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Americans dislike Iran deal

By Ivan Sascha Sheehan, PhD



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The announcement of a preliminary nuclear deal with Iran – **the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action** – touched a nerve in the U.S. body politic.

A **CNN** poll finds that a majority of Americans (52 percent) think Congress should reject the deal. **Pew** finds that just 38 percent support the pact. **CBS** estimates that 71 percent think Obama could have done better.

Gallup too finds that just “one in three Americans approve of President Barack Obama’s handling of the situation in Iran” at a time when he is experiencing reasonably high approval elsewhere.

Surveys also suggest that the more people **learn** about the Iran deal, the less they like it.

The numbers reflect an emerging consensus that the president squandered leverage at the negotiating table and compromised security for a false promise of cooperation.

By not insisting on Iranian concessions that might have prolonged negotiations and rolling over on the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, the president delivered Congress a cosmetic compact in which Americans have little confidence.

Tehran is ready to seize the opening.

But the intoxication resulting from U.S. impotence will lead to regional instability and Iranian aggression, not peace and security.

While foreign policy should never be decided by referendum, the numbers suggest a growing lack of confidence in the president when it comes to Iran policy.

Congress can factor the unpopularity of the Iran nuclear deal into their decision on what will be the most important national security choice in a generation.

Members might note that few in the foreign policy establishment are making the case that the nuclear deal constitutes a diplomatic victory. Only some even contend that the deal represents the best of bad options.

House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi’s (D-Calif.) declaration that that the agreement is a “diplomatic **masterpiece**” was an act of valiant hyperbole. But it failed to mask the administration’s growing insecurity.

Indeed the White House is in crisis mode. A bipartisan uproar is in full effect. And the firewall the president hoped to erect looks more like a chain link fence.

One former U.S. **ambassador** even likened Secretary of State John Kerry to a used car salesman trying to hock a shoddy vehicle to an unassuming customer as he nervously made the rounds to build support for the agreement.

Democrats concerned with political fallout from passage of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action can keep in mind that the September vote is not a partisan contest.

Neither is the agreement a test of loyalty to the president.

At stake is whether Congress can do the right thing by preventing the Iranian regime from becoming a nuclear threshold state.

Also at issue is whether Congress has the courage to push back on the principal agent of regional instability in the Middle East at a moment when the White House lacks the fortitude to do so.

One prominent Iran policy analyst at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, Jonathan Schanzer, recently likened the Iran agreement to the decision to go into **Iraq** noting that the decision to move on Baghdad “was informed by poor intelligence, wrong-headed groupthink, and an unrealistic desire to change a dysfunctional Middle East in one bold stroke. As it happens, these are the three main ingredients in Mr. Obama’s Iran deal.”

Democrats who authorized the 2003 Iraq war paid a hefty political price for that call.

The 2015 Nuclear Agreement Review Act requires that Congress engage in oversight sufficient to ensure the agreement is verifiable, enforceable, and cuts off pathways to the bomb.

But the **porous agreement** lacks the teeth necessary to ensure unfettered inspections, document developmental thresholds crossed, or certify compliance in a credible way.

The deal also fails to provide meaningful contingency planning for the regime’s attempts at nuclear **breakout** and sneakout.

With a deadline looming, **bipartisan analyses** by leading **academics**, prominent former White House officials, and credible analysts have created a climate conducive to evidence-based opposition to the White House.

Sen. **Chuck Schumer** (D-N.Y.), the likely next leader of Senate Democrats, was the first to depart after careful study of the plan.

Many others are concluding that oversight and implementation of the agreement will be impossible and that the White House has no antidote to the regime’s poisonous game of cheat and retreat.

Congress can take action on the nuclear agreement by insisting that any deal that doesn’t include the transparency of unfettered inspections by IAEA inspectors will be rejected. They can also build in contingencies for enhanced sanctions under the premise that they remain useful for ensuring Tehran’s continued compliance.

But at the end of the day Tehran fears **internal dissent** more than they fear external threats – even the credible threat of preemptive force – and the prospect of regime change via the organized opposition (MEK/PMOI) is what keeps the regime’s theocratic rulers awake at night.

The principal Obama mistake is treating the regime as a permanent fixture while ignoring the Iranian people’s aspirations for a democratic, tolerant, and pluralistic state

As the world’s leading state-sponsor of terrorism, the regime enables violent proxies inside the borders of other nations, interferes in domestic Iraqi affairs, props up the Assad regime in Syria, supports Hezbollah in Lebanon, backs Hamas in the Gaza strip, and aids Houthi rebels in Yemen.

The regime is also responsible for a deplorable and deteriorating human rights situation at home.

If the nuclear deal is passed, the hope is that Tehran will be transformed into a responsible, regional power. But as former CIA official Marc Reuel Gerecht recently **noted** in the Wall Street Journal: “History contradicts the dream of Iranian moderation.”

A more likely scenario is that the regime tests the next president without fear of repercussion or consequence.

Even more likely is that the regime chooses to live within the agreement’s loosely defined parameters, exploits loopholes, pursues research and development at clandestine facilities, and emerges stronger in 10-15 years once restrictions are lifted.

In every scenario a regional arms race to avoid Iranian domination is all but certain.

Congress can lean in on Iran by rejecting the nuclear agreement and giving the ayatollahs a clear choice between collapse of the regime or compromise on the nuclear issue.

If they do, they will find broad bipartisan support among the majority of Americans who dislike the Iran deal.

Sheehan is director of the graduate program in Negotiations and Conflict Management in the School of Public and International Affairs at the University of Baltimore. Follow him **@ProfSheehan**