

# Beyond the Vote (Part 1): Implications for U.S. and Allied Intelligence

by [Ellen Laipson \(/experts/ellen-laipson\)](/experts/ellen-laipson), [Amos Yadlin \(/experts/amos-yadlin\)](/experts/amos-yadlin)

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## ABOUT THE AUTHORS



### [Ellen Laipson \(/experts/ellen-laipson\)](/experts/ellen-laipson)

Ellen Laipson is a distinguished fellow and president emeritus at the Stimson Center, where she directs the Middle East/Southwest Asia Program.

### [Amos Yadlin \(/experts/amos-yadlin\)](/experts/amos-yadlin)

Amos Yadlin served for five years as the head of Israeli military intelligence and, from 2011-2012, was Kay fellow on Israeli national security at The Washington Institute. Over his distinguished career, General Yadlin spent more than forty years in uniform, including service as defense attache in



Brief Analysis

## Two former senior intelligence officials assess the new challenges of collecting, sharing, and acting on information about Iran's nuclear activities, political decisionmaking, and regional intentions under the JCPOA.

On September 16, The Washington Institute held *a special one-day conference*

*(<http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/beyond-the-vote-implications-of-the-iran-nuclear-agreement>) on the ramifications of the Iran nuclear agreement, including a *keynote address by Adam Szubin**

*(<http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/uploads/Documents/other/SzubinTranscript20150916-v2.pdf>), the Treasury Department's acting under secretary for terrorism and financial intelligence. The following is a rapporteur's summary of remarks by former U.S. national intelligence officer Ellen Laipson and former Israeli defense intelligence chief Maj. Gen. Amos Yadlin (Ret.). The other panels will be summarized in forthcoming PolicyWatches.*

ELLEN LAIPSON

Iran has been heavily monitored for a long time. It was a priority target before the P5+1 talks, and monitoring increased during the negotiation process. Many techniques are available to continue this monitoring, and they have been improving. Technology for remote sensing is more advanced, open-source techniques are more useful, and financial intelligence networks are vastly better than they were. The Treasury Department in particular has acquired

great expertise in tracking illicit transactions. Treasury has deployed personnel to monitor places with high levels of Iranian commercial and financial activity, and its intelligence office provides analysis about Iranian sanctions compliance to the Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) and other policymaking and implementing entities.

That said, Treasury will face a considerable challenge going forward. In the past, essentially all transactions with Iran were prohibited, but only some will be banned under the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) -- a much more difficult situation to monitor.

As for tracking the regime's nuclear activity, improved access to Iran is both a challenge and an opportunity. The United States will not be the only actor involved in this effort; other parties can add expertise and value, so pooling knowledge and cooperating with the International Atomic Energy Agency will be crucial. The IAEA's role will change, with more personnel, more activity, and new responsibilities. The UN Special Commission on Iraq is a relevant precedent. Over time, UNSCOM and the IAEA became more sophisticated in Iraq and achieved their own intelligence capabilities independent of the United States, while also cooperating with Washington. Yet friction arose from the U.S. intelligence community wanting unilateral protocols for their intelligence products while multilateral institutions collected their own information.

Iran is not a passive actor in this process. It has been very aggressive in using intelligence to harass non-intelligence personnel, so U.S. agencies and their partners need to be careful. Tehran will be assertive in developing its own capabilities, including in the realm of human intelligence.

One of the most difficult aspects to monitor will be shifts in Iran's political behavior and decisionmaking, especially since U.S. policymakers are very interested in the nuclear agreement's effects on Iranian elites. Intelligence work requires very self-conscious awareness of biases and influences. Intelligence professionals are close to policymakers by necessity and design, so it can be difficult to maintain distance and independence from what those policymakers want to hear. Personnel can also get drawn into their own feedback loops, auto-validating their own beliefs. Additionally, different policymakers receive information in different ways, so maintaining clear channels of communication about the conclusions that are being drawn from intelligence will be crucial.

## **AMOS YADLIN**

Intelligence is always a matter of priorities. Iran may remain a high priority for the United States, but Washington faces a number of other global challenges. In contrast, Israel will continue to view Iran as its primary threat. In fifteen years, Iran will be a threshold nuclear state. For the United States, this is the agreed outcome of the deal it has signed, but for Israel, this scenario is unacceptable.

Israel's has four main strategic concerns going forward. First and foremost is any Iranian effort to covertly develop a nuclear weapon. Second is how the nuclear agreement will affect Iran's other regional activities, including support for Hezbollah and Palestinian Islamic Jihad. Third is what Iran may be preparing to do after certain JCPOA provisions expire. Fourth, is the possibility that other regional states will pursue nuclear infrastructure similar to Iran's.

Initially, Tehran can be expected to behave well in order to reap the JCPOA's benefits. Even then, problems are likely to emerge -- issues related to past military development and Iran's role in collecting samples at nuclear sites are worrisome. Of greater concern, though, is the fact that the JCPOA's construction gives the Iranians many possible exit ramps, particularly after they gain sanctions relief. Iran's leadership approved the JCPOA but never stood behind it.

The greatest worry of all is not Iran's declared nuclear facilities, which are comparatively easy to monitor, but rather its undeclared facilities, some of which are small. If Tehran decides to break out, it will use a hidden site, and there is no straightforward intelligence collection process for countering this. Iran has shown that it is good at cheating and

lying.

Any strategy based on countering a breakout scenario requires full-spectrum knowledge of Iran. Such analyses are necessary to inform the decisionmaking process, provide early warning about potential conflicts, and give decisionmakers the situational awareness and targeting information they need to pursue, mitigate, and conclude those conflicts. Cyber capabilities will play an even greater role in not only collecting intelligence, but also identifying and attacking targets. On this note, it is important to remember that not every conflict is a war -- there are many other offensive measures of varying and limited duration. Diplomatic options in these scenarios (e.g., resorting to the UN Security Council) could be very useful for ending hostilities; war is a low probability. Accordingly, intelligence professionals should give policymakers a wide perspective for guiding confrontation with Iran in the event of a breakout.

While keeping in mind that intelligence work is imperfect, Israel and the United States have ample collection efforts in Iran. These efforts are a little more difficult in some respects due to JCPOA restrictions, but also easier in others because there is now more transparency. The challenge lies in the analytical component. Even the best intelligence cannot tell the future. Plus, the art of intelligence is to distinguish between true and false signals. Differing views need to be heard, and open dialogue and role playing will help this effort. Intelligence officers need to remain professional throughout the process, from collection to analysis to the consequences of varying degrees of confrontation.

There is always a risk of intelligence officials trying to please decisionmakers. It is the intelligence community's responsibility to inform their political overseers even if their products do not conform to politicians' hopes and expectations. Politicization of intelligence work is dangerous. As with weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, intelligence professionals cannot overstate or understate enemy intentions or capabilities. Policymakers and collectors need open dialogue, but also a clear demarcation of roles. Trust is key -- political leaders need to be confident that the intelligence community will not manipulate or filter its products. Professional and ethical behavior by intelligence officials and their political overseers is critical.

These issues become more complicated when allies are involved. The Israeli-U.S. relationship is close, involving much communication and sharing of intelligence products. Yet the two countries will have different rules of engagement about how much risk to take while collecting intelligence inside Iran and from Iranians. Under the current framework, Israel will be inclined to take risks that Americans are not, so it will be able to collect more aggressively than the United States. For Washington, targeting is very sensitive and will only become more so as the JCPOA is implemented.

Finally, the intelligence community needs to analyze Iran not only from the traditional top-down approach (i.e., looking at its leadership), but also from the bottom up, examining dynamics in the street, among students, and in the Iranian economy. If change comes in Iran, it could come from the bottom up.

*This summary was prepared by Patrick Schmidt. ❖*

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