



**Statement of General Charles F. Wald, USAF (ret.)
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Hearing on Confronting the Full Range of Iranian Threats
United States House Foreign Affairs Committee
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Introduction

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Engel, Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss responses to the full range of threats posed by Iran. I have followed Iran closely throughout my career, including in my current capacity as co-chair of the Iran Task Force at JINSA's Gemunder Center for Defense and Strategy. This summer, on the two-year anniversary of the announcement of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), our Task Force issued a comprehensive [report](#) on the need to restore U.S. credibility and leverage for confronting the gamut of Iran's menacing behaviors.¹ However, I want to stress that my views expressed here today are my own.

Understandably, much of the current debate focuses on Iran's dubious compliance with the JCPOA, and whether continued adherence to the deal serves our national interests. Our JINSA Task Force has been an outspoken critic of this agreement. It creates a dangerous strategic imbalance by giving Tehran great financial, military and geopolitical benefits, while robbing the United States of the pressures we had built previously against Iran. Any coherent strategy against Iran must prioritize restoring our lost leverage, and I applaud this committee's efforts to examine the range of options available to us and our allies.

Iran's Growing Military Threat

The shortcomings of the JCPOA are numerous and well-known. Suffice to say, the deal places Iran on a trajectory to become as intractable a challenge as North Korea is today – and very possibly worse. Indeed, while Pyongyang's relentless pursuit of nuclear weapons has only deepened its isolation and driven it toward bankruptcy, the JCPOA is doing the opposite for Iran.

¹ JINSA Gemunder Center Iran Task Force, "Strategy to Restore U.S. Leverage Against Iran," July 2017, available at: <http://www.jinsa.org/publications/strategy-restore-us-leverage-against-iran>.

This committee is well aware of the JCPOA's literal costs: an estimated \$115 billion in unfrozen assets back under Tehran's control since day one, plus an additional \$1.7 billion ransom for U.S. hostages.² Since then, the added dividends of sanctions relief have flowed directly to the lucrative economic sectors controlled by the regime and its hardline Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC). The capital and technology from renewed foreign investment is already translating to increased spending on ballistic missiles and IRGC operations in places like Syria, Iraq and Yemen.³

Beyond providing more funds, the JCPOA also effectively legalizes Iran's ambitious military buildup in coming years. Even before the deal, Tehran already possessed the region's largest arsenals of nuclear-capable ballistic and cruise missiles. By removing the previous legally-binding ban on test launches, U.N. Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 2231 gives Iran, and specifically the IRGC, a major opportunity to advance these capabilities and intimidate our regional allies.

No more than three years from now, the U.N. conventional arms embargo on Iran will also disappear, opening the country's defense-industrial base to the international market and enriching the IRGC as an arms dealer. Tehran is already tipping the scales in conflicts across the region with largely outdated military equipment. The IRGC's ability to inflict heavy costs on U.S. and allied forces, and possibly deny our access to the region altogether, will grow significantly as it augments its air defenses, fast attack craft, missile boat, submarines, unmanned vehicles, mines, radars and short-range missiles.

No more than three years after that, the same U.N. resolution will permit the IRGC to access highly-advanced missile technology, materials and financing from abroad. This will aid its development of more sophisticated and accurate delivery vehicles, including intermediate-range (IRBM) and intercontinental (ICBM) ballistic missiles capable of targeting the heart of Europe and the U.S. homeland. Because this will occur shortly before the JCPOA allows Iran to ramp up its enrichment capacity, Tehran could push for ICBMs around the same it approaches nuclear weapons capability – effectively giving it a direct nuclear deterrent against the United States before the agreement even sunsets.

Rising Iranian Aggression Under JCPOA

Iran is already moving more directly and brazenly against U.S. interests and our allies. This stems in part from what the JCPOA does: it removes the aforementioned restrictions on Tehran's power projection resources. Yet this also results from what the JCPOA represents: the weakening of U.S. credibility to push back as Iran aggravates the growing security vacuum in the Middle East.

² U.S. Department of the Treasury Press Center, "Written Testimony of Adam J. Szubin, Acting Under Secretary of Treasury for Terrorism and Financial Intelligence to U.S. Senate Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs, August 5, 2015.

³ Thomas Erdbrink, "Iranian Parliament, Facing U.S. sanctions, Votes to Raise Military Spending," *New York Times* August 13, 2017.

Since day one of the deal, this has been evident in Iran’s defiant upsurge in ballistic missile tests, including more accurate and mobile multi-stage missiles with reentry vehicles better suited for nuclear warheads – and more difficult to intercept than older Iranian versions. In June, Tehran even fired ballistic missiles in combat for the first time since the Iran-Iraq War, when the IRGC launched a salvo from Iranian soil into Syria.⁴

Also for the first time in decades, Iran is at daggers drawn with U.S. ships in the Persian Gulf. It is assisting its Houthi proxy in Yemen with attacks on U.S. ships and our allies – including a steady hail of ballistic missiles targeting Saudi cities and bases. Flush with rising revenues from sanctions relief, Iran is also consolidating control over the heart of the Middle East and directly undermining U.S. efforts to stabilize Syria and Iraq.

Throughout these conflicts, both the IRGC – which enjoys an increasingly central role in Iranian policymaking – and its terrorist proxy Hezbollah are transforming themselves into more professional, expeditionary combined-arms forces. Consequently, Iran can now intervene decisively to alter the course of conflicts across the region and establish new beachheads to threaten U.S. allies like Israel and Saudi Arabia.

Simply put, even if Iran does not materially breach the JCPOA, the deal already is a boon to its destabilizing regional ambitions, and a strategic disaster for the United States.

Rebuilding Leverage Against Iran

American policymakers must now develop a coherent set of responses to reverse this untenable strategic imbalance, before it continues from bad to worse. As we laid out in our recent Iran Task Force report, this calls for a comprehensive strategy, utilizing every element of American power, to rebuild and apply counter-pressure against the full spectrum of Iran’s destabilizing behaviors. Time is of the essence, especially since any nuclear-related sanctions that Congress might snap back or enact would require time as much as anything else – time that Iran could otherwise spend breaking out or retaliating outside the nuclear program.⁵

Our Task Force articulated recommendations to begin imposing costs on Iran’s most threatening behaviors, and to restore U.S. credibility damaged by the JCPOA:

1. Develop Credible U.S. Military Leverage

- I applaud this committee for its years of tireless effort to increase pressure on Iran and Hezbollah through sanctions. Such measures are necessary, but their message and their impact must be reinforced with military leverage.

⁴ CSIS Missile Defense Project, available at: <https://missilethreat.csis.org/missile/emad/> (accessed October 5, 2017).

⁵ JINSA Gemunder Center Iran Task Force, “Strategy to Restore U.S. Leverage Against Iran,” July 2017, pp. 25-32.

- American officials should prepare – and make clear they are preparing – contingency plans to defend the United States and its allies from further Iranian tests of nuclear-capable missiles. This must include unequivocal threats to shoot down future tests if necessary.
- Undertake concrete military preparations for responding to these and other Iranian military challenges, including forward-deploying part of our Aegis-equipped missile defense fleet to the Persian Gulf (like we already do in Europe and East Asia). Whether Iran adheres to the JCPOA or not, Congress should consider requiring the Pentagon adopt these changes as part of a broader reassessment of U.S. force posture and contingency planning for the region.
- Leverage international law in defending our forces and maritime traffic against Iran’s increasingly aggressive and illegal behavior at sea. Existing rules of engagement (ROE) permit much more forceful responses to IRGC naval forces’ demonstrated hostile intent than our current restraint suggests.
- Ensure the United States has a post-ISIS strategy and force presence in Syria. This is crucial to prevent Iran, Hezbollah and their proxies from dictating that country’s future. It will also impose obstacles to their evolving land bridge that would run directly from Iran to the Mediterranean and Lebanon.

2. *Assemble a Regional Coalition Against Iran*

- Augment the new Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on defense aid to Israel by removing artificial Obama-era caps on missile defense assistance. The new MoU must be treated as the floor, not the ceiling, for bilateral cooperation against Iran’s and Hezbollah’s growing presence and capabilities on Israel’s northern borders.
- Work with our Gulf allies Saudi Arabia and U.A.E. to develop a robust, multi-layered theater missile defense architecture, and potentially help facilitate the transfer of advanced Israeli missile defense systems to these countries – both of which confront Iran on their front and back doorsteps. American policymakers should also seriously consider explicit military backing for these two countries to defend against further Iranian encroachment.
- Ensure interoperability of U.S. and Gulf air and maritime defenses to counter Iran’s growing anti-access/area denial (A2/AD) threat under the JCPOA.

Regardless of the JCPOA’s future, these measures will demonstrate American resolve – both to Tehran and our concerned allies – that we will roll back Iranian aggression and deter or deny the hardline regime from advancing toward nuclear weapons capability.

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