

How to Save the Iran Deal

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Although Ayatollah Khamenei and the Revolutionary Guard oppose nuclear inspections, President Obama should stand tough because transparency is the only way to make the deal work.

Should the framework understanding with Iran be finalized in a deal, its terms would give us high confidence that the Iranians would not become a nuclear weapons state for the next 15 years. Even after that, for 25 years, we would be in a good position to know if Iran was seeking to divert materials to a covert nuclear program given the framework's provision for monitoring the whole supply chain -- including the mining and milling of uranium, the conversion of yellow cake to UF-6 gas, its purification in centrifuges, centrifuge assembly and storage facilities, etc.

In many ways, the framework represents a deal that over time would roll back sanctions in exchange for transparency. Though there would be a significant reduction of centrifuges and Iran's stockpile of enriched material for the first 10 years of the agreement, Iran would be able to build up with few limits after that. So the key is not the rollback of the program, but our ability to monitor it. That is what will allow us to determine if the Iranians are living up to the deal and put us in a position to impose severe costs if they are not.

For me, the deal is acceptable -- provided that the transparency is real, we have assured response mechanisms to any noncompliance that cannot be blocked, and we establish in advance what the consequences or price will be for every category of violation. I also believe that for the period during which the Iranians can build an industrial-size nuclear program, starting after 15 years, the Obama administration should establish now the principle that would bind its successors -- namely, if the Iranians move to create a nuclear weapon, we will be prepared to use force to prevent it from doing so.

Does this mean I think the deal is a foregone conclusion and we should discount comments that the supreme leader,

Ali Khamenei, recently made about the framework, and, in particular, those that indicated he would not accept extensive transparency? "The country's military officials are not authorized to let aliens enter our security domain," Khamenei said. "No unusual monitoring that makes the Islamic Republic of Iran an exceptional country in this regard would be acceptable." Already his comments are being echoed by Gen. Hossein Salami, deputy commander of the Revolutionary Guard, who declared that allowing inspection of military bases was not acceptable and would amount to "occupation."

I do not dismiss these statements. Nor should others try to discount such statements as being just for domestic consumption. I recall when I was negotiating with the Israelis and Palestinians, and Yasser Arafat made public statements denying basic Israeli needs and ruling out any compromise, many of my colleagues at the time said not to worry -- "it was just for domestic consumption." Similarly, in an earlier era, President John F. Kennedy had qualms about continuing with the policy of outreach and significant provision of wheat to Egypt at a time when President Gamal Abdel Nasser was railing against United States, Saudi Arabia and Israel; he was advised by the State Department to dismiss the words because Nasser was posturing for internal political reasons and he would be forthcoming to us on issues like the war in Yemen. With both Arafat and Nasser, what they were saying publicly was a good predictor of their behaviors -- and, in fact, both were unyielding in practice.

Perhaps the supreme leader is different. Perhaps we should simply chalk up his speech to his continuing suspicion of us and his inability to alter his commentary about the United States at this point. The problem, of course, is that the more he makes specific points about the content and purposes of the negotiations in public, the more his comments are likely to tie the hands of his negotiators. That certainly has been the case so far in the negotiations.

Recall that the supreme leader publicly stated during the talks that Iran would not suspend enrichment, notwithstanding the United Nations Security Council resolutions that mandated it; that Iran would not dismantle any nuclear facilities; that it must be permitted to continue research and development; and that it must be permitted to have an industrial-size nuclear program -- and the Iranian negotiators insisted that they had to negotiate within those limits and did so.

It was the P5+1 that adjusted its positions and came up with creative solutions to accommodate these conditions. Now, when the supreme leader declares that the sanctions must be lifted upon the conclusion of the deal, and not gradually or only after Iran implements its key nuclear obligations, will we again see the Iranian negotiators saying we must find a way to accommodate them given the supreme leader's position? Similarly, when he says there must be no special provisions that apply only to Iran and not to other signatories of the Non-Proliferation Treaty, will this be used to deny us access to military or IRGC facilities? If there is posturing, is it not likely that it may be less for domestic consumption and more to condition us to the need for further accommodations?

Regardless, if there is a lesson here, it is that we should stick to the terms of the framework understanding that the Iranians committed to and make clear that we will hold them to these commitments or there will be no deal. Whether the supreme leader is posturing for an internal constituency or trying to convince us that we must yield more, our posture should be the same: We will be governed by the principles we agreed to and not by his public statements.

From this standpoint, we need not react to the supreme leader's statements -- either in terms of trying to explain them away or suggesting that they reflect bad faith. The answer will be provided at the table when we see what the Iranians try to argue about the meaning of the framework and whether they now try to adjust it to reflect the supreme leader's words.

No doubt, the task of trying to fill in the technical details of the framework understanding will prove to be an ordeal. The supreme leader has highlighted one gap that relates to the timing of sanctions relief and signaled that the issue

of access to sites may yet be an issue. My guess is that he is trying to affect the shape of the talks, and if he does, then the transparency that is the saving grace of this framework could go by the board. Khamenei and his negotiators need to see we will not be moved by what he had to say -- and we are not so anxious for a deal that we will adjust the meaning of the commitments in the framework.

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