



The Vienna Accord Only Postpones Confrontation with Iran

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: The Vienna agreement has made the situation more complex and dangerous, not less so. Even if Iran completely abides by the terms of the agreement, when restrictions and sanctions come to an end fifteen years hence, it will emerge much stronger, militarily and economically. This situation will almost assuredly lead to the use of force against Iran, because Iran undoubtedly will try to produce nuclear weapons; be much better able to withstand foreign pressures; and hold significant sway across the Middle East. The conflict that will ensue will take place in conditions far worse (from a Western perspective) than before the agreement, pitting the West (and/or Israel) against a much-stronger Iran.

The agreement with Iran reached by the Western powers represents, ostensibly, a great achievement. If the Iranians abide by its terms, their ability to achieve nuclear weapons status will be set back by around fifteen years (although it could be claimed that part of the agreement is valid for only ten years). Furthermore, the strict inspection arrangements are meant to ensure that even if Iran does not observe the agreement, IAEA inspectors will be able to spot any violations, and there will be plenty of time (a year) to formulate a response.

However, this would be to ignore the central problem that arises from the agreement and from a series of inherent weaknesses in the accord. It is clear that the agreement was signed in order to delay the Iranian nuclear bomb program, not to end it. And thus, when the program rears its head again it will be a problem several times more serious and far harder to deal with.

There is no cause for hysteria. The agreement will not bring about Israel's

downfall, and in the best case scenario may even buy Israel some time to better prepare for confronting the Iranian challenge. Nevertheless, the map of reality should be read correctly, and not through rose-tinted glasses. It is important to emphasize that soberly, the verdict should be judged as a bad agreement. The reality facing Israel (and the world) following the signing of the agreement is significantly more threatening than before.

The main problem is with the substantial outcome of the agreement, which was well described by Iranian President Rouhani, as follows: Iran gets to keep its (military!) nuclear program, while sanctions against Iran are lifted. For the Iranians it was important, above all else, to gain international legitimacy for their nuclear program, and in this they have been successful.

As a basis for discussion it is important to emphasize that the Iranian nuclear program has no civilian element, and no justification other than as a military program. This is the consensus of all the international experts, some of whom will only say so privately, but most of whom are explicit in this. There is no serious expert who thinks that Iran is developing its capabilities for civilian purposes.

On the basis of this understanding, which was accepted by the American experts as well, American policy was initially clear: The agreement should *dismantle* Iran's nuclear capabilities. This was the term used by the Americans themselves. But at some stage the US decided to move from a policy aimed at dismantling Iran's nuclear capability, to a policy aimed at delaying Iran's ability to achieve nuclear weapons by ten to fifteen years.

There are several components to the American solution:

a. A significant slow-down of the enrichment program, involving shutting down almost half of Iran's centrifuges. (There are currently around 9,000 centrifuges active; after the agreement there will be just over 5,000). Furthermore, almost all the enriched material will be transferred out of Iran. Iran will continue enrichment, but will no longer have a stock of enriched material, which is a necessary condition for producing weapons.

b. Throughout the period covered by the agreement, Iran will not build a reactor that can produce plutonium. Construction had begun on such a reactor as it will now be modified so that it will not be capable of producing plutonium.

c. A strict inspections regime will be put in place to prevent Iran from cheating and hiding violations of the agreement.

From the moment that the policy in Washington changed, and there was no

longer any intention of actually dismantling Iran's nuclear capabilities, it was clear to the US that it would be impossible to include Israel in the negotiations. The US therefore shifted to conducting secret negotiations that it hid from Israel.

While the importance of personal relations should not be underestimated, this US decision to keep the details of the negotiations with Iran from Israel stemmed from the fundamental understanding that, following the shift in American policy, Israel would not be able to agree with the purpose of the negotiations, nor in any case involved in an active capacity.

As long as the purpose of the negotiations was shared and agreed-upon, Israel went along with the US, and did nothing that might upset the process. As soon as the US decided to make do with delaying Iran's getting the bomb, by a fixed time period, then Israel was left on the outside – not because of the strained relations between the president and the prime minister, but because of significant differences of opinion. Subsequently, although the American negotiators did make use of Israeli experts, Israel was not involved in the central deliberations.

What happens next? Although the struggle in Congress has yet to be concluded, for the purposes of this paper I assume that the president will use his veto to uphold the agreement even without the consent of Congress. I also assume that the Americans will seriously try to monitor Iran's implementation of the agreement.

What are Iran's options? This is an important question, the answer to which will be the most influential factor on Israel's course of action and responses.

It should be emphasized that, in any case, Israel must maintain its freedom of choice. The fact that the powers signed an agreement must not be allowed to paralyze Israel. The country's security is at stake, and on this issue we should take the advice of the current President of the US: "Israel must be able to defend itself, by itself," even if the agreement makes this a more complex proposal.

It should be assumed that whichever course Iran chooses, it will be very conscientious about keeping to the requirements of the agreement during the early stages of its implementation (a year or two, at least). Iran may try, during this period, here and there to erode the understandings regarding inspections, but it will not try to cheat and to crudely contravene the agreed rules.

During this period Iran's supreme interest will be the lifting of sanctions. Around 60% of the agreement deals with the lifting of sanctions and the dismantling of the mechanisms used to enforce them. The removal of sanctions will allow Iran to rebuild and significantly strengthen its economy as billions will

flow into Iran, even though a proportion will be lost to the dark abyss of entrenched Iranian corruption.

This step will also allow the regime to trumpet its achievements, and to strengthen its position versus those Iranians who are more inclined toward freedom and democracy. (Whether the main beneficiaries will be the fundamentalists, who will claim that stubbornness has been rewarded, or the less hardline factions, who will point to the benefits of displaying tactical flexibility, it is impossible to say.)

The lifting of sanctions will also serve to release a great amount of Iran's energy and money which can be redirected toward furthering its interests in the Middle East and beyond. Here, the beneficiaries will be Iran's allies – Hezbollah, Hamas, the Alawites in Syria, and the Houthis in Yemen. For all these reasons it can be expected that, initially, Iran's efforts will be invested in removing the burden of sanctions and becoming stronger, both internally and externally.

After this initial period of several years or so, there are three possible directions in which events may develop:

A first scenario involves the possibility that the agreement will drive regime change in Tehran, or at least a change in the behavior of the current Islamic regime.

This scenario posits that in a decade from now the West will no longer have anything or anyone to fear in Iran, because moderate forces will have taken power, and Iran's policies in terms of terror, relations with Israel, intervention in other states, and more, will be less aggressive and more moderate.

This perspective on the agreement – that it can and might succeed in changing the nature or behavior of the Iranian regime – is very powerful. It offers hope, which is a highly attractive perspective for all human beings, world leaders included.

This was the main theme of the speech given by the European Union's foreign policy commissioner at the signing of the agreement, and it would appear that this belief is shared by many members of the establishment in Europe. It would not surprise me to learn that US decision makers too do not feel that they were "defeated" by their Iranian counterparts in the negotiations, but that they truly believe that this compromise with tyrants was the right course in order to bring about a better world. The agreement, they may have convinced themselves, will change the paths taken by Iranian dictators, and at the very least will do more to prevent threats to peace than the use of military force.

This is not mere naivety; it is a deep-rooted ideological perspective. This was also the accepted approach taken during the Cold War, when many thought that the

very existence of an agreement with the USSR was more important than its content; because of the power of signing an agreement to refresh and improve relations between the two hemispheres. There were even those who claimed that simply meeting to negotiate, and recognizing the existence of the other's claims, could open possibilities to a better world.

Before they changed their policy, the Americans stated that this was not the line of thinking that was guiding them in these negotiations, as they held no expectation of a change in the behavior of the regime following the agreement. Even today many in Washington would agree that such a hope would be baseless. This approach appears completely unrealistic and particularly unsuited to Iran, as it has revealed itself to observers of the Islamic revolution. But still some very important decision makers seem really motivated by that optimistic approach.

We can hope and pray that the optimists are right, but the probabilities seem stacked against them. This approach did not meet with success in Munich in 1938, or in the case of North Korea, or in the initial efforts of the Obama administration towards Russia. In truth, I am not aware of a single case in modern history in which this purported dynamic proved successful (despite the claims made with regard to the Nixon-China case).

A second scenario is that within a few years, the Iranians will feel sufficiently strengthened and will begin to cheat; initially on peripheral issues, and then as they gain confidence, on more substantial issues. In this context, the agreement will lead to two changes, one positive, and the second negative.

The positive achievement rests on the American promise that the inspections regime will be extremely strict, that inspections will deploy advanced technology so that infractions will be detected in close to real time, and that the American response to infractions will be swift and forceful. (This latter part has not been said explicitly, but is implied by the administration's promises).

In spite of the illogical American concession regarding the "surprise inspections" of non-declared sites, which gives the Iranians 24 days to prepare themselves, I assume the experts of the IAEA will do their best. However, there is no question that concessions made by the P5+1 in the final days of the negotiations relating to the 24 days would harm these capabilities.

At the same time, it is important to be aware that the level of intelligence provided by the P5+1 and mainly the Americans will inevitably decline over time. It will not be felt immediately, because at the beginning all parties will take care to ensure a high level of intelligence gathering. But over time, as other problems arise elsewhere in the world, the quality of intelligence about Iran will deteriorate.

There will be two unavoidable reasons for this:

1. *Priority.* Even the mighty US needs to set priorities for the use of resources. After a while, once it is seen that Iran is indeed keeping to the agreement, there will naturally be a slow but steady transferal of intelligence resources to other burning problems.
2. *Levels of operational risk.* Against a state with which there is a signed agreement, intelligence operations are conducted at a lower level of risk. A complicated operation that, if discovered, might embarrass the US will be authorized for a hostile, dangerous state, but not for one with which a signed agreement exists. There may of course be states which find it less difficult to operate against states with which they have an agreement, but American efforts will certainly be affected by the new circumstances after the agreement.

Because of these two reasons, it is probable that over a period of several years the quantity and quality of intelligence will be reduced. This process is familiar in Israel from similar cases in the past, and there is no reason to think that there will be any difference for American intelligence vis-à-vis Iran. The result will be potentially disastrous for the agreement.

It is clear that Iranian cheating will not take place at the declared facilities which are under IAEA inspection, but at sites unfamiliar to the international community, whose location can only be discovered through gathering high-quality intelligence. The combination of the American concession on surprise inspections of such sites, and the inevitable decline in intelligence quality, offers an excellent foundation for successful Iranian cheating.

The ability to leverage American (and other) intelligence about Iran will also necessarily be eroded. The US will be unwilling to disclose its intelligence-gathering capabilities and methods, particularly those that would indicate operational activity on the soil of its new partner, Iran.

The IAEA, for its part, will be as unwilling as in the past to make use of external intelligence (even when presented with it) in order to conduct non-agreed inspections of sensitive facilities, out of fear of being accused of acting as an agent of Israel or the US. Hence it will need to invest a great deal of time and effort in order to build an independent dossier that will stand up to scrutiny, which will be sufficient for it to conduct more confrontational inspections at undeclared facilities. It is difficult to see how the IAEA might develop such capabilities.

It also appears that the claim, “a year will be sufficient in order to respond appropriately,” is not sufficiently well-founded. It is clear that the interest of any administration bound by the agreement, even if it inherits it, and certainly if it identifies with it, will be to obscure any violations rather than to recognize them, for as long as possible. Moreover, governments do not like to be put in the position of having to make difficult decisions, and so in general if a situation is not entirely clear, but rather contains shades of grey, the decision-makers (and even the intelligence agencies) tend to find “explanations” in order to delay making a decision.

Thus, for example, in 1995 Israel presented a great deal of high-quality, well-analyzed intelligence information to the US, to show our friends in Washington that the Iranian administration had begun a military nuclear program. The Americans took the issue very seriously, and appointed a team headed by a senior official to examine it. At the end of this process, this official let Israel know that it had “failed completely in its efforts to create a new enemy.” He meant that the US wasn’t about to identify Iran as a “new enemy” – despite Israel’s information – after the US had tackled Saddam Hussein in the First Gulf War. A further two years passed before my successor was able to persuade the Americans that the Iranian enemy was real and that its nuclear military program was dangerous.

It is not difficult to imagine US intelligence staff presenting information about Iranian violations and being rebuffed by decision-makers, using learned explanations. This would continue until they provide the impossible “smoking gun,” or until it is simply too late. In most similar cases intelligence services have needed more than a year from the moment at which a violation begins in order to identify it, understand it, and persuade the decision makers about it, and for these to then decide and act.

Based on the experiences in almost all similar cases in the past, it must be assumed with a high degree of probability that if the Iranians make an effort to cheat and to hide the evidence, it is almost certain that they will be able to develop their first nuclear device before the West can respond.

A third scenario is the possibility that the Iranians will abide by the agreement to the letter, all the way through to the end of its 10-15 year period. They will not cheat, but will use the time to expand their knowledge and capabilities, in theory and in practice.

Thus, for example, since Iran is allowed within certain limits to develop the next generation of centrifuges, they will focus their efforts on that. In such a scenario it is reasonable to assume that at the end of the period, after more than

a decade, that will have the expertise to produce centrifuges that are 10 or 20 times faster. This is a very realistic prospect, and seemingly would not represent a violation of the agreement, as long as it is done with the appropriate caution.

Since the embargo on conventional weapons will be lifted after five years, the Iranians will work to significantly improve their anti-aircraft defenses. They can expect help from Russia, which needs the money to be gained from these projects, which are defensive in nature and therefore “acceptable.” Three years later the embargo on the Iranian missile project will also be lifted, and Iran will make every effort to progress in its development and production of precise missiles, particularly long-range ones that would allow it to threaten Europe initially (at a very early stage), and later the US.

There is little doubt that within ten years, and certainly once the embargo is lifted, Iran will achieve these capabilities. It will be better protected from any aerial threat, and able to carry out missile strikes on many areas of the world.

In parallel, determined efforts will be made to develop the Iranian economy so that, after a decade, it will be able to withstand outside pressures. For example, Iran will stockpile spare parts for sensitive systems, Iranian banks will hold more foreign currency, and there will be more partnerships with large international companies – making any future sanctions program more difficult.

In short, all the lessons will be learned from the last sanctions regime, and Iran will be better prepared for a similar situation in the future.

The mechanism to renew sanctions is such complicated, the decision to resume sanctions is almost impossible. But more importantly, it is clear that following a global rush to invest in Iran, involving private and government investors, the possibility of a return to a sanctions regime will be significantly curtailed, as billions of dollars from the countries expected to impose sanctions will be invested in Iran – and who would want to lose them? But even if sanctions are resumed, they will have a greatly-reduced impact against an Iran that would be far more ready to withstand them than in the past.

Over the course of these years, Iran will greatly strengthen its grip on the Middle East. For example, it might solidify its control of Yemen, e v e n developing the capacity to block the Bab al-Mandab strait and thus threaten global trade and the Suez Canal, Egypt’s lifeline. It will take complete control of Lebanon, and with the help of other countries (perhaps even including the US), it will “save” the region by fighting ISIS to become the true ruler of Iraq and of what would remain of Alawite Syria.

Hezbollah will be given thousands of precise missiles, while enjoying Iranian backing, Hamas will receive more aid. These organizations will feel stronger being supported by the new regional superpower, Iran, and will thus be less hesitant to act. And of course, Iran's widespread terror network around the globe (according to reports from the US State Department) will be more active than ever, as an irritant and a deterrent.

There is little chance that America will follow through on its promise, that after signing the agreement it will be more determined in its efforts to contain Iran. US officials have repeatedly referred to this promise while defending the agreement. But this promise is unrealistic and illogical.

Once a rival state becomes a partner to an agreement, one does not increase efforts taken against it in other realms. It is the nature of agreements that cover a certain area of relations that they prevent pressure being applied in other areas, rather than increasing pressure. No-one in the West will now be interested in jeopardizing either the agreement or trade relations with Iran. It is therefore likely that, despite the messages of reassurance coming from Washington, Iran will become much stronger over those 15 years, internally, regionally, economically, and militarily, with little opposition from the US.

Only then, after 15 years of careful planning while observing all aspects of the agreement, will Iran begin an accelerated process of building a bomb. How long will it take then to identify and understand Iran's actions? What tools will the world, and the US in particular, possess to deal with a stronger Iran following 15 years of development? How quickly will Iran have sufficient enriched material? No-one has the answers to these questions.

In 2031, then, the Iranian success in achieving the agreement signed in 2015 will come to full fruition. Iran's logic throughout the negotiations will then become apparent, as in retrospect it will be seen that the country's leaders gave up on fulfilling the dream of a military nuclear program in their time, in order to allow it to be achieved easily and with no real opposition less than twenty years later.

Thus, a year after the agreement expires, Iran assuredly will have a small number of missiles capable of reaching the US, hundreds of missiles capable of reaching large parts of Europe, thousands of precise missiles able to carry out attacks anywhere in the Middle East, and, I suppose, at least two atomic bombs. Who will be able to halt its march to regional domination? Who will be able to prevent the fulfillment of the 1,300 year-old Shi'ite dream? Who will be able to stop the representative of the Mahdi (the Shi'ite messianic figure) armed with nuclear weapons?

Once the agreement expires, Iran will be free to begin its rush to nuclear weapons,

legitimately, having abided by the agreement – but with its regime bolstered and its dreams of expansion unchanged.

Several states in the region view these last two scenarios as likely (and even probable). They understand the danger of a Middle East threatened by an Iranian nuclear umbrella; and even prior to that, the dangers presented by Iran's immediate strengthening due to the agreement. They are fearful, and so they will prepare themselves.

The practical outcome is that the Middle East will immediately enter a double arms race. The Gulf States will spend a lot of money on American weapons that will supposedly grant them increased security in the face of a more powerful Iran. Clearly their competition with Iran as to who is the strongest will reach great heights, as both the Russians and the Americans (and even France and Britain) have an economic interest in selling as much weaponry as possible, and there is no upper limit to the advances that money can buy.

This will be the straightforward part of a new Mideast arms race. The more difficult element in terms of international stability will come when at least three Sunni countries, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Turkey, reach the decision that they cannot afford to lag behind a Shi'ite power in developing nuclear weapons. The West will have no moral right to prevent them from doing so, having allowed the dark and cruel mullahs in Tehran a nuclear bomb.

These countries will begin this process sometime after the agreement is in place, once its shortcomings are clear, and will complete it very close to the expiration of the agreement in 15 years' time. This will be an entirely different Middle East. Very much a "New Middle East," and a very bad one.

In the meantime, paradoxically, the agreement may actually contribute to the strengthening of ISIS. The Sunnis have been engaged in a historical struggle with the Shi'ites since the seventh century, and for some time have felt threatened by the Iranian initiative that began with the 1979 revolution, and by the Shi'ite dynamism led by Iran throughout the region. Thus, for example, Iran is responsible for the deaths (by its own forces or by its various supported factions) of Sunnis fighting for their lives in Syria. Shi'ites in Iraq expelled the Sunnis from all positions of influence, and hurt them in every way possible, while Iran supported the Shi'ite government in Baghdad. Iran is leading the wars of Shi'ite minorities against a Sunni majority in Yemen and against the Sunni leaders of Bahrain.

Following the agreement, the Sunnis might feel that the US has "taken sides" in this historic battle. They will be able to claim, based on the visible evidence, that the US did not fight against the "Shi'ite" Assad when he used poison gas against

Sunnis, but does fight against ISIS; and that the US ignores the interests of Sunni states and signs an agreement with the Shi'ite symbol of evil, Iran; and thus Sunnis must protect themselves.

Since ISIS is currently viewed as the strongest organization around, representing better than any others the Sunni interests in the region, this may make it easier for it to recruit more fighters to its ranks, to help it stand against the Shi'ite-American axis. A sign of such a process occurring will be if smaller rebel groups in Syria join ISIS, or announce cooperation with it. Ironically, should this happen, the West's need for Iran to help stem the growth of ISIS will be greater than ever, and thus a feedback loop will be created.

Summary

It is impossible to claim, in light of all the shortcomings of the agreement as described above, that the agreement should be supported even if it is not perfect. This agreement will likely and necessarily lead to the use of force against Iran, at some stage or other, in order to halt its race toward nuclear weapons. This, however, will take place in far worse conditions than before the agreement, against a far-stronger Iran.

The administration claims that "this was the best agreement that could have been achieved, and should therefore it should upheld." But since the contents of the discussions between the parties are not known, the only way for us to evaluate the negotiations is by the results. For example: Some have asked why the US did not include other issues, beyond the nuclear question, in the agreement, such as a commitment from Iran to desist from involvement in international terror. The American answer is that Washington did not want to include issues that would complicate the negotiations, and that might even lead to additional Iranian demands on nuclear issues in response. They therefore chose to stay focused on Iran's nuclear program.

This answer does not hold up under scrutiny. At the very end of the negotiations, Iran sought concessions on two non-nuclear issues: The removal of sanctions on their missile program and on their conventional weapons build-up. In both cases, Washington agreed to an Iranian demand that had no connection to the nuclear issue. Sanctions on conventional weapons are to be lifted after five years, and sanctions on missiles will be lifted after a further three years.

Thus Iran was able to achieve non-nuclear concessions via the negotiations, while the US, by its own admission, did not even try to do so. If no attempt is made to improve vital issues during the negotiations, it is impossible to then claim that this was the best possible agreement.

As to the question, “Yes, but was the alternative?” there is a clear answer. The alternative was increasing the pressure of sanctions, conducting stubborn negotiations, and making serious preparations for military action that would crystalize all options on the table. Together, these would achieve a better agreement.

The choice was between a bad agreement, like the one achieved, and a far better agreement, because the Iranians desperately needed to conclude a deal. Why the six powers agreed to a bad agreement is an interesting historical question. In the meantime, we are left to deal with its consequences, which for Israel (and in my opinion for most of the world) are extremely dangerous.

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