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THE IRANIAN NUCLEAR IMBROGLIO: 'FAR FROM FINISHED'

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The Iran-P5+1 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, if culminates in a final agreement on 30 June, would set a precedent as the positive outcome of multilateral sanctions imposed on alleged nuclear weapons programme. Secondly, at the domestic level, to avoid obstacles from Republicans in securing Congressional consent, President Obama has to negotiate the framework as “an executive agreement”, the second such instance after Nixon’s SALT accord of 1972, which will be “politically, but not legally binding.”¹ Iran, on the other hand, has to take along painstakingly the domestic factions who remain reflexively opposed to any accommodation with the West. Thirdly, at the regional level, the agreement has to be presented as an instrument for ruling out the spectre of future war by addressing the concerns of all stakeholders.

Assuming that the final agreement inked within the timeline set, the suspicion over Iran’s nuclear intentions, the decades of USA-Iran hostility, and the thriving regional trust deficit is unlikely to change for better overnight.² Unless and until it’s entire nuclear infrastructure is opened for IAEA scrutiny that involves numerous time consuming technicalities, and the stakeholders like Israel, Saudi Arabia, and USA are fully convinced, the cynicism over Iran’s commitments would persist.

The parameters in the Plan for Action published by White House are generally viewed to have designed to block Iran’s pathways to nuclear weapon – to make it tougher or longer to build a bomb. But their real value, says Jeffrey Lewis, is not just to “lengthen the breakout time” making less likely for them to build a secret facility or a clandestine



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programme.³ They will help knowing about Iran's clandestine activities, if any, and not allowing it "to be able to get a bomb the way Pakistan did – little by little, in itty-bitty pieces, and by the time we really get around to dealing with it, it's too late."⁴

Interestingly, the Hezbollah viewed the agreement as capable of "ruling out the spectre of regional war and world war;"⁵ the senior officials, important clerics, lawmakers and Revolutionary Guards commanders, who in the past opposed any dealings with the West, have lauded Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif and the government. According to the polls conducted by the pro-government IRNA news agency, 96 percent of people in Tehran found supportive of the agreement. However, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, the supreme leader of Iran, has remained silent.⁶ Also, on 7th April, incidents of protest by small groups in front of the Parliament building were marked. The editor of the hard-line newspaper *Kayhan* wrote that Iran "gave away a saddled horse and received only broken reins in return".⁷ This indicates that the challenges the negotiating team will be facing from domestic level alone in the days ahead would be enormous; therefore, no one should be surprised if the self-imposed deadline for a final agreement by June 30 is missed.⁸

From strategic point of view, by striking this agreement, Iran can be viewed to have succeeded in establishing parity with Israel's weaponized nuclear ambivalence through non-weaponized means, which can be termed as "weaponless deterrence".⁹ In fact, the framework agreement allows Iran to keep its centrifuges spinning and continue enrichment on its soil (whatever may be the degree and magnitude) at the same time ending political, economic and nuclear isolation of Iran. In that case, Iran will remain as a nuclear know-how possessor; therefore, some Israelis are "concerned that the Iranians will circumvent the deal".¹⁰ Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was quoted saying "the proposed agreement would constitute a real danger to the region and the world, and it would threaten the existence of Israel".¹¹ Saudi Arabia has also reacted mutedly.



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The larger question is, whether the US non-proliferation policy is shifting. Undoubtedly, the agreement with Iran is an indication of Obama's decision to break free US' longstanding policies of isolating countries branded as 'axis of evil'. "Obama Doctrine" views that "engagement" combined with meeting core strategic needs while *preserving all capabilities* could serve American interests.¹² Therefore, in response to the Israelis concerns Obama has categorically said, "this is our best bet by far to make sure Iran doesn't get a nuclear weapon, and number two, what we will be doing even as we enter into this deal is sending a very clear message to the Iranians and to the entire region that if anybody messes with Israel, America will be there".¹³

Lastly, the agreement certainly a fruit of the 18 months drawn-out diplomacy, but "far from finished"; even "a lot has been left fuzzy" and subject to (mis)interpretation.¹⁴ Iran has already dismissed some aspects of the White House factsheet on the parameters supposedly agreed. Therefore, the real problem in the days ahead would be meeting each others' expectations. Iran has warned that if the international community falters on its promises of lifting sanctions, it will not be obliged to respect its stated commitments; Obama on the other hand has hinted that "if Iran cheats the world will know".

Given the complexities involved, reaching a win-win solution may take longer time than stipulated, but will the Iran-US rapprochement sustainable beyond Obama?

(Disclaimer: The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the position of the Centre for Air Power Studies [CAPS])



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End Notes

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³ "What Everyone Gets Wrong about Iran Nuclear Negotiations", <http://www.vox.com/2015/3/31/8319103/iran-nuclear-jeffrey-lewis>

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⁸ Rajesh Rajagopalan, "Iran Nuclear Agreement: Unclear and Extremely Vague", *ORF Analysis*, April 04, 2015.

⁹ Rabia Akhttar, "Let it Spin: The Iranian Nuclear Deal and Its Implications for U.S. Non-proliferation Policy", *South Asian Voices*, Stimson Centre, April 05, 2015.

¹⁰ Noah Rayman, "Here's What You Need to Know About the Iran Deal", *Times Inc*, April 03, 2015.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Thomas L. Friedman, "The Obama Doctrine and Iran", *The New York Times*, April 05, 2015.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, "Parameters for a Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action Regarding the Islamic Republic of Iran's Nuclear Program", April 02, 2015.
