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SETTING THE SCENE – FOUR POSSIBLE SCENARIOS

Possible scenarios for Iran in 2025 (assuming approval, adoption and implementation of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action):

1. **Scenario One – Most optimistic scenario:** Iran complies fully with the terms of the agreement, and **positive changes within Iran marginalize the nuclear issue**. Iran becomes a cooperative and moderate member of the regional and international communities, abandoning many or most of its disconcerting ambitions and activities.
2. **Scenario Two – Modestly optimistic scenario:** Iran complies fully with the terms of the agreement, abandons the quest for nuclear weapons, and emphasizes only the expansion of its peaceful nuclear program. However, inside Iran there is no significant moderation and, other than the nuclear weapons issue, Iran continues many of its alarming actions – a mostly "more of the same scenario".
3. **Scenario Three – Pessimistic scenario:** Iran complies with the agreement for only a few years (between two to six) while accumulating the benefits from the rescinding of sanctions, including acquiring significant upgraded defense capabilities (weapons and non-weapons), and **then violates or abrogates the provisions of the agreement by renewing its efforts – either covertly or overtly – to acquire an expanded and short-warning nuclear weapons breakout capability**. As a result, the international community is pressed to take action to foil Iran's surge towards a short nuclear weapons breakout capability.
4. **Scenario Four – Most pessimistic scenario:** "the worst of the worst case scenario" – Iran complies with the agreement for its entire duration **using the interim to increase its capabilities and to pursue an ever more revolutionary and extremist agenda**, including a potential first strike capability. With the expiration of the limitations imposed by the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), Iran resumes its worrisome nuclear activities, including establishing a **zero breakout warning time weapons option**, or actually acquires nuclear weapons in violation of its commitment in the JCPOA to never seek them. This scenario could contain the following series of very disquieting developments:
 - a. Iran uses the windfall of sanctions rescinding to revive its economy and to acquire strategic assets, which makes future military options to foil an Iranian breakout to nuclear weapons less viable. Although the weapons embargo remains in effect for five years, Iran is able to use the time to buy non-shooting defense assets in large quantities (including computers, software, cyber warfare relevant assets, as well as transportation, logistical, and communications assets), invest in defense

infrastructures (such as a roads, rail, air, sea, as well as storage assets, power facilities, and many other assets of implications for defense), and to also use the additional resources at its disposal to increase its indigenous weapons production capabilities.

- b. After five years, the arms embargo is rescinded, and Iran is able to buy a multitude of advanced state-of-the-art weapons systems from eager arms suppliers, this time adding weapons to the above detailed significant non-shooting defense assets.
- c. After eight years, following IAEA confirmation that Iran is in compliance with the terms of the JCPOA – "Transition Day" – the missile sanctions are rescinded and Iran's ballistic and cruise missile programs gain international legitimacy. Subsequently, Iran is able to openly acquire state of the art technology components and materials for its missiles industries. The result may then well be that Iran is able to field a great number (hundreds; perhaps thousands) of state of the art ballistic and cruise missiles with international approval or complicity.
- d. After approximately ten years, the JCPOA allows Iran to begin production and installation of advanced centrifuges, which nominally are able to enrich uranium at several times the rate of the currently almost ubiquitous IR-1 centrifuges.¹ Iran inaugurates capabilities which cut "breakout warning time" to virtually zero. Thus, when the fifteen year limitations imposed by the JCPOA expire, Iran will be allowed to enrich beyond the LEU level of 3.67 percent to higher enrichment levels, and it will be allowed to stockpile enriched uranium beyond the 300 kg ceiling.

COMMENTS: EVALUATING THE FOUR POSSIBLE SCENARIOS FOR IRAN IN 2025

Which of these scenarios is the most probable is a subjective judgment call, if not an imponderable.

Supporters of the agreement fervently hope for the first: that the agreement will foster positive trends inside Iran which have been simmering for years, gained attention in 2009, and appeared to regain momentum with the unprecedented first round election victory of Hassan Rouhani. Rouhani campaigned on a program of change and was not the candidate favored by the Supreme Leader, the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps, the religious establishment, or the hawks of the revolution there and elsewhere (the Majlis, for example). An economic upturn, and prosperity, could foster a popular desire for moderation, and weaken the zest for revolution or regional destabilization. There are indeed historical precedents for the mellowing of revolutions, and for positive turns of historical proportions.²

¹ According to the JCPOA, after 8 years, Iran will be allowed to begin making IR-6 and IR-8 centrifuges, but without rotors, at the rate of 200 centrifuges/annum for each type; after 10 years, i.e. starting in year 11, Iran will be allowed to produce them with the rotors, at the same rate; after 9 1/2 years Iran will be allowed to begin running R&D cascades of 30 centrifuges each of IR-6 and IR-8 types ("a year and a half before the end of the 10 years", that means after 9 1/2 years).

² Many of the things said about Iran today were said in the past of the Soviet Union under Stalin, or about the People's Republic of China ruled by Mao. So, things happen, and things change, sometimes for the better. In Israel, it is recalled that when Egypt's President Anwar Sadat announced his visit to Jerusalem in November 1977, the Israeli Defense Forces Chief of Staff, Lt. Gen. Mordechai Gur – a not un-intelligent person, and no right-wing reactionary politically – declared that Sadat's "peace offensive" was a ruse to camouflage an imminent intended Egyptian military assault in the Sinai, 1973 style. Sometimes favorable trends are what they seem to be (but sometimes not).

Notably, the advocates of this scenario are careful to wrap their assessments in heavy layers of caution and circumspection, and do not venture to guarantee that this is what will happen. Hope and preference for non-military solutions should not be confused with dreamy naivety – supporters of the agreement are well aware of the possible pitfalls down the road. Nonetheless, they are alarmed at the possibility that such an escalation might develop right here and now, within months, if the agreement is not adopted and implemented. For them, a postponement may project – with good luck and cool-headedness, well into the future, and perhaps indefinitely.

The second, less optimistic scenario, is that Iran will comply with the agreement, but only insofar as foregoing an attempt at acquiring nuclear weapons in the next ten years, and beyond, **but overall there will be no moderation in Iran's otherwise aggressive and disconcerting behavior**. Other than in the nuclear realm, this is a generally "more of the same" scenario. In this sense, the agreement will have indeed succeeded in achieving its intended and designated specified goal – to establish a "breakout warning time" of about a year or more, and to postpone an Iranian effort to breakout to nuclear weapons for a minimum of the defined fifteen year time frame. But if in ten years other characteristics of the Iranian regime remain much as they are today, or even worsen in Western terms, then the future prospects will remain grim; i.e., the probability that once the fifteen year restrictions on Iran's nuclear program are lifted, and given deployment of advanced centrifuges – Iran will resume its pursuit of a very short breakout warning time. This could in fact be a zero breakout warning time, which would allow Iran to acquire nuclear weapons unhampered by international constraints, upon a political decision to do so. To recall, after fifteen years Iran will be freely allowed, by the terms of the JCPOA, to enrich uranium beyond the specified 3.67% LEU level, and to resume the stockpiling of enriched uranium beyond the 300 kg of LEU specified in the agreement, with no limitations. Although Iran, as affirmed in the JCPOA, will still be formally committed to never seek nuclear weapons, this may not suffice to allay concerns.

The third scenario, in which **Iran violates or abrogates the agreement after a few years**, once it has fully benefitted from sanctions rescinding, is **the eventuality which most immediately draws the attention of critics**. The most forceful argument in support of this criticism is Iran's decades-long record of ongoing failure to honor commitments made, invoking diverse and sometimes fabricated excuses. In rebuttal, supporters of the agreement draw attention to the fact that Iran has been complying with the November 2013 interim agreement and the subsequent January 2014 Joint Plan of Action as an indication, or a prospect, that something may be changing in Iran. Perhaps this is a result of concerted international actions, including sanctions, which have had a devastating effect on Iran's economy. The political events of 2009 and 2013 may indicate a more open and compliant Iran. These include the first-round election of Rouhani, the seriousness with which Iran negotiated first the interim agreement JPOA and then the 2015 JCPOA, as well as its willingness to dismantle the lion's share of its existing nuclear capabilities – including the Arak reactor and most of its centrifuges, and to eliminate almost all of its existing enriched uranium stock. Therefore, the logic of the argument asserts, perhaps Iran will not violate this agreement for many years to come, and Iran's potential for change should be given a chance. Critics will assert that this is naïve, wishful thinking, and that if Iran violates or abrogates its commitments to the JCPOA – which the record shows that,

sooner or later, it invariably always does – it will be much more difficult to confront the situation in a few years' time.³

Critics of the agreement, then, fundamentally distrust Iran to fully comply with its commitments to the JCPOA for its entire duration; thus, Iran will be left with sufficient nuclear capabilities to quite rapidly restart a worrisome surge to short order nuclear weapons breakout capability. The other factors detailed above, namely Iran's much empowered position as a result of sanctions rescinding and legitimization, may severely erode – possibly to zero – the capability to foil Iran at that point in time. Talk of "snapback" of sanctions, and to the effect that "all options currently on the table will be on the table then too", may well ring hollow in a few years' time, and not be realizable, or feasible, then.

Finally there is **the fourth scenario, which could perhaps turn out to be the most probable, and also perhaps the most pessimistic: Iran will comply with the terms of the JCPOA and will not violate it or abrogate it. This scenario entails an empowerment of Iran on a scale which will make any future confrontation with Iranian actions, nuclear or non-nuclear, so daunting as to be on the verge of the impossible.** This is really a "worst of the worst case scenario", if no favorable developments happen inside Iran in the ten, or later fifteen, years from the adoption of the JCPOA. It in many ways involves a nightmare scenario; its probability is a subjective judgment call, or perhaps an educated guess. If Iran complies with the agreement, it will, first of all, have access to all international markets, with the ability to acquire whatever it desires, except for weapons, which will remain subject to an arms embargo for five years, and missile technology items, which will continue to be embargoed for eight years. Although Iran will not be permitted to buy weapons, it will be allowed to buy non-shooting defense assets (as detailed above) in large quantities. The rescinding of sanctions subsequent to "Implementation Day" of the JCPOA will also help Iran to increase its indigenous weapons production before the lifting of the arms embargo.

After five years, assuming that Iran complies with the JCPOA without grossly abrogating or violating it – not just cutting corners here and there with no substantial impact on the core purpose of the JCPOA – the international community can expect foreign arms suppliers to land in Teheran in droves, to sell Iran anything that moves or shoots and is called a weapons system. Iran will then have the money to buy whatever suppliers will offer. Advocates of the agreement tend to repeatedly and unreservedly assert that, should Iran violate the agreement, a military option to foil Iran's breakout to nuclear weapons will remain "on the table". However, this is plainly questionable. When accounting for the assets acquired before the arms embargo is rescinded, coupled with the arms and state of the art air defense assets that Iran will then be able to buy, there is justifiable concern regarding the feasibility of a future military option. At a minimum, some circumspection is in order.

³ In connection with abrogation, it should be noted that the Majlis abrogated, in June 2004, three months after it was adopted, the 2003-4 Brussels Agreement made between Iran and the EU3 in the late months of 2003, claiming that the other side was not living up to its commitments. So violation can take two forms – either covert; or overt, such as by expulsion of IAEA inspectors or leaving NPT, as did the DPRK; or abrogation is yet another option, with the pretext that the other side is violating its part of the deal, or if the JCPOA is declared inimical to Iran's – or the revolution's – interest.

After eight years – "Transition Day" – the missile sanctions will be lifted subject to IAEA confirmation that Iran is in compliance with its JCPOA commitments. This will legitimize Iran's ballistic and cruise missile programs, and will open up markets for Iran to acquire state of the art missile technology. As a consequence, assuming nothing else changes for the better in Iran between now and then, Iran will subsequently be able to deploy hundreds, maybe thousands, of state of the art ballistic and cruise missiles – perhaps also other kinds of missiles including air defense, air launched, sea, coast, and tactical. The accuracy issue, as well as the numerical aspects, in this regard may stand out. Added to the other developments noted in this scenario, this could well raise concerns of an Iranian first strike capability, or at the very least Iran's decision-makers believing that one has been established. In some ways this is the same thing, if subjective perceptions supersede objective truths when miscalculation becomes dominant.

After less than ten years, Iran will be able to produce advanced centrifuges. After eight years, it will be allowed to produce IR-6 and IR-8 centrifuges at the rate of 200/year of each type, but without rotors. After year ten, i.e. as of year eleven, it will be allowed to produce them at the same rate but with the rotors. After 9 1/2 years, Iran will be allowed to run 30-centrifuge R&D cascades of both types. And after year ten it will be allowed to install advanced centrifuges with no limitation, but Iran will still be subject to the caveat that it is not allowed to enrich uranium to a level higher than 3.67%, nor permitted to stockpile LEU beyond the 300 kg ceiling. After fifteen years these restrictions expire and breakout warning time to nuclear weapons goes to zero.

THE BOTTOM LINE – WHICH SCENARIO IN 2025?

It is impossible to predict which of these four scenarios will turn out to be the one that is evident in ten years' time. **The first scenario, of an optimistic outlook with marked changes for the good, is here rated as having a low probability** – perhaps fifteen to twenty percent – but is certainly not to be entirely ruled out.

The second scenario, of Iran complying with the agreement but with no significant turn for the better in Iran's other worrisome activities – a mostly "more of the same" scenario –constitutes perhaps another twenty percent of the probabilities package.

The pessimistic scenarios portend for greater probability rates overall. **The scenario of Iran not complying with the JCPOA fully by seeking, within the JCPOA timeline, either covert or overt breakout capabilities, or by altogether abrogating the agreement with one pretext or another, appears to be of medium to medium-high probability** – at least thirty percent or more.

The fourth scenario, the "worst of the worst case", that Iran will comply with the terms of the JCPOA fully (not including "cutting corners" with no crucial impact on the core purpose of the agreement), **using the time to immensely empower a radical agenda, and to acquire pivotal strategic capabilities, is also medium to medium-high probability** – perhaps greater than thirty percent in the overall spectrum.

Source:

Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, Vienna, 14 July 2015

<https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/2165388-iran-deal-text.html>