

**“DEAL OR DEADLOCK:
WHY ARE THE IRAN NUCLEAR TALKS STUCK?”
SUMMARY OF A ‘NIAC’ WEBINAR
10 MAY 2022**



*The National Iranian American Council (NIAC) is a non-partisan, non-profit organization founded in 2002 to **allegedly** give voice to the Iranian-American community. However, it is more generally believed that the organization **was set up with the assistance of the Iranian regime** for making use of probably the most highly educated minority group in the United States without the need for registering their activists as ‘agents of a foreign state’ under US law.*

OVERVIEW

A webinar held by the ‘National Iranian American Council’ (NIAC) and chaired by its president, Jamal Abdi, discussed the status of the JCPOA talks and the prospects of arriving at a deal with a panel of informed analysts at a time when negotiations between American and Iranian officials for a renewed nuclear deal have been stalled.

THE PANEL DISCUSSION

1. **ELLIE GERANMAYEH**, (*Deputy Director, Middle East and North Africa programme and Senior Policy Fellow, European Council on Foreign Relations*)
 - The EU has tried to play a positive role in bringing positions of the US and Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI) closer together.
 - In line with this, Enrique Mora, the EU-Iran Nuclear talks coordinator will be in Tehran this week and will try finding a diplomatic solution for breaking the existing deadlock.
 - However, there is very little the EU can do on the question of Biden removing the IRGC from the FTO (‘Foreign Terrorist Organization’) list.
 - So far, EU efforts have not worked which has left the EU countries and the UK frustrated because of the fact that it is politics and not policy that is having the final word in the current standoff.
 - It is unlikely that the IRI will blink on this issue relating to the IRGC for a number of practical and political reasons.
 - The deadlock is further exacerbated given that the US does not see the issue of IRGC’s designation as a FTO as being a nuclear related package.

- Nonetheless, there are concerted efforts carried out by other parties such as Qatar – emphasizing the regional aspects of the interests involved, whose leader is engaging in a shuttle diplomacy effort between Tehran and Washington in a bid for finding a face-saving formula that can allow both parties to move forward.
- From an Iranian perspective, how much the Biden Administration really wants this deal is also a matter of concern, given that the Americans have dragged their feet despite the fact that, in their own eyes, the IRI has made some serious concessions by not insisting on the initial guarantees they had wanted for the durability of the JCPOA as well not demanding the compensation they had sought from the US for the damage they had inflicted on Iran and its economy by leaving the agreement in 2018.
- Having made promises on a number of issues and failed – such as the freeing of imprisoned Americans in Iran - Biden now wants zero blow back, something that was unlikely to happen under any circumstances at a time when risks (such a military escalation) were piling up.

2. **KELSEY DAVENPORT**, *Director of Non-proliferation Policy, Arms Control Association*

- It is important to understand that the threat posed by the IRI is now much worse than any time before.
- Even with no further action taken by Iran, it is still quite bad given that Iran will probably continue enriching uranium metal while accumulating added knowledge simply by remaining on the current trajectory.
- Should the IRI decide on ‘ratcheting up’ its activities by moving forward, the pace of its advances will probably amount to something that no diplomatic effort can hope to hold back.
- Hence, the need for the Biden Administration to move faster and bolder on this matter.
- Biden can move forward by removing the FTO designation and paying the internal political price for it. Alternatively, he can pay a far higher price for being the President that allowed Iran to come to the brink of a nuclear weapon or started a war to try and stop that.

- Significant provisions within the JCPOA that are permanent - such as **monitoring of verifications and prohibition against certain activities relating to weaponization** – were critical to keep.
- To keep under check and to give substance to the promotion of non-proliferation values, it was essential that all efforts should lead to a consummation of a new deal.

3. **TYLER CULLIS**, *Counsel with Ferrari & Associates*

- On the subject of the IRGC's designation as an FTO, the legal consequences of this designation is insignificant and pales in comparison to other authorities targeting the IRGC including its designation as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist (SDGT) under Executive Order 13224.
- Hence, Iran's issue with the designation was not a legal matter, but a political one, as the IRGC is the only foreign military organization designated under the FTO authority.
- For the Biden Administration, removing the FTO is a political issue given the blow back affects that it can have, especially with the November elections coming up.
- No matter what, the US has to pay a political price for returning to the JCPOA.
- Tensions over Russia may be detracting political attention from the effort to reconstitute the deal. More importantly perhaps was whether the Biden administration had the ability to re-implement a full maximum pressure campaign against Iran given how much focus the Treasury Department has dedicated to implementing sanctions against Russia.
- Refocusing once again on Iran in the wake of the Russia-Ukraine war would require substantial investigative resources to be diverted away from Russia, it would involve intensive diplomacy with friends and foes alike – which could obscure some of the objectives that the Biden administration is seeking to achieve with respect to Russia, and it would involve a lot of public messaging on the direction of US policy towards Iran.
- Furthermore, such a shift at this time is simply not in line with the kind of resources and staffing that either the Treasury Department's Office

of Foreign Assets Control [OFAC] or the State Department has right now while all of its resources are being devoted to Russia and Ukraine.

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