

Why the nuclear deal is good for Israel

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The agreement between Iran and the P5+1 will determine the future of Iran's nuclear program for the next few decades. While negotiations were still under way, Netanyahu declared that the deal as it was taking shape spelled an end to the State of Israel. More than a few in the opposition joined in the doomsday predictions. However, senior officials in Israel's defense establishment hold that the deal would actually reduce the threat posed by Iran, freeing resources to deal with other threats. Conversations with senior security experts indicate that many of them share the view that given the realistic alternatives, the deal is in fact good for Israel's security. A sober analysis of the agreement announced today confirms this judgment.

Summary:

1. According to the terms of the agreement, Iran will require one year to accumulate the fissile material needed to create a nuclear device and will stay in that position for ten years, under close supervision. After that timeframe elapses, international supervision will continue.
2. When talks began, Iran was a month and a half away from accumulating the amount of material needed for assembling a nuclear weapon. Had negotiations, adamantly opposed by Netanyahu, never begun, Iran would now be even closer to that point. **Thanks to the talks, Iran's nuclear program has been scaled back for the first time in over a decade.** In other words, if the West had heeded Netanyahu's advice and not begun the last round of negotiations, Iran would now be much closer to achieving military nuclear capabilities.
3. **There is no better option.** The existing alternatives are much worse:
 - Continuing as before: Without a deal, Iran would be even closer to a bomb and additional sanctions would be blocked by Russia and China (who refused to tighten the sanctions without negotiation). In any round of future talks, Iran would be closer to a nuclear weapon, and therefore in a stronger position to negotiate.
 - An Israeli attack on Iran: According to the most optimistic estimates, an Israeli attack would delay the nuclear plan by three years. The price would be war with Iran, likely flanked by Hezbollah and some of the militant groups in Gaza. After two years, Iran could breakout and create a nuclear weapon with a perfect excuse as to why it needs it. An attack would therefore not help Israel, certainly compared to a deal that would delay the nuclear program

for an entire decade and leave a wide berth for Israel and the U.S. to act upon Iranian breach of the agreement.

- A U.S. attack on Iran: Such an attack would roll the nuclear program back for some four years, after which the U.S. would have to repeatedly attack again. However, the U.S. will not attack without Iran violating a deal. As Mitt Romney's reluctance to commit to a strike in Iran during his 2012 presidential campaign demonstrated, the next president, whether Democrat or Republican, will need a very good reason to drag war-weary Americans into yet another military campaign in the Middle-East.
4. **Netanyahu claims that the agreement places Iran on the nuclear threshold in ten years – but without the deal, it would be there by now.**
 5. By adopting a rejectionist approach to the entire negotiation process, **Netanyahu forfeited any way of influencing and improving the agreement.** He also undercut Israel's ability to coordinate intelligence supervision over Iran with global partners, and limited the potential security guarantees that Israel would receive following a deal.

Analysis

What does Iran have now?

The uranium track. The Material required for Nuclear weapons can be produced in uranium enrichment facilities. The two underground enrichment facilities currently operating in Iran – Natanz and Fordow – hold a total of 19,000 centrifuges, of which 18,000 are first generation centrifuges and 1,000 are newer and can enrich uranium at twice the speed. Of the first generation centrifuges, some 9,000 are actively used to enrich uranium. Iran also has some eight tons of low-enriched uranium (LEU) that is ready for further enrichment. Iran had enough LEU to make its first nuclear weapon as far back as 2009.

The plutonium track. Weapons-grade plutonium is created from uranium in certain nuclear reactors. The single nuclear reactor currently operating in Iran is in Bushehr and is used to generate electricity. Iran couldn't extract the small amount of plutonium created in the core this plant even if it wanted to, as it is obliged to transfer the spent fuel rods in which plutonium is formed to Russia under the plant's operation agreement. The heavy water reactor under construction in Arak is capable of making weapons-grade plutonium, and much of its infrastructure is already in place.

How long before Iran can make nuclear weapons?

No one knows exactly how much time Iran will need to develop a nuclear fission device and figure out how to mount it on a missile, but estimates converge at several months at most. The real question, therefore, is how long it will take Iran to enrich enough fissile material to create its first nuclear fission weapon – as the rest of the work can be more easily hidden and defended from potential attacks. According to estimates, Iran needs as little as another month and a half to enrich enough uranium for its first nuclear bomb. That has been the status since November 2013, when Iran entered into the interim deal with the P5+1 freezing its nuclear program and rolling back parts of it in return for a partial easing of sanctions. Incidentally, Netanyahu stridently opposed that deal – without which Iran would be much closer to having an atomic bomb.

What has Iran committed to in the nuclear deal?

The uranium track.

Iran's breakout time will be extended to at least a year and will remain at that length for the next ten years. To that end, Iran will have to dismantle two-thirds of its centrifuges, and leave in place only 6,000 first generation centrifuges of which 5,000 will be used for uranium enrichment. The other 1,000 will be installed in Fordow, but Iran will be prohibited from using them for uranium enrichment or related research for fifteen years. The decommissioned centrifuges will be stored in facilities supervised by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). Iran will be permitted to hold only 300 kilograms of LEU for the next fifteen years – about a third of the amount needed for a single bomb. Restrictions will be placed on Iranian research and development concerning advanced centrifuges for 8-10 years.

The plutonium track.

The plant in Arak, which could enable production of weapons-grade plutonium, will be redesigned so it can no longer do so. The components already built in the plant and adapted for military nuclear needs will be destroyed or removed from the country, and Iran will be prohibited from building new heavy water plants for fifteen years. The spent fuel rods from the plant containing the plutonium will also be removed from the country for as long as the plant is working, and Iran will be forbidden to build the facilities needed to extract plutonium from them for fifteen years.

Monitoring.

To ensure that Iran meets the terms of the agreement, it will be forced to grant IAEA inspectors regular access to all its nuclear facilities, including short notice inspections. The IAEA will also be granted access to Iran's centrifuge-building infrastructure for twenty years, and to the uranium mines and the sites for producing raw materials for uranium enrichment for 25 years. Iran will have

to notify the IAEA in advance of any plan to build new enrichment facilities. These sections of the agreement are meant to guarantee that Iran will not engage in prohibited activity in undeclared sites. Supervision of the nuclear materials from the earliest stages of the fuel cycle onwards should prevent their delivery to secret facilities. The section requiring prior notification is meant to ensure that should Iran be caught in any phase of planning or construction of enrichment facilities – it will not be able to argue that it intended to declare the facility at a later stage.

Research.

To ensure that Iran does not carry out research on military nuclear power, the P5+1 wish to also supervise "regular" military sites in the country. Iran objects on the grounds that other than nuclear secrets, it has military secrets like any other country and has the right to protect them. The final agreement is that the IAEA inspectors will be granted access to military sites to make sure that they do not employ radioactive substances; however, entry into the facilities will require prior notice, enabling Iran to appeal the reason for the visit. The final decision about such visits will be made by an arbitration body in which the west enjoys a majority within 24 days of the first notice by the IAEA.

Full cooperation with the IAEA.

In the early '00s, Iran engaged in researching essential technologies for developing a nuclear weapon. In 2003, fearing an American invasion, Iran froze or substantially restricted this research. However, the activity was exposed and brought to the IAEA's attention. Iran remains steadfast in its insistence that the exposed research did not focus on nuclear weapons capacity. The IAEA and Iran have reached a roadmap that will enable the conclusion of the investigation by December 2015. According to some sources, in the final report the agency will present its view on the prohibited research conducted by Iran while presenting Iran's version on the issue beside it.

Sanctions.

In exchange for abiding by the terms of the agreement, the sanctions imposed on Iran by the UN Security Council, the European Union, and the U.S. Congress in relation to its nuclear activity will be lifted. Sanctions relating to other activities of the Iranian regime such as human rights violations and support of terror will not be lifted. The Iranian economy has suffered severely from the international sanctions, and this pressured the regime into progress in negotiations. Iran demanded that all sanctions be lifted once a deal was reached, while the P5+1 demanded their removal only upon implementation of the agreement. Consequently, the decision on lifting the sanctions will be declared prior to implementation, but will only come into effect after the IAEA has verified that Iran has stuck to its end of the deal. This rhetorical exercise is intended to help the Iranian regime explain to the public why the sanctions will not immediately be lifted. In fact, it will take several months to remove the sanctions. However, even after the deal is signed, Iran will continue to live under the threat of a 'Snap Back' of international sanctions. If one of the P5+1 is concerned over a

possible Iranian breach of the agreement, it can bring the matter before the UN security council which will have to positively decide to prevent the sanctions from snapping back into place.

What happens now?

Now that the deal has been agreed, both sides will have to ratify it – a fairly straightforward step for most parties to the talks, but a complicated one for Iran and for the U.S. In Iran, the deal will be subject to the confirmation of the supreme leader Khamenei and his subordinate Supreme National Security Council. In the U.S., the deal will undergo a sixty-day review in Congress. If Congress supports the agreement or fails to reach a decision on the matter, President Obama will be able to lift the sanctions. Should Congress vote against the agreement, Obama will have to veto the decision and will not be able to suspend or remove the sanctions for a limited period of time. Despite the expected pressure from Israel, it seems unlikely that the Republicans will be able to garner a veto proof majority. Once the deal is ratified, Iran will implement its various articles and only then will the sanctions be lifted.

What happens in fifteen years?

In fifteen years, Iran's breakout time for a nuclear weapon will be significantly shorter. However, the international community will continue to supervise its activity according to the agreement, and according to Iran's responsibilities under the NPT and the Additional Protocol. Iran will be able to enrich larger amounts of uranium using advanced centrifuges and will be permitted to build new heavy water reactors. However, it will still be prohibited from developing a military nuclear program, under threat of an international response. It is worth noting that without the deal, Iran would have reached a similar position in the very near future. Additionally, Israel and its allies can use the time and intrusive inspections in Iran to plan for contingencies.

Who is to say that Iran won't violate the deal?

Iran has a long track record of violating international laws and demands, on various issues including its nuclear program. No one can guarantee that it will not renege on the present deal, and the P5+1 are not relying on such a promise. That is why the deal was shaped to make it difficult for Iran to violate. If Iran tried to breakout today, it could obtain enough enriched uranium for a first nuclear weapon device within a month and a half, rendering international prevention difficult if not

impossible. After the deal is implemented, even if Iran tries to breakout, the U.S. and other international actors, including Israel, will have an entire year to discover the breach before Iran obtains enough material for a first nuclear weapon. This is a vast improvement on the international ability to supervise Iran's nuclear program, whether Iran sticks to the deal or not.

Holding Iran back from the bomb relies on several factors: reducing the amount of LEU in Iran from some 8,000 kgs at present to some 300 kgs; limiting the amount of active centrifuges in the country; and instating strict inspection and verification mechanisms that will make it difficult for Iran to divert fissile material to secret facilities – even if it succeeds in the very difficult task of building those facilities unnoticed. The real cause for concern, therefore, is not a broad violation of the deal, expulsion of the international inspectors, or a dash towards a bomb. Rather, it is the possible gradual corrosion of sections in the deal. That is why Iran will remain under intelligence surveillance even after the deal is implemented so that such breaches, should they occur, will be discovered in time.

What about Iran's missile program, support of terror, and human rights violations?

This is the controversial part of the deal. Various sanctions are currently imposed on Iran for its nuclear activity, human rights violations in its territory, and support of terror. Under the new deal, only some of the sanctions will be lifted and not immediately. The embargo on Iran's nuclear weapons will be lifted in five years from now, and the sanctions on its ballistic missile program will be lifted within eight years – if Iran abides by its commitments to the West.

Although this section of the deal is contingent on Iran upholding its obligations, it is problematic and neither the U.S. nor the European countries intended to include it. Russia and China were the ones who forced its inclusion in the deal – the very countries that Netanyahu, Lieberman and others in Israel's right wing have been touting for years as Israel's new partners in foreign affairs.

Who stands to benefit and who stands to lose from the deal?

Like any good agreement, the Iran deal will leave all sides somewhat disappointed and partially satisfied.

Iran will gain the removal of the strict sanctions imposed due to its nuclear program, and the regime will be able to regain stability. In fifteen years, Iran will be able make the leap towards nuclear military capability, free of the many restrictions it is currently under. However, Iran has been forced to agree to harsh limitations on its nuclear power, to intensive international supervision, and to a scaling back of many achievements in the area. On the public level, the Iranian conservatives won

international recognition of Iran's right to enrich uranium and gave a show of resistance "Western dictates". At the same time, the deal is seen as an achievement of Rouhani and the moderates within the regime and can be expected to encourage more openness to the West, weakening the grip of the Revolutionary Guard.

The international community has gained a deal that will significantly restrict Iran's ability to develop a nuclear weapon, will increase supervision over Iran's nuclear program, and will allow Western investors back in to the Iranian market. Scaling back Iran's nuclear program creates a buffer space that will allow for preventive action, should Iran try to breakout, and has vastly reduced the immediate nuclear threat to the Middle East and to Israel in particular. Also, resolving the nuclear issue may open up possibilities for collaboration between Iran and the West to Bring about Assad's transition out of power in Syria and promote stability there. However, the international community had to relinquish its demand that Iran dismantle all enrichment facilities, agreed to eventually lift the arms embargo and apparently will also give up on Iran admitting to past nuclear weapons research.

Why is the deal good for Israel?

While the new agreement is not ideal, it is the best solution to be had at present. It is certainly better than Israel's alternatives for dealing with the Iranian nuclear threat, as top security officials have noted. For example, Meir Dagan, former head of Mossad, called Netanyahu's claim that the deal will allow Iran to breakout in less than a year "bullshit". Amos Yadlin, the former chief of IDF Defense Intelligence, explained that the deal could hold Iran's nuclear program back for many years, and therefore cannot be called bad. He stressed that the deal will not "whitewash" Iran in the eyes of the world and argued that the proposed deal should be examined in light of Israel's alternatives. Ephraim Halevy, another former head of Mossad, stated that Iran's nuclear program does not pose an existential threat to Israel and actually has many advantages, including reduction of the number of centrifuges in Iran and limiting use of the Fordo enrichment facility to research only. Halevy added that a military attack on Iran would not be effective and would not prevent nuclear progress. Yuval Diskin, former head of the ISA (Israel Security Agency or Shin Bet) posted a Facebook status last March stating that "Netanyahu has failed in almost every major area. When you look at the status of Iran's nuclear program since he came into power, the figures are unbelievable: at the start of his second term in office (2009), Iran had more than 6,000 centrifuges for enriching uranium. It now has three times that amount. Until 2009, Iran produced some 1,000 kgs of enriched uranium. That number is now more than ten times higher. During these years, Iran established an underground enrichment facility and built a heavy water plant that can produce plutonium. But the greatest strategic damage of all is the deterioration in relations with the U.S. After massively failing

to take operative action to stop Iran's nuclear program, Netanyahu switched to a confrontational diplomatic approach to the U.S. Administration. In our dealings with the U.S. we must take care not to jeopardize the strategic relationship that built up. These are the best relationships I can recall with the U.S. intelligence and defense communities. Damaging them means strategically damaging Israel's defense capabilities." Diskin added that "Netanyahu cannot lead a diplomatic move [against Iran] and has already proven himself incapable of making historic decisions on any issue, including Iran's nuclear power – an issue on which, as I have been saying for a long time, Netanyahu's motivations are messianic." Uzi Arad, former National Security Advisor, defined Netanyahu's management the Iranian nuclear issue as an "own goal".

Why is the deal better than the alternatives? First, it will roll back Iran's nuclear program, which is currently mere months away from a nuclear bomb, and maintain this roll back for at least ten years. During that time, emergency scenarios for dealing with an Iranian attempt to acquire nuclear weapons can be further developed, not to mention the fact that it is not certain that Iran will breakout once the decade is over. Also, as part of the deal, the U.S. Administration is offering Israel added security guarantees that can help improve intelligence and operative capabilities for a future strike on Iran.

This solution is better than the existing alternatives:

An Israeli military attack on Iran. Assuming that such an attack is still possible, it is not clear how effective it would be in stopping Iran's nuclear program. Even in a very optimistic scenario, it would result in a two-year delay of the program rather than its elimination. After those two years, Iran would again be able to develop its program, but this time armed with a brilliant excuse. Indeed, many experts believe that Iran would expedite its military nuclear program should such an attack occur. Moreover, attacking Iran would potentially embroil Israel in a war with Iran and Hezbollah, possibly also reigniting the Gaza front in a confrontation with Iranian subsidiary Islamic Jihad. All this besides the billions of dollars that Israel would spend in retaining military readiness for such an attack, instead of directing them to other military or civilian needs.

An American attack on Iran. The U.S. has the military capacity to significantly hurt Iran and buy an estimated four-year hiatus in its nuclear program. However, the current administration is not seriously considering such an attack, nor did the previous one under George W. Bush. Americans are tired of the Iraqi mire created by false allegations concerning weapons of mass destruction; they are not eager to engage in yet another Middle East war. Internationally, too, American credibility suffered a major blow when the WMD claim about Iraq was shown to be false. The vast majority of Americans support a deal with Iran, despite their mistrust of Tehran and support for Israel. In these circumstances, the chances of a U.S. administration launching an attack on Iran are miniscule. Signing a deal, on the other hand, would provide the U.S. with domestic and international legitimacy

to attack, should Iran violate the agreement and may give the American public the time it needs to seriously consider such a move.

Continued international sanctions on Iran. One reason that the sanctions against Iran have been effective is the international consensus they garnered, including Russia and China. This global agreement was forged by Iran's rejection of compromise talks held with the U.S. when Obama entered office, and was complemented by Iranian violations of international law. However, the point of the sanctions was to force Iran to negotiate, and they cannot be maintained – certainly not exacerbated – if that goal is no longer relevant.

It is easy to forget that before the talks, Iran was in a more advanced position than it is now. Without the deal, Israel could not be assured that it would catch Iranian violations in time to stop them and would be forced to resort to either an attack, with all the negative ramifications that would entail, or to come to terms with a nuclear Iran. Moreover, in this scenario, even if the sanctions were to eventually compel Iran to negotiate, its nuclear progress would place it in a stronger negotiation position. Keeping up the sanctions would not have stopped Iran's nuclear program, would not have promoted a better deal in future, and might even have weakened international and Israeli positions in any future negotiations.