

Time to Advance a Diplomatic "Plan B" to Contain Iran's Nuclear Program

April 11, 2023

President Joseph R. Biden
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave. NW, Washington, D.C.

Dear Mr. President:

We write to respectfully urge you and your administration to promptly pursue diplomatic options that reduce the growing risks posed by Iran's nuclear activities in the absence of a mutual return to compliance with the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

In response to the U.S. withdrawal from the JCPOA and reimposition of sanctions in 2018, Iran's leaders have revived and expanded their sensitive nuclear activities and seriously curtailed the ability of the International Atomic Energy Agency to monitor Iran's nuclear program and facilities.

Since negotiations to restore the JCPOA stalled last August, the proliferation risk posed by Iran's advancing nuclear program has grown significantly. At present, Iran has stockpiled enough highly enriched uranium to produce enough weapons-grade nuclear material for four bombs in less than a month.

Further escalation appears inevitable unless the United States and Iran are willing to take steps to deescalate tensions. The Raisi government has made clear it will continue to expand its nuclear program in response to perceived provocations. The 2023 Worldwide Threat Assessment also notes that Iran will likely consider enriching uranium to 90 percent if it does not receive sanctions relief.

Given the growing proliferation risks and potential of further escalation, we strongly encourage the United States and its European allies to pursue a new diplomatic strategy aimed at stabilizing the current nuclear crisis. The most feasible option might be a combination of reciprocal, unilateral measures that ensure the IAEA has sufficient access and insight to monitor Iran's activities and to freeze (or roll back) Iran's most proliferation sensitive activities, such as the further accumulation of uranium enriched to 60 percent and introduction of additional advanced centrifuge cascades.

Such an approach, we recognize, would not be easy to achieve and it would not provide a long-term solution to the risks posed by the Iranian nuclear program, but it could prevent further escalation, reduce the risk of conflict, and create the time and space for the negotiation of a longer lasting and more comprehensive approach. We urge the administration to act with the urgency that the situation demands.

Sincerely,

James Acton, Co-director Nuclear Policy Program, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*

Emma Belcher, Ph.D., President, Ploughshares Fund

Rachel Bronson, Ph.D., President and CEO, Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists

Susan F. Burk, former Special Representative of the President for Nuclear Nonproliferation, and head of the U.S. delegation for the 2010 NPT Review Conference

David Cortright, Director of Policy Studies at the Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies at the University of Notre Dame, and Chair of the Board of the Fourth Freedom Forum

Thomas Countryman, Chair of the Board of the Arms Control Association,
and former Assistant Secretary of State for International Security and Nonproliferation

Kelsey Davenport, Director for Nonproliferation Policy, Arms Control Association

John Erath, Senior Policy Director, Center for Arms Control and Non-Proliferation

Marc Finaud, Associate Fellow, Geneva Center for Security Policy

Mark Fitzpatrick, former U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Non-Proliferation

Ellie Geranmayeh, Deputy Head of the Middle East and North Africa Programme,
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R. Scott Kemp, Professor of Nuclear Science and Engineering, Massachusetts Institute of
Technology, and former Science Advisor in the Office of the Special Advisor for
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Ambassador Thomas Pickering, former Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs, and
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