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Progressive Foreign Policy Debrief

Intel for Advocacy

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SL: [The Iran Deal 2.0?](#)

The Takeaway:

- The United States is hopefully poised to re-enter the Iran nuclear deal — a historic diplomatic agreement that was preventing Iran from developing nuclear weapons...until Trump withdrew from it, with devastating results.
- Renewing the deal will help avert a nuclear crisis, ease the collective punishment of millions of people, and prevent another horrific war.
- Opponents are already trying to sabotage the deal, but history doesn't lie — their "maximum pressure" campaign on Iran has failed. Diplomacy is the only way forward.

The Iran Deal 2.0?

TL;DR — The Iran Nuclear Deal

The United States is on the verge of re-entering a nuclear agreement with Iran. This comes after multiple rounds of negotiations over the course of many months.

The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), more commonly known as the Iran nuclear deal, was signed in 2015 by the Obama administration. It was an international nuclear nonproliferation agreement made by the United States, United Kingdom, France, Russia, China, Germany, the European Union, and Iran. The agreement placed strict, significant, and unprecedented restrictions and inspections on Iran's nuclear program — which has been in development since the 1970s — in exchange for sanctions relief. But in 2018, former President Donald Trump unilaterally withdrew the United States from this agreement, prompting the Iranian government to dramatically scale up its nuclear program — and bringing our countries repeatedly to the brink of all out war.

Re-entering the JCPOA was a campaign promise made by President Joe Biden — and a policy that the [majority of people](#) in the United States support. We applaud his administration's efforts to secure a return to the agreement, which will help stop the spread of nuclear weapons and increase safety and security to both the people of the United States and Iran.

An agreement that worked and can work again

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We've [said](#) it [before](#), and we'll say it again — the JCPOA was a landmark diplomatic achievement that *worked*. After decades of hostility between the United States and Iran, the Obama administration successfully negotiated a deal that helped take both countries off the path to war and prevent nuclear proliferation. Failing to reenter the agreement, after years of catastrophic “maximum pressure” policies and in the middle of increased tensions with a nuclear-armed Russia, would be a terrible mistake.

Since the United States withdrew from the agreement, Iran has made alarming [progress](#) with its nuclear program, such as developing more advanced centrifuges and enriching uranium to new levels that aim towards weapon-ready use. Iran's breakout time — the length of time it takes to produce enough fissile material for one nuclear bomb — has shortened to mere weeks, though the actual process of [weaponizing](#) this fissile material would take another year or more. The [IAEA reports](#) that Iran now possesses 3197.1kg of uranium with 33kg enriched to 60% purity — all the while the Iranian government [claims](#) to have the ability to enrich up to “weapons grade” 90% purity. In comparison, under the JCPOA, Iran's total uranium stockpile and enrichment levels were capped at 300kg and 3.67% respectively.

Iran's stockpiling and enrichment of uranium is reversible, and a revitalized deal would do just that. By placing strict limitations on Iran's nuclear program, it would dramatically increase the time Iran would need to build a nuclear weapon and ensure that the IAEA has the ability to monitor the program to ensure that no “breakout” to a weapon is taking place. But if these negotiations collapse, Iran will get even closer to having the capability to build a nuclear weapon, and the same anti-deal voices sounding off right now will be calling for the president to take military action. And this current crisis will escalate even more.

Two Nuclear Crises Are Not Better Than One

Russia's invasion of Ukraine has only underscored the necessity of expanded arms control and nonproliferation efforts. As news over the past few weeks has indicated that we are on the verge of a revitalized JCPOA, anti-diplomacy voices in both U.S. political parties have been working overtime to try to tank these efforts, including by claiming that Russia would benefit from this deal. This argument is flat out wrong.

Renewing the JCPOA would be a boon to our European allies, not Russia. After Trump walked away from the deal, our European allies stayed in and pushed for us to return. Under the deal, Russia will have some limited obligations to help dispose of nuclear material – a role they've played successfully for decades – but make no mistake, the real benefits of the deal will come to people everywhere who help prevent a disastrous U.S. war with Iran before it can even start.

Walking away from negotiations would be a disaster for everyone. Failure to fully renew the deal would heighten tensions in the Middle East and could even foment a nuclear arms race with Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Egypt, all of this while the international community is trying to maintain laser-focused pressure on Russia to end its invasion of Ukraine. An unchecked nuclear

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program in Iran is a recipe for a crisis that would force attention away from Ukraine. Pushing ahead with renewing the JCPOA prevents the world from dealing with yet another potential nuclear crisis this summer.

Now is the time to fully embrace an opportunity to limit nuclear proliferation. Furthermore, the devastating threat of nuclear annihilation we've been reminded of recently illustrates why nuclear weapons simply shouldn't exist — in the hands of the United States, Russia, Iran, or any other nation truly concerned with protecting human life.

Ending an Indiscriminate Weapon

Returning to the JCPOA will also help ease the collective punishment of everyday people in Iran, who have been needlessly suffering under the "maximum pressure" sanctions. These broad-based sanctions have been utterly ineffective at limiting the Iranian government's actions. What the sanctions have done, however, is drastically drive up the cost of goods in Iran, [immiserating millions of people](#) and causing many to ration food. Amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, sanctions have been particularly cruel, as critical [health care workers haven't been getting paid](#) and many people have struggled to [access medical care](#).

Moreover, the sanctions have undermined changemakers in Iran by hollowing out civil society and human rights activism, as well as limiting the ability of humanitarian and nonprofit organizations to work in Iran. Instead of mobilizing for change, many people have been forced to focus on meeting their basic needs. And to make matters worse, sanctions have emboldened antidemocratic hardliners in Iran's government, giving them fuel to stoke anti-diplomacy and anti-United States sentiment.

With a renewed JCPOA, [many sanctions would remain](#) on Iran's nuclear program and the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, as well as human-rights related sanctions. These types of targeted sanctions are very different from widely sanctioning an entire population due to the actions of its undemocratic government. We should welcome the JCPOA as an opportunity to end the cruel, unnecessary economic punishment of millions.

The Fight Ahead

If the Biden administration successfully negotiates a return to the nuclear deal, it may be submitted to Congress for approval or rejection. The Iran Nuclear Agreement Review Act (INARA), passed in 2015, requires congressional approval for any agreement negotiated with Iran. We expect a fight on this front.

We are already witnessing a series of tired, bad faith arguments against the JCPOA from both Republicans and hawkish Democrats in Congress, and from certain pundits. Deal opponents even dragged John Bolton, former National Security Advisor to Donald Trump and a key person responsible for unilaterally withdrawing from the JCPOA, out of cold storage to write an op-ed in *The Washington Post* arguing against a return to the deal. Opponents of the deal are parroting

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the same failed conservative talking points that equate sanctions relief to unilateral surrender, and advocate for the failed strategy of “maximum pressure.”

But this time around, we know with certainty what works — and what doesn't. Foreign policy debates often revolve around hypothetical analyses, and rarely do we have a case study in how each policy choice could play out. We've tried the path of a negotiated agreement, and we've tried the path of “maximum pressure.” Donald Trump's strategy of “maximum pressure” failed miserably. It did not succeed in deterring Iran from continuing down a path toward developing a nuclear weapon — and neither will more blanket sanctions nor threats of military action. The JCPOA worked. Diplomacy worked. And it will work again. The path forward is clear.

Preventing a nuclear Iran is a security challenge that requires a negotiated diplomatic agreement. And only a negotiated diplomatic agreement can bring about a lasting and secure peace.

BURIED LEDES

The Biden administration publicly [announced](#) that **the violence committed by the Myanmar army against Rohingya Muslims can be classified as genocide and crimes against humanity**. This move bolsters the international legal fight against Myanmar's military government.

What makes or breaks the transition from military industrial complex to green energy hub? [Read](#) about two small towns that both attempted such a transformation. One failed; the other succeeded. The question is... *why?*

The White House will be [scaling back](#) its COVID-19 program after Congress's failure to approve additional COVID-19 relief funding. What does this mean for everyday people in the United States? Less available testing, vaccines, and treatment.

Meanwhile... **The Biden administration plans to request [\\$813 billion](#) for national security spending in its 2023 fiscal budget on Monday, including \$713 billion for the Pentagon.** Other estimates range around [\\$780 billion](#) for the DOD. Clearly, we have our priorities straight.

A [new report](#) finds that **the [Boston Asylum Center](#) is discriminating against asylum seekers**. Your chances of finding refuge in the U.S. are not based in law but rather in the will and the whim of wherever you land. Accountability for corrupt immigration policy is beyond due.

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Despite promises to disengage from the war in Yemen, the Biden administration has continued to support Saudi-led coalition forces. **Our actions have consequences - U.S. support [means more attacks in Yemen](#)...** Reminder: Yemen is home to the world's [largest humanitarian crisis](#).

And finally, are you interested in investing in Crypto? **Consider investing in [this little guy!](#)**