

Why the United States Should Reenter the JCPOA

The growth of Iran's nuclear program remains one of the most pressing national security concerns of the United States and its allies.

President Joe Biden has indicated [his support](#) for reentering the Iran nuclear deal, known formally as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), if Tehran returns to compliance with the agreement. While not accounting for the diplomatic sequencing of a return, Former Secretary of Energy Ernie Moniz has observed it could take [four months](#) for Iran to return to compliance with the deal.

Prioritizing an immediate reentry into the deal on a compliance-for-compliance basis is the most effective strategy to curbing the Iranian nuclear program and will serve as a starting point for follow-on negotiations on other areas of concern, such as Iran's missile program and support for proxy groups.

- **Iran is [closer](#) to a nuclear weapon now than when President Donald Trump came into office and abandoned the agreement.** However, Iran is not yet producing a nuclear weapon nor is Tehran acting recklessly. While an IAEA report from November 2020 shows that Iran's stockpile of low-enriched uranium has increased by about 12 times the amount allowed under the JCPOA, IAEA nuclear inspectors continue to have access to Iran's nuclear facilities — providing real-time reports on enrichment activities and demonstrating that the door remains open for returning to the nuclear deal.
- **The Trump administration's failed maximum pressure strategy brought the United States and Iran to the brink of war twice.** A return to diplomacy and swift reentry into the JCPOA will help de-escalate tensions and avoid another crisis before the Biden administration can work to manage Iran's other threatening behaviors.
- **There is a short window of opportunity to curb Iranian escalation.** [Legislation](#) passed by the Iranian parliament in December requires Iran to enrich uranium to 20% — a [small step](#) away from weapons-grade — and limit international inspector access to its facilities around the end of February unless it receives the sanctions relief promised by the JCPOA. This move could [cut the number of inspectors in the country in half](#) and limit critical access and verification tools. The Iranian presidential elections to be held in June 2021 shorten the window for the Biden administration to bring Iran back into compliance before Iranian leadership changes hands, possibly to a hardliner.
- **Re-entering the JCPOA is in the security interests of U.S. allies.** European allies remain in the deal and [still view](#) it as “the best means of bringing greater security to the region” and preventing a nuclear-armed Iran. Accordingly, U.S. allies are united in their call for Washington to uphold the commitments it made under the original deal.
- **American credibility is being closely scrutinized by the leadership in Pyongyang and other nuclear-armed states.** If the United States is not seen as a trustworthy negotiating partner, North Korea will likely have little incentive to reentering serious negotiations over its nuclear program.