

Iran's nuclear pact: Deal of the century?

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Shanin Specter: It's about bringing Iran back into family of nations

The long, sordid history of nuclear weapons proliferation reveals well-established patterns.

First, countries develop nuclear weapons in secret. There's no benefit in announcing that you're developing nuclear weapons. All that produces is spying, sanctions, sabotage and maybe war. And there's usually little benefit in announcing that you aren't developing nuclear weapons. Disarmament reduces deterrence and erodes the perception of power. So don't expect Iran ever to admit to anything.

Second, no country in history, that we know of, has come as close to developing nuclear weapons as Iran without actually going ahead and getting the bomb. Why would Iran be the first?



Shanin Specter

Third, resourceful nations at the pivot of a hot spot or on one side of historical enmity find nuclear weapons nearly irresistible. Soviet Union versus the United States, North Korea versus South Korea, Pakistan versus India, and Israel versus its neighborhood. Unfortunately, Iran meets that test. Fourth, no inspection regime can keep Iran from clandestine technical advances. According to historical accounts, tiny Israel worked on nuclear

weapons development in a complex that the French were regularly inspecting. Fifth, what happens when a nation enters the nuclear club is well understood. For the rest of the world, just like the five stages of grief, there is denial, anger, bargaining, depression and, eventually, acceptance.

As one of the world's proud pariah states, Iran cares little about whatever criticism it will receive when it is revealed it cheated and got the bomb. That will soon be replaced by fear, and fear is the currency of rogue nations. If Niccolò Machiavelli were advising the ayatollah, he would say keep right on spinning the centrifuges.

So why are we going to all the trouble? Because possession doesn't equal use. Because this negotiation and this deal is really about trying to bring Iran back into the family of nations.

If Iran strengthens its ties to the West and if it becomes politically and economically interconnected with the rest of the world, maybe it will moderate its religious fundamentalism and support for terrorism. Maybe it will keep its nukes tethered, as has every country, since America lost its monopoly in 1949.

So perhaps there are good reasons to support this deal. But keeping Iran away from nuclear weapons isn't one of them. It'll get 'em.

Shanin Specter is a partner in the Philadelphia law firm of Kline & Specter.

Aaron David Miller: The deal of the century -- for Iran

There's no question the Obama administration got what it wanted out of this deal: a slower, smaller Iranian nuclear program more easily monitored and constrained for at least a decade. No chance now of a pre-emptive Israeli strike, and no need for an American one. For now, a putative nuclear crisis has been defused and kicked down the road.



Aaron David Miller

But if the President got the deal he wanted, Iran got a better one. In exchange for a nuclear weapon it doesn't possess and a decision to weaponize it hasn't yet made, Iran will get billions of dollars in sanctions relief, an open for business sign in Teheran that will bring it much more, the satisfaction of sticking it to Israel and Saudi Arabia, and the West's willingness to at least tolerate Iran's support

for Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, Hezbollah and some nasty Iraqi Shiite militias. And to boot, Iran will be left with enough of a residual nuclear infrastructure – as the President himself readily admitted -- that will give it the capacity to break out should it choose to do so.

Was there a better alternative? More sanctions, tougher negotiations or a more credible threat of force? We'll never know. Policy is always a choice between imperfect options. And the administration has bought itself some time, perhaps in the hope that the agreement will lead the Iranian regime to moderate its repressive character at home and cooperate with the United States in the region. But as China, the former Soviet Union, Vietnam (and maybe Cuba) reveal, nations can open up economically and still maintain tight authoritarian control.

All this means that the United States has paid heavily not for a disarmament accord, but for an arms control agreement -- and one that won't end, but that will simply constrain Iran's reputed nuclear weapons ambitions. On this one, we played linear checkers, and the Iranians played a superior game of three-dimensional chess. Aaron David Miller is a vice president and distinguished scholar at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars and was a Middle East negotiator in Democratic and Republican administrations.

Jacqueline Shire: This deal is for Iran's young people

The naysayers will moan that the deal emboldens Iran to more regional adventurism, flush with cash from unfrozen accounts, while Saudi Arabia gets to work on its own nuclear weapon. Doubtful. This deal keeps Iran's nuclear program confined, monitored from every angle, with narrow maneuvering room. It also provides a path for Iran to engage constructively with the world, more necessary now than ever before.



Jacqueline Shire

This is not a perfect deal -- 15 years will pass quickly and maybe we will again find troubling questions about Iran's nuclear intentions. If so, we already know a great deal about how to use the collective strength of like-minded countries to impose crippling sanctions, and the threat of military force is never far behind.

In the meantime, diplomacy has won over the threat of still more conflict. U.S. interests will remain aligned with Sunni allies and Israel. Both can worry less now about the product of Iranian centrifuges and more about the sectarian strife that threatens them daily.

Iran's government remains an adversary for many reasons (its actions to undermine stability in the region, human rights, long memories on both sides of mistakes made and not apologized for) and the deal alone will not change this. Iran's people however, in particular its young people, are a different matter. By every metric, they are among the region's most educated and pro-Western. This deal is for them -- and the future we share. Jacqueline Shire was a member of the U.N. Panel of Experts on Iran from November 2010 through 2014.

Tom Z. Collina: Congress must rise above partisanship

Finally, we have a good agreement to prevent Iran from building a nuclear bomb. And the United States, Russia, China, Great Britain, France and Germany did it with diplomacy, not military force, meaning no U.S. troops will be put in harm's way and we won't risk yet another war in the Middle East. Well done.

Moreover, the deal is built on intrusive verification, not trust. If Iran cheats, the United States will know. Tehran has agreed to the most robust inspection regime ever negotiated.

To understand fully just how important this is, imagine where we would be tomorrow if the agreement had fallen apart. Without this deal, Tehran could resume and accelerate its nuclear program, increasing the chances of an Iranian nuclear bomb and U.S. military action to try to stop it. As former Defense Secretary Bob Gates has said, "If you think the war in Iraq was hard, an attack on Iran would, in my opinion, be a catastrophe."

With a deal this good and alternatives this bad, it's hard to fathom why some in Congress want to kill it. Yet Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Kentucky, recently called on President Barack Obama to "pause" talks on a "bad" deal, which would have been a tragic mistake.

It's time for Congress -- which now has 60 days to review the deal -- to rise above partisan politics and act in the best interests of the United States and the world. We have a historic opportunity to prevent an Iranian nuclear bomb verifiably and peacefully. To get there, all we have to do is not trip over our own two feet.

Tom Z. Collina is director of policy at Ploughshares Fund, a global security foundation in Washington.

Julian Zelizer: Political storms ahead

The nuclear agreement with Iran is the fulfillment of Obama's promise in his first inaugural address to "extend a hand if you are willing to unclench your fist." The verdict will be out for some time as to whether this deal works at curbing the nuclear ambitions of Iran.



Julian Zelizer

But one thing is for sure -- in the near future this agreement will be political dynamite. It will become a symbol for Obama's opponents as to why his foreign policy has been a failure. As soon as he addressed the nation, you could virtually hear the Republicans starting to film their campaign ads. For many of his supporters, the deal with Iran will be seen as a source of electoral vulnerability and potentially a threat to how voters assess his presidency in future years.

American history is littered with examples of diplomatic agreements that have been politically problematic for the party in power. At the end of World War I, Senate Republicans mobilized their party in opposition to the Treaty of Versailles, claiming that the proposed League of Nations represented a dangerous extension by President Woodrow Wilson of U.S. commitments overseas. Fast-forward several decades, President Jimmy Carter paid a heavy political price for the passage of the Panama Canal Treaties in 1978 -- conservatives such as Ronald Reagan used the treaties to paint Democrats as weak on defense and to rally their base.

Even treaties that have proven hugely successful in the long term can have huge short-term political costs. While much of the nation was impressed when President Richard Nixon went to China in 1972 and reached an arms agreement with the Soviets (SALT I), for many conservatives these deals ended their support for this president. "Détente," as

Nixon's foreign policy of easing relations with communism was called, became a point of division for rightwing Republicans with Nixon, Gerald Ford and much of the Republican establishment. When President Ronald Reagan reached a historic arms agreement with the Soviet Union in 1987, much of the nation applauded. But not many conservatives, who at the time saw Reagan's deal as a betrayal of his principles.

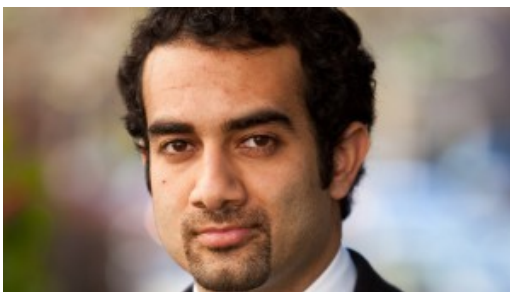
Obama won't have it any easier. Today, Washington is even more polarized, so even if Republicans thought this was the greatest thing since sliced bread (which they don't) they wouldn't have anything positive to say. There are also many Democrats who have been openly uneasy with the agreement, either because they fear it will endanger Israel or they just don't feel that it will be effective at stopping this dangerous regime. Since this is not a treaty, future presidents will have considerable power to use executive authority to undue the agreement. This means that the partisan incentives to attack will be remain strong.

None of this is to say that the deal is a failure. As we saw with Reagan's arms agreement, the deal with Iran could come to be seen as one of the shining accomplishments of this administration. But for now, Obama, and the Democrats, are going to have to suffer through some pretty heavy political storms as a result of these negotiations.

Julian Zelizer is a professor of history and public affairs at Princeton University and a New America fellow. He is the author of "The Fierce Urgency of Now: Lyndon Johnson, Congress and the Battle for the Great Society."

Shadi Hamid: Victory -- at a heavy price

The nuclear deal with Iran will stand, regardless of what comes after, as Obama's great foreign policy victory (or capitulation, depending on your perspective). I've supported the Iran negotiations, but with major reservations. Yes, this does embed Iran in a constraining framework of inspections and monitoring, making it significantly more difficult for it to get the bomb. But it's worth asking a different question: At what cost? And was it worth it?



Shadi Hamid

The Obama administration's relentless focus on Iran negotiations is fine in isolation, but nothing in the Middle East is isolated. Indeed, it's had a distorting effect on other policy priorities. For example, our Gulf allies, fearing an Iran deal was a prelude to further U.S. disengagement from the region, have adopted a more aggressive, interventionist posture in the region. The Saudi military intervention in Yemen, in particular, has been a disaster, coming at

a tremendous

human cost, with little to show for it. The United States was in no position to pick a fight with Saudi Arabia over Yemen when it was already expending its political capital trying to get the Saudis to go along, however grudgingly, with the Iran talks.

Our unwillingness to confront the Iranians over their support for the Syrian regime was always there, but it was reinforced by the momentum of the Iran negotiations. Why rock the boat and potentially provoke a major international incident when progress was being made on the nuclear program? It didn't help that, [as Bloomberg View columnist Josh Rogin](#) wrote, "All Syria proposals at State must go through the office of the undersecretary for political affairs, Wendy Sherman, who is also the administration's lead negotiator over a nuclear deal with Iran."

This was the problem from the beginning. Any Iran deal depended on "disassociating" the nuclear issue from everything else, but everything else mattered a whole lot. These starting assumptions, though, were built in to the world powers' negotiating platform not under Obama, but under President George W. Bush. Once the Obama administration decided to make negotiations its top priority, the choice had been made.

The deal is, on balance, worth supporting (in part because the alternative is worse), but we should be well aware that, if this is a victory, it came at a heavy price.

Shadi Hamid, a fellow at the Project on U.S. Relations with the Islamic World at the Brookings Institution's Center for Middle East Policy, is the author of "[Temptations of Power: Islamists and Illiberal Democracy in a New Middle East](#)."

Mary Ellen O'Connell: A good deal for all concerned

The Iran nuclear deal is a good one for all concerned. This should come as welcome news because it is the only game in town for reasons critics may fail to mention:

First, it is a multilateral agreement. It is not just between the United States and Iran, as the media seem to portray it. And it is certainly not a unilateral agreement where the United States could impose terms. Part of the deal is that the U.N. Security Council will lift sanctions on Iran. So even if Congress finds a way to keep some U.S. sanctions in place, those would do little with the rest of the world heading back to business with Iran.



Mary Ellen O'Connell

Second, Congress has few options for keeping unilateral U.S. sanctions in place. The President can veto a vote against the deal or for new sanctions. Indeed, current U.S. sanctions laws give the President considerable discretion, which he will use to meet the U.S. part of the bargain.

Most importantly, international law strictly forbids the use of military force against Iran to try to end its

program. Ending the program requires a treaty.

In the 1990s, the United States reached another multilateral nuclear agreement, with North Korea. But we failed to supply electricity generators as our part of the deal, and it fell apart. Today, North Korea has the bomb. The Middle East needs this new deal. It is the only lawful way to stop proliferation, and, if successful, could support other efforts such as coordinating against ISIS, negotiating peace in Yemen and more.

Mary Ellen O'Connell is the Robert and Marion Short Professor of Law and research professor of international dispute resolution at the University of Notre Dame.

David Gergen: Will deal hold together?

We toss around the word "historic" too casually these days, so that one hesitates to call the Iran nuclear deal "historic." But it is certainly one of the most consequential international agreements in decades and -- if it holds together -- will be a signal achievement of the Obama presidency.

For years, Iran's pursuit of the bomb has vexed American leaders. Bob Gates, esteemed former defense secretary, told me it was "the toughest foreign policy problem" he had seen in nearly a half-century. It appeared the United Nations would either have to demolish Iran's nuclear sites by air, setting off conflicts across the region, or live with an Iranian bomb, setting off a Middle East nuclear arms race. Both options were unpalatable.



David Gergen

Against what were once long odds, the United States and its partners have come up with a third option that Iran is actually signing: a diplomatic breakthrough. Credit belongs to the stiff sanctions regime imposed on the Iranian economy by both Bush and Obama, along with our allies, and to the gamble that Obama took on aggressive, persistent diplomacy led by Secretary of State John Kerry. (Perhaps another Nobel in the offing?)

But will it hold together? On first blush, parts of the agreement are tougher on Iran than leaks suggested: inspections, limits on enrichment and the snapback provisions. Yet there have also been compromises deeply alienating to skeptics: leaving too much infrastructure in place, opening an eventual path to a bomb, making billions available to Tehran possibly to fund new terrorism support, etc.

Congress and U.S. presidential candidates will now embark upon one of the most important debates in years. This will be the first major test of whether history has actually been made.

David Gergen is a senior political analyst for CNN and has been a White House adviser to four presidents. A graduate of Harvard Law School, he is a professor of public service and co-director of the Center for Public Leadership at the Harvard Kennedy School.

Michael Breen: Verification critical

Keeping Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapon is of central importance to American security. This agreement demonstrates the power of tough, principled diplomacy -- and will make America and our allies safer and stronger if properly implemented and enforced. American leadership made this agreement possible: rallying the international community to force Iran to the table with multilateral sanctions, maintaining a united front through months of negotiations, and holding firm for a deal that improves our national security.

This agreement is not based on trust. Because we expect Iran to try and cheat, verification is a critical component of the agreement. Its terms close off all of Iran's potential avenues to a nuclear weapon, give us access to their entire nuclear supply chain, and impose the strictest monitoring and verification regime ever negotiated in the history of nonproliferation. If Iran cheats a month, a year, or a decade from now, we will be in a position to know. And because this agreement is backed by the international community, America will be in a position to take decisive action with our allies if Iran violates the terms.

This generation of combat veterans, frontline civilians, and policy leaders knows all too well the sacrifice required when diplomacy fails. Many of us, myself included, have spent our adult lives attempting to redeem the aftermath of a deeply unnecessary war in the Middle East, launched in the name of nonproliferation. This time, through tough American-led diplomacy, we have charted a better, smarter course.

Michael Breen served as a U.S. Army Captain in Iraq and Afghanistan. He is currently the Executive Director of the Truman National Security Project.

Danielle Pletka: Deal misses the point

For all the details over which nuclear negotiators have tussled for almost 20 months, there has been one overarching goal: to lengthen how long it might take for Iran to break out from its Non-Proliferation Treaty commitments and actually assemble a nuclear explosive device. But while Tehran has carefully crafted a program to build almost all the components it would need to break out, intelligence analysts and diplomats both may have erred in assuming Iran would want to break out sooner rather than later.

Instead, there is much to suggest that Iran's leadership has a longer-term strategic plan that envisions no immediate breakout. After all, a country that is in a race to build and test a nuke doesn't need to invest in multiple facilities and double down on advanced

enrichment. Both Iranian procurement and International Atomic Energy Agency reporting indicate Iran is game to wait until it has both the means and the materiel to break out -- like Pakistan, Israel or India -- with an arsenal of nuclear weapons, rather than a single bomb. And if that is the case, the deal inked early Tuesday will not stop it.

Danielle Pletka is senior vice president of foreign and defense policy studies at the American Enterprise Institute.

John Glaser and Justin Logan: Agreement a clear success

For neoconservatives and interventionist Democrats, the nuclear program was but one piece of a much larger problem: a looming Persian menace that threatened to dominate the Middle East. This explains the specious nonproliferation arguments offered in opposition to the deal as well as the increased warnings of Iranian "regional hegemony" heard in the run-up to the deal.

These sorts of arguments are tendentious in the extreme, because on their own terms they fall short. The nuclear agreement is indeed helpful from the point of view of nonproliferation, and Iran has no path to regional hegemony in the policy-relevant future. Instead, these claims seem to be part of a larger strategy under which everything that happens tied to Iran is treated as a threat.

But the question in the context of nuclear diplomacy was never a choice between a neutered, Israel-recognizing liberal Iran or an empowered nuclear theocracy. It was between a nasty but weak regional power with little power-projection capability, closer or further away from a nuclear weapons capability. And on these terms, the agreement must be viewed as a clear success.

John Glaser is an incoming graduate student in international security at George Mason University. Justin Logan is director of foreign policy studies at the Cato Institute.