



The Cyrus Cylinder استوانه کوروش or Cyrus Charter منشور کوروش was discovered under the foundation of a Babylonian palace in 1879, making it perhaps the oldest time capsule on record. It commemorates Cyrus' victory over Babylonia in 539 BC and sets out the rights of subjects in his expanding empire. It is often commemorated as the oldest charter of human rights in the world.

## Contents of October 2021 Advocacy Bulletin

- If not the JCPOA, then What? By Paul Barker
- Iran Polling
- Slight Loosening of Sanctions: A Good Sign, by Tom Nelson
- Sanctions Impact
- JCPOA Prospects
- IAEA Inspections
- Afghanistan
- Regional Relations
- Economy
- Iran in Shanghai Cooperation Organization by Tom Nelson
- Environment
- Covid
- Human Rights
- History
- Media

### If not the JCPOA, then What?

Paul Barker

Note from the Editor

As the weeks pass with no commitment from Iran on its readiness to return to JCPOA restoration negotiations, the space for miscalculation grows.

The Biden Administration was in office for over two months before it sent serious signals of its readiness to engage the Iranian government on restoration of the JCPOA. The Ra'isi government has now been in place over two months and is only sending out vague messages of getting closer to being ready to negotiate. While the Ra'isi team [may think this is a smart negotiating strategy](#), it comes with risks. Meanwhile Iran's nuclear enrichment continues with compromised IAEA monitoring, Israel's leadership sends out threatening messages, and Biden's negotiators seem to be losing patience.

That said, there is no good Plan B for anyone. Iran has proved that it can survive under sanctions, but it cannot achieve promised economic growth targets and inflation reduction without an end to US sanctions. Any Israeli attack on Iran's nuclear facilities would probably unleash drone, missile, and other attacks on Israel from parties armed with Iranian supplied weapons and technology. Biden shows no appetite for another

war in the Middle East. A full collapse of the JCPOA would leave Iran's nuclear program unmonitored and foreign ignorance of Iranian actions and intentions could lead to dangerous results.

While most current analysis blames the Ra'isi regime for its dangerously slow steps towards rejoining the JCPOA, there is [new reporting](#) which casts light on Iranian perceptions of the US as an unreliable negotiating partner: in May when reviving the JCPOA seemed on the cusp of success, the Biden team reportedly refused to offer a commitment not to reimpose any sanctions on Iran for the duration of its term in office, even if Iran remained in full compliance with its obligations. Per this reporting Biden wanted to be able to keep the threat of reinstating sanctions as a tool to force Iran into negotiations for a "longer, stronger" deal.

Fortuitously the report on the [latest IranPoll](#) came out this week. This is an outstanding tool for tracking Iranian public opinion over the years. It provides insightful analysis and tracks the views of Iranians over time in relation to the Iranian economy, the JCPOA, the Covid pandemic, the perhaps surprisingly popular assessment of President Ra'isi, shifting perceptions of the United States, China, and Russia, and so much more. The phrasing of some questions and an analysis of Iranian public opinion responses suggests opportunities for negotiators to address weaknesses in the JCPOA without having to throw it out and try to craft a new agreement from scratch.

## Iran Polling

### [Latest IranPoll Results](#), Amir Farmanesh, 2021/10/18

IranPoll's most recent survey of the Iranian people, conducted in conjunction with the University of Maryland CISSM was conducted in September 2021, soon after Ebrahim Raisi took office as Iran's 8<sup>th</sup> President. It has a margin of error of +/- 3.1% and was conducted using IranPoll's standard [nationally representative probabilistic sampling](#).

The survey has many important findings. It shows that Raisi enters office at a hard time. Three quarters (74%) describe Iran's economy as bad (very, 54%), the same as a year ago. While half attribute bad economic conditions primarily to domestic economic mismanagement and corruption, 27 percent blame sanctions, and 22 percent name covid-19.

Iranians have some optimism about Raisi's ability to address Iran's problems and a majority (54%) predicts that ordinary Iranians will have better living conditions three years from now.

Disillusioned with the possibility of improved relations with the West, a clear majority (54%) now say that Iran should try more to strengthen diplomatic and trade relations with Asian countries rather than with European countries (39%). China's favorability ratings, which took a big hit after the pandemic started, are back to pre-pandemic levels: 14 percent very favorable and 44 percent somewhat favorable. This is in comparison to very negative views of the United States. Asked to rate Biden's policies towards Iran on a scale of zero (completely hostile) to ten (completely friendly), 67 percent give a score in the 0-4 range. In February 2021, only about half (52%) expected Biden's policies to be hostile toward Iran.

Expectations about the 2015 nuclear agreement (aka JCPOA) have been dampened by failure to reach agreement during Biden's first eight months in office. Less than half (48%) now support the agreement and only a third (33%) think that the U.S. will comply with its commitments if the JCPOA is restored. Confidence in compliance by other parties to the deal has risen significantly,

though, up from 30% in October 2020 to 49% now. This lack of confidence helps explain why a majority of Iranians (52%) say that Iran should let the Europeans try to get the United States to show more flexibility but not make any more concessions itself and only 27% want Iran to show flexibility to get the JCPOA restored.

The survey covers many more issues that may be of interest to you. Attached please find the results of the survey. Its findings will be presented at the Atlantic Council on Monday, October 18. Please note that the results are embargoed until October 18, 2021, 12pm EST and we expect you and all of our friends to observe the embargo and not to publish anything on the results until that time.

Also, a [permanent link for the survey](#) has been created so you can cite the survey conveniently in your work.

An Atlantic Council discussion of the study can be found [here](#).

## Slight Loosening of Sanctions: A Good Sign

### Tom Nelson

On October 8, 2021, OFAC, the US government agency responsible for "designating" entities the US does not like, [reversed an Iran designation](#). There are two consequences of designation: First, any provision of support to the entity by a US person is a criminal act (unless a special license is first obtained from OFAC). Second, the US banking system will not deal, directly or indirectly, with the designated entity. These "secondary sanctions" are the real killers - they freeze the designated entity from doing virtually any international business that involves in any way the US banking system.

In September 2020 President Trump "designated" Mammut Industries in Iran. Mammut is popularly recognized there as the leading truck maker - virtually all domestically made heavy duty trucks in Iran are made by Mammut. This designation was part of President Trump's "maximum pressure" campaign to force Iran back to the negotiating table in order that the US could cut a better deal than the JCPOA. Mammut Industries was designated not because of anything related to nuclear power or nuclear weapons; rather, it was designated because it provided goods and materials to Iran's defense industries, including "dual use" goods that might be used to support or enhance Iran's ballistic missile program (a growing concern in Israel). [Here](#) is a cite to the September 2020 OFAC press release.

As I have indicated in earlier posts to this group, I think that President Trump's actions were not only facially unfair and unnecessarily oppressive to Iran, they also inflicted serious long-term harm on the United States. Basically, President Trump clearly demonstrated to the world that the United States will not honor its obligations; that those obligations can be cast aside with impunity. This is the long term harm that will be almost impossible to fix (for example, would any country in the world be willing to cut a long-term deal with Mr. Biden given that the nutso Republicans are in the wings?).

As I have stated earlier, what I think President Trump's willy-nilly designation of anything Iranian has done is force Iran out of the Western "tent" and into the arms of China, Russia, and other economies that are not economically integrated with the United States. Instead of forcing concessions from Iran on the JCPOA and other, defense-related matters - Trump's idea of what he wanted to accomplish - Iran has implemented a "resistance economy" whose purpose is to make domestically all goods that are essential to Iran's economy. (In this vein, Iran recently banned the importation of Samsung and LG appliances because South Korea refuses to release \$7 billion in Iranian funds frozen at the request of the US, stating that Iran can produce the appliances domestically.) Further proof that President Trump has driven Iran from the

Western tent is Iran's position in recommencing negotiations relating to reimposition of the JCPOA. Iran has been dragging its feet on recommencing those negotiations, which have gone nowhere since April and the election of a new right-wing president, Ebrahim Raisi, in June. Iran has indicated that it will not recommence negotiations until the US takes positive actions indicating good faith - among those actions removing sanctions not related to nuclear issues (e.g., Mammut Industries) and, more recently, release \$10 billion in Iranian funds that the US has frozen. The significance of today's un-designation of Mammut Industries is, I think, an indication that the US has decided to meet that demand because, I also think, the West is beginning to panic at the thought that Iran will no longer be part of the Western group of nations. This is a lot of supposition based on only one OFAC action, but I think it is at least somewhat reasonable given the dynamics of the situation. We will know more in the near future.

## **Sanctions Impact**

**[Treasury 2021 Sanctions Review, October 2021](#)**

**[Can Sanctions Succeed: Reflecting on a Decade of Financial Coercion, USIP, 2021/10/20](#)**

**[NIAC Urges Biden to Prioritize Humanitarian Relief as part of Sanctions Review, 2021/10/19](#)**

**[NIAC Applauds Passage of Amendment Requiring Report on Efficacy of U.S. Sanctions, NIAC, 2021/10/23](#)**

**[Letter to Senate re GAO Study of Sanctions Efficacy, 45 peace organizations including PCIA 2021/18/21](#)**

October 18, 2021

The Honorable Jack Reed  
Chairman, Senate Armed Services Committee

The Honorable James Inhofe  
Ranking Member, Senate Armed Service Committee

The Honorable Adam Smith  
Chairman, House Armed Services Committee

The Honorable Mike Rogers  
Ranking Member, House Armed Services Committee

Dear Chairman Reed, Ranking Member Inhofe, Chairman Smith, and Ranking Member Rogers,  
We write representing a broad coalition of humanitarian, peacebuilding, faith-based, and other civil society organizations deeply concerned for the health and well-being of people in heavily-sanctioned locations around the world. While U.S. sanctions have increased in scope and quantity, the U.S. government does not currently assess their humanitarian impacts or their ability to achieve foreign policy objectives. For this reason, we urge you to support [Amendment #152](#) to the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), which will initiate these overdue assessments.

Our organizations support this amendment in the House version of the FY 2022 NDAA as it directs the Government Accountability Office to conduct an impartial assessment of the impact of U.S. sanctions on civilian populations as well as sanctions' effectiveness in achieving U.S.

foreign policy goals. NDAA Amendment #152, introduced by Representative Jesus “Chuy” García, was approved as part of an en bloc package.

Earlier this year, over 55 organizations [called on](#) the Biden administration to review the impact of sanctions on COVID-19 relief and issue necessary legal reforms to ensure sanctions do not harm ordinary civilians. Forty-six organizations raised similar concerns in [a recent letter](#) to President Biden and other key leaders in the administration.

Impact assessments provide valuable information to ensure that U.S. foreign policy advances U.S. interests while protecting innocent civilians and maintaining channels for humanitarian organizations to continue their work. This issue is even more important as populations around the globe continue to manage the shared threat of the COVID-19 pandemic. We ask that you support Amendment #152 and ensure that the provisions in this amendment be retained throughout the conferencing process.

We appreciate your consideration, and would also be happy to schedule a meeting with staff working on this issue to give insight about how the provisions in this amendment are crucial to our work.

Sincerely,

45 peace organizations including PCIA

## JCPOA Prospects

### [Revealed: Biden rejected way forward in Iran deal talks](#), Trita Parsi, 2021/10/21

The Iranians reduced their ask and requested only a binding commitment from Biden to stick to the JCPOA and not reimpose sanctions *for the rest of his term* - that is, they were no longer asking Biden to commit the *next* US president to the JCPOA. In May, Biden offered political language, but no binding language, which from the Iranian side, has become the key reason for their refusal to move.

It is not clear how a Plan B with more sanctions will get the Iranians to **bind** themselves to a 15-year commitment if we are not even willing to commit ourselves for 3. Before both sides fully gravitate towards thinking the JCPOA is no longer worth it, we need a more reliable Plan A, not a more coercive Plan B.

### [Nuclear talks under Raisi: Iran's diplomats are going slow to appear smart](#), Esfandiyar Batmanghelidj, 2021/10/19

Western observers are despairing at the lack of progress on Iran nuclear talks. But the Raisi administration and the Iranian people both want sanctions relief to help the economy – meaning there is still cause for optimism.

### [Raisi Gives Criteria for Nuclear Negotiations](#), NIAC, 2021/10/21

### [Here's What Iran Wants From Sanctions Relief](#), Esfandiyar Batmanghelidj, 2021/10/3

Analysis of a new report from the Iranian parliament's research center that proposes a "checklist" for the verification of sanctions relief.

### [U.S. has reached out to China about cutting oil imports from Iran](#), Arshad Mohammed and John Irish

Under Biden this is no longer just passive continuation of maximum pressure, it is *active* continuation of max pressure.

### [Iran introduces own version of maximum pressure](#), Mark Fitzpatrick, 2021/9/27

Iran may return to the table in a few weeks, but expect it to continue waiting for the United States to make concessions.

[Are vaccines and Afghanistan routes back to US-Iran engagement?](#) **Barbara Slavin, 2021/9/27**

[How to Save the Iran Nuclear Deal](#), **Ali Baez and Vali Nasr, 2021/9/21**

Both Sides Must Revise Their Red Lines—or Risk War

**Tom Nelson comment:** This article from the current *Foreign Affairs* that tries to put together a roadmap for reviving and reinvigorating the JCPOA. My thought: Why bother? As the article points out, Iran has taken on the chin the worst that President Trump could throw at it in the form of sanctions and survived to the point that now Iran's economy is (finally) expanding. More sanctions? Yeah - like what? And more to the point, "So what?". The US has lost an enormous amount of both military and ideological influence in the Middle East, and particularly on Iran's eastern border, with the withdrawal from Afghanistan to that point that now the future looks much rosier for Iran than at any time since the withdrawal of the US from the JCPOA. About the only thing that Iran can get from some sort of reinvigorated JCPOA is foreign exchange, which would be helpful to Iran's trading with the West. But trading with the West seems no longer to be a priority and, in fact, something to be lessened over time. Moreover, because the Raisi government seems hell-bent on establishing a "Resistance Economy" approach, which would make Iran self-sufficient in all important economic activities, refusing any relief from the US would actually further that objective, at least politically. Finally, Iran is no longer tying its future to being part of the Western group of nations - Donald Trump graphically illustrated why relying on the Western democracies is a bad idea, particularly if Israel has an interest in the matter. So why bother?

Finally, I would not be surprised if Iran decided to withdraw from the NPT. *That* would be a wake-up call!

[Diplomacy ramps up to try to break impasse on Iran talks](#), **Laura Rozen, 2021/10/13**

As EU envoy Mora heads to Iran, US Iran envoy Malley says US 'realistic' that Iran may not be interested. Blinken: 'We remain ready to return to talks,' but 'prepared to turn to other options'.

[U.S., EU, Israel adopt tough tone on Iran, mull options](#), **Arshad Mohammed and John Irish, Parisa Hafezi, 2021/10/13**

[Sanctions Showdown: What Happens if the Iran Talks Fail?](#) **Bijan Ahmadi, 2021/9/24**

A limited agreement that offers Iran some sanctions relief in exchange for freezing its nuclear program could provide additional time for diplomacy and trust-building measures that could lead to improved negotiations.

## **IAEA Inspections**

[Preventing an accidental nuclear crisis in Iran and beyond](#), **Samuel Hickey, 2021/10/11**

The great arms control theorist and developer of game theory Thomas Schelling opened his book *Arms and Influence* with the reflection: "One of the lamentable principles of human

productivity is that it is easier to destroy than to create.” Let’s hope the groundbreaking verification and monitoring tools of the Iran nuclear deal are not a casualty of human initiative.

[IAEA chief warns Iran’s nuclear surveillance is no longer ‘intact’, Louis Neal, 2021/10/19](#)

## **Afghanistan**

[Americans should not turn away from the tragedy of education in Afghanistan, Barry Rosen, 2021/10/1](#)

[Iran, Pakistan work to strengthen ties as Afghan situation remains fluid, Sabena Siddiqui, 2021/10/20](#)

Iran and Pakistan are talking about the strengthening of their military relations, in the face of the Taliban takeover in neighboring Afghanistan and the region's geopolitical changes.

[Iran sharply divided on recognizing the Taliban, Kourosh Ziabari, 2021/9/20](#)

Iran’s leadership has tarried on formalizing ties with the new Islamic Emirate due to fears of a popular anti-Taliban backlash at home

[Iran to host Afghanistan’s neighbors for Oct. 27 talks, AI-Monitor, 2021/10/19](#)

The Iranian Foreign Ministry said on Monday that the foreign ministers from Russia, China, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan will meet in Iran for talks on Afghanistan next week.

## **Regional Relations**

[Tensions Flare Between Iran and Azerbaijan, NIAC, 2021/10/6](#)

[Iranian war games on the border with Azerbaijan were really a message to Israel, Abbas Qaidari, 2021/10/8](#)

[How Iran and North Korea Cooperate to Develop Missiles and Evade Sanctions, Iran Watch Newsletter, September 2011](#)

[Israeli Estimate on Iran’s Weaponization Unchanged, Arms Control Association, 2021/10/21](#)

The head of Israel’s military intelligence said he sees “no progress” on an Iranian nuclear weapons program and the country remains two years from a bomb.

[Bennett No Longer Considers Iran Nuclear Deal ‘Historic Mistake,’ but He Can’t Say So, Anshel Pfeffer, 2021/10/14](#)

The changing attitude toward the nuclear accord is the new government’s most significant policy change, but Netanyahu’s campaign to shape public opinion on the subject still looms large

[How to reduce the risk of a catastrophic spent nuclear fuel fire near the Persian Gulf, Tara Burchmore, Tom Spence, Ali Ahmad, 2021/10/6](#)

## **Economy**

[Iran’s membership in Asian security body won’t solve sanctions problem, Bijan Khajehpour, 2021/9/22](#)

While the news that Iran will gain full membership in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization is a psychological victory for the sanctions-hit country, it will take much more to achieve lasting economic impact.

## **Implications of Iran's Membership in Shanghai Cooperation Organization**

By Tom Nelson, Gonabad 1966-69

I am reprinting below two news articles, the first from Aljazeera and the second from Tehran Times (Iran), that report on Iran's admission as a full member to the Shanghai Cooperation Organization ("SCO"), a long-established eight-member economic/political bloc consisting of China, Russia, India, Pakistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan. I urge you to read each article in order to get a sense of the attitude of the new hard-line Raisi government in Iran regarding its role in the world, and particularly in regard to the West. I think the second article from the Tehran Times is particularly helpful in presenting the Iranian regime's perception of the benefits from joining the SCO. Myself, I think this realignment will have profound impacts on international relations, the Middle East, and ultimately the declining American empire.

There are a number of precipitating events to this realignment. First, of course, is President Trump's enormous blunder when he unilaterally withdrew from the JCPOA and imposed "maximum pressure" sanctions on Iran for Iran's agreeing with "the evil Obama" to limit its nuclear weapon options. Trump, believing that he is the best negotiator in the entire world, thought he could cut a better deal - not realizing that individuals, groups, and countries in the Middle East highly value "face" (as in "losing face") in all of their relationships. It was impossible for Iran to be seen as in any way as caving in to President Trump's bullying. The result was not only foreseeable, it was predictable: Iran was driven away from its previous efforts to attempt to re-integrate itself into the West. And the new attitude in Iran, I think, better reflects the reality that, so long as US foreign policy in the Middle East serves primarily Israel, and so long as Iran remains a strong supporter of Palestine and Palestinian human rights, Iran will never have a positive relationship with the US and consequently will face endless sanctions from Washington regardless of the immediate justification - from nuclear issues to defense issues (missiles, etc) to whatever other cause-de-jour is popular at the moment. And, realistically, once sanctions are in place they are politically very difficult to remove.

I don't think that the magnitude of the consequences flowing from Trump's blunder and Iran's consequent withdrawal from the Western orbit can be overstated. As the second article (from the Tehran Times) points out, Iran now has a solid place at the table with the regional organization that extends from the Turkish/Gulf border to the Pacific and Arctic Oceans. Direct diplomatic and economic ties with these countries will vastly undercut if not eliminate the impact of banking restrictions imposed by the US Treasury Department; as Tehran today is illustrating by its sales of oil to the Taliban in Herat, Afghanistan, you don't need banks for direct sales to be effectuated. Simply put, it will be impossible for the US to isolate Iran economically to the extent that Washington was previously able. There will, of course, be a lot of other impediments that will have to be reduced or eliminated before Iran can obtain all of the benefits of such integration, but I think the course is now irreversible - no amount of benefits from any re-institution of the JCPOA will compare to the long-term benefits Iran will gain from pursuing deeper integration under the SCO.

Finally, I think that these developments highlight not only President Trump's enormous lack of understanding (not to mention self-awareness), they also highlight how Washington's over-reliance on economic sanctions is harming Washington's long-term international standing and leadership. Increasingly the limitations and drawbacks of US sanctions are being noted; see, e.g., a recent article in *Foreign Affairs*, "[The United States of Sanctions: The Use and Abuse of Economic Coercion](#)". If one goes to the OFAC website to look at the individuals and entities currently sanctioned by the United States, one will discover over 1,800 pages of triple-columned entries that designate over 6000 entities and individuals. The number is so staggeringly large that it is impossible for OFAC meaningfully to monitor and revise that list (a fact I can personally attest to, as I have been attempting to have two Saudi individuals' names removed from the list for years). And still OFAC adds to the list on an almost-daily basis. But that's a topic for future discussion.

**[Iran denounces 'unilateralism' as it becomes full SCO member](#)**, Maziar Motamadi, 2021/9/17

President Ebrahim Raisi sends message of regional multilateralism as Iran fully joins the influential Shanghai Cooperation Organisation.

**[Permanent membership in SCO will break economic bans on Iran: MP](#)**, Tehran Times, 2021/9/17

## Environment

**[Iran's environmental woes could be Raisi's Achilles heel](#)**, Javad Heiran-Nia and Mahmood Monshipouri, 2021/9/16

## COVID

**[Worries about a Sixth Wave of Covid in Iran](#)**, BBC, 2021/10/17

**[America Should Help Iran Get COVID Vaccines](#)**, Sina Toosi, 2021/10/4

## Human Rights

**[Reza Islami, Human Rights Prisoner Sentenced to Five Years in Prison](#)**, DW News, 2021/10/19

**[Iranian court upholds new jail term for Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe](#)**, Al-Jazira, 2021/10/16

**[Iranian Prisoner Shahin Naseri Dies in Custody](#)**, NIAC, 2021/9/28

## History

**[Iran 'won' the war with Iraq but at a heavy price](#)**, Barbara Slavin, Abbas Kadhim, 2021/9/22

**[Legacy of Abdul Qadeer Khan, the father of Pakistan's nuclear bomb](#)**, Press the Button, 2021/10/18. Starts 5 minutes in.

## Media

**[New App Hopes to Help Iranians Communicate More Freely](#)**, NIAC, 2021/9/23

**MOC Letter to Blinken and Yellen re Easing Restrictions on Internet in Iran, 2021/10/8**

**The Impact of U.S. Sanctions on Internet Access in Iran, NIAC, 2021/8/25**

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2. Tolerance and mutual respect form the foundation for peaceful interactions between countries and their citizens.
3. Bringing countries and their citizens into the global community through cultural and economic ties reinforces international cooperation and reduces the likelihood of armed conflict.
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