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Facts & Logic About the Middle East

December 15, 2020



## Before inviting Iran to peace talks, Biden must insist we address all the threats—not just illicit nuclear weapons

Dear Friend of FLAME:

After four years of diplomatic and economic hammering on Iran’s illicit nuclear weapons program by the Trump administration, Joe Biden has made clear that he intends to re-engage with the Islamic Republic.

According to some reports, Biden intends to bring the U.S. back, with no preconditions, to the failed Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action—President Obama’s “Iran Deal” or JCPOA—signed in July 2015.

What’s unclear is how Biden intends to deal with Iran’s cheating on the original JCPOA, plus five momentous years that have transpired since 2015, or with demands Iran is already making that the U.S. pay it reparations as punishment.

President Trump famously withdrew from the JCPOA in 2018, calling the agreement "horrible" and said the United States would "work with our allies to find a real, comprehensive, and lasting solution" to prevent Iran from developing nuclear arms. This was a position welcomed by many American allies in the region, like Israel and Saudi Arabia.

Nonetheless, Biden has indicated on a number of occasions his eagerness to renew the JCPOA. “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,” then-candidate Biden wrote in September. “With our allies, we will work to strengthen and extend the nuclear deal’s provisions, while also addressing other issues of concern.”

In fact, it is precisely the long list of such other “issues of concern” that Biden should place ahead of any return to negotiations over the Iranian nuclear weapons program, because at the moment the Islamic Republic is a massive force of instability, bloodshed and treachery in the region.

One of the reasons the JCPOA failed is that it only addressed the nuclear weapons issue, and then only temporarily, but failed to deal with Iran’s problematic role in the region and beyond, especially its hegemonic ambitions.

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Let's start with Iran's imperialist agenda.

Since the Iranian revolution in 1979, the ruling Ayatollahs have embarked on an ideology of *Gharbzadegi*, which is the concept that all foreign ideas and western culture are a plague that needs to be eradicated. While the Iranian regime has claimed to oppose colonialism, it has simultaneously created an empire of influence and physical presence throughout the region through the import of its radical Shiite worldview, largely through proxies. Its repressive might has been felt widely in the region—through violence in Lebanon, Syria, Iraq and Yemen that have cost millions of lives.

In addition, Iran has a proliferation of sophisticated weapons systems that have wreaked destruction throughout the region. While there is an official weapons embargo placed on Iran, its arms are regularly sent to its proxies, usually terrorist groups, like Hamas in Gaza, Hezbollah in Lebanon and the Houthis in Yemen. They have also been used further afield—in attacks against Saudi oil refineries, as well as in Africa and Latin America, with illicit economic activity, smuggling illegal material, espionage, and the training of armed subversive groups

In other words, to focus only on Iran's acquisition of nuclear weapons capability—as the JCPOA did—misses a larger problem: Nuclear arms are only Iran's means to a nefarious end. This capability is being developed to help it gain a firmer grip over regional opponents, threaten enemies and strong-arm allies.

In fact, Iran's presence is felt in every single conflict in the region, and the JCPOA failed to stop—let alone address—the bloodshed.

For President-elect Biden and his team, President Trump's withdrawal from the JCPOA and the "maximum economic pressure" he placed on Iran present a prime opportunity. If Team Biden wants to make a better deal with Iran, they need to seize the negotiating advantage Trump has left them and acknowledge the region's new realities.

First, the Iranians have not held up their end of the bargain, neither halting their nuclear research nor their weapons development. Furthermore, Iran's imperialist hunger was only whetted by the JCPOA sanctions relief, the billions of dollars in payments it received from the West, and the preferential seat it received at the top table of global diplomacy.

Second, the Biden administration needs to recognize that the Iranian regime has historically responded not to kindness, but to intense leverage. The relatively small window when U.S. troops were on the ground en masse in Iraq and Afghanistan also coincided with the slowest pace and even the stalling of Iran's nuclear program. Trump's sanctions have also had an effect, bringing the fragile Iranian economy to its knees. President-elect Biden needs to use all of the tools at his command and sustain maximum pressure in order to ensure more preferable concessions from the Iranians.

Above all, Biden's negotiations goal—should the Iranians even agree to sit down with him—should not be friendship, but rather aim resolutely to satisfy core U.S. interests. After all, the U.S. and its allies face serious threats and we now hold the cards.

If the U.S. returns to the JCPOA, Iran must agree to a complete, total and

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permanent halt to its nuclear weapons program, even the reversal of all non-civilian or dual-use elements of nuclear technology. The next U.S. Administration should also ensure that the Islamic Republic halts its development of intercontinental ballistic missiles, in line with UN Security Council Resolution 2231 (2015), which calls upon Iran not to undertake any activity related to ballistic missiles designed to be capable of delivering nuclear weapons, including launches using such long-range missile technology.

Finally, Iran must cease colonization of its neighbors and other forms of invasive terror. It must cease its funding for foreign terrorists, stop its involvement in regional conflicts and end the violent export of extremist Shiite revolutionary ideology.

I hope you will point out to friends, family, colleagues and your elected representatives that if President-elect Biden can achieve these reasonable points, the region will indeed become a safer place. We will see greater peace and reconciliation between many groups—such as warring parties in Syria, Iraq, Lebanon and Yemen—as well as the warming of relations we are witnessing between Israel and Arab Gulf nations.

Achieving these goals would be worthy of Mr. Biden's efforts. Merely slowing down Iran's development of nuclear weapons—as the original JCPOA attempted to do—would be more than a waste of time. It would inject greater alarm and heightened danger into the already precarious Middle East.

I hope you'll also take a minute, while you have this material front and center, to forward this message to friends, visit FLAME's lively [Facebook page](#) and review the P.S. immediately below. It describes FLAME's new hasbarah campaign—which exposes the outrageous, false accusation that Israel is an “apartheid state.”

Best regards,

Jim Sinkinson  
President, Facts and Logic About the Middle East (FLAME)

P.S. Every year, dozens of major American colleges and universities host Israel Apartheid Week, sponsored by radical pro-Palestinian groups like Students for Justice in Palestine. In addition, critics of Israel also assert that Israel is or will soon become an apartheid state. As you know, nothing is further from the truth. Israel guarantees equal rights to all its citizens and its laws bear zero resemblance to any of the hateful rules of apartheid South Africa, where the term was invented. To clarify this point, FLAME has created a new *hasbarah* message called “[The Israel Apartheid Lie](#).” I hope you'll review this convincing, fact-based paid editorial, which will run in *USA Today*, the *Washington Post*, and other media nationwide. It spells out specific tenets of apartheid and refutes the apartheid calumny against Israel point by point. This piece will also be sent to all members of Congress, Vice President Pence and President Trump. If you agree that this kind of public relations effort on Israel's behalf is critical, I urge you to support us. Remember: FLAME's powerful ability to influence public opinion—and U.S. support of Israel—comes from individuals like you, one by one. I hope you'll consider giving a donation now, as you're able—with \$500, \$250, \$100, or even

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The logo for FLAME, featuring the word "FLAME" in a bold, white, sans-serif font. The letter "A" is stylized with a flame shape inside it.

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