

# Iran's Nuclear Superposition

Positive and Negative Factors

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In quantum physics, superposition means that a system can exist simultaneously in two or more mutually exclusive states. An

electron is in two places at the same time, the nucleus has both decayed and not decayed, and Schrödinger's cat is simultaneously alive and dead. The latter is just a nice example, because quantum effects do not appear to play any role in the macroworld. But if we look for similarities in the sphere of international security, we will find them in the developments around the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) on Iran's nuclear program and U.S.-Iranian relations in general.

On the one hand, the JCPOA does exist. The document was signed in 2015 by and between Iran, Russia, China, Britain, France, Germany, and the United States, and approved by UN Security Council Resolution 2231. Although Washington withdrew from it in 2018, the other signatory states have pointed out that the agreement remains effective. The Joint Commission, which is responsible for overseeing the implementation of the JCPOA, continues to convene, and the remaining signatories have announced the launch of the Dispute Resolution Mechanism on several occasions.

On the other hand, U.S. sanctions have forced many foreign companies to terminate their cooperation with Iran, have all but killed Iran's oil exports and have destroyed the economic foundation of the JCPOA. Tehran has responded by announcing that it will no longer abide by any of the restrictions imposed on its nuclear development and is gradually approaching the pre-agreement enrichment capacity and level.

The resistance of the other signatories, primarily the European trio of Germany, France, and Britain, to U.S. pressure can be described as superposition. It may look quite convincing on paper: the EU has revised its legislation to prohibit European companies from complying with U.S. sanctions and to protect them from U.S. courts. A special-purpose vehicle, INSTEX, has been created for trade with Iran outside the U.S. fiscal system. At the same time, a great many European companies have deserted the Iranian market despite the "protective" legislation. INSTEX is focused on trade in

the products that have not been subject to sanctions anyway, and then it has not advanced beyond the test transactions in a period of nearly two years. The hopes pinned on China have not materialized either: contrary to the loud statements and joint documents, the volume of China's trade with Iran has fallen due to sanctions pressures.

And lastly, there is no clarity in the most dangerous, military sphere. Officially, Tehran and Washington, just like Tehran and Tel Aviv, are not at war with each other and they are not waging large-scale hostilities either. However, Washington has claimed responsibility for the murder of Iranian General Qasem Soleimani, Iran has launched missiles at a U.S. base in Iraq, the less obvious cyberattacks and mysterious explosions in Iran continue, and non-state armed groups are operating in the region.

There are both positive and negative factors to this international superposition. The biggest positive factor is that the JCPOA is still alive and can be revived any time. Tehran has stated more than once that it will reciprocate as soon as the United States resumes its obligations. It is simpler to stop an undeclared war, pretending that it was never waged. On the negative side, the superposition could "implode," resulting in one of two possible variants. Both the U.S. and the Israeli authorities would prefer the JCPOA to be "dead."

The first attempt to rock the boat has already been made. The U.S. administration is doing its best to prevent the arms embargo on Iran from being lifted in October as stipulated under Resolution 2231. Washington has submitted its proposal to the UN Security Council, but it stands little chance there in light of the expected Russian and Chinese veto. If this happens, the United States will most likely try to use the resolution's self-destruction mechanism to activate its sanctions against Iran. This would create several other quantum paradoxes. Formally, Washington will not be a party to the JCPOA when it comes to its obligations, but at the same time it could play its role under Resolution 2231 and hence

launch the self-destruction mechanism. Moreover, if the United States made this attempt and the other UNSC members refused to recognize its legitimacy, Resolution 2231 itself would be placed in a superposition: it will be effective for some states and ineffective for others, with all the ensuing consequences for the UNSC.

And lastly, there is proof that certain forces are trying to rock the boat in the military sense as well. The campaign of sabotage underway in Iran has gone beyond the nuclear complex and is now targeting Iran's entire infrastructure. Tehran's possible nuclear or military response could be used as a pretext for increasing pressure on the country. An open military conflict in the region would irretrievably destroy the JCPOA.

But the most important event after which the JCPOA superposition will become ineffective is the November presidential election in the United States. Democratic candidate Joseph Biden has announced that he would be ready to resume the agreement signed by his Democratic predecessor. It will not be a simple process, because too much has happened in the past four years (both Iran and the United States have changed), but the possibility still exists. If Donald Trump is re-elected, neither side will be happy with the current state of uncertainty. Britain, Germany, France, and even China will have to choose either to challenge the United States by resuming large-scale economic collaboration with Iran, or to admit that the JCPOA is dead, which means living with Tehran's unrestricted nuclear ambitions and the Middle East on fire.