

Securing Iran: Opportunities Presented with the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action

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Abstract

The historical struggles with the concept of Iranian proliferation, has seemingly found a short-term solution on July 14, 2015. Surrounded by controversy, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) signed by the P5+1 (the United States, Russia, China, the United Kingdom, France and Germany) and Iran has afforded Iran the opportunity to improve global relations and reinstate their economic status within the international community. If Iran breaks its reputation of untrustworthiness, the international community should discontinue to ostracize the state and instead focus on improving its economic standings. Iran is a unique Middle Eastern state in that it is comprised of multiple economic, social and political factors, which if combined in tandem could provide Iran a successful rehabilitation and reintroduction into the global community.

Keywords: Proliferation, Non-Proliferation, JCPOA, Ostracize, International Influence, International Image, Diverse Economy, Educated State, Encouraging Demographics, International Policies

Introduction

For over three decades the international community has struggled with the perspective of Iran obtaining nuclear weapons. The Iranian weaponized nuclear program has been a constant source of national and international insecurity for the United States, Middle East and the Western community. Since the Iranian Revolution 1977-1979, the Iranian government has increasingly expressed anti-Western rhetoric and ideologies and has progressed into a isolated state. The Iranian weaponized nuclear proliferation program has brought specific attention to the balance of power within the Middle East. In response to this program, intense sanctions have been implemented by the United States and other Western states in the hope of degrading and ultimately destroying the Iranian nuclear program. However, in July 2015, the world's most internationally influential states and the Iranian government signed a nuclear non-proliferation agreement, which within the months following has been received as a global controversy. Many U.S. and foreign officials do not support the agreement and have continuously described it as providing Iranians with more economic opportunities to support terrorism and secretly expand their nuclear program. One major factor that is continuously overlooked is the obvious notion that even with sanctions imposed for numerous years Iran has still been able to continue with their proliferation of nuclear weapons. In the wake of the newly signed Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), the international community should not continue to ostracize Iran and instead actively pursue endeavors that would promote the future security and stabilization of Iran and the Middle East.

Key Historical Events: Shaping of the Iran of Today

Analyzing historical events will provide a comprehensive understanding of the current Iranian geopolitical situation. The last 125 years have had the most impact on the current political and social climate. The Persian people have a long and rich history, with successful non-violent governmental alterations and revolutions. For instance, when Iran and Great Britain entered a concession regarding the British tobacco industry in 1890, the Iranian people took a stance and boycotted tobacco. These actions led the Shah of Iran to discontinue the Iranian-British alliance only two years after the beginning of the tobacco concessions (Zunes, 2009). In 1905 the Constitutional Revolution transpired, this revolution was in protest to the Qajar dynasty, known for their extensive corruption within the government system (Zunes, 2009). This revolution was relatively peaceful and set the stage for future Iranian non-violent protests, demonstrations, sit-ins et cetera which have become extremely successful in creating immense political and social transformations (Zunes, 2009). One of the outcomes of the non-violent protests and boycotts included the creation of a legitimate parliament which was intended to segment governmental power with the Shah (Zunes, 2009).

An authoritarian rule was re-established in 1925 with a successful coup that was sponsored by the British Empire. As World War II (WWII) progressed in 1941, Britain and Russia wanted to guarantee Iran's support for the Allied Powers, with immense international pressure the Shah relinquished power to his son (Zunes, 2009). The unstable political climate after WWII provided parliament the chance to regained power and a Prime Minister, Mohammad Mossadegh, was elected. Prime Minister Mossadegh and his nationalist party nationalized a British oil company which in return sparked a nationwide protest that resulted in the Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi resigning from his duties and leaving Iran in 1953 (Zunes, 2009). However, the Shah's influence in Iran was not completely stifled, he had a powerful ally the United States, and with their clandestine sponsorship a coup overthrew the nationalist party and the Prime Minister. The Shah then regained authoritarian control over the government and purged Iran of the opposing party (Zunes, 2009). The Nixon Administration continued to set the stage for friendly relations between the United States and Iran, which resulted in extensive support from the U.S. particularly with the Iranian military and weapon system programs. All this was overturned during the Carter Administration when the Iranian Revolution of 1977-1979 overthrew Shah Pahlavi (Zunes, 2009). Unlike many other revolutions, which were occurring during that time period in various continents, the Iranian Revolution did not instill democracy but instead instilled a different form of authoritarianism (Zunes, 2009). This regime was and is currently led by Islamic authoritarian clergy. The revolution was largely peaceful on the revolutionary's part, however the Shah's regime met the revolutionaries with brutal physical force and often times fired into unarmed civilian crowds. However, true to Iranian form the Iranian people eventually ousted the Shah by conducting protests, boycotts and sit-ins, which had stark impacts on the national Iranian economy by severely crippled the oil industry (Zunes, 2009). Another reason why the 1979 revolution was successful was the leader of the revolution, Ayatollah Khomeini, insisted on the nonviolent approach. He urged protestors not to become violent with the police and military and in turn many of the members of the law enforcement and military community defected and joined the revolution (Zunes, 2009). Unfortunately, when the revolutionary leadership led by Ayatollah Khomeini finally exiled the Shah in 1979 the new government promptly turned on the people and often used brutal force to control the Iranian government and its citizens. The relationship between the United States and Iran came to a

diplomatic standstill when Ayatollah Khomeini persuaded student militants to overthrow the U.S. Embassy in Tehran in retaliation for allowing the cancer ridden former Shah to seek medical treatment within the United States (Jimmy Carter Presidential Library and Museum, 2012). The student militants held the embassy hostages for 444 days and after diplomatic negotiations finally succeeded, the hostages were released. However, the damage could not be undone and the United States officially discontinued diplomatic relations with Iran on April 7, 1980 (Department of State Office of the Historian, 2015). This was the beginning of the tumultuous relationship between the United States, Iran and the western community.

The severance of diplomatic ties with the United States also brought about intense economic ramifications in the forms of embargos and sanctions against Iran. The initial embargo originated after the overthrow of the U.S. Embassy in Tehran. In response the United States implemented the Iranian Assets Control Regulations, under Title 31, Part 535 of the U.S. Code of Federal Regulations (C.F.R), on November 14, 1979 (Department of Treasury Office of Foreign Assets Control, 2015). This regulation froze approximately \$12 billion of Iranian assets. The regulation soon transformed to encompass a full trade embargo (DOT, Office of Foreign Assets Control, 2015). In 1987 the U.S. Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) replaced the Iranian Transactions Regulations, under Title 31 C.F.R. Part 560, which prohibited the import of Iranian products and services (DOT, Office of Foreign Assets Control, 2015). This sanction was in retaliation for Iranian state sponsored terrorism and hostility towards shipping vessels in the Persian Gulf (DOT, Office of Foreign Assets Control, 2015). Sanctions were again tightened in 1995, 1997, 2008, 2010 and 2011 which were in direct retaliation for not only state sponsored terrorism and unprovoked acts of aggression, but for the active role in pursuing the manufacture of nuclear weapons (DOT, Office of Foreign Assets Control, 2015). Producing nuclear weapons is in direct violation of the Nonproliferation Treaty of 1967 and International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Safeguards Agreement in 1974, both of which were signed by Iran (Laub, 2015). These sanctions have not only attempted to limit Iran's nuclear weapon production but has also severely degraded the Iranian economy.

Current Iranian Status

The Iranian government relies on the export of oil as their main source of revenue, petroleum constitutes as 80% of exported commodities. Index Mundi specifically notes "price controls, subsidies, and other distortions weigh down [Iranian] economy, undermining the potential for private-sector-growth" (Index Mundi, 2015). The Iranian people have been suffering from an increased inflation, in 2013 the inflation rate was estimated by the Iranian government to be (Index Mundi, 2015). These types of economic issues have led to widespread corruption and black market deals for sources of revenue. The increase in international sanctions in 2012, resulted in the Iranian national economic growth being in the negative from 2012-2013 (Index Mundi, 2015). Economic hardship has resulted in significant unemployment rates; which the Iranian government estimates was 16% in 2013 (Index Mundi 2014). In 2008, unemployment between the ages of 15-24 was 20.2% for young males and 33.9% for young females (Index Mundi, 2015). This has led to a significant migration of educated personnel to other states, leaving Iran with a noteworthy gap between the rich and the poor (Index Mundi, 2015). It also leaves a significant gap for industries trying to gain the support of foreign companies and states because they do not have the educated personnel to provide all-encompassing, multi-level services. Even though the sanctions of Iran have severely damaged its economy, Iran's struggle

for economic opportunity is not due to a lack of natural resources or a diversified economic portfolio.

The Iranian economy has the potential to offer a great deal to the international market. The state has the fourth largest oil reserves in the world and comes in second with the largest natural gas reserves (Amir-Mokri and Biglari, 2015). Although it may seem that the economy is mostly based around the oil and natural gases, Iran has the potential for extreme international profit from services, industry, and agriculture (Amir-Mokri and Biglari, 2015). Therefore, the issue is not the Iranian economic infrastructure, but the fact that the Iranian government has mismanaged its economy by nationalizing it after the revolution in 1979 and the crippling sanctions emplaced by the international community (Amir-Mokri and Biglari, 2015). The Iranian elections in June 2013, brought about new hope for the economy, President Hassan Rouhani has improved the Iranian currency and the shares in the Tehran Stock Exchange (Index Mundi, 2015). Enabled by President Rouhani's vision of an improved economy and the newly signed JCPOA, the political legal framework for this vision has been enhanced and the international community has come to see the possible opportunities the Iranian economy can offer.

The demographics of Iran are also a key factor in the Iranian economy. Unbalanced demographics can have tremendous negative effects on an economy however, the Iranian demographics are in favor of a prospective promising economy. According to the CIA World Fact Book, 46.87% of Iranians are between the ages of 25-54 years old, this is a critical working age group that is likely to be extremely eager for more economic opportunity (CIA World Fact Book, 2015). Furthermore, the 17.58% of Iranians are between the ages of 15-24 years old and 23.69% are between the ages of 0-14 years old (CIA World Fact Book, 2015). This is critical because as the 25-54-year-old age group continues to grow older they have the younger population, which combined is 41.27%, who are able to almost match the current demographic contribution to the economy.

Iran is considered to be the most educated Middle Eastern state (Amir-Mokri and Biglari, 2015). As of July 2015, Iran has a population of approximately 81,624,270 (CIA World Fact Book, 2015). This is comparable to Germany and is currently ranked 17th in the world based on population size (CIA World Fact Book, 2015). The literacy rate for Iranians over the age of 15 years old is 86.8% (CIA World Fact Book, 2015). The female rate for literacy is 82.5% and the male literacy rate is only slightly higher at 91.2% (Amir-Mokri and Biglari, 2015). Iran has 4.4 million people currently attending universities and 44% of those students are majoring in the academic disciplines of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields (Amir-Mokri and Biglari, 2015). STEM fields of study have great impacts on workforce expansion, military progression, medical advancement et cetera. These are generally considered critical for a successful economy and state. It is estimated that 7.5 million working aged Iranians have already obtained a college level education (Amir-Mokri and Biglari, 2015). As a caveat it is important to keep in mind that the level of quality education is questioned and also the restrictions the government emplaces on curriculum can pose a problem for subjects that are not related to STEM fields. Nonetheless, this is another example of how Iran has the potential to contribute to the advancement of Iranian economy and wellbeing and could be a viable contributor to the international community.

The potential of the demographics and economy, is often overshadowed by the national political structure. The Islamic Republic of Iran or Jomhuri-ye Eslami-ye Iran is a theocratic republic which was fully instilled after the Iranian Revolution of 1979 (CIA World Fact Book, 2015). Although the political system does encompass executive, legislative and judicial branches

the reality is the power remains within the hands of only a few key political leaders. The Iranian political system is organized so that the Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Khamenei, is the de-facto leader of the executive branch but is mainly the chief of state (CIA World Fact Book, 2015). In reality Khamenei holds the majority of power within the government, this power is reinforced with the fact that he is also the commander-in-chief of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) or the *pasdaran* whose sole responsibility is to guard the Islamic governmental system which often trans sends into preventing coups or foreign interference against the Supreme Leader who is the highest ranking governmental religious authority (NDI, 2015). Khamenei often blames the West for the isolationism and economic hardships of Iran (Ganji, 2013). He also views Western influence as a method to expel him from power (Ganji, 2013).

The president of Iran, currently Hassan Rouhani, is elected every four years and is restricted to two-termed presidencies (Bruno, 2008). Under the Iranian Constitution the president of Iran must be a Shiite Muslim (Bruno, 2008). Starkly different from his predecessor, President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, President Rouhani's unexpected victory in the June 2013 presidential elections has inspired altered political approaches. President Rouhani's campaign was based off promises to improve the economy and end isolationism imposed by the international community (Belfer Center, n.d.). President Rouhani is popular amongst the majority of average Iranian citizens and has acted on his promises by commencing improvements with the worth of Iranian currency and has improved the national market value (Index Mundi, 2014). President Rouhani has been quoted stating "there should be a change in direction in order to turn a new page in this unstable relationship [with the international community]" (Belfer Center n.d., 3). President Rouhani has been a force within Iran driving the nuclear talks with the international community. He has also pushed for an increase in freedom of expression and assembly, while also advocating for women's rights.

The legislative branch consists of multiple sectors but the most notable sectors are the Assembly of Experts, the Majlis or parliament and the Council of Guardians (Belfer Center, n.d.). The Assembly of Experts is the only organization within the Iranian government that can remove the Supreme Leader from power (Belfer Center, n.d.). The assembly meets twice a year and consists of 86 clergymen. The Majlis are representatives from the thirty provinces within Iran, 290 total, and are responsible for the passing of legislation however, they are indirectly controlled by the Supreme Leader via the Council of Guardians (Belfer Center, n.d.). The Council of Guardians is constructed of "twelve members-six theologians appointed by the Supreme Leader, and six jurists approved by the Majlis- that review legislation and election candidates for consistency with Islamic law" (Bruno 2008, 5).

The judicial branch of the Iranian government mainly consists of the Supreme Court and the Special Clerical Court (Bruno 2008, 5). The Supreme Court operates much like many other Supreme Courts with an exception that "its members are chosen by the head of the judiciary, who is appointed by the supreme leader" (Bruno 2008, 5). The Special Clerical Court is a court designated to prosecute clergymen for any 'crime' they may commit, these crimes can comprise of "ideological differences" (Bruno 2008, 5). The supreme leader is also the supervisor for the Special Clerical Court. As discussed above, although the Iranian governmental system may give the appearance of a Western approach to government, in reality all political and governmental factions are either directly or indirectly controlled by the supreme leader. However, with President Rouhani's guidance and modern mindset, the governmental system could further capitalize on the upcoming international opportunities.

The Journey Towards Proliferation

The Iranian journey towards proliferation has been a dynamic and often controversial program. The Iranian proliferation program began in the 1950s, however it was not until the 1960s that the program began to expand (Nuclear Treat Initiative, 2015). Ironically, one of the states that is fighting the most against a nuclear Iran is the state that assisted with the founding of the program, the United States. In 1967, the United States supported the Tehran Nuclear Research Center (TNRC) and provided the TNRC with a 5MWt research reactor and highly enriched uranium (HEU) (NTI 2015, 2). In 1968 Iran signed the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and it was ratified in 1970 (NTI, 2015). The Shah of Iran soon became extremely interested in a nuclear program and in 1973 established the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI). This organization would supervise the installment of a 23,000MWe of nuclear power by the year 2000 (NTI 2015, 2). After this goal was publicized the Shah began making all the necessary foreign contacts that would enable his nuclear ambition. Iran made deals and contracts around the globe in order to acquire the necessary materials. He made investments in one of France's uranium enrichment plants in 1976 and also invested in a Namibian uranium mine that same year (NTI, 2015). Iran further exploited Africa by gathering yellowcake uranium from South Africa. Iran did not ignore any aspect of its nuclear future, not only were they gathering the resources but they were ensuring their nuclear scientists had sophisticated training from around the world (NTI, 2015). The Shah declared all these nuclear resources and training in the name of a nuclear power system but it was speculated that he desired a nuclear weapons program. The world would not be able to discover the truth behind the Shah's intentions due to the Iranian Revolution in 1979.

As the purge of officials who were loyal or were employed by the Shah commenced after the Revolution, many of the highly educated including nuclear scientists left the state in search of sanctuary. Ayatollah Khomeini did not share the same passion for nuclear programs, so as the nation was re-aligning itself after the revolution, the Iranian nuclear program fell into disrepair (NTI, 2015). Six years later in 1984 the supreme leader re-inaugurated the nuclear program by continuing the erection of the Bushehr Nuclear Power Plant (NTI, 2015). The 1980s and 1990s were critical years for the development of the nuclear power program because during these years the Iranians signed agreements with Pakistan and China, again like the Shah, these agreements were all inclusive providing Iran with the resources and training needed for the nuclear scientists. The Russian government acknowledged its assistance in 1995 with the construction of a nuclear facility and providing additional reactors (NTI, 2015). During Iran's push for nuclear agreements for resources and training with states and organizations, the United States understood the likelihood that Ayatollah Khomeini's sudden change in policy towards nuclear power was driven by a desire to create and maintain a nuclear weapons program (NTI, 2015). The United States systematically began to discourage other foreign states in assisting the Iranians with this goal. The U.S. was moderately successful at reducing Chinese and Argentinian obligations with Iran, Russian publically agreed to condense its support however it is notable that states such as Russia likely assisted the Iranians with under the radar training and resource transactions (NTI, 2015).

The early 2000s were difficult times for the continued advancement of the Iranian nuclear program. An organization named the National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI) released documents that proved Iran was concealing facilities from the international community and IAEA (NTI, 2015). These documents declared the existence of the Natanz Enrichment Facility,

the Kalaye Electric Company and a further construction being conducted at Arak. Furthermore, the identities of individuals working in the nuclear program were also made known publically (NTI, 2015). From this point forward Iran, the IAEA, and the international community have had continuous battles in regards to reducing and ceasing the Iranian nuclear program. The Iranian government has vowed to commit to various non-proliferation agreements but has lost the trust of the international community on multiple occasions with its inability to abide by these agreements.

Historically, the diplomatic route is the most popular method to solve the Iranian proliferation issue. However, between 2003 and 2009 this method was continuously undermined. The international community, IAEA and Iran devoted a considerable amount of time to reducing the nuclear program's development and implementation with little results to show for it. Even the implementation of numerous resolutions by the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) did not convince Iran to abandon their nuclear program (NTI, 2015). In 2010 more vigorous sanctions were imposed against Iran and in 2011 in the wake of the discounted 'phase out approach' suggested by Russia and the IAEA's report on the dangers and misconduct of the nuclear program, Iran's status within the global community was at a bleak standstill. To further darken the cloud over Iran, the Obama Administration declared "the government of Iran and all financial institutions in the country as entities of money laundering concern, warning financial institutions around the world that doing business with Iranian banks entailed significant risks" (NTI 2015, 6). The Obama Administration was further assisted in its endeavor when Congress enacted the Menendez- Kirk amendment, "requiring the President to sanction the Central Bank of Iran, as well as foreign financial institutions, including central banks, for processing transactions related to oil and petroleum products on behalf of Iranian companies and the Iranian government" (NTI 2015, 6). With 80% of Iran's exports being petroleum this was a setback for the Iranian domestic economy.

Much of 2012-2013 was a low point in Iran's status amongst the international community. The P5+1 convened several times and never reached an agreement, and in August 2012 the United States enacted the Iran Threat Reduction and Syria Human Rights Act, in which supplementary sanctions were put into effect (NTI 2015, 7). In early 2013 the United States continued to expand the sanctions against Iran and foreign entities conducting business with Iran. However, by mid-2013 with the election of President Hassan Rouhani, the outlook for progression with nuclear talks seemed to revitalize (NTI 2015, 8). President Rouhani commenced multiple P5+1 talks, and also signed a Framework for Cooperation (FFC) with the IAEA in order to progress the international cooperation (NTI, 2015).

The Iranian Nuclear Threat

Since the first nuclear weapon was used in World War II the struggle to keep nuclearized states to a minimum has occupied the efforts of the international community for the last 70 years. Great efforts and lengths have been put forth over the decades to ensure Iran in particular does not obtain nuclear weapons. There are specific reasons why the international community fears Iranian proliferation. First, if Iran was able to combine the experience, technology and resources needed to produce a nuclear weapon the balance of nuclearized states would reach a 'tipping point' (Rothkopf, 2015). As a predominately Shiite state Iranian proliferation could trigger a nuclear arms race with the neighboring Sunni states in the Middle East. Second, not only would this be detrimental to Israel's national security but with the ever shifting loyalties and instability

in the Middle East, the fear that nuclear weapons could fall into the hands of violent non-state actors (VNSA) is also a concern. Third, if Iran were to actually utilize a nuclear weapon the retaliation by Israel and the United States would be so immense Iran would likely cease to exist, David Rothkopf notes that some experts argue in the case of deterrence and self-preservation as the reason why Iran would likely not initiate a nuclear strike, “in other words any nuclear action by Tehran would be suicidal” (Rothkopf 2015, 3). However, in the current Middle Eastern climate is the possibility of Iran utilizing a nuclear weapon really that outlandish? Ayatollah Khamenei is considered by some to be extreme with his enforcement techniques and having an extremist possess a nuclear weapon is one of the international community’s concerns. Supreme Leader Khamenei is the foundation of the governmental system and either directly or indirectly controls almost every aspect of the government and is also deemed the Commander-in-Chief of the Iranian military, with so much power resting with a single individual the stretch for the use of a nuclear weapon becomes more and more plausible. These are some of the reasons why the international community is so threatened by the idea of a nuclear Iran. These possible scenarios were the motivations behind the most recent and controversial nuclear non-proliferation agreement signed by the P5+1 and Iran in July 2015.

Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action

The July 14, 2015 nuclear agreement between the P5+1 and Iran was titled the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, which was fully implemented on October 18, 2015 (DOT Resource Center, n.d.). The JCPOA consists of several components but the most prominent is the fact that Iran has agreed to numerous measures and limitations to be put in place by the international community and the IAEA in exchange for the gradual removal of sanctions against their economy (DOT Resource Center, n.d.). The JCPOA addresses many of the concerns on behalf of the international community and Iran, however one of the major concerns is the limitation and reduction Iran’s capacity to enrich uranium (NTI, 2015). The Natanz facility, originally a clandestine facility hidden from the international community, was determined to “reduce centrifuges operating at the Natanz enrichment facility from the 19,000 operating today to 5,060 for the next ten years” (NTI 2015, 8). The Fordow facility’s future role will be that of a research center and will not enrich uranium for the next 15 years, while also reducing the number of centrifuges to 348 devices (NTI, 2015). The ratification of the Additional Protocol by Iran will allow IAEA inspectors “unprecedented access” to Iranian facilities and the signing of the Roadmap for Clarification of Past and Present Outstanding Issues further reassures the IAEA and the international community that Iran is willing to instill its commitment to the JCPOA (NTI, 2015). The concerns over a clandestine operation were addressed by letting the “IAEA inspectors will inventory and inspect Iran’s uranium supplies from the mining stage through waste disposal. Additionally, all centrifuge production facilities will be monitored with centrifuge production and R&D capacities pre-determined and accounted for” (NTI 2015, 8). If Iran breaks its commitment to the JCPOA and the IAEA, the previous international sanctions will be emplaced within 65 days, if the designated joint commission cannot prove the allegations to be false within 30 days (Economist, 2015). On the other hand, Iran was able to procure a portion in the accord that will allow them to acquire certain nuclear materials as long as they are considered to be within the guidelines of the accord and are closely overseen (NTI 2015, 8). The weapons embargo emplaced against Iran will also lighten allowing the Iranian military to obtain “conventional offensive weapons” in five years and in eight years the “ban on any technologies

relating to ballistic missiles” will also cease to be in effect. Another interesting portion of the JCPOA is in ten years Iran will be allowed to “deploy advanced enrichment centrifuges” (Economist, 2015). If the JCPOA is honored by the Iranian government, the accord will allow sanctions to be lifted and delay the possibility of a nuclear armed Iran.

Despite the controversial rhetoric aiming at the JCPOA which has been voiced by many members of the U.S. Congress, U.S. presidential candidates and the Israeli government. Their suspicions and concerns are not without warrant, Iran has rarely abided by any of the non-proliferation agreements in the past and has deliberately deceived the international community and the IAEA in regards to its nuclear program. Nonetheless, after the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) agreed upon the JCPOA on July 20, 2015 the U.S. Congress approved the JCPOA on September 10, 2015 and again on September 15, 2015 (NTI 2015, 8). Consequently, the Iranian Parliament also passed the JCPOA on October 13, 2015 which has subsequently given the international community the ‘go ahead’ to put all legal preparations in place and start to process all the above mentioned details to begin their implementation (NTI 2015, 9).

Since the signing of the JCPOA, the IAEA has completed its Iranian Compliance with Nuclear Accord Report (Costello, 2015). This report stated the Iranian government has begun the compliance requirements laid out in the JCPOA. In December 2015 the U.S. State Department and the Russian Foreign Ministry confirmed another report that Iran had turned 8.5 tons of 5-20% low-enriched uranium over to Russia (Telegraph, 28 December 2015, 1). If Iran continues at this rate, the majority of their commitments for sanctions relief could be accomplished by January 2016, enabling sanctions to cease by February 2016 (Costello, 2015).

Although Iran continues to comply with the JCPOA , it has also been recently condemned in the Middle East and Western community for its recent ballistic missiles tests and the attack on the Saudi Arabian Embassy in Tehran, in response to the execution of a Shiite clergyman, which has sparked the severing of diplomatic ties with several Sunni states. The ballistic missile tests conducted in October and November 2015, have again sparked controversy within the international community (Davenport, Theilmann, and Limball, 2015). Shortly after the tests U.S. officials called on the White House to put forth new sanctions on Iran, which the White House has delayed (Payvand, 2015). The Iranian government has voiced an ultimatum if the U.S. imposes sanctions, they will continue to increase the amount of ballistic missile systems (Payvand, 2015). Before the international community formally responds to the missile tests the world leaders should view the situation from an Iranian perspective. The hardliners within the government likely feel the need to demonstrate their relevancy to the Iranian people and to the world. With these tests it is likely they are demonstrating to their people, other Middle Eastern states and the international community that although they have agreed to delay their nuclear program, they are still a powerful state that should be respected. The international community should take into account that the testing of ballistic missiles is not a violation of the JCPOA (Davenport, Theilmann, and Limball, 2015). These tests do violate the UNSC Resolution 1929, however this resolution was enacted in order to ‘encourage’ the Iranian government to participate in nuclear non-proliferation talks and seeing as the JCPOA is proof of their commitment to a short term non-proliferation program; Resolution 1929 will eventually become obsolete (Davenport, Theilmann, and Limball, 2015). Therefore, the international community should focus on the non-proliferation of Iran and not act prematurely to Iranian show of force. This is important now more than ever with the unstable diplomatic ties between Middle Eastern states. Severance of diplomatic ties between Saudi Arabia and Iran has caused a chain reaction with other Middle Eastern States and Northern Africa. The growing number of states that have

aligned themselves with Saudi Arabia and have disengaged diplomatic ties with Iran include Bahrain, Sudan and Kuwait (Washington Post, 05 January 2016, 1). The Middle East is in a very unstable status, if Iran was to disregard the JCPOA due to new sanctions imposed by the U.S., it is highly likely the Middle East could be carried into further turmoil which in worst case scenario could result in a Middle Eastern nuclear arms race.

Possible Outcomes of the JCPOA

The results of the JCPOA have vast potential economic, political and security outcomes. The JCPOA allows for the Iranian demographics and diverse economy to be able to have an opportunity to attract the foreign investment it so desperately needs in order to truly improve its domestic economy. If the government were to address issues such as corruption, economic protection laws, economic policy changes, securing the Iranian currency and making the market as attractable as possible to foreign investors, the Iranian economy and livelihood of individuals could dramatically improve (Amir-Mokri and Biglari, 2015). If Iran were to secure a few initial investors and demonstrate to other markets and investors the benefits of investing in Iran, the gateway for other investors will be forged. Investment in Iran is already being referred to as a “gold rush” for European and Asian foreign investors (Guardian, 02 January 2016, 1). With the assistance of foreign entities Iran could reduce its “brain drain” by offering the young up and coming generation opportunity, which in turn will benefit Iran in the long-run (Amir-Mokri and Biglari, 2015). The potential is present however, the Iranian government will have to abandon its xenophobic rhetoric and mindset and focus on the future potential power and respect Iran could have with a place in the world economy.

The political opportunities the JCPOA provides Iran are also vast if the Iranian government embraces change. President Rouhani has been a major role in securing changes in policy for a less isolated and more prosperous future for Iran. However as discussed above most of the power within the government lies with the Supreme Leader. Ayatollah Khamenei is often seen in media reports as an Islamic leader shouting for the destruction of the U.S. and Israel however the past is a major factor in why his international image is not appealing to the West and could hold the key to the future political successes. First and foremost Ayatollah Khamenei’s perception of the international community stems from his time as a young man in seminary school during the 1950s and 1960s when the origins for the revolution in 1979 were beginning to resonate amongst the Iranian people (Ganji, 2013). The pre-revolutionary ideology was that the Shah was controlled by the United States and the West and Iran was merely a “puppet” for the Western societies (Ganji 2013, 25). A young Ayatollah Khamenei condoned the methods of the West during the 1979 revolution and this time period is mainly where his viewpoints of the West were forged (Ganji, 2013). He has an extreme distrust for the United States and western community, he is committed to the thought that the United States is perpetually out to overthrow the current Iranian government (Ganji, 2013). If the western community can continue to demonstrate this is not their aspired end state, this could present an opportunity for the Supreme Leader to reconsider some of his negative perceptions of the Western community. Another aspect to consider is it is likely the Supreme Leader is afraid of losing power and seeming weak amongst his people and government officials. However, if his actions favored the return of Iran to the international community he could be viewed as the Supreme Leader who brought the Iranian economy back into being a powerful contender in the international market, his power and respect from Iranians and the international community could increase. Adherently this is one of

the indirect political opportunities offered by the JCPOA. This is obviously a large leap from what the current mindset and leadership style of the Supreme Leader, however over the short and long term future these types of opportunities could be enacted.

The security issues the JCPOA does and does not address have been a constant source of criticism for the opposition to the agreement. The deal does not address every single desire of the international community, but has significantly reduced the chances of affording Iran in becoming a nuclear armed state and ultimately thwarted a potential Middle Eastern nuclear arms race. This agreement is not the final solution to Iranian security concerns in the Middle East or globally however it has the potential to be the gateway for future arms agreements and treaties. For the critics of the agreement, it is critical to take into account that even with strict international sanctions Iran was able to continue their nuclear arms program and was estimated of being within a year of producing a nuclear weapon. This agreement has postponed that reality for at least ten years.

The Way Forward

The JCPOA has afforded a new geopolitical position for Iran in the Middle East. One of the major determining factors to a successful negotiation between Iran and the P5+1 was not to degrade Iran on an international platform. Since the P5+1 council did not embarrass Iran the agreement was able to be signed without making Iran look weak to its people or to the Middle Eastern states has also shifted the geopolitical status of Iran (Huffington Post, 30 September 2015, 1). Iran was seen as ‘standing up’ to the most powerful states in the world and able make concessions, “as an equal” (Huffington Post, 30 September 2015, 2). It also showed the region and world that Iran could not “be completely controlled from outside” (Huffington Post, 30 September 2015, 2). Even the notion that Iran could ‘cheat’ is an indirect aspect that alludes to Iran’s power (Huffington Post, 30 September 2015, 2). The Middle Eastern Sunni dominated states view this shift in geopolitical power as a possible threat. Iran is a force to be recognized and deserves respect from the region and international community.

The potential outcome for Iran’s future does not solely rest within the changes to Iranian policy. If the Iranian government continues to respect the JCPOA and works alongside the international community to safeguard future opportunities and resolutions, the global community will need to direct their policies towards including Iran instead of the ostracizing approach. The world leadership should look towards indirectly assisting Iran in opening its doors to the global economy and the opportunity for more regional and international influence during the first ten years of the JCPOA so it will further entice the Iranian government to keep its doors open and be a member of the global community and be less inclined to close its doors and fall back into conspiring against it.

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