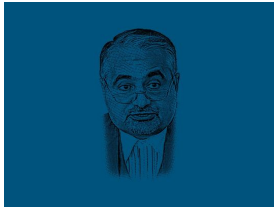


Commentary: 'Coalition of the Coalitions' Needed in ISIS Fight

By Seyed Hossein Mousavian 5 p.m. EST December 13, 2015



(Photo: Staff illustration)

On July 14, after 12 years of crisis and negotiations, Iran and six major world powers agreed on the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), which marked a peaceful settlement of the Iranian nuclear dispute. The JCPOA is the most comprehensive agreement ever achieved on non-proliferation; containing the most intrusive transparency and verification mechanisms ever implemented in the history of the nuclear non-proliferation treaty (NPT). It shuts down all possible "pathways" to a nuclear weapon and prevents any potential covert weapons programs as well. There is no doubt that this agreement represents the most important diplomatic and non-proliferation achievement in several decades and that the global nonproliferation regime is stronger as a result of this deal.



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However, this deal is only a step toward a goal that should be imperative: a Middle East without nuclear weapons. This is an idea which in fact was first advanced by Iran in 1974 as part of the country's Middle East Nuclear Weapon-Free Zone initiative. The JCPOA is a template that could serve as a shortcut toward realizing a nuclear weapons-free Middle East. 2016 should be the year that the international community pushes for all states in the Middle East to help make this vision a reality by adopting provisions of the JCPOA. Furthermore, 2016 is also an important year because of the 2016 Nuclear Security Summit, which is due to be held in Washington. The Obama administration can cement the achievements of the JCPOA and strengthen nuclear policy mechanisms by inviting Iran to participate in this conference.

This past year also saw a breakthrough in the negotiations over the Syrian conflict, with the world powers finally accepting that without Iran, diplomacy could not succeed in resolving the conflict. The nuclear deal certainly helped in this regard by facilitating a shift in the US position with respect to Iran's regional role.

The Vienna negotiations between global and regional powers in late October, which included Iran for the first time, led to all sides agreeing on nine principles to end the Syrian conflict. Two weeks later, on Nov. 14, these same talks made unprecedented progress after it was announced an agreement was reached for there to be a transitional period in Syria and for new elections to be held within 18 months. The positive implications of this development include the prospect for broader cooperation between Iran and world powers in 2016 on addressing the Syrian conflict and beyond, from drug trafficking, organized crime, the refugee crisis and the fight against the Islamic State group, or ISIS.

ISIS and similar terrorist groups will remain the world's number one security threat in 2016. There were 13,463 terror attacks across the globe in 2014, according to the US State Department, with 1,122 a month and an average of 37 per day. In November alone: a Russian passenger jet was blown up over Egypt, making it the biggest terrorist operation conducted abroad since 9/11; Beirut experienced its deadliest suicide bombing in 25 years; and terrorist attacks turned Paris into a bloodbath, killing 129 and making it — the worst mass killing in Paris since the 1961 massacre of Algerian war protesters.

More disastrous terrorist attacks should be expected in 2016 if the overarching strategy of major world powers in fighting ISIS is not corrected. This will require a critical step being taken. The time has come for a "coalition of the coalitions," meaning that the US-led coalition of countries launching airstrikes against ISIS should develop a coherent, comprehensive and cooperation strategy with the coalition comprised of Russia, Iran, Iraq, Syria and Hezbollah to effectively confront and destroy ISIS.

It is now clear for most in the United States and the West that their own allies such as Turkey and Saudi Arabia are the source (<https://www.rt.com/news/192880-biden-isis-us-allies/>) for much of the support and even ideology (<http://annaqed.com/en/terrorism/saudi-arabia-wahhabism-and-the-spread-of-sunni-theofascism/>) of ISIS and groups like it. Iran, on the other hand, is a natural partner to fight such terrorist organizations. It is thus vital for the US/West to adopt a new strategy that aims to engage Iran in the fight with terrorism and push back on the support US allies have been giving terrorist groups. Furthermore, the West needs to convince its dysfunctional and unrepresentative allies in the Middle East to address the widespread vulnerability and poverty among their youth that is one of the fundamental roots of much of the chaos and extremism in the region.

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[\(/story/defense/commentary/2015/12/13/global-crises-spill-new-year/77178534/\)](/story/defense/commentary/2015/12/13/global-crises-spill-new-year/77178534/)

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