

Support the Nuclear Deal with Iran, by Paul Heinbecker¹

U.S. and Israeli conservatives, abetted by Canada's mini-cons, appear to dread the prospect of President Obama successfully negotiating an agreement that curbs, albeit does not forever eliminate, Iran's nuclear program. But what are the rest of us to think?

First, the framework deal is still a work in progress; final agreement is expected in June. In such a negotiation nothing is agreed until everything is agreed. There is much to work through and that's where the notorious devil of the details resides.

Second, the negotiations are going very much in the right direction. What has been revealed so far is an unexpectedly specific draft framework that if successfully completed would dramatically curtail Iran's nuclear program.

Iran's program currently has two paths to nuclear weapons: the first would use centrifuges to enrich uranium to produce fissile material for bombs, and the second would use a nuclear reactor currently under construction at Arak to produce weapons grade plutonium. Under the agreement, the plutonium path would be blocked altogether by redesigning and re-purposing the Arak reactor and disposing of its original core.

As for the centrifuge enrichment path, Iran has agreed that for a period of 10 years it would reduce the number of its installed centrifuges from about 19,000 to 6104. It has also agreed to reduce its existing stockpile of low enriched uranium, suitable for electrical energy generation but also constituting the feedstock for enrichment to bomb material, from 10,000 kilos to 300 kilos, too little to make a bomb, and to keep the stockpile at that level for 15 years. And, further, it has agreed not to enrich uranium beyond the low level of 3.67 percent for at least 15 years.

The US administration calculates that these and many other constraints would extend the time it would take Iran to produce a bomb to one year from the current estimated six-eight weeks. That one year lead time would remain in effect for as long as the agreement continued in force, leaving the international community time to react were Iran to cheat.

Third, the deal is not built on trust. The inspection regime integral to the agreement is arguably the most intrusive ever. Iran's entire nuclear supply chain, from uranium mines to centrifuge production to reactor operations, would come under international scrutiny. The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) inspectors would have access to uranium mines and would continuously monitor surveillance at uranium mills for 25 years. They would have regular access to all of Iran's nuclear facilities, including the enrichment facilities at Natanz and Fordow, using the most up-to-date, modern monitoring technologies. Iran's centrifuge manufacturing base would be frozen for 20

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years and placed under continuous surveillance. And, even after the period of the most stringent limitations on Iran's nuclear program runs out, Iran would remain a party to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), which prohibits Iran's development or acquisition of nuclear weapons. Further, Iran will endorse the IAEA's Additional Protocol, which substantially expands the agency's ability to check for clandestine nuclear facilities by authorizing it to visit any facility. Were Iran to cheat, the sanctions regime could be reinstated.

Fourth, it is illusory to think that Iran's nuclear program can be eliminated altogether— Iran cannot unlearn what it already knows, and Iran has a right under the NPT to a peaceful nuclear program. It is also illusory to believe that a better deal can be negotiated than the current deal which has been made possible by the combined political will of Washington, Beijing, Moscow, London, Paris and Berlin. Nor are the latter five likely to agree to tighten sanctions further just because Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and the Republicans in the US Congress want them to. The reverse is more likely true.

The continuation of the *status quo* is no solution because Iran's nuclear program would continue to grow. Iran has increased the number of its centrifuges from just hundreds 10 years ago to 19,000 now; it is projected by some, including PM Netanyahu, to grow to 190,000. Worse, despite existing sanctions Iran has also significantly upgraded the capacity of its centrifuges.

As for war, it is delusional to think that precision western or Israeli airstrikes could stop the Iranian nuclear program definitively the way such strikes stopped the Iraqi program in the 1980's and the Syrian program in 2007. The Iranian nuclear industrial capacity is much bigger and more dispersed, and would require much more firepower to destroy. After the first few bombs fell, an attack would likely serve to rally even the dissident Iranian population behind the Mullahs and deep-freeze democracy's prospects there. Nor could the Iranian authorities be counted on not to respond militarily, including in the oil shipping lanes of the Persian Gulf, and through their proxies abroad against the attacker's soft targets and its allies.

The war would almost certainly be seen by most of the world to be the US's fault, the 15th conflict with or in a Muslim state since 1980 (Bacevich, Washington Post) with consequent, long term cost to the US's global standing, to its homeland security and to its regional interests. More, such an attack would nullify the sanctions regime, freeing the Iranians to reconstitute their nuclear program in relatively short order -- estimates range from two to four years. It would also strengthen the Iranians' resolve to acquire nuclear weapons for defence.

Finally, what can and should Ottawa do? Not much in Teheran, because with our embassy closed by the Harper government, we are blind, deaf, and dumb there. And as for Washington, we should just "zip it". It would be an error in substance, and destructive of our wider interests if we undermined the Obama administration vis-a-vis Iran, Israel or Congress. As regards Israel, we should not succumb to the temptation to

play Diaspora politics, even in an election year in Canada. We should, therefore, do nothing overtly to support Netanyahu whose own election tactics destroyed whatever credibility he still had outside of Israel and the Republican side of Capitol Hill. This is the same Netanyahu who guaranteed in 2002 “enormous, positive reverberations on the region”, including the implosion of Iran, if the US toppled the Saddam Hussein regime, and who, 19 years ago, told a joint session of Congress that “...time is running out. We have to act” against Iran.

The Harper government has said little, but has announced a contribution of \$3 million to support the IAEA’s efforts to monitor Iranian compliance. On an issue so fraught with dangers, such constructive circumspection is the beginning of wisdom. May it continue.