

IRAN NUCLEAR UPDATE

DECONSTRUCTING AIPAC'S TALKING POINTS ON RESTORING THE IRAN DEAL

While speculation abounds about whether the parties to the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) restricting Iran's nuclear activities will be able to agree on restoring the agreement, longtime opponents of any workable deal with Iran are already attacking and spreading misinformation about the possible terms of a revived pact blocking Iran's paths to a nuclear weapon.

Below are point-by-point responses to the issues raised by AIPAC in its late August 2022 memo making clear that it will again oppose a multilateral agreement to verifiably and permanently prevent Iran from ever achieving a nuclear weapon.

Congressional Oversight: Congress will get a chance to review and take a position, if it so chooses, on a restored Iran deal under the Iran Nuclear Agreement Review Act ([INARA](#)). Deal opponents lost their effort to block the 2015 JCPOA using INARA.

Israel's View: While it is the case that Israel's government, leading politicians and some of the sitting security officials who report to them oppose a restored agreement, the consensus of Israel's security experts, particularly its [top former military and intelligence officials](#), support US participation in the Iran Deal. Here are just a few examples:

- "Netanyahu's efforts to persuade the Trump administration to quit the nuclear agreement have turned out to be the worst strategic mistake in Israel's history." -- Former Chief of Israeli Air Force Intelligence [Major General Isaac Ben Israel](#)
- "A return to the JCPOA is critical to Israel's national security." -- Former Deputy IDF Chief of Staff [Yair Golan](#)
- "Reducing Iran's breakout time and restoring robust monitoring are the most urgent priorities. A return to the JCPOA can achieve these goals." -- [Commanders for Israel's Security](#), an organization of more than 300 retired senior Israeli defense and intelligence officers

Our View: J Street supported the JCPOA as the best means of blocking Iran's pathways to a nuclear weapon, opposed Donald Trump's abandonment of the deal, and supports restoration of the agreement. See our [Topline Facts about the Iran Deal](#) for additional details about how:

- the Iran Deal was working and abandoning it failed;
- a supermajority of Americans -- including Jewish Americans, Democratic voters, Independents and even most Republicans -- support restoring the Iran Deal; and
- Israel's security establishment overwhelmingly supports US participation in the Iran Deal.

“Shorter and Weaker” Claim

AIPAC's Claim: A new deal will be “shorter and weaker” because of sunseting restrictions and Iranian advancement of its enrichment capabilities.

Reality: A restored deal will be neither shorter nor weaker than the 2015 agreement -- but it will be longer and stronger compared to the current crisis created by Trump's abandonment of the agreement.

A restored nuclear deal will have -- at minimum -- the same [restrictions](#) on Iran's enrichment and other nuclear activities as the 2015 agreement, including **permanent protections** like enhanced inspections to prevent Iran from ever developing a nuclear weapon. It will also provide for a [six-month](#) “breakout time” (the time needed to acquire enough weapons-grade uranium for a single weapon) at implementation.

What is actually “shorter and weaker” in the extreme is the present situation created by Donald Trump -- with AIPAC's support -- in which there are virtually no restrictions on Iran's nuclear program, [monitoring devices in Iran's nuclear facilities have been shut off](#), and breakout time is down from more than a year to just a few days. That's the relevant comparison lawmakers must now make: Restoring the deal versus allowing the present crisis created by deal opponents' policies to continue and worsen.

Let's look at the specific points AIPAC raises and see how the situation in each case is worse under the Trump-AIPAC approach without a deal:

- *Closer to a bomb:* Iran is closer to a bomb than ever before [right now](#) due to Trump abandoning the deal and replacing it with ever-increasing sanctions. Freed from the deal's restrictions, [Iran currently has several times the amount of low-enriched uranium \(LEU\) needed to make enough fuel for a nuclear bomb \(if further enriched\). For the first time, Iran also has uranium enriched to 60%](#) -- a level dangerously close to weapons grade. Under a [restored](#) deal, Iran's LEU stockpile will go down to less than the amount

needed for one nuclear weapon and it would have to eliminate or hand over all of its 60% enriched uranium by blending it down or shipping it out. Iran's breakout time would go from a few days to at least six months -- ample time to detect and take steps against a dash to construct a nuclear weapon.

- *Expiring restrictions:* Trump's abandonment of the deal resulted in critical restrictions on Iran's nuclear program simply ceasing to exist. These are not only the limits on Iran's enrichment activities, but the [round-the-clock monitoring and permanent enhanced inspections](#) that are central to preventing Iran from ever acquiring a nuclear weapon. While certain restrictions will be time-limited as they were in the 2015 deal -- and as they are in many nonproliferation agreements around the world -- the enhanced inspections and absolute bar on Iran ever acquiring a nuclear weapon will never expire. And let's not forget that it was Trump's approach of unilaterally breaking the deal which foreclosed the opportunity to negotiate any extensions and additional restrictions while the deal was in place and working.
- *No dismantlement:* The disconnection and verified storage of most advanced centrifuges was a part of the original [agreement](#) and it will be again. The most dangerous of such machines were offline while the deal was in place, being brought back online and even replaced with more advanced ones after Trump broke the deal. Those who favor Iran's advanced centrifuges being offline and under observed storage should therefore support the deal, while those who are comfortable with them being continuously installed, running and upgraded should continue with Donald Trump's approach.

The Russian Role

AIPAC's Claim: The deal will strengthen Putin and undermine allies under threat from Russia.

Reality: The deal will have no meaningful impact on Russia's capabilities and is strongly favored by the US allies most directly threatened by both Putin and a potentially nuclear-armed Iran.

Putin's Russia is able to undertake its malign activities, including its aggression and atrocities in Ukraine, because it is a military and energy superpower possessing a vast thermonuclear arsenal. A multilateral nonproliferation agreement with a second-tier regional power is not going to change that in any way -- good or bad.

The fact that our European NATO allies who are in closest proximity to Putin's forces -- and of course within closer range of Iran -- are fully supportive of restoring the Iran Deal and have been the lead coordinator of the diplomacy to do so shows that they do not regard the agreement as strengthening Russia, but rather as enhancing to their essential security.

Let's look at AIPAC's points on Russia and see how restoring the deal doesn't impact Putin's ability to undermine US interests or those of our allies:

- *Compliance guarantor:* AIPAC says the deal will grant Russia "strategic leverage" by virtue of the fact that Russia will once again hold Iran's excess enriched uranium under a restored agreement, giving Russia the ability to shorten Iran's breakout time at its whim by returning that uranium. This argument would make sense if Iran's excess enriched uranium was the only such material Russia had access to, but Russia has vast amounts of enriched uranium -- as well as fully weapons-grade uranium, plutonium and an arsenal of assembled devices -- that Putin could theoretically decide to give to Iran at any time without regard to any agreement. Restoring the agreement doesn't give Putin any ability or power he doesn't already have. But also let's not forget that it supplies Iran with fuel for its [civilian](#) nuclear reactor and has an economic interest in keeping Iran dependent on that reactor fuel. And it certainly wouldn't be in Russia's security interest for Iran to become a nuclear-armed power -- hence Russia's participation in the JCPOA from the start.
- *Sanctions evasion:* AIPAC claims that lifting sanctions on Iran under a restored deal would allow Russia to evade its own Ukraine-related sanctions, but doesn't explain how much it would gain by doing so. AIPAC provides no evidence that Russia could materially change the massive economic crisis it is experiencing due to trade with or through Iran. Any Iranian bank or company that tried to help Russia violate sanctions could itself be sanctioned and the Iran deal does nothing to change that. AIPAC's claim also ignores the fact that Russia already has major export and trading outlets for its oil like [Saudi Arabia](#), the [UAE](#) and [India](#), all of which have dramatically increased their oil business with Russia following US and our allies' imposition of sanctions. Russia doesn't need Iran to access the international market.
- *Snapback veto:* AIPAC claims that under a restored agreement, the US would not be able to unilaterally reimpose UN sanctions through the "snapback mechanism" in three years time without Russia's consent. What AIPAC neglects to mention is that the US currently can't use the snapback mechanism at all because Trump unilaterally broke and withdrew from the deal. The Trump administration even tried to impose snapback and was rebuffed even by our own European allies. Restoring the deal would restore the US as a party able to use the snapback mechanism.

- *More drones:* AIPAC says the deal will enable Iran to advance its already existing sales of drones to Russia -- a non sequitur given that nothing in the agreement deals with drones. If anything, Iran currently has more financial incentive to sell drones to Russia in order to generate revenue while subject to the far-reaching sanctions reimposed on most of its economy under Trump's approach.

The Separate IAEA Probe

AIPAC's Claim: AIPAC says that one of the of the key questions reportedly remaining in the Vienna talks between Iran and the US is whether and how to close the IAEA's probe into Tehran's undisclosed nuclear activities, and states that prematurely closing the probe without getting real answers from Iran would be highly problematic.

Reality: We agree. Prematurely closing the IAEA probe without getting real answers from Iran *would* be highly problematic. Closing the IAEA probe should be contingent on one, and only one thing: Iran's full cooperation with the IAEA investigation.

[Closing](#) the IAEA probe as part of a restored deal is a non-starter for the US. The IAEA investigation is between the IAEA and Iran. The talks over reviving the nuclear deal are between the US, world powers, and Iran. The former concerns uranium particles that Iran may not have declared to the IAEA in the past, violating its Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) safeguards agreement with the IAEA. The latter is a deal between Iran and world powers to place restrictions on Iran's *current* nuclear program, to give the entire world confidence that Iran's nuclear program is peaceful.

Iran is seeking to tie these two processes -- the IAEA investigation with the international nuclear deal -- and demand the probe be closed as part of the final deal. The US will not agree to this, nor will our European allies. A draft of the nuclear deal reportedly includes language related to the probe, a nod to Iran's demand. But it does not commit the US and allies to press for a premature close to the probe. It merely states, as we do above, that the probe should be closed only after the IAEA is satisfied with Tehran's cooperation.

The "More Money, More Problems" Claim

AIPAC's Claim: Under the heading of "More Money, More Problems," AIPAC claims that sanctions relief for the Iranian economy will result in more Iranian terrorism, human rights abuses and other malign behavior.

Reality: Trump abandoning the deal and imposing “maximum sanctions” actually led to a surge in Iranian support for terrorism and other malign activities, while bringing the world closer than ever before to the nightmare scenario in which Iran is doing all this while backed by a nuclear arsenal.

When Donald Trump broke the deal in 2018, his administration and other deal opponents like AIPAC heralded “maximum pressure” (the kitchen sink of sanctions) as a way to get both a “better deal” and to forcefully counter Iran’s terrorism, ballistic missile program and other malign activities. More than four years later, just the opposite has happened.

Let’s look at AIPAC’s specific points and see how each of these areas of concern has proven to be worse without a deal:

- *Increased terrorism:* AIPAC says providing certain sanctions relief will increase Iranian terrorism, including against Americans. While no one disputes that Iran could use new revenues on its terrorism activities, the fact remains that Iran [increased](#) those activities in response to Trump’s abrogation of the Iran Deal and subsequent maximum pressure sanctions, when its revenues had decreased. This includes attacks on US troops in Iraq, which the State Department [points out](#) did not occur when the JCPOA was fully in place. The empirical evidence shows that what matters is not the absolute volume of the Iranian economy, but where Iran’s regime chooses to put its resources.
- *Terror Sanctions:* AIPAC says the deal will likely lift sanctions on entities engaged in support for terrorism. While the precise terms of the deal are not yet known, it’s important to remember that following Trump’s abandonment of the agreement, his administration put in place a series of sanctions purporting to deal with non-nuclear issues like terrorism, but which the administration itself -- in an unintentional gift to Iran -- [openly bragged](#) were intended to frustrate restoration of the Iran Deal by being politically “difficult” to undo. These are therefore nuclear-related sanctions under a different name that may have to be lifted for the US to meet its obligations under the deal -- including its obligation that it not deny Iran the economic benefits of the agreement, which Trump’s sanctions were expressly enacted to do. The full range of pre-Trump sanctions on Iran’s terrorism and other non-nuclear activities will remain in place, just as they did under the original deal. And again, it is indisputable that Iran’s terror activities surged following Trump’s new sanctions and the larger “maximum pressure” campaign.
- *IRGC handout:* AIPAC says the deal will directly benefit the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and related entities, while ignoring the fact that the IRGC will continue to

be [heavily sanctioned](#). But just as importantly, AIPAC fails to mention how significantly the Trump approach it supports has benefited the IRGC since the US abandoned the deal. Not only was the IRGC given a freer hand and more resources to engage in its terrorism and ballistic missile activities, but the group and its associated hardliners received a decisive boost of domestic support that helped it defeat more moderate Iranian officials in June 2021 elections after the US broke the deal -- a deal the IRGC had opposed from the beginning. Donald Trump's approach was a boon to the IRGC, empowering and enriching it to an extent it probably never thought possible while the deal was in place. Rejecting the deal will just continue the IRGC's charmed trajectory.

- *Human rights and corruption:* AIPAC says the deal may lift “human rights and corruption sanctions” imposed by the Trump administration following its breach of the deal, but this isn't wholly accurate because, again, these are sanctions that the administration [openly bragged](#) were put in place to fully kill the Iran deal and deny Iran its benefits. In other words, they are new nuclear sanctions under another name that are expressly prohibited under the agreement. And as with terrorism, Iran's human rights abuses only got worse as hardliners gained increasing sway following Trump's abandonment of the agreement and imposition of new sanctions.
- *Unrealistic guarantees:* AIPAC says Iran has sought unrealistic guarantees about the US adhering to the deal. While it's not known what terms may be reached on this, it should go without saying that it's Trump's reckless approach of unilaterally breaking the deal and imposing “maximum pressure” sanctions that provided Iran leverage on this point.