

THE BELFER CENTER'S IRAN PROJECT

Tipping the Balance?

Implications of the Iran Nuclear Deal
on Israeli Security



HARVARD Kennedy School

BELFER CENTER

FOR SCIENCE AND INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

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The Iran Project

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Amos Yadlin (Major General, Ret.) has been the Director of Tel Aviv University's Institute for National Security Studies (INSS) since November 2011. INSS is the leading Think Tank in Israel. General Yadlin served for over 40 years in the Israel Defense Forces, ten of which as a member of the IDF General Staff. From 2006–2010, Maj. Gen. (ret.) Yadlin served as the Israel chief of Defense Intelligence. From 2004-2006, he served as the IDF attaché to the United States. In February 2002, he earned the rank of major general and was named commander of the IDF Military Colleges and the National Defense College. Yadlin is a former deputy commander of the Israel Air Force, and has commanded two fighter squadrons and two airbases. He has also served as Head of IAF Planning Department (1990–1993). He accumulated about 5,000 flight hours and flew more than 250 combat missions behind enemy lines. He participated in the Yom Kippur War (1973), Operation Peace for Galilee (1982) and Operation Tamuz—the destruction of the Osirak nuclear reactor in Iraq (1981). Yadlin holds a B.A. in economics and business administration from Ben-Gurion University of the Negev (1985). He also holds a Master's degree in Public Administration from the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University (1994). Maj. Gen. (ret.) Yadlin was the Zionist Union's candidate for Defense Minister in the 2015 national election in Israel.

The statements and views presented in this report are solely those of the individual authors and do not imply endorsements of other views and assessments of this report.

Coping with the JCPOA: Time for a US-Israeli Plan of Action

Amos Yadlin

Director of Tel Aviv University's Institute for National Security Studies (INSS)

The JCPOA (Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action) signed between world powers and Iran on July 14, 2015 does not independently “cut off all of Iran’s pathways to develop a nuclear weapon” as President Obama declared, nor does it pave the road for a nuclear Iran, as some Israeli officials warn. The agreement holds significant dangers, sets bad nonproliferation standards, and increases the burden on Israeli security. Nevertheless, if the next 5-8 years are used wisely, the US and Israel, together, will be able to exploit the positive aspects of the nuclear agreement and cope with its threats. To do so, we must understand the strategic implications of the agreement—nuclear and non-nuclear—and prepare an appropriate response.

The JCPOA creates some short-term benefits for Israel as it rolls back key elements in the Iranian nuclear program. However, it does not close any of Iran’s nuclear facilities, allowing the Ayatollah regime to maintain the capabilities needed to advance its nuclear program at a later stage, while granting them de-facto recognition. In the long term, the nuclear agreement has dangerous implications. Once the agreement expires—in 10-15 years—Iran will be allowed to expand its nuclear infrastructure without constraints: unlimited numbers of advanced centrifuges and vast amounts of 20 percent enriched uranium. According to President Obama, it will place Iran at “almost zero breakout

distance” from a bomb. The nuclear threat from Iran pushes other regional super-powers in the vicinity to build their own nuclear facilities, threatening to materialize the nightmare of a nuclear Middle East.

The agreement also creates non-nuclear risks. Encouraged by this agreement, Iran will continue to push for a bolder policy in the region, including an expansion of its efforts to harm Israel using proxies, such as Hezbollah, the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ), and Hamas. Iran could leverage the financial boost expected upon the lifting of sanctions and the Russian and Chinese attempts to enhance their influence in the region to extract costs from the US. Moreover, a conventional arms race between Iran and the Gulf states that feel threatened by Tehran’s armament is a likely scenario. Altogether, Israel’s qualitative advantage in the region is expected to erode. As long as the Iranian leadership continues calling for the destruction of the State of Israel and acts to enhance its power in the region by supporting terror organizations, no Israeli leader could accept the threshold distance to nuclear weapons that the JCPOA will permit Iran in ten years’ time, nor will he or she be able to remain passive in the face of the growing non-nuclear threats emanating from Iran.

The next 5-8 years are a vital period, which requires a response to the immediate threats expected from Iran. Similarly, it necessitates planning and preparing appropriate responses to possible future threats. On the nuclear level, the next five years should be used to conduct a broad intelligence campaign aimed to monitor Iranian nuclear behavior in accordance with its obligations in the agreement. Any Iranian violation should be addressed seriously by the means provided for in the JCPOA framework,

as well as other U.S. led measures. This campaign should also address the threat of a further nuclear cascade in the region. Israel, on its part, should maintain an independent military option as a last resort if Iran decides to acquire nuclear weapons. The next five year period should also include the establishment of an effective detection mechanism backed by a swift and decisive response mechanism. One which addresses the contingency of Iran's arrival to a very short breakout time to a bomb. The current mechanism offered by the JCPOA, and the expected time required to enforce against possible Iranian violations of the JCPOA, is currently insufficient to effectively block a sudden breakout if one were to take place in 10-15 years' time. Lastly, as the next years will determine Iran's new status in the region, it is essential to develop a dual policy which seeks to implement the nuclear agreement with Iran while assertively blocking Iran's attempts to enhance its malign regional influence.

This three-level strategy should rely on a US-Israel parallel agreement. The agreement will address three major concerns and should include a mechanism for ongoing assessment of the JCPOA consequences. On the nuclear level, it will prepare responses for immediate breakout scenarios, as well as long-term steps to counter Iran's zero breakout distance after the JCPOA expires in 10-15 years. On the non-nuclear level, Israel and America must coordinate an effort to stymie Iran's malign activities in the region, and especially in Syria where it supports the murderous regime of Assad. On the bilateral level, the agreement must include a new 10-year Memorandum of Understandings between the US and Israel that maintains Israel's qualitative military edge through long-term force structure and intelligence sharing during the sensitive period ahead. As an implementation measure, it is necessary to establish a joint

American-Israeli review forum that will annually examine the status of the threat from Iran, assess the probability of a scenario in which Iran breaks out to the bomb or is sneaking towards it. This forum should review trends and changes in the nature of the Iranian regime, and evaluate the scope of Iranian subversion and terrorist activities in the region. Now that the JCPOA is a done fact, there is no point musing about a “better deal.” Moving forward, Israel and the United States must leverage its benefits in order to mitigate its weaknesses, and counter the Ayatollah regime’s nefarious activities, both nuclear and non-nuclear.



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