

US-Iran Nuclear Treaty: Biden Blows It

The U.S., Iran, and other countries in region will come to regret Biden's decision.

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Global Research, May 26, 2022

[Eunomia](#) 25 May 2022

Region: [Middle East & North Africa, USA](#)

Theme: [Intelligence](#)

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Nahal Toosi [reports](#) that Biden decided against removing the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) from the list of foreign terrorist organizations at least a month ago:

President Joe Biden has finalized his decision to keep Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps on a terrorist blacklist, according to a senior Western official, further complicating international efforts to restore the 2015 Iran nuclear deal.

Another person familiar with the matter said Biden conveyed his decision during an April 24 phone call with Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett, adding that the decision was conveyed as absolutely final and that the window for Iranian concessions had closed.

Removing the designation was likely the [last chance](#) that Biden had to salvage the nuclear deal. Top U.S. officials, including Secretary of State Blinken, confirmed that removing the designation would have no meaningful practical effect on the IRGC's financing or operations, but the president chose to keep it in place knowing that it could torpedo the negotiations to revive the agreement. Maybe the Iranian government will drop its demand in the end, but right now I wouldn't give you two cents for the JCPOA's chances of surviving beyond this year. Trump added the IRGC to the list for the express purpose of making U.S. reentry into the agreement more difficult, and Biden [ran right into the trap](#). The writing was on the wall several weeks ago. Now we have confirmation that Biden's diplomacy has been weighed in the balances and found wanting.

Biden's decision to leave the entire IRGC on the list is the wrong one, but more than that it is a remarkably stupid decision because the designation has served no purpose. This is not a case of weighing between different priorities and considering the tradeoffs between them. If the U.S. gained something from keeping the IRGC on the list, there might at least be something to debate, but the administration itself doesn't believe that the designation

matters. As Peter Beinart [pointed out](#) earlier this month, “By its own admission, the Biden administration is risking the Iran nuclear deal for nothing.” Biden is jeopardizing what should be a major policy success for the sake of preserving an empty gesture of hostility.

The IRGC was already under sanctions before it was added to the list, and it would have been under sanctions if it had been taken off the list. Everyone paying attention to this issue understood that the concession would have been mostly symbolic, but even that was more than the U.S. was willing to grant. John Carl Baker was speaking for many of us when he [said](#) this in response to the news:

This is like exhibit A in what drives me nuts about US foreign policy: even the tiniest concessions are off limits, even if that means the collapse of a major diplomatic agreement.

Iran hawks’ cynical framing that Biden would be “rewarding” terrorists if he made this face-saving concession defined the debate. They can celebrate that their campaign of lies and deceit about the nuclear deal has prevailed once again. The administration that boasted that “diplomacy is back” likely just tanked their best chance at a major diplomatic victory because they were scared of the optics.

Daniel Benjamin and Jason Blazakis wrote a good [piece](#) explaining that the terrorist designation was useless:

Iranian-backed terrorism is a serious issue, but the designation of the Revolutionary Guard as a terrorist organization was a stupendously unserious move in the first place, a sanction that brought no discernible pressure on the group or Iran more broadly.

Instead, it is an artifact of the bizarre approach of the last administration, marked chiefly by empty symbolism, tantrums and puerile demonstrations of resentment meant to communicate maximal antipathy. It had nothing to do with advancing U.S. interests.

The Biden administration’s willingness to play along with this bankrupt approach has made it very likely that they will have nothing to show for more than a year of negotiations. Benjamin and Blazakis make a strong case that Biden would have been conceding nothing of importance if he had agreed to the Iranian government’s demand. As they put it, the designation “was just more Trump imaginary statecraft.” For whatever reason, Biden chose to treat the product of this imaginary statecraft as if it were real and more important than reviving a successful nonproliferation agreement. The U.S., Iran, and other countries in region will come to regret Biden’s decision. If the JCPOA does collapse, as many of us now expect it will, Biden will be the one who delivered the fatal blow.

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