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# U.S. STRATEGY AFTER THE IRAN DEAL

Seizing Opportunities and Managing Risks

By Ilan Goldenberg



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Security

## About the Author

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**Cover Image:** United States President Barack Obama delivers remarks alongside Kuwaiti Emir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah (L) and Qatar's Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani, following the Gulf Cooperation Council-U.S. summit at Camp David on May 14, 2015. Obama hosted leaders from Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates and Oman to discuss a range of issues including terrorism and the U.S.-Iran nuclear deal.

*Credit: AP Images*

For the past 18 months as representatives from Iran and the P5+1 (United States, Russia, China, France, Great Britain, and Germany) have negotiated a potentially historic nuclear agreement, a debate has raged in Washington and capitals across the globe on the contents of that possible agreement. While the document itself is critical, what will be more decisive for the success or failure of the agreement is the set of regional, global, and non-proliferation policies that the United States pursues in the aftermath of the deal.

If the deal is achieved, in 10–15 years the world could see a more moderate Iran, reduced instability in the Middle East, a stronger global non-proliferation regime, and an environment in which America's prestige and influence has increased as a result of the nuclear agreement. On the other hand, with poor execution and the wrong policies the United States could face a very different world in 2025: a more hostile and aggressive Iran on the verge of nuclear weapons; a Middle East still drowning in sectarian violence and civil war; a damaged non-proliferation regime; and an international perception that the nuclear agreement with Iran was a historic mistake that significantly harmed American interests.

This report examines the key opportunities and risks the United States will face after a deal and lays out a framework that seeks to maximize the upsides of a diplomatic breakthrough with Iran while protecting against the negative implications. It is part of a series of studies conducted by the Center for a New American Security examining the aftermath of an agreement and potential policy implications for the United States. This report only lays out the outlines of a strategy based on six central pillars:

1. **Strengthen the nuclear agreement** by taking steps outside of the P5+1 negotiations with Iran to set conditions for effective long-term enforcement and implementation.
2. **Cooperate with Iran** on issues of common interest both to stabilize the Middle East and increase the likelihood of a more moderate and cooperative Iran.
3. More forcefully **counter Iranian actions** that are against U.S. interests, most notably their support for surrogates and proxies in the Middle East.
4. **Maintain and deepen U.S. commitments to regional partners** to deter Iranian aggression and dissuade American partners from taking destabilizing steps.
5. **Leverage the agreement to strengthen non-proliferation norms** and dissuade states from reacting to the deal by pursuing similar domestic enrichment capabilities.
6. Use the agreement to **refocus on Asia and Europe and increase U.S. leverage with Russia and China.**

If the P5+1 and Iran successfully complete an agreement in the months ahead, CNAS will produce a final study that will fully flesh out this framework and include a series of specific policy recommendations associated with each pillar.

## OPPORTUNITIES AND RISKS

U.S. objectives in the Middle East and globally will not change after an agreement. Preventing Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons will remain a top priority. The United States will continue to focus on the same core interests in the region: stability, counterterrorism, energy supply, and defense of regional partners. Strengthening the global non-proliferation regime and improving American global standing will also remain top priorities. This section examines five potential questions that could significantly impact these objectives in the aftermath of a deal and identifies their associated risks and opportunities:

1. Will the deal successfully prevent Iran from obtaining nuclear weapons?
2. Will Iran moderate or harden?
3. Will an agreement help stabilize the Middle East or exacerbate competition?
4. Will the agreement strengthen or weaken the non-proliferation regime?
5. Will the deal provide more strategic space for the United States to focus on other challenges in Asia and Europe?

### 1. Will the deal successfully prevent Iran from obtaining nuclear weapons?

The best way to understand how an agreement can successfully prevent Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon is to examine Iran's nuclear strategy. Since the start of the Obama administration, Iran has been within a year's time of obtaining enough 90 percent highly enriched uranium for a bomb, but has not actually chosen to enrich to that level.<sup>1</sup> The final steps necessary to obtain the material are conspicuous and cannot be explained as dual-use activities meant for Iran's civilian nuclear energy program.<sup>2</sup> Any attempt then to pursue this course of action would be quickly noticed, creating a

window of vulnerability during which Israel, the United States, or an international coalition could strike the program and set it back. Iran has slowly sought to shrink this window of vulnerability so that should it ever decide to break out, it would be able to do so with less risk. This strategy has entailed bringing on more centrifuges, improving their efficiency, increasing stockpiles of low enriched uranium, and building facilities that are more difficult to attack.

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The real measure of any final deal's effectiveness is whether or not it can reverse Iran's attempts to expand its nuclear program and set the Iranians far enough away from a nuclear weapon that they will never dare risk pursuing a breakout by taking the final steps necessary to obtain a nuclear weapon. In other words, a deal has to keep the window of vulnerability large enough. If the final agreement is reflective of the White House fact sheet released on April 2, 2015, at the conclusion of the talks in Lausanne, Switzerland, it should be able to successfully lengthen the window of vulnerability to a point where Iran is deterred from pursuing a nuclear weapon for years to come.<sup>3</sup>

TABLE 1: OPPORTUNITIES AND RISKS

KEY QUESTIONS	OPPORTUNITIES	RISKS
Will the agreement prevent Iran from obtaining nuclear weapons?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The agreement prevents an overt dash.</li> <li>• The agreement deters a covert sneak-out.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enforcement breaks down and Iran obtains a nuclear weapon.</li> <li>• Loopholes in the agreement allow Iran to obtain a nuclear weapon.</li> </ul>
Will Iran moderate or harden?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pragmatists use the agreement to wield greater influence.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hardliners reassert their influence after the agreement.</li> </ul>
Will the agreement help stabilize the Middle East or exacerbate competition?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The agreement facilitates greater cooperation between the United States and Iran in Afghanistan and Iraq.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The agreement leads to intensified competition in Iraq, Syria, and Yemen.</li> <li>• Anxious Arab partners respond by going their own way.</li> <li>• The agreement causes a deep permanent breach with Israel.</li> </ul>
Will the agreement strengthen or weaken the non-proliferation regime?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The agreement sets new norms for successfully deterring and dealing with problem states.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The agreement weakens the standards of the non-proliferation regime.</li> <li>• Regional states react by pursuing domestic enrichment programs.</li> </ul>
Will the agreement provide more strategic space for the United States to focus on other challenges in Asia and Europe?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The deal provides the United States more time, resources, and flexibility to devote to key challenges in Asia and Europe;</li> <li>• More flexibility in the bilateral relationship with China; and</li> <li>• Greater economic leverage with Russia.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The agreement leads to increased tensions between the United States and Russia.</li> <li>• China improves its position in the Middle East.</li> </ul>

*OPPORTUNITY: THE AGREEMENT PREVENTS AN OVERT “DASH”*

The final agreement will have to address the two most likely ways for Iran to break out to a nuclear weapon. First, in an overt dash Iran would use all of its existing nuclear facilities, which are closely monitored by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), to produce the 90 percent highly enriched uranium necessary for a bomb as quickly as possible. In this scenario, the Iranians would do all they could to obfuscate early on in the dash and create confusion about precisely what was occurring at their facilities. Even so, they would have to take steps such as reconfiguring centrifuges to enrich highly enriched uranium that would very quickly give away their intentions.

Most nuclear experts estimate that if Iran were to decide to pursue an overt dash today, it could produce enough highly enriched uranium for one bomb in roughly two to three months.<sup>4</sup> In the wake of the Lausanne talks, the Obama administration stated that Iran has agreed to stretch this timeframe to one year for the first 10 years of an agreement, after which it would start to shrink.<sup>5</sup> It is also important to remember that these time estimates assume the Iranians are successful at every step in the process. In reality, there would likely be unexpected delays and challenges that would lengthen the process if Iran sought to build a bomb. These estimates also assume that Iran would pursue only one bomb, which no nuclear state has ever done.<sup>6</sup> Instead, to have a credible arsenal Iran would likely need to dash to a small arsenal of perhaps six to eight weapons.

Thus, the parameters negotiated in Lausanne would leave the United States more than enough time to catch the Iranians cheating and build the political consensus for action at home and abroad to take military action. The United States’ ability to mount such a response should deter Iran from ever trying to dash.

*OPPORTUNITY: THE AGREEMENT DETERS A COVERT “SNEAK-OUT”*

Iran’s second option for a breakout would be a covert sneak out in which it uses an entirely new set of facilities that has not been detected by the IAEA. Such an approach is difficult to carry out and would take a few years.<sup>7</sup> Iran has twice tried to build covert enrichment facilities, first Natanz and then Fordow, both of which were detected long before they ever came online.<sup>8</sup>

The parameters agreed to in Lausanne, which create robust monitoring and verification mechanisms, will make it exceedingly more difficult for Iran to secretly develop covert facilities. Most importantly, the inspections regime will include continuous video monitoring of Iran’s uranium mines and uranium mills for the next 25 years and the monitoring of centrifuge production facilities for 20 years.<sup>9</sup> This cradle to grave monitoring of the entire process will force Iran to develop secret alternative sources of uranium and centrifuges if it ever wishes to develop a covert nuclear program – a difficult proposition indeed.<sup>10</sup>

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*RISK: ENFORCEMENT BREAKS DOWN AND IRAN OBTAINS A NUCLEAR WEAPON*

The greatest threat to the success of an agreement is poor implementation and a lack of high-level political attention that over time results in Iranian cheating with no consequences. This is not necessarily a danger in year one, but could be in year three or five. It is a potential problem not only for



Ministers of Foreign Affairs for the P5+1 (United States, France, United Kingdom, China, Russia, Germany) and Iran celebrate the political framework agreement in Lausanne, Switzerland, in April 2015. (Source: U.S. Department of State)

the United States but also for other P5+1 states, as over time personnel changes and new political priorities divert attention and expertise away from the Iranian nuclear challenge.

The transition from the Obama administration to the next president could be especially problematic if the new team is not as familiar with the details of the agreement or as politically invested in implementing it. This issue contributed to the failure of the 1994 Agreed Framework with North Korea in which poor implementation through the late 1990s followed by the transition to a Bush administration less invested in the agreement were major factors in the agreement's collapse. There are numerous other examples, such as the Bush-Obama transition on Iraq, which led to a lower prioritization of the Iraq issue after the American withdrawal in 2011 and contributed to the rise of the Islamic State of Iraq and al Sham (ISIS). Similarly, the transition from Clinton to Bush led to a lesser focus on terrorism and al Qaeda in the months prior to 9/11.

In short, this challenge afflicts nearly all administrations of all parties, with sometimes catastrophic effects for American foreign policy.

***RISK: LOOPHOLES IN THE AGREEMENT ALLOW IRAN TO OBTAIN A NUCLEAR WEAPON***

Even if enforcement remains effective, there is also the danger that Iran simply waits for certain limitations on its nuclear program to sunset and then dashes to a bomb in 10–15 years. After year 10 many of the limitations on Iran's centrifuge capacity and research and development capacity will be removed, and by year 15 it will be able to enrich uranium at Fordow. At that point it may build a broader and more technologically sophisticated capacity that over time reduces its dash time to near zero, giving it the option to develop a small nuclear arsenal if it so chooses, with much less risk of being caught and attacked.

Another challenge is whether the United States and the international community will have a credible “snap back” mechanism that can automatically reimpose sanctions in the event of Iranian violations and thus deter Iran from violating the agreement. Without such a mechanism, there is a danger that once there is an agreement there is no credible way to snap back sanctions in the event of Iranian noncompliance, and thus the leverage on Iran evaporates. President Obama stated that the agreement will include robust measures for automatic snap back, but the devil will be in the details: It is hard to see how the Russians and Chinese, who deeply value the leverage afforded by their veto capabilities in the U.N. Security Council, would agree to such a measure or implement it in good faith even if they agreed to it.

There are additional questions that need to be answered about whether the international community will truly have access to all suspected sites in Tehran – especially in light of some of the public comments by the Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei and other Iranian officials disputing the White House’s assertion.<sup>14</sup> Many of these questions cannot be answered until there is a final agreement, which need not be perfect but must close off major loopholes and create the conditions that make it so risky for Iran to attempt to obtain a nuclear weapon that it chooses not to do so.

## 2. Will Iran moderate or harden?

Another significant question about the nuclear agreement is whether it will change the strategic orientation of the regime and influence not only Iranian capabilities but also intentions. Will the agreement give a boost to pragmatists like Iran’s President Hassan Rouhani and allow him and his faction to wield greater influence on Iran’s foreign policy? Or will Iranian hardliners reassert themselves and pursue more repressive tactics at home and aggressive policies abroad to ensure that the agreement does not lead to a transformation of



U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry sits with Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif for a one-on-one chat before a broader meeting in Geneva, Switzerland, on May 30, 2015, at the outset of the latest round in the P5+1 negotiations about the future of Iran’s nuclear program. (Source: U.S. Department of State)

Iranian politics and society that they fear would threaten the regime’s existence? These questions cannot be answered overnight, and in the aftermath of an agreement there is likely to be a prolonged, intensive political struggle inside the Islamic Republic about its future.

### *OPPORTUNITY: PRAGMATISTS USE THE AGREEMENT TO WIELD GREATER INFLUENCE*

On one side will stand Iran’s pragmatic President Rouhani and his allies. They are men of the revolution and not looking to overturn the regime’s nature. They will not renounce Iran’s nuclear program in its entirety or cease efforts to wield influence through support for groups such as Hezbollah and Iraqi Shia militias.<sup>15</sup> They will still view the United States as a major competitor. But when evaluating foreign policy priorities they put greater emphasis on economic integration and international legitimacy, believing an approach that is more open to the world is the most effective way for Iran to increase its international



influence. As President Rouhani stated in a January 2015 speech, “Gone are the days when it was said if foreign investors come to Iran its independence will suffer ... It’s been the economy that pays for the politics ... It would be good for once to act in reverse and have internal politics and foreign policy pay for the economy.”<sup>16</sup>

After a nuclear deal, Rouhani will have strong political winds at his back. He will have succeeded in delivering on his promise to Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei to relieve the devastating sanctions harming Iran’s economy and that could have threatened the regime’s stability. With this success, he may have the Supreme Leader’s support and more leverage inside the Iranian system to play an increasingly influential role in Iran’s regional policies in Syria, Iraq, and Yemen, and wrestle some control away from Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps’ Quds Force (IRGC-QF).<sup>17</sup> He may also potentially be able to leverage the agreement to make some domestic social reforms – though thus far in his presidency he has failed to exert influence in this arena.<sup>18</sup>

The Iranian public’s support for Rouhani and his faction could increase substantially, which could translate into greater influence and more seats in the parliament. The agreement’s popularity was apparent when, after agreeing on parameters for the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, Foreign Minister Zarif returned from Lausanne to a hero’s welcome from street protestors.<sup>19</sup> Iran is not a democracy, and popular support alone is not enough to shift the internal political balance toward Rouhani, but the population has some influence. The government “vets” all candidates for office, ensuring they are acceptable, and there is a history of manipulating outcomes.<sup>20</sup> But popular support matters, as demonstrated by Rouhani’s surprise election in 2013 when he received barely over 50 percent of the vote and was allowed to assume the presidency without a runoff – which would have been necessary had he achieved only a plurality – even though his views were not as closely aligned with the Supreme Leader as some of the other candidates.<sup>21</sup>

#### *RISK: HARDLINERS REASSERT THEIR INFLUENCE AFTER THE AGREEMENT*

It is also plausible that after the agreement, having achieved their objectives of getting out from under sanctions, hardliners led by the Supreme Leader marginalize Rouhani and other pragmatists, continue Iran’s aggressive regional approach, and pursue harsher, more repressive domestic policies. Khamenei’s greatest fear is that the nuclear program leads to a broader rapprochement with the West that eventually topples the regime.<sup>22</sup> He has made clear in his public statements that the nuclear agreement is a one-off and not a game-changer in the relationship, stating, “Negotiations with the United States are on the nuclear issue and nothing else.”<sup>23</sup> Conservatives can leverage the vetting process to eliminate many of Rouhani’s allies from next year’s parliamentary elections and try to topple Rouhani in the 2017 presidential elections. Even though Rouhani’s 2013 election showed that the Iranian public has some influence, the suspicious circumstances surrounding President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad’s 2009 election demonstrate that when the regime considers itself at risk it is capable of manipulating outcomes as necessary.<sup>24</sup>

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In reality, the internal struggle will likely take years to play out. Iran's March 2016 parliamentary elections may be an early indicator, but the most important moment may not come until the Supreme Leader, who is 75 years old and is said to not be in good health, passes away.<sup>25</sup> The Assembly of Experts, an elected body of clerics, is charged with appointing the Supreme Leader, but given the changes in the Islamic Republic in the 25 years since the last succession, it is uncertain precisely how the new leader may be chosen. It is not even clear if the Supreme Leader will be an individual or a committee, and how much power the office will retain relative to the other key centers of power. The outcome of the succession process is likely to be a crucial moment in the history of the Islamic Republic and a strong indicator of whether the regime is moderating and becoming more pragmatic or whether the hardliners are winning the internal battle.

### 3. Will an agreement help stabilize the Middle East or exacerbate competition?

A nuclear agreement could have far-ranging positive regional implications if it leads to greater cooperation between Iran and the United States on some of the region's most difficult conflicts. It could over time lead to cooperation to maintain stability in Afghanistan; greater U.S.-Iranian cooperation against ISIS; a negotiated political settlement in Syria that includes a transition process to remove Bashar al-Assad from power; and a de-escalation of the civil war in Yemen.

But it could also have the opposite effect of deepening tensions between Iran and its regional competitors as Iran uses its newfound legitimacy and the financial windfall resulting from the lifting of sanctions to double down on support for President Assad, Hezbollah, Iraqi Shia militias, and the Houthis. And if the Arab states and Israel feel abandoned by the United States in the aftermath of a deal, they may begin acting more independently and aggressively to counter what they see as a rising Iranian threat, further exacerbating tensions in the region.

#### *OPPORTUNITY: GREATER COOPERATION BETWEEN THE UNITED STATES AND IRAN IN AFGHANISTAN AND IRAQ*

The United States and Iran share common interests in Afghanistan and in fighting ISIS. After the fall of the Taliban, Iran played a helpful role in forming the first Afghan government at the Bonn Conference 2001.<sup>26</sup> It has remained an enemy of the Taliban, though it has on occasion engaged in some tactical cooperation out of fear that a long-term U.S. force presence in Afghanistan would threaten Iran's security. While ambivalent towards President Ashraf Ghani, Iran quietly accepted his presidency.<sup>27</sup> With the United States drawing down its forces in Afghanistan, any irritant in the U.S.-Iran relationship on Afghanistan should recede and common interests could trump competition.

In Iraq, Iran and the United States share a common interest in fighting ISIS. The IRGC-QF has been active in training Shia militias that have fought ISIS, and at a minimum there has been an effort to tactically de-conflict American and Iranian operations in Iraq, with the Iraqis playing the coordinator role.<sup>28</sup> American and Iranian officials have also acknowledged that some level of dialogue on this issue has occurred on the sidelines of the nuclear negotiations.<sup>29</sup> Though those conversations have been limited for now, they could significantly expand in the aftermath of an agreement.

*RISK: INTENSIFIED COMPETITION IN IRAQ, SYRIA, AND YEMEN*

It is just as likely that the nuclear deal intensifies regional competition. Iranian and American cooperation in Iraq will remain purely tactical unless Iran pivots from a strategy focused on a Shia victory over the Sunnis to one that recognizes that the only sustainable option for Iraq is a power sharing system that allows Sunnis, Kurds, and Shia to all be effectively represented. Thus far, there have been few indications by the Iranians, and particularly by the IRGC-QF, that they are willing to change course.

The situation in Syria is even more extreme as Iran continues to strongly back President Bashar al-Assad, thus fueling the civil war that has engulfed the country, resulted in the death of more than 220,000 people, and led to the rise of ISIS. Reports have confirmed that at any given time Iran has about 60 to 70 high-level IRGC-QF commanders and military advisors in Syria, while Hezbollah has deployed 5,000 troops.<sup>30</sup> Meanwhile, America's Sunni partners have reacted to Iranian interventionism by supporting Sunni groups, regardless of their level of extremism. While this response may be expedient, it will only exacerbate regional instability.

If there is to be a political agreement that ends the conflict, Iran will have to be a central player in bringing Assad to the table and supporting a transition from power that removes him and stabilizes the country. At the moment that scenario appears a long way off, and Iran seems more intent on doubling down its current policies in Syria. However, if the setbacks on the battlefield for President Assad continue, it is possible that Iran will shift course and be more willing to abandon him as part of a political settlement.

*RISK: ANXIOUS ARAB PARTNERS GO THEIR OWN WAY*

The anxiety of America's Gulf partners, who in the aftermath of an agreement may pursue riskier and more aggressive policies toward Iran with less coordination with the United States, is likely to further exacerbate regional instability. Saudi Arabia has expressed concerns that the United States is so interested in achieving an agreement on the nuclear question that it is willing to tolerate Iran's unchecked influence throughout the Middle East. To many in the region, Iranian nuclear ambitions are inextricably linked to Tehran's aggressive support of its proxies. They feel the United States is doing little to counter the rising strength of Iran and its proxies. What the Saudis most fear is that in the aftermath of a nuclear agreement, the United States would cut a deal with Tehran to divide and stabilize the region – and abandon its Arab partners.<sup>31</sup>

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An image supporting the IRGC Quds Force's regional action network of proxy militias reads, "We are all yours, Zeinab! We are the soldiers of our commander, the faqih [jurist]." Faqih in this context refers to the Supreme Leader. In the background Ali Khomeini waves to the Shi'a fighters in the IRGC-QF's network. The militant organization logos that are depicted are, from left to right: Kata'ib Sayyid al-Shuhada'; Harakat Hezbollah al-Nujaba'; Kata'ib Hezbollah; Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq; Lebanese Hezbollah; and the Badr organization. (Source: Screen grab from Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq posted YouTube video)

Some of the Saudi criticism of the American approach is unfair. For the United States the nuclear issue is still paramount, and given the global consequences of Iran's obtaining a nuclear weapon, prioritizing the nuclear question is the right approach. Moreover, some of the frustration with the United States is closely linked to the Gulf states' anxiety about the instability brought on by the Arab Spring – a problem the United States can help manage but not solve.

However, part of the Gulf states' criticism is justified. In recent years, the Obama administration has been so focused on the nuclear question that it has largely ignored the question of Iranian regional influence. While the administration has done a reasonable job of managing one crisis after another in the region and avoided entangling the United States in new conflicts, it has not articulated a clear strategy and commitment to the Middle East that could reassure partners.

The United States has clearly recognized this problem and begun to move to address it with the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) summit hosted by President Obama at Camp David in May 2015.

This summit was the first step in what is likely to be a long process of attempting to convince the Gulf states that the United States is not pivoting to Iran and remains committed to their security.

Still, the recent Saudi intervention in Yemen and the U.S. response to Saudi actions could portend a shift to a new more aggressive approach by the Gulf states to counter Iranian influence in the region in the aftermath of a nuclear agreement. The Saudis believe that the Houthi-led insurgency on its border is an Iranian supported and engineered effort to establish Shia dominance in Yemen.<sup>32</sup> The reality is that while Iran has played an unhelpful role in fueling the conflict by providing arms to the Houthis, the ties between Iran and the Houthis are not nearly as deep as they are with Shia militias in Iraq or Hezbollah.<sup>33</sup> This is much more a tactical relationship and a target of opportunity than a strategic long-term commitment.<sup>34</sup> Still, Iran's growing influence combined with Saudi anxiety about America's orientation in the Middle East caused the Saudis to act independently of the United States and organize their own international force to intervene in Yemen.

The American reaction to the GCC intervention in Yemen may be indicative of a U.S. policy shift toward Iranian regional influence. Obama administration officials have privately expressed concerns that the Saudi intervention is not clearly tied to a plan to achieve concrete political objectives.<sup>35</sup> But they have chosen to support the Saudi intervention, providing critical intelligence for the aerial campaign and sending ships off the coast of Yemen to deter Iranian resupply of the Houthis.<sup>36</sup> This decision is tied to demonstrating support for the U.S.-Saudi relationship rather than a belief that the Saudi intervention can be successful. In the aftermath of a deal the United States may face future tradeoffs as it is forced to choose between an approach that makes the most sense in one instance versus a strategy designed to reassure important partners in the region.

#### *RISK: A BREACH WITH ISRAEL*

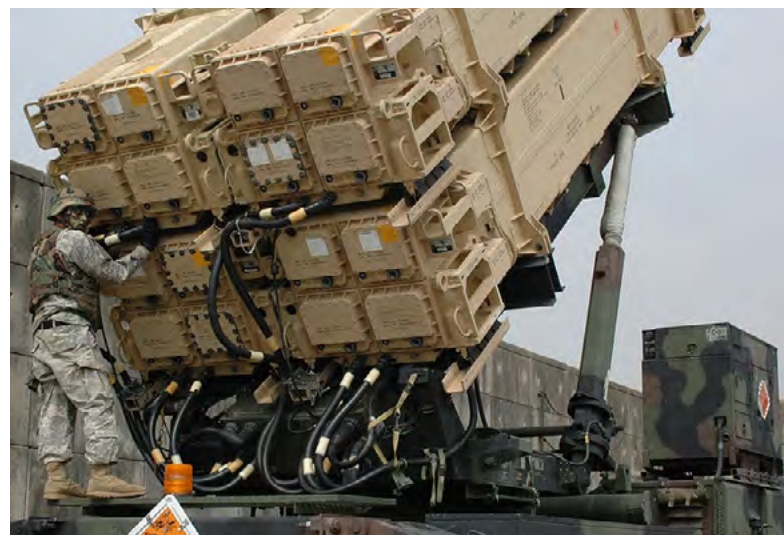
A nuclear agreement with Iran may also have significant implications for the U.S.-Israel relationship. It could undermine trust between the United States and Israel, as it already has with the very open and public disagreements between President Obama and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Given their history of close cooperation against common threats in the region, particularly in the intelligence and security arena, this could hurt both countries' interests.

Iran's regional activities and its extreme rhetoric threatening the existence of the Jewish state are causes of concern for Israelis. However, Israel's greater concern lies with the nuclear agreement itself.<sup>37</sup> The most significant issue for the Israelis is not necessarily the details of the agreement, such as the number of centrifuges or the overall inspections regime, but the question of enforcement. They believe that while Iran is likely to respect an agreement during the early years of implementation, at some point Iran will cheat or wait out the 10–15 year time period, at which point many of the

provisions sunset. The international community's attention will be diverted to other matters, there will be no forceful response, eventually the deal will erode, and Iran will be left with few limits on its nuclear program and no sanctions.



An M142 High Mobility Rocket System (HIMARS) test fires at the White Sands Missile Range in New Mexico. In 2014, the sale of 12 HIMARS worth nearly \$1 billion to the United Arab Emirates was approved by the U.S. Defense Security Cooperation Agency. The sale was touted as greatly improving the United Arab Emirates' ability to meet present and future threats, protect its infrastructure, and improve interoperability with U.S. forces. (Source: U.S. Army)



In 2014, the sale of 202 advanced PAC-3 Patriot Missile launchers worth nearly \$1.5 billion to Saudi Arabia was approved by the U.S. Defense Security Cooperation Agency. The PAC-3 launchers have already been sold to Kuwait and Oman, and the sale is touted as greatly improving Saudi Arabia's ability to meet present and future threats from ballistic missiles, aircraft, and cruise missiles using ground radar. (Source: U.S. Army)

#### 4. Will the agreement strengthen or weaken the non-proliferation regime?

The nuclear agreement will have profound implications for the broader global non-proliferation regime. If the agreement is successful and Iran is prevented from obtaining nuclear weapons then the deal may set an important precedent for how to deter future cheaters and deal with problem states. Some of the rigorous inspections measures agreed to by Iran may also become the new gold standard for all Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) members. On the other hand, if the agreement fails and Iran obtains a nuclear weapon, it will demonstrate the exact opposite, dealing a heavy blow to the non-proliferation regime and calling into question whether or not the international community is truly capable of stopping cheaters – short of using military force or seeing a change in leadership.

##### *OPPORTUNITY: SETTING NEW NORMS FOR DEALING WITH NUCLEAR CHEATERS*

The nuclear agreement could have important positive effects on the global non-proliferation regime if it is successfully implemented over the next 15–25 years and deters Iran from pursuing nuclear weapons. The agreement could become a new model for how to effectively deal with violators. There is a long history of cases in which states have given up the pursuit of a nuclear weapons program because of external changes to their security environment, internal regime changes, a shift in strategy, military coercion, or simply because the task was too difficult and costly.<sup>38</sup> Iran would be a unique instance because of the scale and scope of the international response, the complexity of the negotiations, and the fact that Iran's regime had not fundamentally changed but was still successfully deterred from obtaining nuclear weapons through a combination of economic pressure and an arms control agreement.

The international process will have worked precisely as intended, with initial concerns being referred by the IAEA Board of Governors to the U.N. Security Council, which imposed sanctions but left the door open for negotiations. These sanctions were crafted to ensure maximum leverage on Iran while also maintaining broad international support, and eventually led to a cheater making concessions that prevented it from obtaining a nuclear weapon. The limitations that Iran will have agreed to on its nuclear program could become a model for future violators attempting to rebuild confidence from the international community if they change course, while the cradle to grave continuous monitoring could become a new norm in the non-proliferation regime that perhaps over time all states could be asked to abide by.

##### *RISK: STANDARDS OF THE NON-PROLIFERATION REGIME ARE WEAKENED*

If implementation and enforcement fail and Iran obtains a nuclear weapon, the agreement will do great damage to the non-proliferation regime by undermining the notion that international pressure and diplomatic engagement could lead states who are determined to get nuclear weapons to put reasonable restraints on their programs.

The agreement may not fully punish bad behavior by nuclear cheaters, setting negative precedents for future cases. Iran will not completely admit to having secretly conducted research on building nuclear weapons.<sup>39</sup> Unlike enrichment, these activities cannot be explained as intended for a civilian nuclear program and full and public acknowledgement of these activities would amount to a confession that Iran had been pursuing nuclear weapons.<sup>40</sup> This would be difficult for Iran to accept, since Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei himself issued a public religious order against building nuclear weapons; for Iran to admit that it was conducting such research would be an admission that he had lied.<sup>41</sup> Critics will argue that

without full knowledge of Iran's past activities, it will be impossible to effectively monitor them in the future, setting a negative precedent for the future.<sup>42</sup>

Supporters believe that this problem can be overcome if the nuclear agreement forces Iran to account for the previous weaponization activities most important for having a baseline understanding of the program, without having to account for all previous activities. With that basic understanding the international community can develop an inspections regime that can detect such work in the future.<sup>43</sup> Moreover, they argue that even though Iran did not come fully clean, the great costs that it suffered both economically and to its international legitimacy will effectively demonstrate that the international community held Iran accountable and imposed costs for violating its international commitments.

*RISK: REGIONAL PROLIFERATION OF DOMESTIC ENRICHMENT PROGRAMS*

There is also a concern that Iran's neighbors will react to the agreement by seeking a nuclear capability similar in size and scope to that of Iran. Saudi Arabia has already publicly stated that it

may react to a deal by seeking its own domestic enrichment capability and may feel compelled to do so if it thinks that Iran will develop a threshold capability after many of the provisions of the agreement expire in 10–15 years.<sup>44</sup> This possibility could be further exacerbated if the Arab states start to question the commitment of the United States to their external security and see the agreement as part of the United States' strategic reorientation from the Arab states to Iran.

However, there will be a number of impediments that could prevent other regional states from pursuing Iran's path. It is not easy to build a nuclear weapon. It took Iran years to build its nuclear program, despite having a large and well-educated population.<sup>45</sup> Iran has also paid a tremendous cost, including billions of dollars in investment, onerous sanctions, and isolation in the international community. Additionally, following an agreement there will be a 10–25 year probationary period where Iran cannot take advantage of the technological and civilian energy applications of nuclear technology. The United States will have significant leverage over these states both in the pressure that it can deploy as their primary security guarantor and the incentives it can offer to dissuade them



Iran's agreement to alter the design and production capability of the Arak heavy water facility, which if unaltered could be able to produce enough plutonium for two nuclear weapons a year, is a requirement under the nuclear deal. (Source: Nanking2012)



Anti-aircraft guns protect the Natanz nuclear facility. (Source: Hamed Saber)

from fielding an enrichment capability similar to Iran's. These incentives can range from security guarantees to 1-2-3 agreements that provide robust civilian nuclear programs such as the United Arab Emirates', which has a much more meaningful economic impact than Iran's largely symbolic enrichment program.<sup>46</sup>

### 5. Will an Iran deal provide more strategic space for the United States to focus on other challenges in Asia and Europe?

The effects of the deal on America's global standing, and most importantly its positioning vis-à-vis its two most significant peer competitors – Russia and China – will be complex and unpredictable. The agreement should provide the United States greater policy flexibility and more time and resources to devote to Asia and Europe. It should provide the United States greater leverage in the bilateral relationship with China as the United States has placed a higher value on preventing Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon than China. But reaching a deal may also reduce the importance of an agenda item that has spurred real cooperation with Russia in what has otherwise been a very difficult relationship in recent years.

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*The agreement should provide the United States greater policy flexibility and more time and resources to devote to Asia and Europe.*

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The economic and regional implications are also mixed. An agreement may enable the United States to increase economic pressure on Russia as Iranian oil comes back onto the market, but could enable the Russians to increase their cooperation

with Iran in the region, particularly in Syria. Meanwhile, China, as Iran's largest trading partner, is likely to receive an economic boon from the agreement, but it is an open question of whether it could translate that benefit into greater regional influence.

#### *OPPORTUNITY: MORE TIME, RESOURCES, AND FLEXIBILITY TO DEVOTE TO KEY CHALLENGES IN ASIA AND EUROPE*

The nuclear deal may have both positive and negative effects on America's global standing and its competition with rival powers. A significant challenge for the United States, as a global superpower, is balancing priorities. One of the most important reflections of how an administration prioritizes can be measured in the hours that key issues receive from senior leadership. Over the past few years the Iranian nuclear challenge has tied up an inordinate amount of U.S. leadership's attention, leaving other important issues such as Chinese provocations in the South China Sea or the overall rebalance to Asia to receive less attention and fall lower on the priority list.<sup>47</sup> This has meant less time for other issues as key leaders have spent an inordinate amount of time focused on the Iran question – most notably Secretary Kerry, who by most accounts may have spent more times in meetings with Foreign Minister Zarif than any other foreign counterpart in the last year.<sup>48</sup> Kerry has also needed to spend a significant amount of time with other members of the P5+1 and Middle Eastern partners addressing this challenge. Additionally, the State Department's number three official, Wendy Sherman, is almost solely dedicated to this issue.

The level of attention this issue has received has also led to a disproportionate number of inter-agency policy meetings, including deliberations by deputies and principals. As a result, other challenges have had less time on the agenda, resulting in less rigorous policymaking processes and poorer





Vladimir Putin meets with Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei in Tehran, October 2007. (Source: Russian Federation Presidential Press and Information Office)

policy outcomes. Allies in Asia have questioned the administration's ongoing commitment to the rebalance, and allies in Europe wonder whether Washington is maintaining sufficient attention to Russia's increasingly aggressive behavior in its neighborhood. While enforcement and implementation of the agreement will continue to require significant amounts of effort by senior political officials, hopefully in the aftermath of the agreement there is an opportunity to shift more time and resources to other issues.

**OPPORTUNITY: REDUCED CHINESE LEVERAGE IN THE U.S. CHINA RELATIONSHIP**

Beyond the question of time and resources, there is also the question of leverage in our bilateral relationships, particularly with China. China is also concerned about the destabilizing effects of Iran's obtaining a nuclear weapon, but given its deep

investment in the Middle East and the relationship with some of its closest partners, especially Israel and Saudi Arabia, the United States puts a greater value on this issue.<sup>49</sup> As a result, in recent years the Chinese have been able to use the Iran issue as leverage with the United States, which has prioritized this matter as opposed to issues in Asia that are a higher priority for the Chinese.

But as a member of the P5+1, the Chinese will remain a key player in holding Iran accountable and implementing the agreement. Thus, while the United States may have more leverage, it will have to keep the Iran issue relatively high on its bilateral agenda with the Chinese, somewhat limiting maneuverability in other areas.

*OPPORTUNITY: GREATER ECONOMIC LEVERAGE ON RUSSIA*

A nuclear agreement that lifts the sanctions on Iran's oil industry and returns roughly 1 million barrels per day of oil to the market is likely to shake a Russian economy already ravaged by low oil prices and Western sanctions in response to Russian actions in Ukraine.<sup>50</sup> The Russian Central Bank estimates that the cost of the Iran deal for Russia's energy industry could be as high as \$27 billion.<sup>51</sup> Some experts have estimated that the return of Iranian oil to the market could cause an additional \$15 per barrel drop in the price of oil and prolong the current period of low oil prices.<sup>52</sup> This could result in additional economic strain on Russia and assist U.S. efforts to pressure Russia to change course in Ukraine.

However, there is the danger that if not properly calibrated, reduced oil prices brought on by the return of Iranian oil to the market could go too far in weakening Russia's position and cause an economic collapse in Russia, with the danger of financial contagion flowing into Europe, Asia, and the United States. Such a scenario may have the opposite of the desired effect on Putin's behavior, causing him to lash out in an even more aggressive and risky manner instead of bending to international pressure.

*RISK: CHINA'S POSITION IN THE MIDDLE EAST IMPROVES*

As a major energy importer, China will certainly benefit from the flow of Iranian oil to the market. Even in the aftermath of the November 2013 Joint Plan of Action, oil export from Iran to China increased by 28 percent in 2014.<sup>53</sup> Only days after the Iranian nuclear agreement was signed in early April, Iran's oil minister Bijan Zanganeh was on his way to Beijing, signaling that China and Iran are both preparing to move quickly in the aftermath of an agreement.<sup>54</sup> China is also Iran's number one trading partner, and the two countries' long strategic relationship could benefit from the re-opening of trade.<sup>55</sup>

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*While China is well positioned to be one of the first movers when sanctions on Iran are removed, over time Iran would prefer to diversify its economic trading partners ...*

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However, there is a perception in Iran that China has provided low quality goods to Iran and used the sanctions environment to create an unequal trading relationship, extorting Iran to obtain deep discounts on its oil purchases.<sup>56</sup> While China is well positioned to be one of the first movers when sanctions on Iran are removed, over time Iran would prefer to diversify its economic trading partners and pursue more active trade relationships with the European Union and Asian states such as South Korea and Japan.

The regional benefits the Chinese can extract from an agreement will be limited. China's most difficult challenge in the aftermath of an agreement will be how it balances good relations with both Riyadh and Tehran to increase its influence in a critically important region that provides it with 52 percent of its oil.<sup>57</sup> Amid escalating regional and sectarian competition, one of Saudi Arabia's greatest concerns about the Iranian nuclear agreement is that the removal of banking and oil sanctions will give Tehran the resources to wreak even more havoc through its proxies in Yemen, Syria, Lebanon, and Iraq. Any such influx of funds for Iran would come primarily from China. It will be very difficult for China to satisfy both countries and even more difficult to compete with the United States and try to supplant it as the guarantor of the Gulf states' security, especially when China is bankrolling the Gulf states' most significant threat.

*RISK: INCREASED TENSIONS BETWEEN THE UNITED STATES AND RUSSIA*

The deal has the potential to further increase tensions between the United States and Russia by reducing the importance of one of the few areas where Russia and the United States have constructively cooperated in recent years. Russian support was essential for passing U.N. Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1929, which became a central component of the international sanctions regime.<sup>58</sup> And throughout the nuclear negotiations, the Russians have played a generally supportive role.

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*With the nuclear issue playing a less prominent role, Russia will be able to increase its cooperation with Iran on regional matters ...*

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With the nuclear issue playing a less prominent role, Russia will be able to increase its cooperation with Iran on regional matters such as support for Bashar al-Assad. Tensions are already increasing; for example, the Russians have announced the controversial sale of S-300 missile systems to Iran, which while not eliminating American or Israeli abilities to militarily threaten Iran's nuclear facilities would certainly complicate any operation.<sup>59</sup> This on again and off again sale has been in the works for years and was rescinded by the Russians in 2010 after UNSCR 1929 passed. The Russians have not yet announced a delivery date, and it could be years before the Iranians get the S-300. It is also possible that the threat of the sale is not about Iran at all but is meant as a leverage point for the Russians with the United States, which in the past has expended significant diplomatic capital convincing the Russians to cancel it.

## POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The opportunities and risks described above are all plausible outcomes of a nuclear agreement with Iran. Some may occur as a result of Iranian behavior and factors beyond American control. However, the United States and the international community do have an opportunity to shape positive outcomes in the years after an agreement. Thus, the main focus of American policy in the aftermath of a deal should be to leverage the opportunities presented by the nuclear agreement while reducing the potential downside risks. The remainder of this report proposes the outlines of such a strategy.

### **1. Strengthen the nuclear agreement by taking steps outside of the P5+1 negotiations with Iran to set conditions for effective long-term enforcement and implementation**

The United States should work with key stakeholders including Congress, Israel, and the P5+1 on a series of measures outside the direct negotiations with Iran to strengthen the deal. The United States should derive from the final agreement a clear and specific set of criteria to judge potential Iranian violations. These violations should then be tied to proportional punitive steps that the president could take to respond in the event of a violation. Establishing internal criteria and clearly articulating it to Iran will increase the United States' ability to deter Iranian violations and reduce the risk that Iran is able to slowly erode the agreement through minor violations.

The executive branch should consult with Congress on this approach and together negotiate legislation that includes some of these metrics and provides the president the necessary authorities to impose punishments in the event of violations. The legislation should also include rigorous reporting criteria and the requirement for the executive branch to provide quarterly high-level classified briefings to members of Congress for the duration

of the agreement. The legislation should include increased funding for the IAEA, giving it the necessary resources to implement the agreement in the most robust way possible – particularly by adding more inspectors and technology for monitoring. IAEA Director General Yukiya Amano recently explained that significantly more resources will be necessary to implement a final agreement with Iran.<sup>60</sup> Engaging Congress on implementation of the agreement and making Congress a stakeholder can increase bipartisan support for the deal that can outlast the Obama administration, and channel Congressional skepticism into a tough oversight and deterrence mechanism.

It would also be important to have similar consultations with Israel and our European partners. For the Israelis, a robust consultation that takes their ideas into account and creates the most effective enforcement mechanism possible will significantly reassure them. The culmination of this consultative process could be a private letter from the American president to the Israeli prime minister explaining how the United States intends to implement the agreement, measure violations, and enforce punishments.

The focus of consultations with the Europeans and other likeminded partners such as Japan, South Korea, Australia, and Canada should be on a fallback mechanism for “snap back sanctions” that could be imposed without the U.N. Security Council. According to Obama administration officials, the final agreement will have automatic provisions, which both Russia and China have accepted, for reimposing sanctions through the council. It would still, however, be valuable to have a fallback mechanism outside of the agreement that could quickly levy sanctions in the event the Russians or Chinese find a way to block the reimposition of sanctions. Making clear to Iran that such a mechanism exists could help deter future cheating.

## 2. Cooperate with Iran on issues of common interest, both to stabilize the Middle East and increase the likelihood of a more moderate and cooperative Iran

The United States needs to be realistic and recognize that given conflicting interests in the region, domestic politics both in the United States and in Iran, and the concerns of other regional partners, a close and collaborative relationship is unlikely – certainly in the near term. Instead the United States should view the first few years of an agreement as the time to transition U.S.-Iran relations from a state of complete adversarial dysfunction to one of normal competition, where the two look for areas of overlapping interest even as they compete when their interests diverge.

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A natural first step would be improving communication. For 35 years Iran and the United States have lacked direct channels for dialogue. The nuclear talks have broken this taboo through sustained engagement at the highest levels between the Iranian foreign minister and the American secretary of state. The United States should take advantage and reinforce this trend by eliminating the U.S. government's no contact policy, which prohibits regular interactions between American and Iranian diplomats without special high-level authorization.<sup>61</sup>

In addition, the United States should focus on areas of foreign policy where pragmatists such as Rouhani and Zarif will have greater influence and see if the United States can help the pragmatists achieve additional foreign policy wins within the Iranian government. One area where this might be possible is by deepening economic ties between the two states. This will take time; the United States and Iran have not had significant economic relations for years, but as sanctions are removed there may be opportunities to change this and for Rouhani to demonstrate the economic benefits of engagement.

On the security front, cooperation can start small, with issues that are less politically charged and where American and Iranian interests are more congruous. For example, the United States and Iran share an interest in avoiding unintended military conflict in the Persian Gulf and countering maritime piracy to ensure the free flow of energy resources and broader trade and commerce. There may also be opportunities in Afghanistan.

In 2001, Iran played a critical role in forming the first government after the toppling of the Taliban, and the United States and Iran continue to have common interests in stabilizing the country, preventing the resurgence of the Taliban, and stopping the flow of opium. The United States should not expect immediate cooperation on some of the tougher issues such as Iraq and Syria, where Iran's sectarian agenda and support for President Assad will make cooperation difficult. However, tactically the deconfliction against ISIS is proceeding, and if Assad's position in Syria deteriorates, it is possible that Iran will be more open to a political settlement that sees a transition away from Assad.



U.S. Marines from Fox Company, 2nd Battalion, 7th Marine Regiment conduct live fire exercises in May 2014's multilateral military exercise Eager Lion. Hosted in Jordan, the event is designed to strengthen military-to-military relationships with U.S. regional partners and enhance Middle East regional security. (Source: U.S. Naval Forces Central Command/U.S. Fifth Fleet)

### 3. More forcefully counter Iranian actions that are against U.S. interests, most notably their support for surrogates and proxies in the Middle East

Even as the United States and Iran look for areas of common interest, the United States should significantly increase its efforts to counter Iran's regional surrogates and proxies. Such an approach is intended to deter Iranian meddling in the region by signaling to Iran's leadership, particularly some of the hardliners and leaders of the IRGC-QF, that Iran is not ascendant in the region and that if it pushes too far it risks a direct conflict with the United States. These actions would also signal to America's Arab partners, especially Saudi Arabia, that the United States is not abandoning the region to Iran or pursuing the feared "Persian Pivot."

This means making clear to Iran that even though it might receive sanctions relief through a nuclear deal, it will not be fully welcomed back into the community of nations or receive relief from terrorism-related sanctions until it stops playing a destructive role in Syria, Iraq, Yemen, and Lebanon. The United States might also consider increasing interdictions of Iranian weapons shipments, improving intelligence cooperation with its partners, pursuing more aggressive joint covert actions against Iranian supported terrorism, and finding ways to expose Iranian operatives and embarrass Iran when it pursues irresponsible destabilizing policies in the Middle East. The United States has already started to increase its support for such efforts by backing Saudi military operations against the Houthis in Yemen, providing intelligence to enable air strikes, and increasing naval presence to deter Iranian arms shipments.

Once the United States and its partners are able to clearly communicate their determination to Iran, over time they may be able to shift Iran's calculus and bring it into a political negotiation on how to stabilize the region. But this is not possible as long as Iran's leaders continue to miscalculate their own strength and perceive themselves as ascendant in the region.

One of the greatest challenges in this approach will be not to inadvertently stoke sectarianism and increase regional instability by backing questionable policies, like the Obama administration was forced to do in Yemen in order to address Saudi anxieties. The most effective way to do this would be for the United States and its Gulf partners to begin a robust strategic dialogue on how to jointly counter the unconventional threats posed by Iran in a way that is most effective and what the ultimate political objectives of such an effort may be. At a minimum, there needs to be an agreement that America's regional partners' funding of Sunni extremism is not the answer to fighting Shia extremism. Beyond that, cooperation could include training and joint intelligence programs focused on building partner capacity and using American experiences in countering unconventional threats in Iraq and Afghanistan to steer Arab partners in a more effective direction, as opposed to pursuing scorched earth policies that alienate local populations and deepen the sectarian divide. Such an approach will be difficult and take years to implement, but the alternative of leaving our Arab partners to their own devices to pursue ineffective and sectarian policies without American influence is not a solution.

#### **4. Maintain and deepen U.S. commitments to regional partners to deter Iranian aggression and dissuade American partners from taking destabilizing steps**

The United States should find ways to signal to its regional partners that it remains committed to their security. It is still important to maintain a robust conventional military presence in the Middle East after an agreement to deter Iran from aggressively pursuing its destabilizing activities in the region, violating the nuclear agreement, and threatening freedom of navigation and the flow of energy resources. Despite the regional focus on the unconventional Iranian threat, a conventional presence will also reassure partners that the United States remains committed to their security. Providing the Arab states greater confidence in American commitments will be a useful tool for dissuading them from lashing out more aggressively at Iran in ways that may exacerbate the sectarian divide. It could also reduce the likelihood that the Arab states would pursue their own domestic enrichment capability in response to Iran.

In pursuing this approach, the United States will have to maintain a careful balance. A major influx of U.S. assets to the region could be provocative, undermine both Iran's confidence in the agreement and American intentions, and reduce the likelihood of increased cooperation over time. But any significant withdrawal of assets would shake the confidence of both the Arab states and Israel. The guiding principle should be to maintain an American force posture that is essentially the same or slightly enhanced. The United States could consider forward stationing a limited number of more advanced manned and unmanned aircraft and missile defense assets in the region, but should not go too far beyond that. If the agreement takes hold and over time Iran's behavior moderates, there is the potential for a "peace dividend" in the long term.



The United States maintains a forward operating posture in the Persian Gulf region, including a substantial naval presence based in Bahrain, such as this Nimitz-class aircraft carrier the USS *Harry S. Truman* (CVN 75). (Source: U.S. Naval Forces Central Command/U.S. Fifth Fleet)

The United States could also consider increased arms sales to the Gulf states. Ideally, these should focus on defensive capabilities such as minesweepers and ballistic missile defense that could address the Iranian mining and missile threat. It should also include the types of capabilities that would make its Arab partners more capable at countering the unconventional Iranian challenge, such as tactical tools like night vision goggles and weapons optics, and more strategic capabilities like advanced unmanned aerial vehicles and the networking architecture to enhance air and maritime domain awareness.

### 5. Leverage the agreement to improve the non-proliferation regime

The United States should take the most positive elements of the agreement with Iran and turn them into global best practices. Renegotiating the Non-Proliferation Treaty is impossible, but there are certainly precedents where improvements have been made to the regime. In 1997 for example, the IAEA instituted the voluntary Additional Protocol to better constrain states from illicitly producing nuclear weapons.<sup>62</sup> Another example is the Nuclear



Minesweepers such as the USS *Raven* (MHC 61), operating off the coast of Bahrain, can protect against aggressive Iranian behavior in the Persian Gulf and help ease the anxieties of U.S. partners in the region. (Source: U.S. Navy)

Suppliers Group, which was adopted in 1994 and created standards for the export of nuclear related materials and technology.<sup>63</sup>

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*The United States should take the most positive elements of the agreement with Iran and turn them into global best practices.*

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The most relevant elements of the Iran agreement are likely to be the transparency and inspections mechanisms. Iran has agreed to provide continuous surveillance (e.g., 24-hour video access) to uranium mines for the next 25 years and to centrifuge production facilities for the next 20.<sup>64</sup> Complete access – early on in the production chain – to some of the key components needed to develop a nuclear weapon would render a covert “sneak” to a bomb extraordinarily difficult. Getting other states to



agree to this new standard would improve monitoring around the world, making it more difficult for potential cheaters. It would also make it easier for Iran to continue to comply with intrusive inspections if it did not feel that it was being singled out. And it might ensure that even after Iran's commitments expired, it would continue to implement them if they were considered global best practices.

The United States should also use a combination of reassurance and dissuasion to ensure that no other regional actors respond to the agreement by achieving their own domestic enrichment capabilities. The United States should be open to offering a nuclear umbrella to the Gulf states if they desire it. This would probably be executed most easily through an executive agreement, as generating political support in the United States for the ratification of a mutual defense pact with Saudi Arabia or the United Arab Emirates might be too difficult. Any such offer from the United States will have to be carefully choreographed as it could inadvertently backfire by signaling to our regional partners that the United States believes that the nuclear agreement will eventually lead to a nuclear-armed Iran. The United States should send a message to its partners clearly conveying that it is absolutely confident in the nuclear agreement and believes that it will indeed prevent a nuclear-armed Iran, but that if they have anxieties the United States is willing to assuage them. However, it must also make clear that an explicit element of this nuclear guarantee is that these states will not pursue their own independent enrichment capabilities.

## **6. Refocus on Asia and Europe and increase U.S. leverage with Russia and China**

The United States should take advantage of the nuclear agreement to move the Iranian issue lower on the bilateral agenda with China. This should work to the United States' advantage by reducing Chinese leverage, as the United States places Iran near the top of its list of global priorities whereas China focuses more on issues closer to its own

sphere of influence, such as the South China Sea. But the United States needs to be careful not to allow the issue to fall too far down on the list, as continued Chinese cooperation will be vital for the implementation of any agreement.

While China is likely to be the early economic beneficiary of the removal of sanctions, in the medium term the United States should encourage more reliable partners such as Japan, South Korea, and Europe to reenter the Iranian economy. This will be a difficult balancing act as the United States does not want to encourage too many economic benefits before Iran has fulfilled its obligations. At the same time, it is beneficial for the United States to have Iran economically tied to countries willing to re-impose sanctions if Iran violates the agreement as well as to reliable American partners, which could help tilt Iran closer to the West. This approach would also benefit Iran, who would prefer to not be overly dependent on China. Over the longer term, the United States should also increase its own economic engagement with Iran, but that will take more time given political sensitivities in the United States and the lack of an economic relationship between the two countries since 1979.

The United States should not be too concerned about a more active Chinese role in the Middle East, as in the short term China's risk-averse policies are unlikely to displace the American role of external security guarantor in the region. If anything, in the aftermath of an agreement China will likely struggle to balance its interests to deepen its economic relations with both Saudi Arabia and Iran, even as the two continue to vigorously compete with one another.

The United States should try to keep the Iran nuclear issue near the top of the agenda with Russia, whose cooperation in implementing the agreement is crucial. The Russians may play a central implementing role if Iran agrees to ship a large portion of its low enriched uranium stockpile to Russia. Keeping this

item on the agenda also creates an opportunity for positive discussions in what has been an otherwise dismal relationship since the crisis began in Ukraine.

The United States should also leverage the agreement and the expected drop in oil prices to pressure Russia economically as it tries to shift Russian policy toward Ukraine, though the United States will need to be careful not to inadvertently push the Russian economy over the edge. Finally, by more actively countering Iran's destabilizing activities in the Middle East, the United States would also push back against the Russian agenda, particularly in Syria.

## CONCLUSION

A nuclear agreement with Iran represents a historic opportunity for the United States, with the potential for tremendous regional, non-proliferation, and geopolitical benefits. But history will not judge the deal based on the piece of paper signed by Secretary Kerry and Foreign Minister Zarif. The agreement will be the next step in a long and complex process. It is the behavior of the United States, Iran, and the international community over the next 10–15 years and the policy choices and strategy they execute that will determine whether the agreement succeeds in making the world a more secure and prosperous place. The challenges will be immense, but a concerted American strategy that takes advantage of the opportunities the agreement presents while guarding against the risks can go a long way to increasing the likelihood of a positive outcome.

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*It is the behavior of the United States, Iran, and the international community over the next 10–15 years and the policy choices and strategy they execute that will determine whether the agreement succeeds ...*

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