

STEP BY STEP: THE IRAN DEAL (JCPOA) PROCEEDS SLOWLY

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Barely before the ink was dry, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) provoked a ridiculously wide range of views and expectations in the United States. Beyond the Beltway, the range was probably a little narrower than what the U.S. House and Senate previewed in hearings, but skepticism about Iran's intentions is still prevalent. One year later, the range of responses seems not to have narrowed at all.

Proponents of the JCPOA may have hoped its clockwork-like functioning would win additional supporters, but this hasn't happened yet.

Why not? It may have been too much to expect a wholesale change in attitudes in the United States, just as it was too much for the Iranians to expect a windfall for their economy immediately. Even though the United States was a key negotiator, significant U.S. engagement will require lifting other restrictions. Secondary sanctions were lifted, but primary sanctions remain. (The big exception is in aircraft, and the purported \$18 billion Boeing deal could become a game-changer if it goes through.)

Meanwhile, the gap in expectations persists. Opponents of the JCPOA continue to call attention to Iran's treatment of human rights, support for terrorism, and missile development programs as thorns in the U.S. diplomatic side. They are not wrong,

but the JCPOA never intended to address those problems. The question is whether support for the JCPOA will erode eventually if progress is not made in those areas. U.S. sanctions for those activities will be a constant for a while.

Iran is carrying out the letter of its requirements to disconnect, dismantle, and remove sensitive items and materials or about the effect of these actions on lengthening the breakout time to a nuclear weapon from a few months to at least a year. The progress is tangible. Still, some critics have argued that the process should be more transparent—the two reports issued by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in February and May presented conclusions but fewer details than past reports. Whether an issue of style or substance, the IAEA could and should correct this. More importantly, though, the Agency's finding in December 2015 that Iran had met the terms of the roadmap to clarify past activities met with little resistance.

If broad U.S. skepticism is to be overcome, uneventful implementation of the JCPOA over a period of years could help. The next U.S. administration, however, will need to encourage that smooth implementation of the JCPOA. At the same time, there should be a "go-slow" approach on the next big hurdle in JCPOA implementation: a finding by the IAEA (called a "broader conclusion") that all nuclear material in Iran remains in peaceful activities. This will trigger

what the JCPOA calls Transition Day—the transition from the JCPOA to the post-JCPOA period when sanctions that have been lifted provisionally will be permanently lifted. The JCPOA offers two possibilities for the timing of transition: either eight years after Adoption Day (October 18, 2023) or upon the IAEA’s reaching the broader conclusion. Iran has every incentive to pressure the IAEA to make an early finding of the broader conclusion. However, this would cut short the period of confidence building that is essential for moving forward.

Although July 14 may be considered the first birthday of the JCPOA, the complicated preliminary steps mean that the agreement effectively has only been implemented since January. This is hardly a wealth of experience upon which to build confidence. The next 10 years are an opportunity to move beyond what was a nuclear impasse to greater transparency that benefits all sides.

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