The 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) is an effective, verifiable agreement that successfully addressed a decades-long crisis over Iran’s nuclear program and is a net plus for international and U.S. nuclear nonproliferation efforts. This multilateral nuclear deal was unanimously endorsed by the UN Security Council in Resolution 2231, which urges full implementation of the JCPOA and calls upon member states to refrain from actions that undermine the agreement.

When President-elect Joseph Biden takes office on January 20, returning the United States to compliance with its JCPOA obligations alongside Iran must be an urgent priority. Biden wrote in a September 2020 CNN commentary that “if Iran returns to strict compliance with the nuclear deal, the United States would rejoin the agreement as a starting point for follow-on negotiations.” We strongly support this approach.

The negotiation of, unanimous UN Security Council support for, and full implementation of the JCPOA dramatically reduced the risk posed by Iran’s nuclear program and advanced the security interests of the United States, its EU3+3 partners, states in the region, and the entire international community. Failure to return to compliance with the nuclear deal increases the likelihood that the JCPOA will collapse, possibly triggering destabilizing nuclear competition in the region and increasing the likelihood of military confrontation. Furthermore, failure to honor the negotiating process, the agreement, and the UN Security Council resolution that endorsed the JCPOA will make it more difficult to reduce the long-term nuclear proliferation risks in the region and beyond.

More than three years of Iran’s compliance with the JCPOA from January 2016-May 2019 demonstrated its nonproliferation benefits. Taken together, the array of restrictions on uranium enrichment ensures that Iran’s capability to produce enough weapons-grade uranium sufficient for one warhead would be approximately 12 months for a decade or more. The JCPOA also effectively eliminated Iran’s ability to produce and separate plutonium for at least 15 years. Just as importantly, the JCPOA mandates unprecedented international monitoring and transparency measures that make it very likely that any possible future effort by Iran to pursue nuclear weapons, even a clandestine program, would be detected promptly.

President Donald Trump’s imprudent decision to abandon the JCPOA and reimpose sanctions in May 2018 has jeopardized this critical agreement, isolated the United States from key allies and partners, and undermined international nonproliferation efforts. Following the Trump administration’s “maximum pressure” campaign and systematic efforts to deny Iran any benefits to remaining in the JCPOA, Tehran has taken a series of steps to deviate from its obligations under the accord. These developments have raised the prospect of a new war in the region.

Iran’s breaches of the deal are concerning. They also appear to be calibrated responses designed to pressure the remaining JCPOA parties to meet their commitments to deliver on the sanctions-
relief agreed to in the accord. Iran’s uranium enrichment capacity and its uranium stockpile remain far below the pre-JCPOA levels, and Iran continues to cooperate with the more intrusive verification measures put in place by the accord. Almost all the violations reported to date are reversible.

There is a short window of opportunity following inauguration day for coordinated diplomatic action to fully restore the JCPOA’s restrictions on Iran’s nuclear program and begin to deliver on the economic and civil nuclear cooperation benefits for Tehran envisioned by the accord.

Attempting to leverage the U.S. sanctions put in place by the Trump administration to pressure Iran to accept additional commitments beyond what was agreed to in the JCPOA as a condition for U.S. return to compliance would be a risky, imprudent strategy. The United States should first ensure full compliance with the JCPOA, and then address new issues beyond the JCPOA through follow-on negotiations.

Returning to the nuclear deal provides the United States and other parties to the JCPOA a solid basis for pursuing follow-on negotiations on a longer-term framework for Iran’s nuclear program. It also creates space to address other vital U.S. security interests related to Iran’s actions in the region. While critical restrictions and monitoring provisions in the JCPOA are permanent as is Iran’s enforceable commitment under the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty not to develop a nuclear weapon, limits on uranium enrichment and plutonium reprocessing activities phase out after about 10-25 years (5-20 years from today). Pursuing a JCPOA follow-on agreement with Iran and/or additional arrangements negotiated at the regional level would address concerns about Iran’s nuclear program as restrictions mandated by the JCPOA expire.

Restoration of the JCPOA’s nuclear restrictions and its economic benefits for Iran stands the best chance of blocking Iran’s potential pathways to nuclear weapons, providing incentive and encouragement not to do so, and creating space for further diplomacy.

We strongly urge the incoming Biden administration to end the Trump administration’s failed policy of JCPOA withdrawal that has resulted in Iran advancing its nuclear program and undermined global efforts to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons. We urge all JCPOA parties to meet their respective obligations under the terms of the agreement and all states to support full implementation of the accord.

**Endorsers**

Nobuyasu Abe, Senior Advisor, Council on Strategic Risks, and former UN Undersecretary-General for Disarmament Affairs

James Acton, Co-Director of the Nuclear Policy Program, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace

Brooke D. Anderson, former Chief of Staff and Counselor for the White House National Security Council, and former Senior Advisor to the Secretary of State and the Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs on the Iran nuclear negotiations

*All affiliations are listed for identification purposes only.*
Andrey Baklitskiy, Senior Research Fellow, Moscow State Institute of International Relations

Sergey Batsanov, Member of Council and Director, Pugwash Conferences on Science and World Affairs, and former Russian Ambassador to the Conference on Disarmament

Emma Belcher, President, Ploughshares Fund

Hans Blix, former Director General of the International Atomic Energy Agency

Eric Brewer, former Deputy National Intelligence Officer for Weapons of Mass Destruction and Proliferation at the National Intelligence Council

Rachel Bronson, President and Chief Executive Officer, Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists

Des Browne, former UK Secretary of State for Defence

Matthew Bunn, James R. Schlesinger Professor of the Practice of Energy, National Security, and Foreign Policy, Harvard Kennedy School

Susan F. Burk, former Special Representative of the President for Nuclear Nonproliferation

John Carlson, Non-Resident Senior Fellow, Vienna Center for Disarmament and Non-Proliferation, and former Director General of the Australian Safeguards and Non-Proliferation Office

Joseph Cirincione, Distinguished Fellow, Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft

Avner Cohen, Professor, Middlebury Institute of International Studies at Monterey

David Cortright, Professor Emeritus, University of Notre Dame

Paolo Cotta Ramusino, Secretary General, Pugwash Conferences on Science and World Affairs

Tom Countryman, former acting Undersecretary of State for Arms Control and International Security

Kelsey Davenport, Director for Nonproliferation Policy, Arms Control Association

Sergio Duarte, President, Pugwash Conferences on Science and World Affairs, and former UN Undersecretary-General for Disarmament Affairs

Bryan Early, Associate Dean, University at Albany, State University of New York

Robert Einhorn, Senior Fellow, The Brookings Institution, and former Special Advisor for Nonproliferation and Arms Control at the U.S. Department of State

*All affiliations are listed for identification purposes only.*
Tytty Erästö, Senior Researcher, Stockholm International Peace Research Institute

Dina Esfandiary, Fellow, The Century Foundation

Marc Finaud, Head of Arms Proliferation, Geneva Center for Security Policy, and former French diplomat

Mark Fitzpatrick, former acting Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Nonproliferation

Ellie Geranmayeh, Deputy Director, Middle East & North Africa Programme, European Council on Foreign Relations

Alexander Glaser, Associate Professor, Program on Science and Global Security, Princeton University

Frank N. von Hippel, Program on Science and Global Security, Princeton University

Angela Kane, former United Nations Undersecretary-General for Disarmament Affairs

Togzhan Kassenova, Senior Fellow at the Center for Policy Research, University at Albany, State University of New York, and former Member of the UN Secretary-General’s Advisory Board on Disarmament Matters

Mary Kaszynski, Deputy Director of Policy, Ploughshares Fund

R. Scott Kemp, Class of 1943 Professor, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and former Science Advisor in the Office of the Special Advisor for Nonproliferation and Arms Control at the U.S. Department of State

Laura Kennedy, former U.S. Representative to the Conference on Disarmament, Geneva

Daryl G. Kimball, Executive Director, Arms Control Association

Jeffrey Knopf, Professor, Middlebury Institute of International Studies at Monterey

Katarzyna Kubiak, Senior Policy Fellow, European Leadership Network

Ulrich Kühn, Head, Arms Control and Emerging Technologies Program at the Institute for Peace Research and Security Policy at the University of Hamburg

Jeffrey Lewis, Professor, Middlebury Institute of International Studies at Monterey

Patricia Lewis, Research Director, Conflict, Science, and Transformation; Director, International Security Program at Chatham House, and former Director of the UN Institute for Disarmament Research

*All affiliations are listed for identification purposes only.*
George Lopez, Professor Emeritus and Hesburgh Chair in Peace Studies at the University of Notre Dame Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies, former member of the UN Panel of Experts on North Korea, and former Vice-President of the United States Institute of Peace

Rüdiger Lüdeking, German Ambassador (ret.), and former Deputy Commissioner of the German Federal Government for Arms Control and Disarmament

Edwin Lyman, Director of Nuclear Power Safety, Union of Concerned Scientists

Jessica Mathews, Distinguished Fellow and former President, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, and former Director of the National Security Council Office on Global Issues

Fred McGoldrick, President, Bengelsdorf, McGoldrick and Associates, and former Director of the Office of Nonproliferation and Export Policy at the U.S. Department of State

Oliver Meier, Senior Researcher, Institute for Peace Research and Security Policy at the University of Hamburg

Nicholas Miller, Assistant Professor, Dartmouth College

Gaukhar Mukhatzhanova, Director, International Organizations and Non-Proliferation Program, Vienna Center for Disarmament and Non-Proliferation

Vipin Narang, Associate Professor of Political Science, Massachusetts Institute of Technology

Götz Neuneck, Senior Research Fellow and former Deputy Director, Institute for Peace Research and Security Policy at the University of Hamburg

George Perkovich, Vice President for Studies, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace

Andreas Persbo, Research Director, European Leadership Network

Thomas Pickering, former U.S. Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs, and former U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations, Russia, India, Israel, El Salvador, Nigeria, and Jordan

Steven Pifer, Nonresident Senior Fellow, The Brookings Institution, and former U.S. Ambassador to Ukraine

Paul Pillar, Nonresident Senior Fellow, Georgetown University Center for Security Studies, and former National Intelligence Officer for the Near East and South Asia

Joshua H. Pollack, Senior Research Associate, Middlebury Institute of International Studies at Monterey, and Editor of The Nonproliferation Review

*All affiliations are listed for identification purposes only.*

5
William Potter, Sam Nunn and Richard Lugar Professor of Nonproliferation Studies, Middlebury Institute of International Studies at Monterey

Tariq Rauf, former Head of Verification and Security Policy Coordination in the Office reporting to the Director General at the International Atomic Energy Agency

Laura Rockwood, former Section Head for Non-Proliferation and Policy in the Office of Legal Affairs of the International Atomic Energy Agency

Sergey Rogov, Academic Director, Institute for the US and Canadian Studies, Russian Academy of Sciences

Andrew Semmel, Chair of the Board of Directors, Partnership for Secure America, and former Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Nuclear Nonproliferation for Policy and Negotiations

Sahil Shah, Policy Fellow, European Leadership Network

Dingli Shen, Professor, Fudan University

Jacqueline Shire, former Member of the Iran Panel of Experts at the United Nations

Nikolai Sokov, Senior Fellow, Vienna Center for Disarmament and Non-Proliferation

Sharon Squassoni, Research Professor, George Washington University Elliott School of International Affairs, and former Director of Policy Coordination in the Nonproliferation Bureau at the U.S. Department of State

Greg Thielmann, former Office Director for Strategic, Proliferation, and Military Affairs in the Bureau of Intelligence and Research at the U.S. Department of State

John Tierney, Executive Director, Center for Arms Control and Non-Proliferation, and former Congressman from Massachusetts (1997-2015)

Petr Topychkanov, Senior Researcher, Stockholm International Peace Research Institute

Ali Vaez, Iran Project Director, International Crisis Group, and former Senior Political Affairs Officer at the United Nations Department for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs

Aiden Warren, Associate Professor at RMIT University, Melbourne, Australia

Peter D. Zimmerman, former Chief Scientist of the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee and of the U.S. Arms Control and Disarmament Agency

*All affiliations are listed for identification purposes only.*