



OCTOBER 2015

# AFTER THE JOINT COMPREHENSIVE PLAN OF ACTION

A Game Plan for the United States

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors would like to thank Richard Nephew, Barbara Slavin, Amos Yadlin, and CNAS colleague Loren DeJonge Schulman for their review of this report. They also wish to thank David Abreu, Amanda Claypool, and Ryan Ouwerkerk for research support, as well as Maura McCarthy and Melody Cook for the editing and design of this report.



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## Top 10 Policy Recommendations in the Aftermath of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA)

- 1 Work with like-minded international partners and Congress to ensure effective implementation and oversight of the agreement, including developing sanctions reimposition or “snapback” mechanisms beyond what is incorporated into the JCPOA.
- 2 Continue to hold Iran’s nuclear program militarily at risk through planning and investment for military contingency scenarios and maintaining current U.S. force posture in the Middle East.
- 3 Increase coordination with Gulf Cooperation Council partners on countering Iran’s destabilizing activities in the Middle East, including a new Multi-National Joint Task Force with Arab partners targeted at countering asymmetric threats from the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps and Sunni extremists that would include joint exercises, training, intelligence, and joint actions.
- 4 Use a combination of military pressure and diplomatic engagement against Iran in Syria to shift the balance on the ground and set conditions for a negotiated settlement to the civil war.
- 5 Reinvigorate a U.S.-Israel high-level dialogue on a joint strategy to prevent a nuclear-armed Iran in the aftermath of the JCPOA, combined with professional dialogues and collaboration focused on implementation, detection of cheating, and response scenarios.
- 6 Expand communication channels with Iran, including eliminating the State Department’s no-contact policy and establishing a channel to the Iranian Secretary of the Supreme National Security Council.
- 7 Deepen cooperation with Iran on issues of common interest such as maritime security and Afghanistan, but limit initial engagement on ISIS to operational de-confliction while refraining from early attempts at strategic cooperation in Syria.
- 8 Leverage the agreement to strengthen nonproliferation norms, most notably for monitoring and verification.
- 9 Reduce the importance of Iran in the bilateral agenda with China in order to limit Chinese leverage, but maintain the importance of the Iran issue in the bilateral agenda with Russia to facilitate cooperation in an increasingly fraught relationship.
- 10 Insulate the U.S. economy from energy market volatility caused by the introduction of increased Iranian oil supply to world markets in the aftermath of the JCPOA, including supply-and-demand side measures.



## Executive Summary

The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) agreed to by Iran and the P5+1 (China, France, Germany, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States) on July 14, 2015, represents a historic moment for U.S. foreign policy. The agreement will have to be judged based on its ability to help further four key American objectives:

- Prevent Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon;
- Increase stability in the Middle East;
- Strengthen the nonproliferation regime; and
- Improve America's global standing.

Leveraging the agreement to achieve these objectives is far from a foregone conclusion. Success will depend heavily on the policies the United States and its partners pursue in the aftermath of the agreement. Over the next 20 to 25 years, if implemented effectively, the agreement could succeed in permanently ending Iran's pursuit of a nuclear weapon. Alternatively, if implementation fails, the JCPOA could pave the way for an Iranian bomb in 15 years or sooner. The agreement could open up new channels of cooperation with a more moderate Iran and help stabilize the Middle East, or it could cause increased destabilizing competition between Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Israel. The agreement could strengthen nonproliferation norms across the globe or result in Middle Eastern states more aggressively pursuing domestic enrichment capabilities similar to those of Iran. Finally, the deal could better position the United States in a broader geopolitical competition with China and Russia, or it could lead to the Chinese and Russians taking advantage of the new channels open to Iran while the United States reaps few, if any, benefits.

This report outlines a game plan for the United States that seeks to maximize the upsides of a diplomatic breakthrough with Iran while protecting against the negative implications of the deal. This task inherently includes tensions that pull in opposite directions. The United States must be prepared to quickly reimpose sanctions in the event of Iranian violations even as it encourages

the return of private businesses to Iran to ensure meaningful sanctions relief. U.S. policy will have to more forcefully counter Iran's support for surrogates and proxies in the Middle East while seeking new avenues for U.S.-Iranian engagement. However, history has shown that with regional or global competitors such as China or Russia, the United States is indeed capable of both countering and engaging at the same time and its approach to Iran should be no different.

This paper lays out such a strategy based on six central pillars and more than 45 associated policy recommendations that support the strategy.

***Pillar 1: Set conditions for effective long-term enforcement and implementation by taking steps outside of the JCPOA that complement the agreement.***

The United States should:

- Develop additional sanctions reimposition or “snapback” mechanisms, beyond what is incorporated into the JCPOA, with like-minded international partners;
- Pass legislation that creates greater congressional buy-in for implementation of the agreement and includes additional resources for enforcement of the JCPOA and new U.S. unilateral “snapback” sanctions authorities that can be utilized in the event of an Iranian violation;
- Create mechanisms to promote the return of responsible, transparent private businesses to Iran – in a climate of significant commercial and political risk – to ensure meaningful implementation of sanctions relief that strengthens the overall agreement;
- Continue to hold Iran's nuclear program at risk for military action through continued contingency planning and a public posture that makes clear this option is available in the event Iran moves toward a nuclear weapon;
- Establish a congressional commission to oversee the agreement and ensure consistent and

sustained oversight and support for enforcement and implementation throughout the duration of the agreement;

- Appoint a presidential envoy for coordinating and implementing the JCPOA; and
- Invest in increasing the capacity of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

***Pillar 2: Work closely with Sunni Arab partners to more forcefully counter Iranian actions that are against U.S. interests, most notably their support for surrogates and proxies in the Middle East.***

The United States should:

- Create a high-level defense and intelligence forum at the Cabinet level that regularly meets with Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states and Arab partners to oversee the development and execution of a strategy to counter Iran's destabilizing activities in the Middle East;
- Form a Multi-National Joint Task Force (MNJTF) with Arab partners targeted at countering unconventional threats from the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and Sunni extremists. Use this task force to:
  - » Conduct joint exercises to counter Iran's unconventional capabilities;
  - » Train U.S. partners in foreign internal defense and unconventional warfare; and
  - » Develop a joint intelligence fusion center to counter Iran's asymmetric capabilities.
- Work with GCC and Arab partners to shift the balance on the ground in Syria by significantly expanding programs for arming, training, and equipping moderate opposition forces, including the ones opposing President Bashar al-Assad. Shifting the balance on the ground sets conditions in the longer term for a negotiated political settlement to the conflict.
- Take carefully calibrated direct actions against the IRGC, either unilaterally or jointly with Israel or Arab partners;



- Take a more aggressive approach to maritime interdictions of IRGC weapon shipments, especially in the Red Sea and around Bahrain;
- Continue an aggressive sanctions strategy targeting Iranian support for terrorism and the illicit, destabilizing activity of the IRGC, including thorough coordination with European allies;
- Maintain current U.S. force posture in the Middle East with tailored enhancements, particularly in the form of additional ballistic-missile defense assets; and
- Increase conventional military sales to Arab partners to bolster defensive capabilities against potential Iranian aggression, but avoid the introduction of significant new offensive capabilities into the region.

***Pillar 3: Reassure Israel of U.S. commitments and deepen cooperation on countering Iran's nuclear and asymmetric capabilities.***

The United States should:

- Reinvigorate a U.S.-Israel high-level dialogue on a joint strategy to prevent a nuclear-armed Iran in the aftermath of the JCPOA, combined with professional dialogues and collaboration focused on implementation, detection of cheating, and response scenarios;
- Come to a U.S.-Israel side understanding on the steps they can take together to ensure effective detection of any possible Iranian attempt to develop nuclear weapons and how they might respond jointly under various scenarios;
- Prioritize renewal of the U.S.-Israel Memorandum of Understanding on American Military Aid due to expire in 2017;
- Deepen support for Israel's multi-layered missile defense architecture, including continued and increased investments in the Iron Dome, Arrow-3, and "David's Sling" systems;
- Reassure Israel that new efforts to strengthen the Gulf states will not come at the expense of its qualitative military edge;
- Designate senior American and Israeli officials with the task of strengthening the relationship and reestablishing trust at the political level; and
- Create a high-level political dialogue and increase military and intelligence cooperation with Israel to address the threat posed by Iran's proxies, especially Hezbollah.

***Pillar 4: Cooperate with Iran on issues of common interest both to stabilize the Middle East and increase the likelihood of a more moderate and cooperative Iran.***

The United States should:

- Eliminate the State Department's no-contact policy with Iran;
- Establish a channel between the American National Security Advisor and Iranian Secretary of the Supreme National Security Council;
- Deepen cooperation on maritime security, including new cooperative mechanisms to avoid inadvertent escalation between naval warships, and support cooperative counter-piracy efforts;
- Test the Iranian government's willingness to accept a U.S. interests section in Tehran but proceed cautiously and gradually due to security concerns for American personnel and political challenges in Iran;
- Deepen disaster and earthquake relief cooperation between Iranian and American civilian experts;
- Create new financial opportunities for U.S. and international lenders to empower the Iranian private sector, entrepreneurs, and civil society;
- Expand exchange and people-to-people programs between Iran and the United States in fields such as sports, business, and academia;
- Deepen cooperation in Afghanistan, especially on counternarcotics efforts;

- In the near term, limit initial engagement with Iran on ISIS to operational de-confliction and avoid initial attempts at strategic cooperation in Iraq and Syria; and
- Over the long term, utilize high-level diplomatic channels built with Iran on the nuclear issue to provide a forum to discuss and mediate regional issues.

***Pillar 5: Leverage the agreement to strengthen nonproliferation norms and dissuade states from reacting to the deal by pursuing similar domestic enrichment capabilities.***

The United States should:

- Mitigate against the risk of the JCPOA becoming a precedent for less restrictive civilian nuclear cooperation by staying committed to the “gold standard” (which ensures no self-enrichment or reprocessing capabilities), particularly in the Middle East;
- Deepen regional intelligence cooperation targeted at Iran’s nuclear program;
- Use Iran’s acquiescence to the Additional Protocol to reengage with other hold-outs such as Argentina and Brazil and encourage them to comply;
- Leverage provisions of the JCPOA to pursue stronger global norms for monitoring the entire nuclear supply chain, especially for past violators and states with large civilian nuclear programs;
- Leverage the unique, compelling mechanisms in the JCPOA, such as the Joint Commission’s ability to mandate access to sites not under safeguards or the U.N. sanctions snapback mechanism, as useful models to strengthen future nonproliferation agreements;
- Provide tailored nuclear security guarantees to GCC partners; and
- Clarify economic disincentives to Sunni partners if they begin proliferating in response to the JCPOA.

***Pillar 6: Build on the deal to advance U.S. global leadership and ensure that Iran’s new strategic and economic relationships do not undermine U.S. objectives in the region or U.S. relations with its major global competitors.***

The United States should:

- Reduce the importance of Iran in the bilateral agenda with China in order to limit Chinese leverage and focus on issues more critical to U.S. interests in Asia;
- Maintain the importance of the Iran issue in the bilateral agenda with Russia as it remains one of the few areas of cooperation in an increasingly fraught relationship;
- Work to pry Russia away from the Assad regime and explore whether it could accept a solution for the Syrian civil war that involves a gradual transition in power;
- Cooperate with China on energy-supply security in the Middle East and maritime security in the Gulf and Asia-Pacific for energy trade;
- Bring China into targeted efforts the United States may pursue with Iran to stabilize Afghanistan and counter the Islamic State; and
- Insulate the U.S. economy from energy market volatility caused by the introduction of increased Iranian oil supply to world markets in the aftermath of the JCPOA.

Taken together, this strategy and set of initiatives, some of which can be quickly implemented and others that may take years to put in place, should optimally position the United States to maximize the opportunities presented by the JCPOA while guarding against downside risks.



# **PART 1: IMPLICATIONS OF THE JOINT COMPREHENSIVE PLAN OF ACTION**





CHAPTER 1

# **Understanding the Agreement and Its Implications for Nuclear Proliferation**

The best way to understand how an agreement can successfully prevent Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon is to examine Iran’s nuclear strategy. Since the start of the Obama administration, Iran has been within a year’s time of obtaining enough 90 percent highly enriched uranium for a bomb – and that timeframe currently stands at 2 to 3 months.<sup>1</sup> However, Iran has not actually chosen to not enrich to 90 percent.<sup>2</sup> In a breakout scenario using declared facilities, the Iranians would do all they could to create confusion about precisely what was occurring in their facilities. Even so, they would likely take steps, such as reconfiguring their centrifuges to produce highly enriched uranium, that would quickly give away their intentions.<sup>3</sup> Any attempt to pursue this course of action would create a window of vulnerability during which the United States, Israel, or an international coalition could strike the program. Iran has slowly sought to shrink this window of vulnerability so that should it ever decide to break out it would be able to do so with less risk. This strategy entails bringing on more centrifuges, improving their efficiency, increasing stockpiles of low enriched uranium, and building facilities that are more difficult to attack.<sup>4</sup>

other words, a deal has to establish and maintain a large window of Iranian vulnerability and a low detection threshold.

The nuclear agreement reached in Vienna creates conditions that have a high likelihood of deterring Iran from pursuing a nuclear weapon for the next 15 years. Beyond 15 years, there are a number of measures that will continue to be implemented that are still intended to make it difficult for Iran to obtain nuclear weapons, but those are less stringent and leave gaps that Iran could more easily exploit to develop nuclear weapons. Overall, the agreement is imperfect but better than the realistic alternatives to a diplomatic agreement. Its success will depend heavily on effective implementation and other supplementary and complementary policies that the United States and its partners pursue in the years ahead.

## Deter an Overt Nuclear Breakout Through the Uranium and Plutonium Pathways

The most time-consuming and difficult-to-hide element of building a nuclear weapon is obtaining sufficient fissile material capable of creating a runaway nuclear chain reaction. There are two principle pathways to this approach. The first involves enriching uranium while the second involves removing plutonium from spent reactor fuel. The JCPOA, if fully implemented, significantly limits the uranium pathway for 13 to 15 years and more permanently closes the plutonium pathway.

### URANIUM TRACK

The agreement significantly reduces the risk of an Iranian breakout using the uranium track for at least 15 years. The nuclear agreement confines Iran’s enrichment activities to a low-enrichment level of only 3.67 percent for 15 years.<sup>5</sup> Iran will not be permitted to enrich uranium any higher than that, including to 20 percent, as it did before the interim agreement of November 2013. The stockpile of enriched material that Iran is allowed to accumulate

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**THE REAL MEASURE OF THE AGREEMENT’S EFFECTIVENESS IS WHETHER IT CAN REVERSE THE EXPANSION OF IRAN’S NUCLEAR PROGRAM AND SET THE IRANIANS FAR ENOUGH AWAY FROM A NUCLEAR WEAPON THAT THEY WILL NOT TAKE THE FINAL STEPS NECESSARY TO DEVELOP A BOMB.**

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The real measure of the agreement’s effectiveness is whether it can reverse the expansion of Iran’s nuclear program and set the Iranians far enough away from a nuclear weapon that they will not take the final steps necessary to develop a bomb. In

will be reduced by 98 percent from pre-agreement levels and restricted to 300 kilograms. This is much less than the quantity necessary for one bomb, which requires a little more than one ton of 3.67 percent enriched uranium.<sup>6</sup> This is significant because more effort is required to enrich uranium to this low level of 3.67 percent than from 3.67 percent to weapons-usable 90 percent highly enriched uranium.

The stockpile is only half the equation. The other challenge is the capacity to quickly enrich more uranium using existing enrichment infrastructure. For that reason, the nuclear agreement permits Iran to operate only 5,060 first-generation centrifuges for 10 years.<sup>7</sup> This quantity is sufficient to provide Iran with independent enrichment capabilities, while restricting its breakout time to a one-year period.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, Iranian enrichment activities will be confined to the site at Natanz. Though Iran is allowed to install 1,044 centrifuges in the heavily fortified enrichment site at Fordow, they will not be used for enriching uranium.<sup>9</sup> This limits redundancy in Iran's nuclear program. It also ensures that Iran's nuclear program would be more vulnerable to attack in the event Iran violates the agreement, and the United States, Israel, or an international coalition chooses to take military action.

### PLUTONIUM TRACK

If fully implemented, the agreement will significantly reduce the risk of an Iranian breakout using the plutonium track. In its current form, upon completion the Arak reactor's annual plutonium production would be sufficient for one to two nuclear bombs.<sup>10</sup> As part of the nuclear agreement, Iran is committed to removing the current core and installing a new core, which would dramatically reduce the reactor's ability to produce weapons-grade plutonium.<sup>11</sup> The new core will only be able to produce enough plutonium for one bomb every four years and only if Iran misuses it in obvious ways that can be detected by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).<sup>12</sup> Doing so, however,

would be immediately detected by the IAEA. In addition, Iran is obliged to ship out spent fuel and not build an additional heavy water reactor for 15 years – necessary elements of the production process. The reprocessing of spent fuel or reprocessing research, which is the way plutonium is harvested from used reactor fuel, is prohibited for 15 years, and Iran has stated in the JCPOA that it does not intend to pursue reprocessing thereafter.<sup>13</sup>

### Deter a Covert Sneak Out

Iran's second option for crossing the nuclear threshold would be a covert sneak out in which it builds and uses an entirely new set of facilities that have not already been detected by the IAEA. Such an approach would take a few years to carry out and require Iran to secretly obtain a new batch of fissile material and either enrich it to weapons-grade levels or use it for reactor fuel to produce plutonium, which would quite likely be discovered.<sup>14</sup> It would also force Iran to conduct secret weapons research – in both the covert and overt breakout scenarios – which would be much more difficult to detect.

### INSPECTIONS ON ENRICHED MATERIAL

The nuclear agreement, which creates robust monitoring and verification mechanisms, will make it exceedingly challenging for Iran to secretly develop covert facilities. Most important, the inspections regime will include continuous monitoring of Iran's uranium mines and uranium mills for the next 25 years, the monitoring of centrifuge production facilities for 20 years, and a dedicated procurement channel for any nuclear-related or dual-use items. This cradle-to-grave monitoring of the entire supply process of fissile material will force Iran to develop secret alternative sources of uranium and centrifuges if it ever wishes to develop a covert nuclear program. Iran is also committed to ratifying and implementing the Additional Protocol, which not only provides IAEA inspectors regular access to all declared nuclear facilities but

also allows them to expand their inquiries to undeclared facilities.<sup>15</sup> It is important to note that even with less stringent inspections in the past, the Natanz, Fordow, and Arak facilities were all detected long before they became operational.

**ULTIMATELY, THE AGREEMENT CREATES AN INSPECTION REGIME FAR SUPERIOR TO THE STATUS QUO AND ONE THAT SIGNIFICANTLY INCREASES THE RISK THAT VIOLATIONS WILL BE DETECTED, DETERRING IRAN FROM VIOLATING THE TERMS OF THE AGREEMENT IN THE FIRST PLACE.**

The most significant critique of the inspections regime has been that it does not require “anywhere anytime access.” According to the agreement, the IAEA can request access to any suspected site. Iran can agree to grant access very quickly, particularly if the IAEA requests it under the terms of the Additional Protocol, which requires access in 24 hours or less. However, the deal requires Iran to comply within 14 days without stalling, or face consequences. If it does not, the issue would go to a board comprised of the eight members of the negotiations (P5+1, EU, and Iran) for a majority vote within seven days after it was referred to the board. This would then force Iran to comply within three days so that the total timeframe in a disputed access scenario from the initial IAEA request to gaining access would be 24 days. Skeptics argue that this process is already too generous toward Iran, will be cumbersome to implement, and could actually last much longer. However, the reality is that the United States and its partners will have intelligence assets directed toward the facility during this 24-day period and likely even before it. Moreover, it is exceedingly difficult to eliminate any evidence of enrichment and certainly takes significantly longer than 24 days – by many estimates six months or longer.<sup>16</sup> Since the matter would be

resolved by a majority vote, the United States would simply have to convince its European allies to agree to force Iran to comply. Thus, it would be very difficult under this agreement for Iran to successfully build out a covert nuclear facility.

## WEAPONIZATION

The much more difficult proposition has always been stopping secret weaponization research, which leaves a smaller signature and is difficult for intelligence agencies or IAEA inspectors to detect. The 24-day period could be enough for Iran to hide its weaponization research, but there is no real alternative that can guarantee catching weaponization work. For this reason, the focus of the agreement is first and foremost on stopping the production of weapons-grade fissile material.<sup>17</sup>

There are also concerns about the weaponization research that Iran primarily conducted prior to 2003. Critics argue that the agreement does not require Iran to come entirely clean with its past suspected nuclear military-related activities.<sup>18</sup> The main concern is that the lack of information on past weaponization activities hurts the ability to understand the extent to which Iran has pursued a weapon and how much time it would require to cross the finish line in a breakout scenario. A full and public disclosure of all of Iran’s previous nuclear weapons research would be ideal, especially to challenge its narrative that it had always pursued a peaceful nuclear program, but it is not necessary to demonstrate that Iran is not engaging in such a program now, nor would a confession provide any guarantee that the country would not pursue weapons again in the future. It is important, however, that U.S. and partner nation nuclear scientists and intelligence professionals have sufficient information about the past to be able to detect similar work in the future. The roadmap agreed to by Iran and the IAEA calls for the issue to be addressed before any sanctions relief is implemented. The IAEA is committed to providing a final assessment in December 2015, but the United States and the P5+1 can likely judge prior to that whether Iran is being cooperative.<sup>19</sup>



Ultimately, the agreement creates an inspection regime far superior to the status quo and one that significantly increases the risk that violations will be detected, deterring Iran from violating the terms of the agreement in the first place. Nevertheless, no inspection and verification regime can provide 100 percent confidence that a country would be caught if it cheated and began pursuing nuclear weapons. Therefore the verification regime will require vigorous implementation and complementary intelligence efforts that ensure Iranian violations can be detected.

## Sufficiently Incentivize Compliance Through Sanctions Relief

In addition to deterring pathways to a bomb, the agreement must deter cheating and keep in place sufficient leverage to ensure Iran lives up to its commitments. To accomplish this objective, the agreement provides sanctions relief only after Iran has taken a number of significant steps, and it contains a mechanism for re-imposing multilateral sanctions that cannot be vetoed by Russia or China at the U.N. Security Council.

### SANCTIONS RELIEF SEQUENCING

The agreement spells out that no sanctions relief will be executed until “Implementation Day,” by which point Iran will have made the necessary adjustments to the Arak heavy-water reactor, diluted its low enriched uranium stockpile to 300 kilograms, removed centrifuges from Fordow and Natanz, implemented the necessary transparency measures, and cooperated with the IAEA to assist it in offering a final report on Iran’s previous weaponization research. Most experts estimate that Implementation Day is likely to occur some time in the spring of 2016, depending on how quickly Iran can accomplish these various steps.<sup>20</sup>

This process allows all sides to meet their bottom lines. The United States always insisted that sanctions relief not occur until Iran had taken significant



Anti-aircraft guns protect Iran’s Natanz nuclear facility. Per the nuclear agreement, Iran will only be allowed to enrich uranium at its Natanz facility. (Credit: Hamed Saber)

difficult-to-reverse steps. Meanwhile, the Supreme Leader was very clear that Iran should receive sanctions relief upfront rather than incrementally, over an extended period of time.<sup>21</sup> The structure of significant relief all at once (but only after key steps have been implemented) allows both sides to politically save face and meet their bottom line objectives.

### “SNAPBACK” SANCTIONS

For the agreement to be effective, there must be a credible pathway for quickly imposing punishments on Iran if it cheats, again primarily so as to deter cheating. The agreement puts in place a mechanism for the U.N. Security Council to reimpose sanctions without the danger of a Russian or Chinese veto. In the event that any of the parties, including Iran or the P5+1, believe that the other side is not meeting its commitments, it can refer the matter to a Joint Commission of eight members. The commission would have 30 days to review the matter – 15 days at the commissioner level and 15 days at the foreign minister level. If the issue is still not resolved at the end of the 30-day review period, the complaining participant could then take the issue to the U.N. Security Council,

which would have to adopt a new resolution within 30 days to prevent re-imposing U.N. sanctions as outlined in U.N. Security Council resolution (UNSCR) 2231. If the Security Council fails to act, sanctions on Iran would be reimposed.<sup>22</sup> Under this structure, any of the permanent five members of the council could veto the resolution and thus trigger the reimposition of sanctions. This mechanism prevents any member from blocking the United States from reimposing sanctions.

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**PROBABLY THE GREATEST WEAKNESS OF THE AGREEMENT IS THAT SOME OF THE CONSTRAINTS ON IRAN'S URANIUM ENRICHMENT ACTIVITIES WILL BE LIFTED AFTER 10 TO 15 YEARS, PARTICULARLY IN REGARD TO ITS CENTRIFUGE CAPACITY AND ABILITY TO CONDUCT RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT ON NEXT-GENERATION CENTRIFUGES.**

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Perhaps the biggest challenge with the snapback mechanism is that even if there is technically a way to reimpose sanctions, it is not clear that the political will to do so would exist. This is a particular consideration if Iran commits small-scale infractions under the deal that the United States and the P5+1 do not believe merit the reimposition of sanctions. If the bar is set too high to reimpose sanctions, in part or in whole, it may not offer Iran's current or future leadership sufficient disincentive to cheat. Without the investment of political capital and international support, and a commitment to powerful and creative deterrence to Iranian cheating, a reimposed sanctions regime would become much weaker. Moreover, it takes time for sanctions to truly start having a biting effect, and if the deal collapses and Iran aggressively accelerates its nuclear program, it is not clear that the impact of sanctions will be felt in time.

## Potential Weaknesses of the Agreement

### THE SUNSET PROBLEM

Probably the greatest weakness of the agreement is that some of the constraints on Iran's uranium enrichment activities will be lifted after 10 to 15 years, particularly in regard to its centrifuge capacity and ability to conduct research and development on next-generation centrifuges. Opponents argue that this agreement could leave in place the potential for Iran to become a nuclear threshold state in 15 years.

The restrictions on the number of centrifuges Iran is allowed to operate will expire after 10 years, and limitations on Iran's uranium stockpile are removed after 15 years. More important, limitations on Iran's research and development (R&D) start to come off around year 8 and more so in years 10 to 15 and beyond.<sup>23</sup> This could allow Iran to conduct research and eventually build out new, more efficient generations of centrifuges and allow Iran to shorten the breakout time with significantly fewer centrifuges. Once the uranium stockpile limitations end in year 15, Iran may be able to cross the nuclear threshold within a very short period of time.

Still, there are a number of arguments that partially mitigate this concern. If the inspections regime stays in place beyond 15 years, the most likely scenario for an Iranian pursuit of a nuclear weapon would still be a covert pathway. Many elements of this agreement could be renewed down the road, particularly if the international community is satisfied with Iranian implementation and Iran is pleased with the benefits of the civilian nuclear cooperation it receives under the agreement and seeks to expand them. Moreover, Iran will also be incentivized to renew the agreement or continue to abide by certain restrictions, since otherwise it may face the prospect of a renewed sanctions campaign or military action should its enrichment program or reactor effort go beyond its restricted scope.<sup>24</sup> As a matter of precedent, there is simply no agreement in arms control that does not have a

sunset provision. Even the Non-proliferation Treaty was originally scheduled to sunset after 25 years and had to be renewed.

The agreement also limits Iran's ability to enrich uranium in these next generation centrifuges, significantly limiting how much can be learned and tested in regards to their functioning. And Iran will not be able to test the centrifuges in large industrial cascades until after year 15, further limiting the efficacy of R&D.<sup>25</sup> Through a joint oversight mechanism, the United States and other P5+1 members will have visibility into Iran's R&D plans, and the United States will have the ability to object to any changes Iran proposes to its R&D plans. Indeed, any change to Iran's R&D plans must be approved by the consensus of the Joint Commission.

Additionally, the civilian nuclear cooperation envisioned in the agreement will ensure that the types of technologies shared with Iran allow it to build out a normal civilian nuclear program over time, while constraining its ability to use these technologies to develop weapons-grade fissile material. This civilian cooperation should also give the international community greater visibility into the program beyond year 15.

## Is the Breakout Time Sufficient?

Some critics debate whether the breakout time embedded in the agreement is sufficient to detect and promptly respond to an Iranian attempt to develop a nuclear weapon.<sup>26</sup> One argument is that the Iranian breakout time will be longer than one year, leaving sufficient time for an international response. The one-year estimate assumes that Iran is successful at every step in the process. In reality, there would likely be unexpected delays and challenges that would lengthen the process if Iran sought to build a bomb. This estimate also assumes that Iran would pursue only one bomb, which no nuclear state has ever done. Instead, to have a credible arsenal Iran would likely need to dash to a small arsenal of perhaps six to eight weapons, which would take significantly longer.

Consider the counterargument that the breakout time in the agreement may not be enough time to detect and stop an Iranian violation. After all, even though Iran would seek a small arsenal and might experience some technical complications, once it got close enough to one bomb no one would dare act. The most difficult question here is one of political will. Even if Iran were caught red-handed, it may take a significant amount of time to build support both in the United States and internationally to take the type of actions that could reverse Iran's dash to a bomb, especially if military action is required. Particularly in the aftermath of the 2003 American decision to go to war on the mistaken assertion that Iraq had a dangerous and functioning weapons of mass destruction program, the evidence of a significant Iranian breach of the agreement would have to be incredibly compelling. American leaders will not want to make the same mistake again and will ask for incontrovertible evidence, which is very difficult to obtain in the world of intelligence and nuclear weapons. And many American partners, having been burned by the experience of bad intelligence in the case of Iraq, will also set an impossibly high bar for joining an American military effort.

Both arguments are valid. A one-year breakout time is far from ideal, but allows a resolved and quick international response to Iran's nuclear noncompliance. Nevertheless, the swiftness of the international response is bound to political will in the United States and among its like-minded partners to apply pressure to ensure that Iran complies with the agreement and does not begin producing nuclear weapons.

## LONG-TERM ENFORCEMENT

One of the greatest threats to the success of this agreement is poor implementation or enforcement and a lack of high-level political attention, which could result in Iranian cheating with no consequences. This is not necessarily a danger in year one but could be in years three or five or beyond, when Iran has reestablished economic and diplomatic ties and no longer remains an

isolated state. It is a potential problem not only for the United States but also for other P5+1 states, as personnel changes and new political priorities may divert attention and expertise away from the Iranian nuclear challenge over time.

The transition from the Obama administration to the next administration could be especially problematic if the new team is not as familiar with the details of the agreement or as politically invested in implementing and enforcing it. This issue contributed to the failure of the 1994 Agreed Framework with North Korea, in which poor implementation through the late 1990s followed by the transition to a Bush administration less invested in the agreement were major factors in the agreement's collapse.<sup>27</sup> Numerous other examples include the Bush-Obama transition on Iraq, which led to a decreased prioritization of the Iraq issue and contributed to the rise of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS).<sup>28</sup> Similarly, the transition from Clinton to Bush led to a decreased focus on terrorism and al Qaeda in the months prior to 9/11.<sup>29</sup> In short, this challenge afflicts nearly every presidential administration regardless of political party, with sometimes catastrophic effects for American foreign policy.

The challenge goes beyond American focus and implementation. It will require international attention and willingness to continue to prioritize this issue and collaborate to sustain successful policy outcomes. Without a joint international response, it will be very difficult to reimpose sanctions and force Iranian compliance.

## Implications for the Global Nonproliferation Regime

The nuclear agreement will have profound implications for the broader global nonproliferation regime. If the agreement is successful and Iran does not obtain nuclear weapons, the agreement may set an important precedent for how to deter future cheaters and deal with problem states. Some of the rigorous inspections measures agreed to by

Iran may also become the new gold standard for all Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) members. On the other hand, if the agreement fails and Iran obtains a nuclear weapon or becomes a nuclear threshold state, it will demonstrate the exact opposite. Such a scenario would deal a heavy blow to the nonproliferation regime and call into question whether or not the international community can actually stop nuclear proliferation without military force or regime change.

### AN OPPORTUNITY TO CREATE A NEW MODEL

The nuclear agreement could positively impact the global nonproliferation regime if it is effectively implemented over the next 15 to 25 years and successfully deters Iran from pursuing nuclear weapons. Though all parties have emphasized that the agreement is not intended to set new nonproliferation precedents, future agreements will certainly be judged against it. It could also become a new model for how to effectively deal with states that violate terms of a nonproliferation agreement. There is a long history of cases in which states have given up the pursuit of a nuclear weapons program because of external changes to their security environment, internal regime changes, a shift in strategy, military coercion, or simply because the task was too difficult and costly.<sup>30</sup> Iran is a significant case because of the scale and scope of the international response, the complexity of the negotiations, and the fact that its regime has not fundamentally changed but may still be successfully incentivized to forgo nuclear weapons through a combination of economic pressure and fear of dramatic consequences should it cheat.

If the agreement is successful, the international process for addressing a problem state will have worked precisely as intended, with initial concerns being referred by the IAEA Board of Governors to the U.N. Security Council, which imposed sanctions but left the door open for negotiations. These sanctions were crafted to ensure maximum leverage on Iran while also maintaining broad international support, eventually leading to concessions that

deterred Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon. The limitations that Iran will have agreed to on its nuclear program could become a model for future violators attempting to rebuild confidence with the international community if they change course, while the cradle-to-grave continuous monitoring could become a new norm in the nonproliferation regime that perhaps, over time, all states could be asked to abide by.

### A DANGEROUS PRECEDENT

It is also possible that rather than setting a new positive proliferation model, the JCPOA sets a negative model that could be exploited by proliferators. Despite myriad violations, Iran has managed to keep significant portions of its nuclear infrastructure intact. After 15 years of compliance with the JCPOA, Iran will have the ability to build out a significant civilian nuclear program and attain a threshold capability, which may all be viewed as legitimate by the international community despite its long track record of violating the NPT.

There is a concern that other states might use the “Iranian precedent” to upgrade their status to a nuclear threshold state or develop military nuclear capabilities. States may endeavor to develop similar domestic enrichment capabilities to Iran’s, making Iran a potentially dangerous standard for a non-military, peaceful nuclear program. Potential proliferators may also calculate that, like Iran, they can covertly develop nuclear infrastructure, knowing that even if they are caught they will have the leverage to negotiate and be able to keep many of their nuclear capabilities.

The consequences to the NPT would be even more severe if implementation and enforcement fail and Iran obtains a nuclear weapon. Such a failure would undermine the notion that international pressure and diplomatic engagement can put reasonable restraints on a state’s nuclear program. It would certainly lead other states to respond by at the very least considering nuclear hedging and further expanding out their programs. And it could lead to a broader loss of confidence in the NPT and a

reduction in the resources allocated to supporting the nonproliferation regime, particularly the IAEA.

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**THE NUCLEAR AGREEMENT COULD POSITIVELY IMPACT THE GLOBAL NONPROLIFERATION REGIME IF IT IS EFFECTIVELY IMPLEMENTED OVER THE NEXT 15 TO 25 YEARS AND SUCCESSFULLY DETERS IRAN FROM PURSUING NUCLEAR WEAPONS.**

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## Evaluate the Alternatives

### A BETTER DEAL

While the agreement is not ideal, it needs to be weighed seriously against the realistic alternatives. Opponents argue that the United States should have held out, imposed tougher sanctions, and reached a better deal that eliminated any of Iranian capabilities that could contribute to a nuclear weapon. But the reality is that the United States and its partners already tried that approach and it failed.

Between 2003 and 2005 Iran suspended its nuclear program and entered into negotiations with France, Germany, and the United Kingdom (known as the E3). At the time, Iran had a nascent enrichment program with 164 centrifuges and was willing to accept an agreement similar to the one that proponents of a better deal extol today. Such an agreement would have left Iran with a very small enrichment capability at Natanz and an implicit right to enrich. The E3 countered with an offer that would have allowed Iran a civilian nuclear program, but kept all enrichment capabilities outside of Iran and forced it to ship any spent fuel rods out of the country. This in essence would be similar to the better deal that critics argue for today. But the Iranians rejected this offer, made first from the E3 in

August 2005 and then jointly by the United States, Russia, and China in June 2006.<sup>31</sup>

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**AS A TOOL OF NATIONAL SECURITY,  
SANCTIONS ARE AN ESSENTIAL COMPONENT  
OF A COMPREHENSIVE STRATEGY TO  
ADVANCE U.S. FOREIGN POLICY GOALS.  
IF THE UNITED STATES FAILS TO USE THIS  
TOOL WISELY, IT WILL SEND A MESSAGE  
THAT THE UNITED STATES IS NOT SERIOUS  
AND INEFFECTIVE WHEN IT THREATENS  
ECONOMIC COERCION.**

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Afterwards, the United States and its partners began the effort to increase economic pressure on Iran, imposing four key U.N. Security Council resolutions and developing a robust international economic sanctions regime. Iran responded by increasing the size of its nuclear program – building 20,000 centrifuges and changing facts on the ground – all of which occurred despite sanctions pressure. At the time of President Hassan Rouhani’s election in 2013, Iran’s breakout time to a bomb’s worth of highly enriched uranium had decreased to only two to three months.<sup>32</sup> At that point, President Obama had a choice between seizing the opportunity for an opening with a more moderate Iranian president and freezing Iran’s nuclear program through the Joint Plan of Action (JPOA) or continuing to apply pressure. If the United States had not agreed to the JPOA and continued to apply pressure and gone for a “better deal,” it is possible that Iran would have continued to build out its program even under further financial duress and its dash would have continued to shrink from two to three months to a matter of weeks. In that case, the United States may have been faced with the very real dilemma of pursuing military action or allowing Iran to achieve a virtual nuclear

capability. It is also possible that a harder American line would have produced a better agreement as pressure mounted, but no one will ever know for sure.

At this point, the real policy argument is no longer about what might have happened had the United States acted differently two years ago, but what would happen today if the United States insisted on going back to renegotiate the agreement. Some may argue that the United States still has the necessary leverage to do that because of its economic and military power. But the more likely scenario is that after two years of difficult multilateral negotiations and a final agreement this will no longer be possible. Any attempt to go back and renegotiate now would likely be met with fierce resistance from Iran and many of the United States’ P5+1 partners and would damage American credibility as a serious negotiating partner.

### **GOING IT ALONE**

Some argue that no agreement with Iran would sufficiently accomplish U.S. priorities and negotiating with the world’s foremost state-sponsor of terrorism is antithetical to U.S. interests. The United States should instead act independently with its powerful economic sanctions to continue isolating Iran. The assumption in such an argument is that the United States has the economic and financial strength to compel Iranian isolation. Even if the rest of the P5+1 and others in the community of nations are against further sanctions, fear of being cut off from the U.S. economy will compel them to comply.

This is not a realistic option for the United States. The strength of the powerful economic sanctions on Iran over the last several years was based on multilateral participation in, and enforcement of sanctions. The U.S. economy is the largest in the world; it is liquid, stable, and transparent.<sup>33</sup> Additionally, the U.S. dollar is an extremely attractive store of value and transactions in the currency are virtually essential for any multinational bank or business.<sup>34</sup> However, participation in the U.S. financial system is not a key feature of business

for local, regional, and many international businesses outside of the West. Also, U.S. jurisdiction does not cover the entire world, and therefore U.S. sanctions, no matter how aggressive, cannot reach every entity that would do business with Iran. Threatening major economic punishments against those who would violate U.S. sanctions could be tantamount to broad-scale economic warfare, including on businesses and government entities in countries that are U.S. partners.<sup>35</sup> This could have diplomatic consequences for the United States, and may be risky given the preponderance of U.S. debt held by foreign banks.<sup>36</sup>

Aside from the diplomatic and financial risks associated with trying to continue with a unilateral policy of tough sanctions on Iran, the United States would establish a dangerous precedent in demonstrating a weak sanctions strategy. As a tool of national security, sanctions are an essential component of a comprehensive strategy to advance U.S. foreign policy goals. If the United States fails to use this tool wisely, it will inadvertently send a message that the United States is not serious and ineffective when it threatens economic coercion. This is an outcome the United States can ill-afford, when it relies so heavily on sanctions to successfully exert economic pressure on Russia, South American narcotraffickers, supporters of terrorism in the Middle East and beyond, and proliferation networks linked to North Korea, among other examples.

## MILITARY ACTION

The other alternative to an agreement is military action. Failure to reach an agreement would not have inevitably meant war, but it would have

significantly increased the risk of such an outcome over time. Without a deal, Iran would begin moving ahead on its nuclear program and could eventually leave the United States with the choice of taking action or accepting a nuclear-armed Iran.

The United States would overwhelmingly dominate such a fight, and the consequences to Iran would be much more severe than to the United States. But military action comes with tremendous risk for all sides. We should remember that when the United States intervenes militarily it finds it difficult to get out – as evidenced by its involvement in Iraq, which is now approaching 25 years. Moreover, any attack on Iran’s nuclear facilities would not set the program back nearly as far as this agreement does if it is fully implemented.<sup>37</sup>

Finally, some argue that Iran will simply wait 15 years and then pursue a nuclear weapon under better conditions. In reality, no other option – not even military strikes – could ensure that for the next 15 years Iran will not have nuclear weapons. In a region facing so many other problems, dramatically restricting Iran’s nuclear program for 15 years is certainly a notable achievement. If 15 years from now Iran chooses to violate the agreement or does not appear to be pursuing a credible civilian nuclear energy program, there will be military options available to the United States to respond. More important, for the next 15 years the United States now has policy options to try and influence an outcome that will deter Iran from pursuing nuclear weapons. This is far preferable to being faced with the decision in the coming years of having to choose between an Iran with a virtual nuclear capability or military action.

The background of the page is a close-up, slightly blurred image of a flag. The flag features a white field with a prominent red emblem in the center, which appears to be a stylized bird or a similar symbol. Above and below this emblem are green decorative elements, possibly part of a crest or a banner with text. The overall color palette is dominated by white, red, and green.

CHAPTER 2

## **Regional Implications of the Agreement**



The nuclear agreement could have far-ranging positive regional implications if it leads to greater cooperation between Iran and the United States on some of the region's most difficult conflicts. Over time, it could lead to cooperation to maintain stability in Afghanistan, greater U.S.-Iranian cooperation against ISIS, a negotiated political settlement in Syria that includes a transition process to remove Bashar al-Assad from power, a de-escalation of the civil war in Yemen, and new opportunities for energy cooperation and energy-intensive industry growth in the Gulf.

But it could also have the opposite effect of deepening tensions between Iran and its regional competitors, as Iran uses its newfound legitimacy and some of the financial windfall from the lifting of sanctions to double down on support for President Assad, Hezbollah, Iraqi Shia militias, and the Houthis. Additionally, Iran is gearing up to compete directly with its neighbors on oil exports, with potential negative price and revenue implications for all parties. If the Arab states and Israel feel abandoned by the United States in the aftermath of a deal, they may begin acting more independently and aggressively to counter what they see as a rising Iranian threat, further exacerbating tensions in the region.

In particular, it is important to understand how the agreement might impact internal dynamics inside Iran; traditional U.S. partners, especially Israel and Saudi Arabia; the civil wars and insurgencies being waged in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, and Yemen; the potential for regional proliferation; and regional energy developments.

## Internal Dynamics in Iran

A major question about the nuclear agreement is whether it will change the regime's strategic orientation. Will the agreement give a boost to pragmatists like Iran's President Hassan Rouhani and allow him and his faction to wield greater influence on Iran's foreign policy? Or will Iranian

hardliners reassert themselves and pursue more repressive tactics at home and aggressive policies abroad to ensure that the agreement does not lead to a transformation of Iranian politics and society that they fear would threaten the regime's existence and their role in the system? These questions cannot be answered overnight, and in the aftermath of an agreement there is likely to be a continuation if not an intensification of political infighting, which has characterized the Islamic Republic since its inception.

## THE PRAGMATISTS

On one side stands Iran's pragmatic President Rouhani and his allies. Men of the revolution, they are not looking to fundamentally overturn the regime's nature. They will not renounce Iran's nuclear program in its entirety or cease efforts to wield influence through support for groups such as Hezbollah and Iraqi Shia militias.<sup>38</sup> They will still view the United States as a major competitor. But when evaluating foreign policy priorities, they put greater emphasis on economic integration and international legitimacy than their predecessors, believing that a more open approach to the world is the most effective way for Iran to increase its international influence. As President Rouhani stated in a January 2015 speech, "Gone are the days when it was said if foreign investors come to Iran its independence will suffer ... It's been the economy that pays for the politics ... It would be good for once to act in reverse and have internal politics and foreign policy pay for the economy."<sup>39</sup>

After a nuclear deal, Rouhani will have strong political winds at his back. He will have succeeded in delivering on his promise to Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei to relieve the devastating sanctions harming Iran's economy, which could have threatened the regime's stability. With this success, Rouhani may have the Supreme Leader's support and more leverage inside the Iranian system to play an increasingly influential role in internal decisionmaking regarding Iran's regional policies in Syria, Iraq, and Yemen, while wresting more control

away from the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps' Quds Force (IRGC-QF).<sup>40</sup> He may also potentially be able to leverage the agreement to make some domestic social reforms – though thus far in his presidency he has focused primarily on economic reforms and not emphasized a more open social agenda.<sup>41</sup>

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**IRAN IS NOT A DEMOCRACY, AND POPULAR SUPPORT ALONE IS NOT ENOUGH TO SHIFT THE INTERNAL POLITICAL BALANCE TOWARD ROUHANI. BUT THE POPULATION HAS SOME INFLUENCE, AND THE REGIME WAS SERIOUSLY RATTLED BY MASSIVE PROTESTS FOLLOWING THE FRAUD-TAINTED PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION IN 2009.**

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The Iranian public's support for Rouhani and his faction could also increase substantially, which may translate into greater influence and more seats in the parliament if the Guardian Council, a body dominated by the Supreme Leader's appointees, permits enough pragmatists to run in upcoming elections early in 2016. The agreement's popularity was apparent when, after agreeing on parameters for the JCPOA, Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif returned from Lausanne to a hero's welcome from street demonstrators.<sup>42</sup> Iran is not a democracy, and popular support alone is not enough to shift the internal political balance toward Rouhani. But the population has some influence, and the regime was seriously rattled by massive protests following the fraud-tainted presidential election in 2009. Indeed, many of Iran's leaders came to power themselves through a people's revolution and thus have a healthy respect for and fear of the power of the street. The government "vets" all candidates for office, ensuring their loyalty to the system, and has a history of manipulating outcomes.<sup>43</sup> But popular support

matters, as demonstrated by Rouhani's surprise election from a field of six candidates in 2013 in which he received barely over 50 percent of the vote. This came to pass despite the fact that his views appeared to be not as closely aligned with the Supreme Leader as some of the other candidates.<sup>44</sup> However, as a close associate of Khomeini for more than two decades, Rouhani was well within the establishment and may have been seen by Khomeini as a necessary correction to the incompetent and divisive President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

### THE HARDLINERS

It is also plausible that after the agreement, having achieved their objective of getting out from under sanctions, hardliners encouraged by the Supreme Leader could try to marginalize Rouhani and other pragmatists, continue Iran's aggressive regional approach, and pursue harsher, more repressive domestic policies. Khomeini's greatest fear is that the nuclear deal will lead to a broader rapprochement with the West that eventually topples the regime.<sup>45</sup> He has stated frequently that the nuclear agreement is a one-off and not a game-changer in the relationship, stating, "Negotiations with the United States are on the nuclear issue and nothing else."<sup>46</sup> Conservatives could put this into practice by leveraging the candidate vetting process to eliminate many of Rouhani's allies from next year's parliamentary elections and try to topple Rouhani in the 2017 presidential elections, although all presidents since the post was established in 1989 have served two terms. Even though Rouhani's 2013 election showed that the Iranian public has some influence, the suspicious circumstances surrounding Ahmadinejad's 2009 election demonstrate that when the regime considers itself at risk it can manipulate electoral outcomes.<sup>47</sup>

In reality, the period of internal struggle between hardliners and pragmatists will likely take years to play out. Iran's February 2016 parliamentary elections may be an early indicator, but the most important moment may not come until the Supreme Leader, who is 76 years old and said to

be in poor health, passes away.<sup>48</sup> The Assembly of Experts, a body of clerics that will also face elections next year, is charged with appointing the Supreme Leader. But given the changes in the Islamic Republic in the 25 years since the last succession, it is uncertain precisely how the new leader may be chosen, and how much power the office will retain relative to the other key centers of power. The outcome of the succession process is likely to be a crucial moment in the history of the Islamic Republic and a strong indicator of whether the regime is moderating and becoming more pragmatic or whether the hardliners are winning the internal battle. In the final analysis, the nuclear agreement is likely to spur intensive internal political competition that will take years to play out and may lead to a more pragmatic approach on other issues – but may not.

## Anxious American Partners

The anxiety of two of America's closest partners in the Middle East, Saudi Arabia and Israel – both of whom oppose the nuclear agreement with Iran – could have profound implications for American interests in the region and the stability of the Middle East. In the aftermath of an agreement, Saudi Arabia could pursue riskier and more aggressive policies toward Iran with less coordination with the United States, and tensions in U.S.-Israel relations could lead to a reduced cooperation with a valuable regional partner.

### SAUDI ARABIA

Saudi Arabia has expressed concerns that the United States is so interested in achieving an agreement on the nuclear question that it is willing to tolerate Iran's expansion of unchecked influence throughout the Middle East. To many in the region, Iranian nuclear ambitions are inextricably linked to Tehran's aggressive support of its proxies.<sup>49</sup> The Saudis feel the United States is doing little to counter the rising strength of Iran and its action network. What they most fear is that in the aftermath of a nuclear agreement, the United States would cut a deal with Tehran to divide and stabilize



The *Nimitz*-class aircraft carrier *USS Theodore Roosevelt* conducts a maritime security operation in the Arabian Sea in April 2015 that supported the Saudi and United Arab Emirates-led coalition's efforts to prevent the shipment of weapons from the IRGC to Zaydi Shia Houthi fighters in northern Yemen. (Credit: U.S. Naval Forces Central Command/U.S. Fifth Fleet Flickr)

the region – and abandon its Arab partners.<sup>50</sup> Despite their concerns, in the aftermath of the agreement the Saudis have publicly supported the JCPOA, likely calculating that a public disagreement with the United States on this matter is not in their interest and that their concerns are better expressed privately.

Some of the Saudi criticism of the American approach is unfair. For the United States, the nuclear issue is still paramount, and given the global and regional consequences of Iran's obtaining a nuclear weapon, prioritizing the nuclear question is the right approach. Moreover, some of the frustration with the United States is closely linked to the Gulf states' anxiety about long standing internal problems and the instability brought on by the Arab Spring – a problem the United States cannot solve.

Part of the Gulf states' criticism, however, is justified. In recent years, the Obama administration has been so focused on the nuclear question that it has

largely neglected the question of Iranian regional influence. While the administration has tried to manage one crisis after another in the region and avoided entangling the United States too deeply in new conflicts, it has not articulated a clear strategy and commitment to the Middle East that could reassure partners. The result has been to create an impression that the United States is indeed leaving the region or considering a pivot to Iran and sacrificing Arab interests.

The United States has clearly recognized this problem and begun to move to address it with the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) summit hosted by President Obama at Camp David in May 2015. This summit was the first step in what will likely be a long process of attempting to convince the Gulf states that the United States is not pivoting to Iran and remains committed to their security.

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**KHAMENEI'S GREATEST FEAR IS THAT THE NUCLEAR DEAL WILL LEAD TO A BROADER RAPPROCHEMENT WITH THE WEST THAT EVENTUALLY TOPPLES THE REGIME.**

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However, so far American reassurances have yet to change GCC calculations. Indeed, the recent Saudi intervention in Yemen and the U.S. response to Saudi actions could portend a shift to a more aggressive approach by the Gulf states to counter Iranian influence in the region in the aftermath of a nuclear agreement. The Saudis believe that the Houthi-led insurgency on its border is an Iranian supported and engineered effort to establish Shia dominance in Yemen.<sup>51</sup> The reality is that while Iran plays an unhelpful role in fueling the conflict by providing arms to the Houthis, the ties between them are not nearly as deep as the ones between Shia militias in Iraq or with Hezbollah in Lebanon.<sup>52</sup> This is much more a tactical relationship and a target of opportunity than a strategic long-term commitment, though the Saudis' greatest fear is that over

time this relationship could be transformed into a deeper, more strategic one.<sup>53</sup> Still, Iran's growing influence combined with Saudi anxiety about America's orientation in the Middle East led the Saudis to act unilaterally and organize their own international force to intervene in Yemen.

The American reaction to the GCC intervention in Yemen may be indicative of a U.S. policy shift and a new focus on Iranian regional influence. Obama administration officials have privately expressed concerns that the Saudi intervention is not clearly tied to a plan to achieve concrete political objectives.<sup>54</sup> However, the United States has chosen to support the Saudi intervention, providing critical intelligence for the aerial campaign and sending ships off the coast of Yemen to deter Iranian resupply of the Houthis.<sup>55</sup> This decision is tied to support for the U.S.-Saudi relationship rather than a belief that the Saudi intervention can be successful.<sup>56</sup> In the aftermath of a deal, the United States may face future tradeoffs, forced to choose between an approach that makes the most sense in a particular instance and a strategy designed to reassure important partners in the region.

**ISRAEL**

A nuclear agreement with Iran may also have significant implications for the U.S.-Israel relationship. It could undermine trust between the United States and Israel, as it already has with the very open and public disagreements between President Obama and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Given their history of close cooperation against common threats in the region, particularly in the intelligence and security arena, this could hurt both countries' interests.

Iran's regional activities and its extreme rhetoric threatening the existence of the Jewish state are causes of concern for Israelis. Liked the Saudis, they fear that the regional threat posed by Iran will grow in the aftermath of the agreement. Or that in trying to placate anxious Arab allies, the United States will provide them with more advanced weapons that could eventually be turned against Israel.

However, Israel's greater concern lies with the nuclear agreement itself.<sup>57</sup> The most significant issue for the Israelis is not necessarily the details of the agreement, such as the number of centrifuges or the overall inspections regime, but the question of sunset and enforcement. They believe that while Iran is likely to respect an agreement during the early years of implementation to obtain desired sanctions relief, it will pursue a nuclear weapon once many of the provisions sunset – or cheat and violate the agreement even earlier. The international community's attention will be diverted to other matters by then, there will be no forceful response, eventually the deal will erode, and Iran will be left with few limits on its nuclear program and no sanctions.

Even as the Israelis express their concerns about the nuclear agreement and the policies of the Obama administration, many in their security establishment are uncomfortable with the current Israeli public confrontational approach. Many Israeli security professionals believe that the best way for the United States and Israel to work out their differences is in private consultations, during which Israel could discuss and influence American thinking and try to coordinate the interpretation of the agreement, as well as the policy in response to Iranian non-compliance and how to handle the matter of sunset provisions. However, at the political level, opposition to the agreement is much greater. Prime Minister Netanyahu chose to more directly challenge the agreement and attempted to influence Congress to vote against it, which has significantly increased tensions between him and the White House.

Even as political tensions have risen, security cooperation remains strong. The United States continues to provide billions in security assistance to Israel, including support for the Iron Dome System anti-rocket system, which dramatically improved the security of Israel's population in recent years. In the immediate aftermath of the agreement, Israel has continued to strongly oppose an agreement, both publicly and privately. However, as the political

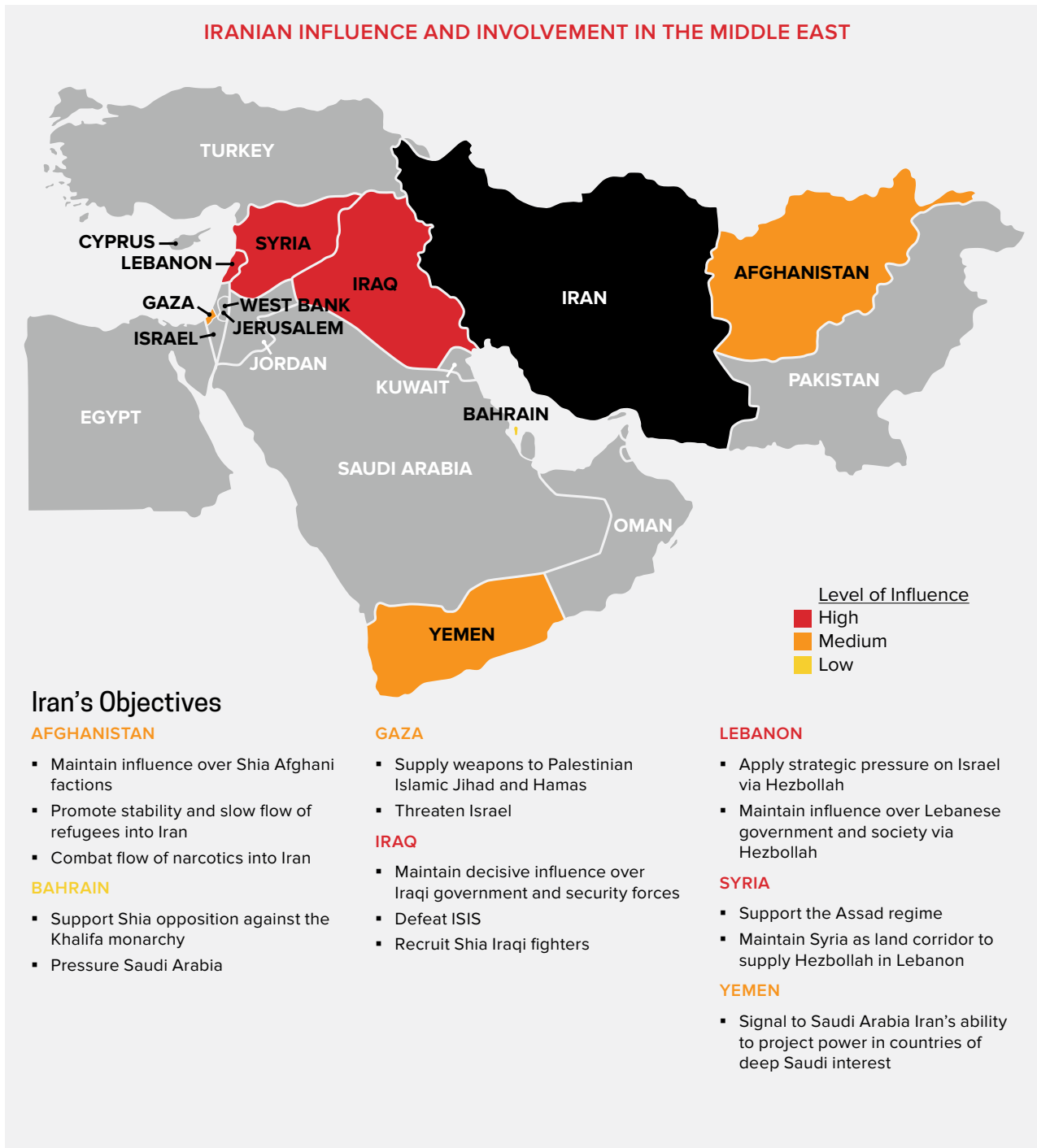
confrontation over the agreement ends, many in both the United States and Israel hope that relations can begin to improve.

## The Civil Wars of the Middle East

Iran, the GCC, Israel, and the United States are all important external actors in the civil wars plaguing the Middle East, especially in Syria, Iraq, Yemen, and Afghanistan. Indeed, the relations and competition among these external actors will be a key factor in the trajectory of these civil wars. Since the nuclear agreement may significantly impact the relations amongst the United States, GCC, Israel, and Iran, it will likely have a significant effect on these regional conflicts.

Three independent factors have contributed to the civil wars in the Middle East. First is the collapse of the institutions and state structures of the old Arab republics in Syria, Iraq, Yemen, Libya, and to some extent, Egypt.<sup>58</sup> This created power vacuums in large swaths of territory in the Middle East, creating the embers of the fire that currently plagues the region. Second, the Iran-Saudi/Sunni-Shia competition acts as the kerosene for these simmering conflicts, as both Iran and the Gulf states continue to pour millions of dollars in funding, arms, and training in an attempt to gain influence. This turns nascent civil wars into full blown conflicts involving sectarian, tribal, and ethnic armed groups fighting as proxies for their regional patrons.<sup>59</sup> Finally, the perception of American withdrawal further feeds Arab insecurity and Iranian triumphalism and causes both to take more aggressive steps to support their allies in the ongoing conflict.

It is not clear whether Iran's heavy involvement in the Iraqi and Syrian civil wars, and its potentially expanding role in the Yemeni civil war, will be significantly impacted by the conclusion of a nuclear deal between the P5+1 and Iran. However, it is important to examine American and Iranian interests in each of these conflict zones and assess if there may be possibilities for greater tactical or strategic cooperation in the aftermath of the nuclear agreement.



## AFGHANISTAN

The most consequential recent example of cooperation between Iran and the United States came in Afghanistan after 2001, when they worked together to topple the Taliban government and participated in the Bonn Conference that resulted in Hamid Karzai's presidency.<sup>60</sup> Since then, Iran has pursued a strategy of hedging its bets and maintaining influence by supporting various groups inside Afghanistan that are sometimes at odds with each other. At varying times, it has actively supported opposition to the Taliban, supported the Taliban, sought to expand its influence in Shia-majority areas such as Herat, and supported various Afghan political and military leaders who have had contentious relationships with the national government in Kabul.<sup>61</sup> Iran's strongest historical relationships, however, are with the Tajik and Hazara Shia minorities who have traditionally aligned against the Taliban, and it supported the Northern Alliance against the Taliban prior to the U.S. invasion in 2001.<sup>62</sup>

One potential tension between the United States and Iran in Afghanistan is that the Iranian government has been a vocal critic of NATO's Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) with the Afghan government, a security arrangement that the Islamic Republic views as a potential threat in the event of a wider armed conflict with the United States.<sup>63</sup> However, given the current plans for significant withdrawals, this matter should not cause significant strain between the two countries.

On several other issues that affect the future stability of Afghanistan, the United States and Iran have similar priorities. These include containing the Taliban and promoting the general stability of Afghanistan by preventing a return to a general state of civil war in the country.<sup>64</sup> Iran joined the United States and other members of the international community in praising the 2014 formation of the Afghan unity government of President Ashraf Ghani Ahmadzai and Chief Executive Officer Abdullah Abdullah.<sup>65</sup> Despite Iran's continued

objection to the NATO SOFA with the Afghan government, it may see benefits from a small residual NATO force in support of Afghan security forces, which can help stabilize a conflict that has sent two million Afghan refugees into Iran.<sup>66</sup>

Preventing the flow of heroin and other narcotics from Afghanistan into Iran and onto the global market is another potential area of cooperation. One of the most damaging contemporary social problems in Iran is addiction to opiates, particularly heroin, most of which enter the country from Afghanistan.<sup>67</sup> Iran's moderate factions have generally taken the lead on their country's anti-narcotics policy, an issue on which they are supported by the hardline factions close to the supreme leader.<sup>68</sup> Iran may also welcome U.S. support in adjudicating claims to water from the Helmand River, which is vital to Iran's Sistan-Baluchistan province.<sup>69</sup>

## IRAQ

Beginning in 2003, the Iraq war helped enable the expansion of Iranian power throughout the Middle East, and particularly in Iraq, where today Iran has deep influence on the government and security forces. As ISIS makes gains throughout Iraq, the United States and Iran share overlapping interests in preventing the breakup of the country, averting civil war and defeating ISIS.<sup>70</sup> The IRGC-QF actively trains the Shia militias that fight ISIS, and at a minimum there has been an effort to tactically de-conflict American and Iranian operations in Iraq, with the Iraqis playing the coordinator role.<sup>71</sup> American and Iranian officials have also acknowledged that some level of dialogue on this issue occurred on the sidelines of the nuclear negotiations, but that it was relatively insignificant.<sup>72</sup>

However, long-term challenges are likely to exacerbate the differences between the two countries' respective visions for Iraq. The United States believes that the best approach for achieving long-term stability must come through inclusive governance that allows representation for Sunnis and Kurds, along with the Shia majority, while at



An image supporting the IRGC Quds Force's regional action network of proxy militias that operate in the Syrian and Iraqi civil wars. It reads, "We are all yours, oh Zeinab! We are the soldiers of our commander, the faqih [jurist]." Faqih in this context refers to the Supreme Leader. The militant organization logos that are depicted are, from left to right: Kata'ib Sayyid al-Shuhada'; Harakat Hezbollah al-Nujaba'; Kata'ib Hezbollah; Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq; Lebanese Hezbollah; and the Badr organization's military wing. (Credit: Screen grab from Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq posted YouTube video)

the same time providing regions with some degree of autonomy.<sup>73</sup> Iran, by contrast, has long viewed Iraq through the lens of the sectarian proxy wars in the region. Former Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki embodied that view. His sectarian agenda, executed through authoritarian means, alienated the Sunnis and Kurds and created an environment conducive to the spread of ISIS into western Iraq and beyond.<sup>74</sup> Concurrently, the IRGC-QF has used the Syrian conflict to build its action network of (primarily Shia) militias, expanding it mostly with Iraqi Shia fighters.<sup>75</sup>

A more cooperative, inclusive approach holds more hope for resolving Iraq's fundamental governance issues, including the status of Kirkuk, distribution of oil revenues, and minority rights. Ultimately, however, cooperation in Iraq will depend on Iran's decision about its vision for the country on its border. It faces a choice between a cohesive, stable, pluralistic state where it maintains significant – although not decisive – influence, or a fracturing state that serves as a hotbed for powerful Sunni jihadist groups, but one in which, due to its weakness and instability, Iran might have greater influence.

Another practical challenge for U.S.-Iranian cooperation in Iraq is that, at least in the near-term, the IRGC-QF led by Qassem Soleimani will continue to have primary responsibility for Iranian policy in Iraq.<sup>76</sup> Perhaps in the longer term Rouhani might be able to increase his influence in this arena, but it is unlikely that, even in the aftermath of a nuclear deal, he could immediately wrest control of this portfolio away from Soleimani, who has essentially run Iranian foreign policy in this arena since the U.S. invasion in 2003 and who remains very close to the supreme leader.<sup>77</sup> Although Soleimani is not an ideologue but a pragmatic hardliner toughened by years of low-intensity conflict across the Middle East, it is hard to envision the United States developing a strong cooperative relationship with a man linked to Shia groups in Iraq that are responsible for many American fatalities.<sup>78</sup>

## SYRIA

The situation in Syria is even more complex as Iran continues to strongly back President Bashar al-Assad, thus fueling the civil war that has engulfed the country, resulted in the deaths of more than 240,000 people, displaced more than 10 million,



and contributed to the rise of ISIS.<sup>79</sup> Reports have confirmed that at any given time Iran has about at least 60 to 70 high-level IRGC-QF commanders and military advisors in Syria, while Hezbollah has likely deployed more than 5,000 troops.<sup>80</sup> Meanwhile, the United States' Sunni partners have reacted to Iranian interventionism by supporting Sunni groups, regardless of their level of extremism.<sup>81</sup> While this response may be expedient, it will only exacerbate regional instability.

The Iranians are most concerned with maintaining the existence of the Assad regime in western Syria or a successor state that can maintain a defensible land route to sustain Hezbollah.<sup>82</sup> The rhetoric from Iranian officials, including President Rouhani, suggests that it is unlikely that Tehran will use the aftermath of the nuclear negotiations as an excuse to draw down its intervention in the Syrian civil war.<sup>83</sup> Syria's ruling Assad regime has been a strategic ally of Iran for three decades. Over the course of the Syrian civil war the Iranians have doubled down their support for the Assad regime. They are not likely to withdraw that support in the near future unless there is a credible and viable alternative, as to do so would likely result in a collapse of regime loyalist forces and the victory of rebel groups supported by Iran's rivals, particularly Saudi Arabia.<sup>84</sup> In both northwest Syria – on the border of the Alawite-majority, regime-core province of Latakia – and around Damascus, local rebel coalitions are strongly networked with key U.S. regional partners including Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Qatar.<sup>85</sup>

This Iranian support for the Assad regime through its transnational Shia jihadist action network provides the IRGC with an effective bargaining chip in any transitional scenario in Syria. The present and likely mid-term reality is that it will be hardliners such as Ayatollah Khamenei and the IRGC that will have the responsibility to determine when and under what conditions Iranian-backed forces are withdrawn from Syria, thus potentially prolonging the viability of the Assad regime.

The one possibility for a breakthrough that ends the crisis in Syria is that Iran could have an interest in reducing its investment in Syria due to the high cost of supporting the Assad regime. Iran has sent large amounts of money and significant numbers of its fighters and has encouraged its regional proxies, including Hezbollah and Iraqi Shia special groups, to take up the fight in Syria. Those efforts have consumed vast resources at a time when sanctions have hit hard on Iran's domestic economy and have also cost Iran dearly by antagonizing the region's Sunni Arab majority. The increasingly sectarian complexion of regional conflicts has undermined Iran's pan-Islamic bid for influence across the Middle East, including until recently distancing Hamas from Iran's camp.<sup>86</sup> Syria's civil war has also placed a costly burden on the IRGC and the Quds Force, which have been deployed to reinforce the Assad regime militarily.<sup>87</sup> At least six senior Quds Force officers, as many as 60 operatives, and an estimated 700 to 1,000 Hezbollah fighters have reportedly been killed in the Syrian conflict as of the summer of 2015.<sup>88</sup> Iran has been forced to make expensive investments in Assad that it can ill afford if Assad is ultimately incapable of controlling the country.

Ultimately, to reach a political agreement that ends the conflict, Iran will have to be a central player in bringing Assad to the table and supporting a transition that removes him and attempts to stabilize the country. At the moment, that scenario appears still seems likely to be a long way off.

## YEMEN

Yemen's complex civil war has also emerged as a site of Saudi-Iranian rivalry, especially from Saudi Arabia's perspective. The Saudi-led "Operation Decisive Storm," directed against the Yemeni Zaydi Shia Ansar Allah (i.e., Houthi) movement and its allies, including some Yemeni armed forces still loyal to the long-ruling former Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh, has been a significant test for Riyadh. Having asserted that the Houthis are a major IRGC proxy targeting the stability of Saudi



U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry meets with Syrian refugee leaders in the Za'atari Refugee Camp in Jordan in July 2013. The number of Syrian refugees now exceeds 3 million, with over 9 million internally displaced, and is a long-term crisis that threatens to have destabilizing effects on the Middle East and Europe. (Credit: U.S. Department of State)

Arabia and the Arabian Peninsula, the Saudis have spent a great deal of political capital and financial and military resources to demonstrate resolve toward Iran and its allies.

Because of its location on the Saudi border, Yemen is strategically central for Saudi Arabia. However, it is more a target of opportunity for Iran and not as vital of a national interest as Syria or Iraq. While the Houthis have received some military and financial support from the IRGC, it is still unclear to what extent the IRGC may have directed the Houthis to seize Sana'a and moved aggressively to depose Yemen's sitting president, Abdu Rabu Mansour Hadi.<sup>89</sup> Indeed, the most likely case is that the IRGC has seized the opportunity created by Yemen's civil war, but wields only limited influence over the Houthis and is not the real driver of this conflict.<sup>90</sup> Still, the Saudis remain concerned that IRGC influence over the Houthis will help Iran to challenge traditional Saudi influence over Yemen.<sup>91</sup>

Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, widely believed to represent the most direct and imminent Salafist

jihadi threat to the United States and its allies in the world, has taken advantage of the escalation of the Yemeni civil war to expand its influence in the central Hadramawt region of the country, presenting a long-term dilemma for U.S. counterterrorism operations.<sup>92</sup> The conflict has also significantly worsened the humanitarian situation. Airstrikes launched by the Saudi-led coalition, the general maritime embargo placed on Yemen to prevent IRGC arms shipments to the Houthis, and the difficulties presented by the ongoing conflict between the combatants in Yemen threaten an estimated 6 million people, with more than 4,500 people, including over 2,300 civilians, killed and over 1.2 million people displaced by the fighting.<sup>93</sup>

Local tribal militias predominately in southern and central Yemen have mobilized to resist the Houthis, and some of them receive support from the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia.<sup>94</sup> Emirati and Saudi support, both on the ground and in the air, have been decisive in assisting these local tribal militias to successfully repel Houthi fighters and their allies.<sup>95</sup> Although these efforts in Yemen by important U.S. Arab partners have started to bear fruit, there are concerning reports that some of these local tribal militias coordinate and fight alongside al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula and other militant Salafist armed groups.<sup>96</sup>

The U.S. decision to aid the Saudi-led intervention and provide intelligence, imagery, and maritime support is likely indicative of the American decision to demonstrate support for the U.S.-Saudi relationship in the aftermath of the nuclear deal. And there is some hope that this intervention could be the start of a more systematic process of building an interoperable Arab military force with the capability and willingness to take the lead in its region's security and stability, potentially easing that burden off the United States. In private, Obama administration officials have expressed concern that Operation Decisive Storm is not clearly tied to a plan to achieve concrete political objectives or bring an end to the fighting. It is also quite concerning to

American policymakers that U.S. partners seem so willing to work with Sunni extremists and have attributed much of what ails Yemen to Iran.

## Proliferation in the Middle East

Furthermore, Iran's neighbors could react to the agreement by seeking a nuclear capability similar in size and scope to that of Iran. Even though the GCC has chosen to publicly support the agreement, some members of the royal family, including former Saudi Ambassador to the United States and former Director of Saudi intelligence Turki Bin Faisal, have already publicly stated that Saudi Arabia may react to a deal by seeking its own domestic enrichment capabilities and may be compelled to do so if it feels that Iran will develop a threshold capability after many of the provisions of the agreement expire in 10 to 15 years.<sup>97</sup> Other countries in the region, including Egypt, Turkey, and the United Arab Emirates, have expressed their concern about the Iranian nuclear program and their intention to develop civilian nuclear programs.<sup>98</sup> This possibility could be further exacerbated if the Arab states start to question the commitment of the United States to their external security and see the agreement as part of the United States' strategic reorientation from the Arab states to Iran. Even if Iran refrains from moving beyond a threshold capability after 15 years, simply the threat of doing so may be sufficient to generate a reaction from partners in the region who may seek similar domestic enrichment programs.

The greatest concern for American policy in the region should be Saudi Arabia, which is in a more direct competition with Iran than are Egypt and Turkey – the two other most significant likely proliferators. Advanced and legitimate Iranian nuclear capabilities will be viewed by Saudi Arabia as a threat, to which it may need to respond by building an equivalent enrichment capability and hedging against the possibility of a nuclear-armed Iran. As the world's leading exporter of oil, Saudi Arabia has significant resources at its disposal to

pursue a nuclear weapon. However, it does not currently have the human capital and scientific base necessary, so it is unclear whether it could quickly develop this capacity. Even if they were unable to produce a nuclear weapon indigenously, the Saudis could also attempt to buy one from Pakistan; some speculate that Saudi Arabia has already entered into contingency arrangements with Pakistan to produce nuclear weapons in the event of a crisis.<sup>99</sup> Therefore, the United States should focus on the Saudi regime as the main potential recipient of a weapon in the region and form an appropriate response to dissuade it from pursuing nuclear weapons.

However, a number of impediments could prevent other regional states, particularly Saudi Arabia, from pursuing the nuclear path. Building a nuclear weapon is not easy. It took Iran years to build its nuclear program, despite having a large and well-educated population.<sup>100</sup> Iran's nuclear program was extraordinarily costly to its economy because of billions of dollars in nuclear infrastructure investments, onerous sanctions, and isolation in the international community. It is also an open question whether Pakistan would be willing to provide Saudi Arabia with nuclear weapons. Such a step would draw intense international condemnation and include risks of isolation and economic penalties for both Pakistan and Saudi Arabia. Indeed, in a recent case Pakistan was not even willing to support a much more limited Saudi request for ground forces as part of the intervention in Yemen.

Moreover, the United States will have significant leverage over these countries, both in the pressure that it can exert as the primary security guarantor and the incentives it can offer to dissuade them from fielding an enrichment capability similar to Iran's. These incentives can range from security guarantees to 123 agreements that support robust civilian nuclear programs. For example, the multi-billion dollar program developed by the United Arab Emirates, which is expected to meet a significant portion of the United Arab Emirates' domestic

energy demands by 2020 – only 11 years after signing a 123 agreement – will have a much more meaningful economic impact than Iran’s largely symbolic enrichment program, which has been in development since the 1960s and will not be able to start meaningfully addressing Iran’s energy demands until at least 2030.<sup>101</sup> Taken together, these tools should provide the international community with the ability to prevent any further regional proliferation after an agreement.

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**WITH THE WORLD’S SECOND LARGEST RESERVES OF NATURAL GAS, AT 1,201 TRILLION CUBIC FEET,<sup>102</sup> IRAN AIMS TO EXPAND ITS NATURAL GAS PRODUCTION AFTER THE LIFTING OF SANCTIONS AND IS ATTEMPTING TO LURE FOREIGN COMPANIES TO THE SECTOR.**

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## Regional Energy Developments

As the P5+1 lifts sanctions on Iran, the country will begin to compete more aggressively with regional neighbors, primarily in the energy sector. While oil trades on a single global market – and its price and political effects are felt internationally – natural gas is often more regional in its supply, distribution, and price competition. More intensive development of Iran’s natural gas market will have a number of local effects, including some that are positive for its neighbors.

With the world’s second largest reserves of natural gas, at 1,201 trillion cubic feet,<sup>102</sup> Iran aims to expand its natural gas production after the lifting of sanctions and is attempting to lure foreign companies to the sector.<sup>103</sup> The National Iranian Gas Company plans to spend more than \$20 billion on projects to become the world’s third largest natural gas producer and increase its share of the global gas trade from 2 percent today to as much as 8 to 10 percent by 2025.<sup>104</sup> Iran hopes to send more gas abroad via pipelines to Turkey and also perhaps to Pakistan, Oman, or and the United Arab Emirates. Turkey is already a significant buyer of Iranian gas, purchasing a quarter of its pipeline imports from Iran and making Iran the second largest supplier after Russia.<sup>105</sup> Pakistan, Oman, and the United Arab Emirates are desperate for natural gas and would benefit economically and strategically from a new, local supply source.

Iran also plans to use its natural gas in oilfield recovery and export refineries, and to generate power to export to neighbors such as Iraq. Iran is unlikely to be an exporter of liquefied natural gas anytime soon, given market saturation and its inadequate domestic financial and technological capabilities.

Iran will compete with some of its neighbors in the area of gas and gas-intensive industries such as petrochemicals. While Saudi Arabia is in serious need of natural gas and there is a business case for its import of Iranian gas, such a circumstance is not viable. Political mistrust and intense competition over oil supply in a weak market will make cooperation difficult between these two regional leaders.



CHAPTER 3

**Key Global Implications of the  
Agreement for the United States**

The Iran nuclear agreement will have global implications far beyond the Middle East. Regardless of how long the deal lasts or its ultimate success, it will impact the way the United States interacts politically with some strategic global partners and competitors. The agreement should confer economic and security benefits to both China and Russia. It will likely provide the United States greater policy flexibility with how it approaches China, but may diminish the importance of one of the few bright spots in contemporary U.S.-Russia cooperation. The deal will also have an important effect on global oil markets. This will be significant for U.S. interests, given the status of the United States as the largest producer<sup>106</sup> and consumer<sup>107</sup> of petroleum and other liquid fuels, and indeed for the interests of all major oil producing and consuming economies.

This chapter focuses on four key implications of the Iran deal significant to U.S. national security and foreign policy interests: the U.S. foreign policy apparatus' ability to effectively balance a broad array of policy objectives; the deal's effects on Russia; the effects on China; and the effects on global energy markets.

## Implications for Overall U.S. Policy Prioritization

For the United States as a global superpower, balancing priorities is a great challenge. An administration's priorities can be measured in the hours of attention that key issues receive from senior leadership. Over the past few years the Iranian nuclear challenge has taken up an unusually large amount of time from leaders in the administration, leaving other important issues such as Chinese provocations in the South China Sea, or more broadly the overall rebalance to Asia, to fall lower on the priority list.<sup>108</sup> This has meant less time for other issues, as key leaders have focused extensively on the Iran question – most notably Secretary Kerry, who by most accounts may have spent more time in meetings with Foreign Minister Zarif than with any other

foreign counterpart in the last year.<sup>109</sup> Kerry has also spent a significant amount of time with other members of the P5+1 and Middle Eastern partners addressing this challenge. Additionally, the State Department's number four official, former Under Secretary for Political Affairs Wendy Sherman, was almost solely dedicated to this issue, and for a time so too was former Deputy Secretary Bill Burns.

The level of attention this issue has received has also led to an extraordinary number of interagency policy meetings, including deliberations by Cabinet secretaries and their immediate deputies, where administrations traditionally make major policy decisions. As a result, other challenges have had less time on the agenda at the highest levels, resulting in less rigorous policymaking processes and poorer policy outcomes. Allies in Asia have questioned the administration's ongoing commitment to the rebalance, and allies in Europe wonder whether Washington is maintaining sufficient attention to Russia's increasingly aggressive behavior in its neighborhood. While enforcement and implementation of the agreement will continue to require significant effort by senior political officials, in the aftermath of the agreement there should be an opportunity to shift more time and resources to other issues.

## The Deal's Effects on Russia

The JCPOA offers a variety of economic and strategic challenges and advantages to Russia. Upon implementation and the roll back of the most significant economic sanctions on Iran, which is expected to occur in the first half of 2016,<sup>110</sup> Moscow could suffer significant losses in revenue as global oil prices drop. But Russia also stands to gain a major new client for arms sales, a target for strategic economic investments, including in the lucrative energy sector, a partner on approved nuclear enrichment, and a closer partnership with a Middle Eastern state aiming aggressively for a stronger role in the region and fellow critic of the West.

## ECONOMIC IMPLICATIONS

As more Iranian oil supplies flow abroad following the lifting of sanctions, weakening an already slack oil market and oil price, the Russian economy may suffer. Compounding this problem for Moscow, Russian oil companies have been producing at post-Soviet highs in the recent past, pumping 10.7 million barrels per day during the second quarter of 2015 in a play to hold onto market share while supply exceeds demand.<sup>111</sup> This strategy puts downward pressure on oil prices, to the detriment of at least near-term revenues for Russia.

On the other hand, Russian oil and gas companies may find the opportunity to partner with Iran on its energy sector development drive, which may cost perhaps \$185 billion, to revitalize and expand oil and gas production that has suffered from years of sanctions, mismanagement, and corruption.<sup>112</sup> Russian companies will compete with more technically sophisticated counterparts, particularly European companies, to earn Iranian contracts. They may also struggle with project financing, and investment financing more broadly, under pressure from the current anti-Russia sanctions regime imposed by the United States and the European Union. The Russian economy is expected to contract by 3.4 percent this year, according to the International Monetary Fund, and capital flight and weak consumption will remain problems for some time to come. Nevertheless, there may still be commercial opportunities for Russian companies, particularly as Iranian production costs are relatively low<sup>113</sup> and many other foreign energy companies will avoid Iranian investments given the high level of commercial sector risk and the need to avoid violation of myriad remaining sanctions on Iran. Russian energy minister Alexander Novak is reported to have scheduled a visit Iran this fall 2015, which may help to accelerate some Russian energy investment with Iran.<sup>114</sup> However, given the bleak market outlook over perhaps the next year or two, and possibly beyond for oil sector revenue creation by oil producers (including Russia), Russia's partnership with Iran on energy development will be more strategic than lucrative in nature.

Russian and Iranian companies may also see opportunities for trade and investment cooperation in other, non-energy economic areas going forward. One area is infrastructure, where Iran is in need of major overhauls to accommodate a new economic opening. Rail lines and reactors may be among the early prominent examples of this cooperation.<sup>115</sup> Additionally, there are a variety of ancillary regional opportunities for cooperation on infrastructure development associated with Iran's anticipated growth of commodity and manufactured product exports to markets in neighboring countries and beyond. This may include a mutual investment to build and expand links to Iran's Middle Eastern neighbors and Central Asia, a key sphere of influence for Moscow.

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## RUSSIAN AND IRANIAN COMPANIES MAY ALSO SEE OPPORTUNITIES FOR TRADE AND INVESTMENT COOPERATION IN OTHER, NON-ENERGY ECONOMIC AREAS GOING FORWARD.

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The sale of weapons is an additional area in which Russia will have additional opportunities to do business with Iran in the future. Russia is the world's second largest exporter of arms, after the United States,<sup>116</sup> and one can judge this issue's importance for Moscow by Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov's very public stand during the end of the JCPOA negotiations on the need to eliminate the arms ban on Iran.<sup>117</sup> This arms ban was put in place through the series of U.N. Security Council resolutions starting in 2006 that target Iran's nuclear program and forbid the export of offensive weapons to Iran. Under the JCPOA, the full removal of bilateral and multilateral sanctions on Iran's procurement of heavy offensive weapons will not occur until year five of the agreement, but even before that Russia will be well-placed to over time increase sales of so-called defensive weapons and security equipment to Iran.

The most likely early deal in the queue is the controversial sale of S-300 missile systems to Iran, which could significantly complicate American or Israeli efforts to conduct airstrikes against Iran's nuclear program or create a credible military deterrent. The S-300 is not part of the U.N. arms embargo, given that the arms are not on the Conventional Arms Register. This on-again and off-again sale has been in the works for years and was rescinded by the Russians in 2010 after UNSCR 1929 – the last major U.N. resolution targeting Iran's nuclear program and imposing sanctions – was adopted.<sup>118</sup> The Russians have not yet announced a delivery date, and it could be years before the Iranians receive the S-300. It is also possible that the threat of the sale is not just about Iran but is also meant as a leverage point for the Russians with the United States, which in the past has expended diplomatic capital convincing them to cancel it. But in the aftermath of the agreement, this sale is likely to go through eventually.

One of the keys to the long-term implementation of the JCPOA is the increased cooperation and development of Iran's civilian nuclear energy program, which should give the P5+1 greater visibility into Iran's overall program, while in the long-term creating economic incentives for Iran beyond year 15 to pursue its legitimate energy needs and not jeopardize them by reactivating its weapons program. Given its long history of cooperation with Iran on civilian nuclear energy, Russia will have a role to play in a strategically significant Iranian sector. Moscow will be at least tangentially involved and may be well positioned to provide Iran with the types of approved technology for future nuclear-based medical research and civilian power applications.

Cooperation on civil nuclear power generation is a major priority in the Russian-Iran bilateral relationship, and the two countries plan to expand activity in this area going forward. Russia played an instrumental role in helping Iran build its first nuclear power plant at Bushehr, which became

fully operational in 2013.<sup>119</sup> The Russian company Rosatom will help Iran build two new units at Bushehr, and the two countries see this low-carbon energy source – and the infrastructure needed to sustain and expand its use – as an assured avenue of mutual investment in the future. Two additional units are planned at Bushehr, which will significantly expand capacity at the facility.<sup>120</sup>

## STRATEGIC IMPLICATIONS FOR RUSSIA AND THE UNITED STATES

The most significant strategic implication of the agreement for the U.S.-Russia relationship is that it could increase bilateral tensions by reducing the importance of one of the few areas in which Russia and the United States have cooperated in recent years. For example, Russian support was essential for passing UNSCR 1929, which became a central component of the international sanctions regime,<sup>121</sup> and throughout the nuclear negotiations, the Russians have played a generally supportive role. With the prominence of this issue likely to recede in the years ahead, one traditional arena for cooperation between Russia and the United States is likely to take on less importance.

Iran's increased freedom of action in the Middle East could create some new opportunities for Russian-Iranian cooperation on issues of common interest, particularly in Syria, where they both have invested in supporting the government of Bashar al Assad. But these benefits for Russia are likely to be marginal given that Iran's interests are much more deeply engaged, particularly ideologically, than those of Russia's. Still, as of the writing of this report, it does appear that the Russians are increasing their military presence in core regime-controlled areas and have begun an air campaign, both intended to strengthen Assad and increase their leverage inside Syria.

Russia's interest in the Assad regime dates back to the Soviet era, when Damascus provided Moscow with a friendly regime in the Middle East. However, modern-day Russian influence over Syria is far less



ideological than that of the IRGC. It is tied more directly to negotiable security interests such as the Russian navy's continued use of a naval base near the Assad-controlled western coastal city of Tartus. Other interests include the estimated \$3.5 billion in Russian arms sales to the Syrian military, military and intelligence support for Assad's loyalist forces, Russian corporations' interest in developing and exploiting potential natural gas fields off the coast of Syria, and Russia's concern for Syria's minority groups, primarily Orthodox Christians.<sup>122</sup> Also of great importance to Russia are the thousands of jihadists from the Caucasus and Central Asia who have traveled to Syria to fight against the Assad regime, either with ISIS or other extremist groups.<sup>123</sup>

The United States will not be a beneficiary of the new economic and strategic links between Iran and Russia in the aftermath of a deal, particularly if it collapses and sanctions participation by foreign countries begins to unravel. However, the new links do not, of themselves, present an abiding challenge to U.S. leadership in the Middle East or U.S. efforts to contain Russia's foreign adventurism. New economic benefits in the Iranian-Russian bilateral relationship will be slanted more toward the much smaller Iranian economy and will be insufficient to seriously mitigate Russian economic contraction. This will be true even with the boost to Russia's economy that the roll back of sanctions and expanded trade, particularly in the security sector, will provide.

## Effects on China

The Iran deal offers China a number of economic and political opportunities. Like Russia, China was a staunch and constructive supporter of nuclear diplomacy over the last several years based on a commitment to nuclear security and for the sake of unique economic and strategic opportunities. China is a traditional ally of Iran, and will be one of the country's most important trading and investment partners in the years to come. With the



Iranian President Hassan Rouhani meets with Russian President Vladimir Putin during the 13th Summit of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization in September 2013. There are likely to be many opportunities for Russia and Iran to cooperate economically and geopolitically in the aftermath of the nuclear deal. (Credit: [www.kremlin.ru](http://www.kremlin.ru))

implementation of the agreement and lifting of the bulk of economic sanctions, China is expected to expand energy and other investment ties with Iran and deepen a burgeoning bilateral security partnership that may extend to other countries of the region as well.

## ENERGY AND ECONOMIC IMPLICATIONS

One major strategic area of increased cooperation between Iran and China following the Iran deal is the energy sector. As some of the last companies in Iran during the most punishing sanctions of the last several years, Chinese state oil and gas corporations have the relationships and tenacity to weather challenging commercial and political circumstances in Iran. The bilateral energy relationship features challenges and fundamental disputes, and China will face competition from more sophisticated energy development companies, primarily European ones. Moreover, new Chinese investments abroad must pass rigorous new scrutiny by Chinese economic authorities for commercial viability following an aggressive anti-corruption purge in the Chinese energy sector, the Chinese

economic rebalance away from industrial production and toward more service-led growth, and a string of risky and underwhelming foreign energy investments.

Nevertheless, Iran and China both have a stake in bolstering their ties in the energy arena. China is Iran's biggest oil buyer,<sup>124</sup> and Iran was China's third-largest source of crude imports until 2012.<sup>125</sup> Both countries value their mutual energy supply relationship, in part because it helps them both to maintain a diverse array of energy partners and balance Saudi Arabia's oil market dominance. Their cooperation in the civilian nuclear power arena, also an important mutual priority, will further serve to diversify their energy supply relationships. Finally, their energy cooperation provides mutual benefits as they each seek to lock in stable and sizable energy trade for the future.

Beyond energy cooperation, Iran and China are poised to cooperate in other areas that will bring the countries together in greater mutual trade, specifically in manufactured and industrial products, and even physically via new infrastructure projects. China's "One Belt, One Road" initiative will link the country to Eurasia and the Middle East through trillions of dollars in infrastructure investment. Iran desperately needs new infrastructure plans to increase the flow of people and commerce across its borders, so it is an attractive target for China's new investment push, both economically and geopolitically, with its overland borders and proximity to key energy shipping routes. Chinese-Iranian trade reached \$44 billion in 2014, amounting to almost a third of Iran's total foreign trade and a fourfold increase from 2005.<sup>126</sup> Once sanctions are removed this trend is likely to continue.

To the extent that new bilateral investment and trade promotes job training and creation and increases family incomes in Iran, it may also support civil society development and entrepreneurship. Additionally, if this new economic activity is conducted according to international best practices, it may help to elevate commercial and

investment standards in Iran and boost financial sector transparency. These developments are all in the U.S. interest and may contribute to greater stability and less corruption within Iran. Furthermore, if Sino-Iranian cooperation following the nuclear deal also extends to the promotion of stability and development of civil society in Afghanistan, a neighbor of both countries, this may also positively contribute to economic growth for all parties.

### STRATEGIC IMPLICATIONS FOR CHINA AND THE UNITED STATES

Sino-Iranian security cooperation may be one of the most important strategic developments following the Iran deal. China has been an important supplier of arms and components for Iran's nuclear energy program.<sup>127</sup> Naval cooperation, once robust, is showing signs of possible revival with China sending a missile destroyer and a missile frigate to the Iranian port of Bandar Abbas last fall, followed by a meeting of the two countries' naval chiefs in Tehran.<sup>128</sup> But bilateral cooperation could run counter to U.S. interests, undermining Washington's goals in the region and further afield. An Iran that is overly dependent on China, and its financing, will bolster Beijing's efforts to create alternative political and economic forums that exclude Washington.

However, there may also be areas in which Sino-Iranian cooperation could benefit the United States. For example, the two countries are likely to coordinate in efforts to stabilize Afghanistan following the withdrawal of U.S. and other coalition forces in late 2016. Both nations are deeply invested in preventing ISIS from gaining a foothold in Afghanistan. Iran will not tolerate insurgents on its eastern border, while China fears the spread of radicalism to its restive Uyghur population in neighboring Xinjiang province.<sup>129</sup> Chinese President Xi Jinping has already pledged to provide security equipment and training to Afghanistan,<sup>130</sup> and China is reportedly seen to be moving toward assuming a role of mediator in peace talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban.<sup>131</sup> Given the overlap of American, Iranian, and Chinese interests in keeping

Afghanistan stable and countering ISIS, this could be a potential opportunity for cooperation between the United States, China, and Iran. However, if Sino-Iranian cooperation on this issue excludes the United States, it could weaken American influence in Afghanistan and Central Asia.

Moreover, the benefits that the Chinese can extract from the deal to advance their interests in the Middle East will be constrained by a number of factors. China's most difficult challenge in the aftermath of an agreement will be how it balances good relations with both Riyadh and Tehran to increase its influence in a critically important region that provides it with 52 percent of its oil.<sup>132</sup> Amid escalating regional and sectarian competition, one of Saudi Arabia's greatest concerns about the Iranian nuclear agreement is that the removal of banking and oil sanctions will give Tehran the resources to wreak even more havoc through its proxies in Yemen, Syria, Lebanon, and Iraq. Substantial funds for Iran will come from China. It will be challenging for China to satisfy both Saudi Arabia and Iran and balance its relationships with both of these key oil suppliers. China will not be able to compete with the United States as the closest superpower ally to Saudi Arabia or supplant the United States as the guarantor of the Gulf states' security. China does not have the capability to attempt this in the near-to-medium term, and its attempt to balance relations and giant oil supply contracts with both Arab Gulf states and Iran precludes it from taking sides. Furthermore, the Gulf states are likely to reject Chinese attempts to provide them with critical security if China retains and expands its commercial and strategic ties to Iran.

Finally, in terms of the U.S.-China engagement, the agreement should over time provide the United States greater leverage in this bilateral relationship. While China agrees with the American objective of preventing Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon, the United States has put a higher prioritization on this issue over the past few years, as opposed to the Chinese who remain more concerned with

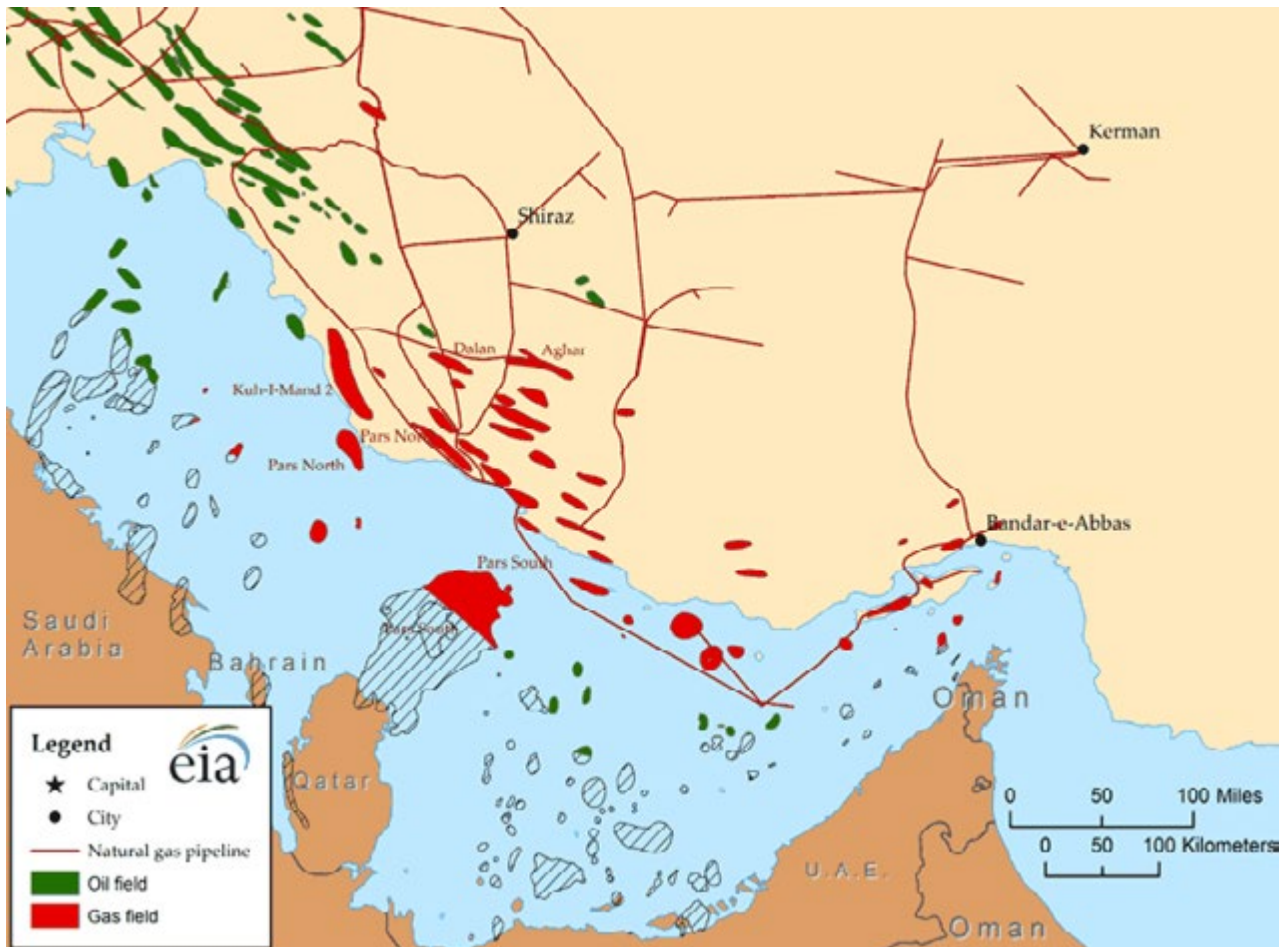


Afghan border police stand at attention in the Afghan-Iranian border province of Herat. Iran, the United States, and China share a mutual interest in the stability of Afghanistan to promote the stability of Central Asia and to facilitate trade throughout Eurasia and the Middle East. (Credit: U.S. Department of State/U.S. Embassy in Kabul)

other challenges in Asia. The result has been that in high-level bilateral meetings between the United States and China (including at the presidential and Cabinet level), the United States consistently raised the issue of Iran, to the detriment of other priorities.<sup>133</sup> For years this took the form of pressing the Chinese to reduce economic relations with Iran, and in more recent years has focused on the P5+1 negotiations. But when the United States raises the issue, it ultimately crowds out a different item on the bilateral agenda, whether that be tensions over the South China Sea, bilateral trade between China and the United States, or now the economic turbulence in China that affects global markets.

## THE AGREEMENT'S EFFECT ON ENERGY MARKETS

Sanctions relief under the nuclear deal will allow Iran to significantly expand energy production and trade, which will contribute to a weakening in global oil markets. This is a major priority for Iran, which saw its crude oil and condensate exports drop by slightly more than 50 percent to roughly 1.3 million barrels per day and its natural

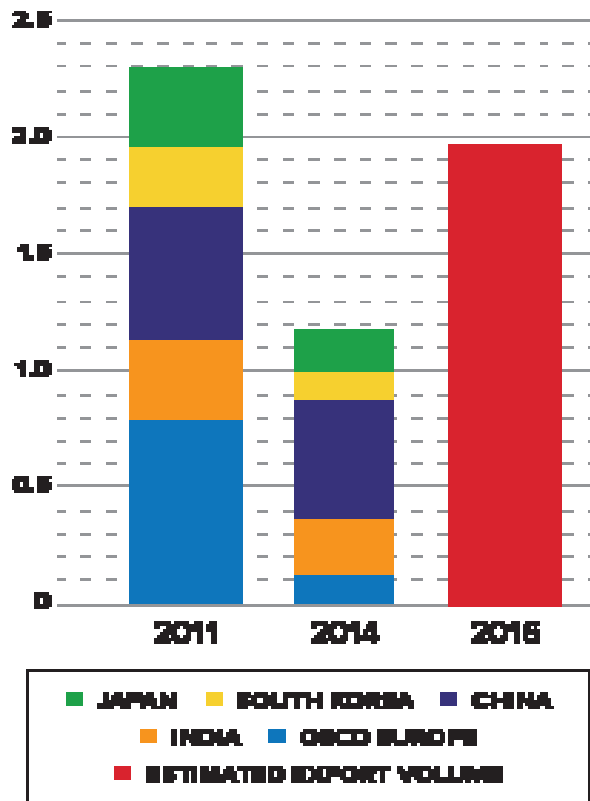


A December 2014 map designed by the U.S. Energy Information Administration depicts Iran’s major oil and natural gas fields. As the P5+1 lifts sanctions on Iran, Iran will compete more aggressively with regional neighbors in the energy sector. (Credit: U.S. Energy Information Administration)

gas export plans hurt after the imposition of strict energy sanctions in 2012.<sup>134</sup> Iran ambitiously plans to expand oil production by half-a-million barrels per day within only a few months after the lifting of sanctions, and by up to 1 million barrels per day within six to seven months.<sup>135</sup> It also has an estimated 40 – 50 million barrels of oil and condensate in floating storage, some of which Tehran sent to Singapore immediately after the nuclear

deal was signed in July to pre-position the cargo for sale immediately upon lifting of sanctions.<sup>136</sup> The International Energy Agency concurs that Iran can rapidly increase oil output, by over 700,000 barrels per day within a few months, and the U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA) estimates that if the Iranian deal is implemented, Iran could add 300,000 barrels of oil per day in 2016.<sup>137</sup>

### IRANIAN CRUDE OIL EXPORTS BY COUNTRY

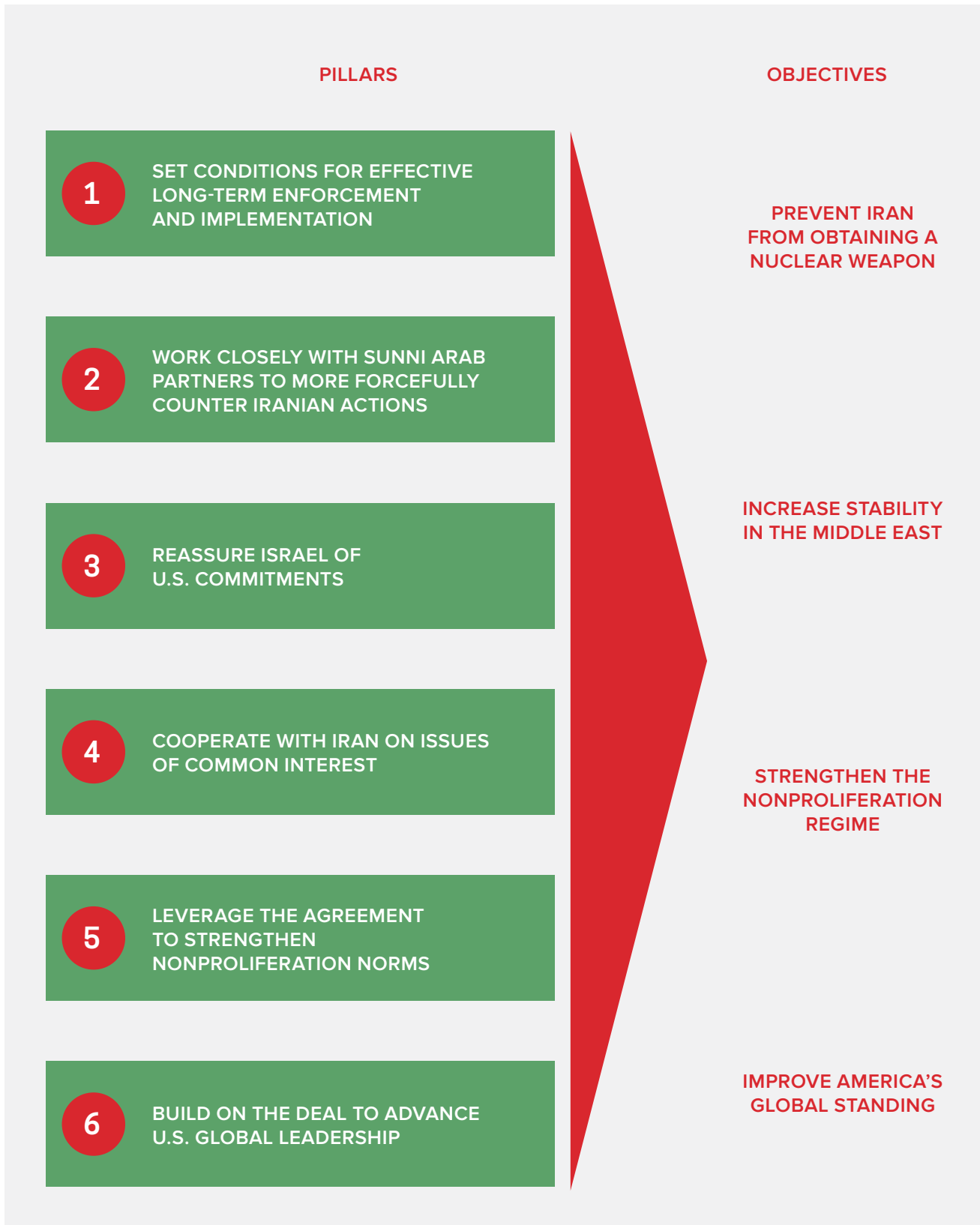


Source: U.S. Energy Information Administration, Iran Country Analysis Brief, (June 19, 2015); U.S. Energy Information Administration, Short-Term Energy Outlook, (September 2015), 3; U.S. Energy Information Administration, Iran: 2011-2014, Total Gross Imports, OECD, by Source by OECD Dataset.

Iran is dismissive of the tension that an increase in oil production may provoke within the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), which is already producing above its 30 million barrel-per-day quota.<sup>138</sup> The Iranian oil minister has warned market participants to prepare themselves for Iran's larger role<sup>139</sup> and for more competition to supply the growing Asian market. Particularly with its direct market and political competitor, Saudi Arabia, Iran is gearing up to challenge Saudi Arabia's role in the region and energy export relationships.

Following the fall in oil prices a year ago, a larger oil-producing role for Iran will add even greater pressure to higher cost producers. While this is a boon for consumers, including Americans, it is a major threat to many producers outside of OPEC, particularly the independent oil producers in the United States that have made a major contribution to U.S. GDP over the last decade of abundant domestic production. Between 2002 and 2013, oil and gas production's share of economy-wide value-added tripled from 0.6 to 1.7 percent, which was a faster and greater rate of growth than any other industry.<sup>140</sup> As cash flow slackens, some in the highly leveraged sector will struggle to service debts and raise new capital, and many will scale back drilling plans and watch growth slow. The EIA estimates that Iran's expansion of crude exports next year will be one factor in driving down U.S. energy production by roughly 400,000 barrels per day.<sup>141</sup> This will erode the United States' status as a major energy producer and may see more U.S. dollars flow to overseas producers to pay for energy needs at home. Overall, this will diminish the country's ability to translate abundant energy resources into influence and leverage in global markets and international strategic leadership.

Energy companies and investors in the United States will not be permitted to participate in Iran's oil and gas development binge after the lifting of sanctions under the nuclear deal, as the U.S. embargo on doing business with Iran will remain in place. This will put U.S. energy companies at a further disadvantage to some of their international counterparts able to enter the Iranian energy and energy services sector. In conjunction with the financial effects of a weakening oil price, this will present a barrier to growth for some of the larger and internationally adept U.S. energy companies.





# **PART 2: A GAME PLAN FOR THE UNITED STATES— 6 PILLAR STRATEGY**





## CHAPTER 4

# Pillar 1 - Set Conditions for Effective Long-Term Enforcement and Implementation

### CHALLENGES & OPPORTUNITIES

- Long-term enforcement and implementation collapse due to lack of political support and senior level attention in the United States and Iran.
- Iran does not receive sufficient economic benefits from the agreement weakening incentives to comply.
- Snapback sanctions are difficult to reimpose and over time are not a credible deterrent.
- Sunset provisions allow Iran to become a threshold state after 15 years.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

- Develop additional sanctions reimposition or “snapback” mechanisms beyond what is incorporated into the JCPOA, with like-minded international partners;
- Pass legislation that creates greater congressional buy-in for implementation of the agreement and includes additional resources for enforcement of the JCPOA and new U.S. unilateral “snapback” sanctions authorities that can be utilized in the event of an Iranian violation;
- Create mechanisms to promote the return of responsible, transparent private businesses to Iran – in a climate of significant commercial and political risk – to ensure meaningful implementation of sanctions relief that strengthens the overall agreement;
- Continue to hold Iran’s nuclear program at risk for military action through continued contingency planning and a public posture that makes clear this option is available in the event Iran moves toward a nuclear weapon;
- Establish a congressional commission to oversee the agreement and ensure consistent and sustained oversight and support for enforcement and implementation throughout the duration of the agreement;
- Appoint a presidential envoy for coordinating and implementing the JCPOA; and
- Invest in increasing the capacity of the IAEA.

As previously discussed, the greatest threat to the success of an agreement is poor implementation and a lack of high-level political attention, as the United States and international community could assume the matter has been settled and over time turn their attention elsewhere. To address this challenge, the United States and the international community should build additional domestic and international mechanisms that lie outside the scope of the negotiated agreement, but increase the likelihood that it will be effectively implemented and enforced to prevent Iran from developing a nuclear weapon. This approach should be similar in many respects to the strategy the United States employed when it built out the sanctions regime on Iran's nuclear program between 2005 and 2013. Measures voted on and agreed to at the U.N. Security Council were the first step, but there were additional strategies taken in parallel such as U.S. congressional sanctions legislation and consultations with like-minded European and Asian partners. The implementation and enforcement regime for the nuclear agreement should be no different.

Another related challenge is that while the JCPOA lays out a clear pathway for snapping back all U.N. sanctions in the event of a major violation, it is vague when it comes to small violations that do not merit ending the agreement but could still be problematic. If there is no agreement about the precise nature of these types of violations and the consequences that should be imposed, the international community could be divided, resulting in inaction or contradictory and conflicting sanctions changes by members of the P5+1. A related risk is that the

agreement fails to deter Iran from cheating if it perceives division and lack of senior level attention from the international community. Conversely, there is also a risk that Iran does not implement the agreement if it fails to see meaningful economic relief and reintegration amidst sustained and contradictory international sanctions. Finally, if anxious partners, most notably the Saudis and the Israelis, perceive a lack of effective implementation, it could raise their willingness to take greater risks in their regional competition with Iran.

Thus, an approach based on strengthening the agreement outside of the agreement should include the following key principles:

- Work with European partners and other like-minded states to gain as much clarity as possible for how Iranian violations will be measured and the types of appropriate steps that would be taken in the event of a violation;
- Build domestic mechanisms and bipartisan buy-in in the United States that ensure the agreement is implemented beyond President Obama;
- Deter Iran from violating an agreement by signaling the consequences and making those consequences as credible as possible; and
- Incentivize Iran to follow through with the agreement by ensuring that economic relief envisioned is not hampered by a failure of the P5+1 to provide sufficient clarity to the private sector on the terms of sanctions relief.

Below is a series of specific steps that the United States can take to achieve the principles outlined above.

### **Develop additional snapback mechanisms beyond what is incorporated into the JCPOA with like-minded international partners.**

One of the greatest dangers to implementation is that once the sanctions come off, it will be impossible to reimpose them; thus, there will be little deterrent to keep Iran from violating the agreement. The snapback mechanisms in the JCPOA provide a credible mechanism for re-imposing U.N. sanctions. However, it is possible that the bar for re-implementation of these sanctions will be too high and international pressure to reimpose sanctions will wane. Even if sanctions are snapped back at the U.N., foreign countries may not rigorously implement them. The United States must build consensus with its like-minded European and Asian partners about what a violation would entail and how to reimpose sanctions, either through the U.N. Security Council or outside the Security Council, if necessary.

These engagements should start with close discussions with the E3 (United Kingdom, France, and Germany), then expand to include the broader European Union, Japan, South Korea, Canada, and Australia. These private consultations will certainly get back to Iran's leadership and can play a useful role in signaling international determination to enforce strong snapback mechanisms. It will also be important for the United States to be transparent with the Iranians and reassure them that this process is not about violating the agreement and finding new ways to reimpose sanctions but instead is strictly about the consequences of violating the agreement.

These conversations would build as much international support as possible and create consensus among partners on how to respond to violations. This is especially key, since under the deal Europe and Asia will have significantly more direct, bilateral economic leverage than the United States will on Iran, given the barring of U.S. companies from new trade and investment with Iran under the deal. It was Europe's and Asia's reduction in oil

purchases that primarily accounted for the halving of Iran's oil exports, and Europe shutting Iran out of its financial and insurance sector, that devastated Iran's state revenues, economic growth, currency valuation, and access to hard currency. These factors played an important role in bringing Iran back to the table and helped change its negotiating calculus.<sup>142</sup>

Before beginning these consultations with like-minded partners, the executive branch should undertake a process to make it as clear as possible internally how the administration defines violations and the types of penalties that can be imposed on Iran in the event of a violation. It is impossible to anticipate every violation or scenario, but a robust process can develop a range of possible violations, the types of steps that Iran would need to take to redress the potential violations and rebuild confidence, and a menu of economic penalties that that can be imposed in response if Iran does not quickly change behavior.

The most important purpose of such an effort is not the execution and preparation for a specific scenario, but the overall planning process itself, which can help policymakers identify potential weaknesses in the agreement and prepare appropriate responses. Also, it will signal to allies and to Iran that the United States is extremely well prepared to respond tactically with precision and efficiency to a violation. A real-life violation is unlikely to reflect the scenarios in this review process, but the fact that policymakers will have already wrestled with how to respond to the overall situation, how to coordinate with international counterparts, and how to signal and communicate with the private sector if there is a change in sanctions, will dramatically improve the effectiveness of the policy response if the time comes.

It is important to note that the United States should not make the specific violations and potential penalties public or try to publicly or privately associate exact penalties with specific violations. Setting such redlines will only inadvertently create "zones



United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-moon addresses the May 2010 High-level Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT). The NPT Review Conferences, the most recent was held in April-May 2015, set nuclear disarmament targets, project the most pressing nonproliferation issues, and set the standards for the global NPT regime. (Credit: United Nations Flickr)

of permission” that the Iranians can exploit by going right up to the line without crossing. Simply, Iran’s awareness that the United States and its partners have thought through these scenarios and are prepared to respond to violations should provide a useful deterrent for cheating.

**Pass implementing legislation that creates greater congressional buy-in for implementation of the agreement and includes additional resources for enforcement of the JCPOA and new U.S. unilateral “snapback” sanctions authorities that can be utilized in the event of an Iranian violation.**

The agreement’s long-term success will require greater domestic political consensus than what currently exists. The political tensions around the agreement have clearly sent a negative message to both Iran and the international community about America’s ability to implement the agreement domestically.<sup>143</sup> Moreover, if the deal is successfully implemented for the next year and a half, it is

unlikely that the next president will abrogate the agreement. However, if there is no political buy-in, a candidate who opposes the agreement may choose to de-prioritize its implementation, causing the agreement to eventually collapse.

To avoid these scenarios, the executive branch should work with Congress now to develop a mechanism that gives skeptics the ability to say that even if they did not fully support the agreement they have found ways to make it more effective. Such an approach will not lead skeptics to support the agreement, but they will at least recognize that despite their objections there are strategies to expand the deal’s viability and success and use this as a footing for a constructive new policy in the region. Given the highly contentious nature of the debate, this will be very difficult to implement. But the good news is that there is broad bipartisan agreement on the need to prevent Iran from obtaining nuclear weapons. Providing Congress with a long-lasting vehicle through which it can play a meaningful role in achieving that objective will appeal to all sides.

The Obama administration should engage Congress and together craft a piece of implementing legislation that can provide the president with the authorities to reimpose certain sanctions for different types of violations and impose new sanctions to address areas of Iran’s destabilizing and illicit activity outside of the nuclear arena. Specifically, this will include new authorities to target Iran’s support for terrorism and the destabilizing activities of the individuals and entities tied to the IRGC. The legislation, including new sanctions authorities, cannot be too specific or inflexible because even the best contingency planning process will not account for all scenarios. It should give the president the necessary discretion and flexibility to waive snapback sanctions, except in cases of extreme Iranian violations.

The legislation can also reiterate and expand on the intensive reporting requirements in the Iran Nuclear Review Act of 2015, including regular

quarterly reports and briefings to members of Congress on the implementation of the agreement by an interagency team that is comprised of representatives from the Departments of State, Treasury, Energy, and the intelligence community. The briefings need to be conducted at the assistant secretary level or above to ensure that implementation continues to receive high-level attention. If successful, this oversight mechanism can contribute to building a process that strengthens long-term implementation by helping Congress hold future administrations accountable.

**Create mechanisms to promote the return of responsible, transparent private businesses to Iran to ensure meaningful implementation of sanctions relief.**

The administration should undertake extensive measures to clarify for the private sector what commercial activity will be allowed with Iran and what will constitute a violation of sanctions. This will give large, international companies essential knowledge with which to pursue new commercial activity with Iran, thereby conferring to Iran the economic benefit of its bargain. While the United States and international partners are not in the position to facilitate investment in Iran or make any assurances about the viability and transparency of the Iranian financial system, they would be remiss if ambiguity over how sanctions will work causes businesses to refrain from entering Iran. Additionally, the demonstration of good will on the part of the P5+1, and this public commitment to uphold its own part of the deal, will be important to Iran in its own calculus about whether to adhere over the long term.

It is important for the United States, in particular, to conduct this outreach, as the sanctions enforcement and litigation landscape in the United States shapes commercial decisions of all large, international banks and companies considering business in Iran. The fear of contravening U.S. sanctions may keep many such companies on the sideline, particularly if the terms for appropriate navigation of sanctions is not clear, leaving less reputable and

less transparent foreign companies to enter Iran. The United States has a keen interest in promoting financial sector transparency and financial sector best practices in Iran, which will surely be advanced with the involvement of reputable, responsible international companies in the country. Therefore, financial regulators in Washington must provide public written guidance, more engagement opportunities with the private sector, an efficient hotline for inquiries and requests for guidance, and a more systematic and expansive attempt to coordinate objectives with policymakers who have put this deal in place.

This effort will require additional resources for the Treasury and State Departments staff who write regulations and legal guidance for public dissemination, convene calls and engagement opportunities with the private sector, and are practically responsible for implementing the framework for Iran's economic relief. This also requires additional resources for the U.S. intelligence community, which is able to assist in identifying Iran's circumvention of sanctions. This will improve the ability of U.S. financial regulators to offer economic relief in such a way that will limit Iran's ability to use the windfall for illicit purposes and promote greater Iranian financial transparency.

**Continue to hold Iran's nuclear program militarily at risk through contingency planning and a public posture that makes clear this option is available in the event Iran moves toward a nuclear weapon.**

Military action should remain an option of last resort. In the aftermath of an agreement and as it is being implemented, provocative language threatening military action intended to coerce Iranian compliance or deter violations is more likely to inadvertently undermine trust. That being said, both Iran and our regional partners must understand that if required, the United States is still capable of taking military action to significantly degrade Iran's nuclear program. This knowledge would deter Iran from violating the agreement and

would also reassure our partners that we have options for dealing with the worst-case scenarios.

The most effective way to do this is not through overt messaging threatening the nuclear program. Instead, the United States should continue to develop and improve the Massive Ordnance Penetrator – a 30,000-pound bomb capable of penetrating deep underground. This weapon has been publicly linked with the pursuit of capabilities to destroy Iran’s nuclear program.<sup>144</sup> The United States should also continue to maintain a similar military posture in the region, including rotating in offensive aircraft that would be required to execute such an operation.<sup>145</sup> Occasionally these capabilities and movements should be leaked to the press or raised publicly by defense officials simply to remind all involved that if necessary the United States still has the capacity to take military action to set back Iran’s nuclear program before it could achieve a nuclear weapon.

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**ONCE THE AGREEMENT MOVES OUT OF THE POLITICAL LIMELIGHT, HOWEVER, IT WILL BE IMPORTANT FOR THERE TO BE A SMALL NUMBER OF PROFESSIONAL STAFF AND MEMBERS OF CONGRESS WHO CONTINUE TO PROVIDE RIGOROUS OVERSIGHT ON THIS KEY SECURITY ISSUE FOR YEARS TO COME.**

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Finally, future administrations can be less forceful in publicly dismissing the military option as unrealistic. The Obama administration has taken a very strong stance on the negative consequences of military action – and those consequences are profound.<sup>146</sup> It was necessary to spell them out clearly while the debate on a nuclear agreement raged and other alternatives were realistically discussed. However, this discussion does have a negative side effect of weakening deterrence toward Iran. In

the aftermath of an agreement, with the likelihood of military conflict greatly reduced, there will be no need for future administrations to so forcefully dismiss this option. They can, instead, remain relatively silent and not so publicly emphasize the lack of effectiveness of military action.

### **Establish a congressional commission to oversee the agreement.**

As part of this legislation, Congress can also create a special congressional body dedicated to overseeing implementation of the agreement. This might not seem necessary given the rigorous oversight and intense political debate on Iran since the signing of the JPOA in November of 2013. Indeed during that time, the committees of jurisdiction – the House Foreign Affairs Committee (HFAC) and Senate Foreign Relations Committee (SFRC) – held at least 29 hearings on this issue.<sup>147</sup> Once the agreement moves out of the political limelight, however, it will be important for there to be a small number of professional staff and members of Congress who continue to provide rigorous oversight on this key security issue for years to come. This commission, or subcommittee, can also develop new legislative proposals, amendments, or existing legislation to support effective long-term implementation and work with the appropriations committees to ensure there are adequate resources in place for implementation.<sup>148</sup>

One option is that HFAC and SFRC each have a new subcommittee responsible for implementing the agreement. Another is to include members from all of the key national security committees – including the intelligence, armed services, and banking committees from both the Senate and House of Representatives – in a joint commission with representatives from HFAC and SFRC as the chairs of this special commission. The Helsinki Commission or the China Economic and Security Review Commission are precedents for such efforts.<sup>149</sup> The precise structure matters less as long as there is a group of members and staff ultimately accountable for long-term oversight.

### **Appoint a presidential envoy for coordinating and implementing the JCPOA.**

To ensure strong and consistent executive branch follow through, the president should appoint a special envoy for the implementation of the Iran nuclear agreement. As part of the JCPOA, the United States will need to appoint a representative to the joint commission for implementing the agreement, along with representatives of the P5+1 and Iran. Stephen Mull, the former U.S. ambassador to Poland, played a key role in building the international sanctions coalition against Iran and has been picked for the position.<sup>150</sup> In many ways he will be taking over the role that Wendy Sherman, the former Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs, and fourth ranking official at the State Department, has essentially played since the negotiations began. Initially this job will focus on the very difficult task of getting the deal off the ground and ensuring effective implementation over the next year and a half, but Ambassador Mull is unlikely to face challenges with regards to ensuring sufficient national leadership engagement given that President Obama and Secretary Kerry are likely to remain highly and regularly engaged on this matter.

However, as discussed in greater detail in Chapter 1, the next president – Democrat or Republican – may not be as regularly engaged on this question as the current administration, given the fact that President Obama has made this issue a center piece of his foreign policy. Therefore, in the long run a new position, reporting to and with significant access to the president, would ensure that implementation of the agreement remains a high priority. Additionally, if political firepower is needed at the top to keep implementation processes moving or respond if there are complications, including any international political escalation that could lead to confrontation, the president and his senior staff can quickly address them instead of letting them lag inside the bureaucracy until the situation hits a crisis point.

The special envoy would not require a large staff and could rely on the same interagency negotiating team that already exists and includes representatives from the State, Energy, and Treasury Departments, as well as the National Security Council. But the job should be shifted away from the next Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs, given the need to put in place a senior official with technical experience and expertise that will form a significant focus of the next stage of deal implementation and to free up the Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs to focus more intensively on other foreign policy issues.

The mandate of this senior official would include:

- Engaging with Iran, the other P5+1 members, and the IAEA to ensure implementation remains on track including by representing the United States on the Joint Commission charged with implementing the JCPOA;
- Engaging with key partners both on ensuring effective sanctions relief and also on developing support for coordinated snapback mechanism with like-minded partners described above;
- Briefing U.S. regional partners on progress and implementation of the nuclear agreement, especially Israel and Saudi Arabia; and
- Working closely with Congress to ensure that members are well informed, Congressional reporting requirements are met, and that necessary funding is appropriated for implementation.

Skeptics will argue that special envoys only confuse matters in the bureaucracy and can often be ineffective. But this is precisely the type of issue where it is useful to have a special envoy. The mandate would be narrow but focused on a critical national security issue that could otherwise lose attention. Moreover, it would not require major new staffing, since an effective interagency model already exists based on current negotiations.<sup>151</sup>

### **Invest in increasing the capacity of the IAEA.**

As part of the agreement, the IAEA will be given the task of monitoring and verifying Iran's compliance. The agreement requires additional capacity to provide the types of cradle-to-grave monitoring discussed in the agreement. The effectiveness of the inspections regime will be tied to not only the level of intrusiveness that Iran has agreed to, but also to the capacity of the inspectors, which is largely a question of resources and political support.

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**THE UNITED STATES WILL HAVE TO WORK WITH ITS PARTNERS TO PROMOTE A MORE FLEXIBLE POLICY THAT ENSURES THAT THE IAEA CAN MANAGE ITS RESOURCES, ESPECIALLY IN RESPECT TO THE AGENCY'S CRUCIAL ROLE IN IRAN IN THE NEXT TWO DECADES.**

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During the negotiations IAEA Secretary General Yukiya Amano publicly acknowledged that more funds will be needed to effectively implement this mission.<sup>152</sup> To ensure the IAEA can provide the most effective, intrusive inspections, it is required to bring 130 to 150 new inspectors into Iran,<sup>153</sup> comprehensively monitor existing enrichment facilities, acquire the most modern equipment for 24-hour video monitoring of centrifuge production facilities and uranium mines, establish additional infrastructure to manage the activity in Vienna, and add new analysis laboratories, likely to be located in member states. In fact, Secretary General Amano recently estimated that the fund needed to implement the agreement will not be different than

the €1 million, or over \$1.1 million monthly fund the agency got for the interim agreement.<sup>154</sup> This is a relatively low-cost estimate given the importance of the mission, and one the United States and its partners should support with more robust funding.

The United States and its partners should also reexamine the policy of "zero-real growth" in the IAEA budget, which was imposed by the IAEA's 35-member state Board of Governors to rein in spending.<sup>155</sup> This policy limits the agency's capability to meet its nonproliferation obligations over time. It also relies on external aid that is contingent on shifting changes in the political environment. The United States will have to work with its partners to promote a more flexible policy that ensures that the IAEA can manage its resources, especially in respect to the agency's crucial role in Iran in the next two decades.

The United States will have to guarantee that the IAEA does not merely possess the resources to conduct effective inspections but also the political support. As Secretary General Amano stated, "The IAEA is a technical organization and our job is to establish the facts to the best of our ability. It is up to our members states to determine the appropriate response."<sup>156</sup> Hence, the IAEA's capability to provide facts regarding the Iranian nuclear program depends on Iran's cooperation and America's resolve to force Iran to comply with its obligations. The United States should conduct an ongoing dialogue with the IAEA Board of Governors to ensure the agency fulfills its mandate to monitor the Iranian nuclear program, inquire about suspected activities or possible undeclared sites, and raise concerns if the joint commission fails to provide a quick response to suspicious violations. An IAEA supported by the American administration is a much more effective agency.



## CHAPTER 5

# Pillar 2 - Counter Iran's Destabilizing Activities in Close Collaboration with Arab Partners

### CHALLENGES & OPPORTUNITIES

- Iranian destabilizing activities become more aggressive after the agreement as hardliners reassert influence.
- Anxious Arab partners move away from the United States and increasingly act on their own escalating their conflicts with Iran.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

- Create a high-level defense and intelligence forum at the Cabinet level that regularly meets with Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states and Arab partners to oversee the development and execution of a strategy to counter Iran's destabilizing activities in the Middle East;
- Form a Multi-National Joint Task Force (MNJTF) with Arab partners targeted at countering unconventional threats from the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and Sunni extremists. Utilize this task force to:
  - Conduct joint exercises to counter Iran's unconventional capabilities;
  - Train U.S. partners in foreign internal defense and unconventional warfare; and
  - Develop a joint intelligence fusion center to counter Iran's asymmetric capabilities.
- Work with GCC and Arab partners to shift the balance on the ground in Syria by significantly expanding programs for arming, training, and equipping moderate opposition forces, including those forces opposing President Bashar al-Assad. Shifting the balance on the ground sets conditions in the longer term for a negotiated political settlement to the conflict;
- Take carefully calibrated direct actions against the IRGC, either unilaterally or jointly with Israel or Arab partners;
- Take a more aggressive approach to maritime interdictions of IRGC weapons shipments, especially in the Red Sea and around Bahrain;
- Continue an aggressive sanctions strategy targeting Iranian support for terrorism and illicit, destabilizing activity of the IRGC, including thorough coordination with European allies;
- Maintain current U.S. force posture in the Middle East with tailored enhancements, particularly in the form of additional ballistic-missile defense assets; and
- Increase conventional military sales to Arab partners to bolster defensive capabilities against potential Iranian aggression but avoid the introduction of significant new offensive capabilities into the region.

As discussed in Chapter 2, in the aftermath of the agreement the United States will continue to face significant instability and multiple civil wars in the Middle East. Anxious Arab partners more willing to act on their own may exacerbate these challenges. Moreover, at least some hardline elements in Iran will also likely push for more aggressive regional policies.

To respond to these challenges, the United States should develop a comprehensive approach to compete with and when necessary forcefully counter the IRGC-QF support for regional surrogates and proxies. This effort will need to be done in coordination with key Arab partners whose greatest concern with regard to the nuclear agreement is that it gives Iran a freer hand in Syria, Iraq, Yemen, Lebanon, and elsewhere. The perception in Tehran and in Arab capitals is that Iranian influence and leverage is on the rise. Thus, one of the key objectives of this effort must be to not only reassure U.S. partners but also to signal to those in Tehran who support this strategy that there are costs to Iran's increasing involvement in the myriad civil wars in the region, and that the United States will not stand by idly in the aftermath of a the nuclear deal and leave Iran unchecked.<sup>157</sup> At the same time, this will be a difficult balancing act, as the United States will need to push back on Iran's activities without inadvertently exacerbating sectarian tensions in the region or undermining potential opportunities for greater positive engagement with Iran.

The good news is that even though the GCC states have, thus far, been relatively ineffective in countering Iranian activities, many U.S. partners

have well-funded and effective internal security and special operations forces that are particularly suited to this mission.<sup>158</sup> They do, however, require leadership from the United States to set a coordinated strategy that could include regular high-level consultations, intelligence sharing, joint covert operations, and coordinated interdictions of Iranian weapons. The most important arena for these efforts would likely be Syria, where Iran's interests and those of U.S. regional partners most diverge. But this would also be the arena that would require the highest levels of sustained effort and only yield results in the long-term.

The overall objectives of this pillar of the strategy would be to:

- Raise the costs to Iran, and particularly to the IRGC-QF, of continuing its operations across the Middle East while signaling to Iran that it is in danger of provoking a direct confrontation with the United States;
- Reassure U.S. regional partners that while the nuclear issue may have been its top priority over the last several years, the United States cares deeply about its partners' concerns and will not sacrifice their interests to Iran; and
- In the long-term, set the conditions for a negotiated agreement to the civil wars plaguing the Middle East by increasing American and Arab leverage that subsequently reduces Iranian leverage.

To achieve these objectives the United States should take the following actions.

**Create a high-level defense and intelligence forum at the Cabinet level that regularly meets with GCC and Arab partners to oversee the development and execution of a strategy to counter Iran’s destabilizing activities in the Middle East.**

The first step in responding to Iran’s asymmetric capabilities would be senior-level American engagement. The secretary of defense and the director of the CIA should travel to the capitals of GCC member states, starting with Riyadh and Abu Dhabi, to open a high level dialogue on a strategy for pushing back on Iran’s support for proxies and surrogates in the region. It would be very important in these initial conversations for America’s partners to hear that the United States has not come to the region to discuss its traditional top priorities – Iran’s nuclear program and the threat posed by Sunni extremism – but instead to dedicate this particular channel and forum to dealing with the GCC states’ top priority: the threats posed by Iranian support for its surrogates and proxies. This high-level strategic dialogue with key regional partners would be responsible for coordinating a holistic response to the escalating threat that the IRGC-QF presents to the Middle East and would allow for setting an overall strategy that utilizes the various tools described in the remainder of this chapter. It would also provide the United States with the opportunity to influence its partners’ strategies and ensure that we are no longer working at crosscutting purposes in the region. The United States has already begun this effort with Secretary Carter’s travel to Jeddah in the aftermath of the nuclear agreement and Secretary Kerry’s meeting with the GCC states on August 3, 2015. A substantial coordinated effort is best led by the NSC, Department of Defense, and intelligence community, with the State Department in a supporting role, both because of the signal this would send to our partners and because it would include the most effective interlocutors in the GCC who are primarily responsible for these portfolios.<sup>159</sup>

This collaboration should include regular meetings at the ministerial level with the director of the CIA and the secretary of defense representing the United States, along with appropriate representatives from Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Jordan, and Qatar. These discussions can feed downward into more coordinated actions. They can also feed upward into presidential-level engagements. In spite of the controversy surrounding perceived acrimony from Gulf partners toward the Obama administration, the May 2015 Camp David Summit with GCC partners was an important step toward developing a regular high-level forum for the United States and its GCC partners at the head of state level. Such meetings should continue on an annual basis and last beyond the Obama administration.<sup>160</sup>

In addition to reassuring partners and developing a coordinated strategy with them, such an effort could also restrain American partners from taking counterproductive steps that are against U.S. interests. This forum would, for example, have been valuable in the spring of 2015 to have a serious strategic discussion with Saudi Arabia about whether an aerial campaign in Yemen would have been truly the most effective way to counter Iranian influence – prior to Saudi Arabia launching those operations unilaterally. The United States can also leverage this forum and the deeper commitment the United States is willing to demonstrate to counter Iran, to press its partners to refrain from utilizing militant Sunni Islamist groups as a convenient counterweight to the IRGC’s Shia action network.

**Form a multi-national joint task force (MNJTF) with Arab partners targeted at countering unconventional threats from the IRGC and Sunni extremists.**

To ensure that the high-level strategic coordination discussed above translates into action on the ground, the United States, along with key Arab partners, should establish a formal, enduring, expeditionary MNJTF to counter IRGC activities in the region. This task force would enhance the



A Royal Saudi Navy Marine participates in bilateral machine gun live-fire training during the Red Reef exercise in December 2014. Bilateral training exercises such as Red Reef are essential to improving the ability of the United States and its Gulf Arab partners to coordinate effectively to counter threats from the IRGC.

(Credit: U.S. Navy Forces Central Command/U.S. Fifth Fleet Flickr)

capability of U.S. regional partners to work jointly in an intelligence, security, and military context to counter the IRGC's ambitions in the region.<sup>161</sup> Activities would include multilateral military exercises oriented toward countering the asymmetric warfare proficiencies of the IRGC and training partner special operations forces in how to conduct effective operations against the IRGC, coordinated intelligence sharing, and in some cases, conducting joint operations.

The scope of the task force need not be limited to countering Iran's activities but can also target Sunni extremists and ISIS, which are common threats. The most likely arenas for operations include Syria, Iraq, and Yemen, as well as addressing smuggling in the maritime domain. There are different risks associated with operating in some of these areas. In some places, such as Iraq or in maritime domains, the United States would be much more comfortable taking a lead role, while in others U.S. partners may take on the primary effort.

**CONDUCT JOINT EXERCISES TO COUNTER IRAN'S ASYMMETRIC CAPABILITIES.**

One particularly important institutional function of the MNJTF is for it to design and implement regular multilateral training exercises for member states that focus on countering Iranian asymmetric warfare capabilities. As a result of the GCC Summit at Camp David with President Obama, the United States and the GCC agreed to begin conducting exercises targeted at these asymmetric threats.<sup>162</sup> An annual, asymmetric warfare-focused military exercise for MNJTF member states would increase partner capabilities while also signaling to Iran that the United States is serious in countering its activities. Areas of emphasis would be coordinated responses to Iranian cyber assaults, IRGC clandestine activity, and countering the activities of the IRGC's action network. Although the United States regularly implements large, multilateral military exercises with its regional partners, these exercises are traditionally more focused on conventional threats.

**TRAIN U.S. PARTNERS IN FOREIGN INTERNAL DEFENSE AND UNCONVENTIONAL WARFARE.**

One core irregular warfare capability that the MNJTF would build is training for counter-IRGC forces in foreign internal defense (FID) and unconventional warfare (UW), both of which are core capabilities in which the IRGC-QF is especially proficient.<sup>163</sup> FID or UW capacity for local armed groups in regional conflicts where state authority is actively collapsing, or has collapsed, is central to reestablishing order by helping build credible forces that can fill the vacuum, particularly in the context of local-level stability operations. The current conflicts in Syria, Iraq, and Yemen are examples of the type of strategically vital areas of the region where this type of FID or UW mission is already being or is scheduled to be executed by Arab partners of the United States.<sup>164</sup> This tool set is important for building the capacity of local militias to become part of a professional security service that protects the local population and can also be reintegrated into the security structure of stabilizing states once the conflict comes to an end.

The next step is for partner states to demonstrate the capability to perform their own FID missions, which is not generally how they have sought to counteract the IRGC's influence in the region. Jordan is the leading candidate to work with U.S. trainers to build partner capacity in FID and UW missions, as it is already engaged in these missions, focused on Syrian and Iraqi local armed groups to counter the militant Sunni Islamist groups such as ISIS and to challenge the Assad regime and its allies.<sup>165</sup> Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates have also engaged in building partner capacity and work inside southern Yemen to train, supply, and support existing tribal, anti-Houthi "popular resistance" militias to build them into the core of a new national security force.<sup>166</sup>

Although these efforts fall short of the systematic FID mission that the IRGC conducts in Syria and Iraq, particularly using these conflicts to expand its action network significantly, FID is a positive development that should be built upon with Arab partners. The incipient Syrian rebel train-and-equip program supported by the United States brings Jordan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and potentially other partners into its operations, and could be the foundation for the MNJTF's future FID and UW missions. However, this is only if the United States is willing to put more resources into and take more risk supporting this program instead of narrowing the scope of its support to anti-ISIS operations.<sup>167</sup> If successful, the training component of the MNJTF's operations could provide U.S. regional partners with a future, actionable option for countering the IRGC's influence in the Middle East that does not rely on support for militant Sunni Islamist groups.

***DEVELOP A JOINT INTELLIGENCE FUSION CENTER TO COUNTER IRAN'S ASYMMETRIC CAPABILITIES.***

The core counterterrorism capability that the MNJTF would institutionally build in the region is a joint intelligence fusion center that would coordinate intelligence collected by member states' intelligence services, identify the most immediate threats to inform the security services of members

states, and create guidelines for the coordination of multilateral direct action against IRGC action network threats based on analysis from the joint intelligence fusion center. The analysis provided by the joint intelligence fusion center would inform the discussions of the recurring, high-level policy forum on Iran's destabilizing activities in the region. It would also be an essential part of the planning process for possible operations that the United States and its regional partners might engage in against the Iranians.

A core function of the joint intelligence fusion center would be to identify and analyze the activities and geographical location of key IRGC agents, assess the activities and the expansion of the IRGC's action network, and provide a time-sequence analysis of how IRGC action network recruitment has expanded to meet the manpower needs of the Syrian, Iraqi, and Yemeni conflicts. Of particular importance is a comprehensive database of the leaders, organizational structure, manpower, armaments, bases of operation, and operational history of the proliferating IRGC action network. The intelligence fusion center need not be limited to focusing on the IRGC and could also be used to target Sunni extremists that threatened our partners.

**Work with GCC and Arab partners to shift the balance on the ground in Syria by significantly expanding programs for arming, training, and equipping moderate opposition forces, including those forces opposing President Assad. Shifting the balance on the ground sets conditions in the longer term for a negotiated political settlement to the conflict.**

The most significant arena where the United States could find a way to clearly signal its Arab partners that it remains committed to the region, while effectively pushing back on Iran, is in Syria. Even as it pushes back, the United States must recognize that given the IRGC's influence inside Syria and its support for Hezbollah and the Assad regime, there

can be no political solution to Syria that does not involve Iran. Therefore, the United States should pursue a strategy in Syria that involves both pressure and engagement with Iran, just as it did on the nuclear issue. The United States should use this approach to create a situation on the ground that can result in a political agreement that ends the Syrian civil war.

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**THE UNITED STATES SHOULD PURSUE  
A STRATEGY IN SYRIA THAT INVOLVES BOTH  
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THE UNITED STATES SHOULD USE THIS  
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The first step in this process should be to significantly expand U.S. support for a Syrian opposition force and thus increase pressure on Iran. This should start with continuing to maintain and expand support for the Southern Front in southern Syria, some moderate rebel groups in Northwest Syria, and the Kurds and their Arab allies in the northeast of Syria.<sup>168</sup> However, it will also require a much more concerted effort to train and equip a Sunni force in the northwest. Initial efforts to build such a force failed, and the Obama administration chose to end the program. A better approach would have been to continue and improve the effort.<sup>169</sup> To expand the pool, this American-trained force should be able to fight not just ISIS but also the Assad regime. Without this shift, U.S. recruitment efforts were doomed to fail.<sup>170</sup> Increasing the significance and effectiveness of this effort should also give the United States leverage to press its GCC partners and Turkey to get behind

the American supported force instead of rebel coalitions in the North that are dominated by the al Qaeda affiliate Jabhat al-Nusra and the Salafist organization Harakat Ahrar al-Sham al-Islamiyya that is close to Jabhat al-Nusra and has ties to al Qaeda.<sup>171</sup> Ultimately, Syria's neighbors are most concerned about their influence in Syria and care less about what particular ideological group they are funding. If the United States can demonstrate its seriousness and show its partners that the force it supports is their best pathway to long-term influence in Syria, it should be able to coordinate a more unified and effective response. This effort will also send a strong signal to Iran that it risks a more direct confrontation with the United States if it does not pull back or look for a diplomatic solution. Additionally, it would increase American leverage on the ground as the United States tries to pursue a political settlement in Syria.

Even as the United States pushes more aggressively against Iranian influence, it should also reach out to Iran and signal that it would welcome a political resolution of the conflict. In the aftermath of the nuclear agreement, Secretary Kerry began new efforts along this front; given the destructive effect of the Syrian civil war, it is certainly important to test diplomatic solutions on a regular basis. However, in the immediate aftermath of the nuclear agreement this initiative is unlikely to succeed without reshaping the situation on the ground. The United States still has little leverage on the ground in Syria. Diplomatic efforts could inadvertently reinforce the worst fears of America's Arab partners that the nuclear deal was part of a broader plan for a new regional condominium with Iran that sacrifices Arab interests and signals to Iran that the United States is not willing to exert more influence and resources in Syria. Over time, as U.S.-Iranian channels in other arenas strengthen in the aftermath of the nuclear deal and as the United States signals to both Iran and the region that it is committed to establishing a credible alternative in Syria, the United States has a much better chance of shifting the situation on the ground and changing

the various parties' calculus to the point where a negotiated political arrangement can be found. At that point, the key parties including Assad and regime loyalists, the Kurds, and non-extremist Sunni groups can move to a political settlement and turn their united focus to ISIS and Syrian Salfist jihadist organizations such as Jabhat al-Nusra.

Even as the United States pursues this policy, it should continue to make countering and eventually defeating ISIS a high priority. And it should be willing to take advantage of the tactical opportunities to cooperate with Iran on jointly fighting ISIS, particularly in Iraq. But in reality, the most effective way to move from a strategy that is slowly attriting ISIS to one that can eventually lead to its defeat is through a political agreement in Syria that ends the other major portions of this multi-pronged civil war and allows the various parties to all turn their efforts on ISIS.

### **Take carefully calibrated direct actions against the IRGC, either unilaterally or jointly with Israeli or Arab partners.**

The United States should consider a limited set of specific cases where it should take direct covert action, either unilaterally or in coordination with partners, to counter Iran's influence in the region. There are real risks to such an approach, as an operation that goes wrong could lead to an escalatory international incident. For this reason, operations need to be carefully tailored. They should be designed to send a clear signal to Iran and our partners that the United States is committed to countering its activities in the region, raise the costs to Iran of its continued destabilizing activities in the region, and limit the risk of unintended escalation.

For example, Israel has a long history of interdicting Iranian arms shipments headed for Syria or Gaza, publicly announcing the interdiction and displaying pictures of the weapons for the world to see. For example in March 2014, Israel intercepted the Klos-C in the Red Sea, unloaded its weapons



A Syrian rebel fighter from the Harakat Nour al-Din al-Zenki coalition fires a U.S.-supplied TOW missile at a Syrian military forward operating base in the suburbs of the highly strategic, northwestern city of Aleppo in July 2015. Harakat Nour al-Din al-Zenki, a moderate Sunni Islamist Syrian rebel organization, is an example of the type of Syrian armed opposition group that can provide the United States and its regional partners leverage on the ground to work toward a negotiated end to the civil war. (Credit: Nour al-Din al-Zenki YouTube page)

cargo, and shared images and video of the cargo with the regional and international media.<sup>172</sup> The United States can work with Israel on such interdiction efforts by allowing the Israeli military to conduct the operation, thus not risking a highly escalatory incident between the United States and Iran. However, once the mission is complete, the United States should be the one to make an announcement and disseminate pictures of Iranian weapons to the world. This would send a clear signal to Iran and our partners regarding Washington's intent to more forcefully counter Iranian actions, while also creating significantly more embarrassment for Iran than if Israel had accused them of shipping arms. Alternatively, if the United States assesses that the risk is worth it, it can choose to conduct the interdiction operation itself.

Another relatively low-risk operation would involve bringing Iranian agents' activities to global attention in a public way that embarrasses Iran and hurts its diplomatic relations. For example, in 2010, an IRGC-QF arms network was exposed in Nigeria, resulting in an Iranian national and his Nigerian



This Bahraini Royal Navy Oliver Hazard Perry-class frigate is a former U.S. navy vessel that is a workhorse of Bahrain's maritime defense against Iranian naval threats. The United States maintains a close security partnership with Bahrain, particularly in the maritime domain, as part of a strategy to strengthen the capabilities of Gulf Arab partners to deter threats from Iran. (Credit: U.S. Navy photo taken by Mass Communication Specialist Seaman Ryan Steinhour)

associate being charged in Nigerian court in 2013 for conspiring to import prohibited weapons into and out of Nigeria. This incident caused diplomatic damage to Iran in Africa, leading Gambia, which Iran alleged was the ultimate destination of the Iranian weapons under a legitimate arms sale, and Senegal, which accused Iran of supporting separatist rebels against it, to cut their diplomatic ties with Iran.<sup>173</sup> Similar incidents could certainly send a signal to Iran and raise the costs of its destabilizing activities.

The United States should be cautious about direct actions in Iraq that could result in escalatory publicized incidents, as they could reduce the possibility of the United States and Iran coordinating the fight against ISIS in Iraq. It could also result in a more direct confrontation between Iranian Shia militias and U.S. forces. Given the level of U.S. forces and their potential vulnerability to Shia militia attacks, this would be dangerous and counterproductive. And indeed Iran showed a capacity and willingness to support and conduct precisely these types of

operations between 2003 and 2011 when American forces were in Iraq in large numbers.

**Take a more aggressive approach to maritime interdictions of IRGC weapons shipments, especially in the Red Sea and around Bahrain.**

The United States can have a more proactive role in deterring the IRGC from shipping weapons to its surrogates and proxies in the region. Indeed, this approach has already had some success in Yemen, where in April 2015 U.S. naval forces working with regional and international partners were able to identify an Iranian vessel attempting to bring weapons and material to Houthi fighters.<sup>174</sup> By stationing warships off the coast of Yemen and publicly stating that Iranian shipments would need to be inspected, the United States succeeded in turning the convoy around and forcing another vessel to be sent to Djibouti for inspection.<sup>175</sup> This intervention sent a meaningful signal to Iran, U.S. regional partners, and the international community that the United States was serious about assisting its Middle East allies to reduce the influence of the IRGC in Yemen's civil war.

There are real challenges to such an approach. Most important, the forced boarding of a ship could lead to a military incident that escalates into a broader conflict. There is also a timing challenge, as the decision-making process to intervene – from the time a ship is detected until it reaches port – is quite short, forcing a rapid reaction that the U.S. bureaucracy is not always geared toward addressing. However, Iran has historically shown great reluctance to engage in a conventional conflict with the United States, and when confronted in such situations, tends to back down.<sup>176</sup> Flexing muscle, as the United States did off the coast of Yemen, sends a clear message to Iran's leadership that ships will be forced to turn around, which will likely cause Iran to relent. Even just a few high profile symbolic encounters may cause Iran to change its calculus while reassuring partners.



U.S. efforts should focus on the Red Sea/Bab el-Mandeb region and Bahrain. The United States should continue to work with Saudi Arabia off the coast of Yemen. It should also cooperate with Israel to counter Iranian efforts to insert arms into Gaza, primarily through shipments to Sudan that then travel by land through Egypt to Gaza.<sup>177</sup> The IRGC has a record of attempting to ship weapons through Bahrain and has tried to exacerbate discontent among Bahrain's Shia majority toward the country's Sunni monarchy.<sup>178</sup> The location of the U.S. Fifth Fleet in Bahrain and the U.S. Navy's strong partnership with Bahrain's navy make this an ideal location for a more forward leaning approach on interdictions.

**Continue an aggressive sanctions strategy targeting Iranian support for terrorism and illicit, destabilizing activity of the IRGC, including through coordination with European allies.**

The United States should craft a sanctions strategy to more aggressively and publicly expose and target with financial penalties Iranian individuals and entities that provide financial and material support to Iranian terrorist efforts or activities that undermine stability in the region. Acting Under Secretary of the Treasury Adam Szubin testified in August 2015 that the U.S. administration will “maintain and continue to vigorously enforce our powerful sanctions targeting Iran’s backing for terrorist groups such as Hizballah; Hizballah’s sponsors in Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps-Quds Force; Iran’s support to the Houthis in Yemen; its backing of Assad’s regime in Syria; and its domestic human rights abuses. We will also maintain the U.S. sanctions against Iran’s missile program and the IRGC writ large.”<sup>179</sup> This continued focus on pressuring Iran with sanctions is crucial, but the president should elevate and discuss this strategy publicly, and U.S. policymakers should elaborate the penalties that will be imposed on those within – or supporting from outside – Iran’s illicit and aggressive regional activities in written guidance

and public engagements in the United States and abroad.

As part of this strategy, policymakers could consider revisiting the proposed rule issued under section 311 of the USA Patriot Act, issued in 2011 by the Treasury Department’s Financial Crimes Enforcement Network, which highlights the extreme risk of doing business in Iran and closes off the U.S. financial system from Iranian banks.<sup>180</sup> Policymakers could re-issue the regulatory action with a revised and elevated focus on concerns associated with the IRGC and Iranian entities’ support for terrorism. Policymakers could also consider new sanctions authorities, via executive order, specifically targeting entities and individuals involved in Iran’s support for terrorism and regional destabilization. Legislators could ask the administration to make a determination about whether the IRGC is a foreign terrorist organization, and act appropriately with penalties if it deems that it is.

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**THE UNITED STATES SHOULD CRAFT A SANCTIONS STRATEGY TO MORE AGGRESSIVELY TARGET ... IRANIAN INDIVIDUALS AND ENTITIES THAT PROVIDE FINANCIAL AND MATERIAL SUPPORT TO IRANIAN TERRORIST EFFORTS OR ACTIVITIES THAT UNDERMINE STABILITY IN THE REGION.**

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Additionally, the administration could create new financial sector penalties associated with the violation of trade controls or other policy restrictions that aim to limit Iran’s access to weapons or materials that can be used in acts of terror or to destabilize the region. The U.S. administration does not necessarily need these policy changes and new authorities to implement a successful, aggressive new approach to targeting Iran’s destabilizing activities in the Middle East. However, their



An M142 High Mobility Rocket System (HIMARS) test firing at the White Sands Missile Range in New Mexico. In 2014, the sale of 12 HIMARS worth nearly \$1 billion to the United Arab Emirates was approved by the U.S. Defense Security Cooperation Agency. The sale was touted as greatly improving the United Arab Emirates' ability to meet present and future threats, protect its infrastructure, and improve interoperability with U.S. forces. (Credit: U.S. Department of Defense/U.S. Army)

creation is a powerful indication that this effort is a top U.S. policy priority, and will establish rigorous new approaches and methods to address a grave security priority.

The public nature of this effort will be an important signal to partners of the United States abroad that the United States has not relinquished the use of sanctions as a tool to target Iran, even while offering relief from nuclear-related sanctions under the deal. It will also be a deterrent to Iran, especially those international companies and individuals who might otherwise partner with IRGC-owned companies and entities in Iran. It can be the basis of a new set of engagements with close European allies about elevating cooperation to target Iran's destabilization of the region, including with a coordinated sanctions strategy in the future.

Building an international consensus around condemnation and penalization of Iran for its regional

destabilization will be very important for the success of sanctions in this arena. This consensus must be based on empirical evidence of Iranian aggressive activity that includes both technical and specific intelligence. Therefore, coordination with the intelligence and security community to declassify examples of Iran's support for terrorism and aggression will be crucial. On the basis of this growing international consensus, the United States and international partners will accrue leverage to demand that the IRGC remove itself from the ownership and control of Iranian banks, companies, and civil society institutions, calling for greater Iranian financial and commercial sector transparency and uncompromised activity. This will make it easier for international investors to enter Iran, and for Iran to therefore receive the benefit of its nuclear bargain.

### **Maintain U.S. force posture in the Middle East with tailored enhancements, particularly in the form of additional ballistic-missile defense assets.**

Currently, there are approximately 30,000 U.S. military personnel stationed in the Middle East.<sup>181</sup> Most of them are in the Gulf, providing robust naval and air capabilities. It is important to maintain and slightly enhance this presence in the Middle East to deter Iran from pursuing destabilizing activities in the region, violating the nuclear agreement, and threatening freedom of navigation and the flow of energy resources. Despite the regional focus on the unconventional Iranian threat, a conventional presence will also reassure partners that the United States remains committed to their security.

In pursuing this approach, the United States will have to maintain a careful balance. A major influx of U.S. assets to the region is unnecessary given requirements in Asia and Europe and could be seen by our P5+1 partners as provocative. But any significant withdrawal of assets would shake the confidence of both the Arab states and Israel. The guiding principle should be to maintain an American force posture that is essentially the

same. Enhancements should focus on defensive capabilities that are reassuring to our partners but not overly provocative – most notably continuing to enhance regional ballistic missile defense.

**Increase conventional military sales to Arab partners to bolster defensive capabilities against potential Iranian aggression but avoid the introduction of significant new offensive capabilities into the region.**

The GCC states already have far superior conventional capabilities compared to those of Iran. America's GCC partners are estimated to have a combined total of \$113.7 billion in defense spending in 2014 compared to the \$15.7 billion that Iran is estimated to have spent on defense in the same year.<sup>182</sup> The United States has given its Gulf partners some of its most advanced military hardware, such as recent sales of latest generation F-15 and F-16 fighter jets to Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.<sup>183</sup> In spite of this support, U.S. Gulf partners still lack the confidence that they can respond effectively to potential Iranian

aggression and continue to view U.S. arms sales as meaningful.

The United States should consider increased arms sales to the Gulf states in the aftermath of the agreement, but these should focus on defensive capabilities such as minesweepers and ballistic missile defense that could address the Iranian mining and missile threat. It should also include the types of capabilities that would make our Arab partners more capable at countering the asymmetric Iranian challenge, including night vision goggles and weapons optics, more strategic capabilities such as advanced unmanned aerial vehicles, and the networking architecture to enhance air and maritime domain awareness. However, a major push on conventional offensive arms sales, which is unlikely to have a meaningful impact on the Gulf states' ability to counter Iran and will not significantly reassure our Arab partners who are already well supplied with American weapons, is unnecessary. Avoiding these types of sales will also reassure Israel regarding concerns about its qualitative military edge, which are more comprehensively addressed in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER 6

# Pillar 3 - Reassure Israel of U.S. Commitments and Deepen Cooperation on Countering Iran's Destabilizing Behavior

### CHALLENGES & OPPORTUNITIES

- The agreement causes a deep permanent breach with Israel.
- Israel is left more vulnerable to a more aggressive Iran.
- Israel pursues more aggressive policies without coordination with the United States, escalating tensions in the region.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

- Reinvigorate a U.S.-Israel high-level dialogue on a joint strategy to prevent a nuclear-armed Iran in the aftermath of the JCPOA, combined with professional dialogues and collaboration focused on implementation, detection of cheating, and response scenarios;
- Come to a U.S.-Israel side understanding on the steps the two allies can take together to ensure effective detection of any possible Iranian attempt to develop nuclear weapons and how they might respond jointly under various scenarios;
- Prioritize renewal of the U.S.-Israel Memorandum of Understanding on American Military Aid due to expire in 2017;
- Deepen support for Israel's multi-layered missile defense architecture including continued and increased investments in the Iron Dome, Arrow-3, and "David's Sling" systems;
- Reassure Israel that new efforts to strengthen the Gulf states will not come at the expense of Israel's qualitative military edge;
- Designate senior American and Israeli officials with the task of strengthening the relationship and reestablishing trust at the political level; and
- Create a high-level political dialogue and increase military and intelligence cooperation with Israel to address the threat posed by Iran's proxies, especially Hezbollah.

The agreement with Iran has been a major source of tension between the United States and Israel. But with the agreement now a reality and the congressional review process complete, the United States and Israel must move forward and begin to repair the rift that has emerged over the past couple of years. While President Obama and Prime Minister Netanyahu will never have a close personal relationship, there is a need to reduce tensions on both sides. This process would serve both American and Israeli interests, as U.S. support is vital to Israel's long-term security and Israel's reliability as a trustworthy and capable ally is key for the United States in an otherwise unstable and dangerous region.

Israel's concerns are dual. Iran will use the deal to advance its nuclear program, especially after the sunset of the main constraints on its enrichment program. It will also expand its regional influence and support for surrogates and proxies – especially Hezbollah – to directly threaten Israel's borders. Israeli capabilities to counter Iran are significantly more advanced than those of the GCC, and Israel is also much more confident in its own capabilities. Still, there are a number of steps the United States can take to reassure Israel. The overall objectives of this approach would be to:

- Signal to Israel that the United States maintains a deep commitment to preventing a nuclear-armed Iran and that close U.S.-Israel collaboration can ensure that together, they will maintain the ability to detect and counter an Iranian breakout;
- Deepen U.S.-Israel defense cooperation as a broader signal of America's long-term commitment to Israel;
- Repair the breach caused by the past two years of tension over the Iran agreement; and
- Leverage U.S.-Israel cooperation to counter Iranian support for its surrogates and proxies.

To achieve these objectives the United States should take the following policy actions.

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**WITH THE AGREEMENT NOW A REALITY AND THE CONGRESSIONAL REVIEW PROCESS COMPLETE, THE UNITED STATES AND ISRAEL MUST MOVE FORWARD AND BEGIN TO REPAIR THE RIFT THAT HAS EMERGED OVER THE PAST COUPLE OF YEARS.**

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**Reinvigorate a U.S-Israel high-level dialogue on a joint strategy to prevent a nuclear-armed Iran in the aftermath of the JCPOA, combined with professional dialogues and collaboration focused on implementation, detection of cheating, and response scenarios.**

One of Israel's greatest concerns with regards to the nuclear agreement is that Iran will abide by the agreement in the early years of implementation but that as the world turns elsewhere it will start to cheat and eventually obtain a nuclear weapon.<sup>184</sup> One way to assuage Israeli concerns is for the executive branch to engage them in a robust senior-level dialogue on implementing an agreement, working together to detect Iranian cheating, and preparing contingency responses in the event an Iranian breakout is detected. Altogether, the underlying message to Israel of such a process would be that although the Iranian potential nuclear threat will stay static or recede, American and Israeli preparations and capacity to prevent a breakout will increase.

This would benefit both sides. First, greater clarity on U.S. plans could reassure Israel of American intentions with regard to implementation. This would reduce the likelihood that Israel would take destabilizing steps outside of the agreement that could harm U.S. interests or undermine the agreement. It would also be very valuable for the United States for Israel to act as an effective red-team examining U.S. plans. Because of the priority that Israel assigns to this issue, it has developed a cadre of highly trained experts who can help the United States and its partners refine and improve their plans. Given Israeli concerns and their high suspicion regarding Iran's nuclear behavior, such a dialogue can be very useful for U.S. policymakers in finding weakness and vulnerabilities in their own plans and improving them.

At the political level, the dialogue should occur at the cabinet or sub-cabinet level. This process should be conducted discretely and not be publicized. The dialogue should start by delineating

the areas of agreement as well as the key dispute points. The second step will be to work together to narrow the disputes and contain them.

The Departments of State, Energy, and Treasury can lead technical discussions on implementation. An important element for these discussions will be to explore what will be considered as a marginal violation that requires international consultations and a flexible response, as well as a blatant violation that should be challenged rapidly and decisively, namely the discovery of undeclared facilities, military-related activities, and/or an Iranian attempt to breakout for a bomb. The United States can leverage its own internal review process on how to respond to Iranian violations, referenced in Chapter 5 to inform this discussion.

The United States and Israel can come to agreement on even deeper intelligence collaboration aimed at detecting as quickly as possible any Iranian violation, particularly covert military-related activities. Covert weaponization activities are the most difficult to detect, but also the most indicative of a change in Iranian calculus, which is why this effort requires the deepest level of U.S.-Israel coordination both among security professionals and political leaderships.<sup>185</sup>

The United States and Israel can also pursue joint military planning focused on contingency scenarios such as responding to the detection of a covert Iranian enrichment facility, new Iranian efforts at weaponization, or other clear indicators that Iran has begun a breakout to a nuclear weapon. Such an approach could help both Israel and the United States prepare for Iranian non-compliance scenarios. It could also reassure Israel of American seriousness and determination and give the United States greater insight into Israeli planning, minimizing the risk of uncoordinated Israeli action. This planning can also guide some U.S. arms sales to Israel to help enable American and Israeli preparations for such a scenario but should be coupled with a commitment that in exchange for these joint

efforts Israel will not surprise the United States with unilateral action.

### **Fast track renewal of the U.S.-Israel Memorandum of Understanding on American Military Aid due to expire in 2017.**

The United States should also reengage Israel in deep consultations about future bilateral security cooperation and offer a robust reassurance package to demonstrate its long-term commitment to Israel's security. The most important element would be for the United States to fast-track negotiations on a new 10-year memorandum of understanding regarding American military aid to Israel. The agreement will set the terms for U.S. military aid for Israel for the next 10 years and is due to be renewed in 2017, but bringing the date closer could send a clearer signal now. The current agreement puts U.S. funding for foreign military financing to Israel at \$3.1 billion per year.<sup>186</sup> If the United States provided a significant increase, this would also send a powerful signal about its long-term commitment to Israel.

### **Deepen support for Israel's multi-layered missile defense architecture including continued and increased investments in the Iron Dome, Arrow-3, and "David's Sling" systems.**

Both Hezbollah and Hamas possess tens of thousands of rockets and missiles aimed toward Israel. This is a direct threat to the lives of civilians in Israel and to the Israeli economy, which could be paralyzed or partially paralyzed during future conflicts. In the last confrontation in Gaza in 2014, for example, Hamas launched missiles on Israel's only national airport. As a result, almost all international flights to Israel were stopped for two days.<sup>187</sup>

Therefore, in the aftermath of the agreement the United States should increase its assistance to Israel's active defense program: anti-rockets and missiles systems such as the Iron Dome, Arrow, and "David's Sling" that increase Israel's ability to defend its citizens, and assets against the missile

and rocket threats from Lebanon, Gaza, and Iran. The United States has already provided \$1 billion for the Iron Dome during the course of the Obama administration – above and beyond its



The United States and Israel have a long-running agreement to conduct frequent bi-lateral military exercises, such as this October 2009 photo of the U.S.-Israeli exercise Juniper Cobra 10. Strengthening U.S.-Israeli security cooperation is an important component of U.S. strategy in the Middle East in the aftermath of the nuclear deal with Iran. (Credit: Israel Defense Forces Flickr)



Israel's Iron Dome anti-missile defense system has a proven track record of success in countering rockets fired by groups such as HAMAS in Gaza and Hezbollah in Lebanon. This Iron Dome launcher was deployed in November 2012, and successfully countered a rocket attack from HAMAS in Gaza. In the aftermath of the nuclear deal with Iran, increased U.S. support for Israel's defensive weapons systems such as the Iron Dome should be a key aspect of the U.S.-Israeli security relationship. (Credit: Israel Defense Forces Flickr)

regular military support for Israel.<sup>188</sup> Going forward, American military assistance should aim to turn the Iron Dome anti-rocket defense system into a nationwide system that goes beyond addressing discrete threats. It should also include thickening Israel's layered ballistic missile defenses in the face of increasingly sophisticated missile threats from Hezbollah and Iran.

**Reassure Israel that new efforts to strengthen the Gulf states will not come at the expense of Israel's qualitative military edge.**

There is significant anxiety in Israel that in the aftermath of the nuclear agreement with Iran, the United States will execute arms sales with Gulf partners that will threaten Israel's qualitative military edge – particularly if the United States were to approve the sale of strike aircraft such as the F-35.<sup>189</sup> The United States should make it absolutely clear to Israel that reassurances Washington provides to Arab states are focused on countering Iran's asymmetric activities, which will

not require the types of weapons that would shift the conventional military balance in the region. Moreover, there is already a robust process led by the Pentagon and the State Department to address Israel's potential qualitative military edge concerns when it comes to future arms sales to the Gulf.<sup>190</sup> This dialogue could be deepened, and specifically the United States should use this forum to present to Israeli counterparts its overall strategy for reassuring the Arab states in the aftermath of the Iran deal and the role arms sales would and would not play in that strategy.

**Designate senior American and Israeli officials with the task of strengthening the relationship and reestablishing trust at the political level.**

President Obama and Prime Minister Netanyahu should each assign an individual close to them – either inside or outside of government – to begin rebuilding some trust in the relationship. These individuals should ideally have direct lines to the president and prime minister, but should not necessarily have been closely involved in the last two years of contentious relations between the two sides. It may be ideal for both sides to lean on some of the individuals who managed these issues for them in the 2009 – 2012 timeframe when U.S.-Israel collaboration on Iran was stronger and there was more trust in the relationship.

The next president – Democrat or Republican – should make strengthening the U.S.-Israel relationship an early administration priority. And the Israeli prime minister in early 2017 – whether it will be Prime Minister Netanyahu or his successor – should also make repairing the relationship a very high early priority.





In March 2011, the Israeli navy seized over 2,500 mortar shells that had been smuggled aboard the Liberian-flagged vessel *Victoria*, which had begun its voyage in the Syrian Mediterranean port of Lattakia. The mortar shells were believed to be destined for Gaza, a delivery provided by the IRGC to support HAMAS. In the aftermath of the nuclear deal with Iran, the United States can take a more proactive role in coordinating with Israel to seize suspected Iranian weapons shipments to its proxies and action network. (Credit: Israel Defense Forces Flickr)

**Come to a U.S.-Israel side understanding on the steps the two allies can take together to ensure the effective detection of any possible Iranian attempt to develop nuclear weapons and how they might respond jointly under various scenarios.**

To further reassure Israel, the president could consider offering a letter of assurance as an end product of the political and security dialogues on implementation of the agreement and potential contingency scenarios. The United States has a long history of providing such side assurances to Israel and they have had a meaningful effect in the past.<sup>191</sup> This agreement should clearly define how a nuclear deal with Iran would be implemented, how violations would be handled, and what could be done outside the framework to provide incentives for Iranian compliance. It can also outline commitments for intelligence and military cooperation to

continue to monitor Iran's nuclear program and prepare for breakout scenarios. Ideally, the United States would require Israel to make a commitment in such a letter not to take unilateral military action without first consulting with the United States.

Given that fundamental differences may still remain on some issues, it is not clear if agreement on such a letter could be reached between the two sides, particularly since the United States would likely be more patient with potential Iranian violations and look first to find ways to change Iranian behavior, while Israel would likely push more aggressively and quickly for the imposition of penalties or even military action. But both sides do have something significant to gain – a reassurance from the United States to prevent Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon in exchange for a reassurance from Israel to not pursue unilateral action without first consulting with the United States.

**Create a high-level political dialogue and increase military and intelligence cooperation with Israel to address the threat posed by Iran’s proxies, especially Hezbollah.**

Like Sunni Arab countries, Israel is concerned that Iran will promote a bolder foreign policy in the region to advance its interests in the aftermath of the agreement.<sup>192</sup> Hence, the American response to Sunni misgivings described in Chapter 6 can assist the United States in reassuring Israel in the aftermath of an agreement. However, there are some unique Israeli interests that should be simultaneously addressed in respect to Iran’s proxies, mainly Hezbollah in Lebanon and Hamas and other Palestinians terrorist groups in Gaza and the West Bank.

Similar to U.S. cooperation with the GCC states to counter Iran’s destabilizing activities, the United States should develop a mechanism with Israel. This cooperation should focus heavily on Hezbollah – the most direct Iranian-supported threat to Israel. But it can also target IRGC activities

in the Golan Heights and interdiction of Iranian weapon shipments to Gaza. Such collaboration should include high-level strategic dialogue, intelligence sharing, and, where appropriate, joint covert action. Indeed, the United States and Israel have a strong history of working together on such matters as evidenced by the alleged joint operation to kill Hezbollah’s International Operations Chief Imad Mughniyah in 2008.<sup>193</sup>

Ideally, Israel could be brought into a direct dialogue with the GCC states so that the United States need not develop separate and parallel efforts with the GCC and Israel. However, without a breakthrough on the Israeli-Palestinian track it will be very difficult to integrate Israel into formal multilateral efforts with the Arab states on these issues.<sup>194</sup> Instead, it will be incumbent on the United States to ensure that its joint efforts with the Arab States and with Israel are well synchronized. And Israel certainly has its own quiet channels into many of the Arab states and could establish more robust bilateral dialogues on this matter with some of them further feeding into this process.<sup>195</sup>

## CHAPTER 7

# Pillar 4 - Cooperate with Iran on Issues of Common Interest

### CHALLENGES & OPPORTUNITIES

- Pragmatic actors in Iran use the agreement to wield greater domestic influence and moderate Iranian foreign policy.
- New opportunities are created for Iran and the United States to jointly pursue common interests.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

- Eliminate the State Department's no-contact policy with Iran;
- Establish a channel between the American National Security Advisor and Iranian Secretary of the Supreme National Security Council;
- Deepen cooperation on maritime security, including new cooperative mechanisms to avoid inadvertent escalation between naval warships, and support cooperative counter-piracy efforts;
- Test the Iranian government's willingness to accept a U.S. interests section in Tehran but proceed cautiously and gradually due to security concerns for American personnel and political challenges in Tehran;
- Deepen disaster and earthquake relief cooperation between Iranian and American civilian experts;
- Create new financial opportunities for U.S. and international lenders to empower the Iranian private sector, entrepreneurs, and civil society;
- Expand exchange and people-to-people programs between Iran and the United States in fields such as sports, business, and academia;
- Deepen cooperation with Iran in Afghanistan, especially on counternarcotics efforts;
- In the near term, limit initial engagement with Iran on ISIS to operational de-confliction and avoid attempts at strategic cooperation in Iraq and Syria; and
- Over the long term, utilize high-level diplomatic channels built with Iran on the nuclear issue to provide a forum to discuss and mediate regional issues.

Even as the United States moves in the aftermath of an agreement to push back on Iran's support for surrogates and proxies, it should also seek to take advantage of the agreement to improve communication and look for areas of cooperation. This will not be easy, and progress may be halting, given the long history of distrust between the United States and Iran and the potential for political spoilers on both sides to undermine any broader engagement beyond the nuclear agreement. Nonetheless, the proposition that there are opportunities for increased cooperation between Iran and the United States should be tested.

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**A GRADUALIST APPROACH THAT STARTS WITH A COMBINATION OF COUNTERING IRAN'S DESTABILIZING ACTIVITIES, REASSURING PARTNERS, AND LOOKING FOR TACTICAL AREAS OF COOPERATION COULD SLOWLY ACCLIMATE THE MIDDLE EAST TO THIS NEW REALITY AND EVENTUALLY SET THE TABLE FOR MORE COMPREHENSIVE REGIONAL NEGOTIATIONS THAT ARE MORE LIKELY TO SUCCEED.**

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First, the United States and Iran do have a number of common interests where cooperation could be tactically useful, including avoiding escalatory incidents in the crowded waters of the Gulf or countering the narcotics trade in Afghanistan. Finding ways to cooperate on such matters will be in America's interest and could also begin to build greater trust. The focus should first be on areas that are less politically sensitive and where the policy is largely run by technocrats on both sides – not politicians.

Second, there will be an internal conflict in Iran between pragmatists, such as President Rouhani,

who value Iran's economic and diplomatic integration into the international community, and hardliners who put a greater premium on more aggressive policies that pursue revolutionary ideals at the cost of international isolation. Finding ways to empower pragmatists, such as demonstrating the benefits of the agreement, will improve the likelihood that this perspective takes a firmer hold inside Iran and gives pragmatists greater political leverage through increased popular support and bureaucratic momentum inside the regime. This approach should not focus on supporting particular individuals, given how complicated internal Iranian politics can be, but instead it should focus on supporting and rewarding pragmatic policies.

Finally, in the longer term there is the need to forge political solutions to the civil wars that currently afflict the Middle East in Syria, Iraq, and Yemen. Iran is a problematic actor in many of these fronts and the first step in the aftermath of the nuclear agreement should involve pushing back on Iran's destabilizing activities as recommended in Chapters 5 and 6. However, even as the United States and its partners work to reset Iran's calculus by countering its activities, they should leave the door open for engagement in the long run because Iran will be a key actor in any negotiated agreement. Even if engaging Iran in a comprehensive dialogue is premature in the immediate aftermath of a nuclear deal, building trust and relationships that can eventually facilitate such negotiations is crucial if the United States is to implement a long-term strategy for reducing political instability plaguing the Middle East.

Successfully executing such an approach will require a careful balancing act. It will not be easy to take a more aggressive stance toward some of Iran's activities in the region while the United States looks to improve relations in other areas. However, the United States has a long history of engaging with regional and global competitors and cooperating in some areas, even as it pushes back in others. Indeed, for most of the past 50 years this

general approach would characterize U.S. relations with both Russia and China and there is no reason to believe that a similar approach cannot be pursued with Iran.

The second challenge will be trying to balance between the need to reassure anxious regional partners even as the United States engages with Iran. This can also be addressed if the United States demonstrates to Israel, Saudi Arabia, and the other GCC states that it is willing to more aggressively counter Iran's destabilizing behavior in the region. It can also be managed by taking a gradualist approach with Iran. If in the immediate aftermath of a nuclear deal the United States begins a pivot to a regional conference to seek political solutions for some of the region's civil wars, it could confirm the worst fears of its allies about an American pivot to Iran. This would cause them to react in a destabilizing fashion by pursuing more aggressive anti-Iran policies on their own. A gradualist approach that starts with a combination of countering Iran's destabilizing activities, reassuring partners, and looking for tactical areas of

cooperation could slowly acclimate the Middle East to this new reality and eventually set the table for more comprehensive regional negotiations that are more likely to succeed.

Deepening engagement with Iran should focus on four areas:

- Leverage the nuclear negotiations to improve communication channels between the United States and Iran;
- Expand cooperation on economic and other non-security issues;
- Start small on security issues that are less politically charged and where American and Iranian interests overlap; and
- Set the table for a long-term regional negotiation with all of the key actors to bring the civil wars in Syria, Iraq, and Yemen to an end.

To achieve these objectives the United States should take the policy actions outlined in the remainder of this chapter.

**Eliminate the State Department’s no-contact policy.**

One of the biggest challenges to cooperating with Iran has been that, because the United States and Iran have not had diplomatic relations since 1979, clear communications have been extremely difficult. The absence of adequate channels for bilateral communications presents tremendous logistical hurdles; when the two sides have wanted to exchange messages, they have had to use go-betweens such as the Sultan of Oman, or the Swiss, who formally represent U.S. interests in Tehran. This game of “telephone” reduces the ability to understand each other, especially when the go-betweens have their own agendas that do not always align perfectly with those of the United States or Iran. The nuclear negotiations have opened up channels at the highest levels for the first time in 35 years. Since the Islamic Revolution, there is regular communication between the U.S. Secretary of State and his Iranian counterpart. Such communication at the highest levels should continue after a deal is reached and the United States should also work with Iran to expand those channels at non-political professional levels among diplomats and technical experts.

conferences or events. The United States should fully eliminate the no-contact policy in the immediate aftermath of the nuclear agreement.

**Establish a channel between the American National Security Advisor and Iranian Secretary of the Supreme National Security Council (SNSC).**

The channel established between Secretary of State Kerry and Foreign Minister Zarif, and between Iranian and American diplomats responsible for the nuclear profile is invaluable. But Zarif’s influence in Tehran is limited. Many in Iran suspect him of being too close to the West and too comfortable with the United States.

The natural next channel is one between U.S. National Security Advisor Susan Rice and the Secretary of the SNSC Ali Shamkhani. Shamkhani is viewed as a relative pragmatist inside Iran, though with more hawkish views than Rouhani or Zarif.<sup>197</sup> He has an unquestioned military record and revolutionary credentials with 30 years of experience serving in top military and defense leadership positions, including in the Iran-Iraq war and as defense minister in the reformist government of President Mohammad Khatami from 1997 – 2005. He previously served as the Supreme Leader’s military advisor, giving him direct access to Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. From a bureaucratic perspective, this channel also makes sense given that Shamkhani plays a similar role to Rice by coordinating the body that deliberates on all of Iran’s most critical national security decisions – not just its nuclear program.<sup>198</sup> It is unclear if Shamkhani would agree to a bilateral conversation with Rice, or if the Supreme Leader would even allow it. However, there is a precedent in efforts by then-SNSC Ali Larijani to reach out to then-national security advisor Stephen Hadley in 2006.<sup>199</sup> There is little downside for the United States to quietly reach out and test the waters on such an idea and there are numerous international conferences in Europe where a meeting could take place on the sidelines.

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**THE UNITED STATES SHOULD FULLY ELIMINATE THE NO-CONTACT POLICY IN THE IMMEDIATE AFTERMATH OF THE NUCLEAR AGREEMENT.**

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The U.S. no-contact policy has required U.S. personnel to obtain a special high-level exemption before interacting with their Iranian counterparts.<sup>196</sup> This policy, which remained in place during the nuclear negotiations, meant that American and Iranian diplomats, whose job is to build relationships with their foreign counterparts and look for common areas of cooperation, could not even talk to one other when attending the same international

**Deepen cooperation on maritime security, including new cooperative mechanisms to avoid inadvertent escalation between naval warships as well as support cooperative counter-piracy efforts.**

Both Iran and the United States have interests in avoiding naval accidents and unintended escalation in the Gulf and North Arabian sea, particularly the Persian Gulf, because both countries' navies operate there, along with the Iranian coast guard and IRGC-Navy.<sup>200</sup> In order to manage future crises, the two countries could negotiate an Incidents at Sea (INCSEA) agreement similar to the one the United States had with the Soviet navy during the Cold War. This would set a series of precise protocols between Iran and the United States to avoid incidents in the first place and ensure communication and de-escalatory steps in the event of an incident. If an INCSEA agreement is too ambitious, the two sides could at least establish a hotline for basic communication in the event of an incident or crisis. Perhaps the biggest challenge to this approach is that incidents are most likely to occur in the very crowded waters of the Gulf. This area is controlled by the IRGC-Navy which would be less likely to be open to this type of cooperation than the more professionalized regular Iranian Navy.<sup>201</sup> Taking measures to de-escalate tensions in the Gulf furthers the interests of both the United States and the GCC by reducing the probability of an inadvertent conflict. Such an agreement would not eliminate the possibility for such incidents, nor would it obviate the need to prepare for intentional provocations, but it would establish common rules of the road as well as channels for military communications that could be used in a crisis.

Another potential area of cooperation is counter-piracy. Both the United States and Iran have an interest in ensuring the free flow of energy resources and commerce from the Middle East to Asia, Africa, and around the world. Iran's past participation in international counter-piracy efforts has not raised concerns from regional partners, and those efforts have provided an opportunity for

Iran to play a constructive role in a broad maritime coalition in the Indian Ocean.<sup>202</sup> The counter-piracy campaign is one area of Iranian security policy where regime hardliners have empowered the regular Iranian Navy. Then-U.S. Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral Jonathan Greenert, complimented the Iranian Navy as being "professional and courteous, committing to the rules of the road" during its active participation in anti-piracy patrols in 2012.<sup>203</sup> Even though Iran plays a productive role in this area, it smuggles weapons to other countries in the Middle East, which may undermine this type of cooperation.

**Test the Iranian government's willingness to accept a U.S. interests section in Tehran but proceed cautiously and gradually due to security concerns for American personnel and political challenges in Tehran.**

Currently the Swiss represent U.S. interests in Tehran, but there is no American staffed interests section at the Swiss Embassy.<sup>204</sup> This inhibits American government officials' ability to communicate with Iranian officials or gain a real understanding of Iranian society. One of the most natural ways to strengthen communication would be to establish an American-staffed interests section in Tehran that could eventually lay the foundation for a U.S. Embassy.

This will not be easy, as Iran's leadership, particularly the Supreme Leader, would be highly suspicious if the United States were to move quickly in the aftermath of an agreement to suggest such a step. It would only confirm his fears regarding a greater American goal of subverting the Iranian government.<sup>205</sup> Given the difficult history and the takeover of the American Embassy in 1979, such a move would also be difficult for many Americans to accept. Additionally, security concerns will be paramount for the United States, particularly in the aftermath of the death of Ambassador Christopher Stevens in Benghazi and incidents of Iranian protesters overrunning the British embassy in Tehran in 2011, causing its evacuation.<sup>206</sup>



U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry and U.S. Secretary of Energy Dr. Ernest Moniz stand with Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif and Iranian Vice President for Atomic Energy and President of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran Dr. Ali Akbar Salehi in Lausanne, Switzerland, in March 2015. The establishment of high-level U.S.-Iranian diplomatic channels is a major accomplishment of the nuclear negotiations that should be maintained in the aftermath of the deal. (Credit: U.S. Department of State Flickr)

**Deepen disaster and earthquake relief cooperation between American and Iranian civilian experts.**

U.S. support for Iran following natural disasters has generally been an area of positive engagement between the two countries. This is similar to the international maritime anti-piracy operations in the Gulf region of the Indian Ocean and provides an opportunity for U.S. and Iranian military forces to directly interact and cooperate. The 2003 earthquake that struck Bam, killing approximately 29,000 people and injuring approximately 23,000 others, led to an active and important role for the United States military in providing disaster assistance to Iranians – considered to be among the most important performed by a foreign actor.<sup>207</sup> U.S. military aircraft hauling humanitarian aid to the residents of Bam are believed to be the first to land in Iran since the ill-fated 1980 Operation Desert One, which tried to covertly deploy American special forces to free U.S. hostages held captive in Tehran.<sup>208</sup> Washington reportedly was

one of the most generous suppliers of humanitarian assistance for relief efforts following the Bam earthquake.<sup>209</sup>

American technical experts responsible for disaster relief should consider holding direct discussions with Iranian officials to discuss how they might be able to cooperate in the event of a future crisis and what kind of contingency planning and resources might be useful to ensure Iran is prepared for future disasters. There is an opportunity in this area for continued cooperation, which can involve potential joint disaster relief exercises with Iran and other countries in the region that commonly experience natural disasters, such as Turkey and Pakistan. The discussion should start among civilian agencies with the possibility of some limited military-to-military cooperation down the line.

**Create new financial opportunities for U.S. and international lenders to empower the Iranian private sector, entrepreneurs, and civil society.**

The U.S. government should seek opportunities to encourage U.S. lending institutions and individuals to engage with the private sector, entrepreneurs, youth, and civil society in Iran. These elements of society may not benefit directly and initially from Iran’s economic opening after the lifting of sanctions, given the flow of much of Iran’s oil revenue and anticipated new investment contracts through tightly controlled state institutions. However, empowering civil society – many elements of which are very eager to expand their ties to the West – can be a powerful strategy to fostering independent innovation, poverty alleviation strategies, and constructive social transformation over time.<sup>210</sup> Such an effort will also make it clear to U.S. foreign partners, Iranian leadership, and the Iranian people that the U.S. government has no desire to punish the people of Iran with economic hardship or isolation.

The U.S. government can also promote so-called “dollar diplomacy” by encouraging U.S. companies



to enter Iran in certain economic sectors after the bulk of economic sanctions on Iran are lifted. Though U.S. companies will generally be barred from engaging with Iran in the future, given that the embargo on U.S. dealings with Iran will remain in place, such permitted opportunities will encourage Iranian companies to adopt transparency, elevated due diligence procedures, and operational and financial best practices in order to win the trust and investments of reputable multinational companies.<sup>211</sup> Allowing U.S. companies to enter Iran will also expand the links of communication and commerce between the U.S. and Iran specifically, which the United States can leverage in its economic pressure strategies with Iran.

General and specific licenses issued by the U.S. Department of the Treasury that permit commercial and banking activities with Iran not otherwise allowed under the framework of the nuclear agreement will be a key mechanism for encouraging greater U.S. business links with Iran, and greater empowerment of civil society institutions in Iran. This will expand the economic benefits to Iran in the future, particularly with reputable international companies, but will keep these ties tightly controlled by U.S. financial regulators, making them easy to reverse if political circumstances merit.

### **Expand exchange and people-to-people programs.**

People-to-people exchange through athletic competitions and higher education programs provide great opportunities for Americans to engage with Iranians in a context that allows for unofficial contacts. Perhaps the most important of these are academic and cultural exchanges. In recent years, the U.S. Department of State has sought to greatly increase the number of Iranian students pursuing degrees at American universities. Ongoing concern that Iranian nationals are spying in the United States, combined with burdensome legislative requirements, have put unnecessary limitations on education exchange programs. Applying for visas is also difficult because the absence of a

U.S. consulate or interests section in Iran means Iranians must travel to Dubai to apply for a student visa, creating a significant barrier.<sup>212</sup>

Still, in 2011 the Obama administration directed the State Department to approve two-year, multiple-entry visas for Iranian students.<sup>213</sup> The Office of Foreign Assets Control provides a general licensing procedure for academic exchange agreements between colleges and universities based in the United States and their counterparts in Iran.<sup>214</sup> It is estimated that more than 10,000 Iranian students currently study in U.S. colleges and universities, with approximately one-third of them women.

Athletic competitions, particularly Greco-Roman wrestling and volleyball, allow U.S. and Iranian nationals to compete against one another in competitions hosted in both Iran and the United States and build relationships in an atmosphere that is generally far less politically charged than interactions between their governments.<sup>215</sup> While not yet at the level of the famous “Ping Pong Diplomacy” that opened greater cultural diplomatic opportunities between the United States and China in the 1970s, since 1998 American and Iranian teams have participated in friendly competitions, and recently the United States and Iran, working with Russia, collaborated to successfully protect wrestling from being dropped as an Olympic sport.<sup>216</sup>

In the aftermath of the nuclear deal, utilizing increased and more active contact between the U.S. Department of State and the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, including eventually opening a U.S. interests section in Tehran, could increase the pace of new interactions between Americans and Iranians while facilitating opportunities for everyday citizens to engage in cultural diplomatic interactions. The President and the Secretary of State should direct the State Department to look for new opportunities to develop such interactions and also increase the funding for these programs. However, the U.S. government must be clear eyed about the limits of this type of public diplomacy



U.S. Navy sailors deployed on the guided-missile cruiser *USS Hue City* provide assistance to the Iranian-flagged dhow *M/V Payam* which had issued a distress call after being attacked by pirates and set adrift in the Arabian Sea in August 2012. U.S.-Iranian maritime and naval cooperation to maintain open sea lanes in the Middle East region for global commerce should be expanded in the aftermath of the deal. (Credit: U.S. Navy Flickr)

and recognize that it will not necessarily translate into a change in political policies toward the Iranian government. It may also cause a backlash of suspicious hardliners in Iran who are not interested in seeing further interactions.

### **Deepen cooperation with Iran in Afghanistan, especially on counternarcotics efforts.**

Afghanistan, where the United States and Iran share a number of common interests and where cooperation is unlikely to stoke significant anxiety from Arab partners, offers another opportunity for cooperation. Both the United States and Iran want to contain the Taliban and promote the general stability of Afghanistan by preventing the return to a state of civil war there. Iran joined the United States and other members of the international community in praising the 2014 formation of the Afghan unity government of President Ashraf Ghani Ahmadzai and Chief Executive Officer Abdullah Abdullah.<sup>217</sup> In spite of Iran's continued objection to the NATO SOFA with the Afghan government, it may see

security benefits from a small residual NATO force in support of Afghan security forces, which can help stabilize a conflict that has sent two million Afghan refugees into Iran.

Preventing the flow of heroin and other narcotics from Afghanistan to Iran and into the global market is another potential area of cooperation. One of the most damaging contemporary social problems in Iran is addiction to opiates – particularly heroin, most of which enters the country from Afghanistan<sup>218</sup> – impacting an estimated 2.2 million Iranians and growing annually. Iran's moderate factions can continue to take the lead on the country's anti-narcotics policy, particularly in attracting greater international engagement and support for Iran on the issue, which unites Iranian political actors across the ideological spectrum, including the hardline factions close to the Supreme Leader.<sup>219</sup>

### **In the near-term, limit initial engagement on ISIS to operational deconfliction and avoid attempts at strategic cooperation in Iraq and Syria.**

Aggressive attempts to cooperate with Iran against ISIS in both Iraq and Syria are unlikely to work. The IRGC-QF is likely to continue to control this portfolio and there has been no indication of a shift from the sectarian strategy the IRGC has adopted toward these conflicts.<sup>220</sup> Moreover, close coordination in Syria or Iraq would also lead to significant regional blowback, particularly from Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, which view the conflicts as part of a regional competition with Iran.

Therefore, the most achievable option in the short term is tactical coordination of operations against ISIS that avoids conflict and ensures American and Iranian efforts against ISIS are mutually reinforcing. This coordination is reportedly already happening with the Iraqi military acting as a go-between with the United States and Iran and de-conflicting operations.<sup>221</sup>

In the long-term, the United States should keep these channels open in the event Iran's strategy changes. Eventually the IRGC may recognize that it cannot win outright and that its strategy is most likely to lead to a permanent failed state in Iraq that would allow for the entrenchment of ISIS. Until Iran recalculates its strategy in Iraq, however, opportunities for broader cooperation will be limited.

**Over the long term, utilize high-level diplomatic channels built with Iran on the nuclear issue to provide a forum to discuss and mediate regional issues.**

The United States has repeatedly emphasized the compartmentalization of the nuclear negotiations from the issue of Iran's regional activities. If in the immediate aftermath of the nuclear agreement the United States immediately pivots to incorporate Iran into negotiations to achieve a settlement to conflicts in the region, it would increase anxiety among Washington's Sunni partners, who would view this move as a confirmation of a pivot to Iran at the expense of Arab interests. The Iranians would view an early pivot to these issues as a signal that the United States is unwilling to aggressively counter Iranian destabilizing activities, causing Iran to take a more aggressive position at the negotiating table. Before pursuing serious negotiations with Iran in the region, the United

States should first focus more on pushing back on Iranian influence and reassuring partners, even as it builds confidence with Iran by cooperating on less controversial issues.

In the long term, once these regional perceptions have been reset, the only viable pathway for ending the civil wars in Yemen, Iraq, and Syria involves a political dialogue with all of the key players – including Iran. Yemen's conflict may be the easiest to manage because the Iranians are not as fully invested there as Saudi Arabia and its allies.<sup>222</sup>

The continued robust action of Saudi Arabia and its regional allies, with the support of the United States, gives them a position of strength with which to engage with the Iranians. In Iraq, Iran's interests are more engaged than those of the Sunni states because Iraq has a larger Shia population with deep ties to Iran, and Iran has invested much more heavily in Iraq since 2003. Over time, the key to achieving a viable political solution to Iraq's civil war will be a recalculation by Iran that it is willing to support an inclusive solution that balances between Shia, Kurds, and Sunnis instead of an approach exclusively focused on Shia sectarian victory. The most difficult conflict to resolve will be in Syria, where Iran's interests and those of the Sunni states are all highly engaged. (A strategy for addressing this challenge was described in Chapter 5.)

## CHAPTER 8

# Pillar 5 - Leverage the Agreement to Strengthen the Nonproliferation Regime

### CHALLENGES & OPPORTUNITIES

- The agreement sets new norms for successfully deterring and dealing with problem states.
- The agreement weakens the standards of the nonproliferation regime.
- Regional states react to the agreement by pursuing domestic enrichment programs.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

- Mitigate against the risk of the JCPOA becoming a precedent for less restrictive civilian nuclear cooperation by staying committed to the “Gold Standard” (which ensures no self-enrichment or reprocessing capabilities), particularly in the Middle East;
- Deepen regional intelligence cooperation targeted at Iran’s nuclear program;
- Use Iran’s acquiescence to the Additional Protocol to reengage with other hold-outs such as Argentina and Brazil and encourage them to comply;
- Leverage provisions of the JCPOA to pursue stronger global norms for monitoring the entire nuclear supply chain, especially for past violators and states with large civilian nuclear programs;
- Leverage the unique compelling mechanisms in the JCPOA, such as the Joint Commission’s ability to mandate access to sites not under safeguards or the U.N. sanctions snapback mechanism, as a useful model to strengthen future nonproliferation agreements;
- Provide tailored nuclear security guarantees to GCC partners; and
- Clarify economic disincentives to Sunni partners if they begin proliferating in response to the JCPOA.

The nuclear deal between world powers and Iran is a dramatic opportunity to shape the future of the nonproliferation regime. If the agreement fails to prevent Iran from developing nuclear weapons, it will dramatically undermine the nonproliferation regime. Therefore, the first nonproliferation priority for the United States and the international community should be to strengthen the agreement and ensure robust implementation by taking the steps described in Chapter 5.

However, if the agreement succeeds in preventing Iran from obtaining nuclear weapons, it can be leveraged to empower global nonproliferation institutions. This is a bold and ambitious goal but certainly one worth pursuing even if it can only be partially realized. The United States should act simultaneously in two main theaters: leading the effort to create new global nonproliferation norms while taking steps to prevent the possibility of regional proliferation in the Middle East in response to the agreement. Global and regional success are interdependent, and the United States should advance policies on both a global and regional level with the following central objectives:

- Mitigate against the risk that Iran becomes a precedent for others to pursue domestic enrichment by recommitting to the nonproliferation “Gold Standard;”
- Leverage the agreement to strengthen nonproliferation norms as they relate to inspections and enforcement; and
- Provide a combination of security guarantees and economic and political disincentives to dissuade Iran’s regional competitors from pursuing a nuclear hedging strategy.

The remainder of this chapter outlines a series of policy actions the United States should take to achieve these objectives.

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## THE NUCLEAR DEAL BETWEEN WORLD POWERS AND IRAN IS A DRAMATIC OPPORTUNITY TO SHAPE THE FUTURE OF THE NONPROLIFERATION REGIME.

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**Mitigate against the risk of the JCPOA becoming a precedent for less restrictive civilian nuclear cooperation by staying committed to the “Gold Standard,” particularly in the Middle East.**

In the nuclear agreement, world powers agreed to collaborate with Iran on peaceful nuclear-related activities, though Tehran did not forswear its right to enrichment capabilities that can be used to acquire nuclear weapons. This is a risky precedent. The United States must set a new standard for nuclear cooperation to ensure that other states do not follow the “Iranian precedent” and become threshold states with domestic enrichment or reprocessing capabilities. Two other historic precedents are useful for potential frameworks. The ideal framework is known in the nonproliferation literature as the “Gold Standard.”<sup>223</sup> According to this principle, a country that seeks nuclear energy cooperation should legally commit itself as part of a civilian nuclear energy agreement not to enrich uranium or reprocess plutonium – two necessary capabilities for military nuclear program – and instead rely on existing markets for nuclear fuel needs. This is to ensure that the civilian cooperation could not be used for military purposes. This standard was applied in 2009 when the United States signed the 123 Agreement for Peaceful Civilian Nuclear Energy Cooperation with the United Arab Emirates.<sup>224</sup>

A second framework is known as the “Silver Standard.”<sup>225</sup> This framework asks a state entering a peaceful nuclear agreement to state its intentions to only buy its fuel on the international market, but unlike the Gold Standard the commitment is not as formal or legally binding. This framework was implemented in the 2014 peaceful nuclear agreement between the United States and Vietnam.<sup>226</sup> Though not an ideal model, the Silver Standard is a backup option and could be used as a new norm to control new civilian nuclear programs along with intrusive and large-scale inspections that guarantee they will not be used to develop nuclear military capabilities. These two standards provide

the United States with a flexible policy instrument if a new country views the Gold Standard as too restrictive.

The United States must be particularly vigorous in pursuing the Gold Standard with Iran’s Gulf neighbors who may seek to develop similar nuclear capabilities in response to the JCPOA. The United States should promote nuclear cooperation with its partners in the region based on 123 agreements. A section in the United States Atomic Energy Act established the legal framework for nuclear cooperation between the United States and other countries.<sup>227</sup> The United States has already signed this kind of agreement with 25 countries, including Egypt, Turkey, and the United Arab Emirates. 123 agreements that provide robust civilian nuclear programs, such as that of the United Arab Emirates’, have a much more meaningful economic impact than Iran’s largely symbolic enrichment program.<sup>228</sup> This cooperation is an important tool to respond to the regional demand in nuclear knowledge, while ensuring it will not generate a nuclear arms race.

Moreover, part of the JCPOA that gets little attention is the deep cooperation on Iran’s civilian nuclear energy program. This cooperation is intended not only to give Iran an incentive to implement the JCPOA but also to provide greater transparency for the international community in the program and create economic incentives for Iran after year 15 to not violate the agreement and lose those economic benefits. Indeed, if Iran faithfully adheres to the agreement over the next 15 years, as the agreement approaches years 10 to 15 the United States could consider negotiating a more robust civilian energy agreement such as a 123 agreement, in exchange for Iran agreeing to limitations on its civilian enrichment capabilities that are in line with the Silver or Gold Standard. However, it must be noted that the level of support that the United States might provide to Iran’s civil nuclear program will depend not only on Iran’s behavior in the nuclear arena, but also on whether it has

become a more constructive player internationally and shifted its policies with regards to its destabilizing activities in the Middle East.

### **Deepen regional intelligence cooperation targeted at Iran's nuclear program.**

The nuclear deal includes unprecedented intrusive inspections and a dedicated procurement channel. However, this regime should be supported by a comprehensive intelligence campaign aiming to ensure Iran does not covertly violate the agreement using illicit trade. This effort should be led by the United States but necessitates cooperation with U.S. partners in the region. This large-scale intelligence campaign, however, should not be limited only to the Iranian nuclear program. It should also address the threat of illicit trade and covert nuclear programs in the entire region. To that end, the regional cooperation should be designed to identify procurement networks, increase intelligence surveillance and data gathering, and promote covert operations to discover and thwart illegal activities.<sup>229</sup>

Regional cooperation between the United States and its allies will support the nonproliferation regime as it increases deterrence against states that consider covertly developing a nuclear program, and provide the tools essential to detecting this kind of attempt. Another impact of the regional intelligence collaboration will be an increase in the confidence of the states in the region in the nonproliferation regime, and in their capacity, along with the United States, to jointly act against the Iranian threat. The evolution of this confidence among Iran's adversaries is essential to cope with the threat of regional nuclear proliferation.

### **Use Iran's acquiescence to the Additional Protocol to reengage with other holdouts such as Argentina and Brazil and encourage them to comply.**

As part of the agreement, Iran agreed to provisionally apply the Additional Protocol for the next eight years and eventually ratify it. The Additional



Iran's current Ambassador to the International Atomic Energy Agency, Reza Najafi, presents his credentials to the IAEA's Director General Yukiya Amano in 2013. The IAEA will have a strong role in the oversight of Iran's nuclear program in the aftermath of the Iran deal. (Credit: International Atomic Energy Agency Flickr)

Protocol is a mechanism that was developed after the failure to detect the covert nuclear programs in Iraq and North Korea in the early 1990s.<sup>230</sup> The protocol expands the IAEA legal authority and allows it to access any location with little notification in order to check for undeclared nuclear material or activities. The main weakness of the protocol is that its legal framework is voluntary rather than compulsory. It has been ratified by 124 states so far, but 68 states that are also parties of the NPT have not done so yet. Iran signed the protocol – and implemented it on a voluntary basis from 2003 – 2006 – but has never ratified it.<sup>231</sup>

With one of the main violators having agreed to the Additional Protocol, the deal creates an opportunity to go back to the remaining states that have yet to implement it and pressure them to ratify it. Ideally, bringing the Additional Protocol into force should be a requirement for every state that has a nuclear program or has signed the NPT. It will increase confidence that civilian capabilities are not being used for military purposes, and that no undeclared activities are undertaken.



Former U.S. Under Secretary of State for Arms Control and International Security Affairs Ellen Tauscher and the current United Arab Emirates' Ambassador to the United States Yousef al-Otaiba sign the U.S.-United Arab Emirates 1-2-3 Agreement for Peaceful Nuclear Energy Cooperation in December 2009. The U.S.-United Arab Emirates 1-2-3 nuclear agreement is considered a global standard in bilateral cooperation to build peaceful nuclear energy programs and support the nonproliferation of nuclear weapons. (Credit: U.S. Department of State/U.S. Embassy to Abu Dhabi)

Specifically, the United States can pressure Brazil and Argentina regarding their reservations to accepting the Additional Protocol. Both countries possess the most advanced nuclear capabilities among NPT members that have not ratified the Additional Protocol. They are the main obstacles for setting the protocol as a condition of nuclear trade in the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG).<sup>232</sup> The NSG is a group of 49 nuclear supplier countries established in 1975 and aims to support the non-proliferation regime by enforcing strict guidelines for nuclear exports and nuclear-related exports. So far, the group has delayed the talks over the Additional Protocol due mainly to Brazilian and Argentinian opposition. The Iranian approval of the protocol along with India's decision to sign the protocol in 2014 (though under a different framework) could be used to push the two South American countries to join the nonproliferation effort. It will

immediately impact international nuclear trading norms, and provide an opportunity to work with Russia to convince Belarus and Venezuela to follow suit.

**Leverage provisions of the JCPOA to pursue stronger global norms for monitoring the entire nuclear supply chain especially for past violators and states with large civilian nuclear programs.**

The JCPOA can be leveraged to strengthen legal norms in respect to the scope of the inspections regime. As part of the agreement, the IAEA will be able to monitor the entire supply chain of the Iran's nuclear program. This includes continuous monitoring of uranium mines and mills for 25 years and centrifuge production facilities for 20 years. It will be impossible to get these new arrangements into the NPT, but over time, the international community should push to make the scope of these inspections a universal norm, essentially creating an "Additional Protocol Plus" for countries with previously undeclared nuclear activities (i.e., a penalty box with limited time for particular violations) as well as those with especially robust nuclear programs.

As a first step, states with nuclear programs should voluntarily accept this monitoring mechanism. The United States and like-minded countries can work together to set an example by voluntarily accepting this new level of monitoring and then encouraging others to do the same. This can be the threshold for any new country that wishes to develop a nuclear program. Along with the depth of the Additional Protocol, this norm could increase the prospect of deterring countries from undermining the nonproliferation regime and detecting covert enrichment activities if deterrence fails. Moreover, if this regime is perceived to be a global norm, Iran may also be pressured into continuing to comply with it even after the provisions of the JCPOA expire in 20 to 25 years.



**Leverage the unique compelling mechanisms in the JCPOA, such as the Joint Commission’s ability to mandate access to sites not under safeguards or the U.N. sanctions snapback mechanism, as a useful model to strengthen future nonproliferation agreements.**

A very important element in the nuclear deal between Iran and world powers is the Joint Commission, whose members include the parties to the JCPOA: the United States, Iran, EU, France, Germany, UK, Russia, and China. The Commission acts as the mediating board in the event of disputes. This board has two unprecedented mechanisms to force Iranian compliance. First, in the event of a dispute over access to a suspicious Iranian facility, the board can determine – by majority vote – that Iran must comply by granting IAEA access within three days. This contrasts with most IAEA decisionmaking, which is more cumbersome and aims to achieve consensus from all parties involved, though majority vote of the IAEA Board is all that is required from a pure legal perspective.<sup>233</sup> Second, any of the parties to the agreement have the ability to force the reimposition of sanctions at the U.N. Security Council and the dissolution of the agreement without fear of a veto by a member of the P5.

Trying to apply this procedure to other cases will be extraordinary difficult, as the P5, particularly the Russians and the Chinese, will oppose changes that weaken their vetoes at the U.N. Security Council.<sup>234</sup> However, perhaps the experiences of the JCPOA can at least be leveraged to try to develop some compelling tools in the nuclear arena, particularly in the event that the IAEA finds egregious violations. For example, the nuclear deal can generate a new norm of quicker and more authoritative international responses against states that enjoy the benefits of being an NPT member and exploit it to pursue a breakout to a nuclear bomb. It is not clear how much the P5 members might be willing to bend or how far they may be willing to take the opportunity created by this mechanism, but the United States and other

members of the international community should at least take the opportunity created by the deal to test this proposition.

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**THE NUCLEAR DEAL CAN GENERATE A NEW NORM OF QUICKER AND MORE AUTHORITATIVE INTERNATIONAL RESPONSES AGAINST STATES THAT ENJOY THE BENEFITS OF BEING AN NPT MEMBER AND EXPLOIT IT TO PURSUE A BREAKOUT TO A NUCLEAR BOMB.**

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**Provide tailored nuclear security guarantees to GCC partners.**

The United States should use a combination of reassurance and dissuasion to ensure that no other regional actors respond to the agreement by achieving their own domestic enrichment capabilities. The United States should be open to offering a nuclear umbrella to the Gulf states if they desire it. It is important to note that there will not be a one-size-fits all approach to the GCC as some states, such as United Arab Emirates, have been very vocal about desiring such an assurance, while others, such as Oman and Qatar, would place far less value on such a commitment, which could potentially complicate their relations with Iran.<sup>235</sup> For some, the statements by President Obama regarding guarantees for the GCC’s external security at the May 2015 Camp David Summit are sufficient, while for others, more may be required. This guarantee would probably be executed most easily through an executive agreement, as generating political support in the United States for the 67 votes needed in the Senate to ratify a mutual defense pact with Saudi Arabia or the United Arab Emirates might be too difficult.<sup>236</sup>

Ratifying treaties is always a tricky business in the Senate; even harmless international documents, such as the Disabilities Treaty, have struggled

to reach the 67-vote threshold.<sup>237</sup> Saudi Arabia's authoritarian domestic policies and mixed history of support for Sunni extremism could make Senate ratification difficult as well. Meanwhile, close Arab partners in the GCC may not want to be publicly identified with a U.S. nuclear umbrella given anti-American sentiment within their populations.<sup>238</sup> Thus, there are some real complications with these types of arrangements in the Gulf. But certainly in the aftermath of the nuclear agreement with Iran, the United States should be prepared to sit down and conduct a quiet dialogue with its GCC partners to consolidate declaratory and secret regional policies and see what is possible and desirable given political constraints.

Moreover, any guarantee from the United States will have to be carefully choreographed, as it could inadvertently backfire by signaling to regional partners that the United States believes that the nuclear agreement will eventually lead to a nuclear-armed Iran. The United States should send a message to its partners clearly conveying its utmost confidence in the nuclear agreement and its ability to prevent a nuclear-armed Iran, but at the same time its willingness to assuage any anxieties partners may have. It must also make clear that an explicit element of this nuclear guarantee is that these states will not pursue their own independent enrichment capabilities.

### **Clarify economic disincentives to Sunni partners if they proliferate in response to the JCPOA.**

Along with the American “carrots” and guarantees that address the needs of U.S. allies, Washington should stress the “sticks” available if states attempt to proliferate, as Iran did. It took Iran years to build its nuclear program, despite its large and well-educated population.<sup>239</sup> Iran has also paid a tremendous cost, including billions of dollars in investment, onerous sanctions, and isolation in the international community. The price should be the same for any other country that wishes to proliferate. The United States can increase pressure on its allies in terms of economic and political sanctions and threaten to withdraw military support if one decides to cheat. The United States' leverage over its allies is stronger than what it had over Iran – with which it has had almost no diplomatic and economic relations since 1979. Nevertheless, negative incentives may suffer from a lack of credibility, as it is hard to see the United States or the international community credibly threatening GCC oil exporters with significant economic penalties. This is most true of Saudi Arabia, the global swing oil producer, but also the country most likely to proliferate in response to the Iran deal. It is more important to use the specter of economic penalties and international approbation to deter Saudi leadership from pursuing this track.

## CHAPTER 9

# Pillar 6 - Build on the Deal to Advance U.S. Global Leadership

### CHALLENGES & OPPORTUNITIES

- The agreement provides the United States more flexibility in great power relations, particularly in dealing with China.
- The agreement removes one of the key areas of cooperation with Russia.
- The agreement provides both Russia and China new economic and geopolitical opportunities in the Middle East.
- The agreement leads to greater oil price instability in the near-term.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

- Reduce the importance of Iran in the bilateral agenda with China in order to limit Chinese leverage and focus on issues more critical to U.S. interests in Asia;
- Maintain the importance of the Iran issue in the bilateral agenda with Russia, as it remains one of the few areas of cooperation in an increasingly fraught relationship;
- Work to pry Russia away from the Assad regime and explore whether it could accept a solution for the Syrian civil war that involves a gradual transition in power;
- Cooperate with China on energy supply security in the Middle East and maritime security in the Gulf and Asia-Pacific for energy trade;
- Bring China into targeted efforts the United States may pursue with Iran to stabilize Afghanistan and counter the Islamic State; and
- Insulate the U.S. economy from energy market volatility caused by the introduction of increased Iranian oil supply to world markets in the aftermath of the JCPOA.

Outside of U.S. security interests in the Middle East, the nuclear deal with Iran presents the United States with opportunities to advance its global leadership role, as well as key U.S. strategic interests with Russia and China. The agreement should provide the United States an opportunity to reduce Chinese leverage in the U.S.-China bilateral relationship, but conversely may complicate U.S.-Russia relations by reducing the prominence of one of the few bright spots in the relationship. Given increased opportunities for cooperation that the deal will facilitate between Iran and some of its traditional friends, especially China and Russia, the United States must also consider new foreign policy initiatives and strategies that either seek to take advantage of Iran's new relationships or guard against such openings. This will mean intensive oversight of the nuclear deal with these international partners, while also seeking out opportunities for constructive security, diplomatic and economic engagement wherever possible. The United States should avoid a scenario where Iran and its relationships with regional neighbors become a theater for a proxy power struggle between the United States and Russia or China.

Meanwhile the agreement should present economic opportunities for the United States as oil prices drop, to the benefit of U.S. consumers, and potential increased stability in the Middle East, which can contribute to greater energy security. It is also likely that energy markets will face increased turbulence due to price weakening and volatility and the possibility that over time the deal does not stick. Looking for areas of cooperation on this front, particularly with China, should be a priority in the aftermath of the JCPOA.

Overall, initiatives to strengthen America's global positioning should focus on the following objectives:

- Reduce the leverage China garners from the Iran nuclear issue in the U.S.-China bilateral relationship while seeking new areas of cooperation with China;
- Continue to utilize the Iran issue to improve U.S.-Russia relations; and
- Protect against potential threats to energy market supply and increased volatility.

Several specific policy recommendations that can advance these policy objectives are outlined below.

### **Reduce the importance of Iran in the bilateral agenda with China in order to reduce Chinese leverage and focus on issues more critical to U.S. interests in Asia.**

In the aftermath of the nuclear agreement, the United States should move the Iran issue down on the U.S.-China bilateral agenda and thus reduce Chinese leverage in the bilateral relationship. Chinese support and buy-in on Iran will still be important to ensure robust implementation of the agreement, but diplomats can focus on this issue at lower levels; it need not be part of the agenda in meetings between the presidents of China and the United States. This should allow for other issues, such as the South China Sea and economic relations, to take on greater prominence in the relationship.

### **Maintain the importance of the Iran issue in the bilateral agenda with Russia as a tool for finding common ground.**

Even as the United States reduces the importance of the Iran nuclear issue with China, it should try to maintain this issue as an important high-level agenda item with Russia. Given the increasing tensions between the United States and Russia, particularly over Ukraine, maintaining some emphasis on Iran in the bilateral relationship helps keep part of the focus on one of the few bright spots in the U.S.-Russia relationship. This has less to do with the importance of the Iran issue in the U.S.-Russia bilateral agenda and more to do with the attempt to maintain healthy working relationships between the countries that possess the world's two largest nuclear arsenals.

Moreover, Russia will be an important player in implementing the agreement. Considering the long history of civilian nuclear cooperation between Russia and Iran, Russia is likely to play an important role in the development of Iran's civilian nuclear capabilities and the United States will want to maintain significant influence on the Russians over this issue.<sup>240</sup> More than any other member of the P5+1, Russia has been sympathetic to Iran's concerns



Syrian opposition activists in the northwestern governorate of Idlib wave a banner depicting China, Hezbollah, Iran, and Russia, in protest of these actors' support for the Assad regime. Russia, Iran, and Hezbollah in particular remain key allies of the government of the Assad regime, and through this support prolong Syria's highly destructive civil war. However, achieving an end to the conflict is likely not possible without the consent and participation of Russia and Iran in the post-conflict transition. (Credit: Freedom House Flickr)

and willing to represent them within the multilateral context. Therefore, convincing the Iranians to change course has often involved bringing the Russians on board.<sup>241</sup> This dynamic is likely to continue throughout the implementation of the JCPOA as disagreements over various implementation issues inevitably arise between Iran and the P5+1.

### **Work to pry Russia away from the Assad regime and explore whether it could accept a solution for the Syrian civil war that involves a gradual transition in power.**

Russia has aligned with Iran and the Assad regime to play a tremendously unhelpful role in Syria by providing funding and international cover at the United Nations for Bashar al Assad. However, Russia's core national interests are not at stake in this conflict, thus Russia is not nearly as invested in Syria as Iran is.<sup>242</sup> As the United States pursues the strategy described in Chapter 6 to reset the situation on the ground in Syria and set the conditions



Ministers of Foreign Affairs for the P5+1 (United States, France, United Kingdom, China, Russia, Germany) and Iran celebrate the political framework agreement in Lausanne, Switzerland, in April 2015. (Credit: U.S. Department of State)

for a political agreement, this increased commitment should also signal to the Russians America's commitment to ending this conflict and its willingness to push back. Even before the United States seriously engages Iran on this matter it can involve Russia. Russia's interests are less engaged than those of Iran and it is more likely to recalculate first and be influenced by American involvement. The United States should first reshape the Russian calculus and then facilitate Russian acquiescence to a political solution that can also potentially work for the Sunni states and the United States. The Russians can then play an important role in bringing Iran to the table and helping the Iranians to moderate their demands, just as the Russians played a similar role in the nuclear negotiations. This possibility has become even more difficult in light of recent moves by Russia to increase its military involvement in Syria, though at the time of the writing of this report the scale of escalation of Russian involvement remains unclear.

The challenge, and opportunity, for the United States and its regional allies will be to convince Russia that it is possible to build a sustainable post-Assad Syrian governance structure that meets Russian objectives of protecting the rights of minorities and countering militant Salafist groups. In exchange for ending its support for the Assad regime, Russia's security relationship with the Syrian military and its access to the naval base at Tartus may need to continue. While understandably repugnant to the Syrian armed opposition, a Russian role could also help support a post-Assad Syria with transitioning its security forces, which should include a significant part of the current Syrian military.

**Cooperate with China on energy supply security in the Middle East and maritime security in the Gulf and Asia-Pacific for energy trade.**

The United States and China have strong and shared interests in assuring the secure production

and export of Middle Eastern energy. This region accounts for 32 percent of global oil production, and more than a third of global oil exports – three quarters of which go to Asia.<sup>243</sup> As the largest global oil consumers, the United States and China are both focused on stable oil markets and energy security policy strategies, though these have not been aligned in the past. In the wake of the Iran agreement, as the country sends more oil to the global market, develops new gas sources, and competes more aggressively with Middle Eastern neighbors to supply the East Asian market, China and the United States will have an opportunity and renewed motivation to more closely align on their commitment to global oil supply stability.

The United States and China could also expand cooperation on critical energy infrastructure protection in Middle East oil-supply security. This is a significant issue for some Middle Eastern producers, such as Saudi Arabia and Iraq, which in the past have suffered targeted attacks and attempted attacks by terrorists and insurgents on processing facilities and pipelines. The United States and China could intensify focus on this issue with Middle Eastern producers, including Iran, to ensure that critical energy transport and port facilities adopt best practices for security and world-class transparency standards for vessel, flag, and cargo identification. China and the United States should also launch a dialogue on maritime security for critical commodity transport in the Indian Ocean and maritime Southeast Asia, key global energy shipping areas. This will help the countries' two security establishments contemplate discrete areas of coordination for the future as China expands its maritime capacity and investment in trade and transshipment, port, and cargo facilities throughout the region.

Additionally, the United States and China should expand their limited dialogue on strategic energy reserves. As energy production and supply conditions within the United States and between the Middle East and East Asia are in a period of

rapid transition, China and the United States have increasing interests in closely examining the role of strategic reserves to manage supply volatility and energy price. China is rapidly expanding its strategic reserves, a project aided by the current low price environment, and U.S. legislators are contemplating shrinking U.S. strategic reserves to raise revenue for various federal expenditures and updating the constituency, location, and management of the resource. However, there is relatively little thought about new areas of cooperation between the world's largest consumers on policies for use of strategic reserves and coordinating stock release in times of crisis. The two countries are not linked in an agreement to collectively shun energy hoarding during such market conditions to stave off price spikes, even though such an agreement could serve mutual interests. The United States should craft basic principles and protocols for coordination with China during energy supply crises, advancing U.S. energy security interests and reducing the potential for energy market crises to assume political overtones and conflict between the two countries.

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## CHINA, IRAN, AND THE UNITED STATES SHARE A COMMON INTEREST IN MAINTAINING STABILITY IN AFGHANISTAN AND LIMITING THE INFLUENCE OF SUNNI EXTREMISM.

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### **Bring China into some of the efforts the United States may pursue with Iran to stabilize Afghanistan and counter the Islamic state.**

China, Iran, and the United States share a common interest in maintaining stability in Afghanistan and limiting the influence of Sunni extremism. In Chapter 7, this report recommends increasing U.S.-Iran cooperation on this issue. There is no reason that as the United States draws down it should not also take advantage of potential opportunity

for Chinese engagement on this matter, given concerns about restive activity along its western border. Neither the United States, Iran, nor China are looking to dominate Afghanistan, so the likelihood of American-Chinese or American-Iranian competition in Afghanistan is relatively low. The United States should embrace increased Chinese-Iranian cooperation on this issue and seek ways to work together in a multilateral setting to improve stability in Afghanistan.

Moreover, the United States should welcome and encourage any willingness by China to engage and counter ISIS – a willingness born out of concerns of Muslim extremism in western China or energy supply security risks to oil production and transport in Iraq and Syria. And there is also a possibility that this could become an area of common interest for Iran, China, and the United States, given that the Iranians are already heavily invested in countering ISIS and view it as a major threat to their security. However, thus far the Chinese have been reticent to become too involved and have not joined the coalition of 60-plus countries assembled by the United States to counter ISIS.<sup>244</sup> It is an open question, then, as to how willing they may be to engage.

**Insulate the U.S. economy from energy market volatility caused by the introduction of increased Iranian oil supply to world markets in the aftermath of the JCPOA.**

In the instance that the nuclear deal with Iran falls apart and international participation in sanctions falters, there will be new instability – and price

volatility – associated with Iran’s contribution to the global oil market. Given the significance of oil to the U.S. economy – from industrial production and manufacturing to the transport of commerce and passengers – the United States has an opportunity to insulate its economy to oil price volatility caused by Iran, and indeed by any other source, by enhancing the efficiency of its energy use. Federal regulators should expand vehicle fuel economy standards and create incentives for the penetration of non-petroleum transportation fleets and vehicles. Additionally, they should adopt policy incentives to shift away from inefficient, and specifically petroleum-based, heating and power generation and focus on abundant and cleaner-burning domestic natural gas resources.

Public policy efforts to expand U.S. energy production, thereby growing the oil market-producing share of U.S. companies, will also help to insulate the U.S. economy from potential Iran-facilitated oil market instability and competition from the Persian oil producer. By responsibly producing more energy resources at home, the United States will increase the share of global energy resources coming from stable countries and spend more dollars on energy resources in the U.S. economy instead of paying for foreign oil. One key strategy for promoting this is lifting the U.S. ban on oil exports, which will correct a price distortion in the domestic market and allow U.S. energy producers to expand their customer base to buyers, including allies, overseas. This will contribute positively to the U.S. economy and balance of trade, and bolster the security benefits and abundant U.S. energy.



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