



THE LONG ROAD TO TEHRAN THE IRAN NUCLEAR DEAL IN PERSPECTIVE

BRYAN R. GIBSON

THE AUTHOR

Bryan R. Gibson holds a PhD in International History from the London School of Economics, was a post-doctoral research fellow at the LSE's Centre for Diplomacy and Strategy, and an instructor on Middle Eastern politics in the LSE's Department of International History and the University of East Anglia's Department of Political, Social and International Studies (PSI).

He has taught undergraduate courses on U.S. and British politics toward the Gulf region, the Arab-Israeli conflict, and Arab nationalism, winning a departmental teaching excellence award in 2011. He also taught undergraduate and postgraduate courses on Middle Eastern politics at the University of East Anglia.

He is the author of *Sold Out? US Foreign Policy, Iraq, the Kurds, and the Cold War* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), *Covert Relationship: U.S. Foreign Policy, Intelligence and the Iran-Iraq War* (Praeger, 2010), and co-edited with Professor Nigel Ashton, *The Iran-Iraq War: New International Perspectives* (Routledge, 2012). He also contributes regularly to publications dealing with Middle Eastern issues, like Foreign Policy, Middle East Eye, CNN, and Huffington Post.

His research focuses on foreign policy decision-making with respect to the Middle East and Gulf regions. Specifically, he analyses U.S. foreign policy toward Iraq, Iran, and the Gulf.

THE LONG ROAD TO TEHRAN

THE IRAN NUCLEAR DEAL

IN PERSPECTIVE

The history of the Iranian nuclear issue is littered with missed opportunities. It is a history in which fixation on the perfect crowded out the good, and in whose rearview mirror we can see deals that look a lot better now than they seemed then. With all its inevitable imperfections, we can't afford to miss this one.

— William J. Burns, Deputy Secretary of State, 2011-2014

After nearly 20 months of near-continuous negotiations, on 14 July 2015 Iran and the P5+1—the five permanent members of the Security Council (US, UK, France, Russia and China) and Germany—reached a deal designed to limit Iran's nuclear enrichment capability and prevent it from obtaining nuclear weapons capability in exchange for relief from the sanctions that have been crippling its economy over the course of the past decade.

A lot is at stake in this deal for all parties. For Iran the deal marks a potential return to the international community, a chance to salvage its faltering economy and a new opportunity to help resolve a wide range of crises in the Middle East, particularly the challenge posed by the rise of the Islamic State (ISIS).

For the United States the deal signals a major diplomatic breakthrough for the Obama administration, especially if it could prevent Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon and even potentially work with the Islamic Republic to increase regional security.

The welcoming of Iran back into the international community also raises economic opportunities to repair the damage done by years of sanctions and mismanagement.

For the Gulf States the deal could reduce the risk from a potential adversary, alongside assurances of American military protection.

The deal also shows great promise for staving off a potential nuclear arms race between Iran and its regional, ideological, and sectarian rival Saudi Arabia. For decades these two nations have rivalled each other for regional dominance; to remove Iran's nuclear threat would significantly reduce the likelihood that this rivalry could go nuclear.

Finally Israel, despite the hyperbolic rhetoric of its current government, likely stands to benefit the most from the deal. The checks and balances imposed on Iran's nuclear programme would give Israel breathing room for over a decade, with the United States certain to provide an increase in military assistance to counterbalance any military threat Iran may pose.

For all actors the deal stands out as an opportunity to resolve, or at least scale back, ethno-sectarian tensions that have plagued the Middle East since Iran's revolution in 1978-79.

To understand the implications of a nuclear deal with Iran, it is necessary to place the agreement within the historical context of US-Iran relations and recognise that major diplomatic breakthroughs like this do not happen in a vacuum: they are the product of years of hard, tedious work.

This Strategic Update provides a detailed examination of the policies of the George W. Bush and Barack Obama administrations, showing both how the Iran deal came about and the acrimonious and divisive nature of the agreement.

The 2013 election of Hassan Rouhani, a moderate who appeared determined to secure relief from the crippling economic sanctions imposed upon Iran in return for scaling back its nuclear programme, and the rise of the Islamic State created a favourable set of circumstances where both the United States and Iran stood to gain more from a nuclear deal than they had to lose.

Fortunately for Rouhani and the Obama administration, which had failed in its initial attempts to reach out to Iran in 2009, also recognised and seized upon this opportunity to resolve one of the most persistent and frustrating diplomatic stalemates in modern history.

This would be no easy task as the current Israeli leadership and their allies in the US Congress tried to block all efforts to make concessions, no matter how reasonable they might be, to Iran. This created a crisis unprecedented in American diplomatic history, where a foreign state was aligned with a legislative body against a sitting president and the international community. The political battle over the Iran deal is certain to be remembered as one of the greatest in modern international history.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF US-IRAN RELATIONS: 1953-2000

Prior to the 1970s, American diplomats viewed the Persian Gulf as a 'British Lake', a euphemism for a British sphere of influence.² The first major crisis in US-Iran relations occurred in 1953, when the CIA helped overthrow the democratically elected government of Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadeq and empowered the regime of Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi.

The consequences of this fateful American action would reverberate for decades. Iran's revolution was not just against the Shah and his corrupt regime; it was a reaction against the United States, its foreign policy, its culture and its values. Having survived the CIA-trained torturers in the Shah's dungeons, the new Iranian leadership labelled the US the 'Great Satan' and built up an entire revolutionary Islamic ideology upon a foundation of anti-Americanism.³

The deterioration of US-Iran relations after the revolution culminated in the seizing of the US Embassy grounds in Tehran on 4 November 1979 and the holding of 52 American diplomats hostage for the next 444 days.⁴ This brazen breach of diplomatic protocol single-handedly crippled the presidency of Jimmy Carter and contributed to his electoral defeat in 1980.⁵ This was truly one of America's lowest moments.

Nonetheless in the 35 years since the revolution every US administration, from Reagan to Obama, has tried to improve relations with Iran.⁶ Until recently, none of these efforts has been successful and there are plenty of reasons for both sides to feel betrayed and distrustful.⁷

Each American president has approached Iran differently. Ronald Reagan engaged in an ill-fated scheme to trade US-made arms for American hostages taken by Iranian allies in Lebanon, leading to the so-called Iran-Contra scandal.⁸ George H.W. Bush reached out to Iran to help secure the release of the remaining hostages, declaring that 'goodwill begets goodwill'. However, as Bush's national security advisor Brent Scowcroft later recalled 'When the hostages were released, we didn't do anything'.⁹ The Iranians understandably felt betrayed.

A GLIMMER OF HOPE

In the 1990s, the Clinton administration escalated tensions with Iran when it announced a policy known as 'dual containment'. The policy was designed to isolate both Iran and Iraq regionally, cut them off from the world economic and trading system, and encourage regime change in Iraq.¹⁰ The problem, according to Gregory Gause, was that dual containment was 'shot through with logical flaws and practical inconsistencies [and] based on faulty geopolitical premises'. He pointed out that the Iranians at this point in time were actively demobilizing their military following the devastating eight-year-long Iran-Iraq War and were focused inwardly on reconstruction.¹¹

Iran seemed to act as if there were two different faces of the same regime. Perhaps the best example is Mohammad Khatami, who shocked political analysts when he won a landslide election in 1997. Campaigning on a platform of reform and engagement with the West, Khatami won nearly 70 percent of the vote. No one in the US government, not even the CIA, saw the result coming.¹²

Khatami did not appear to be bluffing. Upon coming to office, he travelled to the United States for the annual UN General Assembly (UNGA). While there, he gave an interview with CNN where he said 'all doors should now be open for such dialogue and understanding and the possibility for contact between Iranian and American citizens'.¹³ Intrigued by the sudden change in tone coming out of Tehran, President Clinton seized this opportunity and exchanged letters with the Iranian leadership in 1999. Unfortunately, regime hardliners close to the new Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamanei, undercut Khatami and rejected the American overture in a polite but curt letter.¹⁴

'WE DON'T SPEAK TO EVIL'

When George W. Bush came to office in January 2001 his administration was deeply divided on how to approach Iran. One faction wanted to continue Clinton's policy of engaging the Khatami government, while another sought regime change.¹⁵ Initially those seeking engagement held the upper hand.

To American policymakers, the outpouring of grief inside Iran after 9/11 and its covert support for the US-led invasion of Afghanistan in October 2001 indicated that powerful players within the Iranian leadership were interested in working with the US. Consequently, as Barbara Slavin reports, this led to more than a dozen meetings between a handful of American and Iranian diplomats between September 2001 and May 2003.¹⁶

At the same time, the 9/11 terror attacks altered America's threat perception by revealing that major threats did not just originate from enemy states but from small transnational terror groups. In particular, US policymakers feared that states like Iraq, Iran, Syria or Libya could provide terror groups with weapons of mass destruction (WMD), which could then be used against America.

From this point onward, the Bush administration adopted a zero-sum attitude toward state sponsorship of terrorism. As America launched the 'War on Terror', it sought to secure support throughout the Middle East as it prepared to invade Afghanistan and Iraq, two of Iran's neighbours.

Because of Iran's historical support for radical Islamist groups, such as Hezbollah in Lebanon and Hamas in Palestine, those in Washington pressing for regime change in Tehran had now gained the upper hand. This was particularly evident when President Bush included Iran as part of an 'Axis of Evil' in his 2002 State of the Union Address, even though Iran continued to assist the CIA in Afghanistan.¹⁷

America's quiet working relationship with Iran even survived the controversy surrounding an Iranian militant group, called the Mujahedeen e-Khalq (MEK), and its exposure in August 2002 of Iran's secret nuclear programme, including a vast uranium enrichment plant at Natanz and a heavy water plant at Arak.¹⁸ According to Axworthy, some believe that the Israeli Mossad had used the MEK as a front for the release of this information. This, it has been suggested, would establish the MEK's bona fides as an operator and garner support from the US, which was precisely what happened.¹⁹

The US-led invasion of Iraq in March 2003 terrified the Iranian government. As Parsi points out, 'the swiftness with which the United States defeated the strongest standing Arab army—which the Iranians had failed to defeat after eight bloody years of warfare—sent shivers down the spines of America's foes in the region and beyond'.²⁰

As a result, in May 2003, Iran asked the Swiss ambassador to Iran, Tim Guldemann, to deliver a proposal that had been approved at the highest levels of the Iranian regime, including the Supreme Leader. The proposal was hand-delivered to President Bush through Representative Bob Ney (R-Ohio), who spoke Persian and had lived in Iran prior to the revolution.²¹ The proposal put everything on the table: Iran's support for Hezbollah and Hamas, for Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations, and its nuclear programme.²²

American policymakers were divided over how to respond to the Iranian proposal. On one side, Secretary of State Colin Powell, his deputy Richard Armitage and National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice saw this as a major breakthrough and encouraged a positive response. However, Vice President Dick Cheney and Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld cut them off, saying 'we don't speak to evil'.²³

It was clear that the Bush administration, buoyed by its apparent success in Iraq, was not interested in supporting the talks. In fact Condoleezza Rice, President Bush's national security advisor at the time, later claimed that she could not recall ever seeing the Iranian proposal. Both sides cancelled a meeting scheduled for 25 May.²⁴

Despite the collapse of the US-Iranian talks, the discovery of Iran's nuclear programme kicked diplomacy into high gear. Between 2003 and 2005, America's European allies, Britain, France and Germany, pursued a 'critical dialogue' with Iran over its nuclear programme.²⁵ In October 2003, both sides reach an agreement to suspend Iran's enrichment of uranium, have Iran sign the Additional Protocol of the Nuclear Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and allow intrusive inspections by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).²⁶ An American National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) from 2007 confirmed that Iran abandoned its nuclear weapons programme at this time, a conclusion that went against the Bush administration's preferences.²⁷

Despite the 2003 agreement, over the course of the next two years the US and the European Union (EU) continued to raise concerns about Iran's nuclear programme. In November 2004, Iran was accused of violating the agreement and after a 22-hour negotiation agreed to once again suspend enrichment.²⁸ Then, in July 2005, the US provided the IAEA with documents from a stolen Iranian laptop, allegedly containing designs for a nuclear weapon.²⁹

However, Gareth Porter, an investigative journalist, has dismissed the laptop debacle as 'fabrications' created by Israeli intelligence and the MEK in order to increase international support for sanctions against Iran.³⁰ Regardless of whether the laptop was genuine or not, the revelation of these documents had a tremendous impact on the growing Iran nuclear crisis.

SANCTIONS AND THE RETURN OF REVOLUTIONARY IRAN

The election of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in June 2005 brought about a major shift in Iran's foreign policy. With the United States bogged down in Iraq, Iran's geostrategic position in the region had improved considerably. As a result, Ahmadinejad adopted a belligerent attitude and instead of scaling back Iran's nuclear programme, he championed it as an 'inalienable right'—language drawn from the NPT. At the same time, he also picked a direct fight with Israel, making headlines by denying the Holocaust and allegedly calling for Israel to be 'wiped off the map'.³¹ In a sense, Ahmadinejad's bellicose rhetoric played right in Israel's hands, giving credence to its longstanding concern that Iran's nuclear programme was an 'existential threat' to its existence.

In the autumn of 2005, the IAEA issued a report declaring that Iran had not been in compliance with NPT safeguards. In particular, it claimed that Iran had resumed uranium enrichment at Natanz and Arak.³² This led to a third wave of sanctions against Iran, only this time under the auspices of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). As the *Iran Project* pointed out, the Security Council resolutions—UNSCR 1737, 1747, and 1803—were designed to persuade Iran to suspend indefinitely its enrichment of uranium; to sign the 'Additional Protocol' of the NPT; to permit expanded inspection of its nuclear facilities; and to reach a negotiated agreement with the EU over the future of its nuclear programme.³³

COVERT ACTION

Despite growing sanctions and Iran's now defiant approach to the nuclear question, toward the end of Bush's second term the US and Israel began to look for alternative approaches - including targeted killings and cyber-warfare.

David Crist, in his book *The Twilight Wars*, writes about a meeting between American and Israeli officials toward the end of the Bush administration to discuss their options on Iran. 'Israeli officials proposed extreme measures such as assassinations of Iranian scientists and supporting armed opposition groups inside Iran,' like the MEK, but the US 'completely rejected these schemes'.³⁴ However, just because the Americans rejected these proposals did not mean that the Israelis had.

To counter Iran's nuclear ambitions Israel assassinated at least five Iranians associated with the controversial programme between 2007 and 2012.³⁵ In addition, the head of the country's ballistic missile programme and the commander of Iran's Cyber War Headquarters were also killed.³⁶ The extent to which America was involved in these targeted killings is unknown, whereas Israel's involvement is an open secret. As one senior US official joked in 2011: the US always denies everything; the Israelis, however, 'also deny everything—but with a smile'.³⁷

Either way, the assassination campaign was clearly designed to send psychological and physical threats to those working on Iran's nuclear programme: quit and survive or continue to work and die. Today, as the US seeks to engage Iran and scale back its nuclear programme, the Obama administration has been forced to ask Israel to back off from the assassination campaign. The Israelis apparently agreed, citing the danger of these operations, at least for the time being.³⁸

OLYMPIC GAMES

A second—and perhaps more effective—approach to dealing with Iran’s nuclear programme was the use of cyber warfare to sabotage its reactors. Working closely with the Israelis, the US initiated a highly classified covert cyber warfare operation in 2006 known as *Olympic Games*. From its outset, there was widespread support for this option. Before leaving office President Bush green-lit the \$300 million operation³⁹ and President Obama accelerated it after coming to office.⁴⁰

Olympic Games involved at least two highly sophisticated computer viruses, *Stuxnet* and *Flame*—and possibly others that have not yet been exposed. These cyber-attacks on Iran’s nuclear infrastructure were significant not just because they were discovered but because of the damage they inflicted.

Of the two, *Stuxnet* is more famous. Discovered in the summer of 2010, *Stuxnet* was designed to infiltrate and seize control of the computer systems controlling Iran’s nuclear reactors and then rapidly speed up or slow down the centrifuges, causing them to break, while at the same time sending false signals to the computers monitoring the process.

Just as the virus was achieving some success—having destroyed approximately 20 percent of Iran’s 5,000 working centrifuges—it was discovered infecting computer systems outside Iran. This sparked speculation over the origin of the virus and led to the scheme being uncovered.⁴¹

Ivanka Barzashka argues ‘the overall effect of the malware on Tehran’s enrichment efforts in the medium-to-long term was limited at best’ and the ‘misrepresentation of *Stuxnet*’s effects may have hindered diplomatic solutions at a time when they could have had real threat-reduction and confidence-building benefits’.⁴²

The second virus, *Flame*, was in fact far more sophisticated than *Stuxnet*. Whereas *Stuxnet* was created to specifically target Iran’s nuclear infrastructure, *Flame* was designed for purely espionage purposes; to act as a vacuum cleaner and sweep up information from Iranian computers and then transmit the data, likely to the NSA.⁴³ Discovered in 2012, news reports indicate that the virus had been in existence for at least five years.⁴⁴

AN EXTENDED HAND

When President Barack Obama came to office in 2009, he adopted a much different approach to Iran than his predecessors. Just two days after the election, Ahmadinejad shocked US officials when he sent president-elect Obama a congratulatory letter, saying, 'Iran welcomes major, just and real chances in [America's] policies and behaviour'.

Obama seized this opportunity and responded not to Ahmadinejad but to Ali Khamenei, the real power broker in Tehran, proposing talks without preconditions on Iran's nuclear programme and other regional issues, like the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. When Khamenei responded, he politely highlighted Iran's grievances with America, but he did not commit to talks.⁴⁵ Obama would not let up. On 20 March 2009, Obama held out an olive branch to the Iranian people on their New Year, Nawruz. Obama would win the Nobel Prize—perhaps prematurely—for this effort to overcome the differences between the two adversaries.

According to leaked documents made available through Wikileaks, Obama's effort paid off. A cable sent from the US Embassy in Oman in April 2009 reveals that the Iranians had told the Omanis that they were 'ready to begin a quiet dialog 'at a lower level' with the US'.⁴⁶

On 4 June, just weeks before the controversial Iranian presidential election, Obama gave another speech at Cairo University, where he pledged a 'new beginning' for America's relations with the Islamic world. After acknowledging America's troubled past relations with Iran, including America's role in the 1953 coup, Obama said, 'rather than remain trapped in the past, I have made it clear to Iran's leaders and people that my country is prepared to move forward'.⁴⁷ On the eve of the Green Revolution, President Obama was presenting the Iranian people with an opportunity to return to the international community.

Alas, the disputed results of Iran's election, held on 12 June 2009, were a major turning point in Obama's effort to improve relations. As hundreds of thousands of Iranians flocked to the street to protest the contentious election results, which secured a second term for Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, the regime responded with violence and intimidation, prompting international outrage. It was clear that elements of the Iranian regime were responding to Obama's open hand with a clenched fist.

Again, there appeared to be two Iranian faces: a moderate one represented by the Foreign Ministry that appeared to be open to talks, and a conservative one represented by the Revolutionary Guard whose ideology is dependent on having America as an enemy.

Fortunately, Obama was cognisant of this reality and adopted a strategy aimed at bolstering the former, while undermining the latter through targeted sanctions.

ECONOMIC STRANGULATION

In the aftermath of the Iranian election, the Obama administration elected to adopt a strategy designed to strangle Iran's economy and force it to the negotiating table in a weakened position.

To achieve this the United States needed to adopt a multilateral approach, which would entail engaging the international community and rallying the UN Security Council to pass the most comprehensive sanctions ever imposed on a nation. Part of the reason for the Obama administration's eventual success was the exposure of Iran's secret Fordow nuclear enrichment facility in September 2009, a development that concerned all the permanent members of the Security Council. The Obama administration finally had the leverage it needed to convince the Security Council of Iran's ongoing deception about its nuclear programme and impose a comprehensive set of sanctions designed to cut Iran off from the global economy.⁴⁸

This did not, however, mean that an American opening to Iran was completely off the table. According to Laura Rozen, a well-connected journalist for *Al-Monitor*, in October 2009 Deputy Under Secretary of State William Burns and Iran's chief nuclear negotiator Saeed Jallili met one-on-one on the sidelines of P5+1 nuclear talks in Geneva, where a nuclear fuel swap deal was announced. Essentially, the US wanted Iran to relinquish its stockpile of enriched uranium in exchange for Russian-made fuel for its nuclear research reactor. Unfortunately, Iran backed away from the agreement when the deal came under intense domestic criticism.⁴⁹

Despite this hiccup, within two months Oman had again approached the US to offer its services to establish a 'discreet' channel to Iran.⁵⁰ In time, this channel would prove useful.

Despite chaos in the streets of Tehran, the imposition of international sanctions, targeted killings, sophisticated cyber attacks, and secret backchannel talks, Iran's nuclear programme still continued to expand.⁵¹ This prompted the Obama administration to turn back to the Security Council to seek a new round of sanctions. In response, Iran tried to decrease tensions by finally agreeing to a Brazilian and Turkish initiative that was similar to Burns' fuel-swap proposal from October 2009.

The problem for the US was that Iran had expanded its nuclear programme since the original offer, but then refused to negotiate. As a result, the US government rejected the plan and pressed ahead with a new round of sanctions from the Security Council, leading to the passage of UNSCR 1929 in June 2010. This resolution banned companies from working with Iran's energy industry, providing shipping insurance or trade credits, or conducting financial

transactions with Iranian banks.⁵² As the *Iran Project* pointed out:

*Congress took UNSC resolution 1929 a step further by enacting the Comprehensive Iran Sanctions Accountability and Divestment Act (CISADA), which aimed at preventing foreign firms from selling gasoline to Iran and blacklisted several Iranian banks.*⁵³

Still, this was not enough for the Americans:

*Additional sanctions were put in place by Executive Order and by the US Congress, in light of the Iranian regime's repression of the Green Movement protesting the [June 2009] elections ... and the worsening conditions in Syria (where Iran is assisting the Assad government).*⁵⁴

These sanctions, in effect, cut Iran off from the international banking system and isolated it further from the international community. This is a clear example of both the White House and Congress working together to prevent Iran from developing a nuclear weapon.

THE CASE OF THE USED CAR SALESMAN ASSASSIN

In October 2010 the United States Attorney General and the Federal Bureau of Investigation announced that they were charging an Iranian-born used car salesman from Texas, Mansour Arbabsiar, with conspiring with members of Iran's elite Quds Force to hire assassins from a Mexican drug cartel for \$1.5 million to kill the Saudi ambassador to the United States, Adel al-Jubeir.

Arbabsiar had been arrested at the end of September.⁵⁵ The US government responded to the plot aggressively, with several senators describing the conspiracy as 'an act of war'.⁵⁶ Meanwhile, the Obama administration imposed a new round of sanctions against the Iranians tied to the conspiracy, including the head of the Quds Force General Qasem Soleimani.⁵⁷

The Arbabsiar case is peculiar for several reasons. First, as Scott Peterson points out, 'the Quds Force has a reputation for careful, methodical work—as well as effective use of local proxies, and ultimately their pragmatic deployment by Tehran as covert tools to expand Iran's influence across a region in flux'.⁵⁸

Second, the operation was very clumsy, relying on a mentally unstable amateur for an operation that could have major international consequences. As Gary Sick argues, it also seemed strange that the Quds Force would turn to 'a Mexican criminal drug gang that is known to be riddled with both Mexican and US intelligence agents', especially if it wanted to maintain plausible deniability.

Fourth, an Iranian-backed assassination attempt on US soil was a significant departure from Iran's operating procedures, with Sick noting, 'Iran has never conducted—or apparently even attempted—an assassination or a bombing inside the US'.⁵⁹

Finally, according to Alireza Nader, an expert on the IRGC, 'this [plot] doesn't seem to serve Iran's interests in any conceivable way. Assassinating the Saudi ambassador would increase international pressure against Iran, could be considered an act of war ... by **Saudi Arabia**, it could really destabilize the government in Iran; and this is a political system that is interested in its own survival'.⁶⁰

Despite expert opinion, and questions being raised about his mental capacity, Arbabsiar plead guilty and was sentenced to 25 years in prison for his involvement in the plot.⁶¹

THE ISRAELI CARD

Israel has long played a central role in the drama over Iran's nuclear programme. If ever the US government held out a carrot to Iran, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was never too far away with a stick. Nevertheless, early in the Obama administration Netanyahu pressed the White House to reconsider using military force against Iran.

For years, the US had made it publicly known that 'all options'—including the use of military force—were 'on the table' to prevent Iran from developing a nuclear weapons capability. While both the Obama and Bush administrations had stressed this point, they both agreed on the need to restrain Israel from attacking Iran, believing such an action could spark a region-wide Middle Eastern war, and that diplomacy was the best option.⁶²

In 2008, for example, President Bush rejected an Israeli request to obtain specialised bunker-busting bombs that could be used to attack the Fordow nuclear complex buried deep beneath a mountain. Worried that an Israeli attack could inflame the region, Bush instead gave the go-ahead for *Olympic Games* as a means of placating Israel's concerns and convincing it to hold off an attack.⁶³

As the election cycle kicked into high gear in 2011 and 2012, the media was awash with reports of an impending Israel strike on Iran's nuclear programme. As Crist observed, 'every year this story reared its head'. But the prospect of going to war with Iran over an Israeli attack worried senior US policymakers. To them, the Israelis did not seem to consider the repercussions of such an action, including a major regional war that could involve ground forces not to mention retaliatory terrorist strikes.⁶⁴ As the US was winding down two major wars in the Middle East, the last thing the Obama administration wanted was a new one with Iran.

The Obama administration continued to believe that increasingly 'smart' sanctions were the key. In 2012, the US passed a new round of sanctions targeting Iran's central bank and the means by which it received its oil payments. The EU followed suit, imposing its own sanctions and also announcing that it would phase out Iranian oil purchases.⁶⁵ At the same time the Obama administration lobbied the primary consumers of Iranian oil, Japan (17 percent) and South Korea (9 percent), to reduce their imports. However India, which made up for 16 percent of Iran's exports, refused.⁶⁶

Alarmed at the staggering loss of income, Iran responded by threatening to close the Strait of Hormuz, through which one-sixth of the world's oil supply passes. As I argued in a 2012 piece for *The Majalla*, this was an empty threat:

*[If] Iran was to close the strait it would deprive itself of the ability to export oil. Without the sale of oil, the Iran cannot finance itself and its economy could collapse. In short, closing the Strait of Hormuz would hurt Iran far more than any sanctions the Obama administration could ever dream up.*⁶⁷

As tensions mounted between the US and Iran, Netanyahu sought to capitalise on this and press again for military action. During a meeting in March 2012, Obama would not budge. Frustrated, Netanyahu warned that once Iran entered the 'zone of immunity,' the point where military action will not be able to halt Iran's nuclear programme, it would be too late and an Iranian nuclear bomb would be a forgone conclusion. To Netanyahu, Israel simply could not allow this to happen.⁶⁸

At the 2012 United Nations General Assembly, Netanyahu warned the international community once again about Iran's nuclear programme. Taking out a cartoon image of a bomb and drawing a red line, he explained:

*by next spring, at most by next summer, at current enrichment rates, [Iran] will have finished the medium enrichment and move on to the final stage. From there, it's only a few months, possibly a few weeks, before they get enough enriched uranium for the first bomb.*⁶⁹

FROM SECRET TALKS TO A BREAKTHROUGH

In the autumn of 2012, the sanctions on Iran began to show tangible results. By October the value of Iran's currency, the rial, had dropped by nearly 40 percent, plunging the country into an economic crisis. Protestors took to the streets to demand the government do something about the extremely high levels of inflation.⁷⁰ The sanctions were biting.

Iran's growing desperation for sanctions relief, coupled with President Obama securing a second term and Israeli threats of military action, helped set the stage for a secret opening between the two countries in early 2013. For years, the Omani government had offered its services as a potential back channel to Iran. According to Rozen, in 2011 senior US officials 'participated in at least two lower-level, 'preparatory' meetings with the Iranians, facilitated by the Omanis, to see about the prospect of a bilateral channel to be led on the US side by Burns'. A second meeting was held in Oman on 7 July 2012.⁷¹

In early March 2013, American and Iranian officials met again in Oman and spent three days discussing Iran's nuclear programme. These talks were tentative, with both sides uncertain about the other's intention. As one former US official who was familiar with the talks observed, 'it was a useful engagement, but not much progress was made, because the Iran leadership was not really interested'. However, the talks were important because it helped provide a basis for a future understanding, which would rest largely on the outcome of the Iranian elections in June 2013. Until then, the former official said, 'real progress wasn't going to be possible'.⁷²

With an Iranian election set for June, during the spring of 2013 the US and Israel amplified their pressure on Iran. In April, Netanyahu told the *BBC* that only way to stop Iran and its nuclear programme was a 'direct military threat,' and not sanctions or tough diplomacy.⁷³ His statements occurred right around the time that a \$29.5 billion US arms deal that provided missiles, warplanes, and troop transport carriers to Israel, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) became public. According to one senior US official, the deal sought to boost the military capabilities of America's regional allies so that they could better address the Iranian threat and also to allow for a greater network of coordinated assets around the region to handle a range of contingencies.⁷⁴

The results of Iran's 2013 election came as a welcome surprise. Much like in 1997, when Mohammad Khatami swept the field, Hassan Rouhani, a former nuclear negotiator and reformist candidate who managed to make it through Iran's tough vetting process for presidential candidates, soundly defeated his pro-regime opponents. Running on a platform of 'prudence and hope,' Rouhani's pledge to engage the West diplomatically and secure sanctions relief resonated with Iran's population, who were suffering terribly as the economy deteriorated.⁷⁵

Within weeks of Rouhani's inauguration the United States and Iran had reactivated the Omani channel. In August 2013 Burns led a team of Americans to Oman to discuss a prospective nuclear deal.⁷⁶ On 17 September, Rouhani sent a letter to the *Washington Post* that laid out his views on foreign policy and the need for diplomatic engagement in a post-Cold War world. He wrote:

*In a world where global politics is no longer a zero-sum game, it is—or should be—counterintuitive to pursue one's interests without considering the interests of others. A constructive approach to diplomacy doesn't mean relinquishing one's rights. It means engaging with one's counterparts, on the basis of equal footing and mutual respect, to address shared concerns and achieve shared objectives. In other words, win-win outcomes are not just favourable but also achievable. A zero-sum, Cold War mentality leads to everyone's loss.*⁷⁷

In the lead-up to the UNGA Rouhani continued to stun Western observers: condemning Syria's use of chemical weapons; wishing Jews a happy Rosh Hashanah; exchanging private letters with Obama; and releasing prominent political prisoners.⁷⁸ These positive gestures led to further meetings between American and Iranian officials, culminating in a meeting between Secretary of State John Kerry and Iran's foreign minister Mohammad Javad Zarif on 26 September,⁷⁹ and Obama's now-famous telephone call to Rouhani the next day, the first direct contact between the leaders of the two countries since 1979.⁸⁰

Israel's reaction to the Obama-Rouhani telephone call was guarded. According to news reports, Netanyahu 'directed his ministers not to comment on the Obama-Rouhani phone call or US-Iranian relations' prior to his meeting with Obama a few days later.⁸¹

The meeting was bound to be tense, with Netanyahu telling reporters prior to travelling to Washington, 'I will speak the truth. Facts must be stated in the face of the sweet talk and the blitz of smiles'.⁸² Netanyahu stressed that sanctions on Iran should not be relieved until it stops uranium enrichment, removes it from the country, closes down the plant at Qom and abandons a plutonium channel to a nuclear bomb. Obama agreed, saying, 'we enter talks [with Iran] clear eyed. We take no option off the table including military option to make sure [it] doesn't get nuclear weapons'.⁸³

As soon as talks between the P5+1 and Iran began in earnest on 16 October in Geneva, Switzerland it was apparent that change was in the air. US officials were pleased with the first day of 'substantive' and 'forward looking' talks. A senior US official summed up the mood perfectly: 'I've been doing this now for about two years, and I have never had such intense, detailed, straightforward, candid conversations with the Iranian delegation before'.⁸⁴

One immediate outcome of the talks was that Iran agreed in mid-November to resolve all outstanding issues it has had with the IAEA, including allowing inspectors back into its nuclear facilities.⁸⁵ This major step in the nuclear negotiations ultimately set the stage for the announcement of an interim nuclear deal, officially known as the Joint Plan of Action (JPOA), on 24 November 2013.⁸⁶

The terms of the deal were fairly straightforward. Iran agreed to cease enriching uranium, reduce its stockpile of 20 percent enriched uranium, construct no facilities capable of enrichment, and allow more intrusive IAEA inspections. In return, the P5+1 agreed to pause efforts to reduce Iran's oil sales and suspend select US and EU sanctions, on Iran's petrochemical exports, its access to precious metals, and those targeting its auto and aviation industries. The US would implement no new sanctions and make available funds held abroad for the purchase of humanitarian goods, like food or medicine.⁸⁷

THE DEBATE

The debate surrounding the Obama administration's approach to Iran has been incredibly divisive, especially in the period following the initial breakthrough in November 2013. On one side are Israel and its allies in the US Congress; particularly then House Speaker John Boehner (R-Ohio), Senators Bob Corker (R-Tenn.) and Tom Cotton (R-Ark.), on the Republican side, and Senators Bob Menendez (D-NJ) and Chuck Schumer (D-NY) on the Democratic

Nevertheless, the most vocal opponent to any sort of diplomatic engagement with Iran has been Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his allies in Washington's pro-Israel groups, chief among them the American-Israeli Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) and Jewish Institute for National Security Affairs (JINSA). This constellation includes several hawkish organisations as well, such as the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, and the Institute for Science and International Security.⁸⁸

The position of these groups is unequivocal: they see any deal with Iran that leaves any of its nuclear infrastructure intact as a capitulation akin to Neville Chamberlain's appeasement of Adolf Hitler over the question of Czechoslovakia in 1938. They worked to sabotage any nuclear agreement with Iran, whom they argue is determined to wipe Israel off the map. When the interim deal was announced on 24 November 2013, for instance, Netanyahu described it as a 'historic mistake,' saying, the 'world became a much more dangerous place because the most dangerous regime in the world [Iran] made a significant step in obtaining the most dangerous weapons in the world'.⁸⁹

The Republicans, and their pro-Israel allies, developed a multi-pronged strategy that consisted of a) pushing for new sanctions legislation aimed at scuttling the talks; and b) calling like-minded experts before the House and Senate foreign affairs committees in order to shift the debate away from the Obama administration's narrative.

Netanyahu's allies in Congress began an immediate push to impose a new round of sanctions against Iran,⁹⁰ even though this would violate the spirit and the terms of the agreement. This led President Obama to threaten to veto any bill that would jeopardise the ongoing nuclear talks,⁹¹ which forced the pro-Israel lobby to back down, at least temporarily.⁹² From 2013, Congress held 26 hearings on the Iran talks; of the 82 experts who have testified before the senate or house committees, 56 were from witnesses that were highly critical of the deal or the negotiations.⁹³

On the other side are those who favour a deal with Iran that puts in place a framework of checks and balances on its nuclear enrichment programme to prevent it from acquiring a nuclear weapon. The essential premise of this position, to paraphrase Ronald Reagan's observation about his nuclear deal with the Soviets, was 'trust, but verify,' though in this case the maxim would be modified to be 'Don't trust, but verify.'

The pro-deal group is quite diverse. It includes the bipartisan *Iran Project*, which was set up by former ambassador Tom Pickering and includes the support of dozens of high ranking US foreign policymakers, including two former National Security Advisors, Brent Scowcroft and Zbigniew Brzezinski.⁹⁴ The pro-deal group also includes Trita Parsi's National Iranian American Council (NIAC), which operates as a pro-diplomatic engagement Iran lobby in Washington while maintaining considerable distance in its stance from Tehran.

The most vocal proponents of a nuclear deal, of course, have been President Obama and Secretary Kerry, who have argued that it represents the best means of preventing Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon and the only other alternative is war. The departments of Defense, State, Treasury and Energy have supported engagement with Iran as well, and defended the administration's position in regular, and often hostile, congressional hearings.

In particular, Secretary of Energy Ernest Moniz has been crucial to the administration's case, as he played an integral role in ironing out the technical details of an agreement. Moniz is well qualified for the job. Since the early 1970s Moniz has been a leading nuclear physicist at Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), while periodically taking on positions in US administrations, and wields a depth of expertise on nuclear technology, especially fissile-material production.

Within Congress, support for the Obama administration's position is somewhat limited, but not altogether absent. For the past several years, Senators Barbara Boxer (D-Calif.), Diane Feinstein (D-Calif.), Chris Murphy (D-Conn.), and Keith Ellison (D-Minn.) have been supportive of the administration's effort to improve relations with Iran so long as it secures an agreement that would limit its ability to acquire a nuclear weapon.

FROM BREAKTHROUGH TO GRIDLOCK

In the six months since the terms of the interim deal came into effect on 20 January 2014, Iran continued to meet its obligations.⁹⁵ In mid-April, the IAEA confirmed that Iran had diluted 75 percent of its stockpile of 20 percent enriched uranium, prompting the US to release \$450 million in seized funds.⁹⁶ By July, Iran had complied with its obligations to neutralise fully its stockpile of 20 percent enriched uranium, capped its stockpile of 5 percent enriched uranium, frozen the installation of advanced centrifuges as well as not the installation or testing of new components at its Arak reactor, and accepted frequent inspections of its nuclear facilities.⁹⁷

Thanks to the JPOA, observed the State Department's chief nuclear negotiator Wendy Sherman, Iran's nuclear programme is 'more constrained, more transparent, and better understood than it was a year ago'.⁹⁸ On 18 July, the P5+1 and Iran announced that talks would be extended for six months in order to finalise the terms of an agreement. As a reward, the US released another \$2.8 billion of restricted Iranian assets.⁹⁹

In the six months after the talks were extended, the geopolitical situation in the region underwent a profound geopolitical transformation. In June 2014, a relatively obscure Sunni militant group, calling itself the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), also known as the Islamic State, seized control of large swathes of Iraqi and Syrian territory, including Iraq's third largest city, Mosul. The Islamic State quickly posed a clear and present danger to the Shi'a-dominated, Iranian-aligned Iraqi regime of Nuri al-Maliki.¹⁰⁰

After ISIS militants trapped thousands of Yazidis on a mountaintop and came within striking distance of the Kurdish capital Erbil in August, the Obama administration ordered airstrikes and mounted a rescue operation. Following the operation, Maliki stepped down and was replaced by Haider al-Abadi, the deputy leader of the Shi'a Da'wa party.¹⁰¹

The Iraqi crisis put the United States and Iran on the same side, with President Obama admitting publicly in June that he thought Iran could 'play a constructive role' in Iraq.¹⁰² Iran's leadership, however, rejected American overtures about cooperating against the Islamic State.¹⁰³

The nuclear negotiators in Vienna nonetheless tried to firewall the Iraqi crisis from the ongoing talks, which increasingly focused on how to resolve four outstanding issues. For the P5+1, the core issues were the number of centrifuges Iran would be allowed to maintain and addressing concerns about Iran's past research on nuclear weapons. For the Iranians, the main points of contention were over when sanctions would be lifted and how long a final agreement would remain in place, the so-called 'sunset' clause.

As the deadline for the talks loomed, top US and Iranian officials met in Oman for three days in early November to hash out the final details of an agreement. Unfortunately, the talks failed to produce a breakthrough on these core issues, though Iran reportedly signed an agreement with Russia on 11 November to purchase two more Russian-made nuclear power reactors. Russia would apparently provide the fuel for these two reactors, suggesting that this could become a component of a larger deal, as the Russian concession was clearly designed to sweeten it.¹⁰⁴

For the last half of November, Iranian and P5+1 negotiators met in Vienna for continued negotiations. While all sides conceded that significant progress had been made during the Geneva talks, the distance between the two sides on the core issues was enough for all sides to settle on a seven-month extension.

Part of the problem, according to British and French officials, was that 'Iran had not demonstrated sufficient flexibility'.¹⁰⁵ The Iranians, however, believed that 'substantial progress' had been made and that this could be built upon to finalise an agreement within a matter of weeks or even days.¹⁰⁶

When speaking to reporters after the extension was announced, Kerry related that a number of 'new ideas [had] surfaced' about how to overcome these obstacles in the days prior to the announcement, adding that the US would 'be fools to walk away' from the talks at this point because an extension meant that Iran would continue to curb its nuclear programme while the talks continued. According to the *New York Times*, 'in agreeing to extend the existing interim agreement, Iran assured itself of a continuation of the sanctions relief that had brought it \$700 million a month in money that had been frozen abroad'.¹⁰⁷

In early December, a US official leaked details of the concessions that Iran had made during the talks. According to news reports, Iran agreed to limit further its development of new technology for enriching uranium, which seemed to dispel a key critique of the JPOA. Critics had charged that Iran could bypass many of the restrictions by developing more advanced centrifuges that could enrich more uranium, while still abiding by the letter of the agreement. Iran also agreed to convert 35 kilograms of higher-enriched uranium into fuel rods, which would render it virtually useless should Iran seek to develop a nuclear bomb. Finally, Iran agreed to expanded access for international inspectors to its centrifuge

production facilities, a doubling of the number of IAEA inspections, and unannounced or 'snap' inspections.¹⁰⁸ Clearly, the Iranians were willing to make significant concessions in exchange for limited sanctions relief.

In mid-December, American and Iranian officials met again in Geneva for a series of bilateral talks aimed at resolving the remaining differences that had prevented an agreement from being reached in November. While details of the talks are unavailable, the IAEA revealed on 19 December that Iran had so far kept to the word of the agreement and that no further enrichment had taken place beyond the agreed upon limit of 5 percent.¹⁰⁹ This significant development prompted President Obama to say in an interview on 21 December that the last year and a half has been the first time in over a decade that Iran has not advanced its nuclear programme, adding, 'even critics of our policy like the Netanyahu government ... have acknowledged that ... Iran has not made progress'.¹¹⁰

In mid-January, the foreign ministers of the P5+1 and Iran met again in Geneva to discuss ways to prevail over the obstacles presented in November. According to news reports, both sides had reached the point where a framework was being discussed. Famously, Kerry and Zarif were observed taking a long stroll together along Lake Geneva, suggesting that the two had developed a good rapport despite the challenges they faced in securing an agreement.¹¹¹ On 18 January, it was reported that while both sides had been drafting a framework, the talks 'did not make as much progress' as had been hoped for.¹¹²

CRISIS IN US-ISRAEL RELATIONS

As negotiations continued throughout early 2015, staunch opposition emerged from two quarters: Congress and Israel. In both cases, relations with the White House deteriorated to a new low. Obama sparred with Congress over the question of new sanctions against Iran, which he argued would sabotage the talks. Netanyahu conspired with House Republicans to address a joint session of Congress in an effort to prevent the nuclear agreement from moving forward.

It was clear by mid-January that a fissure had opened between the White House and Congress over the question of imposing further sanctions on Iran for failing to reach a nuclear deal. After a meeting with the British Prime Minister David Cameron, President Obama told the press that it would be foolish for Congress to impose new sanctions at this point in time, asking: 'Why is it that we would have to take actions that might jeopardize the possibility of getting a deal over the next 60 to 90 days? What is it precisely that is going to be accomplished?' He then threatened to veto any legislation that might endanger the talks.¹¹³

A few days later, Obama reiterated this threat before Congress in his State of Union address, in which he made it clear that he was pleased with the progress made thus far:

Our diplomacy is at work with respect to Iran, where, for the first time in a decade, we've halted the progress of its nuclear program and reduced its stockpile of nuclear material. Between now and this spring, we have a chance to negotiate a comprehensive agreement that prevents a nuclear-armed Iran, secures America and our allies—including Israel, while avoiding yet another Middle East conflict. There are no guarantees that negotiations will succeed, and I keep all options on the table to prevent a nuclear Iran.

On the question of new sanctions, he was unequivocal in his opposition:

But new sanctions passed by this Congress, at this moment in time, will all but guarantee that diplomacy fails—alienating America from its allies; making it harder to maintain sanctions; and ensuring that Iran starts up its nuclear program again. It doesn't make sense. And that's why I will veto any new sanctions bill that threatens to undo this progress.¹¹⁴

This left little room for interpretation. The White House was now firmly opposed to any effort made by Congress that would block the advancement of the ongoing negotiations.

The period following President Obama's State of the Union marked a low point in the state of US-Israeli relations as well. The relationship between the two allies had already reached a state of crisis by October 2014, when Jeffrey Goldberg had reported that a senior White House official called Netanyahu 'chickenshit,' implying that despite all of his tough talk he was too scared to attack Iran. As Goldberg writes, 'This comment is representative of the gloves-off manner in which American and Israeli officials now talk about each other behind closed doors, and is yet another sign that relations between the Obama and Netanyahu governments have moved toward a full-blown crisis'.¹¹⁵

The state of the relationship only got worse in the weeks following the State of Union. The next day, reports emerged that the Speaker of the House, John Boehner, had invited Netanyahu to address a joint session of Congress without consulting the White House or the State Department first.¹¹⁶ This grievous breach in diplomatic and domestic protocol pushed the relationship between the US and Israel into uncharted territory, while at the same time setting up a showdown between the White House and Congress.

The question of Netanyahu's speech to Congress was deeply divisive, especially because an election had been called in Israel for 17 March. The reaction to the announcement of Netanyahu's impending speech was largely negative, with Netanyahu's former ambassador to the US Michael Oren criticising the announcement as 'a cynical political move' that 'could hurt our attempts to act against Iran.' He then called on Netanyahu to cancel the talk.¹¹⁷

Even the staunchly pro-Israel Anti-Defamation League came out against the invitation, with Abe Foxman, its hard-line former president, calling for the speech to be cancelled. Meanwhile, a growing number of Democrats, including Vice President Joe Biden, had indicated that they would boycott the speech.¹¹⁸

Despite the unprecedented level of protest, when Netanyahu arrived in Washington in early March to give his speech he received a warm welcome from his allies at the American-Israeli Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) and from Republican members of Congress. However, the White House and State Department refused to meet with him and dozens of members of Congress boycotted the speech.¹¹⁹

When Netanyahu spoke to Congress on 3 March, his speech was full of hyperbolic language and factual errors. For example, Netanyahu accused Iran of supporting Shi'a militias that are 'rampaging through Iraq' and responsible for 'killing and maiming thousands of American servicemen and women in Iraq and Afghanistan'. He argued that Iran was in a competition with the Islamic State to establish an 'Islamic empire ... on the region and then on the entire world'. Finally, he said that a nuclear deal with Iran would 'automatically expire in about a decade,' and that under the agreement Iran would be allowed to have '190,000 centrifuges enriching uranium,' which give it the capacity to produce a nuclear bomb in a matter of weeks.¹²⁰ Virtually none of these statements were supported by facts.¹²¹ The *Guardian* described it as, 'long on terror, short on substance,'¹²² while the White House dismissed it as, 'all rhetoric, no new ideas, no action'.¹²³

Not long after Netanyahu's speech to Congress, relations between the White House and Congress deteriorated further after another unprecedented breach of diplomatic protocol. On 9 March, Sen. Cotton, a first term Republican senator from Arkansas, and 46 other Republicans, sent the Iranian government a letter that purported to explain the US constitution and implied that any deal reached with the Obama administration that was not ratified by Congress would be an 'executive agreement' that could be overturned by the next administration.¹²⁴

Vice President Biden was not alone in his outrage when he said, 'I cannot recall another instance in which senators wrote directly to advise another country—much less a long-time foreign adversary—that the president does not have the constitutional authority to reach a meaningful understanding with them'.¹²⁵ Within days, a heated debate emerged about whether or not the letter was considered an act of treason, with left-leaning activists submitting a petition to the White House that demanded the Justice Department charge the 47 senators with treason. It gathered more than 320,000 signatures.¹²⁶

The Iranian government's response to the controversial letter was dismissive. In a statement, Zarif explained, 'this letter has no legal value and is mostly a propaganda ploy'. Moreover, he felt it was 'interesting that while negotiations are still in progress and while no agreement

has been reached, some political pressure groups are so afraid even of the prospect of an agreement that they resort to unconventional methods, unprecedented in diplomatic history'. He then added an important point: 'the world is not the United States, and the conduct of inter-state relations is governed by international law, and not by US domestic law. The authors may not fully understand that in international law, governments represent the entirety of their respective states, are responsible for the conduct of foreign affairs, are required to fulfil the obligations they undertake with other states and may not invoke their internal law as justification for failure to perform their international obligations'.¹²⁷ Later, in an interview, Zarif explained that should an agreement be signed it will then be ratified by the United Nations Security Council and become law 'whether Senator Cotton likes it or not'.¹²⁸

Amidst the domestic turmoil caused by the letter, the lead-up to the Israeli general election took a bitter turn when Netanyahu indicated that he would never allow the creation of a Palestinian state under his watch, thereby repudiating his previous support for a two-state solution.¹²⁹ More problematic, on Election Day, 17 March, he took to Facebook to warn that 'Arab voters are coming out in droves to the polls. Left-wing organizations are bussing them out'.¹³⁰ Netanyahu's remarks prompted an angry reaction from not only the White House, which said it would need to 'reassess aspects of its relationship with Israel',¹³¹ but also from editorial boards across the United States and some pro-Jewish groups. For example, the *New York Times* editorial board described his remarks as a 'racist rant,' and said that he had 'forfeited any claim to representing all Israelis;' the *LA Times* said that his words were 'part of a disturbing, undemocratic conversation that has been underway in Israel for a long time;' and even the conservative Rabbinical Assembly issued a statement condemning his remarks, describing them as 'indefensible,' 'unacceptable,' 'divisive and undemocratic'.¹³² Despite the controversy, Netanyahu's remarks cost him very little at home and may have helped him clinch another term. After securing an electoral victory, Netanyahu backtracked on his remarks and issued an apology.¹³³ The White House was furious about the entire ordeal.

As a sign of its displeasure President Obama waited several days to offer his congratulations, which is unusual. And when he did speak to the Israeli Prime Minister, he told him, 'that given his statements prior to the election, it is going to be hard to find a path where people are seriously believing that negotiations are possible'.¹³⁴

In short the confrontation between the White House and Congress over Netanyahu's speech, Congress's efforts to sabotage the Iran nuclear talks by passing a new round of sanctions, Sen. Cotton's disregard of diplomatic protocol and Netanyahu's abandonment of the peace process and controversial remarks all showed that throughout the first quarter of 2015 the White House was engaged in a war of words with not only its own government but one of its closest allies.

THE BREAKTHROUGH IN LAUSANNE

Despite all of its efforts, Congress and the pro-Israel lobby were unable to scuttle the P5+1's talks with Iran, which had resumed in Lausanne, Switzerland in earnest on 15 March.

For the next two weeks, nuclear negotiators from all sides worked tirelessly, at all hours of the day, to finalise details of what would become a comprehensive framework that would lay out the basis of a final nuclear accord. Against the backdrop of these marathon negotiations, tensions continued to grow between the White House and Congress, which was still pushing for further sanctions on Iran.

One of the biggest complaints coming from Congress was that the White House was not consulting with it enough. In an interview with *CBS News*, Secretary Kerry said this argument was nonsense. 'We have had over 205 briefings, phone calls, discussions with Congress [about the nuclear talks]; 119 of them have taken place since January this year. We have been in full discussion with Congress about this.'¹³⁵ Clearly, the suggestion that the White House and State Department had not been keeping Congress in the loop is a red herring.

The negotiations continued for the next two weeks. Early reports indicated that 'significant progress' had been achieved in the talks, but the two sides appeared to have been stuck on two main points that would stand out as the main obstacles in the negotiations: 1) the scope of the research and development Iran will be allowed in the final stage of the agreement, and 2) how fast the UNSC would lift sanctions.¹³⁶

After an initial round of high-level talks between Kerry and Zarif on 18 March, which included their deputies and political and energy experts from both countries,¹³⁷ the two sides broke off for the Iranian New Year. Then, between 21 and 27 March, American and Iranian diplomats met again to hold technical talks aimed at finding common ground on the research and development question, which would include the dismantling of key elements of Iran's nuclear infrastructure.¹³⁸

On 25 March, Assistant Secretary Sherman met with her two main Iranian counterparts, Deputy Foreign Ministers Abbas Araghchi (for Legal and International Affairs) and Majid Ravanchi (for European and American Affairs), in Lausanne to build upon the progress achieved in the technical talks and to find a pathway to a mutually acceptable framework.

According to Rozen's in-depth report on the negotiations, the American team shuffled back and forth between rooms in the hotel with a whiteboard outlining the key points of agreement and contention in the talks. This whiteboard method proved to be the key to achieving a breakthrough because it allowed Iranian diplomats to avoid creating a paper trail that would have to be reported back to Tehran. According to a US official who was in the room, the whiteboard allowed both sides to go through 'all the elements' of a potential agreement, without either side needing to make firm commitments.¹³⁹

The next day, Kerry and Zarif arrived in Lausanne to advance further the progress that had been achieved over the past two weeks, the other P5+1 foreign ministers joined the talks on 28-29 March.¹⁴⁰ The talks would continue at an intensive pace for the next six days, often running through the night.¹⁴¹ Once again, the main sticking points were how fast sanctions would be lifted and the level of research and development that Iran would be allowed.

On the afternoon of April 2, President Rouhani and Zarif took to Twitter to announce that the negotiators had 'found solutions' and that the negotiators were 'ready to start drafting [a final agreement] immediately'.¹⁴² Soon thereafter, a formal announcement was made that the P5+1 and Iran had agreed to a document known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).¹⁴³

In the 4-page document, Iran agreed to limit its level of enrichment to 3.67 percent and to reduce its stockpile of low-enriched uranium from 10,000 kilograms to 300 kilograms for the next 15 years. All enrichment facilities will be placed under IAEA supervision. Iran also agreed not to build any new facilities and reduce by two thirds the number of centrifuges that it had installed to roughly 5,000, and to convert Fordo into a research centre.¹⁴⁴ In return for these concessions, the P5+1 agreed to slowly lift sanctions against Iran as it met key benchmarks, though the architecture of the sanctions programmes would remain and could snap back into place if it were determined that Iran had cheated.¹⁴⁵

The JCPOA established the framework for a final agreement, but a lot of work still had to be completed before the new deadline, now set for 30 June. Unsurprisingly, Republican lawmakers criticised the JCPOA, with House Speaker John Boehner issuing a statement saying: 'My concerns about Iran's efforts to ferment unrest, brutal violence and terror have only grown. It would be naïve to suggest the Iranian regime will not continue to use its nuclear program, and any economic relief, to further destabilize the region.'¹⁴⁶

In the face of such criticism, the White House abruptly shifted its tactics toward Congress on 15 April, when it announced that President Obama was willing to sign a compromise bill that would give Congress thirty days to review an agreement if it were reached by 7 July or 60 days if it ran past that date. This gesture, designed to placate the Senate Foreign Affairs Committee, which had just voted unanimously to move its draft legislation to the floor,¹⁴⁷ paved the way for the passage of the compromise bill by overwhelming proportions in the Senate (98-1) on 7 May¹⁴⁸ and the House on 15 May (400-25).¹⁴⁹ The president signed it into law on 21 May.¹⁵⁰ The problem with this concession at home was that it incentivised the Iranians to stall the negotiations and insist on last minute demands, knowing that the Obama administration faced a deadline.¹⁵¹

Meanwhile, relations between the United States and Iran continued to improve, as both countries built on the personal relationships that had been established during the arduous Lausanne talks. On 27 April, Secretary Kerry visited the Iranian delegation to the United Nations' residence in New York City—the first time a high level US official had visited Iranian property since the revolution.¹⁵²

Reports also emerged in early May that Iran and the United States have both agreed for the renovation of the Swiss-run US Interests Section in Tehran and allowing the Iranian Interests Section in Washington, which has traditionally been housed in the Indian embassy, to move to a new headquarters. This signalled what may be a step toward the establishment of an increased diplomatic presence for both countries, including the eventual, reciprocal establishment of embassies.¹⁵³

The Saudi Arabian government has been a vocal opponent throughout the talks. In early May, Saudi escalated tensions further when it announced that it would match any nuclear capability that the Iranians have achieved. For years the Saudi government has been accusing Iran of supporting the Houthi rebels,¹⁵⁴ who have recently been successful in seizing large swathes of Yemeni territory, leading to a Saudi-led bombing campaign to halt their advance.¹⁵⁵ The Saudi threat to match Iran's nuclear capability only increased the possibility of an escalating nuclear enrichment race in the region. This did not, however, deter the nuclear negotiators from pressing ahead with the talks.

Also in May another troubling bilateral US-Iran issue cropped up, when the closed-door trial of a *Washington Post* reporter, Jason Rezaian, who had been in jail on espionage charges in Iran since July 2014 began.¹⁵⁶ This issue had been rather vexing for the nuclear negotiators, because the trial was being conducted by Iran's hardline judiciary, which neither President Rouhani nor Foreign Minister Zarif had any influence over. Worse, the trial was held in secret and Rezaian was only allowed to meet with his lawyer for one hour. On 12 October 2015, it was reported that Rezaian had been convicted, but still no details of the verdict or the sentence handed down were made public. The uncertainty of Rezaian's fate, and those of other Americans held in Iran, will continue to be an ongoing challenge to any further improvement in American-Iranian relations, though there is a possibility that Iran might seek to trade Rezaian and the other Americans in exchange for Iranians held in the United States for violating sanctions.¹⁵⁷

Between late-May and mid-July, the P5+1 and Iran worked on the specific terms of the JCPOA. On 30 May, Kerry and Zarif met in Geneva for a six-hour long meeting aimed at overcoming some of the key obstacles to achieving an agreement.¹⁵⁸ From the outset of this new round, concerns were raised about the viability of the 30 June deadline, which seemed

arbitrary and appeared to constrain the P5+1 negotiating position.¹⁵⁹ Moreover amid the talks, the IAEA reported that Iran's stockpile of nuclear fuel had increased over the past 18 months, which seemed to undercut the Obama administration's argument that Iran's nuclear programme had been 'frozen' throughout the talks.¹⁶⁰

Meanwhile, Israeli officials and members of Congress continued to rail against the ongoing talks, with Netanyahu calling on the negotiators to 'reject this bad agreement and insist on a better [one],'¹⁶¹ while Sen. Corker said that he was 'alarmed' by the concessions that American negotiating team was making in Vienna, adding, 'it is breath-taking to see how far from your original goals and statements the P5+1 have come during negotiations with Iran.'¹⁶² Part of the reason for Netanyahu and Corker's alarm were reports that suggested that Secretary Kerry had indicated that the US was prepared to ease sanctions against Iran despite not resolving the question of whether it had been clandestinely working on a nuclear weapon. This question had been separated from the main foci of the negotiations but had increasingly become an obstacle to achieving a compromise.¹⁶³

The question of when and in what form Iran would receive sanctions relief continued to confound negotiators in Vienna. To make matters worse, Ayatollah Khamenei issued a public demand for sanctions to be lifted before he would endorse any nuclear deal and refused to allow inspectors into military sites.¹⁶⁴ By the same token, after an additional extension of the talks at the end of June due to the increased likelihood of deal,¹⁶⁵ the Iranians raised the question of lifting an embargo against arms sales and purchases on 6 July. As one European negotiator noted, 'I think the Iranians see an opportunity here to break the solidarity of their negotiating opponents.'¹⁶⁶

These moves resembled traditional bazaar negotiating tactics, where just before a deal is ready to be clinched new demands are made in the hope of obtaining further concessions or a better deal. But the Iranian move set off a heated response from the P5+1 negotiators, leading to an intense, private exchange between Zarif and Kerry during which an aide entered the room to inform them that 'everyone outside could hear their [argument]'. Zarif had reportedly declared on 8 July, 'Never try to threaten the Iranians,' which prompted Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov to add disarmingly: 'Nor the Russians'.¹⁶⁷

Despite this tense situation and a further extension of the talks, it became increasingly clear over the weekend of 11-12 July that a final nuclear deal had been clinched at last. On 14 July, it was announced that the P5+1 and Iran had reached an agreement on a final nuclear deal. Despite all of the obstacles at home and abroad that the negotiators faced, they had finally managed to reach a compromise that would prevent Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon, while at the same time recognizing its 'inalienable right' to enrich uranium. Meanwhile, Washington braced for one of the greatest political battles of modern history.

THE NUCLEAR DEAL

The terms of the nuclear deal are important. According to the White House, the agreement put in place measures to curb four main pathways Iran could take to produce a nuclear weapon: highly enriched uranium plants at Natanz and Fordow, the production of weapons grade plutonium at Arak and the development of a covert nuclear programme. Under the deal, Iran's theoretical breakout time for producing a nuclear weapon was pushed back from 2-3 months to a minimum of one year, which would have to be maintained for the next decade. Iran would not be allowed to enrich uranium above 3.67 percent and its stockpile of low-enriched uranium would be capped at 300 kilograms for fifteen years. Limits would also be placed on research and development on advanced centrifuges and be confined to the Natanz facility. No enrichment would be allowed at the Fordow facility, which would be converted into a research centre. Iran also agreed that it would not build any new heavy water reactors for the next fifteen years. Finally, Iran agreed to re-design its Arak research reactor so that it would not generate weapons-useable plutonium and to ship any spent fuel outside of the country in perpetuity. This cuts Iran off from a supply of plutonium forever.¹⁶⁸

To ensure that Iran complies with these terms, it has agreed to sign the Additional Protocol to the NPT, which would allow IAEA inspectors to access all of its facilities and the use of modern monitoring technology. In addition, for the next 20 years, the IAEA will monitor the production of centrifuges, their assembly and their storage. Further, the IAEA will have access to all uranium mines and mills to ensure that nothing is being diverted for the next 25 years, and monitor the production, supply, and the storage of Iran's centrifuges in perpetuity. The IAEA will also have 24-hour access to all Iran's declared nuclear sites.¹⁶⁹

In exchange for these concessions, Iran will receive a 'comprehensive lifting' of the economic sanctions that have crippled its economy. These economic carrots include gaining access to international banking systems, which have made it difficult for Iranians to trade internationally, or for expatriates to send remittances to their families. These measures would be enshrined in a new Security Council resolution, which will terminate all previous resolutions aimed at Iran's nuclear programme. This does not, however, mean that Iran gets immediate relief, rather the lifting of sanctions is conditioned on a series of steps that it will need make first. At the same time, the JCPOA puts in place provisions for the sanctions to 'snap back' into place if it was determined that Iran had cheated and the arms embargo against Iran would remain in place for the next eight years.¹⁷⁰

THE CONGRESSIONAL REVIEW

In accordance with the Corker-Cardin resolution the Obama administration was required to submit the agreement to Congress for a 60-day review period and a resolution in support of the agreement to the United Nations. Upon doing so, the White House set off one of the most divisive debates between Congress and the White House in modern history.

The response to the 14 July announcement was predictably acrimonious. The White House hailed the agreement as a 'historic deal,' with President Obama saying that while he welcomed Congress's input on the agreement, he would veto any Republican effort aimed at scuttling it. Speaking to CNN in Vienna, Kerry said, 'This is the good deal that we have sought.'¹⁷¹ Among Democrats in Congress there were mixed feelings. On the one hand, many Democrats felt concerned that the administration had given too much away, but were willing to listen to the administration's pitch before making up their minds.¹⁷² Others, like Sen. Menendez, felt that the administration gave away too much and wanted a better deal. 'The deal doesn't end Iran's nuclear program—it preserves it.'¹⁷³ Menendez's view, however, fits more along the lines of those of Netanyahu, who denounced the agreement as an 'historic mistake,'¹⁷⁴ and Speaker Boehner, who told reporters that the terms of the deal were 'unacceptable'.¹⁷⁵ Indeed, within hours of the deal's announcement, pro-Israel groups launched a \$30 million lobbying campaign aimed at convincing enough congressional Democrats to reject the deal and override President Obama's veto, they would need 61 senators to reject the deal and 67 to override a presidential veto.¹⁷⁶

On 17 July, the United States introduced the draft resolution to the Security Council, which passed in a unanimous vote on 20 July, becoming UNSC resolution 2231. Beyond endorsing the Iran deal, the resolution called upon member states to support the implementation of the resolution, requested that the IAEA begin verifying and monitoring Iran's nuclear programme under the terms laid out in the JCPOA and report its findings to the Security Council, established a framework for lifting sanctions, and put in place a measure that would effectively prevent the five permanent members from vetoing the imposition of the snap-back sanctions.¹⁷⁷ This last provision was key.

As the *New York Times* explained: 'If one of the parties to the nuclear deal, like the United States, determines that Iran is not fulfilling its commitments, it can ask for a Security Council vote on a resolution to continue the deal's lifting of all Iran sanctions resolutions. When a vote takes place, the U.S. or the four other permanent members could then veto the resolution, and the sanctions would automatically "snap back" in 30 days.'¹⁷⁸ In other words, a Security Council veto would automatically bring about the re-imposition of the sanctions.

Understandably, Republicans were openly hostile toward the UN resolution, with Sen. Corker urging the White House to postpone submitting it during the congressional review period. Corker accused the White House of pulling a fast one on Congress. 'It is inappropriate to commit the United States to meet certain international obligations without even knowing if Congress and the American people approve or disapprove of the Iran agreement' he argued.¹⁷⁹ However, the notion that America's negotiating partners would defer action to Congress, as Secretary Kerry observed, is a bit unrealistic. 'It's presumptuous of some people to suspect that France, Russia, China, Germany, Britain ought to do what the Congress tells them to do.'¹⁸⁰ Sherman went a bit further, observing in a sarcastic tone, 'Well, excuse me, the world, you should wait for the United States Congress'.¹⁸¹

The case put forward by opponents of the nuclear accord involved two key refrains. First, critics of the deal, including Netanyahu and congressional Republicans, argued that Congress should reject the deal and take action to compel the White House, and its negotiating partners, to return to the negotiating table and secure a 'better deal'.¹⁸² For example, Mark Dubowitz, the executive director for the neoconservative Foundation for the Defense of Democracies, argued that 'Congress can and should require the administration to amend the agreement's fatal flaws, such as the sunset clause and the nuclear snap back'. The problem, he recognised, was that America's European negotiating partners were unlikely to heed an American call to renegotiate the agreement. To overcome this, he suggested that the White House use the threat of economic sanctions against its negotiating partners to force them to return to the table and get a 'better deal'.¹⁸³ This suggestion, however, would antagonise America's allies and partners unnecessarily and probably fruitlessly.

The second key argument was that the White House had failed to disclose two secret 'side deals' reached between the IAEA and Iran when it passed the nuclear accord along to Congress. Rep. Mike Pompeo (R-Kan.) and Sen. Cotton first learned of the existence of these 'side deals' in late July, after they met with the deputy director of the IAEA. When asked how the nuclear agency would go about verifying that Iran was complying with the nuclear accord, the deputy explained that this was between the IAEA and the Iranian government. When they asked if they could see these agreements, the congressmen were told that this information was classified. They then asked if Secretary Kerry had seen the agreement, and were told, in unequivocal terms, 'No American is ever going to get to see them'. Critics of the agreement, like Marc Thiessen, a neoconservative speechwriter for the Bush administration, pounced on this, arguing that the White House 'is gambling our national security and handing over \$150 billion in sanctions relief to Iran, based on secret agreements negotiated between the IAEA and Iran that no U.S. official has seen'.¹⁸⁴

Throughout August, the debate took on a hyperbolic tone as opponents of the agreement resorted to rhetorical attacks against the administration, often accusing the White House of abandoning Israel. For example, on 5 August, Sen. Cotton told Israeli reporters, 'I don't think the Iranian leadership believes that the United States is willing to use force to protect our national security objectives'. He added 'I don't think any military expert in the United States or elsewhere would say the U.S. military is not capable of setting Iran's nuclear facilities back to day zero'.¹⁸⁵ The implications of Cotton's statement irked Sen. Murphy, who took to the Senate floor that day to denounce Cotton's irresponsible choice of words:

[There] are members of this body who are openly cheerleading for military engagement with Iran, who are oversimplifying the effect of military action, who are blind to the reality of U.S. military activity in that region over the course of the last 10 to 15 years. This belief in the omnipotent, unailing power of the U.S. military is simply not based in reality. We could set back the nuclear program for a series of years, but the consequences to the region would be catastrophic.¹⁸⁶

That same day, President Obama gave a speech at American University in Washington, DC, which outlined his support for the nuclear agreement. Obama described the debate in stark terms: 'Let's not mince words: The choice we face is ultimately between diplomacy and some sort of war—maybe not tomorrow, maybe not three months from now, but soon.' He asked 'how can we in good conscience justify war before we've tested a diplomatic agreement that achieves our objectives' while noting, with some irony, the perception that the same hard-liners in Iran, who chant 'Death to America,' were 'making common cause with the Republican caucus'.¹⁸⁷

As if timed to coincide with President Obama's speech, that day Sen. Schumer dealt the administration a harsh blow when he announced his opposition to the deal. In justifying his decision he expressed alarm that inspectors had to give the Iran government 24-days notice before the inspection of suspicious sites can take place.¹⁸⁸

The next day, Jeffrey Lewis, a non-proliferation expert, published a stinging rebuttal of Schumer's contention in *Foreign Policy*. 'Let's get this straight. The agreement calls for *continuous* monitoring at all of Iran's declared sites—that means *all of the time*.' Lewis argued that Schumer and others were distorting a key part of the agreement dealing with possible undeclared sites. 'Far from giving Iran 24 days,' Lewis wrote, 'the IAEA will need to give only 24 *hours*' notice before showing up at a suspicious site to take samples. Access could even be requested with as little as two hours' notice, something that will be much more feasible now that Iran has agreed to let inspectors stay in-country for the

long term'. More importantly:

*There is a strict time limit on stalling. Iran must provide access within two weeks. If Iran refuses, the Joint Commission set up under the deal must decide within seven days whether to force access. Following a majority vote in the Joint Commission—where the United States and its allies constitute a majority bloc—Iran has three days to comply. If it doesn't, it's openly violating the deal, which would be grounds for the swift return of the international sanctions regime.*¹⁸⁹

WAR OF THE LOBBYISTS

Throughout the review period, the Obama administration scored a series of political victories that all but guaranteed the agreement would overcome congressional opposition.

First, on 3 August, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) announced its support for the nuclear accord. Speaking on behalf of the six-member council, Qatari Foreign Minister Khalid bin Mohammed al-Attiyah said the agreement was 'the best option among other options, to come up with a solution ... through dialogue'. In exchange for their endorsement, Kerry said the United States would expedite military sales and assistance in order to counter any threat Iran might pose. This would include increased intelligence sharing, training special forces, maritime interdiction of weapons, improved cooperation on cyber security, and the sale of ballistic-missile defence systems.¹⁹⁰

The GCC's endorsement was important for several reasons. Throughout the negotiations the Sunni Gulf States had expressed concern that the accord would allow Shi'a Iran to free up resources that could be used to exacerbate regional tensions even further, especially in light of Iran's support for the Houthi rebels in Yemen. By endorsing the agreement and accepting increased American military aid, the GCC also undercut the argument that the United States was abandoning its regional allies. Finally, its support meant that Israel was now the only nation that was openly opposed to the accord.¹⁹¹ This was a major victory for the White House.

Throughout August and early September, the Obama administration lobbied Senate and House Democrats aggressively to secure opposition to any effort to block the deal. According to the *New York Times*, the administration's effort was vast: 'Cabinet members and other senior administration officials talked directly with more than 200 House members and senators. The president spoke personally to about 100 lawmakers, either individually or in small groups, and aides said he called 30 lawmakers during his August vacation on Martha's Vineyard.'

The White House's primary focus was the Senate, where it needed to secure at least 34 votes to allow a presidential veto. Its efforts paid off. On 2 September, President Obama announced that he had enough votes in the Senate to veto the Republican-led effort to block the Iran Deal in Congress.¹⁹² Thanks to procedural rules, the Republicans needed at least 60 votes for the resolution of disapproval to overcome a filibuster and pass, which would prompt a presidential veto. However, if they cannot secure 60 votes, the resolution would be dead in the water.¹⁹³ On 6 September, the White House announced that it had secured 42 votes in the Senate: the implementation of the Iran deal was unstoppable.¹⁹⁴

On 10-11 September, both the House and Senate debated two pieces of legislation related to the Iran deal: 1) a resolution disapproving the Iran deal; 2) a resolution blocking the president from easing sanctions on Iran; and 3) a resolution accusing the administration of not fulfilling the terms of the Corker-Cardin Act because it had failed to disclose details about the secret 'side deals' between Iran and the IAEA.

In the Senate, the outcome was already fixed. The Democrats filibustered the Republican resolution, thereby preventing it from becoming legislation. On 10 September, after a long day of passionate speeches, the Senate voted 58-42 to end the debate, stopping the disapproval legislation in its tracks.¹⁹⁵

In the House, the Republican majority put forward a resolution approving the Iran deal, knowing that it would fail—244 Republicans and 25 Democrats voted against it and 162 Democrats in favour.¹⁹⁶ The House also passed legislation that would prevent President Obama from easing sanctions on Iran by a vote along party lines (247-186), with the entire Democrat caucus voting against the measure.¹⁹⁷

Having failed to block the deal, the Republicans put forward legislation that asserted that the administration had not complied with Corker-Cardin through its failure to disclose details about the 'secret deal' between the IAEA and Iran. Again, the vote was entirely along party lines (245-186), with two abstentions.¹⁹⁸

The failure of the opponents of the Iran nuclear deal to pass any legislation effectively rendered the debate closed. After years of challenging negotiations with the Iranians, and several months of intense debate, the Obama administration and its allies had finally prevailed over their opponents and ensured that the United States would abide by the terms of the Iran deal. If Iran abides by the terms of the agreement, which respected analysts believe will be the case,¹⁹⁹ the Obama administration will have secured the single most important victory to prevent the proliferation of nuclear weapons in several decades.

LOOKING AHEAD

Having secured a nuclear deal, it is worthwhile to consider the implications of a potential deal for the United States, Iran and Israel. On balance, the US stands to gain the most from a nuclear deal with Iran, but there are positive implications for both Iran and Israel.

United States

Following a series of announcements in late 2011, Washington has indicated its intention to 'rebalance' its foreign policy and make a strategic pivot towards Asia.²⁰⁰ In order to achieve this, the Obama administration has made a concerted effort to disengage itself from the Middle East's many problems. This was evident in Secretary Kerry's intensive and unsuccessful effort to bring about a settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, as well as President Obama's reluctance to involve America in the Syrian Civil War or the ongoing Iraq crisis. If the US can extricate itself from these conflicts, it could then refocus its energies in Asia. According to Parsi, the Obama administration has recognised that a functioning relationship with Iran could help the United States pivot towards Asia: 'Many of the problems in the region have become all the more difficult to resolve as a result of the US and Iran not being able to talk to each other.'²⁰¹

For the better part of a century, America's policy towards the Gulf has been aimed at not allowing the dominance of a single state, keeping oil flowing through the Strait of Hormuz on global markets and limiting its military presence in the region, while ensuring the safety of its regional allies, particularly Israel.²⁰² To the US, resolving the Iranian nuclear question aligns perfectly with these objectives.

A nuclear deal will significantly reduce the likelihood of an Israeli military strike against Iran, bring Iranian oil back into the global oil supply and hopefully stave off a potential nuclear arms race between Iran and Saudi Arabia. More importantly, on important regional issues such as stabilising the civil wars in Iraq and Syria, reining in terrorism in Pakistan, preventing a Taliban victory in Afghanistan and countering the region's heroin trade, it is possible that resolving the nuclear issue could lead to joint cooperation.

Finally, the Iran nuclear deal has alleviated a problem that has vexed the United States for over a decade, which should make it easier to undertake a strategic pivot towards East Asia. However, the rise of the Islamic State, and the problems that it poses to the Middle East regional order, could side-track American policymakers and prevent them from taking the steps needed to complete the pivot.

Iran

The international sanctions regime has devastated Iran's economy and left it as a pariah state, so having these measures lifted will likely bring it back into the international community.

'All Iranians see Iran as a great power,' observed Gary Sick. Like many Americans, they see their country as an 'exceptional state,' the idea that they are indispensable, that 'everything revolves around them'. Unfortunately, if Iran is ever achieve to this, it will have to rid itself of the nuclear issue, and only then can things begin to happen.²⁰³

Ali Ansari, a leading Iran expert at the University of St. Andrews, agrees. The driving force behind Iran's diplomacy, he says, 'is to sort the economy out and ... get the sanctions lifted'.²⁰⁴ However, Axworthy believes that the main reason for Iran coming to the table could be because it had already achieved its nuclear objectives. Moreover, he argues, the nuclear deal shows that the Islamic Republic has 'managed to secure a degree of respect as a legitimate sovereign state, in contrast with its previous history of national humiliation and repeated foreign interference'.²⁰⁵ In achieving the nuclear deal, Iran is well positioned to improve on both of these elements.

The implications of a nuclear deal are generally positive. One likely outcome of a deal, according to Parsi, is that 'Iran will break out of its isolation and ... be increasingly treated as a regional player, because discussions between the United States and Iran will have been normalised'.²⁰⁶ At the same time, tensions will likely be reduced across the board, and not just with the United States, but with the EU and the Gulf States, and could lead to increased cooperation against ISIS.

There are other potential positive outcomes as well: Iran will be allowed to trade internationally, Western investment will help restore its oil industry and it could be given a greater role in ensuring the security of the Gulf, provided the Saudis acquiesce. All of these outcomes not only benefit Iran but will also help stabilise the region and bridge the Sunni-Shia divide. In addition, Iran could use its influence with the Syrian regime and Hezbollah to help bring a peaceful end to the Syrian Civil War and perhaps pressure Hamas into seeking peace with Israel, though this is a long shot.

Importantly, the lifting of sanctions against Iran could help foster positive relations with emerging powers, like Brazil and Turkey, which had been hindered due to American pressure. The strengthening of Iran's relations with these two ostensibly pro-Western nations is to America's advantage and should be encouraged. Similarly, the reopening of Britain's embassy in Tehran, after several years of estrangement, could also foster an improvement of diplomatic and economic relations between Iran and the EU, which will only further incentivise ensuring the implementation of the JCPOA.

Despite all this, simply lifting the sanctions will not solve all Iran's woes. 'Even though sanctions will be lifted,' said Parsi, 'the fundamental problem with the Iranian economy is mismanagement and corruption and that will not go away'.²⁰⁷ There is also no guarantee that a nuclear deal will be reached. Dennis Ross, who served as President Obama's point man on Iran during his first term, but generally adopts a pro-Israel line, raises a good question: 'Even if President Rouhani and Mohammad Javad Zarif, his foreign minister, are ready to accept such a deal... can they sell this to the Supreme Leader?'²⁰⁸ This seems to be the case, as Khamenei has endorsed the deal, which the Iranian Majles voted to approve of on 13 October by an overwhelming majority, with 161 voting in favour of the deal and 59 voting against, while 13 abstained.²⁰⁹ The following day, Iran's supreme legislative authority, the Guardian Council, gave its approval of the deal, effectively ratifying the agreement.²¹⁰

Israel

Despite its contentious approach, the Israeli government's aggressive stance actually played a significant role in bringing about the Iran nuclear deal. If the United States was the good cop, then Israel was surely the bad cop. In the end, the implications of a nuclear deal for Israel swing both ways. According to Amnon Aran, an Israeli specialist at City University London, the Israelis fear that a nuclear deal is simply a delaying mechanism for the Iranians to gather strength and keep their basic foreign policy orientation intact and then emerge even more powerful with a nuclear threshold capability.²¹¹ Ross takes these concerns a step further: 'the worry is that we will conclude a deal that leaves the Iranians as a threshold nuclear state: capable of breaking out to nuclear weapons at a time when we might be distracted by another international crisis.' With an intact nuclear programme, the Israelis will continue to view Iran as an 'existential threat'.²¹²

Parsi disagrees with this view. He believes that Israel could actually be the big winner of the nuclear deal. 'If [Israel] truly believes that Iran's nuclear capability is a problem, [a] deal [that] makes sure Iran cannot build a weapon without getting caught, is a significant enhancement of Israel's security.' However, for Israel to capitalise on the benefits of a nuclear deal, Parsi believes, '[there] will need to be some form of a shakeup in Israel because the Netanyahu government has taken Israel down a path and painted Israel into a corner at a time when Israel needs to be flexible and agile strategically, and it currently isn't'.²¹³ Any reduction of the threat of an Iranian nuclear weapon corresponds to an improvement in Israel's security. At the same time, a functioning American-Iranian relationship will create a scenario where it is more difficult for Iran to pursue the same hostile policies toward Israel that it has in the past without repercussions.²¹⁴

In the end, it is clear that the US and Iran both stand to gain considerably from a nuclear deal, but the Israeli government and its allies in Congress stand out as potential spoilers. The problem, according to Sick, is that Israel and Iran are locked in a Cold War-like geostrategic rivalry, with America caught in the middle. 'Israel has quite deliberately chosen Iran as their enemy,' says Sick, which makes it difficult for the US to open up to Iran without hurting its already tense relationship with Netanyahu.²¹⁵ As Israel continues to undermine American efforts to secure a nuclear deal with Iran or broker a peace agreement between the Israelis and Palestinians, it is no wonder that there is a crisis in US-Israel relations.²¹⁶

CONCLUSION

There were five factors that contributed to the successful conclusion of the Iran nuclear deal.

The first was the role that American and Israeli covert action played in sabotaging Iran's nuclear programme or threatening those who participated. While these efforts did not result in any significant reduction in Iran's ability to enrich uranium, these actions showed the Iranians the lengths to which the United States was willing to go in order to prevent it from obtaining a nuclear weapon.

The second factor was the real threat of either an Israeli, or American, airstrike on Iran's nuclear infrastructure. Although it was evident that President Obama was opposed to this option, his regular reiterations that 'all options were on the table' nonetheless played a role in bringing Iran to the table.

The third—and perhaps the most significant—factor was the escalating series of sanctions placed against the Iranian regime. In particular, the Obama administration deserves credit for the way in which he wrangled all of the permanent members of the Security Council into adoption of a harsh sanctions regiment, in addition to his success at persuading the European Union, Japan and South Korea to no longer purchase Iranian oil. The sanctions sent the Iranian economy into a tailspin, with inflation reaching unprecedented levels. This, in turn, put pressure on the Iranian government to find ways to alleviate the economic crisis. The most logical solution was to negotiate.

The fourth factor that contributed to the Iran deal was the coming to office of willing negotiating partners in both Tehran and Washington. Prior to the election of President Obama in 2008, American presidents had only shown a fleeting interest in improving relations with Iran. To Obama, Iran's nuclear programme was a major foreign policy challenge, but not one that he felt could be resolved exclusively by force. Even after the controversial 2009 election in Iran, the Obama White House consistently showed its interest in engaging the Iranians in private, away from the spotlight. This led to the tentative rounds of bilateral American-Iranian talks in Oman, but it was not until Hassan Rouhani was elected in 2013 that these negotiations began in earnest.

The fifth and final factor was the skilful diplomacy and personalities of the nuclear negotiators, Secretary Kerry and Iran's Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif. The Iran deal might not have been secured had it not been for the tireless efforts of these two statesmen. In their weeks-long negotiations, they mastered the art of compromise and achieved what many people did not believe was possible: an agreement that set out a clear framework for blocking the four pathways to a nuclear bomb, while allowing Iran to save face through the recognition of its right to enrich uranium in addition to the lifting of sanctions. No negotiated deal is ever without its flaws, but the one reached in Lausanne provided a pathway for Iran to return to the international community, while preventing it from achieving a nuclear bomb. Nevertheless, as a testament to their success, both Kerry and Zarif were among the contenders for the 2015 Nobel Peace Prize.²¹⁷

In the end, no single factor contributed to the securing of the Iran nuclear deal, rather it took a combination of these factors to produce the agreement. American and Israeli covert action and the threat of a military strike against Iran showed that both were serious about preventing it from obtaining a nuclear weapon; the sanctions gave the United States and its negotiating partners the leverage they needed to induce Iran into genuinely negotiating a way to alleviate the economic crisis they had induced; and finally, the coming to power of a group of individuals—inside both Iran and the United States—and their desire to reach final settlement all brought about the securing what could be one of the greatest diplomatic breakthroughs in decades. ■

NOTES

- 1 William Burns, 'The Fruits of Diplomacy With Iran,' *New York Times*, April 2, 2015, http://www.nytimes.com/2015/04/03/opinion/a-good-deal-with-iran.html?_r=0.
- 2 Roham Alvandi, 'Nixon, Kissinger, and the Shah: The Origins of Iranian Primacy in the Persian Gulf,' *Diplomatic History*, 36/2 (2012): 338.
- 3 See Hamid Dabashi, *Theology of Discontent* (New York: Transaction Publishers, 2005).
- 4 Mark Bowden, *Guests of the Ayatollah* (New York: Grove Press, 2006).
- 5 Gary Sick, *All Fall Down: America's Tragic Encounter with Iran* (New York: Random House, 1985).
- 6 Bryan Gibson, 'Iran nuclear deal shows hawks that diplomacy actually works,' *CNN*, November 25, 2013. Available online: <http://edition.cnn.com/2013/11/25/opinion/iran-nuclear-diplomacy/>
- 7 Bryan Gibson, 'Iran nuclear deal shows hawks that diplomacy actually works,' *CNN*, November 25, 2013. Available online: <http://edition.cnn.com/2013/11/25/opinion/iran-nuclear-diplomacy/>
- 8 See John Tower, 'Congressional Committees Investigating The Iran-Contra Affair,' February 1, 1987.
- 9 Brent Scowcroft and George H.W. Bush, *A World Transformed* (New York: Vintage, 1999), p. 134.
- 10 F. Gregory Gause, 'The Illogic of Dual Containment,' *Foreign Affairs*, 73/2 (1994), p. 56. See also Martin Indyk in the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 'Special Report: Clinton Administration Policy toward the Middle East,' *PolicyWatch*, May 21, 1993.
- 11 Gause, 'The Illogic of Dual Containment,' pp. 56-57.
- 12 Bruce Reidel, 'America and Iran: Flawed Analysis, Missed Opportunities, and Looming Dangers,' *Brown Journal of World Affairs*, 15/1 (2008), p. 101.
- 13 CNN, 'Transcript of interview with Iranian President Mohammad Khatami,' January 7, 1999. Available online: <http://edition.cnn.com/WORLD/9801/07/iran/interview.html>
- 14 Malcolm Byrne, 'Secret U.S. Overture to Iran in 1999 Broke Down Over Terrorism Allegations,' May 30, 2010. Available online: <http://www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB318/>
- 15 Reidel, 'America and Iran,' 106-7.
- 16 Barbara Slavin, *Bitter Friends, Bosom Enemies: Iran, the U.S., and the Twisted Path to Confrontation* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 2009), 197-198.
- 17 Reidel, 'America and Iran,' pp. 106-7
- 18 *The Guardian*, 'Timeline of Iran's nuclear programme,' November 24, 2013.
- 19 Axworthy, *Revolutionary Iran*, 383. For details about subsequent US support for the MEK, see Seymour Hersh, 'Our Men in Iran?,' *The New Yorker*, April 5, 2012, <http://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/our-men-in-iran>.
- 20 Parsi, *Treacherous Alliance*, 247.
- 21 *Ibid.*, 247.

- 22 *Ibid.*, 243.
- 23 *Ibid.*, 248.
- 24 Slavin, *Bitter Friends*, 204-5.
- 25 *Iran Project*, 'International Sanctions Against Iran,' 23-24.
- 26 *New York Times*, 'Timeline of Iran's nuclear program,' March 20, 2013.
- 27 National Intelligence Council, National Intelligence Estimate, 'Iran: Nuclear Intentions and Capabilities,' November 2007, 1-8.
- 28 Elaine Sciolino, 'Iran Claims Draft Accord With Europe on Uranium,' *New York Times*, November 9, 2004.
- 29 William J. Broad and David Sanger, 'Relying on Computer, U.S. Seeks to Prove Iran's Nuclear Aims,' *New York Times*, November 13, 2005.
- 30 Andrew Cockburn, 'Manufactured Crisis: The Untold Story of the Iran Nuclear Scare,' *Harpers Magazine*, May 6, 2014. See also Gareth Porter, *Manufactured Crisis: The Untold Story of the Nuclear Iran Scare* (New York: Just World Books, 2014).
- 31 According to Arash Norouzi, 'Wiped off the Map' – The Rumor of the Century,' *The Mossadegh Project*, January 18, 2007, Ahmadinejad's statement had been mistranslated into English.
- 32 Steven Weisman and Nazila Fathi, 'Iranians Reopen Nuclear Centers,' *New York Times*, January 11, 2006; Michael Slackman, 'Saying It Is Not a Threat, Iran Opens a Heavy-Water Plant,' *New York Times*, August 26, 2006.
- 33 *The Iran Project*, '...International Sanctions Against Iran,' p. 24.
- 34 David Crist, *The Twilight Wars: The Secret History of America's Thirty-Year Conflict with Iran* (New York: Penguin, 2013), 550.
- 35 Ardeshir Hassanpour, January 12, 2007; Majid Shahriari, November 29, 2010; Masoud Alimohammadi, January 12, 2010; Darioush Rezaeinejad, July 23, 2011; and Mostafa Ahmadi-Roshan, January 11, 2012.
- 36 *Reuters*, 'Mossad hit-squads behind Iran scientists' murders - US official,' February 9, 2012. Available online: <http://rt.com/news/iranian-scientists-assassinations-israel-923/>
- 37 Matthew Cole and Mark Schone, 'Who is Killing Iran's Nuclear Scientists?,' *ABC News*, July 26, 2011. Available online: <http://abcnews.go.com/Blotter/killing-irans-nuclear-scientists/story?id=14152453>
- 38 *Reuters*, 'Obama pushes Israel to stop assassinations of Iran nuclear scientists – report,' March 2, 2014. Available online: <http://rt.com/news/iran-obama-assassination-scientists-443/>
- 39 Crist, *The Twilight Wars*, 551.
- 40 David Sanger, 'Obama Order Sped Up Wave of Cyberattacks Against Iran,' *New York Times*, June 1, 2012. Available online: [http://www.nytimes.com/2012/06/01/world/middleeast/obama-ordered-wave-of-cyberattacks-against-iran.html?_r=3&pagewanted=2&seid=auto&smid=tw-nytimespolitics&pagewanted=all&](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/06/01/world/middleeast/obama-ordered-wave-of-cyberattacks-against-iran.html?_r=3&pagewanted=2&seid=auto&smid=tw-nytimespolitics&pagewanted=all&_r=3&pagewanted=2&seid=auto&smid=tw-nytimespolitics&pagewanted=all&)
- 41 Sanger, 'Cyberattacks Against Iran,' *Op.Cit.* For a description of how the Stuxnet virus works, see http://www.nytimes.com/imagepages/2011/01/16/world/16stuxnet_g.html?ref=middleeast
- 42 Ivanka Barzashka, 'Are Cyber-Weapons Effective?,' *The RUSI Journal*, 158/2 (2013): 48-49.

- 43 David Lee, 'Flame: Massive cyber-attack discovered, researchers say,' *BBC News*, May 28, 2012. Available online: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/technology-18238326>. See also Ronald Diebert, *Black Code: Inside the Battle for Cyberspace* (Random House, 2013).
- 44 Sanger, 'Cyberattacks Against Iran,' *Op.Cit.*
- 45 Crist, *The Twilight War*, 541-43.
- 46 Muscat 383 to Department of State, 'Omani Envoy Says Iran Ready for Dialogue with U.S., Advises Exploiting Iranian Vulnerabilities,' April 27, 2009. Available online: <http://wikileaks.org/cable/2009/04/09MUSCAT383.html>
- 47 *New York Times*, 'Text: Obama's Speech in Cairo,' June 4, 2009. Available online: <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/06/04/us/politics/04obama.text.html?pagewanted=all&r=0>
- 48 David Sanger and William Broad, 'U.S. and Allies Warn Iran Over Nuclear 'Deception',' *New York Times*, September 25, 2009. Available online: <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/09/26/world/middleeast/26nuke.html?pagewanted=all>
- 49 Laura Rozen, 'Three days in March: New details on how US, Iran opened direct talks,' *Al-Monitor*, January 8, 2014.
- 50 Muscat 1067 to Department of State, 'Oman – FM's Views on Iran Issues,' December 7, 2009. Available online: <http://wikileaks.org/cable/2009/12/09MUSCAT1067.html>
- 51 See Barzashka, 'Are Cyber-Weapons Effective?,' 48-56.
- 52 *The Iran Project*, 'International Sanctions Against Iran,' 24.
- 53 *Ibid.*, 24.
- 54 *Ibid.*, 24-25.
- 55 Benjamin Weiser, 'Not-Guilty Plea in Plot to Kill Saudi Ambassador to the U.S.,' *New York Times*, October 24, 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/10/25/nyregion/in-plot-to-kill-saudi-ambassador-to-us-suspect-pleads-not-guilty.html?ref=topics>.
- 56 Paul Bentley, 'Obama declares Iran will 'pay a price' for assassination plan as U.S. intelligence chief warns country may be devising other plots,' *Daily Mail*, October 14, 2012, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2048539/It-act-war-Senators-demand-action-murder-plot-urging-Obama-crush-Irans-central-bank.html#ixzz3nRy8YGCA>.
- 57 Department of Treasury, 'Treasury Sanctions Five Individuals Tied to Iranian Plot to Assassinate the Saudi Arabian Ambassador to the United States,' October 11, 2010, <http://www.treasury.gov/press-center/press-releases/pages/tg1320.aspx>.
- 58 Scott Peterson, 'Used-car salesman as Iran proxy? Why assassination plot doesn't add up for experts,' *Christian Science Monitor*, October 12, 2011, <http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Middle-East/2011/1012/Used-car-salesman-as-Iran-proxy-Why-assassination-plot-doesn-t-add-up-for-experts>
- 59 Gary Sick, 'Did Iran launch a plot against the US?,' *Tumblr*, October 12, 2011, <http://garysick.tumblr.com/search/Saudi>.

- 60 Peterson, 'Used-car salesman.'
- 61 Benjamin Weiser, 'Mental Illness Cited in Challenge to Terror Case,' *New York Times*, July 17, 2012; 'Psychiatrist Details Talks With Suspect in Bomb Plot,' *New York Times*, October 5, 2012; 'Man Pleads Guilty in Plot to Murder a Saudi Envoy,' *New York Times*, October 18, 2012; and 'Man Sentenced in Plot to Kill Saudi Ambassador,' *New York Times*, May 31, 2013.
- 62 *BBC News*, 'Bush keeps Iran military option,' April 18, 2006. Available online: http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/4919804.stm
- 63 David Sanger, 'U.S. Rejected Aid for Israeli Raid on Iranian Nuclear Site,' *New York Times*, January 10, 2009. Available online: http://www.nytimes.com/2009/01/11/washington/11iran.html?_r=0
- 64 Crist, *The Twilight War*, 567.
- 65 *Ibid.*, 569.
- 66 *BBC*, 'Japan 'to reduce Iran oil imports',' January 12, 2012, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-16523422>; Choe Sang-hun, 'U.S. Presses South Korea to Reduce Oil Imports from Iran,' *New York Times*, January 17, 2012, <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/01/18/world/asia/us-presses-south-korea-to-reduce-oil-imports-from-iran.html>; and *New York Times*, 'Ignoring Western Sanctions, India Explores Opportunities in Iran,' February 10, 2012, <http://india.blogs.nytimes.com/author/the-new-york-times/>.
- 67 Bryan Gibson, 'Holding Hormuz Hostage,' *The Majalla*, January 12, 2012. Available online: <http://www.majalla.com/eng/2012/01/article55228850>
- 68 Chris McGreal, 'Netanyahu tells Obama: Israel must have right to remain 'master of its fate',' *The Guardian*, March 5, 2012. Available online: <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/mar/05/netanyahu-obama-israel-white-house>
- 69 *UN News Centre*, 'At UN General Debate, Israeli leader calls for 'red line' for action on Iran's nuclear plans,' September 27, 2012.
- 70 Thomas Erdbrink, 'As Iran's Currency Keeps Tumbling, Anxiety Is Rising,' *New York Times*, October 4, 2012. Available online: <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/10/05/world/middleeast/as-irans-currency-keeps-tumbling-anxiety-is-rising.html?pagewanted=all>
- 71 Rozen, 'Three days in March,' *Op.Cit.*
- 72 *Ibid.*
- 73 *BBC News*, 'Israel ready to act on Syria weapons, warns Netanyahu,' April 18, 2013.
- 74 Tom Shanker, 'U.S. Arms Deal With Israel and 2 Arab Nations Is Near,' *New York Times*, April 18, 2013.
- 75 Susan Maloney, 'Prudence And Hope Prevail: Iran Election Reflects Desire For Change,' *Brookings Institute*, June 16, 2013.
- 76 Rozen, 'Three days in March,' *Op.Cit.*
- 77 Hassan Rouhani, 'President of Iran Hassan Rouhani: Time to engage,' *Washington Post*, September 19, 2013. Available online: http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/president-of-iran-hassan-rouhani-time-to-engage/2013/09/19/4d2da564-213e-11e3-966c-9c4293c47ebe_story.html?hpid=z1

- 78 Robert Windrem, 'Iran's president tweets condemnation of Syria chemical weapons attacks,' *NBC News*, August 28, 2013; Max Fisher, 'Iran's president just wished all Jews a happy Rosh Hashanah on Twitter,' *Washington Post*, September 4, 2013; Laura Rozen, 'In letter, Obama told Iran's Rouhani he sees way to resolve nuclear issue,' *Al-Monitor*, September 18, 2013; and Barbara Slavin, 'Iran Frees Political Prisoners Before Rouhani Comes to UN,' *Al-Monitor*, September 18, 2013.
- 79 Jasmin Ramsey, 'Kerry/Zarif Meet; Rouhani Answers Tough Questions,' *Lobe Log*, September 26, 2013. Available online: <http://www.lobelog.com/kerryzarif-meet-rouhani-answers-tough-questions/>
- 80 *BBC News*, 'Iran nuclear: Obama and Rouhani speak by phone,' September 28, 2013.
- 81 Herb Keinon, 'Netanyahu flies to US in role as spoil-sport to Iranian Rouhani's 'charm offensive',' *Jerusalem Post*, September 28, 2013. Available online: <http://www.jpost.com/Diplomacy-and-Politics/Netanyahu-flies-to-US-in-role-as-spoil-sport-to-Irans-Rouhanis-charm-offensive-327334>
- 82 *Reuters*, 'Analysis: Rouhani drives wedge between Netanyahu, Obama on Iran issue,' September 29, 2013. Available online: <http://www.jpost.com/Diplomacy-and-Politics/Analysis-Rouhani-drives-wedge-between-Netanyahu-Obama-on-Iran-issue-327388>
- 83 Herb Keinon and Michael Wilner, 'Netanyahu urges Obama to keep up sanctions on Iran in light of new détente,' *Jerusalem Post*, September 30, 2013. Available online: <http://www.jpost.com/Diplomacy-and-Politics/Netanyahu-to-press-Obama-not-to-ease-sanctions-on-Iran-despite-Rouhanis-sweet-talk-327450>
- 84 Michael Gordon, 'After Talks on Iran's Nuclear Programme, Officials Highlight the Positive,' *New York Times*, October 16, 2013. Available online: <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/10/17/world/middleeast/iran-nuclear-talks.html?ref=world>
- 85 Alissa Rubin and David Sanger, 'Iran Says It Has Agreed to 'Road Map' With U.N. Agency on Nuclear Inspections,' *New York Times*, November 11, 2013. Available online: <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/11/12/world/middleeast/iran-says-it-agrees-to-road-map-with-un-on-nuclear-inspections.html?ref=world>
- 86 Gibson, 'Iran nuclear deal,' *Op.Cit.*
- 87 Joint Plan of Action, November 24, 2013. Available online: http://www.globalsecurity.org/wmd/library/policy/int/iran-5-1-geneva-agreement_2013.htm
- 88 Muna Shikaki, 'Most of Congress 'expert' testimonies are against Iran deal,' August 1, 2015, <http://english.alarabiya.net/en/perspective/analysis/2015/08/01/Two-thirds-of-congressional-expert-testimonies-are-against-iran-deal.html>.
- 89 Alon Ben-Meir, 'The Nuclear Deal: Netanyahu vs. Obama,' *Huffington Post*, November 25, 2013. Available online: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/alon-benmeir/the-nuclear-deal-netanyah_b_4338600.html
- 90 Jim Lobe, '47 Senators Take AIPAC's Word Over U.S. Intel Community,' *Lobe Log*, January 3, 2014. Available online: <http://www.lobelog.com/47-senators-take-aipacs-word-over-u-s-intel-community/>
- 91 Laura Rozen, 'AIPAC expected to lobby for Iran sanctions bill that Obama has vowed to veto,' *Al-Monitor*, February 28, 2014. Available online: <http://backchannel.al-monitor.com/index.php/2014/02/7826/aipac-expected-to-lobby-for-iran-sanctions-bill-opposed-by-white-house/>
- 92 Ashley Alman, 'Now Even AIPAC Says It's Not The Right Time To Advance Iran Sanctions Bill,' *Huffington Post*, February 6, 2014. Available online: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/02/06/aipac-iran-sanctions_n_4741748.html

- 93 Shikaki, 'Most of Congress 'expert' testimonies are against Iran deal,' August 1, 2015.
- 94 *The Iran Project*, 'Letters Supporting Diplomacy': <http://iranprojectcsny.org/letters-to-u-s-leadership/>
- 95 Michael Gordon and Eric Schmitt, 'Negotiators Put Final Touches on Iran Accord,' *New York Times*, January 12, 2014. Available online: <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/01/13/world/middleeast/iran-nuclear-deal.html>
- 96 Laura Rozen, 'U.S. releases funds to Iran as IAEA verifies compliance with nuclear deal,' *Al-Monitor*, April 17, 2014. Available online: <http://backchannel.al-monitor.com/index.php/2014/04/8166/u-s-releases-450-mn-as-iaea-says-iran-complying-with-nuclear-deal/>
- 97 John Kerry, 'Extension of Iran Nuclear Talks,' July 18, 2014. Available online: <http://www.state.gov/secretary/remarks/2014/07/229491.htm>
- 98 Bryan Gibson, 'Battle Lines Drawn in Washington over Nuclear Talks,' *Middle East Eye*, July 31, 2014. Available online: <http://www.middleeasteye.net/columns/battle-lines-drawn-washington-over-iran-talks-2092722224>
- 99 Laura Rozen, 'Iran, P5+1 extend talks,' *Al-Monitor*, July 18, 2014. <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2014/07/iran-p51-talks-extension-vienna-4-months.html>
- 100 See Bryan R. Gibson, 'Why the US has been so reluctant to intervene in Iraq,' *Middle East Eye*, August 14, 2014.
- 101 Bryan R. Gibson, 'Maliki leaves with no guns blazing,' *Middle East Eye*, August 15, 2014.
- 102 Paul Lewis and Spenser Ackerman, 'Obama to send up to 300 'military advisers' to help Iraqi army repel Isis,' *Guardian*, June 20, 2014. Available online: <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jun/19/obama-100-special-forces-iraq>
- 103 Laura Rosen, 'Sherman urges Iran to seize opportunity for nuclear deal,' *Al-Monitor*, September 15, 2014. <http://www.almonitor.com/pulse/originals/2014/09/wendyshermanurgesiranopportunitynucleardeal.html>
- 104 Laura Rozen, 'Breakthrough still eludes Iranian nuclear talks,' *Al-Monitor*, November 11, 2014.
- 105 *New York Times*, 'Iran Honours Nuclear Deal With Powers, IAEA Report Shows,' December 19, 2014. <http://www.nytimes.com/reuters/2014/12/19/world/middleeast/19reuters-iran-nuclear-iaea.html>
- 106 Laura Rozen, 'Last days of Iran talks showed signs of progress,' *Al Monitor*, November 25, 2014.
- 107 David Sanger and Michael Gordon, 'U.S. and Allies Extend Iran Nuclear Talks by 7 Months,' *New York Times*, November 24, 2014. <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/11/25/world/middleeast/iran-nuclear-talks.html>
- 108 *New York Times*, 'US Officials List Iran's Concessions in Nuke Talks,' December 5, 2014. <http://www.nytimes.com/aponline/2014/12/05/us/politics/ap-us-united-states-iran.html>
- 109 *New York Times*, 'Iran Honours Nuclear Deal With Powers, IAEA Report Shows,' December 19, 2014. <http://www.nytimes.com/reuters/2014/12/19/world/middleeast/19reuters-iran-nuclear-iaea.html>
- 110 *CNN*, 'CNN's Candy Crowley interviews President Barack Obama,' December 21, 2014. <http://cnnpressroom.blogs.cnn.com/2014/12/21/cnn-candy-crowley-interviews-president-barack-obama/>
- 111 Laura Rozen, 'Negotiators: 'Time cannot be wasted' at Iran nuclear talks,' *Al Monitor*, January 15, 2015.
- 112 Laura Rozen, 'Slow progress on Iran talks,' *Al Monitor*, January 18, 2015.
- 113 Laura Rozen, 'Obama vows to veto Iran sanctions as Zarif sees Kerry,' *Al Monitor*, January 16, 2015.

- 114 White House, 'Remarks by the President in State of the Union Address,' January 20, 2015. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2015/01/20/remarks-president-state-union-address-january-20-2015>
- 115 Jeffrey Goldberg, 'The Crisis in U.S.-Israel Relations Is Officially Here,' *The Atlantic*, October 28, 2014. <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2014/10/the-crisis-in-us-israel-relations-is-officially-here/382031/>
- 116 David Joachim, 'Boehner Invites Netanyahu to Address Congress,' *New York Times*, January 21, 2015. <http://www.nytimes.com/politics/first-draft/2015/01/21/boehner-invites-netanyahu-to-address-congress/>
- 117 *Haaretz*, 'Michael Oren calls on Netanyahu to cancel upcoming speech to Congress,' January 25, 2015. <http://www.haaretz.com/news/diplomacy-defense/1.638809>
- 118 Steve Benen, 'Critics of Boehner/Netanyahu fiasco grow louder,' *MSNBC*, February 9, 2015. <http://www.msnbc.com/rachel-maddow-show/critics-boehner-netanyahu-fiasco-grow-louder>
- 119 Jonathan Weisman, 'Cross Section of Democrats to Snub Netanyahu's Speech to Congress,' *New York Times*, March 3, 2015. <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/03/04/world/middleeast/cross-section-of-democrats-to-snub-netanyahus-speech-to-congress.html>
- 120 *The Washington Post*, 'The complete transcript of Netanyahu's address to Congress,' March 3, 2015, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/post-politics/wp/2015/03/03/full-text-netanyahus-address-to-congress>.
- 121 Charlotte Alfred, 'Did Benjamin Netanyahu Lie To Congress? 5 Fact-Checked Claims From The Speech,' *Huffington Post*, March 3, 2015. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/03/03/netanyahu-speech-congress-fact-check_n_6792054.html
- 122 Chris McGeal, 'Netanyahu's speech to Congress: long on terror, short on substance,' *The Guardian*, March 3, 2015, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/mar/03/binyamin-netanyahu-speech-congress-long-on-terror-short-on-substance>
- 123 Ibid.
- 124 Tom Cotton, et al, 'An Open Letter to the Leaders of the Islamic Republic of Iran,' March 9, 2015. <http://www.cotton.senate.gov/content/cotton-and-46-fellow-senators-send-open-letter-leaders-islamic-republic-iran>
- 125 *New York Times*, 'New Low in Relations Between Obama, Congressional GOP,' March 10, 2015. <http://www.nytimes.com/aponline/2015/03/10/us/politics/ap-us-obama-republicans.html>
- 126 White House, 'WE PETITION THE OBAMA ADMINISTRATION TO: File charges against the 47 U.S. Senators in violation of The Logan Act in attempting to undermine a nuclear agreement,' March 9, 2015. <https://petitions.whitehouse.gov/petition/file-charges-against-47-us-senators-violation-logan-act-attempting-undermine-nuclear-agreement>
- 127 Iranian Foreign Ministry, 'Dr. Zarif's Response to the Letter of US Senators,' March 9, 2015. <http://en.mfa.ir/index.aspx?siteid=3&fkeyid=&siteid=3&fkeyid=&siteid=3&pageid=1997&newsview=330948>
- 128 Laura Koran and Deena Zaru, 'Cotton, Iranian leader tangle again on social media,' *CNN*, April 30, 2015.
- 129 Jodi Rudoren, 'Netanyahu Says No to Statehood for Palestinians,' *New York Times*, March 16, 2015. <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/03/17/world/middleeast/benjamin-netanyahu-campaign-settlement.html>
- 130 Ishaan Tharoor, 'On Israeli election day, Netanyahu warns of Arabs voting 'in droves',' *Washington Post*, March 17, 2015. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/worldviews/wp/2015/03/17/on-israeli-election-day-netanyahu-warns-of-arabs-voting-in-droves/>

- 131 Matt Spetalnick, 'Obama tells Netanyahu U.S. to 'reassess' policy on Israel, Mideast diplomacy,' March 19, 2015, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/03/19/us-israel-election-netanyahu-idUSKBNOMF2JV20150319>.
- 132 *New York Times*, 'An Israeli Election Turns Ugly,' March 17, 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/03/18/opinion/an-israeli-election-turns-ugly.html>; Los Angeles Times, 'Netanyahu's remarks on Israel's Arab citizens part of a disturbing conversation,' March 25, 2015, <http://www.latimes.com/opinion/editorials/la-ed-israel-arabs-20150324-story.html>; and *The Jewish Week*, 'Conservative Rabbis Break Ranks, Rip Bibi On Arab Comments,' March 19, 2015, <http://www.thejewishweek.com/news/breaking/conservative-rabbis-break-ranks-rip-bibi-arab-comments#Fp0WMSsFweByBXGo.99>
- 133 Jodi Rudoren and Julie Hirschfeld Davis, 'Netanyahu Apologizes; White House Is Unmoved,' March 23, 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/03/24/world/middleeast/netanyahu-apologizes-for-comments-about-israeli-arabs.html>.
- 134 Julie Hirschfeld Davis, 'Obama Says He Told Netanyahu That Talk Before Election Hurt the Peace Process,' *New York Times*, March 21, 2015. <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/03/22/world/middleeast/obama-says-he-told-netanyahu-that-campaign-talk-hurt-the-peace-process.html>
- 135 Laura Rozen, 'Despite congressional threats, Iran negotiators resume talks,' *Al Monitor*, March 15, 2015.
- 136 Laura Rozen, 'Iran, P5+1 tackle final hurdles to accord,' *Al Monitor*, March 18, 2015.
- 137 Ibid. Laura Rozen, 'Iran, P5+1 tackle final hurdles to accord,' *Al Monitor*, March 18, 2015.
- 138 Laura Rozen, 'Iran nuclear talks intensify,' *Al Monitor*, March 28, 2015.
- 139 Laura Rozen, 'How Nespresso and a whiteboard sealed the Iran deal,' *Al Monitor*, April 9, 2015.
- 140 Laura Rozen, 'Iran nuclear talks intensify,' *Al Monitor*, March 28, 2015.
- 141 Laura Rozen, 'Negotiators work through night on Iran deal,' *Al Monitor*, March 30, 2015; 'Iran talks may go into night,' *Al Monitor*, March 31, 2015; 'Kerry, Zarif hold all-night Iran negotiations,' *Al Monitor*, April 2, 2015.
- 142 Javad Zarif, Twitter post, April 2, 2015, 12:49 pm, <http://twitter.com/JZarif>.
- 143 Michael R. Gordon and David Sanger, 'Iran Agrees to Detailed Nuclear Outline, First Step Toward a Wider Deal,' *New York Times*, April 2, 2015. <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/04/03/world/middleeast/iran-nuclear-talks.html>
- 144 William Broad and Sergio Pecanha, 'A Simple Guide to the Nuclear Negotiations With Iran,' July 6, 2015. <http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2015/03/31/world/middleeast/simple-guide-nuclear-talks-iran-us.html>
- 145 Department of State, 'Parameters for a Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action Regarding the Islamic Republic of Iran's Nuclear Program,' April 2, 2015. <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2015/04/240170.htm>
- 146 John Boehner, 'Speaker Boehner Statement on Iran Nuclear Talks,' April 2, 2015. <http://www.speaker.gov/press-release/speaker-boehner-statement-iran-nuclear-talks>
- 147 Jonathan Weisman and Peter Baker, 'Obama Yields, Allowing Congress Say on Iran Nuclear Deal,' *New York Times*, April 14, 2015. <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/04/15/us/senators-reach-deal-on-iran-nuclear-talks.html>
- 148 Russell Berman, 'The Iran Bill Clears the Senate,' *The Atlantic*, May 7, 2015. <http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2015/05/mcconnell-iran-sanctions-cotton-rubio/392300/>

- 149 Lisa Mascaró, 'Congress approves bill to provide oversight on easing Iran sanctions,' *Los Angeles Times*, May 15, 2015. <http://www.latimes.com/nation/politics/politicsnow/la-pn-iran-congress-20150514-story.html>
- 150 Reuters, 'Obama signs bill letting Congress weigh in on Iran nuclear deal,' May 23, 2015. <http://rt.com/usa/261397-obama-iran-deal-congress-review/>
- 151 David Sanger and Thomas Erdbrink, 'Arms Embargo Takes on Larger Meaning as Iran Nuclear Talks Enter Endgame,' July 6, 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/07/07/world/middleeast/iran-revives-embargo-debate-as-nuclear-talks-near-end.html?ref=world>
- 152 Laura Rozen, 'Kerry, Zarif meet at Iranian envoy's residence,' April 27, 2015.
- 153 Al Kamen, 'Iran and U.S. cut deal on new diplomatic offices in Washington, Tehran,' *Washington Post*, May 8, 2015.
- 154 *The Economist*, 'Pity those caught in the middle,' November 19, 2009. <http://www.economist.com/node/14920092>
- 155 *Al Arabiya*, 'Saudi 'Decisive Storm' waged to save Yemen,' March 25, 2015. <http://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/middle-east/2015/03/26/GCC-states-to-repel-Houthi-aggression-in-Yemen-statement-.html>
- 156 Thomas Erdbrink, 'Jason Rezaian of Washington Post Goes on Trial in Iran,' *New York Times*, May 26, 2015. <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/05/27/world/middleeast/american-journalist-jason-rezaian-goes-on-trial-in-iran.html>
- 157 Carol Morello and William Branigin, 'Iranian media says Post correspondent Jason Rezaian convicted,' *The Washington Post*, October 12, 2015, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/iranian-tv-says-post-correspondent-jason-rezaian-convicted/2015/10/12/b1652690-ee9e-11e4-8abc-d6aa3bad79dd_story.html.
- 158 Michael Gordon, 'Talks Begin to Conclude Nuclear Deal With Iran,' *New York Times*,
- 159 Laura Rozen, 'EU envoys: Iran talks may go beyond June 30 deadline,' *Al Monitor*, May 26, 2015; 'Iran talks may go into overtime,' *Al Monitor*, June 11, 2015.
- 160 IAEA, 'Implementation of the NPT Safeguards Agreement and relevant provisions of Security Council resolutions in the Islamic Republic of Iran,' May 29, 2015, <http://www.isis-online.org/uploads/isis-reports/documents/iaea-iranreport-05292015.pdf>; and David Sanger and William Broad, 'Iran's Nuclear Stockpile Grows, Complicating Negotiations,' *New York Times*, June 1, 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/02/world/middleeast/irans-nuclear-stockpile-grows-complicating-negotiations.html>.
- 161 Israel, Prime Minister's Office, 'PM Netanyahu's Remarks at the Start of the Weekly Cabinet Meeting,' June 14, 2015. <http://www.pmo.gov.il/English/MediaCenter/Spokesman/Pages/spokeStart140615.aspx>
- 162 Reuters, 'Key U.S. Senator 'Alarmed' by Reports on Iran Talks,' *New York Times*, June 15, 2015. <http://www.nytimes.com/reuters/2015/06/15/world/middleeast/15reuters-iran-nuclear-congress.html>
- 163 Michael Gordon and David Sanger, 'U.S. Could Lift Sanctions Before Iran Accounting,' *New York Times*, June 16, 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/17/world/us-could-lift-sanctions-before-iran-accounting.html>.
- 164 Thomas Erdbrink and David Sanger, 'Iran's Supreme Leader, Khamenei, Seems to Pull Back on Nuclear Talks,' *New York Times*, June 23, 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/24/world/middleeast/irans-supreme-leader-stiffens-his-position-on-nuclear-talks.html>.

- 165 Brian Naylor, 'Deadline In Iran Nuclear Talks Extended To July 7,' *National Public Radio*, June 30, 2015, <http://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2015/06/30/418899518/deadline-in-iran-nuclear-talks-extended-to-july-7>.
- 166 David Sanger and Thomas Erdbrink, 'Arms Embargo Takes on Larger Meaning as Iran Nuclear Talks Enter Endgame,' *New York Times*, July 6, 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/07/07/world/middleeast/iran-revives-embargo-debate-as-nuclear-talks-near-end.html>.
- 167 John Follain, Indira Lakshmanan, Kambiz Foroohar, 'Keep It Quiet, Aide Tells Shouting Kerry and Iran Minister,' *Bloomberg News*, July 8, 2015, <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2015-07-08/russian-iranian-ministers-at-nuclear-talks-don-t-threaten-us>.
- 168 White House, 'The Historic Deal that Will Prevent Iran from Acquiring a Nuclear Weapon,' July 14, 2015, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/issues/foreign-policy/iran-deal>.
- 169 Ibid.
- 170 Ibid.
- 171 Jethro Mullen and Nic Robertson, 'Landmark deal reached on Iran nuclear program,' *CNN*, July 14, 2015, <http://www.cnn.com/2015/07/14/politics/iran-nuclear-deal/>.
- 172 Jonathan Weisman and Julie Herschfeld Davis, 'Congress to Start Review of Iran Nuclear Deal,' *New York Times*, July 14, 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/07/15/world/middleeast/congress-iran-nuclear-deal.html>.
- 173 *The Hill*, 'Menendez: Deal 'doesn't end Iran's nuclear program — it preserves it',' July 14, 2015, <http://thehill.com/policy/defense/247828-menendez-deal-doesnt-end-irans-nuclear-program-it-preserves-it>.
- 174 Isabel Kershner, 'Iran Deal Denounced by Netanyahu as 'Historic Mistake',' *New York Times*, July 14, 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/07/15/world/middleeast/iran-nuclear-deal-israel.html>.
- 175 John Boehner, 'Speaker Boehner Statement on Iran Nuclear Agreement,' July 14, 2015, <http://www.speaker.gov/press-release/speaker-boehner-statement-iran-nuclear-agreement#sthash.9tzPzbfG.dpuf>.
- 176 Julie Hirschfeld Davis, 'Influential Pro-Israel Group Suffers Stinging Political Defeat,' *New York Times*, September 10, 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/09/11/world/influential-pro-israel-group-suffers-stinging-political-defeat.html>.
- 177 See UNSC Resolution 2231, July 20, 2015, S/RES/2231, <http://www.un.org/en/sc/inc/pages/pdf/pow/RES2231E.pdf>.
- 178 *New York Times*, 'UN Resolution Would End Iran Sanctions in 10 Years,' July 15, 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/aponline/2015/07/15/world/middleeast/ap-un-united-nations-iran-resolution.html>.
- 179 Rebecca Shimon Stoil, 'US lawmakers rail against 'inappropriate' UN vote on Iran deal,' *Times of Israel*, July 20, 2015, <http://www.timesofisrael.com/us-lawmakers-rail-against-inappropriate-un-vote-on-iran-deal/>.
- 180 Michael Gordon and David Sanger, 'U.N. Vote on Iran Nuclear Deal Irks Congress,' *New York Times*, July 19, 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/07/20/world/middleeast/un-vote-on-iran-nuclear-deal-irks-congress.html>.
- 181 *New York Times*, 'UN Security Council to Vote Monday Morning on Iran Deal,' July 16, 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/aponline/2015/07/16/world/middleeast/ap-un-united-nations-iran-nuclear-deal.html>.

- 182 *New York Times*, 'Netanyahu Urges U.S. to Hold Out for Better Iran Deal,' July 19, 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/reuters/2015/07/19/world/middleeast/19reuters-iran-nuclear-netanyahu.html>.
- 183 Mark Dubowitz, 'How to Get a Better Deal With Iran,' *Foreign Policy*, August 17, 2015, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2015/08/17/how-to-get-a-better-deal-with-iran-congress-reject-nuclear-treaty/>.
- 184 Marc Thiessen, 'Obama's secret Iran deals exposed,' *Washington Post*, July 27, 2015, https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/obamas-secret-iran-deals-exposed/2015/07/27/26d14dbc-3460-11e5-8e66-07b4603ec92a_story.html.
- 185 Greg Sargent, 'Tom Cotton: We can bomb Iran's nuke program back to 'day zero',' *Washington Post*, August 5, 2015, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/plum-line/wp/2015/08/05/tom-cotton-we-can-bomb-irans-nukes-back-to-day-zero/>.
- 186 *Ibid.*
- 187 Julie Hirschfeld Davis, 'It's Either Iran Nuclear Deal or 'Some Form of War,' Obama Warns,' *New York Times*, August 5, 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/08/06/us/politics/obama-urges-critics-of-iran-deal-to-ignore-drumbeat-of-war.html?hp&action=click&pgtype=Homepage&module=first-column-region®ion=top-news&WT.nav=top-news&r=1>.
- 188 Chuck Schumer, 'My Position on the Iran Deal,' *Medium*, August 6, 2015, <https://medium.com/@SenSchumer/my-position-on-the-iran-deal-e976b2f13478>.
- 189 Jeffrey Lewis, 'Chuck Schumer's Disingenuous Iran Deal Argument,' *Foreign Policy*, August 9, 2015, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2015/08/09/upchuck-senator-schumers-disingenuous-iran-deal-argument/>.
- 190 Carol Morello, 'On Kerry visit, Arab nations express support for Iran nuclear agreement,' *Washington Post*, August 3, 2015, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/on-kerry-visit-arab-nations-express-support-for-iran-nuclear-agreement/2015/08/03/36bbebea-36d3-11e5-ab7b-6416d97c73c2_story.html.
- 191 Carol Morello, 'On Kerry visit, Arab nations express support for Iran nuclear agreement,' *Washington Post*, August 3, 2015, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/on-kerry-visit-arab-nations-express-support-for-iran-nuclear-agreement/2015/08/03/36bbebea-36d3-11e5-ab7b-6416d97c73c2_story.html.
- 192 Carl Hulse and David Herszenhorn, 'Coordinated Strategy Brings Obama Victory on Iran Nuclear Deal,' *New York Times*, September 2, 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/09/03/world/obama-clinches-vote-to-secure-iran-nuclear-deal.html?hp&action=click&pgtype=Homepage&module=first-column-region®ion=top-news&WT.nav=top-news>.
- 193 For a good explanation of the procedural rules of the US Congress, see *Washington Post*, 'Where lawmakers stand on the Iran Deal,' September 11, 2015, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/politics/where-lawmakers-stand-on-iran/>.
- 194 David M. Herszenhorn, '4 More Senators Back Iran Deal, Assuring Cushion for White House,' *New York Times*, September 8, 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/09/09/world/middleeast/senators-iran-nuclear-deal.html>.
- 195 Sabrina Siddiqui, 'Republican-led attempt to block Iran deal fails in Senate,' *The Guardian*, September 10, 2015, <http://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2015/sep/10/iran-nuclear-deal-senate-day-of-decision>.
- 196 David M. Herszenhorn, 'House Rejects Iran Nuclear Deal,' *New York Times*, September 11, 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/09/12/world/middleeast/iran-nuclear-deal-house.html>.
- 197 *Ibid.*, Herszenhorn.

- 198 *Open Congress*, 'House Resolution 411,' September 10, 2015, <https://www.opencongress.org/vote/2015/h/492>.
- 199 Economist Intelligence Unit, 'Country Report: Iran,' October 6, 2015, 2.
- 200 *Congressional Research Service*, 'Pivot to the Pacific? The Obama Administration's 'Rebalancing' Toward Asia,' March 28, 2012. Available online: <http://fas.org/sgp/crs/natsec/R42448.pdf>
- 201 Interview with Trita Parsi, June 5, 2014.
- 202 John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt, *The Israel Lobby and US Foreign Policy* (Penguin, 2007), pp. 286-87.
- 203 Interview with Gary Sick, June 5, 2014.
- 204 Interview with Ali Ansari, June 4, 2014.
- 205 Interview with Michael Axworthy, September 1, 2015.
- 206 Interview with Trita Parsi, June 4, 2014.
- 207 Interview with Trita Parsi, June 4, 2014.
- 208 United States Senate Committee on Foreign Affairs, Testimony of Dennis Ross, 'Regional Implications of a Nuclear Deal with Iran,' June 12, 2014. Available online: http://www.foreign.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/Ross_Testimony.pdf
- 209 Saeed Kamali Dehghan, 'Iranian parliament passes bill approving nuclear deal,' *The Guardian*, October 13, 2015, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/oct/13/iranian-parliament-passes-bill-approving-nuclear-deal>.
- 210 Emma Bowman, 'Iranian Guardian Council Gives Final Approval To Nuclear Deal,' *NPR*, October 14, 2015, <http://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2015/10/14/448683078/iranian-guardian-council-gives-final-approval-to-nuclear-deal>.
- 211 Interview with Amnon Aran, June 10, 2014.
- 212 Ross, 'Regional Implications,' p. 1.
- 213 Ibid.
- 214 Interview with Parsi.
- 215 Interview with Gary Sick, June 5, 2014.
- 216 Jeff Goldberg, 'The Crisis in U.S.-Israel Relations Is Officially Here,' *The Atlantic*, October 28, 2014. <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2014/10/the-crisis-in-us-israel-relations-is-officially-here/382031/>
- 217 Julian Borger, 'From Pope Francis to Angela Merkel: the top contenders for the 2015 Nobel peace prize,' *The Guardian*, October 7, 2015, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/oct/06/nobel-peace-prize-top-contenders-for-2015-award>.

THE LONG ROAD TO TEHRAN THE IRAN NUCLEAR DEAL IN PERSPECTIVE

Bryan R. Gibson



For general enquiries:

Email: IDEAS.reports@lse.ac.uk

Phone: +44 (0)20 7849 4918

LSE IDEAS

Houghton Street
London WC2A 2AE
United Kingdom

lse.ac.uk/ideas

After nearly 20 months of near continuous negotiations, in 2015 Iran and the P5+1 reached a deal designed to prevent Iran from obtaining nuclear weapons capability in exchange for relief from the sanctions that have been crippling its economy over the course of the past decade.

How was this momentous agreement reached?

This Strategic Update traces the story of this major diplomatic breakthrough, through the historical context of long term US-Iran relations and the tireless international effort to prevent domestic political crises from derailing the negotiations.

Cover image

US Department of State

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/statephotos/16389773974>

(Public Domain)

