

REVIVING THE IRAN DEAL: ON BIDEN ATTEMPT TO REVIVE JCPOA

Relevant for: International Relations | Topic: Effect of policies and politics of developed & developing countries on India's interests

U.S. President [Joe Biden's attempts to revive](#) the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), better known as the [Iran nuclear deal](#), have not seen any breakthrough with both sides waiting for the other to blink. The Biden administration says it would return to the deal if Iran starts complying with its terms. Tehran, on the other side, asks the U.S., which unilaterally quit the deal under the Donald Trump administration in May 2018, to return to the agreement first and lift sanctions on Iran. The EU's efforts to organise direct U.S.-Iran talks were also unsuccessful as Tehran reportedly rejected the offer. Iran has also accelerated its nuclear programme. This game of chicken continues as the clock is ticking. Iran will elect a new President in June. Hassan Rouhani, who bet his presidency on the deal — only to be repudiated by Mr. Trump — cannot stand in a third consecutive election. There is no guarantee that a moderate like Mr. Rouhani would be elected this time. And it is not a secret that there is considerable opposition among the hardliners, a powerful constituency, towards any kind of engagement with the U.S. Mr. Biden's best bet is to get the nuclear agreement back on track before Mr. Rouhani leaves office.

To be sure, Mr. Biden has moved with a sense of urgency after assuming power. He appointed a special envoy for Iran, showed signs of rebalancing ties with Saudi Arabia, and sent clear signals to Tehran about America's desire to get back to the deal. But these actions do not seem to be enough to rebuild the trust after the acrimonious Trump years. Some of Iran's concerns are genuine. After the September 11, 2001 terrorist attack, Iran had cooperated with the U.S. in the war against the Taliban. But once the Taliban were driven out of power, the Bush administration branded Iran as part of an "Axis of Evil" along with Iraq and North Korea. As President Barack Obama offered diplomacy, the Iranians grabbed the opportunity, leading to the signing of the JCPOA in 2015. And Iran was fully compliant with the agreement when Mr. Trump pulled the U.S. out of it. So Iran would seek some consistency in U.S. policy. But Iran is also in a tough spot. Hit by sanctions and a devastating COVID-19 outbreak, its economy is bleeding. It had violently cracked down on protests in 2019-20, the embers of which are still burning. Its regional operations took a hit after Qasem Soleimani was assassinated by the U.S. in January 2020. Its assets in Syria are under repeated air strikes by Israel. Last week, the U.S. had also bombed pro-Iranian militants in Syria. Both sides are under pressure. Both sides need the deal — the U.S. wants to scuttle Iran's nuclear programme and Iran wants relief from sanctions. They should stick to the diplomatic path for a breakthrough.

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