according to him the two aren't linked. The reality is that they are linked "in ways large and small, tactical and strategic." The US is not directly negotiating with the Iranian negotiators who wouldn't allow their American counterparts in the room. Instead, the Americans are relying on their intermediaries: Russia and China (Note: how reliable

they are is unclear and dubious). Whether there is a deal or not won't affect either Russia or China who have both ensured a way to gain from their political relationship:

- Russia will be able to build nuclear power plants in Iran despite sanctions placed on the contrary over the war on Ukraine
- China will be able to conduct a lucrative business with Iran without having to worry about the repercussions of US sanctions thanks to the 25 year 400 billion strategic partnership deal they signed with Iran in 2021

With the recent “no-limits” friendship pact between Putin and Xi Jinping, the renewed Iran deal “would be another step towards a new anti-democratic tripartite pact” (Stephens).

Despite all the negatives, there could be potential upsides to a revived JCPOA. The first is the United States' intention to extend the JCPOA's sunset provisions that were set to expire in the next decade. Another is the United States' intention of placing a limit on Iran's ballistic missile testing. Although it is unclear if the revised deal will fulfill either previously mentioned goals, it will most definitely:

- extend Iran's “breakout time” from three weeks to six months
- Establish a more thorough nuclear-inspection regime
- Give future diplomacy with the Islamic regime leaders more time to work
- Postpone a nuclear crisis in the Middle East while the world's attention is on Ukraine

Implications of the deal's revival

Although the state department believes that reaching an agreement with the Iranian leaders would be a diplomatic victory, if one thinks about it more closely, one realizes that it is actually quite the contrary. When a deal only delays a crisis for the future, in exchange for strengthening adversaries in the present, it should technically be viewed as a strategic defeat.

Most recently, the Islamic regime ordered an attack on Iraq with ballistic missiles and launched missile and drone strikes on Abu Dhabi with the help of its Houthi proxies. Considering that this is the type of activity the Islamic regime is partaking in, it is to be expected that neighboring countries would be worried about what could happen when the government regains access to tens of billions in oil revenues and is liberated from the myriad of sanctions currently weighing it down. A contentious but still very accurate reality is that the principal geopolitical challenge the US faces today is the perception, shared by allies and rivals, that the United States is weak (diffident, distracted, divided). Although American military aid, and the power of US sanctions to help Ukraine against Russia, has helped shift that perception a bit, the US remains far from having the upper hand against the new axis of autocracy (Stephens).

Conclusion

To return to the original query that drove the research you have just read, the answer is manifold and really depends on the objective at hand. Indeed, a return to the JCPOA would be better for international security, maintaining diplomacy, negotiations and civil relations between the West and Iran, while ensuring that the Iranian government's ability to reach weapon grade enrichment is impeded. However on an ethical standpoint, maintaining ties, negotiating, and re-entering a deal with a corrupt and cruel government as that of the Islamic regime of Iran, one that terrorizes its citizens and persecutes minorities such as women and the LGBTQ community, is shocking and vicious on its own. Even if the Iran Nuclear deal is revived, I hope that the United States and its allies will provide the Iranian people with the support they need in order to overthrow the current regime and liberate the space for a fairer government.

Index

- AIOC
- Amirabdollahian, Hossein
- Aramesh, Arash
- Blinken, Anthony
- Biden, Joseph
- Cheney, Dick
- Churchill, Winston
- Dulles brothers
- Eisenhower, Dwight
- Fakhrizadeh, Mohsen
- Financial Action Task Force (FAFT)
- Five Year Development Plan
- Ghasseminejad, Saeed
- Grossi, Rafael
- G5
- Hardliner
- Hezbollah
- Houthis
- IAEA
- IRGC (Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps)
- INRA (Iran Nuclear Review Act)
- International Terrorist Organisation Sanction
- JCPOA (Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action)
- Kani, Ali Bogheri
- Katulis, Brian
- Kerry, John
- Khamenei, Ali
- Khomeini
- Maximum Pressure Campaign
- Menendez, Bob
- Mossadegh
- Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT)
- NUFDI (National Union for Democracy in Iran)
- Obama, Barak
- Operation Ajax
- Ortagus, Morgan
- Pompeo, Mike
- Quds Forces
- Raisi, Ebrahim

- Reformist
- Reza Shah
- Roosevelt, Kermit
- Rouhani, Hassan
- Safari, Mehdi
- Sanction
- Senate Foreign Relations Committee
- Snap-back provision
- Soleimani, Quassem
- Sullivan, Jake
- Sunset Provision
- Takeyh, Ray
- Truman, Harry
- Trump, Donald
- Tudeh Party
- Zahedi
- Zarif, Mohammad Javad

Bibliography

Part I: What is the JCPOA

- Al-Aloosy, M. (2020). *Biden, Iran: Do Democrats mean Detente with Iran?* Arab Center for Research & Policy Studies. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep26862>
- Berger, Miriam. "As Iran buries slain nuclear scientist, leaders promise revenge and no negotiations with the West," *Washington Post*, November 30, 2020
https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/as-iran-buries-its-slain-nuclear-scientist-leaders-vow-revenge-and-no-negotiations-with-the-west/2020/11/30/ebfe3618-32fc-11eb-9699-00d311f13d2d_story.html
- EU Parliament. "Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action," July 14th 2015
<https://www.europarl.europa.eu/cmsdata/122460/full-text-of-the-iran-nuclear-deal.pdf>
- Fahim, Kareem. "Iran deal with U.N. nuclear inspectors buys time for diplomacy as Biden pursues negotiations," *Washington Post*, February 22nd 2021
https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/iran-iaea-biden-nuclear-deal-/2021/02/22/a49d61b0-74ef-11eb-9489-8f7dacd51e75_story.html
- Ghazvinian, John. *America and Iran: A history 1720 to the Present*. Alfred A. Knopf New York 2021
- Goldberg, Jerry. "Obama to Iran and Israel: "As president of the United States I don't bluff," *The Atlantic*, March 2nd, 2012
<https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2012/03/obama-to-iran-and-israel-as-president-of-the-united-states-i-dont-bluff/253875/>
- Gordon, Philip H. and Tabatabai, Ariane M. "Trump thinks 'maximum pressure' will change Iran. History says he's wrong," *Washington Post*, October 14 2020
<https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/2020/10/14/trump-biden-iran-sanctions-nuclear-deal/>
- Harris, Johnny et al. "How the Iran nuclear deal works, explained in 3 minutes," *Vox, Youtube*.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oqvghou5m3U&t=7s>

Henderstein, Corey and King, Noel. "Indirect Talks Over Nuclear Deal To Begin Between U.S., Iran," *NPR*, April 15th 2021
<https://www.npr.org/2021/04/15/987552133/indirect-talks-over-nuclear-deal-to-begin-between-u-s-iran>

Morris, Loveday. Birnbaum, Michael. Et all. "U.S. officials and other signatories to Iran nuclear deal to meet in Vienna next week," *Washington Post*, April 2nd 2021
https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/iran-nuclear-deal-us-talks/2021/04/02/24d718d6-9326-11eb-aadc-af78701a30ca_story.html

"Nuclear." *NTI: Building a Safer World*, June 2020
<https://www.nti.org/learn/countries/iran/nuclear/>

O'TOOLE, B. (2021). *Rejoining the Iran Nuclear Deal: Not So Easy*. Atlantic Council.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep29329>

Rezaian, Jason. "Iran's theocracy is nearing its expiration date. And then what," *Washington Post*, June 7 2018
<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/global-opinions/wp/2018/06/07/with-no-skin-in-the-game-can-the-u-s-have-any-influence-on-iran/>

Rome, Henry. "Reviving the Iran nuclear deal will be harder than it looks," *Washington Post*, Nov 23 2020
<https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2020/11/23/reviving-iran-nuclear-deal-will-be-harder-than-it-looks/>

Ross, Dennis. "There's a deal to be had between the U.S. and Iran," *The Atlantic*, July 10th 2019
<https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2019/07/us-and-iran-shape-new-deal/593590/>

Schake, Kori. "The Disastrous Idea that won't go away," *The Atlantic*, November 19th 2020
<https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2020/11/attacking-iran-would-be-disastrous-pa-rting-move/617145/>

Tirone, Jonathan. "The Iran Nuclear Deal," *Washington Post*, April 15th 2021
https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/energy/the-irannuclear-deal/2021/04/14/aea8ac26-9d5a-11eb-b2f5-7d2f0182750d_story.html

Part II: Conflicting sentiments towards the deal

Brumberg, D. (2020). Biden Faces a Tough Road Ahead. In *Iran and the World Wait for Biden* (pp. 3–4). Arab Center for Research & Policy Studies.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep27606.7>

Katulis, B. et al (2022, February 10). *Beyond the JCPOA: US Iran Policy - NUFDI Iran Conference*. Youtube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=juuqcIo3BPY>

Part III: History behind the disagreement surrounding the deal

Abdelfatah, Rund and Arablouei, Ramtin. “How the CIA Overthrew Iran’s Democracy In 14 Days,” Throughline, NPR, Feb 7 2019

Abrahamian, Ervand. *The Coup: 1953, the CIA, and the Roots of Modern U.S.-Iranian Relations*, The New Press; Reprint edition July 7, 2015

Allen-Ebrahimian, Bethany. “64 Years Later, the CIA Finally Releases Details of Iranian Coup,” Foreign Policy Magazine, June 20th 2017

Ayella, Joe. “American Coup.” Amazon, Nov 9th 2010, Web. Nov 13 2020.

Black, Jeremy. “Eisenhower and the Cold War.” Center for the Study of America and the West, Foreign Policy Research Institute, Feb 20 2018, Web. Nov 20 2020.

Byrne, Malcolm. “CIA Confirms Role in 1953 Iran Coup,” National Security Archive Electronic Briefing Book No. 435, August 19, 2013

Falk, Stanley L. “The National Security Council Under Truman, Eisenhower, and Kennedy.” *Political Science Quarterly*, vol. 79, no. 3, 1964, pp. 403–434. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/2145907. Accessed 9 Dec. 2020.

Gasiorowski, Mark J. “The 1953 Coup D'etat in Iran.” *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, vol. 19, no. 3, 1987, pp. 261–286. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/163655.

Accessed 4 Dec. 2020.

Hitchcock, William I. *The Age of Eisenhower: America and the World in the 1950s*, Simon & Schuster; Reprint edition, March 5, 2019

Kinzer, Stephen. *All the Shah's Men: An American Coup and the Roots of Middle East Terror*, Wiley; Second edition January 1, 2008

Moyara de Moraes Ruehsen. “Operation 'Ajax' Revisited: Iran, 1953.” *Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 29, no. 3, 1993, pp. 467–486. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/4283579. Accessed 4 Dec. 2020.

Powers, John. “‘Coup 53’ Tells the Story of A 1953 Campaign by M16 and the CIA to Oust Iran’s Leader,” *Fresh Air*; NPR, Aug 18, 2020

“Key Events in the 1953 Coup,” *Secrets of History: The CIA in Iran*, *The New York Times Archives*,

Part IV: Current endeavors to renegotiate the deal

Motamedi, M. (2022, March 4). “Iran: JCPOA agreement possible as soon as *red lines* considered.” *Aljazeera*.
<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/3/4/iran-jcpoa-agreement-possible-as-soon-as-red-lines-considered>

O'TOOLE, B. (2021). *Rejoining the Iran Nuclear Deal: Not So Easy*. Atlantic Council.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep29329>

Stephens, B. (2022, March 22). “A New Iran Deal Leaves Us Meeker and Weaker.” *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/22/opinion/iran-nuclear-deal-biden.html>