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Hearing on the Implications of a Nuclear Agreement with Iran (Part IV)  
United States House Committee on Foreign Affairs  
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## **Introduction**

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Engel, Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today and speak to the military and strategic implications of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) for the United States and its allies in the Middle East. My decades of service as first a career submarine officer and then as a fleet commander in the U.S. Navy have afforded me the experience and expertise to understand the potential threats posed by adversaries like Iran, especially in the maritime environment. Along with General Wald, I am a member of the new Iran Strategy Council, an organization of former senior U.S. military officials commissioned by JINSA's Gemunder Center for Defense and Strategy. Its mission is to help U.S. policymakers analyze and respond to the Iran deal's potentially grave repercussions.

Last week, we released a [report](#) assessing that the JCPOA will make the United States and its allies less safe, and military confrontation with Iran and its proxies more likely.<sup>1</sup> This agreement will not prevent a nuclear Iran, but rather allow it to become a nuclear threshold state when its major restrictions lapse in no more than 15 years. This agreement also will enable Iran to become more powerful and expand its influence and destabilizing activities – across the Middle East and possibly directly threatening the U.S. homeland – at the same time that sequestration diminishes the ability of the United States to respond to global threats, including increased Iranian aggression. Consequently, the strategic environment will grow much more treacherous in the next 15 years as Iran becomes economically stronger, regionally more powerful and militarily more capable. Simply put, the United States is in a far better position to limit Iranian aggression and prevent a nuclear Iran today, even by military means if necessary, than when the JCPOA expires.

## **JCPOA Consequences for Iran's Strategic Posture**

Beyond nuclear capabilities, the JCPOA has implications for Iran's conventional military capabilities and its support for proxies. Overall, the agreement will provide the expansionist

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<sup>1</sup> Gemunder Center Iran Strategy Council, "Assessment of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action: Strategic Consequences for U.S. National Security," September 2, 2015.

regime in Tehran with access to resources, technology and international arms markets required to bolster its offensive military capabilities in the vital Persian Gulf region. Further, it will allow Tehran to develop long-range ballistic missiles and other major weapons systems. Finally, this deal will also enable Iran to increase its support for its well-established terrorist and insurgent proxies.

### *Improved Iran Military Capabilities*

Beginning in the short term, Iran will be able to revitalize its defense industrial base, even if it devotes only a fraction of the \$100 billion or more that will be unfrozen as part of the agreement to military spending. Over the medium term, the removal of economic sanctions will generate increased revenues that the regime can channel into its defense budget, and the lifting of the United Nations arms embargo will allow it to acquire other advanced technologies and weapons from abroad. And, once sanctions against its ballistic missile program sunset, Iran could more easily develop weapons capable of reaching targets in the Middle East and beyond – including Europe and the United States.

For the foreseeable future, Iran is unlikely to funnel these new resources into sophisticated conventional capabilities. Indeed, it has gleaned the clear lesson that it cannot hope to match the United States in a direct military confrontation, either now or in 15 years when the capability gap between the two militaries is likely to have shrunk. However, Iran also knows the United States relies heavily on unfettered access to close-in bases across the Middle East to keep the region’s vital and vulnerable sea lanes open, conduct combat operations and deter aggression against its allies. Therefore, Tehran has spent more than a decade pursuing a strategy – commonly referred to as “anti-access/area denial,” or A2/AD – to disrupt or deter the United States from projecting superior forces into the region, or to prevent those forces from operating effectively if deployed.<sup>2</sup>

Our Council expects Iran to use the opportunity provided by JCPOA to augment its capabilities for carrying out this A2/AD strategy. Iran could buy more of the systems and platforms it currently deploys. This would include its stocks of short and medium-range ballistic missiles – already the largest in the Middle East – as well as its growing arsenal of cruise missiles and unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV), and its sizable fleet of fast attack craft and submarines. This would be on top of the advanced S-300 air defenses Iran already is set to acquire from Russia at the end of this year.

Iran could also take advantage of the international access and windfall revenues provided by the JCPOA to upgrade crucial existing capabilities. Specifically: improved precision guidance systems for missiles, better UAVs and longer-range radars, as well as new missile boats, submarines, mobile missile launchers, air defenses or multirole aircraft. It could also enhance

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<sup>2</sup> For an in-depth treatment of Iran’s A2/AD strategy, see: Mark Gunzinger with Chris Dougherty, *Outside-In: Operating from Range to Defeat Iran’s Anti-Access and Area-Denial Threats* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, 2012).

its stealth and electronic and cyber warfare capabilities using new technologies from abroad. Ultimately, Iran might also invest in entirely new weaponry, to project power not only along the Persian Gulf, but across the Middle East and beyond. This could include long-range strike, satellite, airlift and sealift capabilities as well as the development of long-range ballistic missiles.

The A2/AD concept and strategy are not uniquely employed by Iran. In fact China has proven itself very adept at this strategy, and is evolving new and more capable weapon systems that further enhance this strategy at an alarming pace. To a lesser extent, North Korea is making strides here as well. Unfortunately, both North Korea and Iran have become students, and likely customers, of China's strategy and capabilities. Russia could be another major supporter, particularly of Iran, since Moscow is not reluctant to sell high-end arms to any willing buyer.

With these capabilities and connections, the A2/AD threat from Iran would become increasingly severe – a problem aggravated by the challenging geography of the Middle East with its smaller bodies of water and their associated straits. In short order Iran could credibly threaten to seal off the Persian Gulf at the Strait of Hormuz, degrade U.S. freedom of maneuver and military lines of communication, challenge U.S. air supremacy, block the flow of oil through the Persian Gulf, and target naval and commercial vessels, military bases, energy infrastructure and other militarily-critical sites around the region.

#### *Increased Support for Proxies*

This is not just about conventional military spending. The JCPOA also will provide Iran greater resources to funnel to Shia militias – chiefly Hezbollah – and other dangerous proxy groups across the region, including Hamas. The regime's official defense spending was only \$16 billion in 2014. While the real figure – including military support for Hezbollah and Syria's Assad regime – is likely much higher, the infusion of new revenues in the coming years will create opportunities to significantly expand involvement throughout the Middle East and possibly farther afield.

Even with sanctions in place, Tehran has steadily deepened its involvement in the Syrian Civil War. With sanctions lifted, Iran's leadership could try to tip the scales decisively in Assad's favor after years of stalemate. As the arms embargo is relaxed, Iran could also supply Hezbollah with increasingly sophisticated capabilities, thereby raising the risk and potential costs of conflict with Israel.

In Iraq, the Iranian regime could further consolidate its control over the Shia-dominated central government, security forces and the most powerful sectarian militias. This would put some of the Middle East's most productive oilfields in an exclusively Iranian sphere of influence and fracture Iraq into smaller states. Iran could also escalate its efforts to foment or capitalize on internal sectarian conflict in the Arabian Peninsula, as it has recently in Yemen.

The strategic consequences for the United States and its allies could be severe. Combined with

improved military capabilities, these developments could enable the Iranian regime to realize a long-held ambition to bring the region's Shia populations into its orbit and create a "Shia crescent" from the Persian Gulf to the Mediterranean. This would have the potential to erase the decades-old balance of power between Iran and its adversaries in the Middle East, replacing it with a level of Iranian dominance not previously seen.

## **Challenges for the United States**

By giving Iran the means to bolster its military capabilities and support for its proxies – all while allowing Tehran to approach the nuclear threshold – the JCPOA will aggravate sectarian conflict and trigger nuclear and conventional proliferation cascades in the Middle East. Our long-standing allies feel betrayed, even angered, by the deal's perceived weakening of U.S. security guarantees and reversal of decades of U.S. regional security policy. And sequestration is already diminishing the U.S. military's ability to project power in the Middle East.

Maintaining our position in the Middle East to prevent a nuclear Iran will demand increasing resources, posture and attention, far more than is necessary today. We must therefore face the realities of the agreement with immediate action along several key lines of effort.

First, we must strengthen our fraying ties with regional allies through sustained multilateral engagement to assemble a regional coalition to hold the line against Tehran. This demands greater cooperation with U.S. partners in the region in the realms of missile defense, intelligence, air and maritime security.

Second, despite ongoing friction with both countries, we will need to undertake a significant diplomatic effort to convince Russia and China, Iran's most likely suppliers, not to sell advanced weapons to Tehran as the arms embargo and ballistic missile sanctions expire.

Third, we must develop a coherent and comprehensive strategy to deal with Iran's growing adversarial ambitions, despite having infused it with substantial resources and removing all meaningful sanctions, embargoes and restrictions during the JCPOA.

Finally, we must preserve our country's military edge against Iran with recapitalization, investment and modernization of our forces. At a minimum this would mean returning the defense budget to baseline levels requested by Secretary of Defense Robert Gates in 2012, and as recommended by the bipartisan National Defense Panel last year.<sup>3</sup> These additional funds should be invested in rebuilding and retraining what is becoming a hollow force, as well as modernizing those capabilities most essential to deterring – and if necessary defeating – the growing threat from Iran under the JCPOA.

I thank you Mr. Chairman for my time, and I look forward to the Committee's questions.

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<sup>3</sup> United States Institute of Peace, *Ensuring a Strong U.S. Defense for the Future: The National Defense Panel Review of the 2014 Quadrennial Defense Review* (Washington, DC: USIP, 2014), p. xi.