

"Nuclear talks are not about nuclear capability. They are about Iranian integrity and dignity."
Mohammad Javad Zarif

"Iran's goal is not to become another North Korea - a nuclear weapons possessor but a pariah in the international community - but rather Brazil or Japan, a technological powerhouse with the capacity to develop nuclear weapons if the political winds were to shift, while remaining a nonnuclear weapons state."
Mohamed El Baradei

"If we can ascertain and show to our people that the West is ready to deal with Iran on the basis of mutual respect and mutual interests and equal footing, then it will have an impact on almost every aspect of Iran's foreign policy behavior - and some aspects of Iran's domestic policy." Mohammad Javad Zarif

Overview

Iran is a dominant country in the region with a history stretching back millennia. Recall from your readings of Thucydides who eventually prevailed in the Peloponnesian War. As the Middle East's second most populous country, with the fourth largest GDP, Iran is a major player in regional politics. Its large territory is situated on critical sea lanes of communication: the Persian Gulf, including the Strait of Hormuz, as well as the oil-rich Caspian Sea.

The US relationship and view of Iran remains deeply affected by the 1979 theocratic revolution that saw the US ally, Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi, ousted, and US diplomatic personnel held hostage for 444 days. Following the 1979 Revolution, Iran was a revolutionary state, trying to export its model of a Shia theocracy across the region by supporting Shia militias, governments and terrorist organizations. But today, Iran is arguably more a status quo state, less committed to exporting its revolution, and far more concerned with protecting its national interests. Though Tehran continues to support terrorist groups and sub-state actors, this is arguably a result of their overall weakness and reliance on asymmetric means. Much of this support also comes from the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC), a security force outside of the state's chain of command, directly responsible to the theocratic leadership. The IRGC and other paramilitary forces responsible to the theocratic leadership have been used to quell domestic opposition, which since 2013 has become broader based.

Iran is a regional power, and every major conflict in the region has seen a degree of Iranian involvement. It is naive to think that Iran can be excluded from any discussions searching for a durable political solution in Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, or Yemen.

Iran's clandestine quest for nuclear weapons remains important. The US put together multi-lateral sanctions regime that devastated the economy and forced Tehran to accept the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). Negotiations between Iran and the "Perm Five + 1"²

¹ Many thanks to Professor Lisa Bronson for the following text and source recommendations which is drawn from her course, AY19 6500, Topic 11 at National War College.

² The five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council - China, France, Russia, United Kingdom, United States - plus Germany.

began in 2013 and culminated with the JCPOA in 2015. Iran agreed to suspend its nuclear program in return for the lifting of economic sanctions, including the unfreezing of assets overseas. Critics of the JCPOA argue that it did nothing to roll back their nuclear program, and that at the end of 10 years they will have the capabilities to resume where they left off. Supporters of the agreement argue that without it, they would already have nuclear weapons, and what Iran really wants anyway are not nuclear weapons, but “break out capability”; i.e. the capacity to construct weapons, without having them.

In May 2018, the Trump Administration announced the U.S. withdrawal from JCPOA and the reintroduction of economic sanctions. In a statement on 8 May, President Trump argued that deficiencies in the agreement would not guarantee Iran could not develop nuclear weapons and did not hold Iran to account for its ballistic missile defense program, support for proxy militias abroad, regional relations, and human rights abuses that would continue with the lifting of sanctions. President Trump has frequently referenced Iranian "bad behavior", such as support for Hezbollah or the Assad regime in Syria, or harassment of the US Navy in the Persian Gulf, for his justification to not re-certify that Iran is in compliance with the nuclear agreement (JCPOA). The Trump administration left the JCPOA even though neither the IAEA nor the US intelligence community found any evidence that Iran was in violation of the agreement.

The United States has a ban on most trade and investment with Iran that has been in place since 6 May 1995.³ The United States has unilaterally applied additional sanctions, though it has failed to get other signatories to the JCPOA to enforce them.

The other signatories to the agreement – Russia, China, France, Britain, and Germany – expressed their disagreement with the U.S. assessment and their continued commitment to implementation with Iran. Iran and other signatories to the agreement, such as the European Union, continue to abide by it. Earlier this year, France, Germany, and the United Kingdom, with the support of the European Union, took action to salvage the nuclear deal by creating a separate channel for trade with Iran called the Instrument in Support of Trade Exchanges, or INSTEX.⁴

Iran will hold presidential elections in 2021, and without a clear peace dividend or sanctions relief that were promised to revitalize the economy, the moderate government of Hassan Rouhani could face a sharp challenge by hardliners. The economy is set to contract by 2.6 percent in 2019.

Tehran, for its part, has categorically refused to renegotiate the agreement that it, and international inspectors have agreed to date, has largely complied with. But clearly hardliners in Tehran have long opposed the agreement and are also looking for an excuse to renege on the agreement, while blaming the United States for the collapse. While Iran threatened to terminate its relationship with the IAEA if the United States scrapped the JCPOA, it remains within the agreement, and continues to accept international monitoring.⁵

³ Kenneth Katzman, "Iran: Internal Politics and U.S. Policy and Options," Congressional Research Service, 30 April 2019, pp. 2-15.

⁴ Naysan Rafati and Ali Vaez, "A New Trade Vehicle Could Preserve the Nuclear Deal's Core Bargain," Foreign Affairs, 4 February 2019.

⁵ Rick Gladstone, "Iran Hints at Rift with Atomic Agency if U.S. Quits Nuclear Deal," New York Times, 8 January 2018.

[The following language is for scenario use only. It is not based on any knowledge of internal deliberations within the Department of Defense.]

Senior U.S. defense officials have recently returned from meetings with defense leaders in the UK, France, and Germany in which they asked the United States to reconsider a revised nuclear deal with Iran in an effort to reduce tensions in the region and reconcile potential trade disputes with India, Japan, South Korea, and Turkey who (with China) are the largest trading partners for Iranian oil.

Assignment

You are assigned to the Joint Staff J5 Middle East Directorate. You have been asked to write an Iran Options Memo for the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs and the Secretary of Defense to support an upcoming NSC Principals meeting.

Draft a 3-page options memorandum that analyzes two options: the U.S. current strategy and a revised JPCOA (nuclear deal) with Iran. Critical to your analysis will be identify the essential military elements of each option, an assessment of the military requirements, and an assessment of risks, tradeoffs, and/or opportunities.

Recommend you spend no more than three hours on this assignment. On Friday, bring two hard copies to the seminar – turn one into the instructor and use the second for peer reviews. Be sure to include your name, war college, and seminar number.

See **Options Paper template** on the following page.

OPTIONS PAPER (template)

(3 pages in length; no footnotes; no attachments; 11 point font; 1-inch margins; single space within sections; double space between sections)

ISSUE: How to address Iran's nuclear program

BACKGROUND: (*Knowns/Facts* and *Key Unknowns* two paragraphs; max 1/2 of page)

ASSUMPTIONS: (10-15 one-two line bullets; ½ to 1 page)

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STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES: (three one-two line bullets) *List In Priority Order*

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OPTION 1: (up to one page) *Summarize the current strategy (withdrawal from JCPOA)*
(Describe at least three instruments of statecraft (means) and the way in which they are orchestrated together to form a strategic option; you should select the military as one of the three instruments and include a detailed assessment of the military requirements).

PROS: *(state exactly how/why the option achieves each of the stated objectives)*

CONS: *(costs, consequences, opportunity costs, risks, extent to which an objective is not met)*

OPTION 2: (½ to 1 page) Department of State leads USG efforts to seek a revised nuclear agreement.

(Describe at least three instruments of statecraft and the way in which they are orchestrated together to form a strategic option; detail the military's role as one of the three instruments, how it would support this option, and include an assessment of the military requirements).

PROS:

CONS:

DISCUSSION: (between ½ and ¾ of a page) *Use this section compare and contrast the relative costs ("cons") and benefits ("pros") with specific focus on the military implications of both options. Summarize the advice you would recommend the Secretary or the Chairman deliver (5-6 sentences or talking points).*

(Note: space allocations are notional to help "plan" your paper. If in your judgment, more space needs to be allocated to "assumptions" because you believe there are more critical assumptions, feel free to make the space trade off. Try to keep the amount of space allocated to each option about the same – this will help you in providing impartial and balanced options. It will also weed out bogus options -- if there's not much to say, it's probably not a viable option)

Required Readings [80 pages]

- “The Iran Primer” The United States Institute for Peace, <http://iranprimer.usip.org/>.
- Director of National Intelligence, Daniel R. Coats, "Worldwide Threat Assessment of the US Intelligence Community," 29 January 2019, pp. 29-31. [3 pages]
- Kenneth Katzman, Paul K. Kerr, and Valerie Heitshusen, "U.S. Decision to Cease Implementing the Iran Nuclear Agreement," Congressional Research Service, 9 May 2018. [14 pages]
- Kenneth Katzman, "Iran’s Foreign and Defense Policies," Congressional Research Service, 8 May 2019, pp. 5-23. [18 pages]
- Michael R. Pompeo, "Confronting Iran: The Trump Administration's Strategy," Foreign Affairs, November/December 2018. [6 pages]
- Colin H. Kahl, "Pompeo’s Dangerous Delusions," Foreign Affairs, 24 October 2018. [5 pages]
- Naysan Rafati and Ali Vaez, "A New Trade Vehicle Could Preserve the Nuclear Deal’s Core Bargain," Foreign Affairs, 4 February 2019. [3 pages]
- Steven Simon and Richard Sokolsky, “How to Prevent an Accidental War with Iran,” Foreign Policy, 21 May 2019. [3 pages]
- Kathy Gilsinanskrishnadev Calamur, “The Many Ways Iran Could Target the United States,” The Atlantic, 6 May 2019. [3 pages]
- Haleh Esfandiari, ”Reform or Revolution? Iran’s Path to Democracy, "Foreign Affairs (January/February 2018). [7 pages]
- Alex Vatanka, "Iran and the United States Can be Friends," Foreign Policy, 28 November 2018. [5 pages]
- Mahsa Rouhi, "From Rogue to Regular: What will it take for Washington to accept Iran as a “normal” state?" Foreign Policy, 4 February 2019. [5 pages]
- International Crisis Group, "The Illogic of the U.S. Sanctions Snapback on Iran," Briefing No. 64, 2 November 2018, at <https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east- north-africa/gulf-and-arabian-peninsula/iran/b64-illogic-us-sanctions-snapback- iran>. [7 pages]