

Forum: Security Council
Issue: The Situation in Iran
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Introduction

Nuclear weapons are without a doubt the most destructive type of warheads available to the world today. As a result, many countries seek to obtain such weapons while others try to limit their spread as much as possible. The situation in Iran is one of utmost importance as it poses several important questions about international peace and security. On 14th July 2015, Iran and the P5+1 (Germany) nations reached an agreement: the Iran Nuclear Deal, formally known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). This called for several limitations on nuclear research in Iran (mainly the enrichment of uranium) to come to a standstill and for the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to oversee Iran's nuclear program. In exchange, international sanctions against Iran would be removed.



Map of Iran

The JCPOA was endorsed shortly after under UNSC resolution 2231. This laid the guidelines for the layered removal of sanctions, should Iran hold up its end of the deal. In the following years, the IAEA found no violation of the agreements made under the JCPOA; however, in 2018, the United States of America (USA) decided to withdraw from the agreement and reimposed the rigorous economic sanctions on Iran that had been lifted by the deal. The US provided reasons such as the deal's failure to address Iran's ballistic missile program as reasons for its withdrawal, while citing no evidence for any actual violations of the JCPOA. While this decision was long anticipated, it left the rest of the nations in chaos and received a lot of retaliation from other world leaders and global media, including ex-President Barack Obama who claimed that the decision would leave the world in less safe hands and with "a losing choice between a nuclear-armed Iran or another war in the Middle East."

All the other nations, including Iran, remained in the JCPOA. While Iran continued to cooperate and follow the agreement, despite US sanctions crippling its economy, in May 2019, the United States announced the termination of more of the designated sanction waivers for cooperative nuclear projects that were detailed in the JCPOA. This included the movement of enriched uranium out of Iran, the movement and storage of heavy water out of Iran, and the construction of additional reactor units at the Bushehr nuclear reactor. Following this, Iran began to incrementally violate the JCPOA. On May 8th, 2019, it announced that it would no longer operate within the bounds set by the US on enriched uranium and heavy water, and as the IAEA soon confirmed, the Iran nuclear project began exceeding these limits. Soon after, on July 7th, Iran declared its non-cooperation with the uranium enrichment limit and on September 5th, it asserted that it would no longer honor the limits on the research and development of advanced centrifuges. Finally on January 5th, 2020, Iran announced that it would no longer be

compelled by any of the limitations set upon it by the JCPOA but would continue to maintain compliance with the safeguard obligations under the agreement. Tensions between Iran and the US have been high ever since. The Iranian economy suffers under the US sanctions regime that is causing it to shrink year on year however the Iranian government refuses to give in to their demands. The situation has been worsened by the COVID-19 pandemic that has weakened the economy even further and added more pressure on the government.

Given the volatile and discrete nature of this issue, it is imperative that the nations in the Security Council work together and strive to obtain a solution that would involve adequate compromise on both ends. The multifaceted agenda must be approached carefully as the world aims for international peace and security.

Definition of Key Terms

Centrifuge¹

A centrifuge is what is used to enrich uranium via isotope separation based on the slight difference in mass of the isotopes. It is designed to enrich the useful isotope uranium-235 from the mixture of isotopes that is found naturally in uranium compounds.

Economic Sanctions²

Economic sanctions can be either targeted (placed on a person, group, or entity) or they can be comprehensive (placed on an entire nation). They are defined as the withdrawal of customary trade and financial relations for foreign and security policy purposes.

¹ "How a Centrifuge Works." Federation of American Scientists, 2021, www.fas.org/issues/nonproliferation-counterproliferation/nuclear-fuel-cycle/uranium-enrichment-gas-centrifuge-technology/centrifuge-works/.

² "What Are Economic Sanctions?" Council on Foreign Relations, Council on Foreign Relations, www.cfr.org/backgrounder/what-are-economic-sanctions.

Enriched Uranium³

Enriched uranium is a type of the element in which the process of isotope separation has been used to increase the percent composition of the isotope uranium-235. Uranium can be enriched to different levels based on the requirement.

Frozen Asset^{4 5}

An asset owned by person, entity, or government that cannot be converted to cash (bought or sold) due to a government or court order.

Nuclear Power⁶

Nuclear power is an efficient and relatively eco-friendly method of generating electricity. It is used to boil water to make steam, which turns turbines to produce electricity. Nuclear power plants make use of low-enriched uranium fuel. They produce electricity through a process called nuclear fission in which the uranium atoms are split in a nuclear reactor.

Nuclear Weapon⁷

A nuclear weapon is an explosive device that derives its destructive force from nuclear reactions (fission or a combination of fission and fusion). They require

³ "Uranium Enrichment | Enrichment of Uranium - World Nuclear Association." World-Nuclear.org, 2020, www.world-nuclear.org/information-library/nuclear-fuel-cycle/conversion-enrichment-and-fabrication/uranium-enrichment.aspx.

⁴ "Frozen Asset." Cambridge Dictionary, www.dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/frozen-asset.

⁵ "Frozen Asset." Merriam-Webster, Merriam-Webster, www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/frozen%20asset.

⁶ "What Is Nuclear Power and Energy?: GE Hitachi Nuclear Energy." Nuclear Power Plants, www.nuclear.gepower.com/company-info/nuclear-power-basics.

⁷ "Nuclear Weapon | History, Facts, Types, & Effects | Britannica." *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 2021, www.britannica.com/technology/nuclear-weapon.

highly enriched uranium (about 90% pure). Both types of nuclear bomb use relatively small amounts of matter to release very large quantities of energy.

Key Issues

Iran-US Conflict

Perhaps the most significant aspect of the issue is the United States' policy towards Iran and its nuclear program. Unsatisfied with the terms of the deal, the US (under the Trump administration) withdrew from the JCPOA in 2018. The sanctions levied on Iran by the US are what eventually prompted Iran to violate the terms of the deal and move forward with its nuclear research and reduce the JCPOA to what it is today. Even though the European Union (EU), the remaining the P5+1 nations, and all other parties to the deal continue to endorse its agreements and promote its usefulness, the economic influence that the United States holds has put the entire deal in jeopardy. Tensions between the two nations are high and peaked in January 2020 when they were at the brink of war. This was a result of the US-led assassination of an Iranian general Qassem Soleimani, which was met by an Iranian missile strike on a US base in Iraq in retaliation.

US Demands

While the Biden administration appears to have some different views regarding the situation in Iran, any attempt to create a framework for a future deal between the countries must take into consideration the 12 conditions provided by the Secretary of State in 2018, as these provide the guidelines on which the US foreign policy is based. These are summarized as follows: Iran must permanently and verifiably stop all work associated with its nuclear and ballistic missile program, give the IAEA a full account of the program's prior dimensions and access to all nuclear sites, stop enrichment of uranium, release all US citizens in

Iran, cease aid to non-state actors (such as Hezbollah, Hamas, and Islamic Jihad), and seek peaceful relations with its neighboring countries including Iraq, Yemen, Syria, Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia, and UAE.

Iranian Politics

It is important to analyze the political status of Iran when discussing such an issue. The political factions in Iran are broadly separated into 2 divisions: the Principalists and the Reformists. The parliament is dominated by the Principalists, who host a majority of 221 out of 290 members. They believe in a deeply theocratic rule and aim to maintain the status quo in Iran. Meanwhile, the Reformists' aim is to gradually guide the nation towards secularism and more liberal policies, however they lack the necessary power to enact such change. One significant faction is the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC). The effect of the IRGC, which has a very large influence on internal politics, cannot be exaggerated. A large majority of the IRGC feel strongly against the JCPOA, and this is reflected in the bill that was passed by Parliament recently. The United States goes on to regard the IRGC as a terrorist organization, and as such its influence is helpful in understanding the stance of the US. Their classification as 'terrorists' by the US makes it difficult to create a resolution that would appeases everyone. However, tensions between the Iranian cabinet and the IRGC could be used by the UNSC in finding an agreement.

Humanitarian Issues & the Iranian Economy

The situation in Iran has given rise to a number of humanitarian and economic issues in the country. These must be considered if a new agreement is to be reached. Iran had just about begun to utilize the economic benefits it received through the JCPOA when the US, under the Trump administration, withdrew from the deal and imposed extremely strict sanctions on Iran. US sanctions caused the GDP of Iran to drop by almost

6%, sending them into the worst economic crisis since the 1980s, as the government was forced to develop domestic manufacturing and encourage trade with neighboring countries due to the restrictions on oil exports.

COVID-19 Pandemic

Another troubling issue is the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. In March 2020, Iran became the center of the pandemic outside China, leaving the government to fight a two-sided battle: one to uphold the economy crumbling under the US sanctions, and the other to resist the pandemic to save the lives of the locals and the economy. Since the emergency funds provided by the IMF have been blocked by pressure from the US, Iran cannot purchase the necessary medical equipment. This added excess burden on the government. While they managed to control the first wave of the pandemic and reduce the death rate from 1.6 per million per day to 0.6, the economy was not as successful, with the poverty level increasing from 11% to 16% after the pandemic hit.

Human Rights Violations

There have been several allegations of Human Rights violations made against the Iranian Government over the past few years, including suppressing the rights to freedom of expression, association, and assembly. Armed security forces have been used to crush peaceful civilian protests, for example Reuters estimates that around 1500 civilians were killed by Government forces during protests in November 2019. Additionally, ethnic, and religious minorities and women in the region have faced discrimination such as being denied fair trials or being subjected to torture or ill-treatment. The right to health has also been violated, especially for prisoners in the country who suffer from overcrowding, unsanitary conditions,

poor ventilation, etc. This also places them at higher risk of contracting COVID-19.

Even though the JCPOA was just based on nuclear proliferation, the US, EU, and other involved nations have often cited human rights violations in the past when formulating new policies. Hence, it may be relevant to discuss the human rights issues in Iran when presenting a new resolution. The human rights abuses present in Iran are a troubling matter when carrying out discussions in the UNSC as the immunity of Iran against sanctions in the nuclear deal (which calls for the removal of all sanctions on Iran if it fulfils their terms) places those that are oppressed and the marginalized groups more at risk. Should we risk oppression in the name of international security?

The JCPOA or a New Deal

Evidently, the JCPOA was unable to fulfill its purpose as Iran currently functions under the tightest sanctions placed on any country in the world and is continuing with its nuclear research. The JCPOA has often been criticized as being too lenient for Iran, as it allowed it to continue with its research (even if it was under certain limitations) while completely freeing its economy. Furthermore, the JCPOA was not a permanent solution. The deal, which was supposed to last 15 years, would only delay the problem rather than providing a concrete solution to it.

The JCPOA only covered nuclear proliferation in Iran, however given the internal political, economic, and social situation in Iran, it is essential for any revision to the JCPOA or a new policy that is put in place to focus on such issues as well. This must include a change in foreign policy from Iran towards its neighboring countries (in particular, towards Israel) and also action to resolve the humanitarian issues in the country.

Lastly, it is important to take into the consideration one of the most significant aspects of the JCPOA: inspection. As per the terms of the JCPOA, 24 days are allotted to solve any access disputes between the IAEA and Iran. However, several people have condemned this as an opportunity that can be abused to continue nuclear proliferation in secret. Several experts and officials from IAEA claim that they have full access on ground in Iran, however it is still important to consider these claims about the validity of the current method of inspection.

Major Parties Involved and Their Views

Islamic Republic of Iran

While Iran was initially cooperative and following the terms agreed upon under the JCPOA in 2015, US aggression against them in the form of the economic sanctions caused them to change their stance and violate the agreement. They are now working through their crippled economy towards joining just 9 other countries in achieving the status of a being a nuclear power. This is important to Iran for a number of reasons, the most important of which is to defend themselves against external threats such as the US and Israel who have spoken about bombing and invading Iran on numerous occasions. The Iranian government fears ending up like Iraq, which was invaded by the US under the Bush administration. Having nuclear status would allow them to resist such actions against them. It would also allow for them to gain more influence in the Middle East and establish a strong position among their US-allied neighbors. Being the central party in this agenda, Iran and its compliance are key to achieving a lasting solution.

United States of America

The rough history between the US and Iran dates back around 70 years to when the US helped the UK in overthrowing Mohammad Mossadegh (Prime Minister of Iran) in 1953. The next 26 years marked a brutal, US-supported dictatorship in Iran, so when

the Iranians rose against the regime in 1979 and established the Islamic Republic, anti-Americanism became a central part of their ideology. In 1979, a group of students seized the US Embassy in Tehran, taking 52 Americans hostage resulting in a standoff that lasted 444 days. These events—the US meddling in Iranian politics and the hostage crisis—set the tone for relations between the two governments for the next several decades. Most recently, the United States of America has been openly against the idea of Iran obtaining nuclear weaponry. The US withdrew from the JCPOA agreement in 2018 and reinstated its economic sanctions against Iran. Tensions between the nations continued to heighten and peaked in January 2020 when President Donald Trump ordered the killing of top Iranian military commander Qassem Soleimani. Iran responded with ballistic missile attacks on two US military bases in Iraq pushing the countries to the brink of war. Tensions remain high; however, the Biden administration aims to attain diplomatic relations by the end of the term. The USA is once again a key party to the issue and are the driving force behind this issue.

The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland

The UK was one of the strongest propagators of the Iran nuclear deal and has had a diverging policy towards Iran from the US over the past 4 years, as it continued to abide by and support the JCPOA even after the US withdrew. Its main objective remains the same: to prevent the country from gaining nuclear capability, reduce the destabilizing activities that it carries out in the Middle East, and incentivize the nation to act constructively and by the rules of the international system. However, US withdrawal from the JCPOA and rising US-Iran tensions mean that the threat posed to the UK is significantly higher than it was 5 years ago. It's departure from the EU weakens collaboration with its European partners, whereas the UK also faces the dilemma of sustaining a strategic alliance with the US, despite their varying goals in Iran.

People's Republic of China

China and Iran have maintained diplomatic and trade relations for centuries, and this carried into the 20th and 21st centuries with the formation of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the People's Republic of China, in 1979 and 1949 respectively. In the late 20th century China began to switch from coal to oil as its primary energy supply and so began to increase its oil imports. As of 2011, roughly 10% of its oil imports were from Iran. After signing the JCPOA in 2015, China and Iran agreed to expand trade relations to \$600 billion in 10 years from January 2016 constituting an increase of over 1000%. Most recently, in March 2021, they signed a new 25-year trade deal. China first helped Iran begin its nuclear project by helping build a research reactor in the 1980s followed by continued aid in building a uranium enrichment plant. In 1992 they signed a nuclear cooperation agreement despite US protests. While such direct nuclear cooperation is no longer present, there has been speculation of indirect aid from China.

Russian Federation

The Soviet Union was the first nation to recognize the Islamic Republic of Iran in 1979. After the Iran-Iraq War in 1989, Iran initiated an arms deal with the Soviet Union. Soon, the USSR fell, and the Soviet-Iranian arms deal was adopted by the Russian Federation as diplomatic and commercial relations with Iran grew deeper. By the mid-1990s, Russia had reached an agreement with Iran regarding their nuclear program, agreeing to finish constructing the nuclear reactor plant at Bushehr. The countries have maintained good relations into the 21st century, and while Russia signed the JCPOA in 2015, rising tensions between Iran and the USA are pushing Iran into an alliance with Russia and China.

European Union (EU)

The European Union is severely impacted by the situation in Iran, due to its heavy involvement in the region. Countries within the EU are willing to compromise as they fear dropping the JCPOA may be observed as an implicit greenlight indicating a clear path for Iran to develop a nuclear bomb, which may result in war. They are also highly invested in the region due to the rich oil supply that Iran contains. This is essential for trade as the EU requires diverse oil imports to avoid developing a high energy dependence on Russia. As a result, good relations with Iran and a strong Iranian economy are imperative to them. Lastly, the EU is hesitant to aid any actions that may further heighten the instability and humanitarian crises in Iran as this may trigger a refugee movement towards them.

Development of Issue/Timeline

Date	Event	Outcome
1953	US helps the UK in overthrowing Mohammad Mossadegh (Prime Minister of Iran)	US-supported dictatorship begins in Iran
1967	The US provides the Tehran Nuclear Research Center (TNRC) with a 5MWt research reactor	Iran begins nuclear research
1976	Iran begins preparations for a large nuclear program	\$1 billion spent on a 10% stake in Eurodif's Tricastin uranium enrichment plant, France, and a 15% stake in the RTZ uranium mine in Rossing, Namibia, along

		with a \$700 million contract for the purchase of uranium yellowcake from South Africa and sending Iranian technicians abroad for nuclear training
1979	The Iranian Revolution	The Islamic Republic of Iran is formed
1989	Iran initiates arms deal with the Soviet Union	Iran starts to develop a close relation with the Soviet Union (later Russia)
2003	Amid concerns, the IAEA launches an investigation into Iran's nuclear program	The investigation finds the progress that Iran has made over the last several years
2006	Iran is found to not comply with the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) obligations and when told to halt its nuclear program by the UNSC, it refuses	The UNSC imposes sanctions on Iran
14/07/2015	Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) is agreed upon	Despite the varying policies of all the countries involved, an agreement is reached
January 2016	China and Iran agree to expand trade relations to \$600 billion in 10 years from January 2016	The countries build stronger trade and diplomatic relations.

16/01/2016	All nuclear related sanctions on Iran are lifted	Iran becomes economically free
May 2018	Trump administration announces its unilateral withdrawal from the JCPOA and intention to reimpose sanctions on Iran	Iranian economy begins to fall as strict restrictions are imposed on it once again.
21/05/2018	In the secretary of state's (Mike Pompeo) speech, the US lists its demands for Iran	The US signals to the world what it desires from Iran and why it is unhappy with the JCPOA
May 2019	United States announces the termination of more of the designated sanctions waivers	Restrictions on the Iranian economy become stricter.
08/05/2019	Iran announces that it will no longer operate within the bounds set by the US on enriched uranium and heavy water	Iran starts to violate the JCPOA in response to the restrictions imposed against it
07/07/2019	Iran declares its non-cooperation with the uranium enrichment limit	Further defies the JCPOA
05/09/2019	Iran asserts that it will no longer honor the limits on the research and development of advanced centrifuges	Continues to violate the JCPOA and further its nuclear research

03/01/2020	Assassination of Qasem Soleimani (Iranian general) by the US	Retaliation from Iran
05/01/2020	Iran announces that it will no longer be compelled by any of the limitations set upon it by the JCPOA but will continue to maintain compliance with the safeguard obligations under the agreement	Iran finally completely disengages from the JCPOA
08/01/2020	Operation Martyr Soleimani: Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) launches numerous ballistic missiles at US supported bases in Iraq	Tensions between the nations heighten as they are pushed to the brink of war
February 2020	COVID-19 pandemic reaches Iran	Severe impacts on the economy and humanitarian crisis begins
March 2021	China and Iran sign a new 25-year trade deal where China will gradually invest \$400 billion into the Iranian economy in exchange for cheaper rates on oil imports	The struggling Iranian economy finds a consumer for its oil exports and gets the required capital to boost its own local industries

Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue

Economic Sanctions

In the early 2000s, the world began to learn more about Iran's nuclear program and uranium enrichment plants. There were concerns that it may be intended for non-peaceful purposes and so in 2003, the IAEA launched an investigation into Iran. In 2006, it was found to not comply with the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) obligations and when the UNSC demanded that Iran halt its nuclear program, it refused, leading to the imposition of sanctions on Iran. These were, however, unsuccessful in solving the issue as Iran continued to carry out its nuclear research until the JCPOA was agreed upon in 2015.

Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA)

As discussed before, The JCPOA was a deal regarding nuclear proliferation in Iran between Iran and the P5+1 along with a few other members of the EU. The JCPOA has also been largely unsuccessful in obtaining substantial results. As mentioned, it had many flaws, such as the leniency, permanency of the solution, validity of inspections, and the fact that it only tackled the aspect of nuclear proliferation.

Possible Solutions

Renegotiate the JCPOA

It is essential to either renegotiate the JCPOA or arrive at a new nuclear deal in Iran. Measures must be undertaken to amend the agreement in a way that ensures that the P5+1 and the rest of the affected nations are satisfied, but Iran is also willing to comply.

Continue inspections by the IAEA

Continued inspections by the IAEA are definitely a necessary measure that will need to be undertaken to ensure that countries other than Iran are satisfied. This will help

ensure that all the conditions that are agreed upon are upheld in Iran and any nuclear research is in accordance with the nuclear deal signed. The IAEA will function as an impartial middle-ground here.

Removal of Sanctions

In order for there to be any form of agreement between Iran and the rest of the world, the severe economic sanctions placed on Iran must be alleviated. These are largely on part of the US and have severely deteriorated the Iranian economy. Their removal is key to arriving at a solution that would be acceptable to the Iranian government. However, this must be accompanied by a new nuclear deal and may not stand as a strong course of action independently.

Provision of Humanitarian Aid

One important aspect of the deteriorating situation in Iran is severe humanitarian problems and human rights violations. In order to tackle this humanitarian aid must be provided by other countries and organizations, while UN intervention to prevent HR violations is essential. This may be in cooperation with international bodies such as doctors without borders or red cross as well as UN bodies such as the UNHRC.

Negotiations with neighboring countries

In order to improve the political situation in the middle east, communication between Iran and its neighbors is key. This will help ensure that others understand Iran's position among the other countries and negotiations for peace and trade can take place. Since Iran's insecurities regarding its neighbors are an important factor driving its desire for nuclear power, this solution may be key in maintaining peace in the region for the foreseeable future.

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