



Iran Nuclear Deal

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Much hinges on the Iran nuclear deal brokered in July. The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) is an agreement reached by Iran, the United States, Britain, France, China, Russia, and Germany regarding Iran's nuclear program. The purpose is to chart an acceptable path for Iran to continue developing its nuclear energy program without severe economic sanctions while also providing the international community with some reassurance that Iran will not develop nuclear weapons. At stake, many believe, is the safety of Israel, a state which leaders of Iran oppose. In addition, many fear that nuclear weapons in the hands of Iran could disrupt the balance of power in the Middle East, a region with significant Sunni-Shiite tensions.

The plan, in brief, curbs Iran's ability to produce nuclear weapons by providing ten to fifteen years of international monitoring of Iran's nuclear operations and a reduction of Iran's stockpile of enriched uranium and centrifuges. Existing sanctions will not be rolled back until Iran meets these terms, and the JCPOA provides the potential for new economic consequences if there is evidence that Iran has violated terms of the agreement.

The White House argues that this is a strong plan that will "prevent Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapon." Some critics of the plan, however, argue that Iran cannot be trusted in its pursuit of nuclear energy after the country's repeated evasions of previous agreements and its past attempts to conceal its nuclear developments. Critics also point to the fact that the JCPOA does not eliminate Iran's ability to keep intercontinental ballistic missiles which could be used for long range attacks. Even some who support the plan in principle have concern over the details. They point to the fact that the plan does not prevent Iran from developing nuclear weapons after fifteen years. At that time, Iran's economy should be more robust (without

the sanctions), and presumably less vulnerable to any future sanctions.

The United States and Iran have not always been in conflict. Iran in fact began its nuclear operations in 1957 as part of the Atoms for Peace program built under President Eisenhower. The Shah of Iran accepted materials, fuel, and scientific training from the United States in exchange for a commitment to pursue nuclear energy, not weaponry. In 1979 Iranians overthrew the U.S.-supported Shah, prompting the United States to terminate nuclear assistance to the country. Iran's nuclear program did not end, however, and was in fact advanced by assistance from Russia, China, and Pakistani scientist A.Q. Khan. These developments included a heavy-water reactor with potential to produce weapon-grade plutonium, signs of Iran's continued intentions to be part of the nuclear-capable community.

Today, nine countries have nuclear weapons, with Russia's and the United States' arsenal accounting for more than 90% of all operational nuclear warheads. In a sense, it is not the actual production of nuclear weaponry that makes Iran's nuclear program controversial, but the perceived intentions of Iran's administration. International concerns regarding Iran's intentions prompted economic sanctions and oil embargoes that have caused economic isolation for Iran. Economic hardships led to unrest among some Iranians and helped bring to office a president in 2013 who seemed most suited to addressing the nuclear issue and improving the economy. President Obama argues that the sanctions imposed not just by the United States but the United Nations Security Council and others, were critical to bringing Iran to the negotiating table.

The U.S. Congress will vote this month on whether to reject the JCPOA. A majority of Democratic Senators have pledged support for this deal (enough to sustain a veto), while the majority of Republicans are opposed to entering into a diplomatic agreement with a country they deem untrustworthy. Regardless of Congress' vote, the president retains authority to remove sanctions that are imposed by executive action, and Iran can still negotiate the plan's terms with other countries. It remains to be seen what will come of Iran's nuclear program with or without the JCPOA in place, but the plan is a historic attempt at cooperation.

-Shelley Brooks, Ph.D., CHSSP Statewide Office



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Timeline

1935 - The Anglo Persian Oil Company, Ltd. forms to export oil from Iranian oil fields (eventually becomes British Petroleum) and British government owns majority of the company from 1914-1977

1951 - Mohammed Mossadeq, the head of Iran's Oil Committee, becomes Premier of Iran and leads movement to nationalize Iran's oil fields; American and British governments proclaim boycott of Iranian oil

1953 - Mossadeq seeks to depose the Shah of Iran; American CIA and the British Intelligence Agency work with Iranian military to overthrow the Mossadeq regime and return the western-supported Shah to power

1957 - Iran joins the U.S. Atoms for Peace program, receiving materials and training for producing nuclear energy

1968 - Iran signs Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons

1979 - Iranian Revolution deposes the Shah of Iran; U.S. ends nuclear support to Iran

1980-1988 - Iran-Iraq War; Iran slows its nuclear development

late 1980s/90s - Iran pursues nuclear fuel cycle capability, suggesting interest in developing weaponry

1987, 1990, 1992 - Iran enters nuclear cooperation agreements with Pakistan, China, and Russia, respectively

1995 - Russia announces it will help complete a nuclear power plant in Iran, and build additional reactors

2002-03 - After international exposure, Iran admits to covertly developing nuclear facilities with weapon-grade equipment

2005 - The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) finds Iran in non-compliance with its earlier Comprehensive Safeguards Agreement

2010 - After a brief suspension of its nuclear enrichment, Iran significantly increases uranium enrichment (necessary for weaponry)

2011 - The IAEA calls Iran's nuclear activities "relevant to the development of a nuclear explosive device"

2011-forward - Significant economic sanctions and oil embargoes imposed on Iran from the United States and Europe

2013 - After a decade of international negotiations and multiple United Nations resolutions calling for Iran to halt its enrichment activities, the Joint Plan of Action emerges as a path toward agreement on acceptable nuclear development and some sanctions relief

July 2015 - After twenty months of negotiations, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) is signed by Iran, the United States, Britain, France, China, Russia, and Germany to create a more thorough and lasting deal than previously secured in 2013

read the JCPOA: <https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/2165388-iran-deal-text.html>



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Image from Wikimedia Commons: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Map_of_Middle_East.png



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CHSSP Teaching Blog: <http://chssp.ucdavis.edu/blog/iran-and-the-u-s>

Additional Resources*

National Public Radio: <http://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2015/07/14/422920192/6-things-you-should-know-about-the-iran-nuclear-deal>

White House: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/issues/foreign-policy/iran-deal> & https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/jcpoa_what_you_need_to_know.pdf

The Nuclear Threat Initiative: <http://www.nti.org/country-profiles/iran/nuclear/>

The Brookings Institution: <http://www.brookings.edu/blogs/up-front/posts/2013/12/18-sixty-years-atoms-peace-iran-nuclear-program-rowberry> & <http://www.brookings.edu/blogs/markaz/posts/2014/03/21-iran-sanctions-russia-crimea-nuclear>

New York Times, News Analysis: http://www.nytimes.com/2015/08/24/world/middleeast/in-pushing-for-the-iran-nuclear-deal-obamas-rationale-shows-flaws.html?_r=0

The United States Institute of Peace: <http://iranprimer.usip.org/frontpage>

CBS News: <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/iran-nuclear-deal-saudi-arabia-arab-allies-israel-middle-east-sunni-shiite/>

*The resources listed above are provided for further research and do not imply an endorsement by the California History-Social Science Project or the University of California.