



## **The US and Us: The Mitvim-DC Monthly**

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*The US and Us: The Mitvim-DC Monthly* is a monthly report on US-Middle East issues. Each report includes an analysis, a roundup of commentaries, and a profile of a major US policymaker. The series is of particular importance at a time in which personnel changes and policy re-evaluations regarding Israel and the Middle East are taking place. This report is prepared by Brian Reeves, a Visiting Fellow at Mitvim, [breeves@mitvim.org.il](mailto:breeves@mitvim.org.il). Previous issues can be [read here](#).

### **A. Analysis**

True to expectations, the April 2 announcement of a framework agreement on an Iranian nuclear deal was followed by weeks of wrangling in the US Senate as the Republican majority vied to shore up sufficient Democratic support to secure a veto-proof bill providing a Congressional check on any deal before the June 30 deadline.

On the whole, the past few weeks have not been unkind to Obama's team. After the framework agreement received a relatively positive reception, hawkish Democratic Senator and vocal critic of Obama, [Bob Menendez, was forced to step down](#) from his post as head Democrat on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, further dwindling the once ample support base for the toughest of proposed measures on enforcing sanctions and mandating Congressional oversight before Obama signs a final agreement. Further lobbying in Congress on the administration's part led to a [tacitly agreed-upon bill](#), formally called *The Iran Nuclear Agreement Review Act of 2015*, that would allot Congress a 60-day period to approve or disapprove such a deal.

The bill in its current form, however, has proven harder to retain. Hardline senators and prospective presidential candidates looking to take a bold stance have endeavored tirelessly to add stiffer measures to the bill. Despite protestations from [AIPAC](#) and the bill's author, Senate Foreign Relations Chairman Bob Corker (R-Tenn.), they seem willing to risk losing key Democratic support by lumping on new measures, not least of which include an amendment presented by [2016 presidential candidate](#) Senator Marco Rubio to mandate that [Iran formally recognize Israel](#).

On the subject of Israel, the White House has since made efforts to [mend ties with Prime Minister Netanyahu](#) since relations strained in the weeks preceding and following the Israeli general election. Secretary John Kerry's recent [interview on Israel's Channel 10](#) can be seen as part of this overall initiative. Netanyahu's own strides in this direction by releasing money [withheld from the Palestinian Authority](#) have however failed to produce a tangible result as White House officials continued to express concern about Israel's new hard right government coalition's [commitment to two-state solution](#). Familiar hints about not protecting Israel at the UN

were reiterated, although the administration ultimately [advised France to postpone its efforts](#) to promote an Israeli-Palestinian agreement via this international route until after June 30.

Looking ahead, it appears that the Iran bill will indeed have to remain in its current form if its proponents are to maintain a two-thirds majority needed to guarantee that Congress will have a final say in any deal. Speaker of the House John Boehner, admitted this was the case when he [spoke](#) before a Republican Jewish Coalition audience in Las Vegas. A lack of added amendments would mean that Netanyahu and his ardent allies in Congress may have to wait until the final 60-day review period for a deal before making a last ditch effort to derail it. What's more, he may need to tread lightly, as any further devicive attempts on his part may later be returned with pressure on the Palestinian issue before summer's end.

## **B. Article Roundup**

### ***US and Israel***

Brian Katulis, at the Center for American Progress, and Dan Arbell, at the Brookings Institution, offer [five areas](#) for improving US-Israel relations while the Middle East region remains in flux.

The Israel Policy Forum released a [statement of principles](#) supporting the two-state solution and the Arab Peace Initiative.

Michael Koplow, at the Washington-based Israel Institute, calls in [his blog](#) on Israeli and American leaders to adjust their mutual expectations, keep disputes largely behind closed doors and work for solutions while recognizing each other's [security environment and domestic constraints](#).

A new Washington Institute [publication](#) presents "Key Elements of a New Strategy for the United States in the Middle East." Along with recommendations to address identity issues in the region and to develop partnerships in some of its most war torn areas, the policy paper counsels the US to privately engage with Israel to prevent a further deterioration in relations.

### ***US and Iran***

Various experts at the Center for American Progress implored Congress to [defer all legislative measures](#) on an Iran deal until after negotiations conclude. They then outline what provisions should be in the deal and how to improve the current framework, such as a measure to expedite the "snapback" process for sanctions in case of an Iranian violation.

George Perkovich, at the Carnegie Endowment, lays out in a [comprehensive article](#) the case for why an Iran deal cannot be justly compared to the ultimately failed 1994 North Korea deal.

Cheryl Benard, author of a new book titled *Breaking the Stalemate: The Case for Engaging the Iranian Opposition*, suggests that the US sustain breakthroughs in a nuclear deal and hedge against failure by strengthening relations with [Iran's pro-democracy opposition](#).

Dennis Ross, at The Washington Institute, argues that for a viable Iran deal the US should ensure that the [agreed upon terms remain transparent](#) in order to prevent loopholes and misinterpretations.

Soner Cagaptay, James Jeffrey and Mehdi Khalaji, at The Washington Institute, chide that Iran will not abandon its “revolutionary” [ambitions](#) after a nuclear agreement, and cannot be counted on to seek to join the international system.

Paul Pillar, a Senior Fellow at Brookings and the Center for Security Studies at Georgetown University, [takes swipes at the “anti-agreement agitation”](#) voiced in the foregoing Washington Institute article. Pillar dismisses its likening of Iran to the 20<sup>th</sup> Century’s despotic regimes and the notion that Iran is threatening regional hegemony.

## **C. Policy Profile**

### **Primary Trail Highlights Schism in the GOP on Israel and Iran**

In many respects the month of April 2015 became the official launch of the primary season for the 2016 presidential race. Both Democratic forerunner [Hillary Clinton](#) and Republican hopeful Senator [Marco Rubio](#) announced their candidacy this month, while other credible Republican contenders Governors [Jeb Bush](#) (Florida) and [Scott Walker](#) (Wisconsin) ramped up their unofficial campaigns and are expected to make official announcements in the coming few weeks.

Arguably the more dynamic of the primaries, the Republican primary has now already seen a split on foreign policy, namely between the “establishment” views of Bush versus the more hardline conservative stance of Rubio. Bush has been accredited as having been named [Henry Kissinger’s choice](#), though he recently had to distance himself from former Secretary of States [James Baker](#) who criticized Netanyahu’s negotiating tactics and continued settlement construction at J Street’s annual conference. As for Rubio, his activities concerning Israel and the Iran bill have attracted the exclusive backing of the hard-right Casino Magnate, [Sheldon Adelson](#).

In addition to this substantial policy gulf between the GOP contenders, the most striking feature of it is that it elevates Adelson, a businessman, on the level of some of the country’s most seasoned chief diplomats.

This phenomenon highlights what some are predicting as an attempted departure from the predominant center-right approach on foreign policy, which Republican Presidents through George W. Bush have taken, to one espousing a more populist, hardline right worldview that calls into question decades of American positions on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the two-state solution. Such a rightwing lurch certainly has had its precedents in the past several years, first with the rise of the Tea Party under Obama’s first term and most recently with [several impressive Tea Party victories](#) during the 2014 midterm elections.

Still a long ways off before November 2016, it is far too early to tell which side on this right-wing spectrum will prevail electorally, how far to the right Republican candidates are willing to go to fire up their base, and how far back to the center they will return to curry support from

Independents and moderate Democrats. Even then, the full extent of a rightward shift in the Republican leadership on foreign policy toward Israel and Iran may not fully be answered if a Republican does not in fact make it to the White House. For now, what perhaps can be concluded is that Sheldon Adelson's foreign policy views contrast starkly with those of former Republican presidents, and if a candidate receives affirmation on this ideology from the majority of Republican voters—not to mention the American people—its reverberations may not just affect the White House, but also the agendas in Congress.