

Iran nuclear deal

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In 2015, Iran agreed a long-term deal in Vienna, Austria, on its nuclear programme with a group of world powers known as the **P5+1 – the US, UK, France, China, Russia and Germany**. It is formally known as the **Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA)**.

Terms of the agreement

- According to the agreement Iran has to dismantle much of its nuclear programme, and open its facilities to greater international monitoring.
- In return, the world powers agreed to lift many of the sanctions imposed on the country, opening its economy to billions of dollars of lost revenue.
- The world powers wanted to restrict Iran's nuclear capabilities to the point that it would take Tehran at least a year to build a weapon, giving them adequate time to prepare and respond.
- Before the agreement, analysts estimated that Iran had reached a point from where it could build a weapon in approximately three months.
- While the terms of the agreement were complex, in essence, they focused on eliminating Iran's stockpiles of enriched uranium and plutonium (needed to produce a nuclear weapon), and on limiting the number and type of centrifuges Iran could operate.
- Tehran also agreed to implement a protocol that would **allow inspectors from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)** to access its nuclear sites to ensure Iran would not be able to develop nuclear weapons in secret.

The JCPOA is part of **UN Security Council Resolution 2231**. The members of the UNSC voted on it on 20 July 2015, and adopted it on 18 October (Adoption Day). It came into effect

on 16 January 2016 (Implementation Day). The JCPOA stays in effect for eight years from Adoption Day or upon receipt by the Security Council of an IAEA report stating that the IAEA has reached the Broader Conclusion that all nuclear material in Iran remains in peaceful activities (Transition Day), and terminates ten years from Adoption Day (Termination Day).

Uranium enrichment

- In July 2015, **Iran had two uranium enrichment plants namely Natanz and Fordo** where it is alleged that it is creating weapon grade uranium.
- Uranium can have nuclear-related uses once it has been refined, or enriched.
- This is achieved by increasing the content of its most fissile isotopes, U-235, through the use of centrifuges – machines which spin at supersonic speeds.
- Low-enriched uranium, which typically has a 3-5% concentration of U-235, can be used to produce fuel for commercial nuclear power plants.
- Highly enriched uranium has a purity of 20% or more and is used in research reactors.
- Weapons-grade uranium is 90% enriched or more.
- According to the Accord Iran's stockpile of enriched uranium was also reduced by 98% to 300kg , a figure that must not be exceeded until 2031.
- In addition, **research and development must take place only at Natanz** and be limited until 2024.
- **No enrichment is permitted at Fordo until 2031**, and the underground facility must be converted into a nuclear, physics and technology center.

Changes agreed under Iran deal to limit nuclear programme



After the Agreement

- Iran's economy, after suffering years of recessions, currency depreciation, and inflation, stabilized significantly after the deal took effect, and its exports skyrocketed.
- Israel, America's closest ally in the Middle East, strongly rejected the deal, and other countries like Iran's great regional rival Saudi Arabia, complained that they were not involved in the negotiations even though Iran's nuclear programme posed security risks for every country in the region.
- Critics also point out that since 2015, Iran has increased its support for regional proxies, and the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), which the US has designated a terrorist organisation, has expanded its activities.

However, in May 2018, then-US President Donald Trump abandoned the JCOA, calling it "defective at its core". He reinstated all US sanctions on Iran in November 2018 as part of a "maximum pressure" campaign to compel the country to negotiate a replacement that would also curb its ballistic missile programme and its involvement in regional conflicts.

The other powers, namely the EU, in an attempt to keep the deal alive, launched a barter system known as INSTEX to facilitate transactions with Iran outside the US banking system. However, INSTEX only covered food and medicine, which were already exempt from US sanctions.

President Joe Biden's administration recently restored sanctions waivers to Iran to allow international nuclear cooperation projects, as indirect American-Iranian talks on reviving the 2015 nuclear deal with Tehran entered the final stretch. The waivers had allowed Russian, Chinese and European companies to carry out non-proliferation work to effectively make it harder for Iranian nuclear sites to be used for weapons development.

Impacts on India of Restoration of JCPOA: Restoration of JCPOA may ease many restrictions over the Iranian regime, which may directly or indirectly help India. This can be reflected in the following examples:

- **Boost to Regional Connectivity:** Removing sanctions may revive India's interest in the Chabahar Project, Bandar Abbas port, and other plans for regional connectivity.
- This would further help India to neutralize the Chinese presence in Gwadar port, Pakistan.
- Apart from Chabahar, India's interest in the International North-South Transit Corridor (INSTC), which runs through Iran, which will improve connectivity with five Central Asian republics, may also get a boost.
- Restoration of ties between the US and Iran will help India to procure cheap Iranian oil and aid in energy security.