

ISSUES IN PERSPECTIVE

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Thinking about the Iran Deal

President Obama, the government of Iran, and other major nations including Britain, France and Russia, recently announced a framework for a deal to slow down Iran's nuclear program and remove the sanctions that have somewhat crippled the Iranian economy. That it is controversial is an understatement. Even after it was announced, there was evident disagreement between Iran and the US over when and how the sanctions would be removed and over details about inspections and verification as the agreement is implemented. This is astonishing in its own right because the announcement is only about a framework; the specific details about implementing the framework are yet to be negotiated and this is to be completed by 30 June 2015. Both Iran and the US face an incredibly complicated set of negotiations and there is absolutely no certainty a final agreement can indeed be reached. There are two analyses I have found helpful in thinking about this framework.

- First, columnist David Brooks summarizes a series of what "we have learned" statements:
 1. We have learned that Iran's supreme leader still regards the US as his enemy. He seriously questions the US's "devilish intentions" when it comes to this agreement.
 2. We have learned that the West wants this agreement more than Khamenei does. He declared that "I was never optimistic about negotiating with America."
 3. We have learned that the ayatollah is demanding total trust from us while offering maximum contempt in return. Brooks writes that "Khamenei communicated a smug and self-righteous sense of superiority toward the West throughout his remarks. He haughtily repeated his demand that the West permanently end all sanctions on the very day the deal is signed. He insisted that no inspectors could visit Iranian military facilities. This would make a hash of verification and enforcement."
 4. We have learned that Khamenei and the US see different realities. Khamenei affirmed that America is lying and "breaching promises." He argued that the White House "fact sheet" summarizing the framework "was wrong. They are always trying to deceive and break promises," he observed.
 5. We have learned that Khamenei is still bent on putting Iran on a collision course with Sunnis (e.g., Saudi Arabia) and the West. Indeed, he referred to Saudi leaders as "inexperienced youngsters."

As Brooks correctly observes, Khamenei's speech is entirely consistent with Iranian behavior: "Iran still fundamentally sees itself in a holy war with the West, a war that can be managed prudently but that is still a fundamental clash of values and interests. . . If Iran still has revolutionary intent, then no amount of treaty subtlety will enforce this deal. Iran will begin subtly subverting any agreement. It will continue to work on its advanced nuclear technology even during the agreement. It will inevitably use nuclear weaponry, or even the threat of eventual nuclear weaponry, to advance its apocalyptic interests." There is therefore no real evidence that Iran desires to change. President Obama is banking on the proposition that Iran is changing. Khamenei's speech gives no shred of evidence of this desire to change. Without that evidence, this is a very bad deal indeed.

- Second, former secretaries of state, Henry Kissinger and George Shultz, published a brilliant essay in the *Wall Street Journal* that provides a much-needed overview of this framework. They make clear that for 20 years, three presidents of both major parties have proclaimed that Iran with nuclear weapons is contrary to American and global interests—and that they were prepared to prevent this from happening. Iranian stubbornness in the negotiations has consistently been met with a willingness to break every deadlock with a new proposal. In the process, the Iranian nuclear program has reached a point officially described as being within three months of building a nuclear weapon. Under the proposed agreement, for 10 years Iran will never be further than one year from a nuclear weapon, and after a decade, will be significantly shorter. These two former leaders express three fundamental concerns about this proposed agreement:
 1. The ultimate significance of this agreement will depend on its verifiability and enforceability. Under the new agreement, Iran permanently gives up some of its equipment, facilities or fissile product to achieve the proposed constraints. But it only places them under temporary restriction and safeguard—amounting in many cases to a seal at the door of a depot or periodic visits by inspectors to declared sites. "The physical magnitude of the effort is daunting. Is the International Atomic Energy Agency technically, and in terms of human resources, up to so complex and vast an assignment? . . . The agreement's primary enforcement mechanism, the threat of renewed sanctions, emphasizes a broad-based asymmetry, which provides Iran permanent relief from sanctions in exchange for temporary restraints on Iranian conduct. . . Restoring the most effective sanctions will require coordinated international action. . . The gradual expiration of the framework agreement, beginning in a decade, will enable Iran to become a significant nuclear, industrial and military power after that time—in the scope and sophistication of its nuclear program and its latent capacity to weaponries at a time of its choosing."
 2. Long-term deterrence is a real issue in this agreement. In effect, the agreement concedes that Iran will become a nuclear power: "Some of the chief actors in the Middle East are likely to view the US as willing to concede a nuclear military capability to the country they consider their principal threat." Of course both Israel and Saudi Arabia

come to mind here. How will the US guarantee security to these neighbors of Iran? How can the US make certain that other Sunni nations do not also seek nuclear capability because of what the US is in effect conceding to Iran? How can the US guarantee that proliferation of nuclear weapons does not occur in the Middle East? On what concept of nuclear deterrence or strategic stability will international security now be based?

3. Most importantly: "If the world is to be spared even worse turmoil, the US must develop a strategic doctrine for the region. Stability requires an active American role. For Iran to be a valuable member of the international community, the prerequisite is that it accepts restraint on its ability to destabilize the Middle East and challenge the broader international order. Until clarity on an American strategic political concept is reached, the projected nuclear agreement will reinforce, not resolve, the world's challenges in the region."

It is difficult to be positive about the framework for the agreement with Iran. It defies credulity that we can truly trust Iran on this deal. It is also difficult to envision future presidents not lamenting this agreement, assuming Congress agrees with it. President Obama believes that he can draw Iran back into the family of nations and see it become a stabilizing force in the Middle East. There is almost nothing in the past 20 years of Iranian behavior that would cause the US (or anyone else for that matter) to actually believe this. Further, this framework basically concedes that within 10 years Iran will be a nuclear power. So, what is the motivation for Iran to truly change its behavior? For those who are intellectually honest, this framework points to a very bad agreement indeed.

See David Brooks in the *New York Times* (10 April 2015) and Henry Kissinger and George P. Shultz in the *Wall Street Journal* (8 April 2015).