

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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## Implications of the Iran Nuclear Deal on Israeli Security



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# Table of Contents

## Part I: Israel, Hezbollah, and the Iran Nuclear Deal

Payam Mohseni

Introduction:

**Implications of the Iran Deal on Israel ..... 1**

*The View from Iran* ..... 5

Hussein Kalout

**The Dynamics of Hezbollah-Israel Mutual Deterrence  
and Reshaping the Rules of the Game ..... 9**

*Impact of the Nuclear Deal on the Hezbollah-Israel  
Military Equation* ..... 11

*The Political Impact of the Nuclear Deal and  
the Rise to Dominance of Hezbollah in  
Lebanese Political Dynamics* ..... 13

*Conclusion* ..... 19

Daniel Sobelman

**A Shifting Center of Gravity across  
Israel's Northern Border ..... 23**

*Israeli Perception of a Nuclear-Threshold Iran* ..... 24

*Russia: Securing a Regional Asset* ..... 25

*Safeguarding the 'Axis of Resistance'* ..... 26

*Bargaining over Israel's Red Lines* ..... 29

*Hezbollah's Increasing Regional Clout* ..... 31

Part II:  
**Israeli Perspectives on the Implications  
of the Iran Deal**

Biography of Contributors .....	35
Yaakov Amidror <b>After the Agreement—Israel's Perspective .....</b>	<b>45</b>
Ephraim Asculai <b>The Implications of the Iranian Nuclear Agreement for Israel .....</b>	<b>49</b>
Oren Barak <b>After the Nuclear Deal with Iran: An Israeli-Iranian Accommodation? .....</b>	<b>53</b>
Martin van Creveld <b>Iran and the Future of Regional Nuclear Politics .....</b>	<b>57</b>
Ehud Eiran <b>Israel's Response to the JCPOA.....</b>	<b>61</b>
Chuck Freilich <b>Consequences of the JCPOA .....</b>	<b>65</b>
Nimrod Goren <b>The Iran Deal and the Need for an Alternative Israeli Foreign Policy Paradigm ...</b>	<b>69</b>
Ephraim Kam <b>The Nuclear Agreement with Iran: Significance for Israel .....</b>	<b>73</b>
Yosi Kuperwasser <b>The Impact of the Nuclear Agreement on Israel's Security .....</b>	<b>77</b>
Emily B. Landau <b>How the Iran Deal Affects Israeli Politics and Security Thinking .....</b>	<b>81</b>
Daniel Radovsky <b>Iran's Inter-Connected Nuclear and Regional Policies: A Challenge and Opportunity for Israel.....</b>	<b>85</b>
Gilad Raik <b>Sustaining the Cold War between Israel and Hezbollah after the Iranian Deal ....</b>	<b>91</b>
Gerald M. Steinberg <b>The Impact of the Iran Nuclear Agreement on Israeli Politics and Security .....</b>	<b>95</b>
Amos Yadlin <b>Coping with the JCPOA: Time for a US-Israeli Plan of Action .....</b>	<b>99</b>



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*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.*

# The Implications of the Iranian Nuclear Agreement for Israel

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Three basic facts and some additional worries established the fierce opposition of the Israeli public and its government to the Iranian nuclear project and its potential to produce nuclear explosive devices within a relatively short time if it decided to do so. The three basic facts are: (1) the declared animosity of Iran towards Israel and the wish to annihilate it (including the blatant and active denial of the holocaust); (2) Iran's wish and activities to become a regional and world Islamic power as manifested in its regional military and terrorist involvement (Syria, Yemen, Hezbollah, etc.); and (3) Iran's achievements in the nuclear field bringing it to within two months of producing a nuclear explosive device (as stated by US president Obama).

The additional worries include the following: Iran cannot be trusted to uphold its commitments, as manifested in the Security Council's confirmed non-compliance with the NPT and its safeguards commitments, and many concealed activities enroute to its nuclear achievements; Iran is developing a strong offensive capability in its longer-range missile program eminently suitable for the delivery of nuclear weapons; based on historical facts, Israel cannot really depend on any external forces to actively come its aid (except for some US air defenses); the P5+1

disregard of many of Israel's concerns during the negotiations of the deal with Iran; the imperfect JCPOA that includes many loopholes that could bring Iran much closer to consummating its nuclear capabilities should it so desire; the fact that Iran has made no commitments to regional peace, human rights, and so on.

It has to be noted that public opinion in Israel is not unanimous in its condemnation of the agreement. There are those who believe that the JCPOA is, on the whole, a good agreement in that it postpones the almost inevitable by a decade or more, tacitly believing that Iran shall uphold its commitments. If one weighs the options, this agreement could be better than no agreement. Not reaching an agreement could instigate an almost immediate serious regional crisis. On the other hand, there are those who see the present situation as postponing a much more serious and almost inevitable crisis of the future.

What will the implications of the nuclear agreement be on Israeli domestic and foreign policy? Israel is at the moment in an inferior international political situation. The major battle against the terms of the agreement is all but lost, and all that remains is to guarantee that its implementation is carried out meticulously. And, given the secret side-agreements between the IAEA and Iran, even this cannot be assured. Israel will have to use all that is in its power to press the P5+1 and the IAEA to do a decent job. Israel will need to use to the utmost limit its own information-gathering capabilities, strengthen its information exchanges with friendly countries, and especially reestablish its strong strategic relationship with the US. If something amiss comes to light, it must use all means to assure that nothing is overlooked and is treated in the most serious manner. Nothing today

guarantees that others will assume this role. And, in parallel, the Israeli government must do its utmost to assure its public that everything possible is being done for its security and that Israel is strong enough to protect itself and respond to any attack on it.

Will the future regional security architecture depend on how the regional states view the implementation of the JCPOA? The two conflicting issues that will determine the regional response will be the implementation of the JCPOA, and the approaching deadlines—i.e. when Iran will again be fully capable (and even more so) of constructing nuclear weapons. A decade may now seem distant, but it is really a very short time in the annals of man. As Iran becomes much stronger, as a result of the lifting of the sanctions if it behaves well, regional states will become more anxious and will seek to strengthen their safety and security. They have three main options: give in to Iran; unite against Iran politically, and with expanded conventional weapons and defense setups; and, indigenously develop nuclear weapons. These last two are not mutually exclusive.

Iran will need to change considerably if it wants to make a good impression that will convince its strategic neighborhood that it has become a peace-seeking nation. It will be a difficult task for them, given their horrible history of terrorist support, human rights abuse, and the constantly fueled hatred of the US and Israel. It will take much more than a charm offensive to convince the world that it is ripe to be accepted into the family of nations. The history of Iran since the 1979 revolution does not bode well for this possibility.



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