

Israel's "Strategic Flexibility"

Amos Yadlin and Avner Golov

Israel's primary strategic goal is to prevent Iran from attaining the ability to develop nuclear weapons, which would allow Tehran to break out to a bomb at its discretion. A nuclear Iran would dramatically change the balance of power in the Middle East and encourage further nuclear arms proliferation in the region among Iran's enemies, first and foremost Saudi Arabia. An Iranian nuclear bomb would allow the radical Tehran regime to assert its influence throughout the region, affect global oil prices, and perhaps even attain regional hegemony. This, in turn, may damage efforts to promote peace in the region, encourage terrorism, and endanger the global arms nonproliferation regime.

The best way to keep Tehran from developing such capabilities is to prevent uranium enrichment and plutonium production. In contrast to Iranian claims, international law does not ensure these rights. Like every other nation, Iran has the right to a civilian nuclear program. However, as is the case with over 30 other countries, the enriched materials can be procured from a different country and then used for local energy production. Nevertheless, Iran continues to blatantly violate international law, including the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), of which it is a member. These violations, as well as Iran's clandestine nuclear programs, increase the need to restore trust with regard to Iran's intentions, before the international community can allow the completion of an independent fuel cycle, which could

Maj. Gen. (ret.) Amos Yadlin is the Director of INSS. In his long career in the IDF, he served as head of Military Intelligence, commander of the military colleges, defense attaché to the United States, and deputy commander of the Israel Air Force.

Avner Golov, a research associate at INSS, is a doctoral student at the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University.

at a moment's notice be used to manufacture nuclear weapons. Recognition of Iran's right to independent enrichment as part of the final deal will result in official international recognition of Iran as a nuclear threshold state. The Israeli government is opposed to such a notion, and its policy is supported by six UN Security Council resolutions calling for the immediate suspension of the Iranian enrichment process.

Nevertheless, in the interim deal signed with Iran, which came into effect on January 20, 2014, the world powers decided to relinquish this demand. While the agreement contained only an insinuation that in the final agreement Iran would have an independent enrichment program, Wendy Sherman, the US negotiations team leader, made a clear and public declaration to this effect during her visit to Israel in February 2014. The world powers' acknowledgment of Iran's enrichment program as part of a final agreement is a significant Iranian achievement that Khamenei, Iran's Supreme Leader, attributes to President Rouhani's strategy of "heroic flexibility" vis-à-vis the West.

Israel is thus left to decide whether it should maintain its "zero enrichment" principle, and thereby risk being unable to affect the dynamics of the negotiations, which have already moved beyond the question of Iran having an independent enrichment program to a discussion of the scope and features of such a program and the extent of its supervision. Israel has another alternative, namely, to adjust its official policy to current international reality and, together with the United States, formulate a new demand that would ensure that the world powers' expected agreement distance Iran from the nuclear threshold, and facilitate discovery of Iranian violations and formation of an adequate response. This alternative is not ideal and will not keep Iran from reaching the threshold zone. However, if Iran, claiming that its nuclear program is only intended for civilian use, agrees to dismantle some key components of its nuclear program that may serve a breakout to a nuclear bomb, a concession that is acceptable to Israel can be reached, one that will ensure the Israeli goal of preventing Iran from attaining practical capabilities of developing nuclear arms.

The test of such an agreement would be the "Iranian threshold time" or "the dimensions of Iran's threshold zone," i.e., the time required to produce nuclear arms, should Iran decide to violate the agreement. Israel could agree to a situation in which Iran's "threshold time" is at the very least two to

three years. To achieve this, any final agreement between the world powers and Iran must refer to eleven components:

1. An Iranian declaration: Supreme Leader Khamenei must announce, clearly and publicly, that Iran will not attempt to attain nuclear weapons under any circumstance. It is necessary that Tehran clarify the vagueness regarding a *fatwa* on the subject that was never presented to the international community.
2. A legal framework: according to the interim deal, Iran undertakes the provisions voluntarily, i.e., it is able to discontinue its adherence to the agreement pending a unilateral decision on its part. Nevertheless, the final agreement must clearly establish that a unilateral breach of the agreement is sufficient grounds for punitive action. For Israel to accept this agreement, it is necessary to define an unequivocal obligation on Iran's part, whose violation would be handled by the UN Security Council under Chapter 7, which allows use of force in order to ensure adherence to Security Council resolutions.
3. The number of centrifuges: currently, Iran possesses approximately 19,000 centrifuges; of them, 10,000 are spinning, thereby allowing Iran to manufacture nuclear bombs within a few months should it choose to do so. A final agreement acceptable to Israel must include the dismantling of most of the centrifuges, leaving a token number of first generation (R-1) centrifuges.
4. Enriched material arsenal: currently, Iran possesses roughly 7.7 tons of low-level enriched uranium. This is enough for five or six nuclear bombs. A final agreement must limit the amount of material enriched to a very low level (up to 5 percent) and a token quantity of such material, which is less than the amount needed for a single bomb.
5. Enrichment level: even if Iran is permitted to enrich uranium independently, it should be limited to a very low level (up to 5 percent). Nonetheless, it is important to note that any country possessing sufficient knowledge to enrich to a low level has the technological knowledge needed to enrich to military grade (above 90 percent), and only needs more time for the enrichment process.
6. The future of the Fordow enrichment facility: Iran must dismantle the enrichment facility near the city of Qom. The facility was built into the mountainside in order to hinder any attempt to attack the Iranian nuclear program's infrastructure, should Tehran decide to use it for military

- purposes. At the very least, an acceptable final agreement must demand the conversion of the facility so that it cannot be used for enrichment (as President Obama declared at the 10th Saban Forum on December 7, 2013).
7. The Arak reactor: a few years ago, Iran began building a heavy water reactor, which after its completion could provide fissile material for a plutonium bomb. An acceptable final agreement must demand that the facility be dismantled, or at the very least converted so that it cannot serve for military purposes (in the past, the US administration has mentioned this as well).
 8. The military dimensions: Iran's nuclear program has other aspects connected to its military purpose, especially the weaponry for manufacturing detonation devices for the bomb, based at the Parchin facility. So far, Iran has yet to provide answers to questions posed by the International Atomic Energy Agency regarding the military nature of the program. These questions must be answered and resolved as part of an acceptable final agreement.
 9. Inspection: given Iran's blatant violations of international law and agreements it has signed with the West, an acceptable final agreement must include tight and effective supervision of the various nuclear activities in Iran. Such supervision would reduce the chances that Iranian violations will go undetected. It must be based on the Additional Protocol, though it should not be limited to it. The level of supervision must be increased and tightened in order to address the challenge of Iranian subterfuge and secrecy, as has been its behavior over past decade.
 10. Research and development: in addition to the enrichment activity, Iran has been upgrading its centrifuges to more advanced and efficient models, capable of enriching larger quantities of uranium in a shorter time period. This reduces the time needed to produce nuclear weapons and therefore reduces Iran's "nuclear threshold" time. The world powers must demand full supervision and limitation of Iran's research and development program.
 11. The agreement's validity: the final agreement must determine a timeframe for examining Iran's conduct. At the end of the "trial period," Iran will be allowed to resume the status of a regular NPT member, and the restrictions on its nuclear program will not differ from other members. It is recommended that a twenty-year year trial period be stipulated, providing sufficient time to ensure a true change in Iran's strategic

conduct and allow the establishment of effective supervision systems and cooperation that would be characterized by transparency between Iran and the international community.

Should the United States adopt these suggestions and include them in an agreement with Iran, the West's strategic position vis-à-vis Iran will improve. In addition, Israel's strategic objectives in the international reality following the interim deal will be met. If Iran agrees to dismantle key components of its nuclear program, the alternative outlined above would result in a final agreement acceptable to Israel. As such, the discussion about the conditions of the agreement would not remain exclusively between Iran and the world powers.

Since Israel is not present at the discussions between Iran and the world powers, its influence must be channeled primarily through Washington. Therefore, Israel must immediately reestablish an intensive dialogue with the United States, focusing on three issues:

1. Expanding intelligence cooperation between Israel and the West in order to formulate a response to the loopholes in the interim deal and expose Iranian violations, Iranian efforts in the military field, and activity in clandestine facilities. It is critical that all countries cooperate in preserving and maintaining the international sanctions against Iran and the sanctions' enforcement system, to prevent a situation in which Iran succeeds in rendering the sanctions – the West's main means of exerting pressure – ineffective.
2. Setting clear and accepted parameters for the final agreement based on the outline presented in this paper. It is important that Jerusalem and Washington coordinate their positions on key issues of the final agreement listed in the eleven points above, conveying that this is Israel's bottom-line alternative, and that any mitigation would be unacceptable.
3. Should an agreement extending Iran's threshold time from several months to several years not materialize, the United States and Israel must coordinate their actions. While Israel must strive for coordination with the White House, it should prepare an independent Israeli plan of action as well.

The Israeli government must ensure there are no further surprises regarding the US policy on Iran. The US approval of the interim deal and the resulting acknowledgment of Iran as a nuclear threshold nation in the framework of a final agreement forces Israel to change its strategy and demonstrate flexibility

in order to maintain its strategic objective. However, Israel must make it clear that it cannot bend beyond that point. Israel must adopt “strategic flexibility” as a response to Iran’s “heroic flexibility” and the interim deal signed between Iran and the West. Despite the altered international climate following the interim deal – indeed, precisely because of it – one issue remains crucial: Israeli-US coordination and a very high degree of trust between the nations’ leaders as a prerequisite for the success of Israel’s strategy.