

Iran Nuclear Program and the Relevant Actors

Eli Brewer
POL S 426: World Politics
4/26/16

Unbeknownst to many Americans, both the United States and Israel, two of the leading advocates in the international sphere against a nuclear armed Iran, helped to usher in the nuclear age in Iran under the Pahlavi regime during the 1970s, a policy that would inevitably come back to haunt them (Aghazadeh, 143). Iran and U.S are moving forward with a plan designed to increase security in the region and benefit either state, Israel however, is refusing to accept the inevitable and is unwavering in their commitment in blocking any developments in the Iranian nuclear deal. In balancing needs of all three of these actors, the Iranian nuclear deal, known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, seems to be the best option as of yet to do so. Iran wants to pursue their nuclear program for self-proclaimed 'peaceful' purposes in order to act as an alternative energy to oil and natural gas. The three forces driving their policy towards nuclear energy are their security, domestic economics and political dynamics, and national pride. Israel, on the other hand, is looking to reduce the influence of Iran in the region by ensuring that they do not have the capabilities to develop a nuclear bomb. Israel's policy towards a non-nuclear Iran derives largely from fear; fear of destruction, an increasingly more frustrating security environment, socioeconomic degradation, and challenges being made to the founding values of their Zionist state. The U.S has recently been acting as a bridge between these two at-odds states by pursuing a diplomatic solution to balance these converging interests but wants to ensure that Iran is unable to develop nuclear weapon capabilities while opening up their state to international influence. This push for a diplomatic solution has become divided along party lines where the executive branch, under the Democrat Obama administration, has been in conflict with the legislative branch, a Republican held Congress. The main focus of the Obama administration is to show the power of diplomacy, re-iterate the United States intention to stand by their long-term ally Israel, and prevent Iran from developing a nuclear weapon through a comprehensive and effective plan.

There are three main objectives that Iran is advocating for in order to develop nuclear capabilities, whether it is for peaceful or a military purpose is hard to decipher. These three objectives are security, national pride, and internal economic and political developments (Bahgat, 307). The changing security landscape around Iran is a considerable factor in their calculations on whether or not to pursue nuclear weapons. The Iran-Iraq war was a painful lesson for Iran that they must be self-sufficient in their own security. An important note from the onset of this war is that the international community, ironically including the United States that would later go to war with the very same regime in two separate occasions, supported Iraq in the war. This apparent disregard for Iran's sovereignty and the lack of international shunning of Iraq for using chemical weapons forced Iran to begin to develop their nuclear program in order to deter future aggression against their state (Albright/Stricker, 2016). Additionally, in thinking about their nuclear neighborhood, Iran is surrounded by neighbors equipped with nuclear weapons such as Pakistan, U.K, India, France, Russia, China, and Israel (Bahgat, 313). In this sense, a nuclear weapon would be of great benefit to act as a deterrent from the foreign aggression they have witnessed. Most importantly, the U.S

invasion of neighboring Afghanistan in 2001 and Iraq in 2003 exhibits the United States ability to conduct regime change or un-sanctioned breaches of a nation's sovereignty. Rhetoric from leading officials in the Bush administration furthered their fears that an attack may be imminent (Hadley, 1). Although the Obama administration has shown clear determination to move forward with a diplomatic deal, rhetoric from the Republican Presidential candidates have continued to support this foreign threat to the Iranians (Cruz, 2016). Secondly, the national pride and historical pretexts in Iran act as both a push for nuclear development and a pull for a diplomatic solution to their nuclear program. As Gawdat Bahgat stated in *Nuclear Proliferation: The Islamic Republic of Iran*, "The right to develop nuclear power is a matter of national pride, where the population is largely united behind the regime (Bahgat, 323). The history of victimization of the Shiite population, a minority within Islam and the majority of the population in Iran, aside, modern history has taught the Iranian people that they need to be self-sufficient as the international community has taken advantage of their state, in the form of economic manipulation by the U.S and U.K, and the disregard for international law during the Iran-Iraq war. This has been taken into consideration by the Obama administration and was definitely a factor in the Iran nuclear deal, President Obama stated, "this [Iran's nuclear ambitions] have become a matter of pride and nationalism for Iran" (Friedman, 2015).

Thirdly, internal economic and political developments are a pull factor for Iran to settle their nuclear disputes in a diplomatic fashion. As Bahgat stated, "Iran's economy suffers from structural imbalances with high rates of inflation and unemployment and heavy subsidies to basic commodities" (Bahgat, 321). This compounded with the global recession that occurred in 2008 and plummeting oil prices forced Iran to come to the negotiating table to alleviate economic sanctions in order to get their economy to rebound. Additionally, Iran's population is largely constituted by a younger population that push the regime for economic change and political freedoms, evidence of this can be seen through the recent election of the relatively moderate Hassan Rouhani for president. In reference to the election of Rouhani, President Obama stated that, "there is an appetite among the Iranian people for a rejoining with the international community" (Friedman, 2015). The cost/benefit analysis associated with the JCPOA was clearly largely attributed to these three factors. If Iran were to refuse to come to a deal with the UNSC and Germany, they would risk a continuation of their poor economic performance and possible uprising associated with their growing younger population who are pushing for a more open Iran. On the other hand, with the implementation of JCPOA, Iran is sacrificing their ability to pursue a nuclear weapon which, they believe, would make them more secure in an international system where self-sustained security has been engrained in their policy objectives. In signing this deal, it is clear that Iran wishes to pursue an option that preserves their economy and regime, however, it is important to note Israel's reaction to negotiations with a seemingly aggressive Iran.

Israel's objective is to ensure that Iran does not develop the capabilities to produce a nuclear weapon. The policy that they have advocated for is to reduce the number of centrifuges Iran operates, shut down secure uranium enrichment facilities, gradually lift economic sanctions on Iran, have Iran divulge the intimate details of the military aspects of their nuclear programs, and allow the IAEA to access Iranian nuclear sites at any time (Ravid, 2016). Their uneasiness to a nuclear-armed Iran derives from

their existential terror, an unstable security environment, socio-economic degradation, and challenges to their Zionist founding values. In addressing their existential terror it is important to investigate the domestic standpoint of their citizens. A 2012 poll orchestrated by the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs found that, "66% of Israelis believe that 'if Iran will acquire a nuclear weapon it would use it against Israel.' And 77% of Israelis believe that the 'Iranian threat would pose an existential threat to them'" (Eiran/Malin, 78). Oddly similar to the Iranian historical pretexts, the Holocaust has played into similar fears for the Israelis. Memories of the Holocaust is still fresh in many Israeli's minds and, since Israel is essentially a pariah state in the Middle East, their fears of a second Holocaust are not unfounded, especially when this ideology is pushed by leading politicians. "It's 1938 and Iran is Germany. And Iran is racing to arm itself with atomic bombs", stated Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in 2006 (Hirschberg, 2006). Secondly, the difficult security environment that surrounds Israel furthers their states refusal to accept any Iranian deal that does not completely abolish their nuclear program. Israel fears that a nuclear powered Iran would pursue its interests, their support for Hezbollah and Hamas, in the Middle East vehemently once they have a nuclear deterrent. Again, high-level politicians in Israel have linked their actions to pre-World War II Germany. "What happened in the Rhineland in 1936 will be child's play compared to what happens with Iran", Ehud Barak, Israel's former Defense Minister stated in August 2012 (Eiran/Malin, 80). Additionally, Iranian allies, knowing that they are backed by a nuclear-armed state, might also become more zealous in their pursuit of their goals (e.g. Syria and Hezbollah). Finally, nuclear proliferation could occur across the Middle East as Saudi Arabia and Egypt might deem it necessary to arm themselves with nuclear weapons in order to deter an attack from Iran.

Thirdly, a nuclear powered, or the potential for them to develop nuclear weapons, could hinder foreign investment in Israel, as few firms will want to invest in the Israeli markets for fear of a nuclear war in Israel. "A nuclear Iran involves considerable economic cost to Israel, from its effort on our economic ratings to large security outlays," Yarom Ariav, former Director General of the Israeli Finance Ministry said in August 2012 (Eiran/Malin, 81). The fourth and final point is that a nuclear Iran will lead to the degradation of the Zionist values in which Israel is founded upon. Zionism preaches that Israel provides safe havens for Jews across the globe and a more powerful Iran would significantly decrease the emigration into Israel. Additionally, it would be a catalyst for an exodus as families send their children abroad to study for fear of their lives. For Israel, in terms of a cost/benefit analysis, there are few, if no, benefits associated with Iran being allowed to continue their nuclear program even if it is under close international scrutiny and is allegedly for 'peaceful purposes'. In pursuing their objective, Israel has become involved in a concerted lobbying effort of both the Obama administration and of Congress as they want America to take a much stronger stance against Iran and not be seen as appeasing them. Barak Ravid, a journalist for Haaretz, an Israeli media outlet, provides an excellent overview of how the Israeli government is pursuing their objective to reduce the changes of a nuclear armed Iran in his article 'Israel to Push Congress to Pass Bill to Hamper Iran Deal'. Israeli politicians have taken it upon themselves to try to impact U.S legislation by supporting a bill drafter by Senator Bob Corker that would delay the implementation of the Iranian deal by 60 days or categorize the JCOPA as an international treaty that must be confirmed by the Senate, leading to

certain doom of the passage of the deal. Additionally, they have been lobbying the White House to improve the current deal so that the IAEA can inspect facilities at any times and gradually lift economic sanctions rather than lifting them all immediately (Ravid, 2016). The benefits of these types of actions would be to get the main signatory of the Iran nuclear deal to back-out, however, the costs significantly outweigh the benefits. The costs of these actions undermine the relationship between heads-of-state of both the U.S and Israel, reduce the security of the Israeli state by taking away a bill that provides the international community with mechanisms that allow for transparency of Iran's nuclear deal, and set a precedent that diplomatic efforts to curb Iran's path to a nuclear weapon will fail.

The Obama administration have been advocating a policy of relative inclusion with the Iranian government, much to the detest of close ally Israel. The executive branch wants to pursue options that serve Iran's, Israel's, and their own interests by finding a diplomatic solution to the Iranian nuclear program rather than continue down the road of escalating threats and rhetoric that could lead to conflict. Not only does this lead to a safer environment for Israel but it also is an overall safer approach in dealing with states pursuing nuclear capabilities. In advocating for a diplomatic policy, the Obama administration is confident in their military superiority over Iran, which dissuades Iran from attacking both Israel and American troops. "We are powerful enough," President Obama, stated in 2015, "to test these propositions without putting ourselves at risk...Iran's defense budget is \$30 billion. Our defense budget is close to \$600 billion...the doctrine is: we will engage, but we preserve all our capabilities (Friedman, 2015)."

Additionally, economic sanctions and aggressive rhetoric were simply failing to decrease Iran's nuclear capabilities. "Harsh economic sanctions have taken a serious toll on Iran's economy, but U.S and European officials acknowledge that the measure have not yet produced the kinds of public unrest that could force Iranian leaders to change their nuclear policies" (Warrick/Gearan, 2013). The threat of, or even the action of, a military strike would do little deter Iran from getting a nuclear weapon but rather reinforce their ideology of self-provided security. In reference to Iran shedding international regulations and inspectors and pursuing a nuclear bomb and the inflated amount of time the United States would know about Iran's pursuit of a bomb, President Obama stated, "If they wanted to cheat we would have at least a year, which is about three times longer than we'd have right now" (Friedman, 2015). Ultimately, the U.S policy for working with Iran instead of against them as made the international community safer, including Israel. President Obama stated that, "This is our best bet by far to make sure Iran doesn't get a nuclear weapon" (Friedman, 2015). The argument can be made that of course the facilitator of the Iranian deal would support this statement but there have also been members of the Israeli military that advocate this position as well. Israel's chief of staff, Lieutenant General Gadi Eisenkot, claimed that the Iranian nuclear deal ushered in under the Obama administration has removed the tremendous threat to Israel's survival, which was Iran prior to the deal (Goldberg, 2016). A new era of Iranian-U.S relations has begun arising from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, which allowed for economic sanctions to be lifted from Iran and increased inspections and international oversight of their nuclear programs to ensure that they are for peaceful purposes.

Iran, Israel, and the United States advocate for different policies on how to respond to Iran's nuclear program based on their domestic political considerations and their stance in the international sphere. Iran wants to pursue their nuclear program, whether it is for peaceful or military purposes remains unclear, in a domestic environment that allows for economic growth and appeasement of their growing younger population. Israel, on the other hand, is completely against any sort of Iranian nuclear energy or practice of sovereignty by their nation. They have pursued a tactic of attempting to influence U.S politics in order to sway the key decision-maker to take their stance. The Obama administration however, has so far been immune to Israel's tactics and has continued to advocate for the Iranian nuclear deal. They believe that this deal makes Israel safer and is better for international transparency of the Iranians nuclear program and the ensuring that it remains for civilian use. The world waits to see if the deal will lead to an Iran that is more cooperative in the international sphere or if this deal will allow for them to become a stronger nuclear-armed state.

Works Cited

Aghazadeh, Mahdieh. "A Historical Overview Of Sanctions On Iran And Iran's Nuclear Program." *Journal of Academic Studies* 14.56 (2013): 137-60. Web.

Albright, David, and Andrea Stricker. "The Iran Primer." *Iran's Nuclear Program*. United States Institute of Peace, 2010. Web. 26 Apr. 2016.

Bahgat, Gawdat. "Nuclear Proliferation: The Islamic Republic of Iran." *International Studies Perspectives* 7.2 (2006): 124-36. Web.

Cruz, Ted. "Washington Examiner: Ted Cruz: Arm Israel with 'bunker Busters' to Hit Iran's Nuclear Program." *Ted Cruz*. N.p., n.d. Web. 27 Apr. 2016.

Friedman, Thomas L. "Iran and the Obama Doctrine." *The New York Times*. The New York Times, 05 Apr. 2015. Web. 26 Apr. 2016.

Ghiabi, Maziyar. "Drugs and Revolution in Iran: Islamic Devotion, Revolutionary Zeal and Republican Means." *Iranian Studies* 48.2 (2015): 139-63. Web.

Goldberg, J.J. "Israel's Top General Praises Iran Deal as 'Strategic Turning Point' in Slap at Bibi." *Israel's Top General Praises Iran Deal as 'Strategic Turning Point' in Slap at Bibi*. The Forward, 26 Jan. 2016. Web. 26 Apr. 2016.

Hadley, Stephen. "The Iran Primer." *The George W. Bush Administration*. United States Institute of Peace, n.d. Web. 26 Apr. 2016.

Hirschberg, Peter. "Netanyahu: It's 1938 and Iran Is Germany; Ahmadinejad Is Preparing Another Holocaust." *Haaretz.com*. Haaretz, 14 Nov. 2006. Web. 26 Apr. 2016.

Ravid, Barak. "Israel to Push Congress to Pass Bill to Hamper Iran Deal - Diplomacy and Defense." *Haaretz.com*. Haaretz, 7 Apr. 2015. Web. 27 Apr. 2016.

Warrick, Joby, and Anne Gearan. "Despite Sanctions' Toll on Iran, U.S. Sees No Shift in Nuclear Behavior." *Washington Post*. The Washington Post, 17 Mar. 2013. Web. 26 Apr. 2016.