



Nuclear Iran: an Existential Threat to the Zionist Enterprise

Why a placebo agreement with Iran cannot prevent war but facilitates it

- why diplomacy cannot substitute credible military threat
- and how Iran's real map reflects the regime's "strategic depth" policy

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הביטחוניסטים IDSF

Israel's Defense & Security Forum

Research Department

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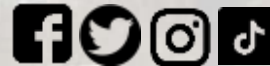
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Cover photo: An Iranian Zolfaghar missile bearing the inscription "Israel must be wiped off the face of the earth" in Hebrew and Persian, as part of an IRGC exhibition marking the Persian New Year in Ahvaz, March 2018

Executive Summary

The Iranian regime invests considerable resources and budgets in developing military nuclear capabilities, a tiebreaker weapon that could give Iran a twofold advantage: on the one hand, a powerful deterrent – an "insurance policy" of sorts – in the form of a nuclear umbrella over Iranian and pro-Iranian forces that are gradually making inroads into large parts of the region, to bring into existence its vision of a Middle East that is a sphere of influence controlled by Shiite Iran, and on the other hand – an offensive instrument that could pose **a supreme existential threat to the State of Israel as an instrument in Iran's designs to annihilate it.**

A nuclear program is more than just an armaments program – it is a status symbol for a country that joins a "prestigious" and limited "club" of nuclear states. A military nuclear program is the jewel in the crown of Iran's efforts to achieve superpower status such that will further fuel the regime's revolution export machine and further consolidate its status and power, including domestically to cement its control over the Iranian people. **Nuclear weapons are not only an end goal but also a means to achieve the regime's strategic objectives.**

Israel cannot – under any circumstances whatsoever – accept a scenario in which Iran is a state in possession of nuclear weapons. The State of Israel is now at a decisive stage, in view of the acceleration of the Iranian military nuclear program, the repercussion of which is the contraction of the **breakout range from** Iran obtaining enough fissile material for its first nuclear explosive device. To date, Iran has enough 60% enriched uranium to cut the threshold divide to **zero breakout time, meaning that from the moment the regime gives the order, Iran would need a mere two to three weeks until it enriches enough 90% enriched uranium to manufacture its first nuclear weapon.** Furthermore, **in the event that it decides to make a dash to nuclear weapons,** Iran could use its remaining 20% and 4.5% enriched uranium to **manufacture 4 nuclear warheads within less than 3 months.** In addition, Iran is conducting advanced research and development of implosion type weapons and of equipping surface-to-surface missiles with nuclear warheads.

This is the number one threat to the Zionist enterprise today.

Based on our projections, a return to the 2015 agreement (JCPOA) might lead to a full-fledged war between Israel and Iran withing a year or two:

- The staggering capital that will be available to Iran as a result of the agreement could allow the regime to fast track the force buildup of its regional partners that pose a threat to Israel
- Iran will enjoy the unrestricted freedom to accelerate the development of its missile and UCAV technology.
- The agreement will signify Iran's success in forcing the US's hand, further boosting its status in the Middle East.
- Such an agreement is tantamount to a thumbs-up to Iran to upgrade its centrifuge plants with more advanced models, enabling it to achieve high-grade uranium enrichment due to the expiration of critical sunset clauses – and the agreement itself – in 2031.

- The agreement denies the IAEA the means with which to effectively supervise Iran's nuclear activity, while Iran continues to withhold information regarding suspected sites believed to be part of the Iranian nuclear program, discovered in the Iranian Nuclear Archive obtained by the Mossad.
- Furthermore, such an agreement – or Iran's attempt to achieve nuclear capabilities without one – might encourage other countries in the region to follow suit and strive toward nuclear abilities, posing a detrimental threat to Israel's military supremacy in the region.
- Throughout the talks between Iran and the US, it was more than evident that the Biden administration is endeavoring to reinstate the nuclear agreement at any cost, including the complete withdrawal of basic demands that were put in place to prevent Iran from attaining short breakout times.

For all the above-mentioned reasons, a nuclear agreement would merely accelerate a scenario of a regional war rather than counteract it. As a result of this eventuality, and with no real agreement with binding jurisdiction such that imposes inexorable supervision mechanisms, sets open ended objectives that are not time limited and stipulates sanction snapbacks in response to violations – it is left to Israel's political ranks to charge the military ranks with the objective of **system-wide readiness for an independent offensive operation against Iran's nuclear infrastructure**. Israel must pose a **credible military threat** for Iran that its strategical value against Iran's nuclear program outweighs any agreement that aim to buy time or to turn a blind eye to Iran's activities. At the same time, however, Israel must strive to unite with Jordan, Egypt and the Abraham Accords states as well as with the pragmatic Arab axis, around their common interests, to forge a regional coalition of aligned countries that can act as an effective strategic bloc counterposing Iran's nuclear scheme.

As effective as it may be, Israel's military campaign between the wars (CBW) cannot completely prevent Iran from reinforcing its allies and tightening its grasp on the region – especially in Syria. **Israel does not operate on the Iranian playfield in many aspects, and this compromise its full military superiority in the region and might prove to be a real threat to its national security.**

On a regional level, the "Iranian Octopus" is extending its tentacles in a bid to bring the region into its clutches. It does so by destabilizing its neighboring countries and building up its proxies in the area, notably Hezbollah, Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ), the Houthis in Yemen, and the pro-Iranian militias in Iraq, aiming to attain Iranian strategic depth and place nooses around Israel. This network of pressure fulcrums surrounding Israel is armed with a substantial military infrastructure of missiles, rockets and UAVs designed to deliver a fatal blow to Israel's home front and is thus another variable in the equation of threat against Israel.

This document presents a comprehensive and exhaustive strategic assessment, by IDSF military researchers and former high ranking military commanders of the Iranian nuclear program and the threat it poses to the very existence of the State of Israel. It includes the following chapters:

- Introduction to the Iranian nuclear program, its underpinning rationale and its current situation
- Review of the 2015 nuclear agreement (JCPOA): the West's eagerness to attain a diplomatic achievement produced an agreement that was ineffective and inadequate, which ultimately paves the way for Iran to becoming a nuclear-weapon state (NWP) with full international legitimization, while at the same time enjoying economic prosperity
- Review of the West's appeasement and containment policy that is in contradiction to Israel's defence doctrine, which relies on a foiling and credible threat approach
- Three tables illustrating:
 - The main drawbacks the 2015 JCPOA nuclear agreement poses for Israel
 - Iran's violations of the agreement in 2016-2018 – prior to the Trump administration's end of term, debunking allegations that the administration withdrew from the agreement despite Iran's compliance
 - The central points of contention regarding the reinstation of the agreement at present
- Iran's real map – the regime's "strategic depth" policy
- Iran's conventional arms threat to Israel – long-range missiles and unmanned combat aerial vehicles (UCAVs)
- IDSF-Habithonistim's recommendations for tackling Iran's nuclear program, from a viewpoint of a regional operative-offensive strategic deterrent

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The Iranian-Regional Campaign

The decisive operational phase under threat of nuclear annihilation



Centrifuge cascades for uranium enrichment at the nuclear facility in Natanz, Iran (Tehran Times)

“ The Iranian regime is investing considerable resources and budgets in developing military nuclear capabilities, a tie-breaking weapon that could provide the regime with **an "insurance policy" in the form of a nuclear umbrella** over Iranian and pro-Iranian forces that are increasingly taking over large parts of the region. Nuclear weapons as a deterrent will allow the regime to fully execute its vision of the Middle East Shiite Iran's exclusive sphere of influence, and may pose **an existential threat of the highest order to the State of Israel as part of the regime's plan to eradicate it**. What began in the late 1990s and early 2000s as the Amad Project has evolved over the past decade into a real progress of Iran's position as a nuclear threshold state, which is on the cusp of obtaining enough enriched uranium to produce a single bomb, and in the advanced research and development stages of attaining an implosion nuclear weapon and the equipping of a nuclear warhead on a surface-to-surface missile.



A rare summit meeting between Qassem Soleimani, former commander of the Quds Force (right), Hassan Nasrallah, Secretary General of Hezbollah (center), and Ali Khamenei, Iran's leader (left). This image illustrates the **Iranian octopus**'s chain of command and its far-reaching tentacles throughout the region

The Iranian campaign against Israel:

Introduction

“ We will support and assist any nation and organization anywhere that opposes and fights the Zionist regime, and we have no qualms about saying so. **The meaning of the 'Final Solution' is the destruction of the Zionist regime**

Iran's Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei

The Iranian regime, the outcome of the Islamic-Shiite revolution in 1979, has dedicated itself to the destruction of the State of Israel as a part of its strategic plan of **exporting the Shiite-Islamic revolution** and imposing Iranian hegemony over the entire region, as a stepping stone on the path to a worldwide expansion of the revolution. This commitment to a Shiite Middle East that has no place for a State of Israel, steps out of the theoretical realm into the practical application in a sustained and potent process of force building and use – emanating from the epicenter of Tehran and extending its “tentacles” over the entire region in an “Iranian Octopus” of sorts – and closing in on the borders of Israel and reaching far into the heart of the country. The pinnacle of this masterplan is Iran’s military nuclear project that is positioned to develop into a strategic – even existential – threat of the highest degree to the State of Israel.

In its bid to undermine the foundation of the State of Israel, **Iran is fortifying its multi-armed capabilities against Israel through its network of proxies in the region – outside of Israel and within the country – using this network as a means of deterrent against the Zionist**

enterprise. This multi-pronged effort includes the fomenting of popular uprising among Israel’s Arab and Bedouin communities, efforts to win the region’s minorities over to its cause; the possession of control over states that in effect have already become “vassal” states of Iran – namely Iraq, Syria, Lebanon and Yemen; bankrolling terrorist organizations the likes of Hezbollah, Hamas, the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) and the Houthis; and the buildup of a massive array of short, mid and long range missile, rocket and UAV arrays – all aimed at Israel. At the same time Iran is pushing toward a **nuclear umbrella** that can serve as a deterrent, an **“insurance policy”** against the attrition of its forces or even against an attack in its territory by Israel, as well as an offensive instrument in the service of the regime’s extreme vision of Shiite hegemony.

The Islamic Republic of Iran remains the number one strategic threat that the State of Israel faces along its borders– both due to the development of the regime’s military nuclear program, as well as a result of the circles of threat it had positioned around Israel and its support of organizations such as Hezbollah – an body that has become an advanced and high-skilled military terrorist organization with capabilities and budgets that eclipses those of many regular armies around the world.

Over the past years we have been witnessing a downright battle between Israel and Iran, driven

by Tehran's efforts to take over the region. This is for all intent and purposes a **strategic race** between the two countries. It is referred to by Israel's defense forces as a regional "strategic competition" in which Iran's nuclear endeavors are met by Israel's non-war military operations, such as its successful procurement of Iran's official Nuclear Archive documents, and likely foiling and elimination operations, over many of which Israel has never officially taken responsibility. Specifically along Israel's northern border, Iranian attempts at seizing the area are met by official and non-official Israeli counter-operations – particularly by the Israeli Air Force – in Syrian territories aimed at thwarting force building activities such as shipments of advanced fighting systems, construction of military bases and deployment of surface-to-surface and surface-to-air missile batteries.

Yet, as effective as they may be, Israel's non-war military operations fall short of preventing Iran

from reinforcing its allies and tightening its grip on the region – especially in Syria. **Israel does not operate on the Iranian playfield in many aspects, which undermines its military superiority in the region and can prove to be a real threat to its national security.** Thus, for instance, the efforts to stem the flow of finances to Hezbollah, Hamas and JIP are falling short of their mark: Hezbollah, which has failed to pull back from the Israeli border as ruled in the UN Security Council's resolution 1701 in the aftermath of the second Lebanon war, is in effect in control of Lebanon through its synergy with its government and defence authorities, and the organization currently wields some 150,000 steep-trajectory weapons aimed directly at the heart of Israel's populated areas and nerve-centers and at its strategic military infrastructures. Not enough is being done to shift the area's minorities – including the Druze and Kurdish communities – away from Iran's clutches and towards the Israeli-Sunni axis.

“ We shall not back down from our goal of annihilating Israel, not even by one millimeter

Iranian Army Spokesman Abdulfarez Shakarchi

Iran's Military Nuclear Program

Iran's nuclear program as an instrument of the Iran rationale of exporting the revolution

The Iranian regime, whose form of government is a theocratic dictatorship under the thin guise of an ersatz democracy, is motivated by a rationale that calls for a fight to wrest supremacy out of the hands of the Sunni faction – the largest in the Islamic world – in order to instate hegemony of the radical Shiite Islam – a minority faction. Iran is one of the few countries in the world with a Shiite majority, along with Iraq (into which Iran has been able to successfully make inroads over the past decade) and other smaller countries such as Bahrain (which has a technical Shiite majority that includes unofficial residents), Azerbaijan, and Lebanon (which has a significantly small Shiite minority). The motivation to export the Shiite Islamic revolution of 1979 stems from a desire deeply ingrained in the Iranian regime's DNA, particularly as a motivation to counterbalance the Sunni world, in what is called the "**Spirit of Karbala**" named so after the fateful battle of Karbala between Shiite and Sunni in 680 AC. In Iran, the **Institute of the Supreme Leader ("Velayat-e faqih")** rules through the status of the clerics, the Ulamā, who play a significant role in the preservation of the regime. The Iranian government also rules through a series of organizing committees such as the Guardian Council, which ratifies or overturns the parliament (Majles) decisions and are charged with disqualifying presidential candidates or candidates for other public positions, who are not aligned with the government's agenda. The difference between



"conservatives" and "moderates" in Iran – such that was manifest in the transition between President Hassan Rouhani and President Ebrahim Raisi – is limited to differences of approaches, but are subjected to a single guiding principle. From this point of view, there is little difference between governments in Iran as they all adhere to the system of government that bows to a supreme leader, who is the ultimate authority on all matters, and are in consensus regarding Iran's bid for nuclear capabilities and its desire to export the revolution.

Project Amad's explicit goal: Nuclear Weapons

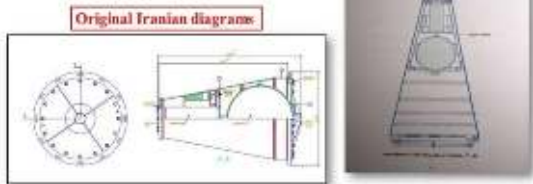
"Design, produce and test...

5 warheads, each with 10 kiloton TNT yield, for integration on a missile."



5. Integrating nuclear warheads on missiles

Design for a nuclear payload on a Shahab 3 missile



Evidence for Iranian nuclear development exposed by Israel, taken from the Iranian Nuclear Archive

The Iranian regime invests considerable resources and allocates vast budgets towards its nuclear program – a tie-breaking weapon of mass destruction, aimed as a deterrent for the regime's perceived enemies, namely Israel and the US, at providing Iran with an "insurance policy" in the form of a nuclear umbrella over Iranian and pro-Iranian elements that are taking over large swaths of the Middle East on the road to see its vision through and create a region controlled by Shiite Iran, and to pose an existential threat to Israel such that will serve the regime's plan to bring about its annihilation. What began in the late 1990s and the 2000s as **Project Amad** has germinated over the past decade bringing Iran to the cusp of becoming a nuclear state and obtaining a sufficient amount of enriched uranium to allow it to create its first nuclear explosive device. Furthermore, Iran has already manufactured long-range missiles that can be armed with nuclear warheads and has gained enough know-how to turn enriched

uranium into a bomb that can be mounted on warheads of surface-to-surface missiles.

The Iranian regime denies any allegations that its nuclear program is for military purposes, and claims it is dedicated to nuclear research and development for civil application. This line of defense repeats itself time after time in the proclamations of senior Iranian politicians and the regime's reports to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), similarly to the following announcement made as part of the Roadmap submitted as part of the JCPOA's implementation stage: "Iran denied the existence of a coordinated program aimed at the development of a nuclear explosive device, and specifically denied the existence of the AMAD Plan". However, the evidence contradicts these claims. Point in fact: a long list of countries, among them Indonesia, Mexico, Brazil and others, have civil nuclear programs that do not entail activities that are unarguably indicative of military nuclear development. None of them enrich uranium to a 60% level, produce uranium metal, procure advance centrifuge cascades, and conduct research on Plutonium. Beyond that – the findings from Iran's nuclear archive indicate that the regime has a well-charted plan for a **"Dual Program – covert and overt "** for both civil nuclear application and military use, the objective of which is to reach a stockpile of 5 nuclear warheads.

Iran's nuclear program is not just an armaments program – it is a status symbol for a country that is joining a prestigious and exclusive club of nuclear states. A military nuclear program is the "jewel in the crown" of the Iranian regime's efforts to attain superpower status, that will further fuel the regime's revolutionary export machine and help it consolidate its status and power in the

domestic arena as well as tighten its control of the Iranian people. **Nuclear weapons are not only a goal but also a means to strategic ends.**

Israel cannot accept a nuclear Iran – this is also the State’s official position. Nuclear weapons pose a substantial and supreme existential threat to the State of Israel, and a single nuclear bomb, even if not launched – is a potential game-changer in the Middle East, and might undermine Israel’s supremacy and its ability to operate freely in Syria and Lebanon, as well as deeper into the

region. The “nuclear balance” principle proves that even North Korea, which holds merely several dozen nuclear warheads, can have a substantial impact on the considerations and decision-making processes of the US – a superpower with far superior military capabilities and more than 5,500 nuclear warheads. It is a two-way pressure lever. **Failure to prevent such a scenario – whether by military strike or other means, might place Israel in a position from which it will have to choose between bad and worse options.**



The main nuclear facilities currently operating in Iran are:

- **Natanz** | Enrichment facility, centrifuge production site
- **Fordow** | Enrichment facility
- **Tehran** | Research reactor
- **Bushehr** | Reactor
- **Isfahan** | Civilian production facility
- **Isfahan** | Uranium conversion facility
- **Parchin** | Military site
- **Göchin** | Uranium mine
- **Unreported sites** such as the "Nuclear Warehouse " in Turkuzabad, Tehran

Map: The Washington Institute for Near East Policy

The 2015 nuclear deal (JCPOA) and the Biden administration's attempts to revive it: appeasement and containment rather than maximum pressure and a credible threat

The 2015 nuclear agreement (JCPOA – Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action) in effect marked a willingness to accede to a nuclear Iran on the part of the international community, led by the US and the EU. In theory, the extreme economic sanctions on Iran were put in place as a leverage of sorts with which to force the hand of the regime that was left to bear the brunt of a collapsing economy and the emerging social unrest that it created within the country. But in effect, **Iran took advantage of the West's eagerness for a diplomatic achievement** – in particular the US administration's determination to chalk up a political achievement ahead of the 2016 elections – to extract **an extremely partial deal at best**, that does not call for the installation of strict safeguards, has a 15-year term with numerous, critical, sunset clauses, **and which in reality paves the road for Iran to eventually amass a large stockpile of nuclear weapons under full international legitimacy while also enjoying economic benefits.**

The West's policy of appeasement and containment is in direct opposition of Israel's security doctrine, which relies on foiling and credible threat. The attempt to score a short-term perceptual effect at the cost of turning a blind eye to Iran's blatant violations and lack of accountability regarding its military nuclear activity, was wrapped and delivered to the world as "the cessation of Iran's nuclear program without firing a single shot". However, the truth of the matter is that the sanctions, which originally were imposed to bring about a change of behavior, simply allowed the parties to the

agreement to maintain their course of action: Iran persisted with efforts towards nuclear capabilities on the safe and unsupervised path it had now gained under the auspices of the agreement, all without having to cross a risky threshold on its way to a large nuclear arsenal, while the West resumed its trade relations with Iran, turning a blind eye to its nuclear violations. At the end of the day, the agreement amounted to a mere perceptual win.

This arrangement benefited all the JCPOA parties – Iran's treasury received a hefty breath of air in the wake of the sanction relief, its regime scoring credit points with the Iranian people for reinstating foreign trade normalcy; the West on its part resumed trading with Iran – the EU alone increased its trade volume with Iran by some 300%– and congratulated itself on its political gain. The EU even went as far as calling JCPOA "the biggest achievement diplomacy ever delivered", and the US announced that the deal "blocks all of Iran's pathways to the bomb", "ensures that Iran will never be allowed to possess nuclear weapons", is "based on verification, not on trust" and that it had "dismantled Iran's nuclear program without firing a single shot".







On the other side of the divide, Israel and the region's countries – the territories in and around which Iran has high-impact operations with the declared purpose of severely harming them – not only were excluded from the nuclear talks, but were not party to any of the aforementioned gains the agreement yielded. Since the deal came into

effect in January 2016 and the restrictions were lifted, Iran has boosted its defense budget by 40%, buying itself greater freedom of action in the Middle East and in turn giving a cash injection to its proxies in the region – Hezbollah, Hamas, PIJ and the Houthis, to mention but a few.

Insofar as the agreement's purpose of producing a document bearing the signatures of Iran and the E+3 powers (US, Russia, China and the EU) – it had indeed achieved its goal. However, in regard to any designs to effectively prevent Iran from attaining nuclear abilities – or at the very least greatly hamper its nuclear program – the deal is a resounding failure: fundamental criteria for real and effective enforcement against Iran's

nuclear program were not up to par. All parties were well aware of this and in this respect – **the agreement failed to fulfill its purpose, and the signing thereof – as well as attempts to revive it – are a real threat to Israel's security, due to the agreement's moral vagueness and the blind eye the international community is turning towards Iran's nuclear development activity under the auspices of the diplomatic achievement, and the seal of approval it in effect gives Iran to steadily step up its ballistic missile development, reinstall new advanced centrifuges, freely conduct research and development in unsupervised sites and eventually attain an arsenal of nuclear weapons – all by the time the agreement reaches its expiration date.**

Key problems of the 2015 nuclear deal (JCPOA)

	Stated Outcomes	Actual and Expected Outcomes
	Fundamental Aim <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Blocks Iran's path to military nuclear capabilities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Even full compliance on Iran's part would have left it with an active nuclear program, legitimized by the international community, and with full ability to attain a nuclear warhead stockpile within 15 years. Significance: the deal paves Iran's road to a nuclear bomb.
	Supervision Mechanisms <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The most comprehensive and intrusive supervision mechanism ever to have been put in an agreement, that "cuts off all of Iran's [potential] pathways to a bomb". IAEA reports prove full compliance. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ban on access to military sites such as Parchin. A dispute mechanism that delays the entrance of inspectors by weeks, and necessitates the sharing of sensitive materials with Iran. Iran is free to propose "alternative means" of inspection. Compliance with verification requests is based on "good faith". No access to the program's scientists. IAEA based reports of partial information and access. In effect gives Iran International approval for nuclear development away from the spotlight.
	Duration <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Iran has committed to never act toward attaining nuclear weapons. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Restrictions expire in 2031 – 15 years after coming into force. Sunset clauses expire other, key, clauses within short periods of time e.g. the lifting of the arms embargo, instillation of advance centrifuges, and development of ballistic missile abilities.
	Ballistic Missiles <ul style="list-style-type: none"> UN Security Council resolution 2231 bans Iran from ballistic missile related activities such as development and launches. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Vague phrasing calling on Iran to avoid "any activity related to ballistic missiles <i>designed to be capable</i> of delivering nuclear weapons", without banning it from conducting tests with missiles <i>with</i> such capabilities. A short 8-year restriction. The agreement itself has no reference to the issue.
	Reinstallation of Sanctions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Violations on part of Iran will be met by a snapback of the international sanctions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> States a 10-year period after which the UN Security Council closes Iran's nuclear file. A dispute mechanism contended on suspicions on part of any of the parties of "significant non-compliance" – a term vaguely phrased in the agreement. A cumbersome mechanism never invoked so to as not jeopardize the deal.
	Regional and Int' Level <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The deal paved the road for Iran's gradual acceptance to the "league of nations" as a peaceful country. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No reference to terrorism bankrolling, territorial appropriation, and regional force buildup. In effect, Iran persists – and even accelerated – its problematic activities.

Some of the crucial clauses that stand in contrast to Israel's interests:

- **The undertone of appeasement conveyed by the agreement permeated other areas as well, with the aim of “projecting seriousness” to the Iranians. These concessions were mainly on a regional level, which in itself casts doubt on the viability of a separation between Iran’s nuclear program and its designs for regional takeover.** In other words, a view of the nuclear dimension that separates itself from the regional hegemony dimension is superficial and unpractical at best. Ahead of the 2015 agreement, the US made concessions as “proof of intent” serving the ultimate goal: the signing of a nuclear deal. The result was that the Obama administration drove a stick in the spokes of an ambitious law enforcement endeavour – Operation

Cassandra – effectively wiping it out. The operation targeted Hezbollah’s extensive drug trafficking rings in the US – a vital financial lifeline for the organization, due to Iran’s interests with the organization¹. Similarly, the US abstained from taking decisive steps against the Iranian Quds Force in the Middle East, and possibly from attacking Syria in 2013 when the Assad regime’s use of chemical weapons in the Ghouta region came under these considerations. Media reports also claimed that the Obama Administration has put pressure on Israel to abstain from targeted eliminations of Iranian nuclear program scientists. Consequentially, early into the Biden administration, in February 2021, the administration took the Houthis in Yemen off the list of terrorist organizations – a full reversal of a decision from the Trump administration. A year later, the US government lifted sanctions on “civilian applications” of the nuclear program, outside the parameters of the deal and without stipulating any quid pro quo from Iran.

- **The Iranian regime is a serial violator of its international commitments, and as such, provides little incentive to trust its declared intention to comply with its commitments under the nuclear agreement.** Topping the list is its blatant violation of the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT)² with its covert nuclear program and the withholding of information from IAEA inspectors on the military



An official White House document from the Obama Administration. “The Historic Deal That Will Prevent Iran from Acquiring a Nuclear Weapon: how the U.S. and the International Community will block all Iran’s pathways to a nuclear weapon”

¹ <https://www.politico.com/interactives/2017/obama-hezbollah-drug-trafficking-investigation/>

² <https://sgp.fas.org/crs/nuke/R40094.pdf>

scope of the program. Moreover, the Iranian regime violated the 2015 JCPOA deal. Among other accords and agreements signed yet systematically violated by the Iranian regime are the 1997 Chemical Weapons Convention (according to US reports, Iran holds a vast stockpile of chemical weapons – part of which it allegedly provided to Syria); the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations – with actions such as the hostage crisis in the US embassy in Tehran in 1979, and the regime’s support of the takeover of the British embassy in 2011; the International Convention against Taking Prisoners by capturing 10 American citizens since 2007, and a French academic that was held captive for a year; alongside violations of a long list of human rights treaties.

The Maximum Pressure Policy of The Trump Administration and The Truth Behind the Misconceptions Surrounding It

In 2018, the Trump administration set in motion a process of “maximum pressure” against the Iranian regime with the explicit aim of forcing Iran into additional concessions within the framework of an upgraded agreement. That administration reimposed the sanctions and put new ones in place.³ These include the blacklisting by the US Treasury Department of tens of thousands of Iranian entities and citizens – including from Iran’s critical oil industry, as well as from its banking, car, shipping, aviation, and metal industries; the banning of financial transactions involving US dollars; personal sanctions against Iran’s leader and foreign minister; and the designation of the Revolutionary Guards as a terrorist organization. These measures weighed heavily on the economy and placed the regime under considerable pressure.

For more than a year, Iran endured the “strategic patience”, the expressed objective of which was the non-violation of the nuclear agreement and to allow the parties time to resume their obligations.

After that year, Iran has been openly and directly in violation of the agreement – a fact that was confirmed in IAEA reports.

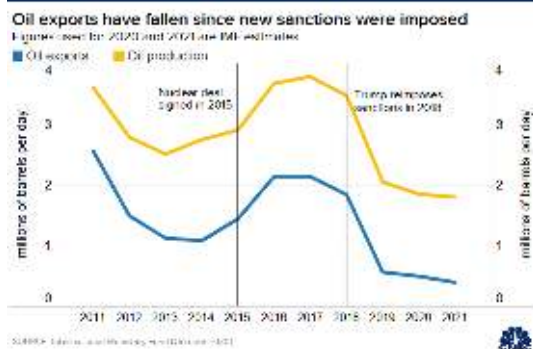
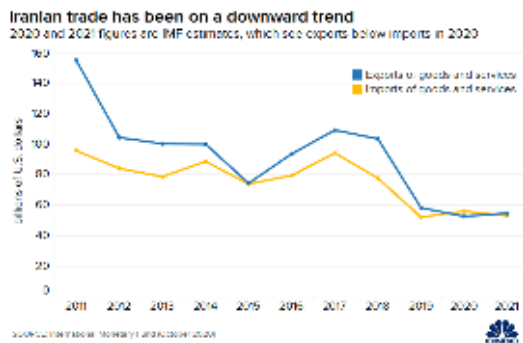
The “maximum pressure” policy was not utilized in full potential, nor has it led to far-reaching Iranian concessions as part of an improved agreement. The regime has also shown some resistance to sanctions by adapting parts of the economy to this new reality. Nevertheless, application over time of this leverage could force the regime to choose between two options: **its own survival or the nuclear program.**

Alongside the sanctions, the measures used to put pressure on Iran included the elimination of Qassem Soleimani, commander of the Quds Force, by the US, as well as sabotage and assassinations for which no responsibility had been claimed, including the damaging of the Natanz facility and the targeted killing of the head of Iran’s nuclear program, Mohsen Fakhrizadeh.

³ <https://sgp.fas.org/crs/mideast/RS20871.pdf> pp.49

The "Maximum Pressure" campaign since May 2018 and its effects on Iran and its economy:⁴




- **The Iranian regime became isolated more than ever before.** Personal sanctions were imposed on Iran's supreme Leader Ali Khamenei and his cohorts, including then-Foreign Minister Javad Zarif, and Ebrahim Raisi, former head of the regime's judiciary and current president of Iran, as well as on a long list of senior Iranian officials, commanders of the Iranian army and Revolutionary Guards, and others.⁵
- **Demonstrations erupted in force throughout Iran with citizens protesting against the regime,** including in 2017 and particularly between November 2019 and July 2020, partly due to **rising unemployment.**




- **Iranian military spending has shrunk.** While following the 2015 nuclear agreement, Iran's defence budget rose sharply by some 40% between 2016 and 2018, its military spending between 2017-2018 dropped by 10% and the 2019 budget called for a 28% cut in the defence budget, with another 17% cut in the Revolutionary Guards' budget.
- **Iran's GDP came to a halt and contracted.** While in 2011-2015 the Iranian economy shrunk by some 20% – it grew by an annual 7% in 2016-2018. In comparison, between March 2019 and March 2020 – it had contracted by 8%.
- **Iran's oil export took a nose dive** – from the moment sanctions were reimposed on May 2018 until they came into effect in December 2010, the country's oil export dropped from 2.45 million barrels a day to 1.6 million, continuing to slip steadily to 1.1 million by December 2021. Aside from its markets in China and Syria, its oil exports to any other market in the world was barricaded, with exports to the EU (which until then exceeded 520 thousand barrels a day), and to India (620 thousand barrels a day) completely dried out, for example.⁶
- **The Iranian Rial (IRR) exchange rate plummeted** from 35 thousand rial to the dollar in May 2018 to 150 thousand IRR by November 2018, later soaring to a staggering 300 thousand IRR to the dollar in December 2021.
- **Inflation rocketed skyward.** The tumbling rial and restrictions on Iranian

⁴ <https://sgp.fas.org/crs/mideast/RS20871.pdf> pp.59-60
⁵ <https://sgp.fas.org/crs/mideast/RS20871.pdf> pp. 44,49,97-98
⁶ <https://sgp.fas.org/crs/mideast/RS20871.pdf> pp.27

A selection of Iran's breaches occurring in January 2016-May 2018 – prior to the US' withdrawal

	According to Agreement	Actual Outcomes
	<p>Due Diligence</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Following the directives in Article 14, Iran reported its "entire nuclear activity from the past" in full through the "Roadmap" it submitted to the IAEA in October 2015, in which it denied pursuing a military nuclear program and the existence of the "Amad Project". 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The "Nuclear Archive" obtained by the Mossad proves the existence of a military nuclear program in Iran in violation of the NPT and the preservation of the nuclear knowledge it has accumulated in preparation for a future nuclear breakout. <u>Significance</u>: the nuclear deal is based on a lie.
	<p>Enriched uranium and Nuclear Equipment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Section A, Article 7 limits the amount of uranium Iran is allowed to hold to 300 kg. Section O, Article 68 requires Iran to keep all of its enriched uranium in one place and report it. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Iran has yet to provide explanations for at least two sites uncovered by Israeli intelligence: a nuclear facility near the city of Abade, and a compound in Tehran's Turkuzabad district that contained at least 15 containers with up to 300 tons of nuclear equipment during its 2009-2018 operation, which was not reported to the IAEA. Israeli intelligence officials have described this site as "the tip of the iceberg", referring to the existence of multiple other covert sites. German intelligence reports that Iran had made 141 attempts to acquire equipment and technology that could be used by its military nuclear and missile programs in the state of North Rhine-Westphalia in Germany in 2015 and 32 attempts in 2016 after the agreement came into effect.
	<p>Ballistic Missiles</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Appendix B, Article 3 of UN Security Council resolution 2231, which ratified the nuclear agreement, called on Iran to refrain from actions related to the development and launch of ballistic 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> On March 9, 2016, just two months after the agreement went into effect, Iran launched two mid-range Qadr ballistic missiles (1,700-2,000 km) capable of carrying a nuclear warhead. One of them carried the inscription in Hebrew, "Israel

		<p>missiles designed to carry nuclear warheads.</p>	<p>must be erased [from the face of the earth]."</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The US, British, French, and German ambassadors sent a strong-worded letter to the UN Secretary General, claiming that the move was "non-compliant" and "a violation" of Resolution 2231. Iran claimed that the missiles were "capable of" and not "designed to be capable" of carrying a nuclear warhead, and thus the test was consistent with the decision. The US ambassador to the UN claimed that the missiles were "designed" for that purpose.⁸
	<p>The Heavy Water Facility in Arak</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Section A, Article 8, and Appendix I, Part B, Article 3 require Iran to remove the core of the heavy water reactor in Arak, which is used to produce plutonium for a military nuclear program, and to decommission it by filling it with concrete to prevent future use. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Iran reported to the IAEA it has met its obligation to fill the reactor's core with concrete. However, Ali Akbar Salehi, Iran's Head of Atomic Energy Organization and member of the JCPOA negotiations team, exposed in a January 2019 interview it was all a posture: other pipes, rather than the core's pipes, were filled it. Later, Iran secretly purchased other pipes to replace those filled with concrete.

And yet, the information that Israel provided, as well as warning letters from the IAEA, were completely ignored by the superpowers, who preferred to cite the IAEA reports, whose jurisdiction is limited, claiming that Iran is in full compliance with the agreement. After Israel uncovered the nuclear archive in 2018, for example, Federica Mogherini, head of the EU's foreign service, said that the information "did not prove a violation of the nuclear agreement" and cited 10 IAEA reports showing that Iran was in compliance. The response of the French and British foreign ministries was that the information

only reinforced the need for the nuclear agreement: "All activities related to the development of nuclear weapons are permanently prohibited by the agreement," a claim that cannot be substantiated – as shown in the table above – due to the expiration date of the agreement. They also asserted that "the agreement is based not on trust but on close supervision" – another statement that cannot be asserted.⁹ Point in case: following the uncovering of the Turkuzabad site, The IAEA chose to respond with a general statement in which it claimed to view seriously its professional work in

⁸ <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-iran-missiles-un-idUSKCN0ZN2JV>
<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-iran-missiles-idUSKCN0WV2HE>

⁹ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/may/01/europeans-cast-doubt-on-israel-claims-about-iran-nuclear-breaches>

examining various information, that Iran complies with the agreement, and that the inspectors visited all the sites in Iran that needed to be visited¹⁰ – the statement had in no way referred specifically to the uncovered site.

In a manner of speaking, **not only Iran violated the agreement but the superpowers knowingly did so as well, by preventing a sanction snapback** and by never convening the Joint Committee following reports on Iranian violations. In that respect **it was actually the Trump administration that treated the nuclear deal with all due seriousness.**

According to the IAEA, **Iran is currently in violation of all sections of the agreement.** For Israel, the most critical point is the breakout time, which due to Iran's accelerated progress, has been significantly reduced from approximately a year to about 2-3 weeks from the moment of

decision until enough uranium is enriched to make one bomb: about 25 kg at a 90% enrichment level, or theoretically (regardless of the level of Iranian research and development today) 40 kg of uranium enriched to 60%.




A critical point in this context is that in the face of the Biden administration's efforts to return to the nuclear agreement with far-reaching concessions on preconditions that were in place prior to the nuclear talks, and despite of the administration's conciliatory approach and its desire to "return to the agreement at all costs," Iran has actually accelerated its uranium enrichment and had installed advanced centrifuges. **The vast majority of Iran's serious violations of the agreement actually occurred during the Biden administration, and not during the withdrawal of the Trump administration from the agreement.**

“ The lack of progress in clarifying the International Atomic Energy Agency's (IAEA's) questions concerning the correctness and completeness of Iran's safeguards declarations seriously affects the ability of the IAEA to provide assurance of the peaceful nature of the country's nuclear program.

Rafael Grossi, Head of the IAEA






¹⁰ <https://www.iaea.org/newscenter/statements/statement-by-iaea-director-general-yukiya-amano-2-october-2018>

Iran's violations of the agreement after the US withdrawal and the current state of its nuclear program, June 2022 ¹¹

	As per agreement * 15 year timeframe unless otherwise mentioned	Program's current situation (June 2022) *As per IAEA's March and June 2022 reports and other sources
	Breakout Time <ul style="list-style-type: none"> One year 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2-3 weeks at the most [from the decision to enrich enough uranium for one bomb]. "Zero breakout time": has accumulated enough 60% enriched uranium for the production of a nuclear explosive device, and is just a few weeks away from 90% enrichment level. Accumulated enough 60%, 20% and 4.5% enriched uranium to produce enough WGU (weapons-grade uranium) for 4 nuclear bombs in less than 3 months.
	Enriched Uranium <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 3.67% maximum enrichment level. In total, 300 kg of enriched uranium of all grades. All uranium enriched to higher levels was destroyed or removed from the country. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 43.1 kg at a 60% level (in uranium mass), at a rate of at least 4.5 kg per month. 182.1 kg of up to 20% (U mass and UF6 form) and another 36.5 kg in other chemical forms, at a rate of 19.7 kg per month (the rate has jumped by 50% since the previous report). 1,277.9 kg of up to 2-5%. 1,390 kg of up to 2% (559.6 kg in previous report).
	Uranium Metal <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Banned 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Production of up to a 20% level
	Advanced Centrifuges <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 6,104 IR-1 centrifuges (10 years). Incremental addition and replacement of advanced centrifuges (IR-4,IR-5,IR-6,IR-8) (after 8 years). All other centrifuges will be dismantled and stored. Enrichment exclusively at the Natanz facility, Fordow to be converted to a research facility without uranium. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2 cascades of IR-6 centrifuges at the Fordow underground facility. Advanced centrifuges accumulating enriched uranium: IR-2m, IR-4, IR-5, IR-6, IR-6s, IR-s Development of other advanced centrifuges: IR-7, IR-8, IR-8B, IR-9.¹² Enrichment of uranium to 60% since April 2021; Enrichment of uranium to 20% in a cascade of advanced centrifuges in Natanz, for the first time at a level of over 5% in any facility. Capacity for 13,400 separate work units (SWU) per year. Increased production of centrifuges and mechanical tests in violation of the agreement.

<https://www.iaea.org/newscenter/focus/iran/iaea-and-iran-iaea-reports>, <https://isis-online.org/isis-reports/detail/analysis-of-iaea-iran-verification-and-monitoring-report-november-2021>, <https://www.iaea.org/sites/default/files/22/03/gov2022-4.pdf>, <https://isis-online.org/isis-reports/detail/analysis-of-iaea-iran-verification-and-monitoring-report-march-2022>, <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/cmsdata/122460/full-text-of-the-iran-nuclear-deal.pdf>, <https://www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/JCPOA-at-a-glance>, <https://isis-online.org/isis-reports/detail/iranian-breakout-timeline-now-at-zero>

¹² <https://isis-online.org/isis-reports/detail/a-comprehensive-survey-of-irans-advanced-centrifuges>

	R&D	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The joint committee will examine and approve changes in the research and development plan (10 years). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Irreversible accumulation of knowledge in rapid enrichment in shorter centrifuge cascades, including enrichment directly to 60% in a single cascade without the intermediate process. Iran announced in September 2019 that it will no longer commit to the restrictions on advanced centrifuges allowing only research and development.
	The Arak Nuclear Complex	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Decommissioning of reactor core and critical pipes blocked with concrete. Ban on reprocessing of nuclear fuel. Heavy water reactors banned in Iran. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Iran boasted that the reactor core had not been decommissioned and that critical pipelines had not been blocked, contrary to the report. Nuclear fuel reprocessing is underway. Production of enriched uranium intended for use at the site in breach of the agreement. The IAEA does not have access to the site, and evidence shows that the site is fully operational and construction and expansion work has been performed on it.
	Supervision Mechanism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Requests to visit undeclared sites. Visits as needed to nuclear sites that are included in the agreement. Iran must request approval dual-use materials (10 years). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Iran has not provided information requested by IAEA since February 2021. Iran has not cooperated with the IAEA in providing requested information about the remaining uranium enriched at three undeclared sites and a fourth known site. Iran failed to hand over missing tapes from cameras at the Karaj site; destroyed cameras in other sites, and refused to allow the IAEA to reinstall them. Even the reinstallation of cameras will not compensate for significant gaps in information incurred by the IAEA during this period.
	Ballistic Missiles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Appendix B, article 3 of UN Security Council resolution 2231, which ratified the nuclear agreement, called on Iran to refrain from actions related to the development and launch of ballistic missiles designed to carry nuclear warheads. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The launch of two Qadr missiles in March 2016, which elicited condemnation from the West. A number of additional launches, including those of Imad, Sejil and Qadr missiles in January 2021¹³ and December 2021, which elicited condemnation from the West¹⁴.
	Sanction Snapback	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> UN sanctions will be re-imposed immediately (snapback) after a vote if the parties raise concerns of a significant violation (10 years). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The sanctions were not re-imposed and the appeals mechanism was not activated even after blatant Iranian violations.

¹³ <https://missilethreat.csis.org/missile/emad/>

¹⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-condemns-irans-use-of-ballistic-missiles-fcdo-statement#:~:text=The%20launch%20is%20a%20clear,launches%20using%20ballistic%20missile%20technology.>

Negotiations with the Biden Administration and the World Powers on a Return to the Nuclear Deal

The Biden administration and the other superpowers are currently committed to reinstating the 2015 nuclear agreement with the US as a party to the agreement. Negotiations with Iran in the Vienna talks focus on agreed upon ways in which the parties can reassume their previous commitments.

In June 2022, the IAEA published a severe report in which it declared that Iran's nuclear program is currently in the "zero breakout time" stage: Iran has amassed enough uranium enriched to 60% to produce an explosive device, and is a mere 2-3 weeks away from attaining enough 90% enriched uranium to produce its first nuclear weapon, using only a fraction of its advanced centrifuge cascades. In the event that Iran decides to use the remaining 20% and 4.5% enriched uranium in its possession, it could **enrich enough uranium to produce 4 nuclear bombs in less than 3 months.**¹⁵

Throughout the talks, **there was a very strong impression that the Biden administration means to push for a return to the JCPOA at nearly any cost – even at a cost of completely waiving basic demands that were put in place to ensure that the Iranian regime does not attain short breakout times to a bomb.** These include a tight monitoring mechanism, the cancellation of the expired sunset clauses, and in particular the sanctions "card". From a position in which the administration has made it clear that Iran must return to the (already limited) commitments it had before the sanctions were lifted – a position

that the administration's envoy Robert Malley and President Biden made clear – the US had later expressed its willingness to lift sanctions as a first step, and as mentioned above, even lifted a series of sanctions related to Iran's "civilian" nuclear program in February 2022, as a confidence-building measure that is not part of the agreement and without any reciprocal measures taken by Iran.

In this context, the American position according to which they are aiming at a "longer and stronger" agreement fails the test of reality in the absence of pressure leverages, and does not reflect the strategy of the negotiations dealing with a return to the original agreement. There was a reason why the administration did not rejoin the original agreement immediately upon the change of government in the US, as it did with the Paris Climate Agreement, and that is that from the get go, it was clear that the original agreement is problematic, and now the administration has to concede to that fact and adopt the same position Iran has been openly expecting it to take.

Head of Russia's delegation Ambassador Mikhail Ulyanov even said on March 2022: **"...Iran got much more than it could expect"** adding that Iran fought for its interests "like lions... for every comma, every word and as a rule quite successfully."¹⁶

In practice, all the options on the negotiation's agenda pose a threat to Israel. Attaining a "good" agreement that would truly block Iran's path to achieving the ability to produce nuclear weapons

¹⁵ <https://isis-online.org/isis-reports/detail/iranian-breakout-timeline-now-at-zero>

¹⁶ <https://www.jpost.com/middle-east/article-700498>

is no longer on the agenda. The American position is that the nuclear agreement must be reinstated without any changes. This is a dangerous possibility, as it will pave the way for Iran to achieve the ability to produce a large stockpile of nuclear bombs in less than a decade. Iran will be doing so without any real oversight of its operations, without limiting its efforts to develop missiles that will be used to carry nuclear bombs, and without having the current leverage in which Iran is subject to the possibility that Israel or the United States will act militarily upon a problematic threshold crossing on its part.

In this reality, the better eventuality for Israel would be the breakdown of the talks, which would spell the continuation of sanctions against Iran, perhaps also on part of Europe, possibly through the activation of the automatic snapback mechanism by one of the European countries that are still committed to the agreement. In such a situation, Iran could try to continue making progress toward achieving the ability to produce a limited number of nuclear bombs, **but it would be doing so under the threat of Israeli or American military action and under economic pressure** that could increase domestic instability.

Similarly to 2015, we are witnessing several material issues in the negotiation strategies of the superpowers:

- **The West's eagerness to reach an agreement is exploited by the Iranian regime and raises its "ask" price for the agreement.** This eagerness is also reflected in public statements that lack tactical logic, such as "the agreement is the only way to stop Iran's progress toward nuclear weapons"; "there is no

alternative to the agreement"; and "there is no military way to stop Iran's progress toward a bomb". There is an apparent desire on part of the US to bring about an electoral achievement before the midterm elections in November 2022 – particularly after the failed withdrawal from Afghanistan and the criticism against the government for its lack of significant intervention in favor of Ukraine in February 2022. In its hunger for an image achievement, the US administration, like in 2015, prefers to skip over criteria that is critical for a successful agreement and settle for a "piece of paper" – a mere image achievement with no real substance.

- **The West is focused on compromise rather than finding the weaknesses of the Iranian regime**, such as the collapsing economy, domestic pressure in the form of popular and organized protest movements, and the clear desire to see the lifting of sanctions releasing trade barriers – particularly on the oil and banking sectors. This internal pressure is not exploited by the superpowers to fortify their positions. On the contrary, it is treated as a nuisance by all parties equally.
- **Iran has already rendered the possibility of returning to the original agreement irrelevant: there is no practical possibility of returning to the original agreement due to the knowledge and experience Iran had already accumulated during this period.** With regard to the operation of advanced centrifuges and their testing, uranium enrichment to 60%, production of

uranium metal, and unlimited research and development. **A return to the original agreement at this point in time will not put the Iranian breakout time at one year, as predicted by the JCPOA, but rather at a significantly shorter time.**

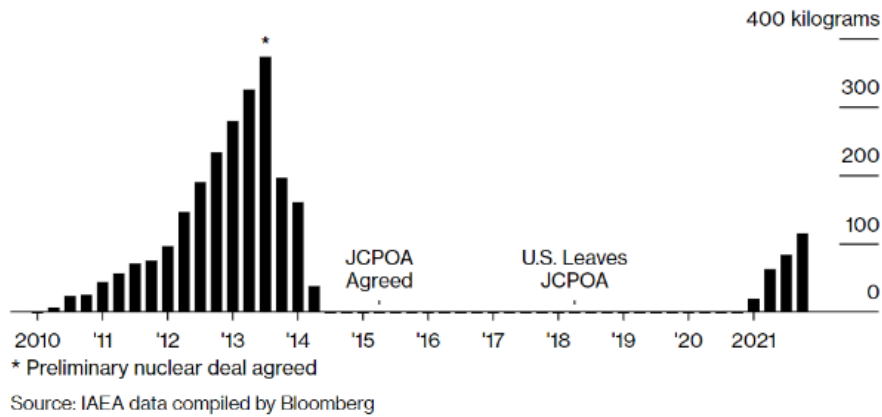
- **The lifting of the sanctions will provide Iran with enormous economic resources** that will enable it to intensify its efforts to establish its hegemony in large parts of the Middle East. A return to the agreement will also compromise Israel's freedom of action to undermine Iran's progress toward nuclear weapons. While Israel has made it clear that it will not be bound by any agreement to which it is not a party, its relationship with the United States will force it to restrain its actions.
- **The results of the American conciliation and containment strategy can be seen in**

the pace of development of the nuclear program, which actually accelerated when the Biden administration stepped into office and not during the Trump administration: Iran's main breaches, such as the enrichment of uranium and advanced centrifuge installations, gained significant momentum at the exact moment the Biden administration took to the Oval office and in parallel with the nuclear talks as a means of pressure, and not during the Trump administration and the credible threat that administration set in place.

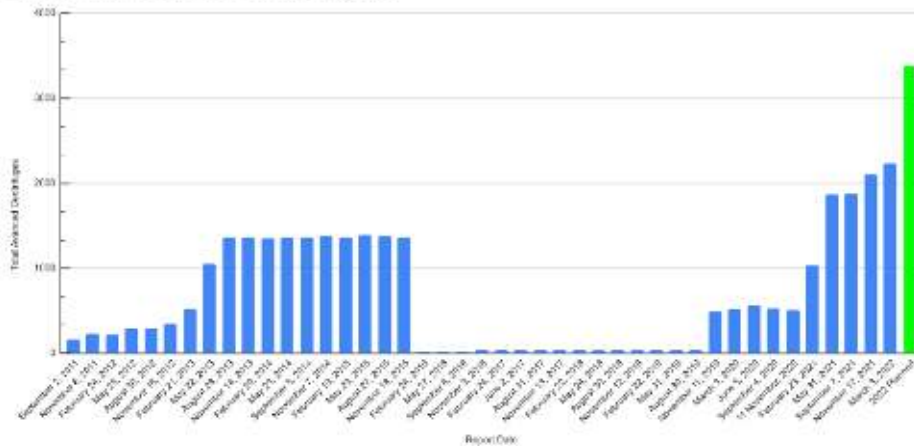
- **US leaks about alleged Israeli acts of sabotage are a signal of a return to the Obama administration's strategy of containment.** Point in case was the leak to the New York Times after the sabotage of Natanz in April 2021, for which no responsibility had been claimed.

Iran's Stockpile of 20% Enriched Uranium

Country raised inventory by about a third in last three months



Iran: Total Installed Advanced Centrifuges By Date



Top: Most of the 20% uranium enrichment in violation of the agreement occurred upon the Biden administration taking office, and not immediately upon the Trump administration's withdrawal from the agreement. This reflects that the US containment strategy precipitates Iranian violations (source: IAEA, Bloomberg)

Bottom: The total number of advanced centrifuges installed by date – most of the violations of the agreement occurred during the Biden administration (source: ISIS agency)¹⁷

¹⁷ <https://isis-online.org/isis-reports/detail/updated-highlights-of-comprehensive-survey-of-irans-advanced-centrifuges>



Every agreement has its end: a return to 2015 will be a huge boost for Tehran

Brig. Gen. (res.) Yossi Kuperwasser | Advisor to the Research Department, former Head of the Intelligence Research Division and Director General of the Ministry of Strategic Affairs, researcher at the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs and the Begin-Sadat Center

The likely possibility that Iran and the US will agree on a gradual return to the nuclear deal is of great concern – and rightly so – among high ranks of Israel’s administration, US congressmen from both parties, and in the Gulf states. The reasons for this are varied: this agreement is dangerous from the outset as it paves a secure path for Iran to achieve the ability to produce a large arsenal of nuclear weapons within nine years, without fear of having to trespass a dangerous threshold and possibly be subjected to the use of forceful measures against it preventing it from doing so, alongside the possibility of facing severe economic sanctions.

The agreement does not guarantee supervision everywhere and at all times, it is time-limited, it does not address means of launching nuclear bombs (missiles), does not require Iran to reveal the truth about its progress in the military nuclear program before it was signed, and the restrictions contained in it are set to be gradually lifted – some have in fact already been lifted while others are due to be removed in the near future.

A return to the agreement currently is even more dangerous, now that Iran has already made significant achievements in the field of enrichment technology, which, according to the agreement, should have happened only in a few years’ time (the production and operation of advanced centrifuges, enrichment to a level of 60% which is near military grade), and achievements in the field

of its weapons program (the conversion of enriched uranium into metal uranium).

This means that there is basically **no real possibility of returning to the nuclear agreement in its original form**. Moreover, a significant portion of the restrictions on Iran are expected to be lifted in early 2024 and early 2026, i.e., within 2-4 years. But even worse, negotiations are taking place when it is clear that any hope that the agreement will bring about a change in Iran's subversive policy and support for terrorism is futile, and in a time when Iran continues to refuse to provide details about the four facilities that were uncovered thanks to the Mossad acquiring the Iranian nuclear archives used in its military nuclear program.

This is dangerous irresponsibility, especially at a time when Iran is growing ever stronger. It is clear that Iran will be using the tens of billions of dollars available to it to continue arming itself and to fortify its efforts to project its influence in the region and increase its ability to directly or through its proxies threaten Israel, and these funds will mitigate the severe economic strife that could have undermine the stability of the regime. A return to the agreement under the current conditions will be a huge boost to the radical Islamic regime in Tehran and will be presented by the regime as proof of the justness of its cause and of the weakness of the West and Israel.

The US administration is well aware of all these dangers and yet it is still determined to push for a return to the agreement, simply to postpone the inevitable and avoid the need to confront Iran.

Initially, the administration tried to rationalize this approach by claiming that a return to the agreement would be the first step on the way to negotiations with Iran that would improve the agreement, but this insubstantial and illogical reasoning has already been abandoned. Israel's

problem is that the administration, which has exhibited a soft and undecisive attitude toward Iran as well as in other theaters, is nonetheless the one leading our most important ally. While it is necessary to try to prevent negative consequences for the Abraham Accords and to prepare for independent action to prevent Iran from achieving the ability to produce nuclear weapons, without American support this task becomes much more difficult.

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The Conventional Threat from Iran

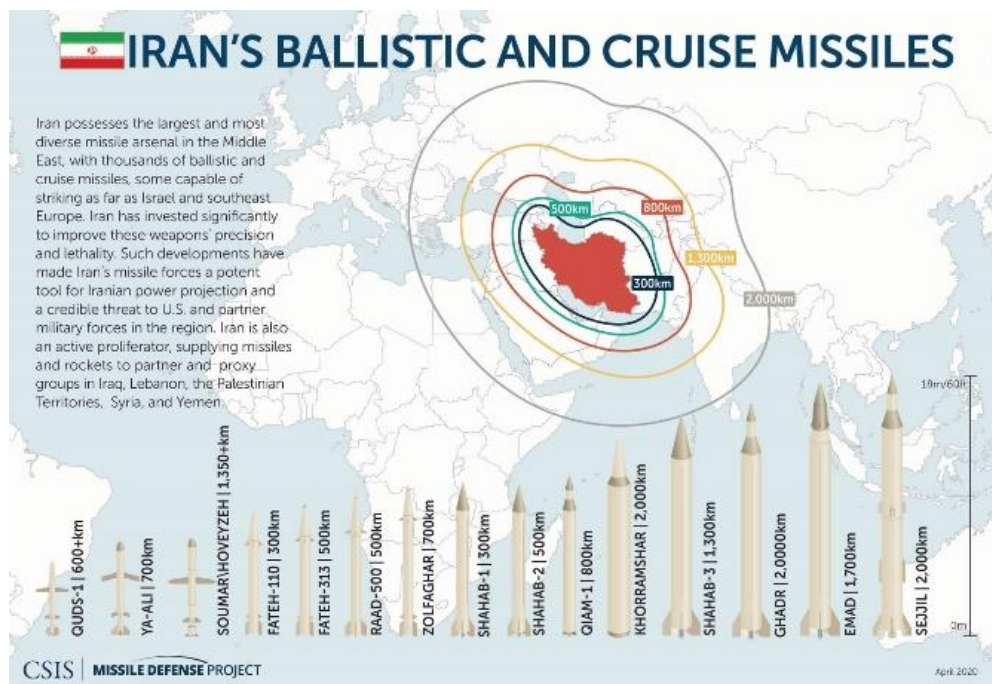
Intelligence sources estimate that Iran has the largest arsenal of missiles in the Middle East.¹⁸ The Iranian regime continues to arm itself with an extensive array of MURs (missiles, UAVs, and rockets), to develop advanced ballistic missiles and the technology for mounting nuclear warheads on missiles designed for that purpose, and to build up its leverage and a deterrence equation against Israel in the form of a surface-to-surface threat from its own territory and the territory of the countries surrounding Israel.

- **Surface-to-surface missiles and ballistic missiles:** Iran has the largest and most diverse arsenal of ballistic missiles in the Middle East. It is estimated that most of these were purchased from foreign countries, chief among them North Korea. These missiles include intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBM).¹⁹

In addition, Iran possesses advanced and long-range missiles that cover the entire territory of the State of Israel and have the ability to reach European soil, and it is developing missiles with even longer ranges. Iran was the only country to possess missiles with a range of 2,000 kilometers without having first acquired nuclear weapons.

Iran's universities and research institutes continue to support the efforts to perfect and develop missile technology, but the regime continues to depend on critical components and equipment imported from abroad.

These missiles include the Sejil (Ashura) with a range of up to 2,000 km; the Shahab-3 (1,300 km); the Qiam-1 (at least 750 km); the Zolfaghar (700 km), as well as the other Shahab, Fatah and other missiles. Iran is also developing Qadr and Khorramshar (up to 2,000 km); Emad-1 (1,700 km) and others.



2021 estimates of the diversity of Iran's surface-to-surface arsenal

¹⁸ <https://csreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/R44017> pp.13

¹⁹ <https://iranprimer.usip.org/resource/irans-ballistic-missile-program>

In recent years, Iran has made operational use of its missile arsenal against targets in the Middle East, such as:

- **June 2017, October 2018** | Missile attacks against ISIS targets in Syria
- **September 2018** | Launched Fatah-110 missiles against Kurdish Iranian targets in Iraq
- **January 2020** | Bombed al-Assad US Air Force base near Baghdad, Iraq, with at least 22 ballistic missiles, injuring at least 100 US soldiers



IRGC ballistic missile exercise "against Israeli targets" in December 2021, which according to Iranian media included Emad, Qadr, Sejil, Zalzal, Dezfol, and Zolfaghar missiles, with ranges of 350-2,000 km ²⁰

<https://eurasianimes.com/iran-simulates-deadly-strikes-on-israeli-nuclear-facility/>²⁰

Iran's unmanned aerial vehicle force

In addition to the missile system, Iran is developing and perfecting its unmanned aerial vehicle force, which includes UAVs (unmanned aerial vehicles) and UCAVs (attack drones). In recent years, Iran has been using drones for a variety of purposes, from intelligence gathering and weapons transfer, to offensive operations aimed at damaging property and causing fatalities²¹.

In recent years, Iran has already used this type of threat on a number of occasions, including at least three launches into Israeli territory:

- **February 2018** | Launched a Shahed-141 UCAV at Israel from within Syrian territory - was intercepted
- **September 2019** | Coordinated attack with kamikaze drones and cruise missiles against oil infrastructure in Saudi Arabia, Abqaiq and Khorais, which displayed a high level of accuracy. The attack left heavy damage to the extent that it was visible from space, and caused the disruption of 5-7% of the world's oil supply
- **March 2021** | Attacked Aramco oil facilities in Saudi Arabia
- **March 2021** | Launched two Shahed-197 drones from Iranian territory carrying TNT explosives and firearms towards Israel. Drones were intercepted by Israeli F-35 fighters over the territory of neighboring countries. Air Force Commander Maj. Gen. Amikam Norkin stated that this was "the world's first operational interception of enemy UAVs by the Adir (F-35) aircraft"
- **May 2021** | Launched a Zamad UCAV from Iraqi territory at Israel, which was intercepted during the Operation Guardian of the Walls events
- **April to July 2021** | A series of drone strikes by Iran and its proxies against coalition forces in Iraq
- **July 2021** | Launched an explosive drone that hit the Israeli-owned Mercer Street oil tanker in the Oman region, killing two British and Romanian crew members, and another that hit the CSAV Tyndall in Persian Gulf waters
- **September 2021** | Attack on the Abha airport in western Saudi Arabia

²¹<https://www.idf.il/> אתרי-יחידות/זרוע-האוויר-והחלל/כל-הכתבות/2022/יירוט-מל-טים-איראניים-חיל-האוויר-2018-2021-שומר-החומות-מטוס-אדיר/



The attack drone launched from Syrian territory to Israel in February 2018 (IDF Spokesperson)



Iranian Drone launched from Iraqi territory toward Israel, May 2018 (IDF Spokesperson)



Launch of UAV from Iranian territory to Israel, March 2021

UAV Attacks by Iran and Iranian Proxies



- | | | |
|---|--|---|
| 1 10/02/18
Interception of an Iranian UAV by the IDF | 6 08/05/21
UAV attack on Coalition Forces in Ein al-Asad | 11 05/07/21
UAV attack on Coalition Forces in Baghdad |
| 2 14/09/19
Dozens of Iranian UAVs and cruise missiles strike "Aramco" facilities in Saudi Arabia | 7 15/05/21
UAV attack on Coalition Forces in Ein al-Asad | 12 06/07/21
UAV attack on Coalition Forces in Baghdad |
| 3 19/03/21
UAV attack on an "Aramco" oil facility in Riyadh | 8 06/06/21
UAV attack on Coalition Forces in Ein al-Asad | 13 23/07/21
UAV attack on Coalition Forces in Erbil |
| 4 25/03/21
UAV strike on the container ship "LORI" | 9 26/06/21
UAV attack in Iraqi territory | 14 29/07/21
Suicide UAV attack on the container ship "Mercer Street" |
| 5 14/04/21
UAV attack on Coalition Forces in Erbil | 10 02/07/21
UAV strike on the container ship "CSAV Tyndall" | 15 24/09/21
UAV attack on "Abha" airport in west Saudi Arabia |

Iranian use of force in the Middle East by means of UAV attacks (IDF Spokesperson)²²

²² <https://www.idf.il/> אתרי-יחידות/זרוע-האוויר-והחלל/כל-הכתבות/2022/יירוט-מל-טים-איראניים-חיל-האוויר-2021-2018-שומר-החומות-מטוס-אדיר/
<https://twitter.com/idf/status/1500904036719075328>



The coordinated Iranian attack of UCAVs and cruise missiles on the Abqaiq and Khorais oil facilities in Saudi Arabia²³

The "Iranian octopus" pincer movement: leverage nooses around Israel aiming to create "strategic depth"

The Revolutionary Guards: The executive and enforcement arm of the "revolution export", charged with creating an Iranian "strategic depth" in the region

A central pillar of the Iranian regime's concept of "exporting the revolution" and the philosophy of founding leader Ayatollah Khomeini is **leveraging the Iranian Revolutionary Guards** (Persian: سپاه پاسداران انقلاب اسلامی) in order to create **strategic depth** (in Persian عمق استراتژیک) or regional foothold for Iran beyond its territorial borders. This principle of "Iranian strategic depth" is reiterated both in the founding texts of the revolution and in the sermons and texts of the Supreme Leader of Iran and other key figures. For example, on March 10, 2022, Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei held a meeting with the Assembly of Experts, in which he stated that **"a regional presence gives us more strategic depth and national strength. Why should we give it up?"** ²⁴ Khamenei repeatedly refers to Islamic countries as "the strategic depth of the regime." ²⁵ " In a sermon delivered on February 3, 1995, he stressed:

"With the victory of the Islamic revolution in Iran, the feeling of pride and

high spirits arose among the Muslims... One of the dimensions of the revolution has been known as the "strategic depth of our revolution" and this is exactly what our enemies want to take away from us. **This is like a man who owns a tent with dozens of strings at dozens of points in the area, and he pulls them with his long claws.** This tent remains pitched and fixed in place so that no storm can rattle it. Thus, the nations of Islam in Asia, Europe and Africa speak in praise of the Islamic revolution; Imam's fatwa... Palestine Day Celebrations – Al-Quds Day... Last Friday of Ramadan... All of them testify to the **strategic depth of the Islamic revolution, which our enemies cannot see.**"²⁶

Thus Ali Sa'idi, representative of Iran's Supreme Leader Khamenei in the IRGC, determined in a speech on August 10, 2015:

"They [the superpowers] do not want Iran to have strategic depth in Yemen nor have spiritual influence there, and in Lebanon, Gaza, Bahrain, and Syria. If we want to give up this strategic depth, we

²⁴ <https://www.tasnimnews.com/he/news/2022/03/11/2680379> מנהיג-איראן-לא-תוותר-על-נוכחות-אזורית-על-

תוכנית-הגרעין

²⁵ <https://farsi.khamenei.ir/speech-content?id=4992>

²⁶ <https://farsi.khamenei.ir/speech-content?id=2739>

will have to give up everything we have achieved. They came to the negotiating table [the nuclear talks in Vienna] because of Iran's regional power and strategic depth. **Strategic depth is a critical factor for Iran, and if we want to give it up, we will be isolated.**"²⁷

Originally, the Revolutionary Guards were established as an alternative military force to the Iranian army, a force loyal to the regime that would be its mainstay. The aspiration was to create a revolutionary Islamic force that would uproot the "root of evil" from the region, namely the "Great Satan" (the United States) and the "Little Satan" (Israel), while establishing Islamic Shiite dominance in both Iran and the region. This is, in effect, the "**Iranian octopus**": a military and political force that serves as an **enforcement and executive lever** with which to promote Iranian interests and deepen the regime's projection throughout the region.

The Revolutionary Guards are the strongest and most dominant force in Iran today, and have evolved far beyond an exclusively military organization. The heads of the Revolutionary Guards (currently Hossein Salami) are personal advisors to the Supreme Leader and have a very influential tone in the political-military decision-making process. In addition to being the most significant military force in the country, the IRGC is also budgeted with huge sums of money and in practice has control over Iran's economy. For example, in the 2021-2022 fiscal year, 161 trillion tomans (\$6.5 billion) were allocated to military, defense, and law enforcement forces – or 25% of

the state budget; **Approximately one third of the defense budget was allocated to the Revolutionary Guards** (\$2.3 billion)²⁸. In addition, **huge budgets flow to the Revolutionary Guards from obscure sources** that are not transparently reported, through a network of organizations, subsidiaries, and projects, such as the Khatam al-Anbiya'a construction project, whose profits are estimated at trillions of tomans²⁹. In 2017, then-CIA Director Mike Pompeo estimated that **the IRGC controls about 20% of Iran's economy**,³⁰ but various assessments cast doubt on the reliability of the existing data, some of them believing that the **IRGC control about two-thirds or even 80% of Iran's economy**.

The IRGC as a whole was designated as a foreign terrorist organization (FTO) by the Trump administration in 2019, after US administrations refrained from doing so for years, and instead, many organizations and projects belonging to them have been the target of US sanctions as entities linked to proliferation, support for terrorism, and human rights violations.³¹

The Quds Force: The "Guiding Mind" Behind the Islamization and "Shiiteization" of the Middle East.

The Quds Force, one of the five branches of the IRGC, is an elite unit that supports the "proxy" or Iran's regional military proxies through force buildup, training, infrastructure operation, subversive actions against the government, and support for sympathetic governments and leaders. **It is in fact Iran's elite regional unit, the "executive arm" of the Iranian revolution export machine**, and as such constitutes an exclusive

²⁷ <http://www.memri.org.il/cgi-webaxy/item?3942>

²⁸ <https://iranwire.com/en/features/68279>

²⁹ <https://iranwire.com/fa/features/43466>

³⁰ <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/R44017> pp.21

³¹ Ibid.

and prestigious force of several thousand operatives, according to estimates. The Quds Force to date supports Hezbollah, Hamas, and pro-Iranian movements in Iraq, Syria, Yemen, the Gulf, and remotely from Iran's borders, both economically and militarily, as well as with consultation and guidance. It is in fact the **"planning and guiding brain"** behind the

Islamization and "Shiiteization" of the Middle East. Until his assassination in 2019, this force was headed by Qassem Soleimani, who to a large extent was responsible for the Iranian military proliferation in the region, and was also very close to Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah. Today, the Quds Force is headed by Ismail Qa'ani.

Terrorism around the world

As a result of these efforts, the Quds Force, as an agent of the Iranian regime, has perpetrated terrorist attacks and attempted attacks around the world, whether directly or indirectly. Among the most prominent of these attacks are:

April 18, 1983	Attack on the U.S. Embassy in Beirut with the use of a truck bomb, killing 63
October 23, 1983	Terrorist attack at the US Marine base in Beirut, killing 241
July 31, 1984	Hijacking of an Air France to Iran
March 17, 1992	Terrorist attack on the Israeli Embassy in Buenos Aires, killing 29 and wounding more than 220
July 18, 1994	Attack on the Jewish Community Center in Buenos Aires (AMIA) that killed 85 and wounded 330
October 11, 2011	A plan uncovered by American intelligence to assassinate the Saudi ambassador to the United States
July 19, 2012	Terrorist attack in Sofia, Bulgaria by Hezbollah terrorist that ended in 5 Israeli tourists killed
June 2018	French intelligence thwarted IRGC plan to carry out a terrorist attack at a conference of the Iranian opposition group Mojahidin Khalq in Paris
October 2018	Denmark recalled its ambassador from Iran after thwarting IRGC plan to assassinate Arab opposition leaders in Iran staying in Denmark

The Iranian regime is creating a defensive network of vassal countries throughout the region, in a developed version of the former Soviet Union's concept of "Finlandization".

Similarly to the former Soviet Union's concept of "Finlandization", which sought to create a **defensive belt**, or Soviet **strategic depth** around the home country in the form of vassal countries that partition Russia from the rest of the world, the Iranian regime seeks to destabilize, agitate, and ultimately take over its neighboring countries, remote states, and other geographical areas of interest. Within its spheres of influence are:

- **The Gaza Strip:** Iran finances Hamas to the tune of \$30 million a month,³² or \$360 million a year – a budget that had been hiked since Operation Guardian of the Walls to allow Hamas to "upgrade its capabilities." This is higher than the previous \$300 million annual budget.³³ Iran broadly supports Hamas, politically, by supplying it with arms by way of weapons smuggling, and by providing the organization with operational and economic guidance. An additional \$30 million is allocated to the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ). Previous estimates set the total annual Iranian aid to Palestinian armed groups, including Hamas, Islamic Jihad, and the PFLP, at \$100 million a year.³⁴
- **Lebanon:** For all intents and purposes, the Iranian regime controls the state of Lebanon through its proxy, Hezbollah, which enjoys the funding of \$700 million

a year by Iran.³⁵ Hezbollah is an Iranian Shiite force established with the support of the Iranian regime and remains a loyal proxy of the regime to this day, serving as the executive arm of Iran's policy in Lebanon.

- **Syria:** Between 2012 and 2021 Iran has bankrolled the Assad regime at the amount of \$16 billion,³⁶ provided it with military forces to help stabilize the country during the civil war, and is now establishing a military presence in Syria through a network of Iranian military bases, ammunition smuggling, and the training of Syrian military personnel. Iran also sends mercenaries to the country to fight on its behalf, like the Liwa Fatemiyoun brigade which consists of Afghan fighters. It is estimated that at its peak, the Iranian force in Syria amounted to some 2,500 soldiers and officers.³⁷
- **Yemen:** Iran has allocated hundreds of millions of dollars to assist the Houthis in Yemen, along with military guidance and weapons' supply – including surface-to-surface missiles and attack drones that were used militarily against Saudi Arabia.
- **Iraq:** Iran supports pro-Hezbollah and pro-Iranian Shiite militias in the country, which have launched attacks against the US embassy in Baghdad, among others. In 1982, the IRGC established the Badr

³² <https://old.iranintl.com/en/iran-in-brief/iran-reportedly-agreed-pay-hamas-intelligence-israeli-missiles>

³³ <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/R44017> pp.39

³⁴ <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/R44017> pp.39

³⁵ <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/R44017> pp.40

³⁶ <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/R44017> pp.23

³⁷ <https://www.idf.il/en/minisites/iran/iran-in-syria/iranian-forces-deployed-in-syria>

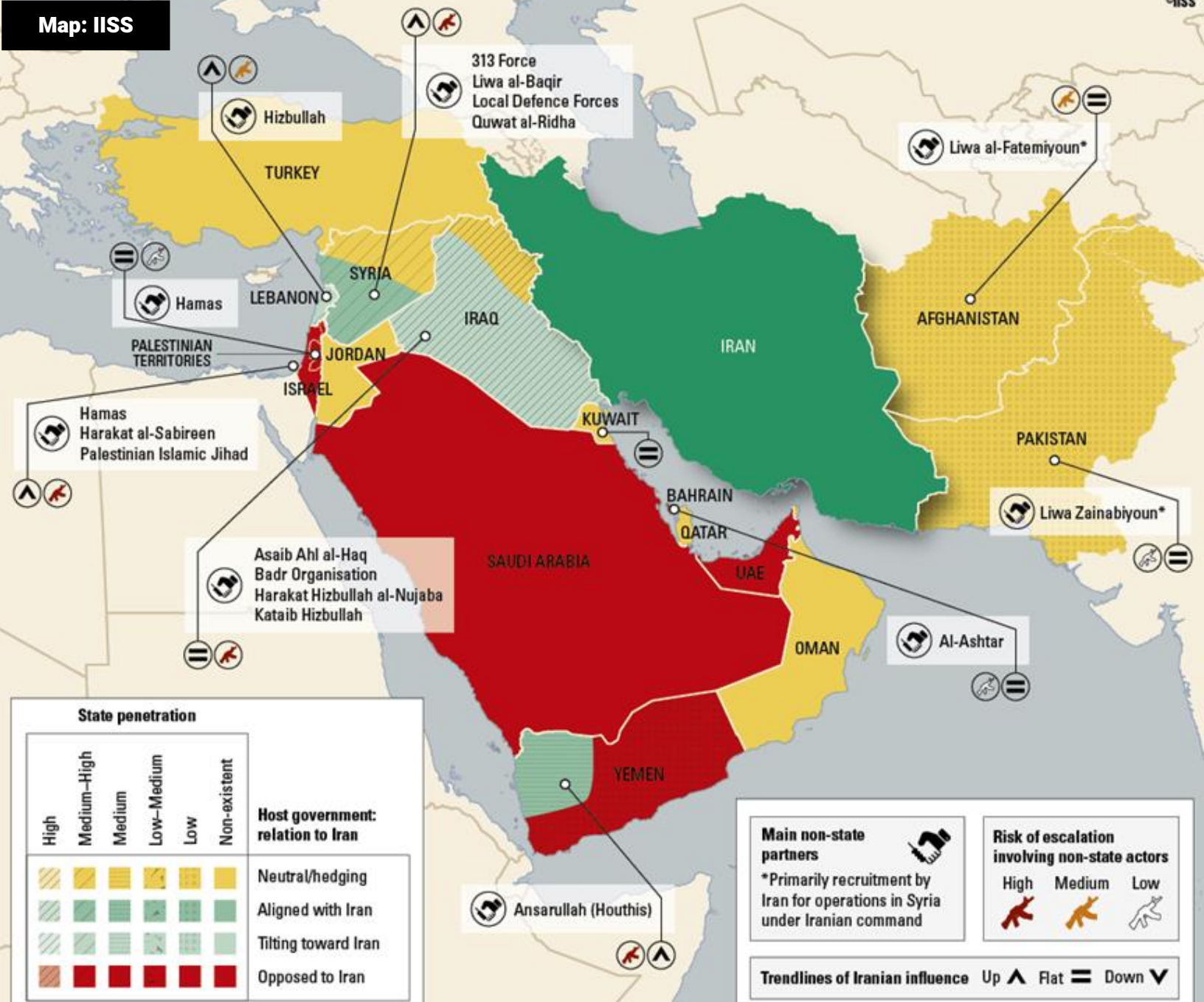
organization, which fought against Saddam Hussein. Since 2014, some 60,000 Iraqi Shiites have fought in more than 60 armed groups following a fatwa issued by Shiite cleric Sistani against the rise of ISIS. In 2016, the Iranian Majles legally recognized the PMF – The Popular Mobilization Forces – in Iraq, with the number of fighters increasing to about 100,000 to 150,000 By 2018. Iran provides financial, advisory, and military support to a wide range of armed groups in Iraq, such as the Qatada al-Sadr cleric's Peace Brigades, Kata'ib Hezbollah, Hezbollah's Harakat al-Nujaba, and others.³⁸

- **Sudan:** For years, Iran has used Sudan as fertile ground for weapon smuggling into the Gaza Strip, and in doing so, the regime has also become closer to its counterpart in Khartoum. Since 2014, Khartoum has distanced itself from the Iranian regime in favor of the U.S. In 2020, Sudan signed a normalization agreement with Israel under the Abraham Accords.
- **Afghanistan:** The Iranian regime has supported the Taliban over the years – despite is complex relationship with the Sunni organization that culminated in an Iranian threat to invade the country in 1996 in the wake of the Mazar al-Sharif events. Among other things, Iran supplied the organization with weapons against American targets, and had expressed an interest in establishing close ties with the rise of the Taliban in 2021.

- Iran also operates in sub-Saharan Africa, Southeast Asia, and South American countries such as Venezuela and the Argentina-Brazil-Paraguay tri-border area as part of an extensive network of drug and weapons smuggling, human trafficking, and other sources of income for its organizations, chiefly Hezbollah.

Thus, in fact, the "**real map of Iran**" is not delineated solely within the borders of the country itself, but is vastly projected over "vassal countries" and areas of control throughout the Middle East, which are already in practice controlled by the Iranian regime and its proxies: Lebanon, Iraq, Yemen, and to a large extent – Syria, as well as Hamas. This is in effect **a military buildup not for defensive purposes – but an offensive move against Israel and its allies, and against any force in the region that is not aligned with the Iranian regime.**

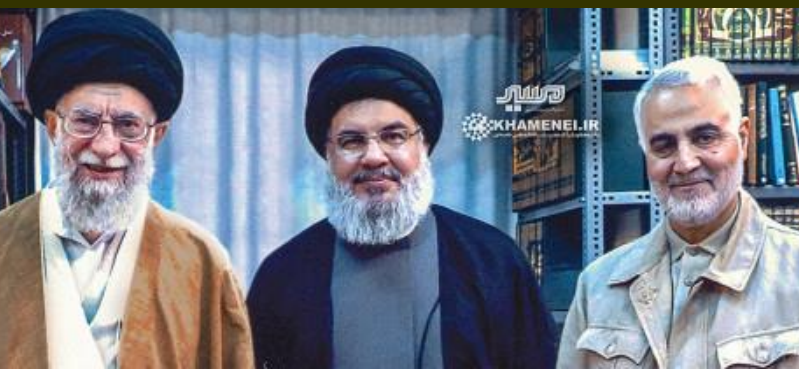
³⁸ <https://iranprimer.usip.org/blog/2021/nov/10/profiles-pro-iran-militias-iraq>



The Iranian Octopus – A Map of Iran’s Deepening Regional Sphere of Influence

A central pillar of the Iranian regime's concept of "exporting the revolution" and the philosophy of founding leader Ayatollah Khomeini is leveraging the **Iranian Revolutionary Guards** to create strategic depth or regional foothold beyond Iran's borders. Its aspiration is to create a revolutionary Islamic force that will uproot the "root of evil" from the region, i.e., the "Great Satan" (the United States) and the "Little Satan" (Israel), while establishing Islamic Shiite dominance in both Iran and the region. This is the "**Iranian octopus**": a military and political force that serves as an **enforcement and executive lever** to promote Iranian interests and deepen the regime's hold on the region.

Hezbollah: \$700M per year



Hamas: \$360M per year



Requirements For a Future Agreement and Directions of Action

- **What is needed is a completely new agreement – one that effectively guarantees that Iran will never attain the ability to produce nuclear weapons.** For this end, the US must lean harder on Iran to report on the progress it had made in its military nuclear project, and provide information on the undisclosed facilities and unreported uranium stockpiles. Only under these conditions an agreement ensuring that Tehran is incapable of producing nuclear weapons could be relevant.
- Such an agreement must not include deadlines for the expiration of restrictions on Iran's nuclear program, including sunset clauses, and it must stipulate supervision measures at any time and in any place – that include Iranian scientists; it must require the dismantling of the underground nuclear facility at Fordow, which is intended for military needs, and limit Iran's development of ballistic missiles.
- The Iranian regime continues to threaten Israel with annihilation and finance terrorism throughout the Middle East, thereby blatantly violating the UN charter. There is no justification for removing sanctions and paving a secure path for the regime to produce a nuclear weapons arsenal.
- Preventing Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons is possible and critical. Unfortunately, it has been proven that the JCPOA allows the Iranian regime to advance to nuclear weapons and to expand its regional influence, rather than restrain it.
- **The most effective means of contending with the Iranian regime is to continue applying to its full the "maximum pressure" strategy, and particularly severe economic sanctions and a credible military threat.** Throughout the timeframe leading to the agreement, Iran had a gap to fill in order to produce nuclear weapons, and was exposed to the possibility of an American or Israeli attack at the same time if it tried to break forward. Such an attack has lost its legitimacy under the framework of diplomatic agreements between Iran and the world powers.
- **For its part, Israel must set in motion the following measures:**
 - **In no scenario can Israel accept Iran as a nuclear state or a state with nuclear capabilities.** The State of Israel is in a decisive stage in the face of the acceleration of Iran's military nuclear program, to the point of significantly shortening the containment distance. **This is the number one existential strategic threat to the Zionist enterprise.**
 - **Setting up a credible threat: Setting an objective of a system-wide readiness to carry out any type of operation, covert and kinetic, against the Iranian nuclear infrastructure independently and regardless of international agreements.**
 - **Continue making clear to the US that it should not persist with the effort of attaining a bad agreement with Iran and pressure** the administration toward this end through American elected officials, public opinion, the media, and the elites to prevent such an agreement.