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## JOINT COMPREHENSIVE PLAN OF ACTION (JCPOA): PROSPECTS AND CHALLENGES FOR THE GLOBAL SECURITY

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### Abstract

**Purpose of the study:** The Iranian Nuclear ambition is an issue that tends to disturb the strategic balance and therefore the peace in the world's most important geopolitical and geostrategic region; the Middle East. This study intends to explore the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), the agreement signed to reign the Iranian nuclear ambitions.

**Methodology:** This is exploratory qualitative research. It utilises the embedded case study method in which the said phenomenon is explored at different levels of analysis.

**Main Findings:** Though there existed different types of perceptions vis-à-vis JCPOA, commonly known as the Iranian nuclear deal, yet the withdrawal of the US from it under the Trump administration gave Iran a rationale to further pursue its nuclear ambitions. So, the US withdrawal from the deal has enhanced the threat perceptions for global and regional security.

**Applications of this study:** The study targets the students, scholars, and policy practitioners of Middle Eastern studies.

**Novelty/Originality of this study:** The novelty is the use of an embedded case study method to explore the impact of the JCPOA and US withdrawal from it, at different levels of analysis.

**Keywords:** Global Security, 9/11, Arab Spring, Iranian Nuclear Ambitions, JCPOA, P5+1.

### INTRODUCTION

Today's world has truly evolved into a global village thanks to rapid technological advances and cultural shifts taking place all over the world. The world today is an extremely interconnected place where an insignificant event at one place possesses the potential to wreak havoc on other places, such as 9/11 or the Arab Spring. The most pressing problem that globalization has brought along is that of global security, the whole world has turned into a giant village filled with uncertainty, marked with negative sum interests where everyone is competing against everyone. Yet, few incidents and issues have more potential to shake the whole world upside down than others because of their nature and extent. Iranian nuclear program is one such issue that has been impacting the nature and contours of the international political system. Security is a dangerous liability for Iran's nuclear program which is occasionally met with dangerous physical and cyber-attacks on its installations. Iran is ranked among the worst countries in terms of the security of its nuclear materials and stockpiles. The Obama administration, by realizing the gravity of the situation, extended a cooperative hand to the Iranian regime. After a marathon of serious negotiations, an extensively detailed and promising Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) deal was signed between Iran and P5+1. Both parties stood mutually benefitted from the agreement, and so did the whole world because it has impacted global security and nonproliferation. The Trump administration considered the decision a bad move and withdrew from it while the other parties to the deal refused to follow suit and remained members of the JCPOA. Iran laid out its own set of conditions if the US looks forward to re-joining the deal under the new administration.

Iran's interest in nuclear weapons dates back to the 1950s when the United States itself assisted Iran in having a civil nuclear plant through its Atoms for Peace Initiative (Inskeep, 2015). The Islamic Revolution of 1979 did halt the construction of the Iranian nuclear plant for a while, but the regional strategic setting and anarchic structure based upon fierce competition forced Iran to go nuclear to survive. Post-revolution Iran on one hand faced incessant sanctions that crippled Iran's economy by cutting short almost half of its oil exports, on the other hand, deteriorating regional security dynamics compelled international actors to hold talks with Iran over the nuclear dispute and put a halt upon vicious arms race and a probable nuclear proliferation in the region.

Keeping in view all these factors, 'P5+1' powers (Five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council i.e., China, France, Russia, United Kingdom, and the United States, plus Germany) embarked on a negotiating mission with Iran to keep a check on its nuclear ambitions. Followed by a marathon of serious negotiations between Iran and the P5+1 powers, a historical agreement was concluded in July 2015, known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), commonly known as the Iran-Nuclear Deal. According to this agreement, economic sanctions on Iran will gradually be minimized and eventually lifted if it complies with the safeguards of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) regarding its nuclear program. JCPOA is nothing less than a hard-earned milestone amidst a fierce multifaceted dispute such as the one brewing in the Middle East, but at times, the agreement has had to face harsh opposition and criticism. A lot of scholarly work and journalistic thoughts have been penned down to explore the historical and strategic factors

which contributed to the conclusion of this deal and the implications this deal has for the region, its forefront signatories and effecters, Iran and the United States in particular.

This study is an attempt to elucidate this historical deal through the theoretical lens(es). The factors which contributed to its conclusion, the structural dynamics that guided the actions of its participants and the implications that were faced by the region in the form of after-effects are analysed through structural or neo-realism. Furthermore, future policy options and their impacts are also analysed.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Theorizing the Iranian Nuclear Puzzle

To understand the importance and implications of JCPOA on international security the lens of Structural Realism will be utilized. Iranian Nuclear Puzzle is one of the modern jigsaws in which each piece is connected with the other, yet it is so difficult to comprehend. Structural Realism can better help us in understanding this puzzle because of its many components that rightly explain the actions of different actors.

The basic assumption of Structural Realism put forward by Kenneth Waltz is that the International System is anarchical and there is a state of war of all against all (Waltz, 1979). In such an anarchic system, most of the time states don't have a free choice rather they have to bandwagon and succumb to structural pressure and adopt the course that is dictated by the system. According to Waltz, an anarchic system and distribution of capabilities are powerful constraints that compel states to behave in a specific manner (Waltz, 1979). Iran is an important actor in the Middle Eastern region. The implications of Iran becoming a nuclear weapon state will be seismic and will be felt across the globe. As there is no global government, in an anarchical structure the JCPOA was an attempt to maintain stability in the international system by leading states of the world.

This struggle toward international stability takes us to the second component of structural realism called the balance of power ("The Balance of Power," 1995). To maintain stability, it is necessary to maintain a balance of power. If Iran goes nuclear it will alter the balance of power in its favour, thus compelling its competitors to feel vulnerable and giving rise to a security dilemma; the third component of structural realism. This security dilemma will then further aggravate other states in the region to look for a nuclear weapon of their own, thus triggering an arms race. The lens of structural realism explains the factors that compel states to stop Iran from going nuclear. To achieve this, different measures were utilized from economic sanctions and oil embargos to nuclear deals. JCPOA is the latest of these efforts which look to solve this puzzle through a nuclear deal.

Kenneth Waltz also proposed a level of analysis approach to understand International Relations. According to this approach, there are three levels of analysis; the individual, the state, and the international system (Singer, 1961). With the help of this approach, we can understand the impact of specific events or actions on any of our desired levels. This approach is utilized to understand the implications of US withdrawal from JCPOA at the State level and on the International System level.

### Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA)

The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) is a comprehensive 159-page document signed between P5+1 powers and Iran. Under this agreement, Iran commits to forego its nuclear program in exchange for sanctions relief which has hampered the economic growth of the country. JCPOA is a sustainable step towards the preservation of the nuclear non-proliferation regime as this deal extends over 15 years. For those 15 years, all the signatories along with the IAEA would continue to keep a routinely check on the Iranian nuclear program and Iran's compliance with the agreement. Not only that, but JCPOA also allows IAEA to conduct regular inspections of Iran's nuclear facilities for an indefinite period. No enrichment activity is to be allowed at any nuclear facility up until 2031. This not only increases the break-out time required for creating a nuclear weapon but also eliminates any possible military dimension of Iran's nuclear program.

This agreement restrains Iran from enriching uranium beyond 3.67 per cent which is sufficient enough to build dirty bombs or full-fledged nuclear bombs if it is enriched up to or above 90 per cent. The deal was endorsed by United Nations Security Council (UNSC) on 18<sup>th</sup> July 2015. After its formal adoption, Iran and the P5+1 powers officially took steps to fully implement JCPOA (Vishwanathan, 2016). IAEA, the nuclear non-proliferation watchdog, is there to certify whether Iran is taking steps to reduce its enrichment capabilities, transferring extra enriched material to desired locations, complying with the terms of the agreement, and fully following the IAEA safeguards to offer sanctions relief and compensation to Iran. JCPOA is a reliable and effective means to block all paths for Iran to achieve a nuclear weapon for at least 15 years. Not only that, but this plan of action also restricts other ways for Iran to attain nuclear weapons for an indefinite period. In the worst-case scenario, with no nuclear safeguards in place and Iran's zero compliance to the restrictions, the nuclear break-out window for the next 10-15 years for building a nuclear weapon would at least be a year. More precisely, along with uranium, this plan of action also blocks the plutonium pathway for a nuclear weapon for the next 15 years. As said earlier, JCPOA blocks every possible way Iran could get its hands on a nuclear weapon.

Despite detailed scrutiny of the Iranian nuclear program and the intent to limit Iran's futuristic nuclear ambitions, JCPOA has been subject to criticism by various circles in the United States in particular, and in the Middle East in

general (Einhorn, 2015). One of the concerns that forefront critiques of JCPOA share, is that while it certainly has worked to contain nuclear proliferation, it has not dealt with other concerns about Iran which may lead to increased tension in the Middle Eastern region. Critics state that for a better regional security framework, there is more to be done. Iran's missile tests have been the bone of contention which has not been dealt with through JCPOA. As far as Iran is concerned, it has already stated that the missile program is essential for Iran's defence and therefore it is non-negotiable. Iran has stated that the United States should stop selling weapons to its allies Israel and Saudi Arabia to avoid any unbalance in the regional balance of power.

## METHODOLOGY

This is a qualitative exploratory study. The specific method utilised to conduct this study remains an embedded case study. The phenomenon, thus, is analysed at different levels of analysis. Data utilised for the conduct of this study remains mostly secondary in nature.

## RESULTS/FINDINGS/DISCUSSION

### US withdrawal and its Implications.

The United States withdrew from the JCPOA during the time of Donald J. Trump. His administration was unreasonably hawkish and, on occasions, illogical for mere populist rhetoric. Trump administration targeted Obama for concluding this deal in his campaign and reverted the deal, putting maximum pressure on Iran through sanctions. Eventually, he won the election and rolled the United States out of the deal, which made the future of the deal uncertain (Landler, 2018). On other hand, Trump restored relations with his allies in the Middle East and played a crucial role in turning the Abraham Accords into a reality.

Now, to analyse the post-withdrawal implications, Structural Realism theory will be used. As highlighted in the theory, the post-withdrawal implications would be analysed on two levels of analysis: the domestic or the state level, and the global level in the context of the Iran-Nuclear deal.

#### Domestic level

The US withdrawal wreaked havoc on and in Iran. The anti-Rouhani group, which was already sceptical of the deal and criticised the president for giving up the country's right to become nuclear, came out lashing at him even more aggressively. With economic sanctions reinstated in place by the United States, the economy once again reaches the brink of collapsing with millions of people losing their jobs and inflation skyrocketing once again (Desk, 2019; Nasseri et al., 2018). Supporters of the Supreme Leader blame President Rouhani for grim incompetency and accuse him of selling state secrets to the United States as within three years that the deal remained intact, the United States gathered as much information about the nuclear program of Iran as was possible and required which makes the Iranian nuclear vulnerable to attacks in future be it a physical or cyber-attack (Zetter, 2014). Overall, the US withdrawal worsened the politico-economic situation in Iran, Rouhani's optimism didn't pay off, and although unlikely, there is fear of political turmoil.

#### Global level

At the global level, this deal has been more beneficial for Iran in terms of agreements with the western world. Post-withdrawal support from the western world is a diplomatic win for Iran which Iran is utilizing to manipulate the United States back into the deal. US withdrawal has proven to be more beneficial for Iran, as it removed the superpower from the equation on the regional political chessboard and gave other interesting powers space to deal with Iran legitimately. Moreover, the deal provided global powers especially China and Russia to integrate with Iran geo-strategically and geopolitically, while the vacuum created by the United States' withdrawal has been filled with vigour by both great powers, which is a great win for China, Iran, and Russia and a diplomatic and geopolitical loss for the United States in a longer run. China and Russia are in the process of signing multi-billion dollar agreements with Iran (Gady, 2016; PN, 2020). Iran's policy of having strong relations with the Eastern great powers i.e., Russia and China and the rising powers, such as India – despite the US sanctions are helping it strengthen militarily, politically, diplomatically, and economically.

Moreover, JCPOA has significantly altered the geopolitical and geo-strategic landscape of the whole region. In the matter of the past six years, many have gained from the situation, and many have lost. Iran and its allies have gained from this whole saga as Iran now enjoys western support against the will of the United States while the United States has lost its credibility in realpolitik and the vacuum was quickly filled by the next contenders which is a huge diplomatic setback to the superpower.

### Future of JCPOA: A Quagmire for Biden Administration

The United States withdrawal from the JCPOA has multi-dimensional impacts at various levels. Not only has this undermined the United States supremacy in the region but it has also provided room for Iran to carry out its nuclear ambitions without any moral burden. Since the United States' withdrawal, Iran has exceeded many of the limits which were imposed through the original deal. Not only has Iran increased the enrichment activity at its facilities, but it has also been increasing its stockpiles of low-enriched Uranium. Although, the IAEA inspectors can still access Iran's nuclear

facilities Iran's compliance with IAEA's safeguards has been significantly reduced. The new Biden administration had repeatedly hinted that the United States return to the Iran nuclear deal. However, that too is conditioned by other factors such as a review of Iran's ballistic missiles program and its regional policies.

Just as JCPOA has significantly altered the regional security framework, the United States' withdrawal from the deal and Iran's growing persistence with going nuclear have further complicated the regional geostrategic dynamics which has made it even more unsafe, volatile, and vulnerable. Owing to that, other powers in the region also looked to enhance their military capabilities. Saudi Arabia, which has been a staunch critic of JCPOA had already stated that if "Iran pursues a nuclear weapon, Saudi Arabia would have no choice but to follow the nuclear path" (Reif, 2018). Similarly, the UAE also has opened its first nuclear station named 'Barakah Nuclear Station' (Staff, 2020).

Statistics suggest that practically it is not conducive for these states to embark on a nuclear path for creating a weapon soon, however, the regional political and security environment might compel them to do so to enhance their security, which indicates the beginning of a strategic arms race in the region. With Israel's nuclear program being an open secret, nuclear proliferation can further push down the Middle Eastern region on the path of turmoil and poverty in the future as an arms race at such a massive extent and that too in a highly volatile region such as the Middle East, can serve nobody's interests. Although Waltz proposes that the more nuclear weapons you have the more stability it brings, as happened in the case of US-USSR and India-Pakistan, but with complex geo-strategic, geopolitical, religious-cultural, economic conditions and the presence of so many possible nuclear flashpoints, the Middle East will be further plunged into chaos and poverty as the cost of maintenance and securing nuclear weapons and radioactive material exceeds the cost of actually making the bomb. Nuclear proliferation in the Middle East is not only dangerous in terms of the state actors but also in terms of non-state actors, as the region is inundated with terrorist outfits, proxy, and civil wars, therefore having nuclear weapons in such a quagmire will increase insecurity and instability ("Prospects for the Iran Nuclear Deal," 2020).

Iranian Nuclear Deal remains one of the key foreign policy questions for the Biden administration. The peace and stability of the Middle East depend upon the choices and actions of this administration (Luce & Williams, 2021). Returning to the deal might be more complicated than it looks. The United States has repeatedly persisted that Iran should immediately halt its nuclear activities if it wants to melt the ice and ease sanctions while Iran isn't ready to trust the Americans once again and demands the prior removal of sanctions to restart the process of negotiations (Goldberg & Dubowitz, 2021; Wright, 2020). The United States' attempt to re-join the deal also correlates with the fact that when former US President Donald Trump announced unilateral withdrawal from the deal in 2018, Democrats unequivocally opposed his hasty, irrational, and illogical decision.

JCPOA is an international agreement involving key European states who have shown active interest since the negotiations begin in the first place. European powers' stakes in the deal correlate with both the United States and Iran. While the United States has been a key European partner in many ways, Europe's relations with Iran are mainly economic. The Middle Eastern region and its natural resources are one of the key reasons why JCPOA is equally vital for the Europeans and the sudden withdrawal of the United States also left European powers in shatters (Rahim, 2019). On one hand, remaining signatories, especially key US allies Britain, France, and Germany have vowed to honour the agreement despite the United States' absence, on another hand, on several occasions the European powers have urged the United States to re-join and honour its pledge but with no success (Ellyatt, 2020). With the new administration in the United States and its intention to revive the deal, it would also be beneficial for the European powers to weigh in and play their better part in the revival.

Biden administration is also worried about an increase in the Chinese and Russian influence in the region in the absence of the United States which is harmful to the strategic and political interests of the superpower in the longer term. Russian interest and ambitions in the region are discernible in wake of the role that it played in the Syrian conflict. China has also been increasing its presence in the region through its economic ventures especially its trademark geo-economic project 'BRI' (Cai, 2017; Chatzky & McBride, 2020). While the United States' withdrawal from the deal may have dealt a severe blow to JCPOA as a whole, it cannot be denied that it may have worked well for other global powers such as China and Russia (Osiewicz, 2018).

It would not be an overstatement to say that Iran has gained more from the United States' withdrawal from the deal than it has lost. The absence of the United States has not only given leverage to the Iranian stance in this whole saga, but Iran has also managed to work it for its advantage. Iran's growing non-compliance with the components of the deal, its notorious expansion on the bank of its proxy policies, and an increased Iranian role in the Middle Eastern region are in a way the outcome of this development (Jett, 2018). However, with the Biden administration's intent to re-join the deal and after the Iranian presidential elections, it would be another challenge for President Joe Biden on how he moves ahead with the intention of re-joining the deal. It is generally presumed that the Iranian Presidential elections saw the return of hard-liners into the corridors of power who have been immanent critics of this deal since its inception. As this happened, it will present another challenge to the Biden administration because it would not be easier to deal with the new leadership and their perception of the deal.

Given the priorities of the new administration, with the pandemic raging all across the world and its severe hit on the United States economy, the Iranian Nuclear deal may not be at the top of the agenda list for this administration. This provides Iran with an opportunity to escalate its nuclear activities and increase its nuclear stockpile. While it is not the first choice of the current US administration to make a sudden return to the deal on Iranian terms but delaying this matter may worsen the situation for the future (Wright, 2020). Therefore, the United States should take the first steps to show its commitment to the deal, this will also give Iran a certain hope and create a conducive environment in which this process can move ahead without any enmity and grudge from either side.

Some of the elements in the Biden administration have pointed out the fact that while this administration is seriously looking at different prospects for re-joining the Iran deal, it will also look forward to extending and enhancing the deal in its follow-up. This means that there will also be a focus on Iran's missile program and Iran's regional activities. The United States has also intended that for better inquisitions, regional players will also be included in the follow-up negotiations. Iran has never shown any positive intent in this regard as there exists a lot of trust deficit among the regional states, especially the Arabs and Iran. Moreover, Iran has also rejected extending the sunset clauses of the deal and as far as its missile program is concerned, Iran has termed it as its alienable right to enhance its defence capabilities and it will not accept any limitations as long as its regional rivals acquire defence equipment, especially from the United States. In light of all these findings, the Biden administration must deal simultaneously with all of these issues. Past experiences have shown that coercion and maximum pressure have resulted otherwise, therefore, the future also depends on a diplomatic engagement that would involve both sides respectively (Goldberg & Dubowitz, 2021).

It is imminent that the Biden administration brings all the working options to the table while it decides to deal with the Iranian nuclear issue. While the withdrawal from JCPOA caused a certain dent to the United States hegemonic posture in global affairs, the United States cannot afford yet another policy miscarriage by backing out of the Abraham Accords or the arms deals that Trump signed with the Arabs, just to re-join the JCPOA. Moving on, the United States should actively engage with Iran and other negotiating partners of the deal. The Biden administration's decision to review the arms sales to its Arab allies can be a welcoming sign for re-engaging Iran in negotiations. Furthermore, the United States needs to take preliminary steps and remove the sanctions which can improve Iran's economy and trade, such positive incentives will go a long way in gaining Iran's trust and compliance (Goldberg & Dubowitz, 2021). In saying so, it should also be particularly important for the Biden administration to initiate a multilateral deal with Iran which also covers its ballistic missile programs and its regional activities, although Iran has repeatedly refused to discuss these matters and declared them non-negotiable. Securing a multilateral deal, to not only limit Iran's nuclear ambitions but its regional designs as well, will not only enhance the security of the region but will also be a great diplomatic success for the Biden administration in the heap of all pressing challenges.

### JCPOA and Saudi Arabia

This deal has diverse effects concerning regional stability, non-proliferation (Ishaque et al., 2017) order and existing rifts in Saudi-Iran relations. Saudi Arabia, a traditionally ideological and political foe of Iran, had displayed displeasure over gradually relaxing US-Iran tensions and steady developments on the nuclear deal, now welcomed Trump's aggressive approach and ending this deal (Ishaque et al., 2017). Saudi's concerns over Iran's expanding influence from Yemen to Iraq further dictate augmenting her deterrent capability as well as alternative strategic options to keep Iran restricted from interfering in her neighbouring countries. But, on the other hand, Saudi Arabia's strategic reluctance for an anti-Iran confrontationist approach is seemingly due to over-arching dependence on the American military apparatus, fear of a nuclear arms race and changing political landscape in the region.

US-Saudi Arabia relations are marked by strategic overlapping priorities, and historic rifts but a marriage of convenience. Despite greater distrusts and different political systems and working mechanism, both overcame these troubling issues ranging from Oil embargos to the 9/11 attacks, invading Iraq to Iran Nuclear Deal. Withdrawing from JCPOA, Obama's signature legacy (Sterio, 2016) that had developed Saudi security dilemma over US assurances, received an enthusiastic welcome from the latter (Ibish, 2018). Furthermore, it led to massive US arms sales to Saudi Arabia as well which raised serious concerns about security imbalances in the Middle East. Also, it brought severe criticism to the US for ignoring Saudi's human rights violations in Yemen. A recent 8.1\$ billion arms deal (Robiou, 2019) includes the latest sophisticated, precision-guided weaponry, missiles, and jets, along with sharing hi-tech technology that has alarmed Congress as well as Arms Control institutions.

Saudi Arabia views Iran's posturing of 'dialogue-diplomacy' with her neighbours, as contradictory to her expansionist regional policy (Einhorn & Nephew, 2016). This deal is largely due to Iran's efforts to end the worsening financial crisis, raising capital for interventionist foreign policy to stoke terrorism and intensify instability for regional hegemony. Saudi Arabia feared that lifting sanctions and gradual releasing of Iranian assets shall help it expand influence –through funding proxies and endangering regional stability, stoking an unprecedented arms race –from Syria to Yemen, Now, with Biden in power, these fears are resurfacing and forcing Saudi Arabia for alternative strategic alliances and enhancing her potential capability. Though, it appears an uphill task for the Biden administration to renew this deal amid serious concerns from regional allies, particularly Saudi Arabia and Israel.

## Israel and JCPOA

Israel has been a staunch opponent voicing concerns against Iran's nuclear deal with massive sanctions to discourage the latter's ambitious agenda. Israel's vehement advocacy (Nazareth, 2019) for a 'military option' (Pasha, 2016) against the Iranian nuclear programme is one of the dominant factors which led the US to withdraw from the Iran Nuclear deal (Nazareth, 2019). Israel has been accused of assassinating Iranians and launching cyber-attacks (Shalal-Esa, 2013) on Iran's nuclear installations. Iran's pursuits of nuclear bombs and expanding proxy militias forced Israel to befriend Arab countries, targeting Iranian stakes in the region. This tit-for-tat between Israel and Iran is reshaping the middle eastern geopolitical landscape and alliances. Furthermore, despite being in alliance with the US, Israel and Arab countries were critical of this deal. They eventually succeeded in ending it. It reimposed the lifted sanctions on Iran, invigorated Israeli stance and damaged the growing rapport between Iran and US.

With President Trump gone, the prospects of renewal of the Iran Nuclear deal under the Biden administration reignited the fears and inflamed the tensions. An Israel-led vigorous campaign, linked with non-proliferation order and risks of arms race escalating into war is being pursued. Fearing Iran's multiplying resources in the wake of renewal to fund armed militias, Israel is building pressure through closing to Arab countries, media campaigns and non-proliferation regimes.

## CONCLUSION

The future of JCPOA and nuclear proliferation in this part of the world is one of the key challenges that the new administration in Washington has received from its predecessor. The new team in the Oval Office must be aware of the fact that initially when the deal was concluded back in 2015, Issues were very different at the regional level. Iran had no choice but to go for the deal or face an economic blockade. However, the situation has changed since the Trump administration unilaterally walked away from the deal. In the current situation, this has not only benefitted Iran but has also put restrictions on the policy options for the Biden administration. The newly elected President has been very vocal and optimistic about the fact that the United States will once again conclude a successful deal to restrain Iranian nuclear activities. On the contrary, the situation seems more complicated than before. Not only have the regional circumstances changed, but Iran also seems to have had the upper hand since the United States' withdrawal in 2018. Iran has clearly stated that it will not extend JCPOA to include its ballistic missile programs or any of its regional activity. Therefore, Biden and his team need to devise a carefully extracted strategy which not only saves the deal but also encompasses Iran's other activities in the region. JCPOA was a result of complicated diplomacy back in 2015. Moving on, the United States must keep diplomatic measures as its forefront option. The policy of coercion has not worked with Iran in the past and it is highly doubtful that it will work given the current context. The United States should engage directly engage Iran in talks and negotiate its way through this process.

## LIMITATIONS AND STUDY FORWARD

Biden administration has just landed in Washington DC. It is difficult to predict the policies that President Biden may pursue in future. Whether he will continue the policies of the Trump administration vis-à-vis Iran or will join back the JCPOA or still will re-negotiate the deal? Answering this question is difficult at the moment

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## AUTHORS CONTRIBUTION

The idea to write this paper was coined by Dr Summar Iqbal Babar. Afterwards, the three authors sat together and drew a complete plan of action on how to conduct this research. Since then, till the formatting of this paper for HSSR, all three authors worked together to transform the idea into a ready paper.

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