



Time for Plan B on Iran

Key Findings

Stop Trying to Revive a Dead Corpse – Acknowledge Iran Killed The JCPOA

For more than a year, President Joe Biden has offered Iran mutual reentry into the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) nuclear deal, in the hopes this might lead to a “longer, stronger” agreement. This policy has now clearly failed. There can be no return to the JCPOA, as Iran’s nuclear program has advanced so significantly that imposing the same nuclear restrictions as seven years ago would merely curb Iran’s nuclear program only half as much, and only for half as long, as the original accord. It is time for the Biden administration to acknowledge that failure and adopt a “Plan B”: a new strategy of comprehensive pressure on Tehran, particularly focused on strengthening the capabilities of U.S. regional partners to defend themselves against Iran.

Recommendations for the United States:

- Articulate a Biden Doctrine reaffirming America’s commitment to use all elements of national power to defend vital U.S. interests in the Middle East – first and foremost to prevent Iran from developing nuclear weapons;
- Set clear redlines for further Iranian nuclear advancement and regional aggression;
- Update contingency planning to neutralize Iran’s nuclear facilities, enhance regional force posture, and conduct joint military exercises with Israel and Gulf partners for long-range strike, aerial refueling, air defense, and distributed maritime operations;
- Stringently enforce existing U.S. sanctions against Iran:
 - Pursue “snapback” sanctions through the UN Security Council;
 - Work for a censure resolution by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in response to Iran’s systemic non-compliance with its nuclear safeguards obligations; and
 - Enact U.S. penalties against entities involved in Iran’s energy cooperation with China.
- Amplify strategic communications to link these actions to emphasize U.S. readiness to use all elements of national power to prevent a nuclear Iran.

To strengthen Israel’s freedom of action, Washington should:

- Provide Israel with adequate stockpiles of precision guided munitions (PGMs), including Joint Direct Attack Munitions (JDAM) and GBU-39/B small diameter bombs (SDB);
- Expedite transfer of KC-46A aerial refueling tankers;
- Transfer F-35I multirole aircraft, CH-53K heavy lift, and SH-60/MH-60 multi-mission helicopters, and fast-track efforts to sell or transfer F-15 fighter aircraft via the excess defense articles program;
- Provide Israel adequate batteries of – and interceptors for – Israeli’s multi-layered air and missile defenses (co-produced with the United States); and
- Expand and deepen bilateral intelligence cooperation on Iranian nuclear and regional threats.

The United States should harness the unique strategic opportunity of the Abraham Accords by:

- Integrating Israel more fully in U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) alongside U.S. and Arab partner forces;
- Strengthening regional maritime domain awareness and cooperation, including incorporating Israel into U.S.-led naval forces operating in Middle Eastern waters;
- Inaugurating serious efforts to build an effective regional air and missile defense and shared early warning system, beginning with enhanced information-sharing through CENTCOM to develop a common air operating picture for the United States and its Middle East partners; and
- Signaling that the United States takes seriously Saudi and Emirati concerns about Iran by reimposing the foreign terrorism organization (FTO) designation against Tehran's Houthi proxy in Yemen, appointing an American ambassador to Abu Dhabi and positioning the United States to be a reliable supplier of U.S. Arab partners' legitimate defense needs.

Negotiations are stalemated due to Tehran's demand that the United States lift terrorism sanctions on the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) unrelated to the JCPOA. Meanwhile each step Iran takes in its nuclear program, and each dollar it earns from unenforced sanctions, increases the amount of pressure the United States and its partners will have to bring to bear to get concessions from Tehran while shrinking the amount of time left to do so. This leverage deficit is only compounded by years of declining U.S. presence and commitments in the Middle East. America's partners and the Iranian regime all harbor serious doubts about Washington's continued willingness to stop Iran's nuclear program, push back against Iranian aggression and uphold regional stability. The time to adopt "Plan B" is now.

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