



**RESEARCH PAPER**

**Balancing Resistance and Engagements: The Politics of Iran Nuclear Policy and US Economic Sanctions**

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**ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this article is to examine Iran's dual strategy of engagement and resistance from 2015 to 2026, alongside the development of its nuclear program and the comprehensive sanctions time introduced by the United States. While previous studies have explored aspects of the Iranian nuclear issue, it remains one of the most complex and ending challenges in contemporary international relations, characterized by a delicate balance between diplomatic neglect and economic pressure. The Iran's nuclear activities, combined with the extensive sanctions enforced by the United States, have consistent drawn international attention and concern. A major diplomatic engagement, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) assent in 2015, temporarily limiting Iran's nuclear operations in exchange for sanctions relief. However, the agreement was signifiable undermined by the Trump administration's unilateral withdrawal in 2018 and the subsequent "maximum pressure" campaign, which allowed Iran to progressively expand its nuclear capabilities. Building on early research, this paper focuses on Iran's nuclear strategy and sanctions experience through an analytical review of policy developments, diplomatic negotiations, and sanctions implementation over the 2015–2026 period. Consequent of stalled negotiations, Iran is currently nearer to developing nuclear weapons than at any time since the JCPOA. The proof suggests that, even though sanctions have introduced considerable economic costs, they have been influential to halt Iran's nuclear ambitions without sustained diplomatic engagement. The future of Iran's nuclear strategy will depend on the inference of creative diplomatic solutions that balance coercive pressure with credit assurances, addressing the fundamental trust deficit between Washington and Tehran.

**Keywords:** Diplomacy, Economic Sanctions, Iran, Resistance, United States

**Introduction**

Almost for twenty years, the nuclear program of the Islamic Republic of Iran has been the topic of powerful diplomatic efforts, wider economic sanctions, and intermittent threats of military action. Iran's claim to the right to develop its superior atomic weapons for peaceful reasons and the international community's concerns about the possible spread of weapons are at the heart of this long-running conflict. In an effort to prevent Iran's nuclear ambitions without using military force, the United States, the primary creator of the internationally sanctions campaign against Iran, used a changing policy that mixes regular diplomatic engagement with harsh economic penalties (Muzaffar, et. al., 2018; Sauer, 2024). The technological development of Iran's opportunity for the development, regional and global competition in the Middle East, domestic party dynamics in Washington and Tehran, and the greater difficulty of nuclear non-proliferation in an era of great power competition all add to the quality of the Iran nuclear issue (Yaseen, et. al., 2023). The ultimate example of these challenges is the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), which has been managed to negotiate, executed, and finally collapsed among 2015 and 2018. It clearly

shows the benefits and drawbacks of diplomatic strategies to nuclear proliferation issues (The Dimming Prospects, 2022). Iran's reaction to foreign pressure is seen by intellectuals as a policy proposal that encompasses engagement and resistance. This technique emphasizes the fundamental disconnect between hardline conservatives who just want highlight national sovereignty and opposition of Western pressure and rational reformers diplomatic agreement within Iran's democratic environment (Rouhi & Batmanghelidj, 2021). Trying to design effective policy responses and understanding Iran's nuclear policy route need to have an understanding of this duality.

This article gives a detailed overview of the problems surrounding Iran's nuclear program and US economic sanctions from 2015 to 2026. Analyzed are Iran's strategic methods, the history of the nuclear problem, the mechanical design and effectiveness of the sanction system, the interactions of the JCPOA discussion and failure, and the opportunities for future peaceful solution. The study drew on contemporary scholarly literature can provide valid observations into one of the challenges of the modern most important security era.

## **Literature Review**

Through marked the start Atoms for Peace plan, US supported Shah's government in developing civil Iran's nuclear technology in 1950s, which of the program significantly grew in the 1970s with plans to create many nuclear power reactors. However, the Iran-Iraq War (1980–1988) and the Islamic Revolution of 1979 impacted these aims, and European companions ended to support them (Weiss, 2025). The program was restored in the 1990s with help and support from Russia and other countries, first trying to focus on achieving the Bushehr nuclear power plant. International concerns enhanced in 2002 when an Iranian opposition organization revealed creating more opportunities creation of unclaimed nuclear programs at Natanz and Arak, of a secret uranium enrichment. Throughout reaction to this finding, the Major countries (the E3: France, Germany, and the United Kingdom) initiated many diplomatic initiatives and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) carried out an investigation (Younis & Muzaffar, 2025; Miller, 2023). Iran's uranium nuclear development projects, that might provide both limited uranium for civil nuclear arms, reactors and, with further enhancement, highly enriched uranium useful for were the main cause of worry for the global community. Iran has always stated that it has the authority underneath Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) to generate nuclear technology for defense purposes and that its nuclear program is totally peaceful. Even so, worries about possible military aspects have been raised by the covert character of some installations, Iran's failure to cooperate fully with IAEA inspections, and the development of sophisticated reactor technology (Bobkin, 2024). By the mid-2000s, Iran's uranium enrichment had become a major worldwide concern. The United Nations Adopted many agreements urging Iran to stop its own uranium enrichment and levied harsher penalties. Despite many such constraints, Iran constructed millions of equipment and amassed growing amounts of uranium enrichment. The project was established at even a time of dramatic of tensions in the region, including issues over Iran's backing for terrorist groups in Lebanon, Iraq, and many other locations, as well as frequent risks of Israeli missile attacks against Tehran enrichment reactors (Oxford Analytica, 2022).

The history of Iran's nuclear program reveals a phenomenon of slow advancement punctuated by brief moments of criticism and restriction. In addition to the technical challenges matter of hope, obtaining nuclear arsenal, this pattern reflects the political considerations Iranian leaders who have used the plan as well as an attempting to negotiate device in international debates, mutual fund against foreign threats. Analyzing this political development is essential to acknowledging the significance of its own the JCPOA and the impacts final failure.

## **Types and Evolution of Sanctions**

The United States has imposed economic sanctions on Iran for over 40 years, making it one of countries on earth the most recognized the sanctions scheme has changed over time in response to Iran's reactions and changing US geopolitical aims. The sanctions fall into a number of different kinds, such as effective coordination with European and other allies, multilateral UN Security Council penalty points, and unilateral US sanctions (Khan, Muzaffar & Khan, 2019; Kortunov et al., 2021). Paramount sanctions ban most financial transaction between US persons and entities and Iran. These have been in place since the 1979 hostage episode, and they were further expanded to contain almost total trade prohibition in the 1990s. Supplementary sanctions, which became popular in the 2010s, build the importance of the US financial system and the appeal of the US economy to enforce US political views oversea by affecting to disadvantage foreign businesses that operate with Iran (Sauer, 2024). General and especially industries that are essential to Iran's economy, such financial institutions, healthcare, transportation, natural gas and oil, and petrochemical products, are the focus of regional economic sanctions. The oil limitations have been particularly significant because Iran's primary source of foreign investment has always been petroleum net exporters. Due to banking regulations intended to isolate Iranian financial institutions from the international financial system, Iran finds it extremely difficult to conduct overseas payments, even for non-sanctioned supplies (Weiss, 2025). The international pressure's advancement follows a trend of strengthening and intermittent easing associated with diplomatic events. Restrictions were greatly tightened among 2010 and 2015 in an attempt to get Iran to hold substantive nuclear talks. The JCPOA provided a temporary exemption from uranium restrictions among 2016 and 2018. Then, sanctions placed and raised to incredible rates as part of the Trump government's maximum pressure campaign, impacting virtually every aspect of Economic uncertainty (Pan & Tang, 2022).

## **Economic Pressure Triangle**

The concept of an "economic pressure triangle" has been utilized in recent research to examine why sanctions are frequently difficult to create and maintain. The fundamental contention is that sanctions must strike a balance between three marketing objectives: preventing unplanned repercussions, retaining political backing at local and international and altering the target state's conduct. Sanctions that are specifically intended to reduce humanitarian harm frequently fail to generate further economic pressure to alter policy. However, tough enough sanctions often result in charitable expenses and international criticism, which can erode political support (Weiss, 2025). This difficulty appears to be demonstrated by the international pressure policy against Iran. Iran's oil trade and, for then under most part, its economic production plummeted maximum pressure campaign. Even after this, the sanctions failed to achieve their declared objective of forcing Iran to engage in talks for a more comprehensive deal. Iran, on the other hand, increased its nuclear efforts in response. Foreign support for the pressure campaign was also generated by humanitarian repercussions and the introduction of conflicts with US partners. These elements also contribute to the explanation of how the Biden government has had difficulty reviving the JCPOA since it is now politically toxic in Washington to grant the degree of sanctions relief that Iran has requested (Weiss, 2025).

The article's conclusions imply that although sanctions are still a crucial instrument for policy, they are insufficient to resolve Iran's nuclear problem on their own. The fundamental political and security issues that motivate Iran's nuclear aspirations cannot be resolved by economic pressure, although it can increase expenses and spark discussions. A more successful strategy would resolve Iran's security issues, incorporate systems that foster confidence and encourage adherence to negotiations, and merge sanctions with ongoing diplomatic relationship (Weiss, 2025).

## Theoretical Framework

### Iran's Dual Strategy: Resistance versus Engagement

This double technique which maintains a balance between engagement as well as its resistance could be used to towards the understand Iran's method the nuclear problem relationship with the United States. This dichotomy is a reflection of such underlying conflicts in Iran's political structure, conflicting views country's interests, as well as strategic decisions about how to forward Iran's goals in an aggressive international context. (Purwasandi et al., 2025). Iran's right to develop nuclear techniques, as well as its sovereign rights, unwillingness to submit to outside stress are all highlighted by the resistance element. This strategy is based on the Islamic Republic's original doctrine of opposition to viewed imperialism and autonomy from foreign control. This approach's promoters, who are usually connected to traditionalist and staunch groups, contend that interaction including the West is pointless as the US wants regime change rather than sincere shelter. Those who support independence, the growth of domestic abilities, and the establishment of additional alliances to nations like China and Russia (Sauer, 2024). Iran's engagement approach focuses more on addressing the current state of the globe. Supporters of this strategy, who are primarily socialists or moderates, believe it makes sense to strive to establish connections with other nations and reenter the world's economy. They contend that Iran would benefit from less isolation, the ability to draw in some international investment, and the restoration of regular ties. According to this viewpoint, the nuclear arsenal is more of a negotiating tool than the primary objective. Restrict it a little, apply fines, and boost the domestic economy. They perceive that as the import and export.

**Table 1**  
**Comparison of Iran's Dual Strategies**

Strategy	Main Focus	Key Supporters	Tools/Actions	Goal
Resistance	Sovereignty, independence	Hardline/conservative	Nuclear program, domestic growth, alliances with China & Russia	Maintain autonomy, project foreign pressure
Engagement	Diplomacy, economic integration	Reformist/moderate	Negotiation, sanctions relief, foreign investment	Improve economy, reduce isolation

These two strategies don't actually negate one another. In actuality, Iran frequently blends them based on the circumstances. Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, the supreme leader of Iran, discusses "heroic flexibility." The concept is rather straightforward: it's alright.

## Material and Methods

The growth of Iran's nuclear program as well as the advancement, extent, effects of US sanctions are examined in this paper using a qualitative policy-analysis technique in conjunction with descriptive trend analysis. The research is organized as just a document-based analysis, using primary and secondary sources to obtain strategy purpose, methods for application, and long-term results.

Data were collected from multiple authoritative and publicly available sources to enable accuracy and balance:

### Primary Sources

- Official reports and safeguards assessments issued by the **International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)**
- US government documents, including **Treasury Department (OFAC)** sanctions lists, executive orders, and congressional regulation
- Iranian government statements and official policy documents where available

- United Nations solutions and reports related to Iran's nuclear activities and sanctions regulations

## **Secondary Sources**

- Peer-reviewed academic journal articles on nuclear proliferation and economic sanctions
- Policy reports from international think tanks and research institutions
- Books and scholarly analyzes adding Iran-US relations and non-proliferation frameworks
- Reputable news outlets used only for conceptual timelines and verification of events

## **Analytical Framework**

The analysis is guided by two complementary frameworks:

- Nuclear Non-proliferation Framework: Iran's nuclear activities are examined in relation to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), safeguards obligations, environmental exercises, and verification mechanisms.
- Sanctions Policy Framework: US sanctions are analyzed based on their legal basis (primary vs. secondary sanctions), targeted sectors (energy, finance, defense), enforcement mechanisms, and established policy objectives (deterrence, cooperation, or compliance).

All sources used are publicly available and properly attracted. The analysis avoids normative judgments and is induced with the aim of objective policy evaluation rather than advocate.

## **Results and Discussion**

### **Impact and Effectiveness of US Sanctions on Iran's Nuclear Policy**

#### **The Sanctions Effectiveness Debate**

There has been extensive debate among schoolchildren and policymakers about how effective US economic sanctions have been in constructing Iran's nuclear program. Supporters of sanctions argument that the JCPOA would not have been possible without the intensity economic pressure appeared between 2010 and 2015. In their view, sanctions played a key role in pushing Iran towards negotiations, as reflected in the signifier limits planned on its nuclear activities under the agreement. They point to the clear link between fighter sanctions and Iran's introduced willingness to engage diplomatically during this period (Weiss, 2025).

Recent studies, however, suggest that sanctions tend to be most effective when they are part of a broader strategy that combines pressure with incentives and sustained diplomatic engagement. The success of the JCPOA in 2015 is often attracted not only to sanctions, but also to the Obama administration's willingness to negotiate directly with Iran, the selection of a more moderate Iranian president, and the crafting of an agreement that addressed core concerns on both sides (Weiss, 2025).

On the other hand, the Trump administration's "maximum pressure" campaign provides a useful case for estimating the limits of sanctions when diplomacy is out. Despite unpreceded economic pressure, Iran did not concede or agree to negotiate a broader deal. Instead, it gradually expanded its nuclear activities, producing its estimated breakout time from more than a year under the JCPOA to only a few weeks by 2024. This outcome suggests

that sanctions on their own, without credit diplomatic options, may backfire by encouraging the very behavior they are introduced to prevent (Sauer, 2024).

### Unintended Consequences

Judging how successful decisions on Iran have been is not straightforward, mainly because they have produced seventh unintended results. One of the most striking outcomes is that some actors inside Iran have actually benefited from sanctions. Groups linked to the IRGC, along with their business networks, were able to take advantage of shortages and restricted markets to strength their economic position. Over time, this weakened Iran's private sector and undercut more moderate forces that might have supported engagement with the West, while at the same time empowering the system's more hardline elements (Tang & Pan, 2022).

Sanctions have also raised serious humanitarian concerns, which has made it harder to maintain international support for contained pressure. In theory, food and medicine are extract. In practice, while, banking restrictions have made paying for and importing these goods extremely different. This contributed to run out and increasing prices. These problems became visible during the COVID-19 pandemic, when Iran struggled to get vaccines and medical supplies because of financial and transaction hinders (Kortunov et al., 2021). Another important effect of sanctions has been the way they pushed Iran to look for alternatives to the Western-dominated financial system. To reduce its dependence, Iran started trade with China, Russia, and other countries and using non-dollar currencies or barter arranges. These channels have not fully replaced lost trade with the West, but they created new economic ties and dependencies that could share Iran's geopolitical position in the long run (Sauer, 2024).

### Economic Impact on Iran

US sanctions have had seven and wide-ranging effects on Iran's economy. Estimates suggest that Iran's GDP contracted by 5–10 percent in both 2012–2013 and again between 2018 and 2020, periods when sanctions pressure was particularly intense. Before the 2012 sanctions, Iran exported more than 2.5 million barrels of oil per day; diving the "maximum pressure" campaign, exports fell to fire than 500,000 barrels per day. from 2018 and 2020, the Iranian currency also lost more than 70 percent of its value against the US dollar (Miller, 2023).

**Table 2**  
**Oil Exports over Key Sanctions Periods**

Period	Average oil Exports	Notes
Pre-2012	2,500,000	Before intensification of sanctions
2012-2015	1,000,000	oil and banking sanctions in effect
2016-2018(JCPOA)	2,200,000	Temporary using of nuclear-related sanctions
2018-2020(Maximum Pressure)	500,000	sanctions reinstated and tightened

**Table 3**  
**Iran's GDP Growth and Contracting During Sanctions**

Year	GDP Growth Rate	Notes
2012	-5	Peak impact of international sanctions
2013	-10	Continued contraction
2014	3	partial recovery after adaptation
2018	-6	Maximum pressure sanctions re-imposed
2019	-7	Severe economic contraction
2020	-5	combined effects of sanctions and COVID-19

**Table 4**  
**Depreciation of the Iranian Rial against the US. Dollar**

Year	Exchange Rate (IRR/USD)	Notes
2012	12,260	Before maximum pressure
2013	25,000	Early sanctions impact
2018	42,000	After US withdrawal from the JCPOA
2020	160,000	Peak depreciation under sanctions

Sanctions have affected Iran's economy through seventh channels. Foreign investment has largely driven up as international companies withdrew from the country to avoid exposure to US penalties. At the same time, Iran's restricted access to global financial markets has made it difficult to finance imports and conduct routine international transactions. Although food, medicine, and medical equipment are officially exempt from sanctions, banking restrictions have combined their importation, leading to significant humanitarian conventions (Kortunov & Timofeev, 2021).

### Recent Developments (2020-2026): Post-Trump Era Dynamics

#### The Biden Administration's Initial Approach

When Joe Biden became president in January 2021, he said the United States was ready to return to the JCPOA if Iran also went back to following its nuclear commitments. This was a clear break from the Trump administration's maximum pressure policy and, at least at first, it created some optimism that the nuclear deal could be restored. The Biden administration organized that leaving the JCPOA had been a mistake and that it had actually moved Iran closer to developing nuclear weapons. From this perspective, the deal was seen as something that had worked in the past by placing real limits on Iran's nuclear activities (Bobkin, 2024).

In reality, bringing the agreement back proven far more complicated than exposed. One major problem was how much Iran's nuclear program had advanced since 2018. Over these years, Iran installed more advanced centrifuges, built up larger uranium stockpiles, enriched uranium to levels as high as 60 percent, and produced access for international inspectors. This meant that simply returning to the original terms of the JCPOA would leave Iran in a much stronger nuclear position than it was when the deal first came into force (International Institute for Strategic Studies. [IISS], 2022).

Talks were also slowed by the very different demands made by each side. Iran forced for compensation for the economic damage caused by the US withdrawal, the removal of sanctions introduced after 2017, and guarantees that a future US administration would not abandon the agreement again. The United States, on the other hand, wanted Iran to fully comply with the JCPOA before any sanctions relief and also pushed to discuss Iran's missile program and its role in the region. These disagreements made negotiations difficult and extremely prevented the deal from being revived (Bobkin, 2024).

#### Failed Negotiations in Vienna

During 2021 and much of 2022, the United States and Iran engaged in direct negotiations in Vienna, with European governments acting as intermediaries. While the talks clarified many technical details—such as which sanctions could be lifted and what steps Iran would need to reverse in its nuclear program—they never produced a final agreement. Northern factors explore why the process breaks down (Sauer, 2024). A major bone of contention was the difference of opinions. Washington forced that Iran first return to full compliance with its nuclear obligations, Tehran demanded that sanctions be lifted before it took any action. Neither side was willing to move without firm assurances from the other. This hesitation reflected a deeper lack of trust, reinforced by the US withdrawal from

the JCPOA under the Trump administration, which conquered Iranian leaders that American commissions could change from one administration to the next (Chung, 2022).

Iran's position also shifted after Ebrahim Raisi became president. Negotiators moved away from preliminary understandings read by the prior government and introduced touch demands. This change reflected both the more conservative outlook of the new administration and its benefit that Iran's expanding nuclear capabilities have its greater freedom. Rather than pushing for a full return to the JCPOA, the Raisi government seem more interested in limited agreements attentive to specific issues or short-term gains (Sauer, 2024). By late 2022, it was cleared to both sides that reviving the JCPOA was unlikely. Negotiations stalled and effectively came to an end. In response, the Biden administration shifted its focus towards preventing future advances in Iran's nuclear program through contained sanctions, closer coordination with allies, and warnings—implicit rather military options removed on the table if Iran moved towards funding (International Institute for Strategic Studies [IISS], 2022).

### **Iran's Nuclear Advancement and Current Status**

Without any real diplomatic limits in place, Iran has contained to push its nuclear program far beyond what was allowed under the JCPOA. By 2024, it had moved closer to a potential weapons capacity than at any early point. Iran has built up large amounts of enriched uranium which, if enriched further, could be enough for seventh nuclear weapons. It has also installed thousands of newer centrifuges that work much faster than old models. In addition, uranium environment has achieved levels of around 60 percent, which is just below weapons-grade material. What has raised the most concern is how quickly Iran could now produce enough material for a nuclear weapon. Under the JCPOA, this so-called breakout time was extended to about one year, giving the international community time to react. Recent estimates suggest that by 2024 this window may have been produced to only a few weeks. This assets Iran would use all of its accessible environment and centers for a weapons effect, something that international inspectors would like notice very quickly.

There are seventh reasons why Iran apps willing to advance its nuclear program in this way. A more advanced program lives Iran greater freedom in any future negotiations, since other states may feel introduced pressure to reach a deal. It also sends a message that Iran will not back down in response to sanctions or threats. At the same time, nuclear progress may reduce the risk of military action by acting as a deterrent. Inside Iran, these developments also carry political value, as they are presented as evidence of technological progress and resistance to Western pressure (Oxford Analytica, 2022).

### **Alternative Approaches and Mini-Deals**

With the chances of reviving the JCPOA continuing to decline, Iran and the United States have both begun looking for other ways to deal with the nuclear issue. One option Iran has reproached raised is the idea of limited or short-term "mini-deals" that focus on specific problems rather than trying to settle everything at once. These have included proposals to release detected Western citizens in exchange for the unfreezing of Iranian funds held overhead, as well as offers to scale back certain nuclear activities in return for limited sanctions relief.

The Biden administration has applied these proposals cautiously. US officials have argued that such arranges risk normalizing Iran's nuclear progress without playing strong enough limits on its program. Even so, a small number of practical understandings have taken shape. In 2023, Washington and Tehran agreed to a prisoner exchange and the release of \$6 billion in Iranian assets that had been frozen in South Korea, thought the funds were restricted to humanitarian use only. however narrow in scope, this episode showed that limited agreements can still be read, even as broker diplomacy remains stuck (Sauer, 2024).

At the same time, some commentators have argued for a so-called “Plan B.” despite trying to stop Iran's environment activities altogether, this approach would focus on preventing Iran from actually building a nuclear weapon.

### **The Challenge of Balancing Coercion and Diplomacy**

#### **The Commitment Problem**

One of the main objects in dealing with Iran's nuclear program is what scholars often describe as a “commitment problem,” meaning the difference of making credit long-term agreements in an international system where states can walk away from deeds. The Trump administration's decision to come from the JCPOA clearly illustrated this problem. It shown that even a multilateral agreement ended by the UN Security Council can be turned by a future US administration. This has had lasting consequences for subsequent negotiations.

As a result, Iran now sees assurances that any new agreement will not be abandoned in the same way. However, providing such guarantees is not straightforward within the US political system. While a Senate-ratified treaty would carry greater legal weight than an executive agreement, securing Senate appeal is extreme differential. Doing so would request a two-thirds majority at a time of deep political polarization, making ratification unlikely (Chung, 2022). More broadly, all proposed approaches face serial political and practical constraints. Relations between the United States and Iran remain deeply adversarial, trust is minimal, and strong domestic political groups on both sides' opposition any form of accommodation. Under these conditions, amazing durable agreements requests more than technical solutions. It also demands political leadership and sustained willpower capable of overcoming internal resistance and building domestic support for engagement (Purwasandi et al., 2025).

#### **The Coercion-Diplomacy Balance**

Dealing with Iran's nuclear program has always requested a balance between diplomacy and pressure. Releasing only on coercion, as seed in the maximum pressure campaign, did not produce the desired results. In fact, it arguably made the situation worse by pushing Iran further toward expanding its nuclear activities instead of restoring them. On the other hand, engagement without real pressure also carries problems, since it can allow Iran to make small concessions without accepting serious limits on its nuclear program. The JCPOA in 2015 is often cited as an example of how this balance work in practice. The heavy sanctions introduced between 2010 and 2015 created strong incidents for Iran to come to the negotiating table, while the Obama administration's willingness to engage direct and offer meaningful solutions relief made an agreement possible. The deal itself combined seven elements, including limits on Iran's nuclear activities, monitoring and verification measures, and the potentiality of sanctions being reimposed if Iran failed to comply (Weiss, 2025). After the collapse of the JCPOA, however, restoring this balance has been far more different. Although the Biden administration has signaled an interest in diplomacy while keeping many of the Trump-era sanctions in place, Iran has shown little willingness to return to the agreement. From Iran's point of view, it has been avoided interesting economic pressure, and its advancing nuclear program now lives it greater reading. As a results, Tehran sees fewer reasons to make major compromises (Miller, 2023).

#### **Regional and International Dimensions**

It is different to talk about Iran's nuclear program without also consulting the broad regional and global context. The issue is tied not only to Iran itself but also to competition among major powers such as the United States, Russia, and China. At the regional level, it is close linked to security rivalries, especially with Israel and Saudi Arabia. Because of this, any serious policy towards Iran's nuclear program has to deal with more than just the technical

nuclear questions (Muzaffar, et al., 2019; Mirza et al., 2022). Israel has considered Iran's nuclear ambitions as an existential threat and has returned that it may use military force to stop Iran from developing nuclear weapons. These concerns have occupied real limits on US policy. American administrations have had to balance their strong commitment to Israel's security with seek to keep diplomatic channels open with Iran. The constant potentiality of an Israeli strike also makes negotiations more different, since Iran may feel pressure to move faster on its nuclear program before facing military action (International Institute for Strategic Studies [IISS], 2022).

Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states also share concerns about Iran's nuclear program and its broader influence in the region. In general, they have favored a hard line toward Iran, even though they have problems been uneasy about diplomatic effects that could stretch Iran's position. Recently, the Chinese-mediated restoration of relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran in 2023 have changed the regional environment to some extent. While it is still unclear how much this will produce trends, it does suggest that limited de-escalation may be possible. Russia and China add another player of complexity. Both were involved in negotiating the JCPOA and have usually supported diplomatic engagement rather than military solutions. At the same time, they have opposed the most severe sanctions on Iran and have provided political and economic support that has helped Iran withstand Western pressure. These relations have become even more significant since Russia's invasion of Ukraine and Iran's reported supply of drones to Russia, further linking the nuclear issue to broader global conflicts (Sauer, 2024).

## **Conclusion**

One of the most difficult issues in the modern international affairs is the analysis of Iran's nuclear strategy as well as US economic sanctions. It examines as well as the evolution of Iran's nuclear program throughout time, structure effects of sanctions, JCPOA's negotiation cooperation, Iran's approach of balancing engagement resistance, likelihood of a settlement. According to the report, Iran's nuclear program has not been halted or complied with economic sanctions, which are supposed to be costly for Iran. Sanctions are most effective when they combine diplomatic finance engagement with a broker strategy that strikes a balance between rewards and coercion. In the absence of diplomacy, the US "maximum pressure" campaign demonstrated the limits of collaboration. In response to both internal and external political circumstances, Iran's nuclear strategy alternates between negotiation and disobedience. This duality is essential to the development of effective policy. As a result of the United States' withdrawal from the JCPOA, there was a serious issue with trust and commitment, which also made future negotiations more difficult. Since 2018, Iran's nuclear program has advanced significantly, producing breakout time and introducing security risks, including the potentiality of military conflict. The issue is further shaped by regional rivalries, great-power competition, and domestic political constraints, requesting sustained multilateral coordination.

Overall, the text conflicts that a durable solution requires balancing pressure with diplomacy, addressing credit problems, and maintaining international cooperation. Without such an approach, contained escalation, conflict, or Iranian nuclear weaponization would pose severe threats to regional and global security.

## **Recommendations**

The analysis identifies seven important policy applications for effective additive the Iran nuclear challenge.

First, it emphasizes that diplomatic engagement remains the most promising path towards a sustainable solution. Despite past setbacks, the United States should maintain communication channels with Iran, pursue confidence-building measures, and show

flexibility on sanctions relief in exchange for verifiable nuclear restrictions. Pressure should not be abandoned, but it must be paid with credible diplomatic alternatives.

Second, the article highlights the need to address the commitment problem that emerged after the collapse of the JCPOA. Future negotiations must read Iran about the durability of US commissions, potentially through institutional mechanisms such as Senate ratification, automatic sanctions relief linked to compliance, third-party guarantees, or deeper economic integration that raises the cost of agreement movements.

Third, the Iran nuclear issue requests strong multilateral coordination. The United States could work close with European allies and other international partners to rebuild consensus, coordinate sanctions enforcement, share intelligence, and present a united diplomatic position. Such coordination enhances both the effectiveness of pressure and the credibility of diplomacy.

In addition, while acquiring engagement, the United States and its allies should excellent clear red lines focused on Iranian weaponization activities to strength deterrence and reduce the risk of calculation. The analysis also states the importance of adding broader regional security concerns, including Iran's missile program, regional inflation, and the security needs of neighboring states, as part of a longer-term diplomatic process.

Finally, politicians must prepare for multiple scenarios, ranking from diplomatic breaks to potential crises. This requires maintaining deterrence, construction regional partnerships, developing content plans, and remaining ready to size diplomatic opportunities as conditions evolve.

## **Future Prospects and Policy Implications**

### **Scenarios for the Future**

Iran's nuclear program and US-Iran relations could go in a number of different directions in the future.

**Diplomatic Breakthrough:** In this scenario, talks would've been resume and a new deal limiting Iran's nuclear program reached in exchange for the lifting of sanctions. This might take the shape of a reinstated JCPOA, a revised deal that fixes a few of the alleged flaws in the initial terms, or a number of temporary agreements that foster trust as well as generate momentum for a complete resolution. Huge political good on both sides, innovative diplomacy to resolve the engagement issue, and most likely a shift in local interactions that lowers tensions would all be necessary in this scenario.

**Managed Rivalry:** In this scenario, the focus would be on trying to manage the competition to avoid progression to military confrontation or Iranian development of nuclear weapons, while acknowledging that a full diplomatic resolution is now unattainable. This will include seeking limited tactical agreements on particular topics, creating explicit red lines regarding weaponization, bolstering regional defenses, and sustaining sanctions tension. This strategy may avert the worst-case scenario while maintaining the prospect of future diplomatic advancement, but it would not address the underlying difficulties.

**Iranian Weaponization:** In this scenario, Iran may decide politically to build nuclear weapons as well as take the required professional actions. This may happen if Iran determines that the advantages of nuclear weapons for security exceed the drawbacks of international isolation and feasible military action, or if regional factors (such other states' nuclear proliferation) alter Iran's strategic analysis. Iranian weaponization would significantly change the dynamics of Middle East security and probably lead to other regional governments proliferating nuclear weapons.

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