

Turning the Tide: The Imperatives for Rescuing the Iran Nuclear Deal

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Abstract

After three years of enduring the immense failures and fallouts of the US “maximum pressure” sanctions imposed on Iran in the aftermath of the Trump administration’s withdrawal from the JCPOA (Iran nuclear deal) in 2018, the Biden administration has signaled an important shift by promising to conduct a foreign policy that leads with diplomacy. The EU-brokered negotiations that have already taken place during the first half of 2021, although encountering some tactical obstacles and lack of momentum, nonetheless offer grounds for cautious optimism that the JCPOA can be rescued and that the return of all signatories to full compliance with the terms and conditions of the deal can be secured.

The critical question that this article addresses is what are the key imperatives required for a durable outcome of the upcoming negotiations. This research is based on a critique of the failures of the Trump administration’s “maximum pressure” sanctions from the Ethical or Just War theoretical framework and the Utilitarian and Realist perspectives. The research methodologies are critical observation and empirical analysis. The article’s survey of the historical trajectory of US sanctions against Iran also supports this critique by clearly demonstrating that during periods of US over-reliance on sanctions to the exclusion of other foreign policy tools, including those of diplomacy, political engagement, and economic

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incentivization, successive administrations failed to advance their foreign policy goals and objectives vis-à-vis Iran. The article argues that rescuing Iran's nuclear deal and restoring its advantages for all signatories will require the implementation of essential US policy changes. It will also be necessary for the EU foreign policy establishment to direct its efforts to reinforce Biden's inclination to return to the JCPOA in good faith with demonstrable full commitment to the terms of the original deal.

Keywords: JCPOA, Nuclear negotiations, Iran Nuclear deal, Maximum pressure

Received: 2021-09-03

Review: 2021-10-25

Accepted: 2021-11-27

Iranian Review of Foreign Affairs, Vol. 12, No. 1, Winter- Spring 2021, pp. 83-104



Introduction

In 2018 the US administration withdrew from the JCPOA¹ and unilaterally-imposed severe comprehensive sanctions on Iran. Withdrawing from the deal and violating UNSCR 2231 was a total departure from the approach adopted by the Obama administration and it also went against the expressed policy positions of all other signatories to the JCPOA. The Trump administration's approach was also widely regarded as having failed to achieve any of its stated objectives. Instead, the strategy has adversely impacted US-Iran relations, regional peace and stability, future prospects for multilateral nuclear diplomacy, transatlantic relations and the reputation and credibility of the United States as a diplomatic actor on the international stage.

In an effort to reverse the foreign policy failure inherent in the preceding administration's "maximum pressure" approach towards Iran, the Biden administration has signalled a major change of policy by promising to revert to multilateral approaches that lead with diplomacy. However, tangible and effective results are yet to be seen in relation to reviving the JCPOA. Despite some tactical obstacles facing the heretofore six rounds of negotiations in Vienna, broad agreement has already been reached on some of the parameters of substantive issues. In particular, positive signals have emerged regarding the sequencing options for the US return to the deal and Iran's reversal of its measures which

1. The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, (JCPOA) was a multilateral agreement that is more commonly known as the Iran Nuclear Deal. It was signed by Iran, the US, China, Russia, France, Germany and the UK in 2015.

seem to be beyond the terms of the agreement.

This article provides a brief outline of the background and context to US sanctions on Iran. It describes how sanctions have dominated the US approach to Iran since the Islamic Revolution in 1979, yet they have failed to exert any real changes or policy outcomes. Adopting the theoretical approach of *Just War* theory, the demonstrable ethical failures of US sanctions are presented. This is followed by an analysis of US sanctions policy from the *Utilitarian* theoretical perspective. Within this framework, the lack of a discernible objective or coherent strategy and the absence of a credible negotiation track are identified as key flaws of the US approach. Considering recent diplomatic and political developments influencing the procedure and substance of the negotiations, this paper argues that a set of key requirements still need to be fulfilled in order for a successful outcome to be achieved in the JCPOA negotiations currently underway. The research methodology applied in this article is critical observation and empirical analysis.

I- The Ethical Perspective – Sanctions as Alternative to War?

Sanctions have been the core feature of US Iran policy since 1979 (Katzman, 2020: 1) and the “mainstay of U.S. strategies” towards Iran (O’Sullivan, 2003: 45). For over four decades Iran has been subjected to a myriad of different types of sanctions (trade, financial, targeted and comprehensive sanctions) operating at different levels including unilateral, bilateral, plurilateral and multilateral levels (Felbermayr et al., 2019: 18).

Dominant political discourses in the US often present these sanctions as a humane alternative to war. However, such an assumption is categorically refuted by research. In fact, many studies adopting an ethical theoretical framework, particularly those situated within the *Just War* tradition, argue that key policy considerations need to focus on the extent to which the authorization and imposition of sanctions can be morally-justified

(Winkler, 1999). In this sense, *Just War* theory supplies an analytical framework that decision makers can utilize to assess the conditions under which sanctions can be imposed according to ethical principles.

The current sanctions imposed unilaterally on Iran by the United States following its withdrawal from the JCPOA (Iran nuclear deal) in May 2018 represent the “most sweeping sanctions” of any country in the world (Katzman, 2020: 71). Unprecedented in their scope and application, they apply to almost every sector of the Iranian economy amounting to “A big bus that punishes a total population of 80 million” (Fitzpatrick, 2020: 95). The IMF reported that “a dramatic worsening of macroeconomic conditions” occurred in Iran in 2018 and 2019, resulting in “severe distress” (Bozorgmehr, 2019). By 2019 it was clear that Iran was facing the worst economic recession since 1988, the final year of the Iran-Iraq war, with revenue contractions of more than \$40bn (Johnson, 2019; see also Kautilya and Bravish, 2019). The collapse in oil exports had a particularly detrimental effect (IMF, 2019: 3). GDP contracted by 12% during 2018-2019 and 2019-2020 following the re-imposition of sanctions and GDP is expected to remain as low as 1.7% for 2020-2021 (World Bank, 2021: 3-4). Export trade fell by 29% and imports plummeted by 56%, while investment rates contracted by 17% (World Bank, 2021: 4). Other indicators of macro-economic stability have also been seriously impacted by sanctions. In 2020-2021 inflation was continuing to increase upwards by 36.4% while the Rial had depreciated by over 65% (World Bank, 2021: 4).

Moreover, US government claims that sanctions constitute an effective means of pressuring target governments such as Iran are directly contradicted by the reality that “maximum pressure” sanctions have inflicted more harm on the Iranian population than its leadership (Dassa Kaye, 2019) with insufficient protection being afforded to people by the so-called humanitarian exemptions (Kokabisaghi; 2018: 374). Sanctions have adversely impacted the standards of living and economic security of most Iranians

(Kautilya and Bravish, 2019: 189), with the impact being particularly felt in relation to rising inflation and unemployment (Mazumbara, 2019). There has been a sharp drop in living standards with the brunt of the hardship being faced by people earning low incomes, particularly since inflation has soared and 14.3% of the population are estimated to be living in absolute poverty (World Bank, 2021: xii).

Sanctions have also had devastating consequences for public health provision (Marks, 1999) resulting in severe disruptions to the supplies of food and medicine despite such supplies being theoretically exempt from sanctions (De Vries, Portela and Guijarro-USobiaga, 2014:7-8). For instance, although food and medicine are technically exempt, some international companies have ceased trading with Iran because of difficulties in receiving payments. Thus, it is commonplace that many financial, insurance and shipping businesses and “, anyone else who wants to ever deal with the US have been spooked by the American hostility” (Dizard, 2019). Sanctions have also “drastically constrained Iran’s capacity to finance humanitarian imports” (Human Rights Watch, 2019) and this has, in turn, resulted in scarce supplies of some medicines and medical equipment (Aloosh, 2018; Benjamin, 2019; Setayesh and Mackey, 2016), thereby threatening the health of millions of Iranians (Human Rights Watch, 2019). By mid-2019, imports of medical supplies had fallen by 60% from the previous year, disrupting the domestic manufacture of medicines (Akbarpour and Abbasi, 2015: 3471; Kebriaeezadeh, 2019; Kheirandish et al., 2018).

The Covid-19 pandemic not only severely compounded the dire economic effects of “maximum pressure campaign” (Maloney, 2020), it also exacerbated sanctions’ debilitation of medical commerce. Critics highlighted the ways in which sanctions undermined Iran’s early response to Covid-19 and limited the government’s options in dealing with the health impacts and economic fallout. Above all, Covid-19 exposed the detrimental cumulative impact of sanctions on Iran’s health system as every stage of the response to the pandemic from prevention, diagnosis,

and treatment was directly and indirectly adversely impacted (Takian et al., 2020: 1035).

However, notwithstanding the enormous humanitarian impact of the US sanctions policy on Iran outlined above this policy has been retained more or less in one form or another for over four decades, thereby giving rise to questions regarding its efficacy and/or effectiveness in achieving foreign policy goals and objectives.

II- The Utilitarian Perspective – Assessing the “Effectiveness” of US Sanctions against Iran?

Much of the research on sanctions adopts an *Utilitarian* approach and centres on investigating the level of effectiveness achieved by sanctions and explaining the factors and conditions that account for their success or failure as a foreign policy tool (Bonetti, 1998; Brooks, 2002; Drury, 2000; Elliott and Hufbauer, 1999; Hufbauer and Oegg, 2000; Martin, 1992; Mastanduno, 1999; Pape, 1997; von Sponeck, 2000). Moreover, assessing *comparative utility* requires an evaluation of “whether sanctions were the right course to pursue in a given instance, even when the performance of sanctions was itself favourable another approach - one relying primarily on different tools - might have yielded greater benefits at lower costs, be they humanitarian, political, diplomatic, or economic... [Thus], only by comparing sanctions to other available policy options can a study assess the comparative utility of sanctions” (O’Sullivan, 2003: 30).

In order to assess effectiveness, therefore, it is imperative to analyse the ways that sanctions interact with the political context of the target country in order to address how the performance of sanctions compares with that of other strategies that might have been employed in their place. For instance, the *Realist* theoretical model views sanctions as rarely influencing state’s policies or behaviours, acknowledging as it does the essential dilemma faced by sanctions (as an inherently economic tool) in seeking to exert political outcomes. It also gives due consideration to the political

reality that when faced with the devastating economic impact of sanctions, target states (as essentially political actors) base their decision on how to respond on “whether they consider their political objectives to be worth the economic costs” (Pape, 1997: 94).

In theoretical and foreign policy terms, sanctions against Iran have had several stated goals. One overarching objective has been to place “unsustainable pressure on the population and isolate the target country in a way that the popular discontent will trigger a change of the institutions and in turn a change of policy” (Macaluso, 2014: 21). Other aims included halting Iran’s nuclear enrichment programme, compelling Iran to move towards negotiations, as well as signalling opposition to the domestic human rights situation (Clawson, 2010). An additional goal of US foreign policy has been to influence the dynamics of regional politics by orchestrated the economic and political isolation of Iran through containment via sanctions (*Takeyh* and Maloney, 2011: 1302-3).

However, these objectives have for the most part failed. Prior to the Trump administration, US governments had more or less adhered to what was termed the “dual-track” policy on Iran, whose purported aim was a negotiated outcome through escalated deployments of economic pressure with the threat of military force remaining present in the background. However, the bifurcated strategy’s achievements have “always been open to question” with the main issue being that while “sanctions have imposed heavy financial and political costs on the Islamic Republic” they “failed to achieve their intended policy result” (*Takeyh* and Maloney, 2011: 1298, 1312).

Prior to the JCPOA, the impact of sanctions in exerting changes to Iranian policies and calculi was both uncertain and questionable. Instead, sanctions had morphed into “[an] awkward blend of containment and behaviour change espousing different objectives, including the unstated, but largely assumed objective of ‘regime change’” (O’Sullivan, 2003: 45-47). Notwithstanding their

ineffectiveness in securing US foreign policy objectives. By the early 2000s, sanctions had become an integral part of US policy toward Iran, weakening rather than facilitating US interests in Iran because sanctions had essentially blocked all channels of political and diplomatic engagement and there was little hope of lasting relationships.

III- Sanctions as a Means to an End – the Road to the JCPOA?

As outlined above, the absence of a credible and serious negotiations option as part of the dual track approach was one of the most critical drawbacks of the US sanctions policy prior to the JCPOA (2015). While the Obama-era sanctions (2006-2013) also adhered to the dual track approach inherited from previous administrations, his administration's policy also involved a more pronounced shift towards the negotiations track and it was this change which proved most effective in reaching agreement on Iran's disputed nuclear programme. Significantly, within the Obama foreign policy framework, sanctions were envisaged as complementing rather than replacing other policies and their easing would be offered in exchange for policy changes by Iran as part of different negotiation stages and outcomes.

While it has been argued that the conditions for the negotiation process that led to the JCPOA were brought about by the severe comprehensive sanctions imposed on Iran by the Obama administration from 2011-2015, it is doubtful if that policy alone achieved this outcome. Instead, what appears to have been the most impactful dimension of the Obama administration's policy towards Iran was its demonstration from the outset that its real commitment to direct negotiations without preconditions was the core feature of its overall strategy (Tayekh and Maloney, 2001: 1304). Thus, although the Obama administration's Iran strategy was a sanctions-led approach its ultimate goal was to convince Iran to participate in negotiations. Also, it was envisaged that those negotiations would be limited to the nuclear programme and thus focused on a

negotiated outcome that was consistent, straightforward, modest and achievable (O'Sullivan, 2010:11-12).

Significantly, the JCPOA was based on a sound assessment of Iran's calculi and it successfully balanced positive incentives with economic coercion alongside a reliable commitment to a negotiated outcome. The strategy of compartmentalising the nuclear issue as the "theoretical cornerstone for talks with Iran" was also a particularly successful one (Sariolghalam, 2020). President Obama also introduced another major, yet often overlooked, policy shift in the US-Iran relational dynamic by no longer insisting on the perquisite that an Iranian strategic shift would have to precede a nuclear agreement. Instead, his administration pursued the nuclear-first deal as a means of expanding future possibilities for wider rapprochement.

The JCPOA was greeted on the international stage as a robust non-proliferation agreement. It promised the very real chance of a "win-win solution" fulfilling international, regional and US security interests and it was widely regarded as "the one mechanism in the past 35 years that has reliably constrained Iran's nuclear program" (Nephew and Goldenberg, 2018). Also, because the deal wasn't a "one-sided triumph" imposed by Washington and it acknowledged Iranian vital interests, there was a good chance that it would endure and offer real and lasting benefits (Walt, 2012 [E3]).

All in all, Obama's diplomatic approach towards Iran was considered relatively fruitful because sanctions were viewed as a tactical means of achieving a negotiated outcome aimed at the resolution of issues relating to Iran's nuclear programme. This was sufficient to secure Iran's engagement in what seemed to have been a credible process of negotiations whereby Iran could secure major sanctions relief and preserve its right to develop a peaceful nuclear programme under the Non-Proliferation Treaty. Both sides also made considerable efforts to construct an international consensus to secure multilateral support for the nuclear deal. Once the United States demonstrated that it would implement sanctions as a means rather than merely an end, Iran showed its willingness to get

seriously engaged in negotiating the deal.

To conclude, the Obama strategy was ultimately successful precisely because it focused squarely on policy ends rather than merely means; namely, a multilateral negotiated outcome endorsed by the international community and it was the United States' "shift away from that policy of threats and pressure and towards serious diplomacy aiming at a reconciliation of interests" that actually made the Iran nuclear deal possible (Fathollah-Nejad, 2014: 62; see also, Vaez, 2019).

IV- The Failure of Maximum Pressure:

In a total departure from the Obama presidency's Iran policy, the Trump administration violated the multilaterally-agreed and internationally-supported JCPOA by withdrawing US participation from the deal in 2018. After the US withdrawal, Secretary of State Pompeo outlined the administration's "New Iran Strategy" as consisting of a list of twelve conditions that Iran had to fulfil in order to avoid the imposition of the "strongest sanctions in history." These demands included: supplying complete information on all dimensions of its historical and present-day nuclear programme, ending all enrichment activities and ballistic missile development and providing the IAEA with complete access to every site in the country, releasing all US citizens from prison, ceasing its support for Hezbollah, Hamas, Islamic Jihad, Iraqi Shia military organisations and the Houthi rebels, withdrawing all Iranian military from Syria and changing its resistance posture towards Israel, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (Pompeo, 2018).

After it became apparent that Iran was unable to acquiesce to these demands and ruled out the possibility of renegotiating an already-negotiated deal that had been endorsed by the international community and supported in full by all other signatories to the deal, the Trump administration imposed the "full force" of economic sanctions in its "maximum pressure" policy which instigated sanctions to a far greater degree than previous administrations.. These actions were undertaken despite IAEA reports that Iran had

been in full compliance with the JCPOA and remained in compliance for an entire year after the Trump administration's decision to withdraw.

In contrast to the Obama administration's approach, the Trump administration's "maximum pressure" policy towards Iran has been described as the "worst-case scenario" of sanctions episodes - devoid of any clearly-delineated and precisely-defined goal (Ashford and Glaser, 2017: 1, 7). Moreover, despite President Trump's own intermittent statements indicating that he would welcome negotiations, there was never any credible elaboration of a negotiation's strategy and/or the conditions that would constitute grounds for the lifting of sanctions (Nephew 2019, 6-7). In this sense, the Trump Administration's view of sanctions was purely tactical and devoid of any long-term vision on how to "turn tactical advantages into strategic accomplishments" (Blanc 2020: 1).

The Trump administration's "maximum pressure" policy also sought to realize an extremely wide series of unrealistic demands including the containment of Iran through political isolation, and economic debilitation as a means of curtailing its influence in the wider region (Sariolghalam, 2020). However, the twelve demands stipulated by Secretary Pompeo as the conditions for the lifting of sanctions would have involved such an entire shift in Iran's strategic regional policy towards supporting US interests as to be considered "next to impossible" to achieve (Fathollah-Nejad, 2014: 50-51). Essentially, Iran's acquiescence to these demands would have amounted to sweeping concessions on vital interests, especially its inalienable right to sovereignty and its defence of national security (Posen, 2020).

The tactics-centric approach pursued by the Trump administration, therefore, inevitably fell into serious "strategic drift" and it ultimately proved incapable of changing Iran's view of its options (Nephew, 2019: 7). In addition to the complications caused by the "maximum pressure" policy's overreach, another critical flaw was that there was considerable confusion regarding the conditions and contexts that would constitute grounds for the

lifting of sanctions (Abdelal and Bros, 2020).

Viewed from the *Utilitarian* perspective, given the extent of these limitations and miscalculations and the primacy accorded to tactics over strategy, it is not surprising that “maximum pressure” has been an abysmal failure. Aside from its failure to exert changes to Iran’s nuclear or regional policies, it has also been detrimental to long-term US strategic and geopolitical interests in the region (Jalalpour, 2020). Ironically, the most urgent current requirement is for American policy to completely reverse course by demonstrating unequivocally that it is no longer dependent on such a failed “maximum pressure” sanctions approach to achieve its foreign policy goals. Moreover, within this context, the only realistic and feasible strategy that is likely to produce any positive outcome would be for all parties to fully return to the engagement process embodied in the JCPOA while at the same time guaranteeing that Iran’s participation in this process will result in the easing and lifting of sanctions.

From a realistic point of view, the US "maximum pressure" campaign against Iran failed because it was wrong to assume that the Iranian government considered the goal of ensuring access to international trade and commerce more important than its goals of maintaining it. The policy also accorded an unwarranted primacy to tactics over strategy which in effect turned sanctions into the end rather than the means. In this sense it was hardly surprising that “maximum pressure” failed to generate any incentive that could have gained political traction in Iran. In conclusion, therefore, the key lesson to be drawn from the failure of the “maximum pressure” campaign is that instead of relying on sanctions alone, a “well-rounded approach” that would have incorporated different forms of political inducements with credible negotiation opportunities would have had a far greater chance of success (Masters, 2019).

V- Charting a New Way Forward

Trump’s election defeat in November 2020 was an important turning point for US politics. With particular respect to Iran where

the costs and consequences of his administration's failure have been most gravely felt, there was an urgent requirement that the new Biden-led administration adopt an entirely different approach (Tharoor, 2020). Given the fiasco of the "maximum pressure" policy, the Biden administration's rhetorical commitment to rejoin the nuclear deal and to uphold its international commitments was greeted with guarded optimism.

The fact that the JCPOA has been widely acclaimed as an outstanding accomplishment of multilateral diplomacy must continue to be recognized as an important milestone. It is most fortuitous that a convergence already exists within academic and diplomatic communities on the most workable and durable solutions. This convergence clearly points in the direction of a genuine win-win negotiation process which can be achieved if all parties recommit to the letter and the spirit of the JCPOA.

Since President Biden's inauguration Iran's negotiators have been cautiously monitoring his administration's willingness and capacity to turn the tide of coercion, particularly in relation to easing and lifting sanctions and restoring the credibility of the JCPOA as a durable multilateral framework for future US-Iran relations. Taking into account the role played by domestic partisan politics and foreign-run lobby groups on policy-making processes in Washington, as well as European political agendas and regional politics in the Persian Gulf, a number of scenarios might be posited on what a renewed US policy towards Iran might look like. Of particular significance is charting the ways in which that policy could present real opportunities for the Biden administration to constructively reengage with Iran with a view to embarking on a new and mutually-beneficial course. The Biden-led administration has acknowledged that a more coherent and consensual approach which would encompass a broader set of measures in relation to Iran is required. This in turn would require substantive political engagement based on real negotiation opportunities.

In response to initial signals of change in the US

Administration, Iran's former Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif pointed out that the onus was on the United States to demonstrate its commitment to return to compliance with the JCPOA, lift all illegal sanctions imposed by the Trump administration and compensate for the damage done to Iran as a result of "maximum pressure." (Council on Foreign Relations, 2020).

After agreeing to enter EU-brokered talks in Vienna earlier this year, US representatives participated in six rounds of talks over a period of three months. A seventh round, purportedly the final round, will be held in due course and it is likely that the new administration in Iran led by President Ebrahim Raisi will complete the process. These negotiations have already encountered some tactical obstacles that reflect the very real "challenge of moving from agreement in principle to practice" (Rafati, 2021). There has also been considerable concern that without appreciable changes in US policy on Iran and the immediate implementation of tangible policy measures, the Biden Administration runs the risk of falling victim to policy stalemate and/or drift. For this reason, both the United States and Iran are cognizant that time is a crucial factor in concluding a successful negotiations process (Fahim and De Young, 2021).

Notwithstanding these obstacles, however, broad agreement has been reached during the negotiations on some of the parameters of substantive issues. In particular, positive signals have emerged regarding the sequencing options for the US return to the deal and Iran's reversal of its breaches of the deal. This synchronized step-by-step return to the deal would enable the JCPOA to be restored on a secure footing that over time could constitute the foundation for follow-on agreements on issues of mutual concern (International Crisis Group, 2021).

In the context of the critical nature of the current impasse in US-Iran relations, the Biden administration must demonstrate a strong commitment to a more feasible and less coercive strategy. It must present a clear and coherent roadmap to all signatories of the

JCPOA forthwith. Moreover, it is imperative that this roadmap detail how the United States will reinstate the nuclear deal, return to compliance with UNSCR 2231 and commit to further talks to address mutual concerns and interests (Singh 2020). In addition, the United States will need to work collaboratively with the other signatories of the JCPOA in order to revive the nuclear deal and ensure its effective implementation (Karlin and Wittes, 2020). A prerequisite for reengagement on the part of all the signatories to the JCPOA, but especially Iran, is that the United States “pursue a more realistic agenda on nuclear issues” (Burns and Sullivan, 2019). At the very least, it is imperative that the current impasse not be used opportunistically as a means of extracting further so-called concessions from Iran.

Secondly, it will be absolutely essential that any diplomatic track be preceded by the lifting of US sanctions that were illegitimately and disingenuously-imposed to begin with. In fact, the bottom line from the perspective of Iran and the wider international community is that sanctions’ lifting constitutes the single most important precondition for a return to the comprehensive deal that continued to enjoy almost universal support long after it had been abandoned by the United States in one of the most flagrant violations of international law in recent times.

Within the current international context dominated by an unprecedented pandemic and socio-economic crisis it is now more essential than ever that the United States change course and recommit to multilateral approaches to overcoming the current impasse caused by “maximum pressure” sanctions.

Conclusion

In order to save JCPOA and overcome the current stalemate that is hindering the resumption of negotiations, the wave of unilateral US sanctions against the Islamic Republic of Iran must be lifted. A new impetus is needed with principled diplomacy and result-focused leadership from key actors on the international stage. The European

parties to the nuclear deal have a pivotal role. While they have resisted the tremendous pressure exerted by the Trump administration to abandon the JCPOA, they have nonetheless failed to fulfil their own obligations under the nuclear deal. However, political excuses mainly attributed to open and hidden American intimidation campaigns seem not to be working any more. The European signatories of the JCPOA should now focus on reviving the deal as agreed upon in 2015.

Diplomatic manoeuvrings to gain extra leverage beyond the terms of the deal will be counterproductive. In this context, the EU foreign policy establishment should direct its efforts to reinforce Biden's inclination to return to the JCPOA in good faith with demonstrable full commitment to the terms of the original deal. This seems to be the only viable way to turn the tide on the failed "maximum pressure" approach which has directly precipitated the current diplomatic impasse. It remains to be seen how President Biden's Administration will deliver on his promised policies particularly if he encounters internal pressure from oppositional partisan factions within the wider US political system and external pressure from Israel and Saudi Arabia to act contrary to his stated foreign policy objectives.

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