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## **The Nuclear Deal: A Crossroad or Deadlock in Relations with Iran**

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### **Introduction**

The nuclear agreement signed by the Islamic Republic of Iran and the P5+1 world powers (five permanent members of the UN Security Council plus Germany) has led to the opening of a market previously untouched due to an international sanctions regime. Overwhelming sanctions had crippled the Iranian economy since 2006 due to international suspicion about the peaceful nature of Iran's nuclear program.

Having now entered the post-sanctions era, Iran has been able to

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resume ties with most global powers. The British embassy in Tehran was reopened after having been closed for four years, and many European airlines have once again resumed flights to Tehran. Communication with the United States during the presidency of Barack Obama was at historic levels. President Hassan Rouhani's phone call with President Obama, in September, before the negotiations, was the "highest-level [of] contact between the two countries" since the Iranian Revolution of 1979.<sup>1</sup> During the negotiations, Iran's foreign minister, Mohammad Javad Zarif, and Secretary of State John Kerry met bilaterally 23 times and even communicated on a first name basis, something unprecedented between the longtime rival nations.<sup>2</sup>

The nuclear agreement signed in 2015 marked a diplomatic triumph. After agreeing to some of the most intrusive inspections in the history of nuclear energy, Iran was granted a relieve from international sanctions. The JCPOA between the P5+1, the EU, and Iran represents a triumphant new method to approaching disagreements in the region and around the world. Iran had signed an agreement with the US, who had not so long ago labelled it as part of an "axis of evil." Diplomacy, not war, won the day. Now that this agreement is under threat due to President Trump's Iran policy, it is worthy of our time to examine the effects and the future of the JCPOA.

For now, President Trump's strategy has been to reject diplomacy and proceed with threats and intimidation. He has undermined the US' role in international negotiations by rejecting the counsel of American allies and endangering an accord which the United States itself is party to. Trump has threatened to destroy the JCPOA and "rip it up" which seems to be part of a personal vendetta against President Obama's legacy. The IAEA (the international watch-body tasked with monitoring Iran's compliance), UN, EU, former Secretary of State John Kerry, Marine Gen. Joe Dunford (the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff), and many more have voiced unanimous agreement

1. Jeff Mason and Louis Charbonneau, "Obama, Iran's Rouhani Hold Historic Phone Call," Reuters, Thomson Reuters, 28 Sept. 2013, [www.reuters.com/article/us-un-assembly-iran/obama-irans-rouhani-hold-historic-phone-call-idUSBRE98Q16S20130928](http://www.reuters.com/article/us-un-assembly-iran/obama-irans-rouhani-hold-historic-phone-call-idUSBRE98Q16S20130928).
2. "Iran Nuclear Deal: The Special Relationship between John Kerry and Mohammad Javad Zarif," The Telegraph, Telegraph Media Group, 15 July 2015, [www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/iran/11740268/Iran-nuclear-deal-The-special-relationship-between-John-Kerry-and-Mohammad-Javad-Zarif.html](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/iran/11740268/Iran-nuclear-deal-The-special-relationship-between-John-Kerry-and-Mohammad-Javad-Zarif.html).

that Iran has met all of its requirements and continues to cooperate with the strictest nuclear inspections regime in history. However, Donald Trump has chosen to not certify Iran's compliance with the JCPOA, and the agreement's future remains uncertain. President Trump has named four conditions in order to keep waiving sanctions against Iran and effectively keep the deal alive. It is up to Trump to decide whether the US will begin a new era of cooperation and dialogue with the Islamic Republic based on good faith and mutual respect or continue a fruitless deadlock that is fueled by war mongering and fear. As President Trump loses domestic support prior to key congressional elections and President Rouhani faces increased criticism and resistance at home leading up to parliamentary elections, we can only predict increased hostility and confrontation for the two countries unless serious intervention is implemented.

In the remaining time, we witness a serious challenge for Europe as it determines its stance on the future of the deal. A growing Washington, Tel Aviv, Riyadh alliance has made it its goal to sabotage the JCPOA. Europe has become the deciding factor determining whether the agreement will survive. If Europe gives into American pressure, it will spell out the end for the JCPOA and normalized relations with Iran. The nuclear deal with Iran is Europe's biggest foreign policy achievement in the last decade. The JCPOA gave Europe an opportunity to take the lead in a diplomatic breakthrough for the first time and is thus part of Europe's foreign policy identity. All eyes are on Europe.

### **Economic Growth**

Iran's ailing economy desperately needed the relief from sanctions that the nuclear deal provided. Since the signing of the landmark deal, Iran's economy has recovered from an inflation rate of 34.7% in 2013 to 9.5% as reported by the Central Bank of Iran.<sup>3</sup> As a result of Rouhani's government's policies, GDP grew 6.6% in the year 2016 alone, and inflation has remained stable. Much needed foreign investment was a major incentive for Iran in the nuclear negotiations and has been streaming in after the signing of the agreement. Last

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3 "Latest News," Central Bank of Iran, Islamic Republic of Iran, n.d. [www.cbi.ir/default\\_en.aspx](http://www.cbi.ir/default_en.aspx).

year, greenfield investments exceeded \$12 billion and in the first three months of 2017 five new projects worth \$1.3 billion were launched. Iran's closer relations with the EU have been economically beneficial and have led to an increase of over 300% in Iranian exports to the European Union since the implementation of the nuclear deal.<sup>4</sup> In 2016 alone, exports "to the EU grew to 5.5 billion euros (\$6.5 billion)..., more than four times the previous year" and in the first half of 2017, there has been an increase of 94% in Iran-Europe trade.<sup>5 & 6</sup>

France, specifically, has been making strides toward economic cooperation with Iran and has been quick to try to make amends for the lull created by sanctions. The new French president, Emmanuel Macron, has shown a willingness to continue improving ties with Iran.<sup>7</sup> During President Rouhani's visit to France in 2016, Iran inked "an array of deals worth \$30 billion." An economic delegation headed by French Foreign Minister Jean-Marc Ayrault consisting of more than 100 members representing Airbus, Peugeot, Renault, and other major companies visited Iran's chamber of commerce to participate in a business forum in late January of this year.<sup>8</sup> Many French companies have created or added to their presence in Iran and have been taking advantage of one of the world's last emerging markets. Total's recent \$4.8 billion agreement with Iran to develop the South Pars oil field is the first oil deal with a European company in more than a decade.<sup>9</sup> Royal Dutch Shell and Italy's Eni have signed provisional agreements, but, for now, delays have hindered production.

4. "EU: Iran Exports to Europe Rise by 300%," PressTV, PressTV, 29 Apr. 2017, [www.presstv.com/Detail/2017/04/29/519908/Iran-EU-Climate-Energy-Commissioner-Miguel-Arias-Canete-JCPOA](http://www.presstv.com/Detail/2017/04/29/519908/Iran-EU-Climate-Energy-Commissioner-Miguel-Arias-Canete-JCPOA).
5. Angelina Rascouet, and Anthony Dipaola, "What's at Risk for Energy If Trump Kills the Iran Deal," Bloomberg.com, Bloomberg, 10 Oct. 2017, [www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2017-10-10/what-s-at-risk-for-energy-if-trump-pushes-iran-deal-to-collapse](http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2017-10-10/what-s-at-risk-for-energy-if-trump-pushes-iran-deal-to-collapse).
6. "Iran-EU Trade Value Doubles," Financial Tribune, Financial Tribune, 25 Aug. 2017, <http://financialtribune.com/articles/domestic-economy/71056/iran-eu-trade-value-doubles>.
7. "Macron Presidency Augurs Well for Enhancing Iran-France Economic Ties," N.p., 13 May 2017, <http://financialtribune.com/articles/economy-domestic-economy/64343/macron-presidency-augurs-well-for-enhancing-iran-france>.
8. "Iran-France Trade Sees Threefold Rise Post Sanctions," Financial Tribune, N.p., 31 Jan. 2017, <https://financialtribune.com/articles/domestic-economy/58635/iran-france-trade-sees-threefold-rise-post-sanctions>.
9. Karen Gilchrist, "What Total's \$4.8 Billion Investment Means for Iran," CNBC, CNBC, 03 July 2017. <https://www.cnbc.com/2017/07/03/iran-to-sign-new-ipc-gas-deal-with-total-for-south-pars.html>.

Iran is the Middle East's second biggest economy with an estimated Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of \$412.2 billion in 2016. The country is expected to need "more than \$1 trillion of infrastructure investment over the next 10 years." Italy's Ferrovie dello Stato has already agreed to a €5 billion deal to develop the country's rail system. France's Accor group, Spain's Meliá hotels, the UK's easyHotel, and the UAE-based Rotana have all signed agreements to start building hotels in Iran.<sup>10</sup> The country's airports, public transportation, and hospitality industry all need major restructuring and foreign investment in order to meet the government's quota of 20 million "international arrivals" by 2025, which would be nearly four times as many as the current amount.<sup>11</sup> Imam Khomeini International Airport (IKIA) is said to have signed an agreement with Swiss-based ADI Consulting GmbH and the Netherlands Airport Consultant Company (NACO). Iran has made it a priority to boost its tourism industry and diversify the country's oil-based economy. Inefficiency, isolation, and bureaucracy have kept the country's tourism industry stagnant for decades.

Investment into Iran's economy is mutually beneficial: the French company that makes Peugeot and Citroen cars has announced that, "its sales nearly tripled in the Middle East and Africa in the first half of the year because of new production in Iran."<sup>12</sup> Iran Air has signed deals with several international airplane manufactures including both Boeing and Airbus to buy a total of 200 aircraft worth around \$37 billion to help it replenish its aging fleet. Iran's arrangement with Boeing to buy 80 jetliners has revived Boeing 777 production which had stalled due to a sharp decrease in demand. Boeing has already applied for licenses from the US government (which is required for all the jets because of their use of US parts) and so far the American

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10. "UK's EasyHotel to Open 500 Rooms in Iran," PressTV, PressTV, 18 July 2017, [www.presstv.com/Detail/2017/07/18/528849/Iran-tourism-UK-hotel-group-easyHotel](http://www.presstv.com/Detail/2017/07/18/528849/Iran-tourism-UK-hotel-group-easyHotel).

11. Kian Sharifi, "Iran Tourism Market Stirs Int'l Interest," Financial Tribune, N.p., 07 Feb. 2017, <https://financialtribune.com/articles/travel/59093/iran-tourism-market-stirs-intl-interest>.

12. Erin Cunningham, "The United States and Europe Are on a Collision Course over Iran," The Washington Post, WP Company, 14 July 2017, [www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle\\_east/the-united-states-and-europe-are-on-a-collision-course-over-iran/2017/07/14/e7b70108-657c-11e7-94ab-5b1f0ff459df\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.3f45fb1c9c44](http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/the-united-states-and-europe-are-on-a-collision-course-over-iran/2017/07/14/e7b70108-657c-11e7-94ab-5b1f0ff459df_story.html?utm_term=.3f45fb1c9c44).

government has been cooperating.<sup>13</sup> The president of Iran's central bank recently announced that China has "agreed to allocate \$35 billion in financing and loans for Iran's economy" with \$15 billion going to "infrastructure and production projects" and a new \$10 billion credit line for Iranian banks.<sup>14</sup> Both Volkswagen and Mercedes Benz have also inked deals with Iranian companies in order to resume the distribution of their cars in Iran.<sup>15 & 16</sup> The opening of the Iranian market has created a unique opportunity for European and Asian companies as well as American ones to explore the potential of one of the Middle East's largest economies. Investment from outside Iran has been gradually seeping in and has been paying off.

Though the nuclear deal has allowed European based foreign investment to once again stream into Iran, most of the economic growth has been concentrated in the oil sector and has not translated into tangible benefits for average Iranians. Oil, gas, and automotive industries have accounted for most of the growth, while other industries have remained stagnant. Since 2016, 70% of investment in the Iranian economy has been in the oil sector. The non-oil economy, however, hasn't witnessed much growth and youth unemployment stands at 27%. Iran's lower and middle classes are still suffering with 18.7% of the population still living in poverty.<sup>17</sup> The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has only predicted 3.5% in non-oil growth for the country in 2017, which is up from .75% in 2016 but is still not satisfactory for the emerging economy. It is important for Iran to attract major economic development investment from major Eastern-Western powers in order to solidify sustainable economic growth.

13. David Lawder, "Treasury Chief Says Reviewing Iran's Aircraft Licenses," Reuters, Thomson Reuters, 24 May 2017, [www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-iran-sanctions/treasury-chief-says-reviewing-irans-aircraft-licenses-idUSKBN18K2U4](http://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-iran-sanctions/treasury-chief-says-reviewing-irans-aircraft-licenses-idUSKBN18K2U4).

14. "China Provides \$10 Billion Credit Line to Iran," Alaraby, The New Arab, 16 Sept. 2017, [www.alaraby.co.uk/english/news/2017/9/16/china-provides-10-billion-credit-line-to-iran](http://www.alaraby.co.uk/english/news/2017/9/16/china-provides-10-billion-credit-line-to-iran).

15. Andreas Cremer, "VW to Start Importing Cars to Iran in August with Partner Mammut Khodro," Reuters, Thomson Reuters, 04 July 2017, [www.reuters.com/article/us-volkswagen-iran/vw-to-start-importing-cars-to-iran-in-august-with-partner-mammut-khodro-idUSKBN19P1C7](http://www.reuters.com/article/us-volkswagen-iran/vw-to-start-importing-cars-to-iran-in-august-with-partner-mammut-khodro-idUSKBN19P1C7).

16. Stephanie Nebehay, "Activists Cry Foul as U.N. Decides against Yemen Rights Probe," Reuters, Thomson Reuters, 29 Sept. 2016, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-yemen-security-un/activists-cry-foul-as-u-n-decides-against-yemen-rights-probe-idUSKCN11Z276>.

17. "Islamic Republic of Iran Home," The World Bank Working for a World Free of Poverty, N.p., n.d. [www.worldbank.org/en/country/iran](http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/iran).

Iran's young, talented workforce has lots of potential but is currently faced with a shortage of jobs. 40% of the population is under the age of 25 and around 60% of the college population is made up of women. Women make up 70% of Iran's science and engineering students, but more than 44% of young women are currently unemployed.<sup>18</sup> Traditional narratives about societal gender roles and workplace discrimination have prevented women's progress in the workplace.

The nuclear deal allowed Iran access to the Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication (SWIFT) banking system which allows for "secure, seamless and automated financial communication between users," but European banks are still reluctant to conduct transactions with Iran and finance projects due to the fear of reprisal by the United States.<sup>19</sup> This reluctance has stalled potential international investment in non-oil sectors and has frustrated Iran's efforts to heal its economy. President Trump's increased anti-Iran rhetoric has further dissuaded efforts to invest in Iran's economy. The threat of US reprisals towards countries that invest in Iran looms over investors, and many fear that a "snap-back" in sanctions will result in them facing huge fines once again.

Delivering the promised economic benefits for Iran from the nuclear deal is vital for continued international diplomacy with Iran and to ensure further compliance with the deal. If Rouhani is unable to tackle unemployment and secure foreign investment into the economy, the Iranian people will lose faith in the nuclear deal, and its future will be in jeopardy. Key economic provisions for Iran were the main incentive in the deal, and if they are not delivered, there is not much to keep Iran compliant. Iran has been fully complying with intrusive inspections and has maintained limits on its nuclear program. The United States' commitment to its economic promises remains doubtful, and the replacement of President Obama by President Trump is an ominous sign. The United States under President Trump seems to

18. Amy Guttman, "Set To Take Over Tech: 70% Of Iran's Science And Engineering Students Are Women," *Forbes*, Google, 9 Dec. 2015,

[www.forbes.com/forbes/welcome/?toURL=https://www.forbes.com/sites/amyguttman/2015/12/09/set-to-take-over-tech-70-of-irans-science-and-engineering-students-are-women/&refURL=https://www.google.com/&referrer=https://www.google.com/](http://www.forbes.com/forbes/welcome/?toURL=https://www.forbes.com/sites/amyguttman/2015/12/09/set-to-take-over-tech-70-of-irans-science-and-engineering-students-are-women/&refURL=https://www.google.com/&referrer=https://www.google.com/).

19. "Messaging and Standards," SWIFT, SWIFT, 21 June 2016, [www.swift.com/about-us/discover-swift/messaging-standards](http://www.swift.com/about-us/discover-swift/messaging-standards).

be “looking at a policy of isolationism and containment” which if executed will destroy the nuclear deal and further derail any chance for stability in the Middle East.

An emerging Trump-Tel Aviv- Riyadh alliance has made it its priority to reduce Iran’s economic benefits from the nuclear deal to zero. This is while Rouhani’s government desperately needs international investment and banking credibility in order to save the economy which has been plagued by corruption, recession, and unemployment for years. Recent protests starting in December of 2017 were a manifestation of the growing discontent of the Iranian populace with the lack of tangible progress made on the economic front by the Rouhani administration. Protests in tens of cities witnessed 25 deaths and hundreds of injuries. Triggered by a rise in egg prices due to an outbreak of the bird flu, the protests were quick to pick up momentum.<sup>20</sup> President Trump was quick to tweet in support of the upheaval and protests in the country which could’ve led to chaos, unrest, and instability in the country. He tweeted, “the people of Iran are finally acting against the brutal and corrupt Iranian regime.” This newfound support for the Iranian people is after having named Iran one of the countries in his “travel ban,” effectively preventing Iranians from entering the United States.

### **Iranian Political Climate and Social Freedoms**

The decisive victory by President Rouhani in Iran’s recent presidential elections suggested continued hope for possible reform and economic growth in the country. The economy was a focal point in the debates between Rouhani and his rival candidates. His challengers asserted that slow economic growth proved the ineffectiveness of the nuclear deal and pointed out American threats to “rip up the deal” as evidence of the deal’s fragile nature. The Iranian public was unconvinced. The 2017 election witnessed an astonishing voter participation rate of about 70%, with Rouhani receiving 57% of the vote, demonstrating continued support for the moderate camp in Iran.<sup>21</sup> All, but one, of Rouhani’s cabinet members were immediately confirmed by the parliament in a massive show of support for the new

20. Zack Beauchamp, “The massive new protests in Iran, explained,” Vox, Vox, 3 Jan. 2018, [www.vox.com/world/2018/1/3/16841310/iran-protests-2018](http://www.vox.com/world/2018/1/3/16841310/iran-protests-2018).

21. “Iran Election: Hassan Rouhani Wins Second Term as President,” BBC News, BBC, 20 May 2017, [www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-39984066](http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-39984066).



government. This vote of confidence signified public approval of the nuclear deal and the current government's policies. This support, however, seems to be dramatically dying down as the government has failed to uphold promises of economic growth for average Iranians.

Ayatollah Khamenei, whose approval was necessary for the signing of the nuclear agreement, has recently been more vocal about his criticism of Rouhani's intention towards improved relations with "the US." He has cited slow economic recovery, increased sanctions, and islamophobic rhetoric by President Trump as reasons not to trust the United States. In a speech in June, Ayatollah Khamenei denounced the United States for "regional instability" and the creation of ISIS, further calling into question the possibility of improved relations in the future. Inflammatory rhetoric by President Trump is often used by conservatives in Iran as justification for opposition to the nuclear deal and major detente with the West.

Iran has parliamentary elections this year while Rouhani is facing serious economic challenges, and it is unlikely that these problems will disappear by the parliamentary elections. The Iranian public has become disillusioned with promises of economic recovery, and support for President Rouhani's government has diminished immensely in the recent months. Thus, we can predict that Rouhani's challenges domestically will only increase after a low turnout in upcoming elections, and Iran's hostility and confrontation towards America will increase due to Trump's policies.

In the last five years, the Rouhani administration has made efforts towards an improved domestic situation with more social freedoms. The administration has opposed and shown its reluctance towards arrests of journalists, lawyers, filmmakers, musicians, minority rights activists, human rights defenders, bloggers, and even foreign nationals.

Iran hosts many ethnic minorities including Kurds, Turkmen, Baluchis, Ahwazi Arabs, and Azerbaijani Turks. President Rouhani's government has attempted to tackle mistreatment of these groups by delegating more positions to ethnic minorities, but there is still much to be done. The government announced in June that optional Kurdish and Turkish language courses "would be offered in schools in two provinces, Kurdistan and West Azerbaijan," a positive step towards ethnic equality.<sup>22</sup>

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22. "Amnesty International," Iran 2016/2017, N.p., n.d,  
[www.amnesty.org/en/countries/middle-east-and-north-africa/iran/report-iran/](http://www.amnesty.org/en/countries/middle-east-and-north-africa/iran/report-iran/).

Iran is frequently criticized by the international community for its human rights situation.

Social media activities in Iran are far better than US allies in the region such as Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. Sites such as Facebook, Twitter, Line, and Tango are filtered, but many Iranian officials have Twitter accounts and use them as a form of communication. Telegram, Instagram, Pinterest, Facenama, and Cloob, remain unblocked and popular among Iranians.<sup>23</sup> Nevertheless, Iranian authorities regulate social media activities in the country and frequently crack down on anything “deemed threatening to moral [and or national] security.” The Association of Iranian Journalists addressed President Rouhani and asked him honor his 2013 pledge to lift the group’s suspension but was ultimately unsuccessful. President Rouhani’s recent electoral victory was in part due to the Telegram, an instant messaging app immensely popular in Iran, which allows unfiltered news to be spread, almost instantaneously, across the country. One in four people in Iran, a country made up of tech savvy youth, is believed to be using Telegram.<sup>24</sup> The rise in popularity of social media in Iran means a population now more informed of events in the country and has created a platform for citizens to freely express their views.

An increase in public political awareness is partially due to the nuclear deal. The nuclear negotiations were highly publicized and were instrumental in exciting the Iranian public and giving them reason to once again follow domestic and international affairs.

Iranian women hold a relatively high status as compared to women of other Middle Eastern countries but still suffer from legal discrimination and have not yet established their maximum potential presence in the economy. Women outnumber men by 13% “in gaining admission to higher education” and are highly educated in Iran.<sup>25</sup> However, conservative narratives that encourage women to embrace

23 Hamed Jafari, “Even Our President Is More Social Than You!” TechRasa, 15 Jan. 2016, [www.linkedin.com/pulse/even-our-president-more-social-than-you-hamed-jafari](http://www.linkedin.com/pulse/even-our-president-more-social-than-you-hamed-jafari).

24 Saeed Kamali Dehghan, “Telegram: The Instant Messaging App Freeing up Iranians' Conversations,” The Guardian, Guardian News and Media, 08 Feb. 2016, [www.theguardian.com/world/2016/feb/08/telegram-the-instant-messaging-app-freeing-up-iranians-conversations](http://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/feb/08/telegram-the-instant-messaging-app-freeing-up-iranians-conversations).

25 “Females Outnumber Males by 13% in Iran's 2017 University Admissions,” Payvand Iran News, Payvand, 17 Sept. 2017, [www.payvand.com/news/17/sep/1083.html](http://www.payvand.com/news/17/sep/1083.html).

their roles mainly as caregivers for their children and homemakers prevent women from claiming their place in the workspace. Iran is facing a future population decline, and as a response, the government has been pushing women more and more to stay at home and aspire to be mothers rather than become independent, working members in society. In spite of this, the Iranian women have proven that they don't tolerate workplace discrimination and out of date hiring practices at all. President Rouhani's government has sought to tackle this issue by appointing two women, Laaya Joneidi and Masoumeh Ebtekar, as his vice presidents for legal affairs and women and family affairs and Shahindokht Molaverdi as his assistant on citizenship rights.<sup>26</sup> The president has issued a directive asking his cabinet to utilize an increased number of women and youth in their respective ministries and many ministers are choosing to name women as their deputy ministers.

Now that President Rouhani's first term has ended with the success of the nuclear deal, he can use the momentum of support to try to cement in reform at home. Though the nuclear agreement has not led to the progress on this front that some expected, there are still reasons to be hopeful. A beneficial consequence of the deal is that it has opened up the door to more international communication and cooperation with Iran which could translate to more changes in the future.

What this progress will lead to, will be determined by the level of commitment the world shows toward this nuclear deal. The US and the West siding with domestic factions inside of Iran would be a substantial obstacle to further progress because it would be considered as an attempt to interfere in Iranian internal affairs and to bring about regime change especially during increased sensitivity after recent protests.

### **Iran and The Region**

Iranian foreign policy is often at odds with American involvement and interference in the region which puts a strain on already tense relations between the two main parties of the nuclear deal. Both countries tend to be on opposing sides of proxy wars in the Middle

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26. "Iran's Rouhani Names Female Vice-Presidents after Criticism of All-Male Cabinet," France 24, France 24, 9 Aug. 2017, [www.france24.com/en/20170809-iran-rouhani-women-vice-presidents-criticism-all-male-cabinet](http://www.france24.com/en/20170809-iran-rouhani-women-vice-presidents-criticism-all-male-cabinet).

East which are becoming more frequent and more violent. In Syria, Yemen, Qatar, Palestine, and Bahrain, both Iran and the United States are vehemently opposed to each other's policies which complicates any progress towards better relations between the countries.

In the fight against ISIS, the United States and Iran actually share similar interests, and though there is no formal cooperation between the two on this front, both nations have been wary of each other and are careful to stay out of each other's way and work independently. Mistrust, however, remains. Many, including the Supreme Leader, believe that the US and its regional allies are behind ISIS and do not want ISIS or Takfiri terrorism to die in the region. Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps has been training Shiite militias in the region in the fight against ISIS and Al Qaeda and has been coordinating with the Iraqi and Syrian government's attempts to slowly take back besieged cities. After the formal offer by Iran to provide a "blank check" of support, even former Secretary of State John Kerry acknowledged that Iran's role against ISIS is a "helpful" one.<sup>27</sup> The victory against Mosul was made possible mostly by Iran's efforts in Iraq which include lending Iran's beloved Major General Qassem Soleimani, the commander of the Quds Force and a renowned strategist and tactician, to the front lines. Both Baghdad and Erbil would have fell if not for Iran's role in fighting ISIS and Iran's support for the Iraqi people. The fight against ISIS could prove to be a future opportunity for cooperation between Iran and the United States but not in the current climate. The United States' designation of Iran as the world's leading state sponsor of terror has outraged the Iranian nation who claims that the United States led to the creation of ISIS, Al Qaeda, and the Taliban. The Revolutionary Guards Corps, who Trump has sanctioned, is the main branch of the Iranian armed forces coordinating the offensive against ISIS.

Tehran's support for President Assad in Syria is at odds with Washington's stance of support for the rebels and regime change policy in Syria. Russia, Iran, and Hezbollah have been instrumental in preventing state collapse by keeping Bashar al-Assad in power. Without Iran's involvement, the Syrian crisis could have easily

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27. Lee Ferran, "Iran Offered Iraq 'Open Check' in ISIS Fight, Official Says," ABC News, ABC News Network, 23 July 2015, [abcnews.go.com/International/iran-offered-iraq-open-check-isis-fight-official/story?id=32651016](http://abcnews.go.com/International/iran-offered-iraq-open-check-isis-fight-official/story?id=32651016).

mirrored the collapse of Libya in 2011. The US, NATO, and the GCC launched military strikes in Libya destroying the government resulting in a failed state that has now become a haven for Al Qaeda and ISIS. As of now, this hasn't occurred in Syria because Russian airstrikes paired with Iran's Revolutionary Guards and missile strikes have kept ISIS and the Syrian rebels back with major defeats. Tens of thousands of foreign terrorists from all over the world were recruited by allies of the West in the region and exported to Syria to bring about regime change in Syria. Iran's foreign minister, Mohammad Javad Zarif, has proposed a four-point plan to the United Nations aimed at ending the Syrian conflict.<sup>28</sup> The United States, however, maintains its assertion that any elections can only take place without Assad: an assertion disputed by Iran whose foreign minister has insisted that, "the Syrian people must decide about the future of President Bashar al-Assad."<sup>29</sup>

The current political climate in the United States remains uncertain due to frequent revelations about Russian interference in the 2016 presidential elections. The nuclear agreement, however, is a good guideline for future international negotiations and, if successful in the long term, could help with the peace process in Syria and be an example for how to best approach problems in the region. In October of 2015, Iran was invited for the first time to attend international negotiations on Syria. Consequently, this was the first time the world and regional powers were able to agree on the principles for a resolution to the Syrian crisis. Engagement with Iran works. It is ludicrous to think that crises in the region can be solved by sidelining Iran, an influential regional power in the Middle East.

Yemen is yet another battleground in the Middle East where the United States and Iran find each other with conflicting interests. The Houthis in Yemen are currently struggling against the combined efforts of Saudi Arabia and the other Persian gulf states who are attempting to reinstate deposed President Abdrabbuh Mansour Hadi. The Houthis have been operating with Iran's support. Washington's

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28. Ben Hubbard, "Iran's Foreign Minister Visits Syria for Talks With Assad," The New York Times, The New York Times, 12 Aug. 2015, [www.nytimes.com/2015/08/13/world/middleeast/irans-foreign-minister-visits-syria-for-talks-with-assad.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2015/08/13/world/middleeast/irans-foreign-minister-visits-syria-for-talks-with-assad.html).

29. "Not for US, Saudi to Decide for Syrians," PressTV, PressTV, 13 Feb. 2016, [www.presstv.com/Detail/2016/02/13/450142/Iran-Syria-US-Saudi-Arabia-Zarif-Kerry-Assad-Munich](http://www.presstv.com/Detail/2016/02/13/450142/Iran-Syria-US-Saudi-Arabia-Zarif-Kerry-Assad-Munich).

support for the Saudi led coalition currently bombing and blockading Yemen is opposed by Iran who has been sending humanitarian aid and weapons shipments to the war-torn country. The Saudi Kingdom (KSA) has been repeatedly accused of “bombing schools, markets, hospitals and other civilian targets.”<sup>30</sup> Severe food shortages caused by the Saudi blockade have left 17 million Yemenis hungry and severely malnourished. “The Saudi Arabia-led coalition has also [been using] cluster munitions, lethal explosive weapons banned under international law. When launched cluster bombs release dozens – sometimes hundreds - of small ‘bomblets’, which often lie unexploded and can cause horrific injuries long after the initial attack. Amnesty International has documented the coalition’s use of at least four different types of cluster munitions, including US, UK and Brazilian-manufactured models.”<sup>31</sup> Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif has submitted a four point plan to [the UN] outlining a peace process in Yemen calling for “an inclusive dialogue between all respective parties and the ‘establishment of an inclusive national unity government.”<sup>32</sup> The Saudi-US war on Yemen has created the world’s worst humanitarian crisis and no solution seems to be in sight.

The recent escalation of tensions between Qatar and its Arab neighbors has proven to be an interesting opportunity for Iran who has expressed support for Qatar. After the Saudi blockade of Qatar, Iran stepped in and began flying food shipments to the country. Iran’s policy saved Qatar from a total collapse because all other borders around Qatar were closed, and only Iran opened its borders.

The nuclear deal has facilitated a shift in power in the Middle East which is currently playing out in the region’s many proxy wars. Saudi Arabia and Israel opposed the nuclear deal and have been increasingly critical of the Islamic Republic. Many times during the nuclear talks, the KSA and the GCC encouraged the United States to attack Iran. According to leaked U.S. diplomatic cables, “King Abdullah of Saudi

30. "UN Agrees to Send War Crimes Investigators to Yemen," Yemen News | Al Jazeera. N.p., 29 Sept. 2017, [www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/09/agrees-send-war-crimes-investigators-yemen-170929162124149.html](http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/09/agrees-send-war-crimes-investigators-yemen-170929162124149.html).

31. "Yemen: The Forgotten War," Amnesty International, n.d., [www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2015/09/yemen-the-forgotten-war/](http://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2015/09/yemen-the-forgotten-war/).

32. Seyed Hossein Mousavian, "Is Iran Really to Blame for Yemen Conflict?" Al-Monitor, Al-Monitor, 10 May 2015, [www.al-monitor.com/pulse/ar/contents/articles/originals/2015/05/iran-saudi-houthis-yemen.html](http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/ar/contents/articles/originals/2015/05/iran-saudi-houthis-yemen.html).

Arabia repeatedly exhorted the United States to ‘cut off the head of the snake’ by launching military strikes to destroy Iran’s nuclear program.”<sup>33</sup> Saudi Arabia is one of the United States’ closest allies in the region and the recent \$110 billion arms deal has further cemented that alliance.<sup>34</sup> The recent conflicts in Yemen, Syria, Bahrain, and Iraq have led to increasing Saudi-Iranian confrontations with the United States often siding with Saudi Arabia and Israel spelling worse relations for Iran and the US. “In June [of 2017], Tillerson openly declared that U.S. policy towards Iran included regime change,” a stance supported by Tel Aviv and Riyadh.<sup>35</sup>

President Trump’s shared goal with Israel and Saudi Arabia to reduce Iran’s economic benefits from the nuclear deal to zero has successfully affected Iranian activity abroad.

Iran’s scramble towards better diplomatic relations with the international community after the nuclear agreement, however, has proven fruitful and has helped the country regain legitimacy in global affairs through diplomacy. China recently reiterated its support for Iran’s ascension to the Shanghai Cooperation Agency.<sup>36</sup> Iran has been seeking to change its observer status to that of a full time member since 2005. China’s recent change in tune has been welcomed by Russia who had been pushing for Iran’s admittance since 2015. Iran also plays an influential role in the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) and even chaired the organization from 2013 till 2016. As well as NAM, Iran is a member of OPEC and has proved a key player in the organization’s output policies. In 2014, Iran was awarded 4 year membership in several U.N. committees on human rights.<sup>37</sup> The

33. Ross Colvin and Additional Keith Weir, "Cut off Head of Snake" Saudis Told U.S. on Iran," Reuters, Thomson Reuters, 29 Nov. 2010, [www.reuters.com/article/us-wikileaks-iran-saudis/cut-off-head-of-snake-saudis-told-u-s-on-iran-idUSTRE6AS02B20101129](http://www.reuters.com/article/us-wikileaks-iran-saudis/cut-off-head-of-snake-saudis-told-u-s-on-iran-idUSTRE6AS02B20101129).

34. William Roberts, "Questions Raised over \$110bn Arms Deal to Saudi Arabia," USA News | Al Jazeera, Al Jazeera, 07 June 2017, [www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/06/questions-raised-110bn-arms-deal-saudi-arabia-170608033511760.html](http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/06/questions-raised-110bn-arms-deal-saudi-arabia-170608033511760.html).

35. Seyed Hossein Mousavian, "Commentary: A Former Iranian Diplomat on What Trump Needs to Know about Iran," Reuters, Thomson Reuters, 10 Oct. 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mousavian-iran-commentary/commentary-a-former-iranian-diplomat-on-what-trump-needs-to-know-about-iran-idUSKBN1CE22K>.

36. "China Reaffirms Backing for Iran's SCO Membership," Financial Tribune, N.p., 09 June 2017, <https://financialtribune.com/articles/national/66082/china-reaffirms-backing-for-irans-sco-membership>.

37. Adam Kredo, "Iran Wins Top Spots on U.N. Human Rights Committees," Washington Free Beacon, N.p., 24 Apr. 2014, [freebeacon.com/national-security/iran-wins-top-spots-on-u-n-human-rights-committees/](http://freebeacon.com/national-security/iran-wins-top-spots-on-u-n-human-rights-committees/).

Islamic Republic is now on the U.N. Economic and Social Council's Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), the Commission on Population and Development, the Commission on Science and Technology for Development, the Committee for Programme and Coordination, and "the leading U.N. committee that oversees the work of non-governmental organizations (NGOs)." Iran has expressed willingness to obtain full membership in the WTO based on the JCPOA and the full support of the EU, China, and Russia.

### The Way Forward

" 'No one should doubt my word', Trump said in his statement. 'I hereby call on key European countries to join with the United States in fixing significant flaws in the deal, countering Iranian aggression, and supporting the Iranian people. If other nations fail to act during this time, I will terminate our deal with Iran.' Trump's statement set out specific criteria for Congress, including a provision requiring 'immediate' access to Iranian facilities by international inspectors; and an explicit declaration that the U.S. sees Iran's long-range ballistic missile program and its nuclear program as 'inseparable.' Trump also insisted upon a undefined guarantee 'that Iran never even comes close to possessing a nuclear weapon.' But a senior administration official told reporters that means that Iran 'remains above a one-year breakout timeline,' which is what the deal currently mandates. Trump also said that any new Congressional provisions must have no expiration date. Most key provisions of the nuclear deal sunset in the next decade, which critics say will allow Iran to quickly resume its progress toward a nuclear weapon."<sup>38</sup>

Such a policy would kill both the nuclear deal and any chance for managing regional crises through diplomacy.

Rather than trying to kill the Iranian nuclear deal, President Trump can use the JCPOA as a model to engage with Iran on regional issues to foster peace and stability. The nuclear deal, a product of negotiations and communication, is a pathway for future success. Trump is facing an undesirable situation at home as well as challenges abroad, even with US allies. Congressional elections are coming up,

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38. Michael Crowley et al, "Trump extends Iran nuclear deal again," POLITICO, 12 Jan. 2018, [www.politico.com/story/2018/01/12/trump-extends-iran-nuclear-deal-again-337959](http://www.politico.com/story/2018/01/12/trump-extends-iran-nuclear-deal-again-337959).



and it is evident that Trump's power and standing in the country are weakening. In the meantime, with Trump's current Iran policy, unilateral American sanctions against Iran will continue, and it is possible that Trump may even pull out of the agreement.

Iran similarly has parliamentary elections this year. Rouhani is facing serious economic challenges, and it is unlikely that these problems will disappear by the parliamentary elections. Thus, we can predict that Rouhani's challenges domestically will only increase and Iran's hostility and confrontation towards America will increase due to Trump's policies.

Europe, Russia, and China need to stand up to America, and even in the face of an America withdrawal, preserve the deal with a p4+1 and maintain normal economic relations with Iran:

US withdrawal would have a dramatic and negative impact on international business with Iran that cannot be overlooked; Iran would not be able to enjoy economic benefits from the JCPOA and therefore would withdraw. There is only one way to prevent this. US withdrawal would put the other P5+1 members in a position where they would have to guarantee the promises of the JCPOA for economic benefits, normal business, banking, financial relations, and increased economic engagement with Iran in reaction to US misbehaviors. Only then, Iran may stay. Iran has stayed fully compliant in spite of American shortcomings in delivering on promises. Iran has maintained a united voice in its commitment to the nuclear deal, something very rarely found in the Islamic Republic. Rouhani's election rivals all pledged to comply with the nuclear accord even though many of them opposed the circumstances in which it was created.

If President Trump continues to wave the nuclear related sanctions, the Iranian government may tolerate President Trump's threats and stay committed to the nuclear deal. The Iran nuclear deal is the most comprehensive agreement made in the history of nonproliferation, containing the most intrusive transparency measures and objective guarantees on non-diversion towards nuclear weaponization. Even IAEA Director-General Yukiya Amano claimed that, "Iran is now subject to the world's most robust nuclear verification regime."<sup>39</sup> If

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39. "French Leader Raises Possibility Of Reopening Iran Nuclear Negotiations In 2025," Payvand Iran News, Payvand News, 19 Sept. 2017, [www.payvand.com/news/17/sep/1094.html](http://www.payvand.com/news/17/sep/1094.html).

this agreement stands, it will be a bold step towards nuclear non-proliferation and a positive example for future Nuclear Global Zero Bomb negotiations. This agreement could inspire renewed efforts at the Review Conference for the Treaty on the Nonproliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) in 2020 towards concrete progress in global nuclear disarmament. An unfaithful United States however, who has already backed out of the Paris Climate Accords and is now looking to sabotage the nuclear deal, leaves itself without credibility in future negotiations with North Korea and the world and may no longer have any weight towards its promises. Any possibility of successful negotiations with North Korea over their nuclear weapons would suffer immensely from an American failure to abide by the JCPOA.

Nevertheless, to maintain the nuclear deal we need a constructive regional dialogue between Iran and other regional and international powers. In 2003, Europe initiated the nuclear talks with Iran. Now is the time for Europe to help solve the regional crisis.

Solving the crisis in Yemen can prove to be a good start by forming a new group of P5+2 countries (five permanent members of UN Security Council plus Saudi Arabia and Iran) to manage the crisis through diplomacy. Diplomacy can save Yemen from a total collapse, address Saudi Arabia's security concerns, and create a regional agreement in which Yemen is free from foreign domination.

The P5 + 2 countries should work for an inclusive plan aimed at reaching an immediate and complete ceasefire, ending foreign incursions, facilitating widespread humanitarian assistance, resuming broad national dialogue, addressing the concerns of the various factions and stakeholders inside the country in a non-zero-sum manner, agreeing on a power-sharing system, and establishing a national unity government.

Among all crisis in the region, the Iranian nuclear crisis is the only case resolved peacefully through diplomacy. Trump can preserve the deal and use this model to manage other crises through diplomacy and engagement. Full and correct implementation of the deal would be the best confidence building measure to encourage Iran to engage with the US and other world powers on regional issues.

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