



The Iran Deal One Year Later: The Fuse Is Still Burning

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: One year later, it can clearly be said that the nuclear talks reversed power relations in Iran's favor, with the US forfeiting a historic opportunity to dismantle Iran's nuclear capability. Instead, the agreement left Iran with its full capability concerning enriched uranium – only at a reduced scale and subject to questionable monitoring. When the deal expires, Iran will have the ability to set up an extremely fast enrichment system, and its ability to reach the quantity of material required for a nuclear weapon will have increased tenfold. Iran also can continue to develop heavy long-distance missiles – without global opposition and without sanctions.

One year later, I have not changed my mind about the very problematic contours of the JCPOA that the American administration and its allies concluded with Iran.

I continue to believe that the US lost a historic opportunity to use its clear advantage at the start of the negotiations to achieve more significant accomplishments. A much better deal could have been struck regarding the dismantling of Iran's nuclear capability, and also regarding the struggle to prevent the nuclearization of other countries. Iran was the weak side in the negotiations, but the US did not properly use the cards it held, making concessions instead of extracting them.

Before the deal, the US, together with Israel, led a united front that pitted most of the world against Iran. The economic situation there deteriorated to such an extent that the Iranians were forced to enter into negotiations with the principal goal of lifting sanctions. The US made mistakes that led it to feel compelled to reach an agreement, and the Iranians understood that the US believed it had no other option but a deal. Power relations in the negotiations thus reversed in Iran's favor, and its representatives took skillful advantage.

With the deal, the US was able to claim a grand and immediate accomplishment: Iran committed itself to removing the bulk of its enriched uranium (enough for four bombs) from its territory. Iran did so, and is now holding onto a minimal amount of enriched material until the deal expires (or until it breaches the terms of the agreement). This is a relief, as Iran has, for the time being, lost its ability to "make the jump" to a nuclear bomb in a relatively short amount of time. Moreover, the agreement has temporarily eliminated Iran's ability to produce plutonium. It cannot, therefore, forge a plutogenic rather than an enriched uranium path to nuclear weapons.

The deal has clearly bought Israel and the world a fair bit of time. So what is so bad about it?

The US made a critical concession during the negotiations. Instead of demanding the dismantling of Iranian nuclear capability, the US left Iran with its full capability concerning enriched uranium – only at a reduced scale and subject to strict monitoring. It is by no means clear that monitoring has, in fact, become any stricter – the opposite appears to be the case. Even worse, the deal allows Iran to advance in two important fields related to its nuclear future.

First, Iran can continue developing the next generation of centrifuges for enrichment. Once it passes through the research and trial stages (which are expected to last about as long as the deal), the next generation will allow Iran to enrich uranium at a rate 10 or 20 times faster than the current generation. When the deal expires, Iran will have the ability to set up an extremely fast enrichment system, and its ability to reach the quantity of enriched material required for a nuclear weapon will have increased tenfold.

Second, Iran can continue developing heavy long-distance missiles. The missiles in question can carry nuclear weapons further, deliver bigger bombs, and strike targets with greater accuracy. Iran is conducting tests that prove that it is advancing in this field in an orderly manner.

But the biggest problem with the deal lies in the fact that Iran has been given the legitimacy to maintain, develop, and move forward along the path of uranium enrichment after the deal. This legitimacy will allow Iran to get much closer to a nuclear bomb by the time the deal expires.

Proponents of the agreement boast about the few years' delay, pointing out that the Iranians had a similar capability prior to the deal. But this argument is disingenuous. Iran's capability was hardly similar when most of the world was applying pressure and imposing debilitating sanctions on its economy.

At the end of the deal, the Iranians will have the same capability, but without global opposition and certainly without sanctions. Fifteen years may seem a long time to a president or a prime minister who is focused on his term in office, but it is the blink of an eye to a nation. This is particularly true because once the deal expires, the Iranians' breakout time may be quicker than the reaction time needed to stop them thanks to the advanced centrifuges.

The scope of the deal's damage is wider still. It has turned Iran into a superpower that aspires to become a major influencer throughout the Middle East. This is hardly a new goal for Iran, but now that it is perceived as the country that made the US bend to its will, Iran sees itself differently and is seen differently by others. Iran is growing stronger militarily, thanks to the acquisition of modern weapons; economically, thanks to major investments and the procurement of large purchase contracts with countries around the world; and politically, because it now has both deal-procured immunity and much more money with which to fund its emissaries, from Hezbollah to Hamas.

In this context, the major deal Iran made with Boeing is of immense significance because it is in the strategically important field of air transport capacity – not just for tourists, but also for the military and for weapons. Having an important American company like Boeing open the door made it much easier for Iran to make contact with other companies around the world. If the US can sell Iran airplanes, other countries can sell it anything. The interests generated by deals like this will prevent any possibility of returning to the sanctions regime. It is almost an Iranian insurance policy against any future sanctions initiative.

Israel cannot remain indifferent to the consequences of the deal. As it turned out, the US was determined not to use the military option, contrary to its promises. If Iran does go for the bomb, it will therefore be up to Israel to be prepared to act independently. The efforts to hide the negotiations from

Israel, the shirking of commitments, and the negotiations' end result justify the pessimism in Jerusalem.

However, it is possible that Washington's approach might change. To this end, Israel must build a close working relationship with the US administration that will come into power within the next six months. Israel and the US should establish joint working groups with the responsibility of identifying any breach of the nuclear deal. Rules must be determined that would come into play if the deal is violated or if Iran starts building up its power when the deal expires.

Iran is the only country that has the potential to pose a threat to the existence of Israel. Israel has no choice but to prepare for the possibility that it may have to eliminate that threat on its own if such potential is realized. At the same time, Israel must try to recruit the US to join in this tremendous effort.

Editors note: This is a slightly-edited version of op-ed article penned by General Amidror that appeared in *Israel Hayom* newspaper on July 15, 2016, two weeks before President Obama remarked (on August 5) that “even Israel” admits the US was right to sign the nuclear deal with Iran.

General Amidror was National Security Advisor to the Prime Minister of Israel until 2.5 years ago, and played a significant role in the dialogue between Jerusalem and Washington over how to confront Iran's nuclear weapons drive. The view he expresses here probably present in a very sober way the perspective of many experts in Israeli defense and diplomatic circles with regard to the Iran deal – even now.

Also available: The original [Hebrew](#) version of this article.

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