



PERSPECTIVES

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A Year After the JCPoA: An Interim Report on the Nuclear Deal with Iran

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: A year after it was finalized, the nuclear deal with Iran has clearly made the region and the world more dangerous, notwithstanding the temporary respite won in Iran's pursuit of a nuclear weapon. The Obama administration's advocacy of warmer relations with Tehran appears totally removed from realities on the ground. Iran is using its new legal position to obscure, rather than clarify, past activities and present inventories; work on ballistic missiles and on the acquisition of materials for Iran's non-conventional weapons arsenal continues apace; repression has worsened; regional subversion is at its peak; and exterminatory positions towards Israel are openly put forward. The JCPoA has in no way moderated Iran's stance, nor made it a legitimate member of the community of nations.

A year to the day after the "Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action" (JCPoA), better known as the Iran nuclear deal, was finalized in Vienna (and nearly six months after "implementation day", 18 January 2016), the argument over the deal's value and utility remains far from settled. Vocal supporters – such as editorial writers at *The New York Times*, and, presumably, the administration sources who helped feed them their lines – now advocate for further conciliatory gestures, the drastic removal of sanctions, and normalized relations (exemplified by the Boeing sales). Their object is to strengthen Iranian "moderates" against their rivals and keep the promise of the JCPoA alive. The alleged views of former Israeli officials are even produced to make this case.

Recent indicators belie these advocates' rosy view. Take, for example, the brutal and exterminatory speech by Deputy Commander of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps, Hossein Salami, on 1 July, excitedly informing his massed audience that 100,000 rockets and missiles in Lebanon (and tens of thousands elsewhere) are ready to wipe out the "accursed black dot", Israel. Consider, too, the revelations in Germany about illicit Iranian acquisition efforts for their non-conventional weapons arsenal.

One might be excused for believing that some in New York and Washington live in a parallel universe, populated by moderate and well-meaning Iranians, whose only wish is to fly about comfortably as they seek their place in the community of nations. For many in our region, and Israel is far from alone in this respect, such delusional interpretations of reality are downright dangerous.

Silence can be misleading. The absence of ongoing overt opposition to the deal by Israeli government officials should not be misconstrued as a sign of complacency. Nor should the points raised by former officials and leaders – challenging Prime Minister Netanyahu's priorities and decrying what they describe as his alarmist style – be read as signs of acceptance of Obama's arguments in favor of the deal. The government has simply shifted gears, because there is no point in fighting a lost battle – at least until January 2017.

Other critics of the government, meanwhile, believe that because the JCPoA (as almost everyone is willing to acknowledge) has given us a few years' breathing space, Israel should turn her energies to other issues, particularly those concerning the Palestinians. None of these views should be interpreted, however, as having reversed the broadly held belief that the JCPoA was, and is, a bad deal – and certainly far worse than what could have been achieved, given the immense levers the P5+1 were in a position to use at the time.

It is true that most of Iran's stockpile of enriched uranium has been shipped out, many of its centrifuges mothballed, and the Arak reactor disabled. A genuine respite has been achieved, which can still be put to good use with proper planning. But in almost every respect, the balance sheet is worrying – not only in terms of realities on the ground, but in terms of what we are retroactively learning about both the veracity and the wisdom of confident American claims in support of the "new era" of relations with Tehran. The US administration made these claims a year ago and has reiterated them in recent weeks.

To begin with, the first and second quarterly reports by the IAEA on Iranian compliance have left serious questions unanswered, indicating (among other

things) gaps in interpretation on what needs to be disclosed about Iran's existing stockpiles. As Director General Yukiya Amano explained in March, after the first report came out, Security Council Resolution 2231 – which endorsed the JCPOA – removed previous reporting requirements and reduced, rather than increased, the level of transparency. That is hardly a promising start towards "blocking all of Iran's paths" to the Bomb, as the US administration has claimed the deal does.

Moreover, the Iranian regime – "moderates" and hardliners alike – has now insolently rejected all Security Council resolutions requiring an end to its ballistic missile program, raising serious questions about the program's ultimate purpose. A long-range ballistic missile is a bizarre choice with which to bring a conventional high explosives payload to a target. It is likely that the Iranians are already laying the foundations for a military nuclear arsenal, once they are free of their present limitations.

As for internal repression, even steadfast supporters of the JCPOA now admit (as did the German Ambassador in Israel last month at the INSS) that things have been going from bad to worse. Precisely because the deal gave rise to hopes of liberalization, the Supreme Leader and the IRGC moved brutally to suppress any sign of "cultural invasion" and any relaxation in the patterns of repression. Attacks on relative reformists like Rafsanjani grew sharper, executions and arrests are on the rise, and the leader's line is being strictly enforced.

Subversion across the region – with Iran already in control in Lebanon, Syria (jointly with Russia), much of Yemen and parts of Iraq – continues to be a major cause of concern. Iran's ambition to overthrow the existing order, both locally and globally, have only become more pronounced, with Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Bahrain singled out for threats and abuse. The humiliation meted out to US servicemen in the Gulf was more than simply an arrogant act of defiance: it was a signal to the small Gulf countries that their traditional reliance on the US may have been misplaced.

When it comes to Israel, the level of virulence is on the rise. This may be a product of heated competition for regional hegemony; it may even be a deliberate attempt to conceal the fact that neither Hezbollah nor Iran has done anything active against Israel in years. But from an Israeli perspective, given our history, exterminatory declarations cannot be dismissed as irrelevant. The half-hearted international reaction to Salami's words – and to the abomination of the "caricature competition on the theme of the Holocaust" earlier this year – adds to the sense of anger and dismay.

It is true that, as US Deputy National Security Adviser Ben Rhodes (the man who masterminded the marketing of the deal to the American public) asserted in mid-June, the JCPOA was never meant to resolve any issue other than the nuclear program. But the administration is well aware of Iran's "support for terrorist organizations like Hezbollah, or its threats towards Israel". One might have expected that the president and his secretary of state would maximize their remaining leverage on Iran to bring these practices to an end. What they are doing instead – in looking for ways to enable Iran to access dollars, among other things – is the opposite of what their own language would have led us (or Iran) to believe.

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