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Conflicts Of The Past As Lessons For The Present

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THE PROSPECTS OF A NEW IRAN DEAL

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PETER R. MANSOOR • EDWARD N. LUTTWAK • HY ROTHSTEIN

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Iran's Nuclear Program

By Peter R. Mansoor

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The Biden administration came into office with the hope of reentering the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA)—the nuclear deal with Iran—and thereby reduce tensions in the Middle East, an area of the world to which it would rather pay less attention. President Joe Biden has stated that the United States would reenter the JCPOA provided Iran comes back into compliance with its terms, but Iranian leaders have insisted on the lifting of U.S. economic sanctions first. Furthermore, Biden has indicated his desire for the agreement to address other areas, such as the Iranian ballistic missile program. The newly elected Iranian president, Ebrahim Raisi, a protégé of Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, has stated that areas not covered by the original JCPOA are off the table. Negotiations in Vienna among Iran and China, Germany, France, Russia, and Britain (with the United States on the margins) have to date failed to reach an agreement.

The background to the current impasse is complicated. On July 14, 2015, the Obama administration, along with China, France, Germany, Russia, and the United Kingdom, signed the JCPOA limiting Iran's ability to process fissile material. The United Nations Security Council endorsed the agreement six days later. The nuclear deal, the culmination of twenty months of negotiations, placed significant restrictions on Iran's nuclear program for a period of fifteen years. In return the international community lifted economic sanctions, which had crippled Iran's domestic economy. The nuclear deal was touted as the signature foreign policy achievement of Barack Obama's presidential tenure.

The Iranian nuclear program began in the late 1950s under the government of Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi. In 1970 Iran signed the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) in return for assistance under the U.S. "Atoms for Peace" program. The Iranian nuclear program went into abeyance after the 1979 revolution, with a number of nuclear scientists fleeing the country. After the disastrous eight-year war with Iraq concluded in 1988, Iran resumed nuclear research with the assistance of China, Pakistan, and Russia. A 2003 International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) report concluded that Iran had violated the NPT, leading to negotiations with the United Kingdom, France, and Germany (EU 3). The resulting Paris agreement in November 2004 led to Iran's suspension of nuclear enrichment and conversion.

The election of Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad led to the collapse of the Paris agreement. In February 2006, Iran resumed enrichment activities at Natanz. Four months later, the United States, Russia, and China joined the EU 3 to form the P5 + 1, which worked to limit Iran's enrichment capabilities. The first of six United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Resolutions addressing Iran's violation of the NPT passed in July 2006. The UNSC called on Iran to cease nuclear enrichment and imposed economic sanctions to pressure the Iranian government to comply with its resolutions.

Iran failed to comply with the resolutions. In September 2009, U.S. president Barack Obama revealed intelligence indicating the existence of an underground enrichment facility in Fordow, near the religious center of Qom. IAEA director Mohamed ElBaradei called for the lifting of sanctions in return for Iran's suspension

of enrichment, to no avail. The Green Movement in the summer of 2009 had shaken Ahmadinejad's government, and his hard-line crackdown on civilian protesters signaled its unwillingness to compromise with perceived enemies, foreign or domestic. The United States and Israel then deployed the Stuxnet computer worm, which interrupted the operation of centrifuges at Natanz, ultimately destroying approximately a thousand of the machines.

The election of a new Iranian president, Hassan Rouhani, in June 2013 broke the diplomatic logjam. Three days after his inauguration in August, Rouhani publicly called for a resumption of negotiations with the P5 + 1. The next month Rouhani spoke by telephone with Obama, and U.S. secretary of state John Kerry met with Iranian foreign minister Mohammad Javad Zarif. The first high-level contacts between the United States and Iran since the Iranian revolution of 1979 signaled the diplomatic possibilities surrounding the nuclear file. The Obama administration was concerned that absent an agreement, Iran could develop a nuclear weapon within a matter of months if it chose to do so. This danger could lead to a preemptive strike by Israel, or to the acquisition of nuclear weapons by Saudi Arabia, Iran's strategic competitor in the Middle East.

Negotiations between the P5 + 1 and Iran in Geneva led to the signing on November 24, 2013, of a Joint Plan of Action, an interim agreement that limited Iran's nuclear enrichment capabilities in return for the partial lifting of economic sanctions while negotiations sought a more permanent agreement. That agreement, the JCPOA, was finally inked on July 14, 2015. At its core, the agreement would extend the "breakout time"—the amount of time required for Iran to develop a nuclear weapon—to more than twelve months.

Specifics of the JCPOA included a ten-year cap on the number of operational centrifuges (from more than 20,000 to just over 6,000), a fifteen-year uranium enrichment cap of 3.67 percent (nuclear weapons require concentrations in excess of 90 percent), a fifteen-year cap on the stockpile of enriched uranium (from 10,000 to just 300 kilograms), redesign of the Arak heavy water reactor for peaceful nuclear research, a twenty-year period of continuous IAEA inspection of centrifuge production facilities, the termination of all UN Security Council Resolutions regarding the Iranian nuclear program, the cessation of U.S. and EU sanctions on Iran's oil and banking sectors, and the resumption of economic commerce including the sale of passenger aircraft and automobiles to Iran. Additionally, the United States and the EU released approximately $100 billion in frozen Iranian assets. U.S. sanctions on Iran targeting human rights, ballistic missiles, and terrorism remained unaffected by the agreement.

The Obama administration signed the JCPOA but refrained from submitting it to the Senate for ratification. This gave the agreement the force of an executive order, which could be quickly undone by a future Republican president. If President Obama desired a lasting foreign policy achievement, this was a fatal error.

Republican lawmakers and Israeli government officials immediately attacked the agreement as insufficient to permanently halt Iran's nuclear aspirations. While negotiations were in progress, on March 3, 2015, Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu traveled to Washington and spoke to a joint session of Congress, decrying the agreement as insufficient to curb Iranian nuclear ambitions. Without deeper and permanent concessions, Iran could follow North Korea into the club of nuclear-armed nations. Any deal should also be contingent on the cessation of Iran's bad behavior in the Middle East: its support for proxies in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and Yemen; its sponsorship of terrorism, and its public calls for the destruction of Israel.

The unspoken hope by the Obama administration was that the Iranian regime would moderate by the time the restrictions in the nuclear deal lifted. This was a significant miscalculation. Following the signing of the JCPOA, Iran abided by its restrictions but used the resources freed up by the deal to fund proxy groups across the Middle East, from Hezbollah in Lebanon and Syria to Houthis in Yemen to various military groups in Iraq. The revolutionary generation of 1979 was not disappearing—it was metastasizing. The quixotic hope for a more moderate Iranian government never came to pass, and probably will not happen provided the government remains in the hands of an all-powerful religious leader with no incentive to compromise.

The Trump administration entered office with a more clear-eyed vision of the sources of Iranian misconduct. The president lambasted the JCPOA as seriously flawed, deciding to withdraw from the agreement,

and reimpose U.S. economic sanctions on May 8, 2018. The other members of the P5 + 1 remained in the agreement, but without access to the U.S. banking system or the ability to export large amounts of oil, Iran's economy—80 percent of its exports linked to oil—tanked. The Trump administration enacted a policy of "maximum pressure," attempting to force Iran to agree to deeper and more permanent cuts in its nuclear program, limitations on its ballistic missile program, and withdrawal of support for proxy and terrorist groups in the region.

Iran retaliated by instituting a policy of "maximum resistance." Iranian forces and proxy groups attacked U.S. allies and interests in the Middle East, including strikes on Saudi oil facilities, interdiction of tanker traffic in the Gulf, proxy attacks on U.S. service personnel in Iraq, and the downing of a U.S. drone over the Strait of Hormuz. The Trump administration responded on January 3, 2020, by killing Iranian Revolutionary Guards Qods Force commander Major General Qassim Soleimani in a drone strike in Baghdad. Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, the commander of the Iraqi Popular Mobilization Forces, was also killed; Iraqi paramilitary groups continue to target U.S. forces in Iraq to this day to exact revenge. Iran also walked back portions of the JCPOA: doubling the number of centrifuges in operation, enriching uranium to 5 percent purity, and ending on-site inspections by the IAEA.

Despite the failure of the maximum pressure campaign to change Iranian behavior or induce it to renegotiate the JCPOA, the Biden administration would be ill-advised to reenter the agreement without exacting further concessions from Iran. Some of the restrictions of the current JCPOA expire in just four years, without a change in Iranian behavior or ambitions in sight. Time is on the side of the United States; Iran needs an agreement to restore its economic fortunes far more than the Biden administration needs a foreign policy achievement. The administration should remain firm and demand a revised and stronger agreement. In the best of all worlds, a new and stronger JCPOA could be presented to the Senate for ratification, giving it more permanence. Senate ratification would be a heavy lift in the current domestic political environment but provided the Biden administration gives due credit to Trump's policy of maximum pressure, bipartisan backing of a treaty might be possible. A treaty capable of Senate ratification will require much deeper Iranian concessions than are currently on the table, but such is the price Iran must pay to reach an agreement with the Great Satan that can withstand a change in presidential administrations.

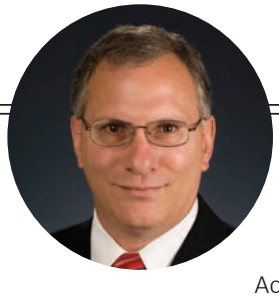

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Image credit: Poster Collection, IR 96, Hoover Institution Archives.

The Prospects of a New Iran Deal

By Edward N. Luttwak

The Biden administration and President Biden personally, like Obama and his administration before him, have promised that Iran shall not be allowed to acquire a usable nuclear-explosive device. Nor is that one of those political promises that can remain unfulfilled without immediate, highly visible, and highly damaging consequences for the president, the United States, and its allies and friends.

Moreover, given the institutional incapacity for more discreet capabilities (two noisy helicopter-loads of troops were sent against Osama Bin Laden, his gardener, and their two rusty AKs . . . and the operation is deemed praiseworthy), Biden's promise would require him to launch an aerial attack if all else fails.

That, moreover, would have to be a full-scale aerial offensive because of another institutional limitation: the U.S. Air Forces refuse to execute overnight "air strikes" against specific targets of interest as others might do. They insist on a preliminary, or at least a concurrent "suppression of enemy air defenses" campaign to destroy every surface-to-air missile battery in any location even if decades old and most likely rusted out; every fighter-class aircraft even if long since outclassed, if operable at all; and of course every air-defense radar and command post—the desired standard is that U.S. pilots executing air strikes should be safer than the passengers of some third world airlines. In the case of Iran and its nuclear targets, that would require some twelve thousand sorties requiring more than a week to execute, with hundreds and more likely thousands of incidental casualties. In theory, a president determined to have his way might insist on an overnight operation against the urgent nuclear targets alone, but that would entail an inordinate personal political risk, including a three-ring media circus over any aircrew casualties (even the late Donald Rumsfeld, who was by no means averse to overruling the uniformed military, could not prevent, with unfortunate results, the air strike against long inoperable Mig-17s that inaugurated the 2001 Afghan intervention).

In other words, if Iran continues on its path, President Biden would have to choose between a catastrophic loss of personal, political, and national credibility if he does not order military action (unlike Obama, he cannot feign indifference to the very notion) and authorizing a vast military operation that would add many unnecessary, bureaucratically mandated, costs and risks to the inherent war risks, including unpleasant, if strategically unimportant, Iranian retaliation.

That creates ideal conditions for the Iranian negotiators.

They might not again be blessed with a Kerry who sits down in their shop making it clear that he must buy the carpet even before negotiating prices (the then secretary of state relocated to Geneva, making it clear he would not leave till the "interim framework" was agreed, as it duly was on November 24, 2013), but they do know that Biden must accept their conditions.

These conditions include full freedom of action in developing ballistic missiles for any purpose including the delivery of any future nuclear warheads; full freedom of action to arm and direct the Shi'a militias of Iraq, Lebanon, Syria, and Yemen; full freedom of action to threaten U.S. allies in the region, and to attack those incapable of retaliating (the Saudi air force did nothing at all after Iranian drones and cruise missiles destroyed much of the gigantic oil processing plants at Abqaiq and Khurais on September 14, 2019, knocking out 5.7 million barrels a day of production). And of course the Iranian side demands an end to U.S. and UN sanctions, in exchange for the acceptance of some limits on some of their uranium enrichment activities, not including their ongoing development effort to increase the efficiency of the centrifuges, or any effective limits on their weapon design and explosive trigger development activities that have never been declared, nor explained when the International Atomic Energy Agency was apprised of physical evidence of weapon-related work. That is what Iran can count on, just like last time, but for the $400 million cash down payment airlifted as an advance on the total $1.7 billion paid to Iran to settle claims dating back to 1979.

In other words, President Biden deserves our sympathy for facing the Iranian negotiators with allies alongside him eager for a settlement, any settlement (except for the French, who almost walked out last time and have demands this time), with uniformed bureaucrats in the Pentagon who deny him perfectly feasible one-night military options, and his own strategic conscience that prevents him from signing off on just about anything and blithely call it a negotiating success. But sign he will.

Edward N. Luttwak works as a contractor for the U.S. Department of Defense and for some treaty allies, and has served as consultant to the White House chief of staff, the U.S. Department of State, and the U.S. Army, Air Force, and Navy. Luttwak also cofounded and heads a conservation cattle ranch in the Amazon. His books, including *The Rise of China viz. the Logic of Strategy*, *The Grand Strategy of the Byzantine Empire*, *The Grand Strategy of the Roman Empire*, and *Strategy: The Logic of War and Peace* have been published in multiple English-language editions, and also in twenty-five other languages, including Arabic, Bahasa, Chinese, Japanese, Hebrew, Mongolian, Korean, and Russian. He has also published other books in Italian and in Japanese only, and has a number of honorary as well as academic degrees.

Image credit: Poster Collection, IR 94, Hoover Institution Archives.

Can U.S.-Iranian Relations Be Remade?

By Hy Rothstein

The Biden administration is taking steps to restore the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, or the JCPOA, and lift sanctions imposed by the Trump administration that are inconsistent with the accord. The new administration also assumes that a resurrected JCPOA will be the basis for future agreements to address other areas of concern, including Iran's ballistic missile program and actions through its proxies that destabilize the Middle East. This initiative raises several important questions: First, what does Iran want? Second, does the United States have the credibility to broker a deal? And third, will a deal help or hurt Middle East stability?

What does Iran want?

Iran wants to have substantial influence in the region to which it belongs. Such a goal is natural and is not necessarily part any specific ideology or strategy. Iran is one of the most important states in the Middle East. This goal is independent of the political character of the current regime or any future regime. Furthermore, the same goal and thinking would apply regardless of who runs Iran. Iran competes with other states in the region for influence and as in other regions, competition involves interests that sometimes conflict, and sometimes converge with those of its neighbors. Like all states, Iran reacts to what it sees as threats and tries to counter those threats. In this respect, its posture is rather ordinary because such behavior is consistent with that of other nation-states.

In its quest for influence, Iran faces the disadvantage of being a minority in its own region. It is predominantly a Persian state in a neighborhood that is mostly Arab. It is also mostly Shia in a region in which most people are Sunni Muslims. Some influential religious Sunnis consider Shia barely tolerable. These circumstances contribute to Iran's sense of being threatened within their own neighborhood. No experience has contributed more to Iranian leaders' sense of being surrounded than the Iran-Iraq War in the 1980s. The long conflict was enormously costly with hundreds of thousands of casualties. Although Iraq started the war, most Arab states, including those facing Iran across the Persian Gulf, sided with Iraq. Iranians also remember that the United States took Saddam's side. This experience shaped how Iranian leaders think today and perhaps explains their desire to develop nuclear weapons and undermine U.S. presence in the region. As a result, Iran's strategic position and sensitivity towards security is arguably, quite rational.

One can easily argue that Iranian policies have been reactions to someone else's unfriendly actions. For example, Iran's support of Hezbollah was in response to Israel's invasion of Lebanon in 1982. When the United States convened a conference in 1991 to address Middle Eastern issues, forty-three states attended, but Iran was excluded from the invitation list. Tehran's response was to organize a counter-conference to adopt a more militant position toward Israel. Including Iran in the original conference would have likely precluded this response. Additionally, Iran did not start the wars in Iraq, Syria, or Yemen. It did not start the earlier war in Lebanon. It had nothing to do with the war that led to the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territory. It had nothing to do with the reaction to the Arab Spring in Egypt that established a new repressive

regime with destabilizing effects in the form of increased extremist violence. Claims that Iranian actions are the primary cause of instability in the Middle East or that Iran has a goal to dominate the region is inconsistent with the facts. This history is part of a larger picture, as Iranians see it, of hostile powers exploiting local circumstances to threaten Iran. The Trump administration's U.S.-Israeli-Saudi axis was the latest chapter in that history.

Does the United States have the credibility to broker a deal?

President Biden asserted throughout the 2020 campaign that under his leadership the United States would be "back at the head of the table." This notion reveals how detached from reality Washington has become. Washington's track record over the past two decades reveals incompetence rather than the indispensable nation of the past. A series of disasters starting with the 2003 invasion of Iraq and the subsequent destabilization of the Middle East, the ineffectual war in Afghanistan, incoherent policy in Syria, and even domestic failure surrounding the handling of the COVID-19 pandemic show a stunning lack of American leadership. Former president Trump's withdrawal from the Iran nuclear deal, a deal that had been carefully put together by Iran, the United States, five other major nations, and the European Union, further eroded America's reputation. Trump's "America First" nationalism damaged U.S. credibility overseas and damaged long-standing alliances.

More importantly, America's self-immolation domestically projects chaos, polarization, and dysfunction. American culture, shaped by the principles enshrined in the Declaration of Independence, was a cornerstone of American power. By the beginning of the 21st century, race and ethnicity were mostly in the background as defining characteristics of what it meant to be an American. Freedom and equality under the law, though imperfect, was a reality. Two centuries of progress towards creating a more perfect union began to fray during the Obama administration when race was again brought to the forefront. It was divisive and continued under Trump and has accelerated under the Biden administration. The narrative that the United States is a racist nation, and its institutions are purveyors of systemic racism is dishonest. The message being sent is that the bright glow from the shining city on the hill has dimmed. In such an environment everything Washington hopes to achieve on the foreign stage will be more difficult.

As a thought experiment, let us assume that the United States has the credibility to broker a deal. What would the deal, or the series of deals, entail? Since returning to the provisions of the JCPOA is currently being considered, what exactly does that mean? All constraints effecting Iran's nuclear programs phase out in 10–15 years under the 2015 agreement. We are well into this timeline. Plus, Iran has been enriching uranium to high concentrations since the United States withdrew from the agreement. Facility inspections by the International Atomic Energy Agency have ceased leaving the United States blind as to how far Iran has advanced towards having a nuclear weapon. Most importantly, any deal would require the lifting of the most significant economic sanctions—on the Central Bank of Iran and on oil sales. Once lifted, how would the administration induce Iran to negotiate a stronger agreement, much less negotiate follow-on agreements to cover other areas of concern? Finally, any deal would be vigorously opposed by Israel, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates. Military hardware, as a form of inducement to go along, would likely be used against Iran and its proxies undermining any benefit of a renewed JCPOA. The problems associated with going back to the JCPOA are obvious.

Will a deal help or hurt Middle East stability?

It is unlikely that a return to the JCPOA will benefit regional stability in the long term. The return would compound the error of the Obama administration of having a JCPOA policy instead of an Iran policy. Washington must reconsider how its interests are affected by Iranian actions in the Middle East and move beyond emotions that are a legacy of the 1979 hostage crisis. Much of today's U.S. policy toward an entire region is built narrowly around containing Iran.

In the past, ensuring the flow of oil for U.S. consumers, supporting Israel, fighting terrorists, and preventing the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction were goals Americans supported. These goals are

POLL: What are the prospects of a new "Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action" (JCPOA)?

- ☐ The JCPOA will be reset and finally bring peace to the Middle East.
- ☐ The U.S. and its allies will accept a nuclear Iran and a Persian/Shiite crescent to the Mediterranean.
- ☐ The JCPOA will be recalibrated——but eventually fall apart again.
- ☐ The JCPOA will last but ensure a nuclear Iran.
- ☐ There will soon be a major revision to the Middle East involving Iran.

less critical today and sacrificing American lives to obtain these goals is not likely. The United States is energy independent; Israel's strategic position has never been stronger; terrorism no longer holds the importance it once did largely due to U.S. and allied actions against terrorists over the last two decades. Lastly, actions to curtail Iran's quest for nuclear weapons have been unsuccessful. A different approach will be needed.

If the biggest U.S. interest in the region is to keep Iran from becoming a hegemon over the Middle East, she need not worry. Iran lacks the hard power to come anywhere close to hegemony. Its military spending is dwarfed by that of Saudi Arabia, UAE, and Israel. These countries possess modern equipment and have demonstrated the capacity to effectively use their weapons systems. Iran relies on obsolete military hardware. Besides the military balance, the region's ethnic and religious geography also works to Iran's disadvantage. There is no need to worry about Iranian hegemonic desires.

What about the link between U.S. interests and Iranian activity in Syria and Iraq? Iran has had close relations with Syria for decades. What difference does it make to U.S. interests that Iran has been supporting the Assad regime against ISIS and other threats, given that the U.S. lived with the Assads for nearly five decades? Nothing in the Iranian-Syrian relationship has increased the threat to the U.S. In Iraq, Iran is using its influence to help eliminate ISIS, as well as bolstering the Iraqi regime and, in the longer term, avoiding another Iran-Iraq War.

Iran still has the capacity to challenge its enemies and shows a willingness to do so. The Iranians have not backed down in the face of U.S. pressure. Iran wants the U.S. to leave the Middle East. This has been a stated goal for decades. Accordingly, Iran will continue to attack, indirectly, U.S. personnel and bases in a measured way. The "War of the Flea" against the U.S. will accelerate because of the successful drone strike that killed General Soleimani. The United States will not be able to completely deter Iranian action. Washington lacks coercive credibility and political dysfunction in Washington will undermine effective deterrence. Given this reality, Washington should consider a different tact.

Continuing to treat Iran as an incurable foe risks creating a self-fulfilling prophecy. The United States needs to better understand Iranian actions to determine what incentives might influence future Iranian decisions. Rather than focus on how to use force to deter, Washington needs to signal how Tehran could benefit from cooperation. Certainly, some type of nuclear deal for sanctions relief is necessary as a starting point. A resolution of the nuclear issue could help ease tensions between Iran and Israel, as well as with U.S. Sunni Arab allies such as Saudi Arabia who fear the possibility of Shiite Iran obtaining nuclear weapons.

While Washington needs to pursue direct, bilateral negotiations with Iran, any negotiations with Tehran must ultimately involve diplomatic engagement with all states of the Middle East in pursuit of greater stability and prosperity. The diplomacy should recognize that all states have some interests that conflict, and others that converge with those of the United States. Any formula needs to meet reasonable and legitimate requirements of all players, including Israel. In fact, the least important player may be the United States. The concerns and interests of the regional states must take precedence, whether America likes it or not.

To conclude, the United States will not fight a war in Iran. Sanctions impose a cost on Tehran but have a poor track record in shaping Iranian behavior on its nuclear program and its regional policies. Furthermore, America's coercive capability and credibility are insufficient to dissuade Iran's own coercive actions. The absence of formal diplomatic ties must end, otherwise Iran will continue to strengthen its ties with Russia and China to counter American actions. The United States must stop looking back and recognize Iran's legitimate interests in the region to which it belongs. Working with our enemies can be just as important as working with our friends, especially when reducing the spread of nuclear weapons is involved.

Hy Rothstein recently retired from the faculty at the Naval Postgraduate School in Monterey, California. His teaching career coupled with his military career as a Special Forces officer culminated fifty years of service to the Defense Department. Hy has spent considerable time in Afghanistan, Iraq, and the Philippines observing the conduct of those wars. Dr. Rothstein has written and edited books about Afghanistan, Iraq, the similarities between insurgency and gang violence, military deception, and the challenges of measuring success and failure during war. Dr. Rothstein taught courses on the strategic utility of special operations, military deception, and psychological and political warfare. He is currently working on an updated assessment of civil-military relations.

Destabilizing Detente

By Seth Cropsey

Renewed detente with Iran will undermine Near Eastern stability. Iran is more secure than it was in 2016. Despite the damage economic sanctions have done, Iran has escalated its campaign in the Levant, continued its pressure in Yemen, and more recently signed an economic agreement with China that will insulate it from the worst of renewed American punishment if it is found in breach of a new nuclear deal. An American detente with Iran would force Israel, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE to seek alternative security options. All three powers can mount a strike on an Iranian nuclear program and Israel has demonstrated its willingness to use independent capabilities to neutralize hostile WMD threats. The UAE and Saudi Arabia likely would activate nuclear programs out of necessity. Moreover, an American detente with Iran would allow Russia to retain a moderate diplomatic relationship with Iran *and* court the Saudi-Emirati-Israeli partnership, promising it a free hand against Iran in exchange for a diplomatic realignment that would end U.S. influence in this strategic fulcrum between Europe, Asia, and Africa. Russia could then balance between the two parties, oscillating between them as it has done with Turkey since 2014. In every scenario, an American-Iranian detente destabilizes the region.

Seth Cropsey is a senior fellow at Hudson Institute and director of Hudson's Center for American Seapower. He began his career in government at the Defense Department as assistant to Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger and subsequently served as deputy under-secretary of the navy where he was responsible for the navy's opposition to defense reorganization, development of the maritime strategy, and naval special operations. In the Bush administration, Cropsey served as acting assistant secretary of defense for special operations. Cropsey served as a naval officer from 1985 to 2004. His articles have been published in *Commentary*, *Foreign Affairs*, the *Weekly Standard*, the *National Interest*, the *Wall Street Journal*, the *Washington Post*, and other national journals.

The Path Forward with Iran

By Chris Gibson

We are half a year into the new Biden administration, but the complexity and frustration surrounding U.S. policy towards Iran that have vexed earlier administrations are already readily apparent.

Like the previous Trump administration, the Biden administration's goal is to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons while facilitating peace and stability throughout the Middle East. During the 2020 presidential campaign, then candidate Joe Biden was critical of President Donald Trump's perceived bellicose stance towards Iran, objecting to the Trump administration's withdrawal from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), which was concluded by the Obama administration with Biden's full support. Biden pledged

to reenter the JCPOA with the intent of improving and extending it to better achieve the aforementioned goals. It's not going well, and that's not surprising.

The realities and dynamics surrounding the Biden administration's foundering efforts stem from Iran's perception that Biden has boxed himself in, limiting U.S. leverage during ongoing negotiations. Simply put, the Iranian leadership believes Biden needs a new agreement more than they do, and they do not intend to budge. Iran's ability to withstand years of onerous sanctions by working around them, trading with and selling oil to nations willing to ignore U.S. exhortations, coupled with marked success Iran has had diplomatically dividing NATO members in general—and JCPOA signatories in particular—on negotiating positions has emboldened them to press the Biden administration for substantial sanctions relief with little concession. After all, the Obama administration didn't exactly achieve a strong agreement in the first place. This explains the recent lack of progress at Vienna. This is all happening against the backdrop of inexplicable damage to Iranian nuclear facilities and a mix of Israeli denials and ambiguous statements regarding their involvement in said developments. The U.S. and the world should be concerned.

Fortunately, there is still time to get this right. We should start by establishing a framework for a future that benefits the U.S., Iran, the broader Middle East, and the world. I nominate three overarching goals:

- An Iranian pledge to *permanently* renounce nuclear weapons and the implementation of an international oversight regime that *verifies compliance* with that pledge. Inspectors, which should include Americans, must be able to get anywhere, at any time, to ensure compliance.
- A pledge by all JCPOA parties to pursue peace and stability in the Middle East and an international oversight regime that *verifies that no exportation of state-sponsored violence* has occurred.
- Having achieved the first two goals, the implementation of sanctions relief and wide-ranging economic and social incentives for Iran to rejoin the community of nations and flourish.

The Trump administration chose to apply maximum pressure to force Iran to accept its unilateral goals and the Biden administration has tried at Vienna to reestablish the JCPOA. Neither succeeded.

We should pursue a third way: reestablish a policy of maximum pressure to force Iran to the table and then work with France as a mediator to persuade Iran that accepting the three aforementioned goals is in everyone's best interests, including Iran. French president Emmanuel Macron has credibility with both the U.S. and Iran and appears committed to achieving these three goals. Some sanctions relief could be tied to verified compliance with initial specific stipulations in the new agreement to build trust and demonstrate the positive effects of a peaceful negotiated settlement, but most of the sanctions would not be removed until both the first two major goals are verified as complete. Securing this kind of agreement will not only help stabilize the Middle East, it will also enable the United States to effectively pivot and focus on the civilizational challenge we face from China.

Chris Gibson is the twelfth president of Siena College, where he also serves as professor of leadership. Previously Chris served for three years as the Stanley Kaplan Distinguished Visiting Professor of American Foreign Policy at Williams College, a member of Congress from New York for six years, and as a soldier in the U.S. Army for twenty-nine years, including four combat tours in Iraq. Chris holds a PhD in government from Cornell University and is the author of *Rally Point: Five Tasks to Unite the Country and Revitalize the American Dream*, a book published by Twelve in October 2017.

Will Biden's Outreach to Iran Increase or Erode Middle East Stability?

By Josef Joffe

Barack Obama's tilt toward Tehran and away from Israel-cum-Arabs was as imprudent as Joe Biden's tilt II promises to be now. ***First***, it is bad realpolitik. As housekeeper of the global order, the U.S. will not thrive by bandwagoning with the local would-be hegemon, in this case Iran. The task is exactly the opposite: to corral local powers into a coalition balancing against Iran.

Second, it defies the imagination to believe that embracing Iran and weakening its regional foes will tame the Islamic Republic and still its ambitions. Why be a good citizen when the reins are dropped?

Which leads to the ***third point***, based on the distinction between revisionist and revolutionary powers. Revisionists who want a bigger pile of chips can be satisfied—you give, I give. Driven by a consuming ideology, revolutionists like the Tehran theocracy want to overturn the gaming table and deconstruct the casino furniture. Napoleon's Revolutionary France had to be vanquished by an all-European army, and Leninist Russia had to be patiently contained until the fires burned out.

How would the U.S. draw the line between Beirut and Basra without local allies who fear for their existence and thus have a good reason to join the posse? Nor will JCPOA II undo Iran's ambitions. It will use billions of dollars from the end of sanctions. With those new riches, Tehran will continue to pursue weaponization. It will extend the reach of its missiles, boost its expeditionary forces across the Middle East, and strengthen local surrogates between the Gulf and the Mediterranean.

To correctly size up the threats to stability does not require a PhD in international politics.

No sheriff, no posse. Indeed, the Arabs might go the opposite way if the U.S. is out as security lender of last resort by sidling up to Iran. Or go to another extreme, which is nuclearization. Since a nation can't order a full-fledged second-strike force from Amazon, Iranian preemption lurks on the longish path to, say, a Saudi Bomb. It is strewn with deadly risks. Iran would first hit high-value targets like oil to get the message across. The next targets would be nascent nuclear facilities.

Think also about Israel, which the Believers have sworn to rub out. Israel has chosen a smarter way than placation à la Obama/Biden or veiled threats of military action like Trump. Instead of either doing nothing or full-scale bombing, Israel has gone after the nuclear infrastructure without revealing its hand. The sub-strategic weapons are cyberwarfare and sabotage. No fingerprints, no in-your-face bragging, but the credible threat of attacking an Iran on the threshold of the Bomb.

Which leads to the ***fourth part*** of Biden's misperception. By keeping up relentless pressure, Israel is America's ace in the hole. It allows the U.S. to be the good cop who does diplomacy while Israel plays the bad cop by waving the instruments of torture.

Good guys don't score in the Middle East where power always beats propitiation. If Bidenesque affability triumphs, say goodbye to the Abraham Accords, the historic realignment that has done better than a dozen mediation attempts since the Eisenhower days. Who knows what dreams lurk in the minds of men? Hopefully, No. 46 will not go one worse than No. 44 and vacate the Middle East. If so, it will be a Hobbesian

world, not peace eternal. It has been the war of all against all for 4,000 years. Leave it and lose it. But coming back is vastly more costly than staying in to sober up whoever angles for hegemony.

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Revisiting Past Mistakes: A Revival of the Iranian Nuclear Deal

By Robert G. Kaufman

Samuel Johnson described a second marriage as a triumph of hope over experience. This adage sums up the Biden administration's determination to revive Obama's dangerous doctrine in the Middle East that failed dismally the first time around. Worse, this reprise of past mistakes threatens to undo the significant though provisional progress the Trump administration achieved in the region by doing exactly the opposite of its predecessor.

Instead of courting the rabidly anti-American Iranian regime, President Trump deemed Iran enemy number one in the Middle East. He rightly abrogated President Obama's Iranian nuclear deal because it facilitated Iran crossing the nuclear threshold even if the Iranians abided by it, depended on Iranian goodwill in nonexistent supply to verify it, subsidized Iranian aggression by lifting sanctions, and relied on the UN Security Council to reimpose sanctions in the less-than-reliable event we detected Iranian violations in a timely fashion. Obama's Iran deal also did not tame either Iran's genocidal threats toward Israel or Iran's relentless campaign to incite sectarian violence across the Middle East through its surrogates in Syria, Hezbollah in Lebanon, and the Houthis in Yemen. Nor did Obama's Iran deal constrain

Iran's burgeoning ballistic missile program menacing to America's allies in the region and, eventually, to our NATO allies in Europe.

Conversely, President Trump's reimposition of stringent primary sanctions and the threat of secondary sanctions crippled the Iranian economy, significantly diminishing the regime's capacity to project its power and its noxious doctrines beyond Iranian borders. President Trump's decision to move the American embassy to Jerusalem—emblematic of broader policy to embrace rather than distance the U.S. from a decent democratic Israel—bolstered American credibility globally. Contrary to dire predictions of Middle East regional experts, President Trump's repudiation of the fallacy of moral equivalence between Israel and its mortal enemies did not undermine in the least the administration's successful efforts to facilitate the emergence of a regional coalition—with Israel, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia as the linchpins—to contain Iran. President Trump managed to accomplish all this without involving the United States in another conflict in the Middle East that would have detracted from his long overdue goal of devoting primary energy and attention to the Indo-Pacific. President Trump's unstinting support for America's emergence as an energy superpower also diminished the imperative of embroiling the United States in many of the conflicts in the Middle East that our energy dependence on that volatile region had heretofore necessitated.

President Biden risked casting all of the Trump administration's progress away by doing the same thing as President Obama did while expecting different results. All signs attest to the Biden administration's eagerness to rejoin the Iran nuclear deal largely on Iran's terms—no significant changes in the deal's terms, a swift and significant easing of sanctions, and no fundamental change in Iran's external behavior. President Biden miscalculates, likewise, that reviving the Iran deal may pave the way for transforming Iran from an adversary to partner akin to Nixon and Kissinger's opening to China—an analogy Kissinger has assailed as false and dangerous. The Biden administration's conciliation of Iran goes beyond the Iranian nuclear program. Presenting the State Department's 2020 report on human rights, Secretary of State Anthony Blinken named Saudi Arabia as a significant violator while making no mention of an Iranian regime that is at least as bad or possibly even worse.[1] President Biden's restoration of aid to the Palestinians while giving President Netanyahu the cold shoulder and rejecting Israeli entreaties about the danger of the Iran deal signals the administration's inclination to put distance between the United States and Israel, another staple of the Obama Doctrine.

President Biden's reprise of the Obama Doctrine's flawed assumptions and policies in the Middle East will yield the opposite of what the administration intends:

- More turmoil, strife, and peril at the expense of U.S. interests and our principal allies in the region.
- An emboldened Iran facing less effective constraints.
- An impending nuclear arms race in the world's most volatile region as Saudi Arabia, Iran, Turkey, and other regimes react predictably to American conciliation of Iran that accepts de facto Iran possessing nuclear weapons.
- An increasingly imperiled Israel struggling whether to strike Iran preemptively, risking diplomatic isolation, or else contend with Iran's diabolical employment of its nuclear capabilities as a shield for its surrogates—Hamas and Hezbollah—waging a war of annihilation aimed at demoralizing Israelis at home and demonizing Israel internationally.
- Intensified pressure on Western countries to make unsavory bargains with Middle East tyrants as the Biden Green New Deal imperils our capacity to remain an energy superpower. Count on the chaos and erosion of American credibility in the Middle East having negative ramifications elsewhere, most ominously in the calculations of Xi Jinping and Vladimir Putin.

Meanwhile, our Middle Eastern allies and collaborators will mourn President Trump's defeat while yearning for a Republican victory in the 2024 presidential election that offers the most plausible option for reversing the Biden administration's perverse perilous course.

1 Eytan Gilboa, "Biden's Foreign Policy: New Administration, Old Missteps," *Jerusalem Post*, April 17, 2021, https://www.jpost.com/opinion/bidens-foreign-policy-new-administration-old-missteps-opinion-665442.

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Xerxes Made Us Do It: Iran, the Biden Administration, and Mid-East Instability

By Ralph Peters

Americans obsess over means, while our enemies focus on purpose. American decision makers and their paladins focus so intently on the practical requirements of an Iranian nuclear weapon that we forget to ask why this Persian-majority state wants one, thus obscuring simultaneous Iranian initiatives designed to achieve the same strategic ends through other means.

While the prospect of nukes in the paws of the Tehran regime is certainly unappealing, it's doubtful any Iranians, even the most embittered, would attempt to strike an adversary with such weapons. An Iranian nuclear capability would be about hegemony, not destruction: Iran—Persia still—is interested in empire not suicide.

While there is also a defensive quality—"Better not mess with us!"—to Iran's nuclear ambitions, the real strategic utility is to awe all those still standing amid the wreckage of the Middle East, to facilitate Iran's return to the regional dominance it believes to be its due: Iran's leaders, be they shahs or mullahs, see their patrimony—an inheritance stolen, in their view—as an imperial role in the vast region, leprous with history, between Beirut and Kabul, Mecca and Samarkand. We see history in snapshots; Persians read it as an endless scroll.

Suspend, for a moment, our excited focus on the here and now. Consider Persia's three-thousand-plus years of imperial ambitions, occasionally interrupted but never extinguished: It's a remarkable chronicle of persistence, whether its rulers were idolaters, Zoroastrians, or Muslims. Persia's enemies have been reduced to strategic impotence where they have not disappeared entirely: Hittites, Assyrians, Egyptians, Greeks (classical or Byzantine), Romans, Arabs, Mongols, Turks . . . apart from the comically (if deadly) ill-conceived designs of Turkey's current president, which old foe has a vision of empire restored?

While we have concentrated on the nuclear issue, Iran already has expanded (though not yet consolidated) its influence westward to the Mediterranean Sea, constructing a postmodern empire on the cheap, asserting its strategic vision while exploiting its current religious identity as a Shi'a state.

Not all has gone perfectly for Tehran. The Persian assumption of racial superiority over Arabs is an old, old story still told, impeding Iran's consolidation of hegemony in Iraq and Syria, while its hatred of Israel leads to tactical and operational setbacks throughout the region—and, probably, the ultimate denial of nuclear weapons to Tehran. Yet, we should be impressed with how much today's Persians have achieved with little outlay. The vast armies of Cyrus or Xerxes may be present in spirit, but a relative handful of Revolutionary Guards, in concert with clients, have staked today's claims far from home. Indeed, it may not be excessive to speak of the genius of the late General Soleimani, whose death at the hands of the Trump administration was as justified and essential as the action's reflexive critics were naïve.

As for an American return to a no-nukes compact of some sort with Iran, it would prove to be of immediate practical—economic—advantage to Tehran, but is unlikely to constrain Iran's overarching ambitions. On the other hand, it may be a necessary sacrifice on our part in order to further repair key alliances badly damaged by the last administration's unilateralism: NATO is worth far more to us than the United Arab Emirates.

An Iran nuclear deal has always been a naïve proposition, but once we were in it we should have honored it to placate our allies—and we should have killed more Iranian mischief-makers than just Soleimani.

If Iran has more than one path to fulfilling its ambitions, so do we: if, for reasons of accord, we must pay Iran a ransom, we needn't stop killing the bagmen.

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China, Iran, and Russia in the Middle East and the S.E. Mediterranean

By Zafiris Rossidis

On March 27, 2021, China and Iran signed a 25-year strategic cooperation agreement reaffirming China's effort to build an Asian axis of alliances and penetrate the Middle East. Russia cooperates with both of them as well as with Turkey, but also pursues its own strategy in the Middle East and with the Middle Eastern and North African countries.

The Tehran-Beijing agreement could serve as a precedent to lure Ankara into a similar strategic agreement, which would offer a lifeline to the collapsing Turkish economy, and also provide Ankara with a strong bargaining chip in the face of U.S. pressure. Moreover, it may also help Turkey to make the leap by turning its rift with the West into an abyss. If Turkey decides to stay on the Western side, then it can use the threat of siding with Tehran and Beijing to gain favorable exchanges form the U.S. and other allies (i.e., a more extended power role in Eastern Mediterranean, carte blanche for its aggressiveness in the Aegean, a watchdog role in Libya, a free hand in Syria, a vanguard to sting Russia's vulnerable border with Azerbaijan, to mention only a few). If Turkey decides to break its alignment with the West, it will solidify its pacts with China and Iran to make up for the losses it will suffer by leaving the West. As an indication of China's effort to increase its presence in the region, consider the Middle East tour conducted in March by China's foreign minister, Wang Yi, during which he visited not only Iran but also Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Turkey, Oman, and Bahrain.

Iran's strategy after 1979 has led to the creation of a "Shiite crescent" that starts in Iran and ends in the Mediterranean Sea via Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon, plus the Shiites of Bahrain and the Houthis in Yemen. Israel and the Gulf monarchies have not been able to stop this expansion. Iran has achieved a lot, despite its isolation: it has sent dozens of Shiite paramilitary organizations, as well as members of the Revolutionary Guard to Syria. Its allies in Yemen (the Houthis) continue to control most of northern Yemen. In Lebanon, Hezbollah remains the most powerful militant group, while in Iraq the Shiite militia continues to operate unhindered.

U.S. sanctions have created serious problems for the Iranian economy, only further exacerbated by the coronavirus pandemic. Even if a new deal on Iran's nuclear program emerges, the United States should not stop blocking Iran's expansion into the Middle East because it threatens its allies (Israel and Saudi Arabia) and reinforces sectarian violence and terrorism. America will certainly be assisted by the axis of Saudi Arabia—United Arab Emirates and their allies (Bahrain, Jordan, and Yemen) with which Iran has been in a "proxy war" for at least a decade. Given the Chinese presence in the Middle East, through the strategic agreement with Iran, the U.S. policy of putting pressure on the Gulf monarchies with human rights at the forefront, seems problematic.

A serious accelerator of Iran's expansion in the area is Turkey. Today, Turkey and Iran have developed an opportunistic, yet effective type of cooperation. It is a fact that the two countries have common interests in energy, in nuclear aspirations, and in Kurdistan. Even though they have conflicting interests due to their efforts of gaining the role of protectors of the opposing Sunni and Shi'a factions respectively, their short- and medium-term interests overpower their differences. Best proof for this is the engagement of Turkey in the bypassing of sanctions against Iran (Halkbank case).

Russia has already secured its presence in the Middle East. Moscow and Tehran are cooperating for three reasons. First, their shared enmity towards the U.S. Second, Western sanctions have brought the two countries (and Turkey) closer to economic cooperation. Third, they have common interests in Syria—the survival of the Assad regime and the elimination of ISIS. In Syria, Iran provides "the boots on the ground," suffering

casualties, whereas Russia launches air and missile strikes, avoiding human losses, which could have a negative impact on Putin's popularity in Russia. Russia, however, does not want Iran's permanent presence in Syria because that would reduce Russian influence there.

China, on the other hand, has every reason to tighten its ties with Iran. First, Iran is part of the new Silk Road (Belt and Road Initiative) and the ports that China is building there significantly strengthen its presence in the Persian Gulf. China also looks forward to future energy cooperation with gas-rich Iran. The geostrategic implications for the U.S. are serious: The prospect of building a pipeline from Iran to Pakistan (which is dependent on China because of India) and from there to Chinese territory is strengthened (China-Pakistan Economic Corridor [CPEC]). So how wise is the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan? And given the Iran-China deal, how reasonable does U.S. pressure on India not to buy the S-400s seem? It threatens to eradicate India from strategic cooperation with Japan and Australia. India is neither a NATO member nor has it asked for F-35s to raise issues such as those with Turkey.

In addition, Iran is one of the main reasons for the U.S. stay in the Middle East. This benefits China, which is trying to delay the implementation of the American "Pivot to Asia," with the aim of halting China. Finally, Iran may be a stopover in the Middle East. The Chinese want to infiltrate the area by building or controlling infrastructure. Iran could contribute to China's penetration of the Levant (i.e., the port of Beirut and the reconstruction of Syria) which would lead to the expansion of the Chinese presence on the eastern shores of the Mediterranean, not to mention their cultural and economic penetration in the Balkans, boosted by their anti-CORONA diplomacy in the region.

Iran plays an important role in the Middle East, and the Eastern Mediterranean, by reflection. It also influences the policies of Russia and China. It seems that relations with Russia are more conjunctural, while with China they have a strategic character. In any case, Iran will continue to influence the region for many more years, depending on how long of a leash the United States allows it to have.

The assessments and opinions expressed in this article are strictly those of the author himself and in no case of the Hellenic Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

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The Biden Administration and Middle East Stability

By Barry Strauss

The Middle East is one of the world's most volatile regions. How can the United States use its power to help bring peace there? A blessing in and of itself, Middle East peace would also free the U.S. to turn its attention to what is now an area of greater strategic importance to it, the Asia-Pacific region.

The Obama and Trump administrations had two diametrically opposed solutions to the problem. Obama followed a policy of appeasing Iran, a revolutionary and expansionist regime since the 1979 revolution. By negotiating the 2015 nuclear arms agreement with Iran, the U.S. pushed back Iran's progress toward acquiring nuclear weapons. The price, however, was lifting sanctions and making cash payments. The result left the Iranian regime better able to expand its power in the region by nonnuclear means.

Trump followed a different policy. With the Abraham Accords, the Trump administration got four Arab states—Bahrain, Morocco, Sudan, and the United Arab Emirates—to normalize relations with Israel, with Saudi Arabia a silent partner. It's a milestone to have former enemies agree to open up to each other. So is the geopolitical bottom line, to wit, building an anti-Iranian coalition in the Middle East. It was part of a Trump administration strategy to keep the peace in the region by a combination of tough sanctions on Iran, toleration of Israeli covert actions against Iran's nuclear facilities, closing off the financial spigot that financed Palestinian terrorism, and the encouragement of new agreements between Muslim states and Israel. That strategy, however, is now being upended by a return to Obama era policies.

The Biden administration is determined to negotiate a return to the 2015 deal with Iran, or at least a revised version thereof, in which Iran would pledge to slow its drive toward nuclear weapons in exchange for the lifting of sanctions and perhaps additional financial incentives. In practice, a revised deal won't work. Iran cheated on the 2015 deal with gusto and will surely cheat again. The upshot will be the very nuclearization of the Middle East that the U.S. wishes to avoid. If the U.S. agrees to Iran's condition of lifting all sanctions, the U.S. will lose any leverage of enforcing the deal other than by violent means. More important, Iran is destabilizing the Middle East other than with the threat of nuclear weapons: with Iranian militias in Syria; Iranian support for the Houthis in Yemen and their attacks on Saudi Arabia and on Israeli shipping; with its support of Hezbollah in Lebanon; and with the threat of missile attacks on Israel.

In its first hundred days, the Biden administration has lifted sanctions against the Houthis. It has restored aid to the Palestinian Administration (PA) that the Trump administration had cut off because of the PA's support for terrorism. Biden has appointed several anti-Israel advocates to important foreign policy positions in the administration. It may or may not be an accident that the Houthis have since launched drone attacks that the Saudis have shot down. Or that Iranian-backed rocket attacks, on targets in Iraq housing U.S. personnel, have increased. Or that the PA has canceled the upcoming elections that threatened its hold on power. Or that violent riots targeting Israeli civilians have recently broken out in Jerusalem and the West Bank.

Iran has frequently said that it considers the destruction of Israel among its chief foreign policy goals. Israel has said that it considers a nuclear Iran to be an existential threat, and so it opposes a renewed deal. As part of that deal with Iran, the U.S. will surely try to prevent any future Israeli covert actions against Iran, no doubt on the grounds such as (a) they could only stop Iran temporarily and (b) they would only stir up a violent reaction. Israel has said that that it won't feel bound by any new deal, and that it will retain its freedom of action against Iran. Where will that leave the US-Israel relationship? And where will it leave the anti-Iran coalition of the Abraham Accords? The participants might double down on the agreement or they might decide to make friends with Iran after all.

Saudi Arabia is at least considering the latter course. While the Iranians have green-lighted increased Houthi attacks on the Kingdom, they have also begun talks with the Saudis to explore détente. Ever fearful of a threat from Iranian expansion, the Saudis no longer feel that they have Washington's support for a policy of confrontation, as they did under the Trump administration. Although not a party to the Abraham Accords, Saudi Arabia's behavior will influence the agreement's future.

Morocco, on the other hand, is a party to the Accords, and has recently been given grounds to maintain its support. The Biden administration has agreed to abide by the Trump administration's decision to recognize Morocco's claim to the disputed territory of Western Sahara. That recognition was Morocco's condition for signing the agreement, so Morocco will presumably continue in the Accords. Yet Morocco is hardly a major player on the level of the Saudis.

History shows that appeasement works only if the state to be appeased is fundamentally peaceful and committed to coexistence. Iran is not such a regime. It has ambitions to dominate the region, export revolution even further afield, and to destroy the state of Israel.

"Death to America!" is second only to "Death to Israel!" as a chant used to stir up crowds in Iran, and has been since the revolution of 1979. It is hard to understand why the U.S. government wishes to empower such a regime. Why is the U.S. pursuing such a destructive course of action? Who benefits?

The Middle East will be many things under the Biden administration but, unfortunately, more peaceful is not one of them. Just the opposite is likely to happen.

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The Constitution and the JCPOA

By John Yoo

The first great conflict of Joseph Biden's presidency will erupt on the field of foreign policy. In his most significant foreign policy achievement, Donald Trump withdrew from Barack Obama's Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), which traded limits on Iran's nuclear program for billions of dollars and an end to Western

economic sanctions. In his knee-jerk rejection of all things Trump, the former senator and vice president has promised that he would immediately rejoin the JCPOA in his hopeless quest for a peaceful settlement with the mullahs in Teheran.

Reentering international agreements terminated by Trump sits at the top of the Biden agenda. "The United States will rejoin the Paris Agreement on day one of my presidency," Biden promised in December 2020, referring to the global climate change agreement. Biden envisions the same for U.S. participation in the World Health Organization, dismissed by Trump for its coverup of the COVID-19 pandemic's origins in China, and the JCPOA. Agreed upon by China, France, Germany, Russia, the U.K., the European Union, and the U.S. in April 2015, the agreement codified Iran's promise not to develop nuclear weapons in exchange for an end to Western economic sanctions. Rather than use the billions in released dollars to the benefit of their impoverished people, the mullahs in Tehran sent the cash abroad to fund terrorists in Lebanon, its government allies in Syria, and rebels in Yemen. President Trump wisely pulled the U.S. out of the agreement in May 2018 and imposed, with congressional acquiescence, even harsher sanctions that have pushed Iran to the brink of economic collapse. Iran's ability to foment terrorism and undermine our allies in the region, such as Israel, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt, has suffered as a result.

Despite these gains from Trump's Middle East strategy, Team Biden has announced its intentions to reenter the JCPOA. This would only reward Iranian malevolence. The mullahs have never given up their nuclear ambitions; after hiding a covert nuclear weapons program, it greeted European efforts to keep the JCPOA alive by building up its enriched uranium stockpiles beyond approved limits. Nevertheless, Biden announced in December, "If Iran returns to strict compliance with the nuclear deal, the United States would rejoin the agreement as a starting point for follow-on negotiations." According to media reports, Iran is demanding that the incoming administration immediately rejoin the agreement and lift all sanctions unconditionally, without any corresponding freeze in Iranian uranium enrichment. It also intends to seek compensation for the economic losses caused by the Trump administration sanctions. Chutzpah apparently is not just an Israeli concept.

Republicans can attempt to stop the JCPOA first by demanding adherence to the Constitution. In yet another demonstration of his disregard for the Constitution, President Obama refused to submit the agreement to the Senate as a treaty. Article II of the Constitution, however, recognizes only a single manner for the federal government to enter international agreements: the president "shall have Power, by and with the Advice and Consent of the Senate, to make Treaties," but only if "two thirds of the Senators present concur." Article II's plain meaning and history requires that any agreement that restricts the nation's sovereignty must undergo Senate approval by a two-thirds supermajority.

Joe Biden himself used to believe that the Senate had to consent to all significant international agreements, at least when Republican presidents made them. "With the exception of the SALT I agreement, every significant arms control agreement during the past three decades has been transmitted to the Senate pursuant to the Treaty Clause of the Constitution," Senators Biden and Jesse Helms declared about the 2002 Treaty of Moscow, in which the U.S. and Russia agreed to deep reductions in their nuclear arsenals. "No constitutional alternative exists to transmittal of the concluded agreement to the Senate for its advice and consent." In the 1980s, Biden even attacked President Reagan's missile defense programs because they went beyond the terms of the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty with the Soviet Union, and therefore required a new amendment to the treaty. He went so far as to pen a scholarly article declaring the treaty power to be "a constitutional partnership" between the president and Senate.

Republicans in the Senate can force President Biden to live up to his own words. The Constitution requires that treaties receive supermajorities to guarantee that they are backed by the highest levels of political consensus. "The vast importance of the trust, and the operation of treaties as laws, plead strongly for the participation of the whole, or a portion, of the legislative body in the office of making them," Alexander Hamilton explained in *Federalist No. 75*. Allowing a single man to make international agreements, he warned, would not just risk unwise decisions, but also open the possibility of the personal corruption of a President who might be tempted either by avarice or ambition.

The Biden administration is sure to resurrect Obama's claim that the JCPOA did not amount to a treaty because it did not constitute a legally enforceable agreement. The JCPOA was not even "a signed document," the Obama State Department explained, but just a series of "political commitments." But in 2015 congressional hearings, the administration more candidly admitted that it did not comply with the Constitution's treaty process because it could not persuade two-thirds of the Senate of the JCPOA's merits. "Well, Congressman, I spent quite a few years trying to get a lot of treaties through the United States Senate, and it has become physically impossible," Secretary of State John Kerry told the House Foreign Affairs Committee. "That's why," he added. "Because you can't pass a treaty anymore." Kerry has joined the Biden administration as "climate czar."

Republicans responded to the Obama administration's constitutional delinquency by enacting the 2015 Iran Nuclear Agreement Review Act. While INARA unfortunately reversed the Constitution's presumption against entering international agreements—it required Congress to pass a law to *reject* the JCPOA, subject to presidential veto—it at least forced all members of the House and Senate to vote on the record on whether to support such a flawed agreement. Republicans in Congress could rightly demand that Biden submit a renewed JCPOA to Congress for another up-or-down vote, or risk mandatory sanctions on Iran that would doom any fresh nuclear deal.

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Discussion Questions

1. How precisely does a reckless and empowered Iran serve the strategic purposes of China and Russia?
2. Are there auxiliary agendas in pushing for a new Iran Deal?
3. What is the effect of any deal on moderate Arab regimes and Israel?
4. What would the United States do if American allies conducted a successful preemptive attack on Iranian nuclear facilities?
5. Is there any reasonable chance of stopping Iranian nuclear proliferation?

Suggestions for Further Reading

- "The Maximum Pressure Campaign Against Iran Is Working," Intelligence2 Debates (March 4, 2020). https://www.intelligencesquaredus.org/debates/maximum-pressure-campaign-against-iran-working
- "What to Do About Iran," *The Caravan* (Hoover Institution), Issue 2131 (June 15, 2021). This publication of the Hoover Institution's Working Group on the Middle East and the Islamic World contains essays by Russell A. Berman, James Jeffrey, Miles Maochun Yu, Alma Keshavarz, Bernard Haykel, Dania Koleilat Khatib, Robert Lieber, James Jay Carafano, and H. R. McMaster. https://www.hoover.org/publications/caravan



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America After Afghanistan

Military History in Contemporary Conflict

As the very name of Hoover Institution attests, military history lies at the very core of our dedication to the study of "War, Revolution, and Peace." Indeed, the precise mission statement of the Hoover Institution includes the following promise: "The overall mission of this Institution is, from its records, to recall the voice of experience against the making of war, and by the study of these records and their publication, to recall man's endeavors to make and preserve peace, and to sustain for America the safeguards of the American way of life." From its origins as a library and archive, the Hoover Institution has evolved into one of the foremost research centers in the world for policy formation and pragmatic analysis. It is with this tradition in mind, that the "Working Group on the Role of Military History in Contemporary Conflict" has set its agenda—reaffirming the Hoover Institution's dedication to historical research in light of contemporary challenges, and in particular, reinvigorating the national study of military history as an asset to foster and enhance our national security. By bringing together a diverse group of distinguished military historians, security analysts, and military veterans and practitioners, the working group seeks to examine the conflicts of the past as critical lessons for the present.

Working Group on the Role of Military History in Contemporary Conflict

The Working Group on the Role of Military History in Contemporary Conflict examines how knowledge of past military operations can influence contemporary public policy decisions concerning current conflicts. The careful study of military history offers a way of analyzing modern war and peace that is often underappreciated in this age of technological determinism. Yet the result leads to a more in-depth and dispassionate understanding of contemporary wars, one that explains how particular military successes and failures of the past can be often germane, sometimes misunderstood, or occasionally irrelevant in the context of the present.

Strategika

Strategika is a journal that analyzes ongoing issues of national security in light of conflicts of the past—the efforts of the Military History Working Group of historians, analysts, and military personnel focusing on military history and contemporary conflict. Our board of scholars shares no ideological consensus other than a general acknowledgment that human nature is largely unchanging. Consequently, the study of past wars can offer us tragic guidance about present conflicts—a preferable approach to the more popular therapeutic assumption that contemporary efforts to ensure the perfectibility of mankind eventually will lead to eternal peace. New technologies, methodologies, and protocols come and go; the larger tactical and strategic assumptions that guide them remain mostly the same—a fact discernable only through the study of history.

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