



**July 23, 2015**

**Testimony before the House Foreign Affairs Committee**

*Prepared Statement of Ilan Goldenberg*

*Senior Fellow and Director of the Middle East Security Program, Center for a New American Security*

Chairman Royce, Ranking Member Engel, Members of the Committee, thank you very much for the opportunity to testify before you today about the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) recently agreed to by Iran and the P5+1 in Vienna. This is a historic moment in American foreign policy and it is important that Congress exercises its crucial role and reviews this agreement.

I will focus my remarks today primarily on the strengths and weaknesses of the agreement as well as the potential alternatives to the nuclear agreement negotiated by the Obama administration. I will then review the potential regional implications of the agreement for Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Israel. Finally, I will close with a series of recommendations for how Congress can exercise its oversight role to improve the likelihood of success of the agreement, while also pushing back on Iranian influence in the region, reassuring our regional partners, and looking for possible openings in the aftermath of the deal.

**The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action**

*Creating the Necessary Window of Vulnerability*

The nuclear agreement reached in Vienna creates conditions that have a high likelihood of deterring Iran from ever trying an overt or covert breakout to a nuclear weapon. To understand why, it is important first to understand Iran's nuclear strategy. Since the start of the Obama administration, Iran has been within a year's time of obtaining enough nuclear material for a bomb. However, during this time Iran has not actually pursued a bomb. The final steps necessary to reach over 90 percent highly enriched uranium are quite conspicuous and cannot be explained as dual use activities meant for Iran's civilian nuclear energy program. Any attempt to pursue this course of action would be quickly noticed, creating a window of vulnerability during which Israel, the United States, or some international coalition could strike the program and set it back. Iran has slowly sought to shrink this window of vulnerability so that should it ever decide to break out, it would be able to do so with less risk. This strategy has entailed building more centrifuges, improving their efficiency, increasing stockpiles of low enriched uranium, and building facilities that are more difficult to attack. The real measure of this deal's effectiveness is whether or not it can reverse Iran's attempts to expand its nuclear program and set the Iranians far enough away from a nuclear weapon that they will never dare risk pursuing a breakout. In other words, a deal has to keep that window of vulnerability large enough. That is precisely what this deal does.

The agreement puts in place the conditions to successfully deter Iran from pursuing an overt breakout using its existing uranium enrichment facilities. The limitations Iran has agreed to on the size of its enrichment program include no more than a 300 kilogram stockpile of 3.67 percent of low-enriched uranium for 15 years; 6,000 spinning centrifuges for 10 years; and limitations on research and development of next generation centrifuges. Together these limitations create a one-year breakout time



for the first ten years of the agreement and a shrinking breakout time during years 10–15 that is likely to still keep Iran further from a nuclear weapon than the two-to-three month breakout time that it faces today. These timeframes should create a sufficient window of vulnerability in which Iran is deterred from pursuing a nuclear weapon through this pathway out of fear that it would be quickly caught and stopped if it tried a covert breakout to a bomb. It is also important to note that these breakout times are based on worst case scenarios that assume Iran will dash to only one weapon; in reality states that pursue nuclear weapons start by dashing to a small arsenal so it may have a credible deterrent and the ability to test a nuclear weapon. This would take significantly longer than one year.

The agreement also blocks the plutonium pathway by forcing Iran to replace the core of the Arak heavy water reactor. The current core, if made operational, could produce spent fuel that if further processed could produce one to two bombs worth of plutonium each year. The new core will only be able to produce enough plutonium for one bomb every four years and only if Iran were to take steps to modify it that would be immediately detected by the IAEA. Beyond that, Iran has agreed to forgo all reprocessing capabilities so it will not have the capacity to convert the spent fuel into material that could be used for a nuclear weapon. It has agreed to ship all spent fuel out of Iran.

The agreement should also be able to successfully deter Iran from covertly pursuing a nuclear weapon using secret facilities. The unprecedented cradle to grave inspections mechanisms, including 25 years of access to Iranian uranium mining facilities, 20 years of access to centrifuge production facilities, the permanent ratification of the Additional Protocol, and a dedicated procurement channel will make it exceedingly difficult for Iran to establish an entirely new secret production chain apart from its existing facilities. It is also important to note that even with less stringent inspections in the past, when Iran cheated it was caught at both Natanz and Fordow long before either of those facilities became operational. A full and public confession of all of Iran's previous nuclear weapon research previous activity is not necessary. Instead, it is important that nuclear scientists and intelligence professionals have sufficient information about the past to be able to detect similar work in the future. The roadmap agreed to by Iran and the IAEA fulfills this condition and ensures that questions about the possible military dimensions of Iran's nuclear program are addressed before any sanctions relief is granted.

Finally, the agreement keeps in place sufficient leverage to deter Iranian cheating and ensure that Iran lives up to its commitments. The agreement creates a structure whereby major sanctions relief is not granted until after Iran has taken significant steps that are very difficult to reverse. It also puts in place a sanctions snapback mechanism that allows the United States and its European partners to quickly reimpose sanctions without the possibility of a Russian or Chinese veto. Thus, the costs for Iranian cheating will remain high even after sanctions relief.

#### *The Sunset Problem*

Of course, the agreement is far from perfect as no tough international negotiation yields a deal that is completely satisfactory to all sides. Perhaps the greatest weakness of the agreement is that some of the constraints on Iran's nuclear activities are lifted after 10–15 years, particularly with regards to its



centrifuge capacity and ability to conduct research and development on next-generation centrifuges. Opponents will rightfully argue that there is a danger that this agreement leaves in place the potential for Iran to become a nuclear threshold state in 15 years and it is certainly true that permanent restrictions would have been more effective.

The good news is that the agreement still leaves in place a number of sufficient checks that last longer than 15 years. Most important, the key elements of the inspections regime, including the Additional Protocol, remain in place forever or for 25 years, giving the United States and its partners unprecedented visibility into Iran's nuclear program. Iran is also forbidden from ever pursuing any research and development activities that could contribute to the development of a nuclear explosive device, including uranium or plutonium metallurgy activities. Through the joint oversight mechanism the United States will have the ability to gain visibility into Iran's research and development plans and block any changes Iran proposes that the United States find unacceptable.

Additionally, the civilian nuclear cooperation that is envisioned in the agreement will over time ensure that the types of technologies that are shared with Iran allow it to build out a normal civilian nuclear program, while constraining its ability to use these technologies for weapons purposes. Indeed, there is a long history of non-proliferation agreements, including 1-2-3 agreements designed to share top-end civilian nuclear technology while specifically putting in place limitations that prevent a country from weaponizing and provide economic incentives for it to not pursue nuclear weapons.

It is also important to note that there is no other option that could ensure that for the next 15 years Iran will not have nuclear weapons, including military strikes. And 15 years is a long time in the unpredictable and unstable Middle East. In a region facing so many other problems, dramatically restricting Iran's nuclear program for 15 years is certainly a notable achievement. If 15 years from now Iran chooses to violate the agreement or does not appear to be pursuing a credible civilian nuclear energy program, the same diplomatic, economic, and military options will be available to the United States and its partners.

#### *No Credible Alternatives*

While the agreement is not ideal, it is far superior to the alternatives that have been posited. Opponents argue that the United States should have held out, imposed tougher sanctions, and reached a better deal that eliminated Iran's nuclear capabilities. But the reality is that the United States and its partners already tried that approach and it failed.

Between 2003 and 2005 Iran suspended its nuclear program and entered negotiations with France, Germany, and the United Kingdom. At the time, Iran had a nascent program with 164 centrifuges and was willing to accept an agreement similar to the one that proponents of a better deal today extol. But rather than take that agreement, the parties walked away.

Afterwards, the United States and its partners began the effort to increase economic pressure on Iran, levying multiple Security Council resolutions and building out a robust international sanctions regime.



Iran responded by increasing the size of its nuclear program, building 20,000 centrifuges and changing facts on the ground – all of which occurred under sanctions pressure. At the time of President Rouhani's election in 2013 Iran's breakout time to a bomb's worth of highly enriched uranium had decreased to only two to three months. At that point, the President Obama had a choice either to seize the opportunity for an opening and freeze Iran's nuclear program through the Joint Plan of Action or continue to apply pressure. If the United States had continued to apply pressure and gone for a "better deal," Iran would have continued to build out its program. By now, Iran's economy would have been even more devastated, but it also would be only weeks away from a bomb. And the United States would be faced with the very real dilemma of pursuing military action or allowing Iran to achieve a virtual nuclear capability.

The possibility of renegotiating a better deal is even more infeasible today than it was prior to the agreement in Vienna. Now that the United States, Iran, and five other world powers have come to an agreement on Iran's nuclear program, the idea that Congress could vote it down and bring Iran to the negotiating table is unrealistic. Instead, Iran would walk away and begin moving forward on its nuclear program even as unity between the United States and its P5+1 partners would be shattered by the United States going back on its word and not fulfilling the agreement.

The other alternative to an agreement is military action. Failure to reach an agreement would not have inevitably meant war, but it would have significantly increased the risk of such an outcome over time. Without a deal, Iran would begin moving ahead on its nuclear program and could eventually leave the U.S. president with the choice of taking action or accepting a nuclear-armed Iran.

The United States would overwhelmingly dominate such a fight, and the consequences to Iran would be much more severe than to the United States. But military action comes with tremendous risk for all sides. We should remember that when the United States intervenes in a Middle Eastern country it finds it difficult to get out – as evidenced by its involvement in Iraq, which is now approaching 25 years. Moreover, any attack on Iran's nuclear facilities would not set the program back nearly as far as this agreement does.

### **The Implications of the JCPOA for the Middle East**

#### *Internal Iranian Politics and the Possibility of Reform*

A major question about the nuclear agreement is whether or not it will change the strategic orientation of the regime and influence not only Iranian capabilities but also intentions. Will the agreement give a boost to pragmatists like Iran's President Hassan Rouhani and allow him and his faction to wield greater influence on Iran's foreign policy? Or will Iranian hardliners reassert themselves and pursue more repressive tactics at home and aggressive policies abroad to ensure that the agreement does not lead to a transformation of Iranian politics and society that they fear would threaten the regime's existence? These questions cannot be answered overnight, and in the aftermath of this agreement there is likely to be a prolonged, intensive political struggle inside the Islamic Republic about its future.



On one side will stand Iran's pragmatic President Rouhani and his allies. They are men of the revolution and not looking to overturn the regime's nature. They will not renounce Iran's nuclear program in its entirety or cease efforts to wield influence through support for groups such as Hezbollah and Iraqi Shia militias. They will still view the United States as a major competitor. But when evaluating foreign policy priorities they put greater emphasis on economic integration and international legitimacy, believing that an approach that is more open to the world is the most effective way for Iran to increase its international influence. As President Rouhani stated in a January 2015 speech, "Gone are the days when it was said if foreign investors come to Iran its independence will suffer ... It's been the economy that pays for the politics ... It would be good for once to act in reverse and have internal politics and foreign policy pay for the economy."<sup>1</sup>

After a nuclear deal, Rouhani will have strong political winds at his back. He will have succeeded in delivering on his promise to Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei to relieve the devastating sanctions harming Iran's economy and that could have threatened the regime's stability. With this success, he may have the Supreme Leader's support and more leverage inside the Iranian system to play an increasingly influential role in Iran's regional policies in Syria, Iraq, and Yemen, and wrestle some control away from Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps' Quds Force (IRGC-QF). He may also potentially be able to leverage the agreement to make some domestic social reforms – though thus far in his presidency he has failed to exert influence in this arena.

The Iranian public's support for Rouhani and his faction could increase substantially, which could translate into greater influence and more seats in the parliament. Iran is not a democracy, and popular support alone is not enough to shift the internal political balance toward Rouhani, but the population has some influence. The government "vets" all candidates for office, ensuring they are acceptable, and there is a history of manipulating outcomes. But popular support matters, as demonstrated by Rouhani's surprise election in 2013 when he received barely over 50 percent of the vote and was allowed to assume the presidency without a runoff – which would have been necessary had he achieved only a plurality – even though his views were not as closely aligned with the Supreme Leader as some of the other candidates.

However, it is also plausible that after the agreement, having achieved their objectives of getting out from under sanctions, hardliners led by the Supreme Leader marginalize Rouhani and other pragmatists, continue Iran's aggressive regional approach, and pursue harsher, more repressive domestic policies. Khamenei's greatest fear is that the nuclear program leads to a broader rapprochement with the West that eventually topples the regime. He has made clear in his public statements that the nuclear agreement is a one off and not a game-changer in the relationship, stating, "Negotiations with the United States are on the nuclear issue and nothing else."<sup>2</sup> Conservatives can leverage the vetting process to eliminate many of Rouhani's allies from next year's parliamentary elections and try to topple Rouhani in the 2017 presidential elections. Even though Rouhani's 2013 election showed that the Iranian public has some influence, the suspicious circumstances surrounding President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's 2009 election demonstrate that when the regime considers itself at risk it is capable of manipulating outcomes as necessary.



In reality, the internal struggle will likely take years to play out. Iran's March 2016 parliamentary elections may be an early indicator, but the most important moment may not come until the Supreme Leader, who is 75 years old and is said to not be in good health, passes away. The Assembly of Experts, an elected body of clerics, is charged with appointing the Supreme Leader, but given the changes in the Islamic Republic in the 25 years since the last succession, it is uncertain precisely how the new leader may be chosen. It is not even clear if the Supreme Leader will be an individual or a committee, and how much power the office will retain relative to the other key centers of power. The outcome of the succession process is likely to be a crucial moment in the history of the Islamic Republic and a strong indicator of whether the regime is moderating and becoming more pragmatic or whether the hardliners are winning the internal battle.

*Anxiety in Saudi Arabia about a Pivot Iran*

The anxiety of two of America's closest partners in the Middle East – Israel and Saudi Arabia – both of whom oppose the nuclear agreement with Iran, could have profound implications for American interests in the region and the stability of the Middle East. In the aftermath of an agreement there is a danger that both may pursue riskier and more aggressive policies toward Iran with less coordination with the United States.

Saudi Arabia has expressed concerns that the United States is so focused on an agreement on the nuclear question that it is willing to tolerate Iran's unchecked influence throughout the Middle East. To many in the region, Iranian nuclear ambitions are inextricably linked to Tehran's aggressive support of its proxies. They feel the United States is doing little to counter the rising strength of Iran and its proxies. What the Saudis most fear is that in the aftermath of this nuclear agreement, the United States will cut a deal with Tehran to divide and stabilize the region – and abandon its Arab partners.

Some of the Saudi criticism of the American approach is unfair. For the United States the nuclear issue is still paramount, and given the global consequences of Iran's obtaining a nuclear weapon, prioritizing the nuclear question is the right approach. Moreover, some of the frustration with the United States is closely linked to the Gulf states' anxiety about the instability brought on by the Arab Spring – a problem the United States can help manage but not solve.

However, part of the Gulf States' criticism is justified. In recent years, the Obama administration has been so focused on the nuclear question that it has largely ignored the question of Iranian regional influence. While the administration has done a reasonable job of managing one crisis after another in the region and avoided entangling the United States in new conflicts, it has not articulated a clear strategy and commitment to the Middle East that could reassure partners.

The United States has clearly recognized this problem and begun to move to address it with the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) summit hosted by President Obama at Camp David in May 2015. This summit was the first step in what is likely to be a long process of attempting to convince the Gulf states that the United States is not pivoting to Iran and remains committed to their security.



*Impact on the U.S.-Israel Relationship*

A nuclear agreement with Iran may also have significant implications for the U.S.-Israel relationship. It could undermine trust between the United States and Israel, as it already has with the very open and public disagreements between President Obama and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Given their history of close cooperation against common threats in the region, particularly in the intelligence and security arena, this could hurt both countries' interests.

Iran's regional activities and its extreme rhetoric threatening the existence of the Jewish state are causes of concern for Israelis. However, Israel's greater concern lies with the nuclear agreement itself. The most significant issue for the Israelis is not necessarily the details of the agreement, such as the number of centrifuges or the overall inspections regime, but the question of enforcement. They believe that while Iran is likely to respect an agreement during the early years of implementation, at some point Iran will cheat or wait out the 10–15 year time period, at which point many of the provisions sunset. By this time, the international community's attention will be diverted to other matters, there will be no forceful response, eventually the deal will erode, and Iran will be left with few limits on its nuclear program and no sanctions.

Even as they express their concerns about the nuclear agreement and the policies of the Obama administration, many in the security establishment in Israel are uncomfortable with the public confrontational approach taken by Prime Minister Netanyahu in opposing the agreement. There is a widely held view among Israeli security professionals that the best way for the United States and Israel to work out their differences through private consultations in which Israel could shape and influence American thinking and try to improve the contents of the agreement. Instead, by pursuing this direct confrontation and trying to use Congress to undercut the deal, the prime Minister has turned support for Israel – a traditionally bipartisan issue – into a politically contentious wedge issue that has forced Democratic legislators to choose between the president and leader of their party and the prime minister of Israel.

The good news is that even as political tensions have risen, security cooperation has remained strong. The United States continues to provide billions in security assistance to Israel, including support for the Iron Dome System anti-rocket system, which dramatically improved the security of Israel's population in recent years. In the immediate aftermath of the agreement the Prime Minister is likely to continue to strongly oppose an agreement both publicly and privately. However, once the political confrontation has ended, many in both the United States and Israel hope that relations can begin to improve and that the two traditional partners can return to operating as they used to.

**The Way Forward: Regional and Non-Proliferation Policy in the Aftermath of the Agreement**

While the agreement itself is critical, what will be more decisive for its success or failure is the set of non-proliferation and regional policies that the United States pursues in the aftermath of the deal. In 10–15 years the world could see a more moderate Iran, reduced instability in the Middle East, a stronger global



non-proliferation regime, and an environment in which America's prestige and influence has increased as a result of the nuclear agreement. On the other hand, with poor execution and the wrong policies the United States could face a very different world in 2025: a more hostile and aggressive Iran on the verge of nuclear weapons; a Middle East still drowning in sectarian violence and civil war; a damaged non-proliferation regime; and an international perception that the nuclear agreement with Iran was a historic mistake that significantly harmed American interests.

Congress, working with the executive branch, can exercise its oversight responsibilities by trying to promote policies that put the United States on the right path, such as strengthening the agreement with mechanisms outside of the deal; pushing back on Iran's support for surrogates and proxies in the region; reassuring U.S. regional partners; and looking for ways over time to improve communication with Iran and find some areas of common interest.

*Strengthen the nuclear agreement by taking steps outside of the P5+1 negotiations with Iran to set conditions for effective long-term enforcement and implementation*

The United States should work with key stakeholders including Congress, Israel, and the P5+1 on a series of measures outside the direct negotiations with Iran to strengthen the deal. The United States should derive from the final agreement a clear and specific set of criteria to judge potential Iranian violations. These violations should then be tied to proportional punitive steps that the president could take to respond in the event of a violation. Establishing internal criteria and clearly articulating it to Iran will increase the United States' ability to deter Iranian violations and reduce the risk that Iran is able to slowly erode the agreement through minor violations.

The executive branch should consult with Congress on this approach and together negotiate legislation that includes some of these metrics and provides the president the necessary authorities to impose punishments in the event of violations. The legislation should also include rigorous reporting criteria and the requirement for the executive branch to provide quarterly high-level classified briefings to members of Congress for the duration of the agreement. In an ideal world, Congress should establish a subcommittee specifically dedicated to this issue, as it has for other high profile arms control agreements, to ensure long-term monitoring and implementation. The legislation should include increased funding for the IAEA, giving it the necessary resources to implement the agreement in the most robust way possible – particularly by adding more inspectors and technology for monitoring. The IAEA is developing estimates of how much it will cost it to implement the deal: Early indications from Director General Yukiya Amano suggest an additional cost of approximately \$10 million per year – a small price to pay for greater transparency into Iran's nuclear program.

*More forcefully counter Iranian actions that are against U.S. interests, most notably their support for surrogates and proxies in the Middle East*

The United States should significantly increase its efforts to counter Iran's regional surrogates and proxies. Such an approach is intended to deter Iranian meddling in the region by signaling to Iran's



leadership, particularly some of the hardliners and leaders of the IRGC-QF, that Iran is not ascendant in the region and that if it pushes too far it risks a direct conflict with the United States. These actions would also signal to America's Arab partners, especially Saudi Arabia, that the United States is not abandoning the region to Iran or pursuing the feared "Persian Pivot."

This means making clear to Iran that even though it might receive sanctions relief through a nuclear deal, it will not be fully welcomed back into the community of nations or receive relief from terrorism-related sanctions until it stops playing a destructive role in Syria, Iraq, Yemen, and Lebanon.

The United States should also dramatically increase cooperation with regional partners to counter the threat posed by Iran. This should start with a high-level strategic dialogue with Saudi Arabia and other key partners that is focused on coordinating a joint policy to counter Iran's support for surrogates and proxies. It should include the creation of a multi-national joint task force that targets unconventional threats from the IRGC and Sunni extremists. This task force could jointly work on a number of tasks including increasing interdictions of Iranian weapons shipments, improving intelligence cooperation between the United States and its partners, increasing the emphasis of training and joint exercises of special operations forces, and pursuing more aggressive joint covert actions against Iranian supported terrorism.

One of the greatest challenges in this approach will be not to inadvertently stoke sectarianism and increase regional instability by backing questionable policies of our partners. The most effective way to do this would be for the United States and its Gulf partners to begin a robust strategic dialogue on how to jointly counter most effectively the unconventional threats posed by Iran and what the ultimate political objectives of such an effort may be. At a minimum, there needs to be an agreement that America's regional partners' funding of Sunni extremism is not the answer to fighting Shia extremism. Beyond that, cooperation could include training and joint intelligence programs focused on building partner capacity and using American experiences in countering unconventional threats in Iraq and Afghanistan to steer Arab partners in a more effective direction, as opposed to pursuing scorched earth policies that alienate local populations and deepen the sectarian divide. Such an approach will be difficult and take years to implement, but the alternative of leaving our Arab partners to their own devices to pursue ineffective and sectarian policies without American influence is not a solution.

*Maintain and deepen U.S. commitments to regional partners to deter Iranian aggression and dissuade American partners from taking destabilizing steps*

The United States should find ways to signal to its regional partners that it remains committed to their security. It is still important to maintain a robust conventional military presence in the Middle East after an agreement to deter Iran from aggressively pursuing its destabilizing activities in the region, violating the nuclear agreement and threatening freedom of navigation and the flow of energy resources. Despite the regional focus on the unconventional Iranian threat, a conventional presence will also reassure partners that the United States remains committed to their security. Providing the Arab states greater confidence in American commitments will be a useful tool for dissuading them from lashing out more

aggressively at Iran in ways that may exacerbate the sectarian divide. It could also reduce the likelihood that the Arab states would pursue their own domestic enrichment capability in response to Iran.

In pursuing this approach, the United States will have to maintain a careful balance. A major influx of U.S. assets to the region could be provocative, undermine both Iran's confidence in the agreement and American intentions, and reduce the likelihood of increased cooperation over time. But any significant withdrawal of assets would shake the confidence of both the Arab states and Israel. The guiding principle should be to maintain an American force posture that is essentially the same or slightly enhanced. The United States could consider forward stationing a limited number of more advanced manned and unmanned aircraft and missile defense assets in the region, but should not go too far beyond that. If the agreement takes hold and over time Iran's behavior moderates, there is the potential for a "peace dividend" in the long term.

The United States could also consider increased arms sales to the Gulf states. Ideally, these should focus on defensive capabilities such as minesweepers and ballistic missile defense that could address the Iranian mining and missile threat. It should also include the types of capabilities that would make our Arab partners more capable at countering the unconventional Iranian challenge, such as tactical tools like night vision goggles and weapons optics, and more strategic capabilities like advanced unmanned aerial vehicles and the networking architecture to enhance air and maritime domain awareness.

*Cooperate with Iran on issues of common interest, both to stabilize the Middle East and increase the likelihood of a more moderate and cooperative Iran*

Even as we push back against Iranian influence and reassure our partners, the United States should take advantage of the agreement to improve relations with Iran. The United States needs to be realistic and recognize that given conflicting interests in the region, domestic politics both in the United States and in Iran, and the concerns of other regional partners, a close and collaborative relationship is unlikely – certainly in the near term. Instead, the United States should view the first few years of an agreement as the time to transition U.S.-Iran relations from a state of complete adversarial dysfunction to one of normal competition, where the two look for areas of overlapping interest even as they compete when their interests diverge.

A natural first step would be improving communication. For 35 years Iran and the United States have lacked direct channels for dialogue. The nuclear talks have broken this taboo through sustained engagement at the highest levels between the Iranian foreign minister and the American secretary of state. The United States should take advantage and reinforce this trend by eliminating the U.S. government's no contact policy, which prohibits regular interactions between American and Iranian diplomats without special high-level authorization.

In addition, the United States should focus on areas of foreign policy where pragmatists such as Rouhani and Zarif will have greater influence and see if the United States can help the pragmatists achieve additional foreign policy wins within the Iranian government. One area where this might be possible is by



deepening economic ties between the two states. This will take time; the United States and Iran have not had significant economic relations for years, but as sanctions are removed there may be opportunities to change this and for Rouhani to demonstrate the economic benefits of engagement.

On the security front, cooperation can start small, with issues that are less politically charged and where American and Iranian interests are more congruous. For example, the United States and Iran share an interest in avoiding unintended military conflict in the Persian Gulf and countering maritime piracy to ensure the free flow of energy resources and broader trade and commerce. There may also be opportunities in Afghanistan to work together on counternarcotics efforts.

### Conclusion

The agreement on the JCPOA represents a historic moment that deserves a fair and comprehensive debate. While the deal is imperfect it accomplishes key American foreign policy objectives by preventing any real possibility of Iran obtaining nuclear weapons in the next 15 years and making it extraordinarily difficult for them to pursue a nuclear weapon thereafter. It is also far superior to the available alternatives. Still, much will depend on U.S. policy after the agreement. Congress and the executive branch must work together on an effective policy that strengthens implementation of the agreement, pushes back on Iran's support for terrorism in the Middle East, rebuilds ties with Israel and the GCC, and looks for some areas of tactical cooperation with Iran.

---

<sup>1</sup> Ladane Nasser, "Rouhani Tells Iranians Economy Can't Grow With Nation Isolated," *Bloomberg*, January 4, 2015, <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2015-01-04/iran-s-economy-can-t-grow-while-nation-isolated-rouhani-says>.

<sup>2</sup> AFP, "Iran's Leaders Rules Out Cooperation with US," *MSN News*, March 21, 2015, <http://www.msn.com/en-ph/news/other/irans-leader-rules-out-regional-cooperation-with-us/ar-BBixQu0>.