

NOVEMBER 2021

# IRAN'S OPTIONS WITH REGARDS TO NUCLEAR NEGOTIATIONS



Research and Consulting



OpSour Middle East Studies Series  
No.2

## ABOUT OPSOUR

OpSour aims to process open-source information by experts and transform it into meaningful reports to provide foresight. While political and economic reports are prepared within OpSour, our company researches each country through the local expert of that country. Local and international experts will prepare reports and analyses in accordance with the customers' requests.

## DEPARTMENT GOALS

OpSour Middle East Studies publishes articles, reports and research on Middle Eastern countries society, politics, government, policy-making, international relations, and foreign policy.

[www.opsour.com](http://www.opsour.com)

Ataköy Bedri Rahmi Eyüpoğlu Street No.75 Bakırköy – İstanbul

[info@opsour.com](mailto:info@opsour.com)

The views expressed are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of OpSour.

## ABSTRACT

Iran's nuclear program and the initiatives of the JCPOA countries to restrict the program have reached a critical stage. Considering Israel's military threats, the problem has the potential to turn into an international crisis at any moment. As it will be remembered, the agreement between Iran and the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) countries became dysfunctional in 2018 with Trump's unilateral exit from the agreement. The negotiations started with Biden again were interrupted by the election of Ebrahim Raisi, who received the support of radicals and revolutionary guards in Iran. At the current stage, mutual discussions and accusations continue as to why the negotiations were interrupted. In addition, the questions of "Tehran's new strategy if the negotiations continue and what policy the USA and Israel will follow" occupy the agenda seriously.

“ This paper will try to answer these questions by focusing mainly on the political actors' statements on the subject. ”



## **Different Approaches to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) in Iran**

Iran's nuclear program negotiations started with Biden, were interrupted by the election of Raisi as president in Iran. Naturally, the interruption of the talks causes some speculations about why Iran left the table and what will be the fate of the nuclear file. In this regard, it can be said that there are three different approaches in Iran that can be classified as optimistic, pessimistic, and prudent realist approach.

1. **Optimistic Approach:** Reformists and supporters of the previous government approach nuclear talks with an optimistic perspective and argue that these talks will almost determine the country's fate. Those with an optimistic approach mostly blame domestic actors for the interruption and deadlock of the nuclear deal. [For example, Jalal Mirzaei](#), a former member of parliament and an analyst on political and international issues, believes President Raisi and Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian forgot the principles, foundations, key and vital points and stuck to some trivial and unimportant matters such as the location of the negotiation. In his view, time is now working against Iran. Because the more negotiations with the Western parties are delayed, the more country's economic situation will be complicated and critical. As the last years of Ahmadinejad's government, the country has been on the edge of a cliff, and there is no more opportunity for trial and error. Now the situation is a hundred times worse than in those years. The threshold of people's tolerance has reached its most fragile state. The country can reach a point of no return at any moment. Seyyed Ebrahim Raisi does not know political issues, especially diplomatic ones, so his government still faces a gap in diplomatic knowledge.

2. **Pessimistic Approach:** A section led by the Revolutionary Guards has a pessimistic approach to nuclear talks. [An article](#) published on 20 July in the weekly "Sobh-e Sadeh" newspaper, the publication organ of the Revolutionary Guards, can be considered as a reflection of this pessimistic view. The article expresses the following statements: "Six rounds of negotiations are enough for any observer to conclude that the United States does not want to accept the negotiations and what it wants to add to the content of the negotiations. 'Even if Tehran and Washington return to the nuclear deal, hundreds of US sanctions against Tehran will remain in place,' Secretary of State Antony Blinken told in the Senate Committee. The United States and Europe are not ready for Iran to have advanced centrifuges. The United States and Europe have called for the demolition of Iran's next-generation centrifuges. They are also unwilling to lift Iran's arms and missile restrictions in 2023. The United States and Europe insist that in addition to restricting Iran's nuclear policy, it also restricts foreign policy orientations in the region and Iran's missile defence policy... But it is the balance of power that determines the final game. Although Iran has many economic problems due to mismanagement, the situation is in Iran's favour. One of the most important powers is nuclear capability. Increasing the enrichment from 5 per cent to 60 per cent, the accumulation of 3,241 kilograms of enriched uranium, the existence and commissioning of advanced centrifuges, and especially the production of uranium silicon metal sent the following strategic message to the United States: Biden's velvet policy will fail similarly to Trump's iron fist policy."

- 3. Prudent Realist Approach:** The prudent realistic approach is close to the optimistic approach and reformists in its realistic aspect, but it differs from them in its cautious aspect. Likewise, although this approach is close to the radicals and pessimistic approach with its cautious aspect, it differs from its realistic aspect. It can be said that the Supreme National Security Council, which is currently the most authoritative and critical institution of the political system in Iran, embraces this approach. It is predicted that the Raisi government will eventually implement the decision to be issued by the Supreme National Security Council in the context of nuclear negotiations and the agreement.

### **Iran's Possible Strategies Regarding the JCPOA**

To understand Iran's current strategy on the JCPOA, it is necessary to know the strategy pursued by the previous President Rouhani's government on this issue. It should be seen that the Raisi government's strategy regarding nuclear talks is actually a reaction to Rouhani's foreign policy vision.

Relying on society's political and economic liberalization, former President Hassan Rouhani sought participation in a global financial system and normalization of relations with the United States through the JCPOA. His administration saw the negotiations with the USA and the implementation of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action as the only solution to the country's problems. For the past eight years, in the eleventh and twelfth governments, the focus of the government's foreign policy apparatus has been to resolve Iran's nuclear program with an approach to normalizing relations with the West. But this has failed due to European and US failure to keep their promises and lack of cooperation, and worse yet, it has weakened relations between Iran and countries like Russia and China. However, Iran's new president, Ebrahim Raisi,

seeks to build an economy of resistance in the face of US sanctions and pursue an anti-Western foreign policy by strengthening the foundations of the Islamic State and eliminating all forms of western-oriented policies.

Therefore, two main perspectives that will form Iran's JCPOA strategy in the new period can be mentioned. The first of these will be the prudent realist approach, and the second will be to avoid the mistakes of the western-oriented policies of the Hasan Rouhani government. In this context, it is thought that Iran will follow two basic strategies in order to achieve maximum gain and make minimum concessions in the JCPOA negotiations.

**First Strategy:** [Iran will continue](#) to increase its enrichment level, deploy more modern centrifuges, produce and enrich uranium metal, and limit the controls of International Atomic Energy Agency inspectors. With this action, Iran will send a message to the westerners, especially the USA, that the nuclear program is advancing and has reached a very critical point. Undoubtedly, in the literature of the USA and Israel, this critical point will be translated as Iran is on the verge of constructing the first atomic bomb. Therefore, in Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action negotiations, Iran will use this critical stage in the nuclear program as a psychological factor that may have real consequences and try to make the USA take a step back. Iran thinks that this strategy will achieve its goal. Because it assumes that the Biden administration tends to withdraw from the Middle East, wants to focus on China, and does not care about Israel as much as Trump.

**Second Strategy:** The government of Raisi focuses on a strategy that prioritizes "neutralizing the effects of sanctions" by strengthening economic ties with neighbors and countries such as Russia and China. Iran signed a 25-year strategic agreement with China and started similar cooperation with Russia. Since March, Iran has been a

member of the Eurasian Economic Union and joined the Beijing and Moscow-led Shanghai Cooperation Organization in September. With these initiatives, Iran wants to send two messages to the USA and Europe: First, Iran will not need the USA and the West even in the worst case, and it has an alternative in this regard. Second, maintaining the embargo on Iran will bring Tehran closer to Moscow and Beijing.

### **The Future of Iran-US Relations in the Shadow of the JCPOA**

It is difficult to make an accurate prediction about the future of Iran-US relations before the negotiations to be held within the scope of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action are concluded. It is observed that the USA wants to start the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action negotiations as soon as possible and to get a result from the negotiations. In this direction, a senior US official, speaking on condition of anonymity, told [The National](#) that Iran will eventually return to the nuclear deal but that Iran's stance in the talks will become more stringent as the Conservative government takes office. "We are concerned that Iran's new nuclear negotiation team has different goals than in the past. We do not know when Iran will return to the negotiating table and who will lead the Iranian delegation in these talks," he said. He pointed out each side in the nuclear talks should evaluate the options and plans ahead and added: "We have solutions to the situation where Iran refuses to return to the nuclear deal, or delays the resumption of talks, or sets conditions that are not compatible with the nuclear deal."

In the light of these explanations, it can be said that the USA hopes in the negotiations and does not want to turn to a military solution at present. However, it is an undeniable fact that Israel intends to manipulate the United States in this regard. Although Israel constantly refers to the military method in the context of Iran's nuclear program, it knows that Tehran's nuclear capability will not be destroyed by a military



attack. In fact, Israel sees the Iranian nuclear issue as an opportunity to develop a comprehensive regional strategy against Tehran. Within the framework of this strategy, if the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action fails, Israel is likely to launch a military attack on Iran in coordination with the US. Considering Israel's terror and sabotage actions towards Iran in recent years, it is evident that Tehran takes this possibility seriously.

Although it is difficult to predict the future of Iran-US relations in the shadow of the JCPOA, it is a common belief that Washington will continue to impose sanctions on Tehran under different pretexts. In fact, the reason for the Iran-US tension in the Middle East is that Washington, as a hegemonic power, sees the nature of the political regime in Iran and Tehran's foreign policy based on Shiite political theology as dangerous for itself and its allies. In this context, it can be predicted that the Iran-US relations will always be tense and that it will follow a course between "low tension" and "high tension" with the effect of various variables.

## **Conclusion**

Negotiations on the JCPOA, which the Raisi government blocked in Iran, will soon resume. Although there are different approaches to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action within Iran, the common opinion is in favour of continuing the negotiations. Despite all their disagreements, the countries of the P5+1 also want negotiations to solve the problem. However, unlike the Hassan Rouhani administration, the Raisi administration does not see the JCPOA as the only saviour of the country.

Tehran will use its ongoing nuclear program and the strategic relations with Russia and China as two fundamental strategies in the negotiations. Tehran states that it will agree to limit its nuclear program in return for the end of US sanctions in the

negotiations. The USA, on the other hand, wants Iran's regional policies and missile system to be discussed in the negotiations. This different expectation is the contentious part of the negotiations. A rational analysis highlights that negotiations should result in an agreement despite differing expectations and disagreements, but political history shows that decision-makers are not always rational.