2015 Iran Nuclear Deal (JCPOA) Simulation General Factsheet

Positions in this scenario are fictionalised for educational purposes and inspired by, but not identical to, publicly reported positions. Roles are institutional functions, never named living individuals.

Background

The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), commonly known as the 2015 Iran Nuclear Deal, was a landmark agreement finalised on 14 July 2015 between Iran and a group of world powers (the P5+1: China, France, Russia, the UK, the US, plus Germany), with the European Union playing a coordinating role. The deal aimed to ensure Iran's nuclear programme remained exclusively peaceful — imposing limits on nuclear fuel production and allowing enhanced inspections, in exchange for lifting UN, EU, and US nuclear-related sanctions.

This simulation reimagines those negotiations as talks between **Iran and the European Union**, with you playing the key stakeholders on both sides. It is set in 2015: the UK is an EU member state, sanctions are at their peak, and no deal exists yet.

This factsheet provides only a high-level overview — you must also study your personal role handout.

Educational purpose

Rather than re-creating every procedural detail of the real talks, this simulation is designed to illuminate the different responsibilities, interests, and power dynamics among the actors involved. You will practise coalition-building, persuasion, and compromise under time pressure, grappling with trade-offs between security guarantees, economic benefits, and human-rights concerns. The objective is to negotiate an agreement on Iran's nuclear programme that all sides can accept — within the constraints of an online format and limited time. The goal is *not* a 1:1 recreation of the historical deal; we are far more interested in dynamics and improvisation than authenticity.

One more skill we want you to practise: orienting yourself quickly with only basic tools. The jump from "here is a briefing" to "we need to draft an agreement about this — how does that even work?" is the key move in real policy work. Being confused and having to figure things out within your team is a feature, not a bug.

Roles and teams

Participants are divided into five teams:

- **Iran** — a four-member delegation led by the Foreign Minister, with deputies for nuclear and economic affairs and a strategic adviser.
- **Council of the EU / European Council** — six member-state representatives (France, Germany, the United Kingdom, Italy, Sweden, Poland) with different national priorities.
- **European Commission** — four officials from DG Trade and DG Energy: the EU's technical and legal backbone.

- **European Parliament** — five MEPs from different political groups (EPP, S&D, Renew, Greens/EFA, ECR), voicing democratic and value-based pressures.

- **EU High Representative** — the EU's chief diplomat, who chairs the talks.

Every player receives an individual role brief with their function's motivations, red lines, and negotiating style. Play your role as a real stakeholder with those interests — even as you work toward an overall agreement. All roles are **functions, not named individuals:** you are "France" or "the Iranian Foreign Minister", never a real person.

How the deal is adopted

Iran decides through its Foreign Minister. The Council decides by **consensus** — every member state must agree. The Parliament endorses by simple majority of its MEPs. The Commission and the High Representative do not vote. If any of these fails, there is no deal. No deal is a possible outcome, not a failure of the exercise.
The United States is not played by anyone; its reactions arrive through the facilitators, and you will have to decide how much they matter.

Rules of diplomacy and etiquette

(Read aloud at the start of the session.)

- **Stay in character:** negotiate as your function, in a diplomatic register. Focus on positions and interests, never on the person playing the role. No personal remarks, insults, or ad hominem comments — in-character sharpness must never land out of character.

- **Respect the floor**: in plenary, speak only when recognised by the chair (the High Representative), who manages the speaking order so everyone is heard. No interruptions, no talking over others.

- **Time discipline:** opening statements are strictly **30 seconds** per bloc; the chair or facilitator will enforce limits, and being cut off is nothing personal. Plan your key points to fit.

- **Online decorum:** camera on, microphone muted when not speaking, profile renamed to your function with your institution's logo before the session starts.

- **Chat:** the text chat is for procedural and technical issues, not side negotiations. Private team coordination belongs in your team channel or breakout room.

- **The tap-out:** at any moment, any participant may pause or step out of the simulation, no questions asked. Message the facilitator or simply say "tap-out". Simulations run on pressure; the tap-out is what makes the pressure safe. You may also use the facilitator back-channel for a brief private consultation if you are lost and need to get back on track.

- **Rule zero:** the facilitator's ruling is final and follows the spirit of the rules, not their letter.

- **Stay in the simulation:** the activity runs for a limited time and is only meaningful if you bring energy to it. There is one break; either side of it, be present.

Technical logistics

The simulation runs entirely online (our platform: Discord, with a shared Google Doc for drafting).

- A **plenary room** hosts all chaired sessions; **team channels** are your private spaces; three **thematic breakout rooms** open during negotiations. You may move between breakout rooms freely during multi-track phases — this freedom exists to make diplomacy fast, not to "listen in"; do not abuse it.

- The **shared document** is the single authoritative text of the emerging deal. The High Representative's team manages it, but every team may propose wording, add clauses, and flag issues — and may keep its own working documents besides. If you agree on something verbally, it does not exist until it is in the text. Compiling changes into one document is itself an important drafting exercise.

- **Time is managed by the facilitator**, with a visible timer and broadcast announcements. Appoint your own timekeeper in breakouts; if a room runs over, expect a broadcast or a forced return.

- Log in a few minutes early; have a backup connection ready if you can. If you disconnect, rejoin and catch up from the shared document — your teammates can brief you. Any supplementary documents you want to circulate must be cleared with the facilitator first. Avoid screen-sharing.

- Once the simulation starts, even the facilitators will not have full information about what is happening where — the negotiation is deliberately fractured. Managing that fog is part of the game.

Schedule

The exercise runs in **two 45-minute blocks with a 10-minute break between them**, preceded by an asynchronous introductory briefing (posted about a week ahead, with roles distributed) and a short welcome, and followed by a debrief; the full debrief continues in the next course session.

- **Block 1 — Mandates, Openings & First Contacts:** team huddles to craft your bloc's mandate and red lines; a plenary of **30-second opening statements**; the High Representative names the main points of conve-rgence and conflict; then the negotiation tracks open for a first round of bargaining *(Energy & Economy, Sanctions & Rights, Security & Monitoring:* names, not walls: the topics connect, and procedure is yours to invent).
  The High Representative and the Commission can use this time to start drafting options.

- **The break:** the High Representative, with the Commission, distills a one-page **Draft Framework** — a rough skeleton of a possible agreement and its fault lines and posts it as the starting point for the second block. Expect news from the outside world around this time.

- **Block 2 — Bargaining & Adoption:** the main negotiation. Shuttle between rooms, build coalitions, trade across tracks, and get agreed wording into the shared text under time pressure, and possibly under pressure from Washington. The High Representative then enumerates the remaining conflicts for focused resolution, the finalised text goes to the vote under the adoption rules above, and each bloc gives a 30–60-second closing statement in role.

Before the simulation, do not communicate about the scenario with participants outside your team; your team channel is the place for preparation.

Key principles in brief

- **Mandates:** agree your team's minimum goals and red lines early; adjust them consciously, not by accident.
- **Package deals:** link issues ("stricter inspections if faster sanctions relief"); nothing is agreed until everything is agreed.
- **Credibility:** do not promise what your role could never deliver.
- **External events:** facilitators may inject news — statements from Washington, leaks, reports. Treat them as real and respond in role.
- **Winning:** there is no win/lose state. There is the outcome your faction wanted, the outcome the room produced, and the distance between them — which is what the debrief and your written reflection are about.

Recommended preparation

- Study the shape of the sanctions regime before the deal — see the annex below. Swap notes and ideas with your teammates.
- Edward Fishman, *Chokepoints: American Power in the Age of Economic Warfare* has a whole chapter on the JCPOA, its negotiation and results.
- Your role handout lists what your function needs you to know. An hour of preparation shows; three hours show more.

Annex — Sanctions on Iran as of 2015 (pre-JCPOA)

Prepared by Paul Diegel.

Area	European Union	United Nations	USA
Arms & military	Embargo on arms sales; restrictions on dual-use goods for nuclear/ military use	Ban on arms exports/imports; prohibition on ballistic-missile activities (UNSCR 1737, 1747, 1929)	Complete ban on arms sales; sanctions on IRGC and defence firms
Nuclear & dual-use tech	Ban on nuclear-related goods and dual-use tech exports	Ban on transfer of sensitive nuclear/missile technology	Prohibition on US persons and foreign entities supplying nuclear or dual-use goods
Oil & gas	Full embargo on Iranian crude oil, petroleum products, and natural gas (2012)	None directly (indirect restriction via tech bans)	Import ban on Iranian oil (since 1995); secondary sanctions on foreign companies buying Iranian oil

Area	European Union	United Nations	USA
Petrochemicals	Export ban on key equipment for the petrochemical sector	None specific	Sanctions on petrochemical trade and investment (2012 NDAA, IFCA)
Financial sector	Freeze of Central Bank of Iran assets; ban on financial transfers; SWIFT access cut (2012)	Asset freezes on designated persons/entities; restrictions on Iranian banks	Ban on dealings with the Central Bank and major Iranian banks; secondary sanctions on foreign banks transacting with Iran
Shipping & aviation	Ban on cargo flights by Iranian carriers; restrictions on IRISL vessels in EU ports	None specific	Sanctions on IRISL and NITC; insurance ban for tankers carrying Iranian oil
Insurance	Prohibition on insurance/ reinsurance for Iranian	None specific	Ban on insurance/ reinsurance for Iranian trade and shipping

Area	European Union	United Nations	USA
Precious metals	Ban on trade in gold, diamonds, and other precious metals with Iranian entities	None specific	Prohibition on Iran's access to gold, precious metals, graphite, aluminium, steel
Individuals & entities	Asset freezes on hundreds of individuals, companies, banks, IRGC affiliates	Travel bans and asset freezes tied to the nuclear programme, IRGC, missile activities	Hundreds of persons and entities on the US Treasury SDN list, especially IRGC and Quds Force
Overall impact	Iran lost the EU as a key oil customer; assets frozen; cut from financial markets	International legitimacy for the sanctions regime; diplomatic isolation	Most extensive: secondary sanctions forced non-US companies worldwide to comply or lose US market access