



# **The Nuclear Deal with Iran: Commentary & Analysis**

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**The deal reached between Iran and the six world powers is likely to have significant implications for Iran's role in the region, Israel-US relations, domestic American politics, Israel's foreign policy, and next steps regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This document includes commentary and analysis on these issues by [Mitvim Institute](#) experts: Prof. Moshe Ma'oz, Dr. Nimrod Goren, Dr. Ilai Saltzman, and Brian Reeves.**

## **An Israeli campaign against the deal will further damage Israel-US relations**

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The signing of a nuclear deal with Iran will further aggravate the already tense relations between Israel and the US regardless of the exact details of the agreement or the nature of the mechanisms put in place to make it work. To be more specific, this dramatic development will drive Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and President Barack Obama further apart. The Prime Minister presented no coherent and practical alternative; he merely advocated maintaining the sanctions against Iran and dismantling its nuclear program, even by force. This "all or nothing" approach was utterly unacceptable and unfeasible from Obama's vantage point and mutual criticism between the two leaders has lasted until the very last minute.

The signing of the nuclear agreement will mark a new stage in Netanyahu's anti-agreement crusade. Given the fact that the US Congress will now have 60 days to review and assess the signed accord before lifting the sanctions on Iran, we should expect a massive Israeli campaign against its approval. While Netanyahu will not be invited to give another anti-agreement speech on Capitol Hill, he will use every possible asset to prevent Congress from lifting the sanctions. Netanyahu's proxies, including Israeli Ambassador to the US Ron Dermer and

AIPAC, will engage every legislator, Republican or Democrat, and will be extremely vocal in the public sphere, criticizing the agreement and the president's handling of the negotiations.

Regardless of the outcome of the battle in Congress, one obvious casualty will be US-Israel relations. Israel has become a partisan political issue, dividing Congress and the Jewish community and forcing people to choose between their President and their support of Israel, as Netanyahu's speech in Congress vividly showed. Obama will do anything in his power to prevent Congress from interfering in what he believes to be one of the most significant diplomatic achievements of his administration. The crossfire will certainly take its toll and the only question is: What exact price Israel will pay?

Netanyahu's maximalist and uncompromising approach throughout the nuclear talks left Israel marginalized and disengaged from the negotiations. In the post-deal period, the Israeli government must engage the Administration in good faith and regain access to the decision-making process in order to influence the ways in which the agreement is enforced and Iran's nuclear facilities are monitored. Moreover, in the long-term, Israel should seek a reversal of Iran's destabilizing policies in the region through encouraging a potential US-Iranian rapprochement that could stem from the nuclear agreement.

## **A veto-proof majority in Congress against the deal is unlikely**

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Now, that an Iranian nuclear deal has been reached, the US Congress must decide whether it risks being a hindrance or abettor to this historic compromise. Particularly in the Senate, where it can still plausibly go either way on whether the chamber can muster a veto-proof, two-thirds majority against an agreement, the reputation of many Democratic members on the fence hangs in the balance.

With this in mind, recent statements from leading senators appear to corroborate the prevailing assessment that this two-thirds majority cannot be achieved. Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R) repeatedly called an expected deal a "hard sell," but refused to impart a more forceful response. Senior Senator Lindsey Graham (R) contended he was in favor of the interim deal and applauded Secretary John Kerry's efforts, while qualifying these comments with a formulaic critique of President Obama's supposed willingness to give concessions. Senior Democratic Senator and known hawk on Iran, Robert Menendez, voiced his concerns but would not rule out support for a deal.

Given the influence of these three senators, their statements are of considerable import. They each demonstrate pains to hedge their bets on the passing and long-term success of a deal, and more importantly to help prepare their

constituencies for coming to terms with that deal. This latter, critical aspect of helping one's nation take advantage of any new, significant reality is now also being practiced by Iranian President Rouhani.

With a deal soon to be reached and under review in Congress, Israel's leadership now has a choice. It can either continue to level unrestrained rebuke at its American counterparts and pronounce doomsday predictions. Or it can still voice its legitimate concerns, but through language and actions mindful of its relationship with the US, while preparing new regional policies and its citizens for both the challenges and opportunities that this new paradigm in the Middle East may present. If strategy, not ideology, is to prevail, then it should adopt the second option.

## **The international community can now re-engage in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict**

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Israeli politicians, from the coalition and opposition alike, were quick to state unequivocally that the deal poses grave danger to Israel. They did so before even having the chance to read the text of the final agreement. This is characteristic of Israeli statesmanship, which tends to emphasize the risks and the negative aspects of international and regional developments. The problem with this approach is that it lessens the ability to identify opportunities in a timely manner. Moreover, it tends to create tensions between Israel and its Western allies, which often distance Israel from international decision-making processes relating to international issues of historical significance.

Israel would be wise to react positively to the efforts invested by the six world powers, among which are Israel's two greatest allies – the US and Germany, to address a major security threat that Israel faces. Israel would also be wise to refrain from launching a new struggle against the deal that has been reached. Instead, and despite its reservations from the deal, Israel should now work together with the US and the broader international community, and seek to leverage the deal to promote its diplomatic and security interests.

The fact that a deal has been reached on the Iranian nuclear program also means that the international community's self-imposed hiatus from dealing with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has come to an end. As a result of the recent Israeli elections and the negotiations with Iran, international efforts on this issue have been frozen for over half a year. However, Israel did not use this respite to propose its own framework for advancing the two-state solution, and now the international powers are likely to return to these issues with greater urgency and perhaps in a more coordinated fashion in light of their successful model of joint negotiations vis-à-vis the Iranians.

In the coming months, the US and the Europeans are expected to promote initiatives that will bring more clarity to the parameters for resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, to the potential fruits of peace, and to the potential price each side will pay in its absence. Israel should be as engaged as possible in the shaping of these efforts and should avoid slamming the door on its Western allies, as she did on the Iranian nuclear talks. If the current Israeli government does not do so, the Opposition will have an opportunity to carve a significant political-diplomatic role for itself, vis-à-vis both the international community and the Israeli public.

## **Iran's regional role after the deal: Fighting IS while promoting a "Shi'i Crescent"**

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The nuclear deal will increase Iran's strategic, political and economic power. The crucial question is whether or not Tehran will employ its newly accumulated influence to advance stability in the Middle East and to settle its ideological and strategic disputes with Sunni Muslim countries.

Iran is likely to expand its military and economic efforts to contain, if not defeat, IS forces in Iraq and Syria, who, in turn, are threatening Tehran's allies in Baghdad, Damascus and Hizballah, and are also a main source of regional instability. By doing so, it will contribute to regional stability. However, simultaneously, Iran is likely to continue pursuing its regional "Shi'i Crescent" strategy, which widens friction between Shi'is and Sunnis in several Arab countries, thus contributing to the region's instability.

Shi'i Iran by no means can afford to forsake the most important Shi'i shrines in Najaf and Karbala (Southern Iraq) and the majority (60%) Shi'i state of Iraq. Nor could Tehran abandon its Alawi (pseudo-Shi'i) ally in Damascus, being a crucial link to its Shi'i proxy, Hizballah, in Lebanon, as well as to its "Shi'i Crescent" strategy. Indeed, it may be also predicted that Iran will also use its new grand position to strengthen its would-be Shi'i Crescent by fostering the Shi'i communities in oil-producing Gulf state such as Bahrain, Kuwait and even Saudi Arabia, as well as Yemen.

In view of this possible scenario, Israel should find ways to establish solid strategic cooperation with Sunni-Muslim states in the region aiming at curbing this common Shi'i threat. A major condition for such strategic cooperation is for Israel to settle the Palestinian problem. Such bold policy may also reduce Iran's significant antagonism to Israel.