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## JCPOA Revival: Implications for Regional Security Architecture and Non-Proliferation Qura tul ain Hafeez

Lecturer, Department of Politics and International Relations, International Islamic University, Islamabad (IIUI)/ Ph.D Scholar, School of Politics and International Relations (SPIR), Quaid-i-Azam University (QAU), Islamabad

### ABSTRACT

*Iran's determination to attain nuclear weapon technology is perceived as a threat to regional security and global peace. The international community has been attempting for a long time to stop Iran from developing nuclear weapons. The absence of resources, crippling economy, and a hyperinflation obligated Iran to come out of isolation. In 2015, Iran and a group of major world powers - the P5+1 entered into a long-term nuclear agreement; The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). The Plan held out the prospect of preventing Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons and nuclear arms race in the Middle East. The deal's high hopes, however, were quickly ruined when Donald Trump withdrew the United States from it in 2018. The contract promises all struggles to limit Iran's nuclear programme. Following Trump's withdrawal, if the JCPOA is no longer sufficient to restrain Iran's nuclear ambitions, the Middle East would be thrust into a ferocious nuclear arms race and strategic vulnerability. Iranian conservatives will start to take control of Iranian foreign policy and the ensuing political unrest will distance Iran even more from the JCPOA and any potential upcoming settlements with the West. The JCPOA's revival is a cumbersome challenge for the Biden administration because the post-2018 impasse significantly reduced its effectiveness in preventing Iran from developing nuclear weapons. Due to the resulting security conundrum, several developments in the regional and global political environment where neither party is willing to compromise could potentially trigger challenges to the regional security architecture and nonproliferation. This research brings a way forward for the policy makers that how the JCPOA affects both instant regional security and the global non-proliferation regime thus opening the paths for various diplomatic and strategic options for future stability. Given the developing geopolitical dynamics in the Middle East and beyond the restoration of JCPOA can further promote significant understandings for the power dynamics in Middle East. It could bound Iran's nuclear threshold status, reduce nuclear threat among neighboring countries i.e. Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Israel and provides broader insights about nuclear arrangements and structures to maintain status quo for regional security fears with international non-proliferation ambitions.*

**Keywords:** JCPOA Revival, Regional Security Architecture, Non-Proliferation, Geopolitical Dynamics.

### The research questions to be explored are:

- Whether Iran will be prepared to rejoin what Biden believes to be a more robust and extended JCPOA?
- How does the deal impact Iran's domestic and regional security architecture?
- How will the JCPOA's revival guarantee stability between Iran and its regional adversaries?

- How will the JCPOA affect the nuclear non-proliferation future?
- Does a regional security framework need to invest internationally and locally in resolving disputes and fostering goodwill?

### **Research Design and Framework**

A methodological approach combining qualitative and theoretical perspectives provides a comprehensive view of how a JCPOA revival might influence both regional security dynamics and global non-proliferation efforts. The integration of multiple methods will enhance the study's depth and relevance, offering valuable insights for policymakers, security experts, and international organizations involved in nuclear diplomacy. By focusing on Iran as a central case, the study investigates its regional interactions, nuclear ambitions, and proxy influences. With the prism of Realism and Security Dilemma the study explains how the JCPOA affects security dynamics in the Middle East, where countries perceive threats from a nuclear-capable Iran. A realist approach might consider how states respond to shifting power balances and whether they perceive a revived JCPOA as reducing or increasing Iran's regional power. These theories would contextualize the JCPOA within the broader framework of global non-proliferation efforts, examining the conditions under which nuclear restraint can be maintained and enforced. Using quantitative data, such as uranium enrichment levels reported by the IAEA, military expenditure changes in Iran and surrounding nations, and economic impact assessments (e.g., sanctions relief projections), could help to quantify the agreement's impact on regional security.

### **Introduction**

Following a plethora of global rumors regarding the true motivations behind Iran's pursuit of its nuclear programme, Major world powers worked together to negotiate the JCPOA. The JCPOA suffered a severe setback in 2018 when the Trump administration withdrew the United States from it, undoing the advancements it had made in promoting the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons. (Vatanka, 2020) After assuming office, Biden pledged to restore the JCPOA deal to its original intent and persuade Iran to once again abide by its terms. Nonetheless, considering recent developments both domestically and internationally the revival of JCPOA is proving to be a much more difficult task than it was initially anticipated to be. Without the JCPOA, Iran is more likely to use its nuclear programme to develop nuclear weapons, which could lead to a nuclear arms race in the region. If prompt actions are not taken to prevent such circumstances, this nuclear arms race could endanger the precarious balance of power in the Middle East, destroy regional security, and undermine the non-proliferation regime. If the JCPOA remains deadlocked due to political tensions with Iran, all previous struggles made by the international community to maintain regional and international security as well as to protect the non-proliferation regime may prove futile.

Under Donald Trump's presidency, relations between Iran and the US deteriorated after he pulled out of the deal and started his "Maximum Pressure" Campaign, which included a number of aggressive measures against Iran. (Vatanka, 2020) Iran responded by resisting as many of the constraints and requirements that the JCPOA had primarily imposed on it as possible under a strategy it dubbed "Maximum Resistance" (Lynch, 2024). Although, despite Trump's claim that the JCPOA's restrictions were insufficient to address the serious threat that Iran poses to international security. The revival of JCPOA is still questionable whether it

guarantees that Iran won't restart its efforts to develop a nuclear weapon after it expires, and it also does not prevent Iran from terminating its ballistic missile programme. However, The United States lost credibility on the global stage because of the president's irrational decisions motivated by retaliation, which made the country look unreliable in supporting non-proliferation efforts.

The astonishing start of the Russia-Ukraine war is yet another obstacle in Biden's path to reviving JCPOA. Russia desires written assurances from the JCPOA that trade between Iran and Russia will not be obstructed. Given the severe repercussions Ukraine is experiencing as a result of the war, Iran feels more vulnerable to giving up its nuclear potential (Esfandiari, 2022). These changes have caused JCPOA to make less progress toward achieving a revival. The Middle East would enter into a deadly arms race because other regional actors particularly Saudi Arabia would be most likely to act in the same way as Iran (Harman, 2022). Therefore, a nuclear Iran would be fatal for regional/ global security.

The present American administration feels obligated to make thoughtful decisions due to the fear that forceful compulsions against Iran would give nothing but further distance JCPOA from a peaceful revival. Iran's demands for the JCPOA have changed now. Given the international environment and regional structure; Ukraine crisis and the Abraham Accords (Mohnblatt, 2022), Iran now seeks restitution for the harm done to its reputation by being added to the FTO list as well as compensation for the losses it sustained as a result of the crippling economic sanctions (Mathew, 2022). It won't take long for Iran and the US to break their current standoff over the JCPOA. Currently various stakeholders of the Biden administration are trapped in a tenuous stability/instability paradox in the Middle East. To ensure that JCPOA will solve the issue of non-proliferation of nuclear weapons in the Middle East President Biden must take a decisive step toward bringing back the JCPOA deal into effect.

### **The JCPOA Revival**

As a result of US's JCPOA withdrawal (2018) Tehran abandoned those restrictions and made significant advancements in its nuclear programme for a considerable span of time. The 2015 deal's stringent limitations on Iran's nuclear capabilities would be reinstated if the JCPOA were to be renewed (Association, 2022). Returning to compliance would stop it from rapidly moving closer to the threshold for producing enough weapons-grade uranium for nuclear weapons. Importantly, it would uphold the JCPOA's comprehensive monitoring and inspection clauses and give the world community a timely and comprehensive picture of Iran's nuclear advancements. By easing immediate concerns about Nuclear Iran, the JCPOA renewed interest could lessen the amount of quick and decisive military engagements that could start a war in the region and likely lead to the next Middle East conflict for the United States.

Moreover, if Iran returns to compliance, most substantial U.S. sanctions would be lifted and permit other nations to buy Iranian crude oil without being penalized. This will boost Iran's economy and have access to the global financial system thus releasing billions of dollars of Iranian money that has been frozen in foreign accounts. During the Vienna negotiations The Biden leadership's primary objective in April 2021 was to return to the basic "nuclear prohibitions for lifting sanctions, proposed in the 2015 JCPOA." However, after the current

deadlock even if a solution is found the majority negotiating goals will not be met From a United states' perspective and it won't be as advantageous in some ways as it were in 2015 JCPOA (Motamedi, 2021).

### **Geopolitical Tensions and Current Regional Environment**

Iran's regional role is a recurring element in almost all Middle East conflicts. In order to address its activities and the causes of regional conflicts a transitional and crucial process is necessary in advancing a larger JCPOA dialogue known as a "more for more" strategy as well as safeguarding it from future subversion. Iran's meddling in Syria, Yemen, Lebanon, and Iraq is rightfully seen by other regional states as seriously destabilizing. They believe that the only way to find a solution is through negotiations in which Iran makes concessions regarding these matters (Motamedi, 2021). The fact that Tehran is one of many Middle Eastern countries carrying out disruptive activities is something that Arab states choose not to publicly acknowledge.

The Middle Eastern regional security architecture continues to be greatly exacerbated by Iran's regional foreign policy, support for proxy organizations, proliferation of weapons and ballistic missile programme. Driven by its own threat perceptions vs a vs Israel and the US Tehran's asymmetrical, low-cost forward-defense strategy has made room for neighboring states to infiltrate.(Cordesman, 2011; Yossef, 2019) Regionalizing solutions would perhaps offer better chances of success for an extensive progression by strengthening negotiating leverage and comprehending Iran's operational capacity.

However, there is a more significant elephant in the room that we must contemplate. If we take into consideration Iranian positions in terms of nuclear debate and JCPOA that raises the question, whether it would be beneficial to even bring up regional problems as core component of the JCPOA or in addition to it. Will Iran be forced to stop some of its operations, the majority of which are conducted through sock puppets rather than Iran itself. Of course, this does not imply the absence of strategies available to counter Iranian activity in the area. Similar decisions have been taken by other nations in Syria and Iraq as Israel has. Not only through use of physical force, but also by providing Syria and Iraq with choices to Iranian political, economic, and military influence. Given below are some of the scenarios that whether the revival of JCPOA alters the current regional environment of Middle East?

When it comes to the nuclear weapons there should perhaps be a separation between JCPOA and Iran's regional policy -so-called maximum resistance strategy (Iran's retaliatory measures, such as targeting Saudi Arabia oil tankers in the Persian Gulf) since spring 2019 (Vaez & Rafati, 2019). This is how some critics undoubtedly connect Iran's aggressive policies in Syria, Iraq or Yemen. but for some critics it has nothing to do with the JCPOA. Rather it revolves around Iran's aspiration to increase its influence and take the lead in the region. There are therefore few chances that tensions will decrease in a way that will result in peace even if the JCPOA is renewed and both sides return to their previous positions.

Subsequently it is also pertinent to keep in mind the Iranian position with respect to the United States and Israel. The fact that Iran does not even recognize Israel makes matters more complicated because Iran does not want to bring up any topics that have anything to do with Israel, including those that are more important to other regional players, such as the conflicts in Yemen and Iraq, its support for Hezbollah, Hamas in Gaza, or military developments in Syria.

Similarly, American participation in regional collective bargaining is not permitted by Iran because Iran views America as a problem generator rather than the solvent. It can be a partner in nuclear negotiations but not in regional ones. Consider for a moment that even if Iran agrees to discuss the regional issues, it will not just bring on the table Iranian activity in the region, but that of other players as well. This will open another plethora of what the Saudis have been doing in Iraq and Turkey's involvement in Northern Iraq. Crisis situations would not magically disappear by eliminating the Iranian variable. Tehran will also unavoidably put forth its own conditions in any regional negotiations. The prerequisite for improving the regional dynamics is that Iran must acknowledge the unintended consequences of its actions and Arab states must also admit their part in fomenting conflict by continuing to support Iran.

### **The JCPOA with the Prism of Russia-Ukraine Conflict**

The Russia-Ukraine war has created unforeseen barriers to the JCPOA's revival. While the entire world was focused on the potential threat posed by Iran's nuclear programme and there was a glimmer of hope in the negotiations, the conflict in Russia and Ukraine diverted the entire world's focus to the new developing crisis. The negotiation process of eleven months in Vienna was completely dashed between Iranian and other party representatives from participant states like China, Russia, France, Germany, and Britain apart from the US because Iran rejects direct mediation with the US (Jon, 2022). Insecurity among regional rivals, particularly Israel and Saudi Arabia, has grown because of Iran's unchecked nuclear ambitions during the Ukraine crisis. Once Iran can develop nuclear weapons, it will only be a matter of time for its regional rivals to follow suit, ushering in a race for nuclear proliferation in the Middle East in the name of security.

In this entire situation, Russia is actively looking for any way to prevent the JCPOA from being revived because it is no longer in its best interest. Russia asserted that, unlike in the past, the United States must abide by some written commitment to continue to be a party to the JCPOA (Hafezi & Murphy, 2022). The US ideal of unrestricted discretion in multilateral agreements would be at odds with this binding restriction as a member of the revived JCPOA deal. Additionally, Russia applies the requirement that the revised JCPOA's sanctions relief for Iran have no bearing on trade between Iran and Russia, implying that Iran's oil trade with Russia should continue to be exempt from international trade sanctions and tariffs (Esfandiari, 2022). It goes against every principle of US patience since allowing the oil trade between Russia and Iran would essentially imply that Russian actions against Ukraine are tolerable under some circumstances. The JCPOA negotiations and the non-proliferation efforts are being undermined by such contentious demands. A revised JCPOA necessitates restoring bilateral ties between the US and Iran. Accordingly, Iran as an ally must discontinue all ties and trade with Russia given its desecrations of international law and belligerence against (Ukraine) an ally of the United States.

Iran's decision of JCPOA and the threat to regional/ global security and nonproliferation regime is whether Iran too might become another Global Tension Area where risk of war and arms race is highly contingent.

A nation's foreign policy trajectory is more strongly influenced by how it is viewed on the global stage after revealing its nuclear program to the world. However, upon becoming a

nuclear weapon state, if Iran is accredited by the international nuclear community and given inducements to use its potential for a global cause like Pakistan's contribution to War on Terror and receiving US support and funding, it may prove to be an ally and less threatening to the world. If, however, it is shunned away by never-ending penalties like North Korea, its presence may turn out to be a threat to international security(Polsky, 2015).

Iranians have been made aware of the negative effects of terminating their nuclear program and giving up their ability to develop a bomb thanks to the tragic example of Ukraine. Until Russia invaded Ukraine's borders, the protection of great power allies like the US and the EU was ineffective. Iran has become more skeptical of the West's promises due to western allies' inability to effectively protect Ukraine's national security. Currently Iran is more hesitant than ever to give up its nuclear program as of its increased insecurity vs regional rivals, including the US-backed allies Israel and Saudi Arabia.

The conflict between Russia and Ukraine has caused critiques on the Middle East to reevaluate the neo-realist view of nuclear proliferation and Kenneth Waltz's idea of mutually assured destruction (MAD), a multilateral strategy for containing the nuclear threat to international security. Waltz contends that building nuclear arsenals is safer for all nations than punishing them for developing nuclear capability(Waltz, 2012). When every nation possesses nuclear weapons, there is a good chance that nuclear deterrence would take hold and nations would refrain from going to war because they would be aware of the immense destruction that nuclear war can cause for all parties involved. Waltz's perspective holds that permitting Iran to develop a nuclear weapon could potentially close the region's power gap, which is the key contributor to the Middle East's instability. Iran and Israel might end up threatening one another, but this viewpoint ignores Saudi Arabia's presence, which might feel more vulnerable if Iran were to acquire a nuclear weapon.

### **Threat to Nonproliferation**

The future of the non-proliferation regime is in doubt if world powers can come to an agreement with Iran regarding its nuclear program. Climbing inflation, excessive domestic polarization, fluctuating political landscape and complex repercussions of Iranian proxy warfare has essentially augmented Iran's reluctance whether a revival of JCPOA would best serve its interest. With the shifting political debate on the international and domestic scene and the Ukraine debacle, Iran is alarmed more about its national security rather than economic security, and resultantly forgoes its determination to build nuclear weapons.

After Trump fulfilled his promise to make the Abraham Accords a reality on August 13, 2020 Iran has become more aware of its vulnerability in the region(Mohnblatt, 2022). Israel has continued to take the position of purposeful ambiguity with regard to its nuclear programme, which is essentially an open secret(Israeli, 2015). The Arab world is slowly turning its attention to Israel, and its advanced military capabilities are an appealing topic for defense cooperation. Since the key actors of the region like the UAE and Bahrain have made indirect references to which adversary they have preferred to support and decided to defuse their tensions with Israel, Iran has grown more uncertain about its position in the Middle East(Ghazal, 2022). Trump's policies resulted in the revival of JCPOA more insecure and vulnerable for Iran(Lynch, 2024). The Biden administration must act to reassure Iran that giving up its nuclear ambitions

voluntarily will make it more protected than before to safeguard the non-proliferation regime.

If Iran succeeds in developing a nuclear weapon and formally declares its admission into the international nuclear community, Saudi Arabia and other regional players will feel compelled to follow suit to safeguard their national security. This would result in the most immediate threat to the non-proliferation regime thus opening a nuclear arms race in the Middle East. For the successful revival of JCPOA the United States must consider the national security interests of all regional parties involved. Only a regionally recognized agreement is less likely to encourage insecurity and anarchy in the Middle East. Biden must understand that preventing the spread of nuclear weapons in the Middle East is a major challenge for his administration. Moreover, Iran and other regional players' ability to accept the resulting status quo is subjected to carefully considered nuclear deals.

The Iranian domestic political landscape is also changing, putting Rouhani's chances of winning reelection in jeopardy. Conservatives who have made clear how unhappy they are with the JCPOA's stringent sanctions-relief conditions for Iran could make up the new administration in Iran (Mills, 2021). Following the US's withdrawal under the Trump administration, Rouhani faced a severe backlash at home for the deal's failure and the ensuing economic instability brought on by the sanctions imposed as part of the Maximum Pressure Campaign (Welle, 2017). Resistance to giving the US another chance to revive the JCPOA is growing on the domestic scene. Iran's re-entry into the capitalist global economy is not in favor with the new traditionalist conservative party.

It is well known that only a small number of Middle Eastern nations genuinely embraced the JCPOA when it was finalized. Given the close ties that most of the countries in the region have with the United States, governments largely accepted politically popular responses from the public in a variety of murky areas. Even now, be it Israel, Saudi Arabia, or other Arab States, The US partners in the region seem to find the Iranian nuclear programme and US-Iran partnership to be the most controversial matters.

The Treaty on the Nonproliferation (NPT) places additional limitations on Iran's nuclear programme through the JCPOA. Except for Israel every regional state is a party to NPT including Iran. However, there were many issues with the deal itself, predominantly with its sunset clauses, which limit its legitimacy to a specific time period rather than an unspecified one (Parliament, 2015). Concerning the centrifuge sunset clause claims, Iran can resume uranium enrichment after ten years (Parliament, 2015). This led to a great deal of anxiety despite the fact that Iran would always be bound by its obligations under the additional protocol, the Comprehensive Safeguards Agreement with the IAEA, and the NPT (Davenport, 2017).

The other major concern is that the contract will release large amounts of frozen assets to Iran without considering its combative behavior in local conflicts. In essence, the agreement would give Iran more political influence and financial resources for its regional policies. Iran would then be able to re-join the international community as a legitimate member (Mistry, 2018; Vaez, 2017). The JCPOA's revival would even put Iran in a stronger position to advance its nuclear programme once the sunset clause perishes, barring a longer-term settlement. According to a previous response from US Secretary of State, John Kerry "technically sound,

stringent, and innovative deal that will provide the necessary assurance ... that Iran is not developing nuclear weapons”(Kerry, 2015). Accordingly, the JCPOA was the best possible consensus at that moment and was meant to be the inaugural step in a series of commitments that would address the concerns raised in the previous paragraphs.

Biden cannot handle this level of uncertainty, so there needs to be some standards in place to prevent the superpower from acting independently and pulling out of the agreement without a compelling argument. The P5+1 has unrestricted authority, which means that it can void the agreement at any time and undo the work done to safeguard the non-proliferation regime. The major powers who have so far failed to put into effect a deal that was mutually agreed upon have also been called into question in the JCPOA discussion. A comprehensive, long-lasting JCPOA agreement is required to protect the non-proliferation regime, not a transitory, unsustainable agreement that can only be in place for a short period of time. Because of this, any new agreement between Iran and the P5+1 must be based on discussion and agreement over shared self-interests and the provision of national security to key stakeholders rather than just on promises of prosperity and faith.

#### **Iran's Uranium Enrichment Levels**

Iran's uranium enrichment programme has seen various ups and downs since the JCPOA was implemented in 2015. In its early phases it was limited to 3.67% having a stockpile cap of 300 kgs however in the post withdrawal of us from JCPOA phase the enrichment once again begin progressively at higher levels and quantities.

#### **Iran's Uranium Enrichment Levels Based on Reports from The IAEA (2015-2024)**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Enrichment Level</b>	<b>IAEA Observations</b>
<b>2015 (JCPOA start)</b>	3.67%	JCPOA limits Iran's stockpile within 300 kg limit
<b>2019</b>	Exceeds 3.67% (up to ~4.5%)	recommences enrichment above JCPOA limits post-U.S. withdrawal.
<b>2020 (January)</b>	4.5%	maintains to go beyond JCPOA constraints.
<b>2021 (January)</b>	20%	Enrichment increased to 20% (JCPOA violations).
<b>2021 (April)</b>	60%	started 60% enrichment (Natanz facility sabotage).
<b>2024 (May)</b>	Continues near 60%	enrichment reach to weapons-grade (90%) levels.

Sources: Centre for Strategic and International Studies, Arms Control Association, Institute for Science and International Security.

By early 2024, Iran had accumulated a significant stock of uranium enriched up to 60%, leading to heightened proliferation concerns, as this material could be more easily converted to weapons-grade if enrichment were further increased. Current IAEA estimates suggest that Iran has the capability to produce enough weapon-grade uranium in a matter of weeks if it decides to pursue a breakout, depending on its advanced centrifuge capacity and stockpiles of low-enriched uranium.

These escalations underscore the urgency in JCPOA revival talks, as re-imposing limits could reduce both the enrichment level and stockpile size, thereby extending the estimated breakout time and helping maintain regional stability and non-proliferation goals.

### The Military Expenditure Trends in Iran and Surrounding Regions Since The Announcement Of the JCPOA (2015)

Country	2015 (JCPOA Signing)	2018 (US Withdrawal)	2020 (Heightened Tensions)	2022 (Recent Data)
Iran	\$11.6 billion	\$13.4 billion	\$15.2 billion	\$24.6 billion
Saudi Arabia	\$81.9 billion	\$67.6 billion	\$57.5 billion	\$75.0 billion
United Arab Emirates (UAE)	\$22.8 billion	\$24.5 billion	\$23.4 billion	\$22.5 billion
Israel	\$18.6 billion	\$20.9 billion	\$22.0 billion	\$24.3 billion
Iraq	\$13.1 billion	\$18.2 billion	\$13.0 billion	\$7.8 billion
Turkey	\$15.4 billion	\$18.2 billion	\$18.7 billion	\$20.5 billion

Sources: SIPRI 2023, SIPRI 2022 Regional Defence Analyses and Military Budget Reports.

This overview reflects how the JCPOA influenced regional defence postures, with many nations boosting their military expenditure after the U.S. exit from the deal and as regional tensions persisted.

#### The economic impact assessments and projections

The table below gives a snap short of the economic impact assessments and projections related to sanctions relief for Iran post-JCPOA implementation, including growth in GDP, trade, inflation, oil revenue, and currency value.

#### Economic Impact Assessments (E.G., Sanctions Relief Projections) 2015-2018

Year	Economic Indicator	Impact/Projection	Sources
2015	GDP Growth	Initial boost due to sanctions relief; economic reforms anticipated.	IMF Reports, SIPRI
2016 (Sanctions Relief Begins)	GDP Growth	12.5% growth as oil exports surge and international trade resumes.	World Bank, IMF
2016-2017	Oil Exports	Expanded 2.5 million barrels/per day, contributing around \$40 billion annually.	CRS Reports
2016-2017	Inflation	Inflation stabilized around 9%, down from pre-JCPOA rates above 20%.	World Bank, IMF
2016-2018	Trade	Projected trade potential estimated at \$500 billion over five years; foreign investment growth in infrastructure, energy.	SIPRI, IMF
2018 (US Exits JCPOA)	GDP Decline	-5.4% economic contraction as U.S. re-imposes sanctions, oil exports drop.	IMF, Congressional Research Service CRS Reports
2019	Currency Value (Rial)	Rapid devaluation: rial lost over 60% of its value due to sanctions and reduced foreign currency inflow.	World Bank

<b>2019</b>	Inflation	Surged to above 30%, strictly affecting purchasing power and domestic economic stability.	World Bank
<b>2020</b>	Oil Revenue Loss	Revenue declined, reduced exports, less than 0.5 million barrels per day.	Congressional Research Service CRS Reports
<b>2020-2022</b>	Investment and Trade	Loss of foreign direct investments (e.g., energy, manufacturing)	IMF, Congressional Research Service

### Key Observations:

This data reflects the JCPOA's initial economic benefits for Iran, followed by severe economic stress under renewed sanctions. Initially with the onset of the JCPOA Iran was provided with economic relief. The economy expanded substantially with the GDP grasping double digits and declined inflation. However, post withdrawal of USA (2018) the condition reversed resulting in GDP contractions excessive devaluation and intensified inflation.

### Deal Or No Deal, How Regional Stability Is Ensured?

The no nuclear agreement and JCPOA revival both have drawbacks. However, the no-deal option is riskier. It bets that delaying action to impose restrictions that are set to expire is a more effective way to eventually prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons than keeping the option open to impose severe sanctions pressure. However, there are few chances of increasing or even keeping up the current level of sanctions pressure. A regional armed conflict is more likely to occur without nuclear restraints, and Iran would be free to pursue a clandestine, crash programme to produce nuclear weapons. Iran would also be completely independent to advance toward nuclear weapons quite fast, possibly even within the year. The JCPOA revival is not a miracle cure. The ban on nuclear energy would end gradually and might be lifted in 2031. Relief from sanctions would bring in more money, which Iran could use to fund its proxies in the region as well as its nuclear and missile programmes. However, a resurrected agreement would demonstrably stop Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons for an additional eight years and possibly longer if Iran can be convinced to agree to new requirements. Correspondingly, it would reduce the probability of imminent retaliatory strikes against Iran's nuclear facilities and geographical violent conflict, which might involve the United States and enhance Iran's intention to acquire nuclear weapons. JCPOA reinvention is the better option besides its downsides.

### Implications of no deal

A revival of the JCPOA and the lifting of sanctions, according to JCPOA critics, would give Iran a financial windfall and improve its capacity to finance its regional, missile, and nuclear ambitions. Instead, they contend, the United States ought to put an end to negotiations and step up its sanctions and other forms of pressure. Iran would eventually be compelled to accept a new, more stringent, and long-lasting nuclear agreement.

The argument in favor of a no-deal scenario overstates the power of sanctions and other pressures to influence Iranian behavior. The "maximum pressure" campaign of the Trump administration undoubtedly did significant economic harm to Iran. But since 2019, Iran has found the means to advance its nuclear programme significantly (Talley, 2022). Iran has

worked hard to develop a covert banking and financial system as part of its efforts to circumvent sanctions. In the first three and a half months of 2022, Iran's oil exports increased 30%, mostly to China. According to a senior Iranian official, Iran is now selling up to 1.2 million barrels per day, the most since the United States re-imposed sanctions (News, 2022).

Another implication is that it helps Iran in expanding nuclear capacities and shrinking breakout time. Prior to the 2015 agreement, the breakout time was increased to at least one year. After the US withdrew from the JCPOA in 2018, it decreased to a month or less. Breakout time might keep getting shorter until it only takes a few days if no agreement is reached (Samore, 2022). Moreover, without an agreement, the IAEA and the rest of the world would also have less access to Tehran's nuclear programmes and less ability to identify efforts to develop nuclear weapons (Davenport, 2022). Pressure for a preemptive strike against Iran's nuclear facilities would increase as it got closer to the nuclear threshold. The Biden administration appears to be committed, which suggests that at some point, the US would also be willing to use force to stop Iran.

Such a regional military conflict would force Iran to target American forces and potential allies, possibly launching terrorist attacks (either through regional proxies or on its own) (Baker et al., 2020). Despite the administration of Biden and the American public's desire to reduce American military involvement and presence in the Middle East, this would directly endanger significant U.S. interests. Similarly, Iran can rely on the NPT's withdrawal clause if "extraordinary events" jeopardize its supreme interests. It can also use the option of expelling IAEA inspectors and monitoring tools that it no longer requires to accept and eventually build nuclear weapons as soon as possible.

### **Confidence Building Measures**

After the above debate regarding the Revival of JCPOA and the current and international political environment it is important that international and regional actors might arrive at a regional security framework for the Middle East. The only way to prevent harm to bilateral or multilateral security agreements in the Arab League or the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) is to bring the JCPOA back on firm ground and thereafter strengthen it by resolving the issues raised in this paper. Two important precepts end up making up the Middle East security infrastructure (Vakil & Quilliam, 2021).

In the light of the above discussion regarding the revival of the JCPOA and the current and international political environment it is crucial to consider how international and regional actors might develop a regional security framework for the Middle East. The only way to prevent harm to bilateral or regional security agreements in the Arab League or the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) is to put the JCPOA back on solid ground by addressing the issues raised in this paper. There are two main pillars that support the Middle East security architecture. First is, arms control disarmament. The region should be barred from possessing nuclear weapons and other WMD. The Middle East needs to start serious negotiations to end the threat of WMDs and establish a nuclear-weapons-free region in place of politically motivated double standards on non-proliferation. This can be achieved through JCPOA, Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT), the Chemical and Biological Weapons Conventions (CWC/BWC), and the NPT. Both broad international support and direct talks

between the regional parties, or at least some of them, will be necessary to achieve these goals.

Disarmament and arms control ought to be the first cornerstone, nuclear and other WMD should be completely banned in the area. The second pillar would cover measures for fostering mutual trust, resolving disputes, regional cooperation, and the declaration of regional security reached at the Arms Control and Regional Security (ACRS) Peace Conference. Disputes over nuclear disarmament and the right of all countries in the region, including the Palestinians, to self-determination prevented this declaration from being adopted in the end. A first step towards the CBMs could be the creation of general principles for both political and security-related regional practices. Combating terrorism, the illegal arms and drug trade, interfering in other people's internal affairs, and fostering good neighbor relations are a few examples. If there is a political will all major and ongoing conflicts in the region have a solution. Though a comprehensive framework requires time and a settled political environment, taking steps toward a regional security architecture umbrella could offer a chance for improvement even before full appreciation or stabilization is attained.

States frequently take part in multilateral negotiations and agree to obligations under international agreements, even without reciprocal recognition for resolution of conflict that have regional repercussions. This can be done while the JCPOA is moving forward, under the aegis of the UN, with the P5 serving as conveners. Nevertheless, this proposal is quite ambitious. But the current problems cannot be dealt with in bits and pieces. Failure would be far worse than allowing these problems to deteriorate, which would leave the area vulnerable to even more dire repercussions in coming times.

### **Conclusion**

The response to the JCPOA on the international political stage has been significantly curtailed because of the Russia-Ukraine war. Iran and the United States are pleading with one another to begin negotiations for a nuclear agreement. Iran has mistrust for the US, and with good reason, given what the previous administration under Trump did. This situation will have significant effects on the Middle East security and non-proliferation regime. By reviving the JCPOA, the international community will be at peace concerning the spread of nuclear weapons and will be shielded from Iran's potential to escalate global tensions and spark a war.

Iran's belligerent and suspecting foreign policy toward the West would be compelled to transform by the JCPOA's revival. Sanctions relief will enable Iran to finance its defense through arms export and economic integration with the rest of the world. Instead of going the nuclear route, it might make Iran feel more competitive with its neighbors. The US should think about striking a deal to safeguard its long-term national and global security interests. This is only possible if the US considers striking a deal to safeguard its long-term national and global security interests. Interest of the entire stakeholder must be considered, particularly about Iran's, which has the principal stake in the outcome resultantly fostering cooperation based on mutual trust, economic benefit, and security of the United States.

### **End Notes**

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