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Keeping Iran from the Bomb: The Obama Administration and the Puzzle of the Iranian Nuclear Program

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KEEPING IRAN FROM THE BOMB:
THE OBAMA ADMINISTRATION AND THE PUZZLE OF THE IRANIAN
NUCLEAR PROGRAM

by

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Table of Contents

Foreword	Page 4
Chapter One: A Historic Phone Call	
Introduction	Page 6
Literature Review: Politics	Page 11
Literature Review: The Evolution of Stereotypes	Page 14
Method	Page 17
Chapter Organization	Page 18
Conclusion	Page 20
Chapter Two: The Hostage Crisis and the Origins of American-Iranian Hostility	
Build-Up to Revolution	Page 22
The United States' Fears and President Carter's Mistake	Page 25
Imagery of the Great Satan and the Logic of the Hostage Takers	Page 27
The Hostage Crisis as a Critical Juncture	Page 29
The Role of the American Media During the Hostage Crisis	Page 30
Conclusion: The Implementation of Sanctions and the Origins of Path Dependency	Page 32
Chapter Three: Iran's Violations of the NPT and the Impact of Post 9/11 Fears on American-Iranian Relations	
Background of the Non-Proliferation Treaty and the Duties of Signatories	Page 37
Why Iran May Want Nuclear Weapons	Page 40
A Lack of Transparency and the Origins of Iran's Nuclear Program	Page 41
President George W. Bush's "Axis of Evil" Speech	Page 46
Iran's Indignation and the Continued Elusiveness of Diplomacy	Page 48
Conclusion: Path Dependency Continues	Page 49
Chapter Four: President Barack Obama's Dilemmas	
Relations With Iran at the Beginning of the Obama Administration	Page 53
Iran, the Gulf States, and the Risks of a Grand Bargain	Page 58
Israel's Fears and the Pressures to Use Military Force	Page 61
Conclusion: What Can President Barack Obama Do?	Page 64
Chapter Five: The Constraints of American Domestic Politics and the Limitations of Sanctions	
America's Special Relationship With Israel	Page 67
The Logic and Impact of Sanctions	Page 70
Economic Effects of Sanctions	Page 71
Political Effects of Sanctions	Page 72
The Israel Lobby and Congress	Page 74
Conclusion: Are Sanctions the Answer?	Page 79

Chapter Six: The November Interim Agreement and the Fragile Promise of Diplomacy	
When Diplomacy Fails: The Case of the Tehran Declaration_____	Page 83
A Historic Breakthrough Agreement_____	Page 85
Who is Hassan Rouhani? The Potential for a Moderate Regime_____	Page 87
Reactions in Iran to President Rouhani’s Actions_____	Page 91
What Does Iran Really Want? President Rouhani and the Ayatollah_____	Page 93
Nervous Remarks from the Gulf and Israel’s Outrage_____	Page 96
Hesitations in Congress_____	Page 97
Conclusion: The Fragility of the November Agreement_____	Page 100
Afterword_____	Page 107
Endnotes_____	Page 109

Foreword

My original plan with this project was to explain why the Obama administration had failed to create an effective policy towards Iran. I had closely followed the development of Iran's nuclear program during the past few years, and relations between America and the Islamic Republic were stagnant. I never expected that the focus of my topic would change so much in so little time. While I have been working on this thesis, the United States and Iran have made more progress towards diplomacy than at any other time in the past thirty-five years.

Since American-Iranian relations broke down with the hostage crises that began in 1979, the United States has punished Iran for various behaviors deemed unacceptable. For example, the United States has sanctioned the Islamic Republic for supporting the terrorist groups Hezbollah and Hamas. The majority of sanctions, however, have been issued as a result of Iran's failure to reveal various aspects of its nuclear program. Though Tehran has repeatedly claimed the nuclear program will only be used for peaceful purposes, there is a reluctance in Washington to believe this is true, and the Islamic Republic's lack of transparency has led many in the United States to fear the worst.

In early 2011, Israel began a campaign to garner support for a military strike against Iran. Washington had recently issued a new round of sanctions, but Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak declared that the time for diplomacy had passed. While Israel's threats of a preemptive strike against the Islamic Republic have begun to fade, Israel still supports military intervention to shut down Iran's nuclear program. Israel has good reason to be wary of Iran, but the time for diplomacy has not passed; rather, it has just arrived.

On November 23, 2013, two days before the first draft of Chapter One of my thesis was due, I checked the news to find Iran had reached an interim agreement with six world powers, including the United States, regarding its nuclear program. My research question was no longer valid. After more than thirty years without diplomacy, American-Iranian relations had a chance to evolve from antagonistic to cooperative. I could no longer ask why President Obama had failed to reach an international agreement with Iran because he was now the first president to do so since 1979.

When I started revising my chapter to reflect the recent developments in American-Iranian relations, I found that many of the issues I had addressed before the interim agreement continue to be relevant. For example, the shadow of the hostage crisis still looms over the United States and the Islamic Republic. The United States has not lifted all of the sanctions against Iran, and many members of Congress want to implement more sanctions despite the interim agreement. Various other foreign actors fear the consequences of an Iran emboldened by rapprochement with the United States. Some Israeli leaders still advocate for a military strike against Iran. With all of the obstacles to American-Iranian diplomacy that remain in place, I asked: why now? What made recent attempts at diplomacy different from past attempts, and is there hope for future agreements?

My thesis begins with two chapters of background. The first looks at the hostage crisis, and the second looks at American-Iranian relations during President George W. Bush's time in office. Even though there is a gap of more than twenty years between the subject matter of these chapters, I chose to include background on the hostage crisis because it fundamentally changed the nature of American-Iranian relations from cooperative to antagonistic. Understanding where these antagonisms came from, and how they have affected President Obama's efforts to engage Iran, is crucial. I also chose to discuss President Bush's Iran policy because it has limited President Obama's capacity to repair diplomatic ties with the Islamic Republic. The rest of my thesis will focus on the Obama administration's relationship with Tehran.

By laying out the difficulties encountered by the current administration, I hope to show what made the November agreement possible and how the progress it represents remains tenuous. The interim agreement is in place for six-months and, obviously, I am unable to predict what will happen when it expires. What I can do is situate the November agreement in the timeline of American-Iranian relations. Regardless of whether the diplomacy between the two nations persists or falters, this unprecedented moment of cooperation is helpful to analyzing the complex relationship between Washington and Tehran.

Chapter One: A Historic Phone Call

Introduction

On September 27, 2013, President Barack Obama and the newly elected president of Iran, Hassan Rouhani, spoke on the phone. Their conversation lasted fifteen minutes and occurred as the two presidents were leaving the United Nations (UN) General Assembly. Following his conversation with President Obama, President Rouhani posted on Twitter that he and President Obama had expressed their mutual political will to reach an agreement regarding Iran's nuclear program.¹

The September 2013 phone call between President Obama and President Rouhani was the first time a United States president had spoken with an Iranian leader since 1979, when President Jimmy Carter spoke to Shah Mohammed Reza Pahlavi on the phone. President Carter never anticipated that the Shah would soon be ousted as a result of the Iranian Revolution. Even more unexpected was the 444-day-long imprisonment of fifty-two American citizens at the United States embassy in Iran. The hostage crisis was the tipping point for United States-Iranian relations, an explosive signal to the United States that it could not manipulate Iran to satisfy American interests. Since then, the relationship between the United States and Iran has been marked by tension and failed diplomacy. Periodic excitement at opportunities for diplomatic breakthrough have quickly been followed by disappointment. The unprecedented phone call between President Obama and President Rouhani showed a cautious willingness of these two heads of state to initiate dialogue between their countries.

Iranian leaders have repeatedly claimed that they support uranium enrichment for peaceful reasons. Former President Mohammad Ahmadinejad, for example, insisted that nuclear capability would boost Iran's economy, providing jobs and a source of alternative energy. The United States, however, has been reluctant to believe Iranian leaders such as Ayatollah Khamenei who promise Iran's nuclear program is peaceful: "Iran is not seeking to have the atomic bomb, possession of which is pointless, dangerous and is a great sin from an intellectual and religious point of view."² Since September 11, 2001, and the subsequent invasion of Iraq and Afghanistan, the United States has invested billions of dollars to combat terrorism in the Middle East, and Iran is a known sponsor of prominent terrorist groups such as Hezbollah and Hamas. Iran's nuclear program is perceived as a threat to the United States' position in the region and is part of the reason President George W. Bush named Iran a member of the new "Axis of Evil" in one of his early speeches as president.³

Both conservative and liberal politicians fear that if the Islamic Republic were armed with atomic weapons, Iran would push the United States out of the Middle East with threats of nuclear strikes and subsequently engage in more extensive sponsorship of terrorist groups. If this scenario happens, the United States would lose influence in the Middle East and the Islamic Republic would emerge as a regional leader capable of mobilizing terrorists and neighboring countries against America. The pressure placed on the United States to persuade Iran to commit to non-proliferation is augmented by the American alliance with Israel, which feels severely threatened by the idea of a nuclear Iran. President Rouhani's predecessor, President Ahmadinejad, is a Holocaust denier and

was one of many Iranian leaders, both past and present, who have expressed a desire to see Israel destroyed.⁴

While the United States has compelling reasons to prevent Iranian nuclear capability, Iran has its own rationale to continue enriching uranium. In the seventies, citizens of the United States were sent overseas to help finance the Islamic Republic's modernization efforts and protect American oil interests. Iran's economy boomed, but only people from the United States and a small group of elite Iranians reaped the monetary benefits. American-Iranian relations then rapidly disintegrated when President Carter offered to shelter the ousted Shah from the leaders of the Islamic Revolution. President Carter's actions prompted the hostage crisis, which was carried out by Iranians as an attempt to persuade the president to hand over the Shah.⁵ Even the resolution of the crisis did not signify the end of American involvement in regional issues that affected Iran, as is evidenced by the United States' involvement in the Iran-Iraq war. For Iran, nuclear capability is a way to define itself against a long history of United States influence, to gain power in the Middle East, and to give the Islamic Republic a greater capacity to affect international politics.⁶

Iranian officials have, for various reasons, consistently failed to convince the leaders of the United States that Iran's nuclear program does not pose a threat to the America and its allies. For one thing, Iran has failed to make its nuclear program entirely transparent. Iran has given inspectors from the International Atomic Energy Association (IAEA), a branch of the UN, access to only a limited number of its nuclear facilities. This has impeded IAEA inspectors from determining Iran's breakout time—the amount of

time it takes to produce the material required for one atomic weapon—and verifying that Iran’s nuclear program is peaceful. Iran’s failure to reveal its nuclear program’s breakout time leads the United States and the international community to assume that the Islamic Republic is hiding something sinister, like an intention to pass weapons on to terrorist groups or bomb Israel.⁷

Between 2012 and 2013, Iran’s stockpile of medium-enriched uranium nearly doubled and the number of centrifuges expanded from 12,000 to 19,000.⁸ As Iran continues to expand its nuclear program, there is a growing sense of urgency among the United States and several of its allies to reach a deal that prevents Iran from being capable of producing atomic weapons. David Albright, president of the Institute for Science and International Security and a former inspector for the IAEA, advised that President Obama’s team should “try and find a way to lengthen the breakout times and shorten the time that inspectors could detect breakout.”⁹ Israeli politicians, fearful of the consequences of a nuclear Iran, have repeatedly advised the United States to consider joint military strikes against the unyielding Islamic Republic. President Obama continues to give economic sanctions and diplomacy a chance to convince Iran to be more transparent, perhaps because he knows because a military strike would be a risky operation.¹⁰

In October 2013, President Obama’s negotiators were busy preparing to meet with President Rouhani’s negotiators in Geneva to resume talks regarding Iran’s nuclear program. In November 2013, Iran reached an interim agreement with six world powers: France, Germany, Britain, China, Russia, and the United States. Iran agreed to halt its

progression towards nuclear breakout by suspending uranium enrichment above a concentration of five percent, the level suitable for running nuclear power stations. To prove compliance, Iran also committed to allowing increased UN nuclear inspections. In return, Iran will receive limited sanctions relief and access to more than \$4 billion in frozen Iranian oil sales revenue, a prospect that sent Iranian citizens into a frenzy of excitement. The strictest oil and investment sanctions will remain in place to give President Obama leverage to further pursue the shut down of Iran's nuclear program after this interim agreement ends in sixth months.¹¹

The October phone call between President Obama and President Rouhani sparked hope for those who believe that diplomacy should be given a chance to work. The conversation between the two presidents helped pave the way to the November agreement, a first step towards the imposition of diplomatic standards between Washington and Tehran. Why have the United States and Iran progressed more towards repairing diplomatic ties in the past eight months than in the past thirty years, and what factors could destroy this political momentum? My analysis will discuss what has shaped each country's current foreign policy towards the other and clarify why past efforts to restore diplomatic relations between the two nations have failed. This will help explain the tensions between the United States and Iran, show what challenges President Obama has faced when formulating his Iran policy, and assess whether the progress of the November agreement can be maintained.

Literature Review: Politics

One group of authors focuses on politics to explain the tension that, until recently, has crippled diplomacy between Washington and Tehran. Some of these scholars use history as a lens through which to explain recent policy decisions of American and Iranian politicians. This is useful for understanding diplomatic obstacles that are still working to impede negotiations between the Obama administration and Iran's leaders. In his book *Going to Tehran*, Flynn Leverett provides detailed descriptions of the most important aspects of The United State's relationship with Iran since the Islamic Revolution. Leverett argues that since the hostage crisis, many American legislators have invested so much energy and political capital in demonizing the Islamic Republic for its ideologically driven politics that they cannot take Iran seriously as a a strategic actor.¹²

Throughout his analysis, Leverett points to several instances in which Iran reached out to the United States following the Islamic Revolution only to be harshly rejected. He does so to show that Iran is not inherently opposed to diplomacy with the United States and to argue that moving beyond historical antagonisms is possible and necessary to allow for a greater possibility of successful negotiations. Leverett's argument, however, does not account for the domestic impact of September 11 on American politics or the fact that Iran has a history of funding terrorist groups.

Iran's support of terrorism affects how the United States approaches negotiations by limiting the ability of the United States to concede to Iran. A desire to maintain credibility in the fight against terror restricts the ability of American politicians to negotiate with nations who sponsor terrorist groups. As White House Press secretary Jay

Carney said in March 2014, “It is important to make clear that even as we continue efforts to resolve our concerns over Iran’s nuclear program through diplomacy, we will continue, in coordination with our partners and allies, to push back against Iranian support for terrorism.”¹³ By understanding how this dynamic has influenced the manner in which American leaders and diplomats approach talks with Iran, we can better predict how Iran’s links to terrorist groups will affect negotiations in the future.

Another approach used to explain the difficulties faced by the United States and Iran with regards to negotiations is to analyze the reasoning behind the recent foreign policy decisions of one of the two countries. Trita Parsi’s book *A Single Roll of the Dice* offers an argument for why the United States can and should reach a compromise with Iran regarding its nuclear program. Parsi examines President Obama’s foreign policy approach in great detail, emphasizing President Obama’s attempts to persuade Tehran to abandon the pursuit of nuclear power. The epilogue of Parsi’s book lays out six policy suggestions for the Obama administration. Parsi’s most important points are as follows: the United States needs (1) to rely less on sanctions; (2) to develop more effective negotiating strategies, such as fuel swaps, that offer benefits to the other side; and (3) to realize that a nuclear Iran is inevitable.¹⁴

Parsi’s focus on international politics, however, fails to take into account domestic politics. The President’s foreign policy options are restricted by the influence of pro-Israel lobbying groups that do not want Iran to have any nuclear technologies. These constraints will need to be taken into account when the interim agreement ends and

President Obama has to make a new round of decisions on how to approach negotiations with Iran.

Vali Nasr argues in his book *The Dispensable Nation* that President Obama's foreign policy in the Middle East is constrained by his reluctance to compromise with countries in the region. In his chapter on Iran, Nasr primarily focuses on one aspect American foreign policy: the use of economic sanctions. Nasr reiterates numerous times that the United States needs to find a more effective way of using its political and economic power as leverage in negotiations. He argues that sanctions have contributed to the elusiveness of successful diplomacy by making Iranians bitter through the weakening of their economy.¹⁵ Nasr's argument that sanctions are a weak foreign policy strategy, however, is called into question by the November agreement. Iranians who voted for President Rouhani did so because of his promise to "alleviate the pain of sanctions." His support of the November agreement shows that sanctions have the potential to persuade a leader participate in diplomatic talks.¹⁶ Despite this, Nasr's analysis can be used to determine how the Obama administration can balance punitive sanctions with diplomacy.

Authors who approach the relationship between Washington and Tehran from a political perspective focus on the differences between their respective foreign policy strategies. This is useful for understanding not only how diplomacy has been impeded in the past, but also how each country will approach negotiations in the future. The majority of authors who have analyzed the differences of Washington's and Tehran's foreign policy conclude that the United States would benefit from improved relations with Iran. The problem is that those authors jump from an analysis of what prevented diplomacy

between the two nations in the past to the conclusion that each country would benefit from a more cooperative relationship with the other. They do so without factoring in domestic politics or such dilemmas as Iran's support of terrorist groups or its hostility towards Israel, America's most significant ally in the Middle East. Further explanation as to why the two countries took decades to overcome their antagonisms and reap the benefits of a stronger diplomatic relationship is needed to understand the obstacles that could still potentially destroy the momentum of the November agreement.

Literature Review: The Evolution of Stereotypes

Rather than focusing on the political relationship between the United States and Iran, a distinct strand of literature analyzes the cultural construct each country has of the other. Cultural constructs, in this context, refer to stereotypes that Iran and the United States use to demonize one another. This analysis looks at how such stereotypes have manifested and evolved in the rhetoric of each country's politicians. Scholars study the media and the word choices of political leaders to understand how and why people in the United States and Iran perceive each other in the manner that they do.

David Farber in *Taken Hostage* focuses on a specific event, the hostage crisis, and examines how the crisis impacted American perceptions of Iran and vice versa. The hostage crisis happened during a time characterized by economic hardship and fatigue over the Cold War, when people in the United States worried about the threat the Soviet Union posed to the position of their country in the international community. Farber argues that the hostage crisis embodied the existential fears of American citizens by making the United States look vulnerable. He writes that the media's harsh demonization

of Iran and its citizens was accepted by people in the United States because it gave them a scapegoat, an external source to blame for their everyday problems.¹⁷ Farber's book is a great starting point for understanding the roots of the United States' reluctance to trust Iranians and their cultural constructs of one another.

In his book *The Great Satan vs. The Mad Mullahs*, William O. Beeman looks at the evolution of the two stereotypes he names in the title of his book. He analyzes the time period between the hostage crisis and the months following September 11 to explain the origins of the current perceptions that Iran and the United States have of one another. Iran, for example, calls the United States the Great Satan because the West and its attractions embody the lure of the external world. Past meddling of the United States in Iranian affairs makes the United States the ultimate representation of the temptations of the West.¹⁸ The United States, in turn, is skeptical of the Islamic Republic because it was founded on the idea that religion and state politics are linked, whereas the United States was founded on the exact opposite principal. Iran is therefore often perceived as a nation led by Mad Mullahs, unpredictable, irrational religious extremists who cannot be reasoned with at the negotiating table.¹⁹

As previously discussed, scholars who focus on the political relationship between Washington and Tehran argue that the two sides would benefit from normalized relations. Factoring in perceptions that each country has of the other can explain why diplomacy has been elusive until recently. Cultural studies of the relationship between the United States and Iran show each nation has a difficult time conceding to the other because of stereotypes that have emerged. Literature that deconstructs these stereotypes, however, is

still lacking. It is true the United States and Iran make foreign policy decisions that are based in part on their respective cultural biases of one another. The problem is the dearth of analysis on how and why cultural biases have such a strong influence on the decision-making processes of both countries, even in situations where there is ample evidence that both would benefit from stronger diplomatic ties.

To explain why the United States and Iran have, in the past, failed to restore relations and what circumstances made the breakthrough November agreement possible, a new approach is necessary for analyzing the relationship between the United States and Iran. The literature about the United States and Iran has tended to provide either an explanation of the variances in the political strategies of each country or a constructivist analysis of their cultural antagonisms. There is very little overlap between the two approaches, which leads to limited analysis.

Many in Iran want to defy the egotistical Great Satan, and many in the United States want to keep nuclear weapons out of the hands of the unpredictable and irrational Mad Mullahs. Understanding how these cultural biases were formed can help explain how they have altered the political decision making processes of each country's leaders and limited the possibility for diplomacy. Through my analysis of the relationship between Washington and Tehran, I will show how and why political actors from each nation have often been discouraged from pursuing engagement with the other. The extent to which the United States and Iran are capable of successful diplomacy is contingent on whether each side's leaders are able to obtain political benefits for their country that are

perceived as valuable enough to transcend the hostilities that exist between the two nations.

Method

My argument will be driven by an examination of existing sources: scholarly articles and books, news articles, and congressional reports. During my research, I was inspired by the arguments of two scholars: Paul Pierson's theory of increasing returns and path dependency and Robert Putnam's theory of two-level games. Pierson argues that politicians tend to repeat known decision-making processes because those processes offer a familiar set of outcomes and therefore appear less risky. While Pierson did not invent the concept, I chose to reference him as an authority on the subject because of his addition of how the concept of increasing returns relates to path dependency. Pierson borrows from the study of economics in order to argue that path dependence is a self-reinforcing behavior that often rewards political actors with positive feedback. His analysis will be useful for explaining why the United States and Iran demonize one another even when they could benefit from repaired relations.²⁰

I was also inspired by Putnam's work because I found that his argument can be used to explain why the positive feedback Pierson refers to inspires path dependence. Putnam looks at how domestic politics influence the ability of a country's leaders to negotiate at the international level. Putnam's work is useful for understanding how the domestic political context of both the United States and Iran can influence the foreign policy of each nation and limit the diplomatic options of their respective leaders. Domestic political actors often discourage foreign policymakers from offering diplomatic

concessions. This can limit the capacity of foreign policymakers to agree to international agreements for fear of compromising domestic interests.²¹

The conclusion of each chapter will provide an analysis of the information presented using Putnam and Pierson's arguments. Together, the works of Putnam and Pierson can help to understand the circumstances necessary for two countries with abnormal relations, such as the United States and Iran, to engage in successful diplomacy.

Chapter Organization

Historical context is important for understanding the current relationship between the United States and Iran and why diplomacy between the two countries is a difficult feat to achieve. Disagreements over how to address Iran's uranium enrichment are rooted in hostilities that originated several decades ago. Chapter Two will be a discussion of the event that caused Iran and the United States to be estranged from one another: the Iranian hostage crisis. Through an analysis of the rhetoric of politicians and the portrayal of the hostages in the media, I will argue that the hostage crisis was the critical juncture in the relationship between the two countries. The uncertainty surrounding the fate of the innocent victims in the crisis, and the difficulties in negotiating their release, set the stage for decades of antagonism between Iran and United States.

The next two chapters will look at how the idea of a nuclear Iran came to be considered a threat by the United States and its allies. Chapter Three will begin by delving into the significance of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and the international obligations that come with signing it. Through an analysis of the consequences of Iran's violations of the NPT and President Bush's "Axis of Evil" speech,

I will explain why hostility between the United States and Iran increased in the years following 9/11, even after Iran offered to assist America in the Middle East. President Bush and President Ahmadinejad each focused more on domestic interests rather than foreign cooperation. This led to a clash of interests between the United States and Iran. Chapter Four will be an analysis of this clash of interests and how regional politics in the Middle East affect President Obama's Iran policy. Looking at the dynamics between the United States, Iran, and their respective allies, I will analyze why the United States has repeatedly been inclined to pursue policies of containment towards the Islamic Republic. For American policymakers, the benefits of restricting Iranian influence in the Middle East frequently outweigh the perceived risks of engaging Iran.

Chapter Five will discuss what aspects of domestic politics have influenced the Obama administration's approach to negotiations with Iran. I will primarily examine the relationship between pro-Israel lobbyists and Congress. This dynamic has restricted President Obama and members of his administration from pursuing more cooperative strategies regarding negotiations with Iran. There is wide support for sanctions in Congress by members who seek to appease the powerful lobbyists. This has helped make sanctions the most frequently used tactic to pressure Iran to abandon nuclear proliferation. Sanctions are viewed as practical because they work to undermine Iran's banking and energy industries, therefore decreasing Iran's ability to proliferate without military strikes. In terms of diplomacy, sanctions can be a useful way to gain leverage over Iran in negotiations because sanctions relief can be offered in exchange for compliance with the requests of the United States and the international community.²² The

problem is that the Obama administration has not always combined the imposition of sanctions with incentives. Iran needs to be persuaded that it will be rewarded for cooperating with the United States. Otherwise, negotiations will remain unproductive.

Finally, Chapter Six will analyze the circumstances necessary for success in the November agreement as well as various reactions to the agreement, including the excitement of Iranian citizens, the fury of Israeli leaders, and the skeptical statements made by Republicans in Congress. I will argue that Iran's economic suffering was the primary reason its leaders agreed to the agreement, and I will explain why the achievements of the agreement are fragile and vulnerable to political hardliners in both the United States and Iran.

Conclusion

With the general information provided in this chapter, it is already possible to see the various obstacles that have in the past worked to prevent successful diplomacy between Iran and the United States. Each country has very distinct foreign policy goals and diplomatic decision-making tactics, and each is hesitant to concede to the other because of the perception that there are few benefits to doing so. Various scholars have offered explanations for the motivations of Iran and the United States. Some use politics, for example, to explain why the United States is invested in preventing a nuclear Iran at all costs. Others have used cultural studies to explain such phenomenon as why Iranian leaders continue to use such rhetoric as calling the United States the Great Satan. Explanations such as these, however, are insufficient on their own.

Throughout the following chapters I will discuss various facets of the American-Iranian relationship to show how politics and culture have intersected to impede diplomacy. In doing so, I hope to provide a clearer answer why each nation makes the foreign policy decisions it does and to demonstrate there is additional room for successful diplomacy. Diplomacy is not an easy task for two countries who have been antagonistic towards one another for over thirty years. As represented by the historic phone call and subsequent agreement that took place between their respective leaders, the United States and the Islamic Republic are wobbling at the edge of a tipping point. The leaders of each country have a chance to make diplomacy work, but a myriad of political and cultural factors could cause one or both nations to walk away from the negotiating table.

Chapter Two: The Hostage Crisis and the Origins of American-Iranian Hostility

Build-Up to Revolution

The Iranian hostage crisis, referred to in Farsi as “the Conquest of the American Spy Den,” changed the course of relations between the United States and Iran. Before the crisis, the United States had provided financial and political support to Shah Mohammed Reza Pahlavi after supporting his rise to power. During World War II, allied powers saw Reza Shah, the existing Shah of Iran and father of Mohammed Reza Pahlavi, as a threat to victory. Reza Shah’s refusal to allow Iranian territory to be used as a transport corridor to ship arms to the Soviet Union prompted Britain and the Soviet Union to occupy Iran. Reza Shah was forced to abdicate in favor of his son, who opened up Iran to the Allied powers. When Mohammed Reza Pahlavi became Shah, Iran and the United States became important allies.²³

During the 1950s, Shah Mohammed Reza Pahlavi was locked in a power struggle with Prime Minister Mohammed Mosaddegh. In 1953, Prime Minister Mosaddegh led a general strike by the impoverished people of Iran to gain a 50-percent share of petroleum revenues from Britain’s Anglo-Iranian Oil Company. This prompted Britain, which was still recovering from the severe economic damage inflicted by World War II, to partner with the United States’ spy agencies in order to depose Mosaddegh and his government. The military coup d’état, codenamed Operation Ajax, helped the Shah expand his power from constitutional monarch to absolute monarch.²⁴

The United States not only helped the Shah overthrow his father and establish power but also continued supporting and funding the Shah’s regime after the coup.

During Shah Mohammed Reza Pahlavi's rule, Iran underwent intense modernization and industrialization, more than the Islamic Republic had ever experienced throughout its history. Iran, however, was almost entirely dependent on Western countries for the impetus of modernization during the twentieth century. The United States provided assistance with industrialization, but American technicians moved to Iran to make their own money rather than because of a desire to help bolster the Iranian economy. This is evident in the fact that Americans, for one thing, were paid more than Iranian workers. When the Iranian government agreed to compensate American companies for housing for their employees if they completed a designated project, Americans began renting mass numbers of Iranian apartments. Rental costs were driven up throughout the country, and Iranian citizens were burdened with the cost of inflation.²⁵

Ancient Persia had been a mighty civilization, but modern Iran was still searching for its identity, and many Iranians worried that their lifestyle would be consumed by the Western world.²⁶ As the United States rapidly increased its involvement in Iran's economic affairs, this foreign intrusion into Iranian society began to overwhelm the many Iranian citizens who saw Western society as contradictory to their values and beliefs. The population of Tehran had quadrupled and culture shock was rampant. Smog polluted the air and "the leisurely pace of life of earlier years had turned into a frantic struggle for most citizens."²⁷ While most Iranians struggled to adjust to the changes, the upper classes of society, including the throne itself, became partners in the country's development plan and reaped great economic benefits.²⁸

The United States provided financial support to the Shah not just through the export of workers but also through the purchase of oil. Iran was a member of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), which decided to implement an oil embargo in 1973. The Shah was not directly involved in the decision to embargo oil, but he did benefit from it. He continued to sell oil to the United States during the embargo and thus made the United States dependent on maintaining its partnership with Iran. Furthermore, the Shah monopolized oil revenues and used them, for example, to buy weapons.²⁹

After oil prices increased in 1973, the country was flooded with money. The lower and middle classes of society “had no access whatsoever to investment capital through normal channels.”³⁰ With nowhere for most of the oil money to go, inflation rose to 50 percent per annum by 1976. Varying classes of Iranian citizens ranging from factory workers to bazaar merchants began to express discontent. They were frustrated that they had not been given access to participate in Iran’s new economy and now had to pay the price for the country’s rapid industrialization.³¹

With inflation on the rise, the influence of outside nations to help with rising costs and providing technology became essential to the continued survival of development programs. Resentment began to grow among the more traditional sectors of the population. The throne, feeling threatened by the growing dissatisfaction, began to show signs of paranoia and retaliated harshly against any expression of dissent. Demonstrations against the Shah began in October of 1977. As the Shah increased the number of crackdowns on protestors, the opposition movement grew and more Iranians abandoned

their loyalties to the Shah. Over the next two years the protests escalated until the Shah, fearing for his life, abandoned his position and left the country.³²

On February 1, 1979, Ayatollah Khomeini, who had been in exile for fifteen years due to his opposition to the Shah, returned to Iran. On the day of his arrival, Ayatollah Khomeini made clear his fierce rejection of interim prime minister Shapour Bakhtiar's government. Ayatollah Khomeini appointed his own competing interim prime minister, Mehdi Bazargan, on February 4. As Ayatollah Khomeini's movement gained momentum, soldiers began to defect to his side. On February 11, with the military now supporting Khomeini, revolutionaries took over government buildings, the Pahlavi dynasty collapsed, and the Islamic Republic was born.³³

The United States' Fears and President Carter's Mistake

For the United States, the Iranian Revolution had various negative consequences. By the 1970s, the United States had formed a reliant partnership with the Shah. The Shah regularly purchased American-made arms and served as a "protector of stability and U.S. interests in the Persian Gulf."³⁴ Some members of President Jimmy Carter's administration had a positive perception of the Shah's departure, disparaging him as an autocrat and a violator of human rights. Most, however, saw the Shah's ousting "as a shocking setback to U.S. interests in the region."³⁵

The new regime, led by Ayatollah Khomeini, frequently spouted anti-American rhetoric and blamed the United States for augmenting the suffering experienced by Iranians in recent decades. The Ayatollah and other revolutionaries championed the image of the United States as the Great Satan, "the great external corruptor of culture and

morality, supporter of illegitimate power, and destroyer of natural bonds that bind men to each other in a relationship of mutual benefit....”³⁶ Iran wanted to end the involvement of the United States in Iranian affairs: “After the revolution in 1979, Iran’s history [had] entered a new phase of evolution. The concept of the Islamic republic and the Islamic government was a new notion which had an anti-Western policy orientation.”³⁷ The leaders of the Iranian Revolution sought to eliminate the notion that Iran is dependent on Western nations to help with modernization and economic progress.³⁸

In the struggle to establish the Islamic Republic’s identity, a central symbolic pattern emerged in Iran: “The struggle between the inside, the internal, the core, to conquer the outside, the external, the periphery.”³⁹ After the Revolution, the United States came to represent external forces that threatened the core values and belief systems of Iranian citizens. Because of United States involvement in Iran’s economic affairs and its strong alliance with the Shah during his reign, the United States could easily be held partially responsible for Iran’s economic difficulties and inequalities.⁴⁰ Establishing the Islamic Republic as an independent power in the Middle East, as it once was in the days of the Persian empire, would not be possible if Iran maintained friendly relations with the United States.

President Carter attempted to accommodate the new government of the Islamic Republic because Iran was an important strategic partner in the Persian Gulf, but he never sought to make Iran the focal point of his presidency. On October 22, 1979, Carter made a decision that would soon serve as evidentiary support for the regime leaders of the Islamic Republic, who consistently accused the United States of seeking to meddle in

Iranian affairs: he permitted the Shah, who was ill with lymphoma, to enter New York Hospital-Cornell Medical Center for cancer treatment.

Imagery of the Great Satan and the Logic of the Hostage Takers

During the time following the Iranian Revolution, images of the United States as the Great Satan slowly began to emerge and spread around the country. The words Great Satan were written on posters, graffitied on walls, and invoked by politicians. Iranian leaders began to claim that religious and cultural values were being threatened by the temptations of the Great Satan and the external Western world. The image of the United States as the Great Satan began with America's involvement in Iran's industrialization in the decades leading up to the Iranian Revolution and culminated with President Carter's offer to shelter the Shah.⁴¹

The admittance of the Shah into the United States intensified the anti-American feelings of Iranian revolutionaries and spawned rumors of the United States planning a coup to reinstall the Shah.⁴² Many Iranians, including Ayatollah Khomeini, saw America's protection of the Shah as proof that the United States was acting as the Great Satan and was intent on debasing Iranian society. Ayatollah Khomeini increasingly used the notion of the Great Satan as a rhetorical device to convince Iranians that the United States was colluding with the Shah. The Shah was portrayed as an illegitimate authority, and the United States became viewed as the ultimate corrupting force because of American support for the Shah.⁴³

The Muslim Student Followers of the Imam's Line, a group of students who supported Ayatollah Khomeini and the Islamic Revolution, demanded that the Shah be

returned to Iran to face trial and execution. Despite being advised by various members of his cabinet not to allow the Shah to reside in the United States, or else risk fueling the already alarming spread of anti-American sentiment, President Carter reluctantly decided to protect the Shah. President Carter was convinced by key staff members such as Henry Kissinger not to send the Shah back to Iran because this would be the equivalent of condemning him to death. On November 4, 1979, in response to President Carter's decision, the Muslim Student Followers stormed the United States' embassy in Tehran and took hostage the fifty-two American citizens who were inside.⁴⁴ The hostage crisis was a shock to President Carter because never before had a country, let alone a former ally, questioned the position of the United States in such a dangerous and defiant manner.

For the hostage takers, capturing American citizens and holding them prisoner functioned as a superlative act of defiance against the Great Satan: "They wanted to electrify the Iranian people and mobilize the support for an uncompromising Islamic Revolutionary government that neither feared nor accommodated itself to Western interests and intrigues."⁴⁵ The embassy officials were representative of the United States government "which had subverted their political system, supported a dictator who had tortured and killed dissidents, and sought to destroy their revolution."⁴⁶ The Iranian students attacked the United States embassy in order to show their support for Ayatollah Khomeini and his Islamic Republic, and they warned President Carter that the hostages would be held until the United States agreed to return the Shah to Iran to face justice.⁴⁷

The Hostage Crisis as a Critical Juncture

The hostage crisis marked a change in the relationship between the United States and Iran. Once close allies, the two countries were now trying to negotiate the release of fifty-two captured American citizens. In his article, Hillel David Soifer analyzes the causal logic of critical junctures, which he defines as a potential turning point in the relationship between two countries in which “the interlocked networks of relation that preserve stability come unglued and the (normal) perpetual change of social life takes over.”⁴⁸ The hostage crisis was a critical juncture because it disintegrated the already increasingly antagonistic relationship between the United States and Iran. More than that, however, the crisis affected how the way the two countries perceive one another.

President Carter’s refusal to return the Shah in exchange for the release of his own citizens served as evidence for the Iranian regime that the United States was acting as the Great Satan and was determined to intervene in Iran to further its own interests. The longer President Carter refused to extradite the Shah, the more the Islamic Republic worried that the United States was plotting to reinstate the Shah’s regime. While Iran saw the hostage crisis as a defensive statement against the influence of the United States, the United States saw the crisis as a vicious act of terrorism. The capture of the hostages made Iranians look, to people in the United States, like religious extremists who engaged in threatening, irrational behavior.⁴⁹

The impact of the hostage crisis is not isolated to the period in which negotiations for the release of the hostages took place. As Soifer explains, “what makes a juncture critical is that the outcomes generated in one historical moment persist over time.

Mechanisms of reproduction are the factors that are sufficient to keep an outcome in place after the factors that produce it have disappeared.”⁵⁰

The crisis was a critical juncture not just because it destroyed any vestiges of a diplomatic relationship between the United States and Iran. Decades after the hostage crisis, Iran would continue to perceive the United States as meddling and imperialistic while the United States would continue to view Iran as a country who supports religious extremism. In other words, the hostage crisis generated the development of stereotypes that have hindered diplomatic relations from being repaired for decades.

The Role of the American Media in the United States During the Crisis

This shift in how the United States perceived Iran was largely the result of the new role of mass media that emerged following the takeover of the American embassy in Tehran. In 1978, very few people in the United States cared about Iran or the Shah. They were more concerned with the economic downturn that the United States was experiencing at the time. Oil prices were rising and inflation was increasing at the rate of ten percent annually, threatening to uproot the lives of American citizens.⁵¹ After the takeover of the embassy in Tehran, coverage of the hostages' situation dominated news outlets and Iran became the focal point of national attention.

Even though the hostage crisis did not directly affect anyone in the country directly other than the families of those captured, the fate of the hostages became tied to the fate of the nation. Anxiety over the economy had caused Americans to question the place of the United States in the world before the Iranian students stormed the embassy. The hostage crisis was alarming to people because the United States was portrayed for

the first time as being vulnerable to attacks from people with seemingly different livelihoods and beliefs. While people had worried about the energy and economic crises that affected their daily lives, the hostage crisis turned their attention to something larger than themselves.⁵²

Media coverage of the hostage crisis had “a profound and sweeping impact on the perceptions and emotions of the American public.”⁵³ One day after the hostages were captured, ABC broadcasted images of men with black beards and women shrouded in chadors screaming in rage while the United States flag went up in flames.⁵⁴ This imagery set up a narrative that would dominate the coverage of the Hostage Crisis for the next 444 days: United States citizens were under attack by American-hating, religious fanatics in Iran.⁵⁵ Interviews of tearful wives and mothers begging for their husbands and children to be returned dominated the airwaves. Family members functioned as stand-ins for the actual hostages and helped to shift the focus away from the political context of the crisis.⁵⁶

Walter Cronkite, anchor of CBS Evening News, demonstrated America’s preoccupation with the hostages by ending every broadcast during the crisis in the following manner: “And that’s the way it is Friday, January 4, 1980, the 61st day of captivity for the American hostages in Iran.”⁵⁷ As the crisis progressed, Americans publicly expressed their solidarity with the hostages. People hung yellow ribbons on everything ranging from trees in their yard to their cars in order to express their sympathies for the hostages and their families. The hostages were not thought of as the victims of a complex political crisis but rather as members of the national family. Their

captivity came to represent new dangers that faced not just them, but the United States as a whole.

Conclusion: The Implementation of Sanctions and the Origins of Path Dependency

On July 27, 1980, the former Shah died as a result of his illness. Less than two months later, Iraq invaded Iran. These two events prompted Iran to meet with the United States to negotiate the hostages' release, which President Carter eventually did by promising to unfreeze billions of dollars' worth of Iranian assets. Iran was willing to accept this exchange because the country desperately needed funds to wage war against Iraq. President Carter's reelection chances, however, were destroyed by the fact that he was unable to negotiate the freedom of the hostages before the 1980 presidential election. It was not until the final hours of his presidency that President Carter reached an agreement with Iran. The hostages were released on January 20, 1981, twenty minutes into newly elected president Ronald Reagan's inaugural address.⁵⁸

President Carter's initial response to the hostage crisis was to implement sanctions. Along with ordering the end of diplomatic relations with Iran, President Carter froze all Iranian government assets in the United States.⁵⁹ The freezing of Iranian assets gave President Carter a new tool for negotiating the hostages' release, one that put significant pressure on the Iranian economy. In April 1980, President Carter sought to create further leverage with Iran by imposing a trade embargo. The embargo included a ban on direct and indirect imports of Iranian goods and services to the United States, excluding news publications.⁶⁰

Even though President Carter released Iranian assets to secure the freedom of the hostages, the trade embargo he implemented remained in place and was tightened during Reagan's presidency. This was due to the "increasing concerns about Iran's development of military equipment and the threat of American interests in the Persian Gulf."⁶¹ Furthermore, the vilification of Iran by news outlets and the American government helped perpetuate the notion that the attack on the embassy in Tehran was an act of terrorism: "the seizure of the embassy and its staff also identified Iran in the American consciousness as the number one terrorist state in the world."⁶² In 1984, Iran was placed on the list of international sponsors of terrorism.⁶³

The hostage crisis was a critical juncture not just because it affected the way the United States and Iran perceive each other, but because the change in perception continues to affect how the two countries interact. This is part of a phenomena known as path dependence, which Pierson explains in his argument occurs when "preceding steps in a particular direction induce further movement in the same direction."⁶⁴ In the case of America and Iran, the relationship between the two countries shifted towards path dependency when President Reagan decided to continue President Carter's new strategy of punitive action against the Islamic Republic.

In his discussion of the relationship between domestic and international politics, Putnam defines a country's "win-set" as a set of all possible international agreements that would win domestically by gaining the necessary majority number of constituents. When two countries are engaged in diplomacy, and country A has a large win-set, there is a higher likelihood that the win-sets of country A will overlap with those of country B.

When win-sets overlap, the possibility for diplomatic agreement increases.⁶⁵ At the time President Reagan entered office, the hostage crisis had caused Iran to be perceived as a threat by both the government and the people. Iran had targeted American citizens, and there was no scenario in which cooperation with the Islamic Republic would have been approved by the majority of the American public.⁶⁶ President Reagan had no motivation to repair relations because the United States did not have a win-set for Iran.

Path dependency occurs for a variety of reasons that encourage people to act in ways that uphold the status quo regarding the relationship between two countries. One of these reasons is that the political costs of creating a new foreign policy strategy are often high, due to a lack of win-sets, and incentivize policymakers to “identify and stick with a single option.”⁶⁷ Throughout the hostage crisis and after, politicians perpetuated the demonization of Iran both in speech and in action, supporting sanctions that placed pressure on the Iranian economy.⁶⁸ Creating a new foreign policy strategy to engage Iran would have required President Reagan to contradict 444-days worth of rhetoric, spread by news outlets, that slandered Iran as a nation of American-hating extremists. Maintaining the implementation of sanctions and refraining from engagement with Iran was an easier strategy. Politicians, including the President, did not want to appear to their constituents that they were cooperating with a nation who had attacked American citizens.⁶⁹

Since the hostage crisis, Iran and the United States have not fully repaired their diplomatic relationship. Iran has retained its status as an arch-terrorist state and thus continues to be perceived by many, both citizens and politicians, as an unrelenting enemy.

This is, in part, the result of adaptive expectations. Adaptive expectations are another cause of path dependency that helps explain why policymakers have made few alterations to their Iran strategy, even decades after the release of the hostages.

Adaptive expectations signify that “projects about future [political scenarios] lead individuals to adapt their actions in ways that help make those expectations come true.”⁷⁰ The notion that Iran is a threat is upheld each time American news outlets broadcast, for example, footage of Iranian protestors chanting a phrase that originated during the Islamic Revolution: “Death to America!”⁷¹ Such images become evidence for politicians and constituents who support the use of punitive action against Iran to argue that Iran has not changed since the hostage crisis. If engagement with Iran is proposed, politicians who disagree can point to the latest public display of anti-American sentiment in Iran. Protestors chanting “Death to America!” contribute to an already convincing argument, one that cites Iran’s sponsorship of terrorism and lack of nuclear transparency (which will be discussed further in the next chapter) as reasons for distrusting Iran. Politicians have little reason to support engagement because any concessions they make to Iran will be constructed as peace offerings to a dangerous and unpredictable enemy state.⁷²

Iranian leaders, after the release of the hostages, also lacked a compelling reason to engage the United States. Iran was preoccupied with creating a reputation centered on defiance of America and the West. Cooperation with the United States would have contradicted this vision of the new Islamic Republic.⁷³ Even today, attempts to engage America are attacked as making Iran vulnerable. Progress is also difficult to achieve

when prominent politicians, such as Ayatollah Khamenei in late 2013, refer to America as “the devil incarnate” who has plans for “evil domination of Iran.”⁷⁴

Moving away from the current course of path dependency would be a political risk for the leaders of either country. As discussed above, the United States is hesitant to trust Iran, and Iran does not want to succumb to American influence. To understand the diplomatic challenges faced by each country, it is important to first analyze the different manners in which the United States and Iran view Iran’s nuclear program. This will help explain why path dependency has continued more than thirty years after the hostage crisis ended.

Chapter Three: Iran's Violations of the NPT and the Impact of Post-9/11 Fears on American-Iranian Relations

Background of the Non-Proliferation Treaty and the Duties of Signatories

The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty is an international treaty whose officially stated purpose is three-fold: (1) to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons and weapons technology, (2) to promote cooperation in the peaceful uses of nuclear energy, and (3) to assist with achieving global nuclear and general disarmament.⁷⁵ A total of one hundred and ninety signatories have joined the treaty since it was drafted in 1968. More countries adhere to the NPT than any other disarmament agreement, thus establishing the NPT as the most significant legal document for defining non-proliferation standards.⁷⁶ The treaty is enforced by the United Nations and recognizes the five permanent members of the UN Security Council as nuclear-weapons states: the United States, Russia, the United Kingdom, France, and China. Though not specified in the NPT, Israel, India, Pakistan, and North Korea are also known or believed to have nuclear arsenals. Nuclear states are also prohibited by the treaty from transferring weapons or assisting a non-nuclear-weapon state with the manufacturing of atomic weapons.⁷⁷

After World War II, along with the emergence of the Cold War, more countries began to acquire nuclear weapons. After the United States and the Soviet Union championed nuclear armament, other countries began to want the security protection of atomic weapons. The United States helped its allies France and Britain acquire nuclear weapons to strengthen their security. When West Germany asked for assistance developing a nuclear arsenal, both the United States and the Soviet Union became

nervous. At the time, there was no treaty in place to regulate the possession or production of nuclear arms. A nuclear West Germany, even one who claimed to want nuclear weapons for self-defense, could be destabilizing. Germany had started two World Wars, and the United States and the Soviet Union worried that nuclear weapons would make it easier for Germany to start a third. The United States turned this dilemma into an opportunity to orchestrate the non-proliferation movement. The NPT was drafted to appease West Germany and to avoid singling it out as the only nation to be denied nuclear weapons. West Germany became the leading signatory of the NPT and, in exchange for not having nuclear arms, was credited with pioneering the non-proliferation movement.⁷⁸

Signatories of the NPT, including West Germany, were originally skeptical of the nonproliferation movement and worried it would damage their economies. Ultimately, West Germany and others signed the treaty because they “were dependent upon US leadership and were ready for a constructive engagement in non-proliferation so long as their security and vital economic interests were not negatively affected.”⁷⁹ The NPT was, for many, a bargain that helped them align with the United States, which had emerged as a global leader after World War II. In many cases, the United States would provide signatories with security guarantees and new technologies to help with peaceful nuclear projects.⁸⁰

Since the inception of the NPT, signatories have come to be perceived as champions of non-proliferation that are helping keep the world safe from the potentially destructive threat of nuclear weapons. The treaty ends with an open invitation to other

states to become signatories, encouraging nations to join and commit to non-proliferation. Signatories of the NPT, both nuclear-weapon states and non-nuclear-weapons states, are deemed responsible for promoting non-proliferation. Since the treaty opened for signature, it has become accepted as an international set of rules for which to protect all people from the grave danger of nuclear weapons and global nuclear war. The official description of the purpose of the NPT is “to make every effort to avert the danger of such a war and to take measures to safeguard the security of peoples...”⁸¹ One nation's violation of the NPT can be treated as a threat to all of the treaty's signatories.⁸²

Each non-nuclear-weapon state that has signed the treaty has waived its right to acquire or manufacture weapons for its own defense.⁸³ The NPT requires non-nuclear-weapon state signatories to promise not to receive any transfer of nuclear weapons, not to manufacture nuclear weapons, and not to seek or receive any assistance in the production of nuclear weapons.⁸⁴ The NPT does not, however, prohibit all nuclear activity. Signatories of the NPT have an “inalienable right...to develop research, production and use of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes without discrimination.”⁸⁵ A variety of fields benefit from the availability of nuclear technology. “[F]rom medicine to agriculture to industry,” for example, nuclear technology “is used to generate electricity, diagnose diseases, treat cancer, and sterilize food and medicine.”⁸⁶ Signatories are also allowed to exchange scientific and technological information that allows for collaboration on and development of such peaceful nuclear technologies.⁸⁷

Under the NPT, nations with a nuclear energy program are expected to make the details of their program public to the IAEA. The IAEA is a branch of the UN charged

with promoting the peaceful use of nuclear energy and inhibiting its use for any military purpose, including nuclear weapons. Iran was one of the earliest signatories of the NPT, having signed it in 1968, but has since been accused by the IAEA and the international community of violating the treaty's standards and threatening the security of other states.

Why Iran May Want Nuclear Weapons

Iranian leaders claim that Iran's nuclear program is within the confines of the NPT and will only be used for peaceful purposes to bolster Iran's economic and technological advancement. Perhaps this is true, but there are various reasons why nuclear weapons would be a strategic asset to the Islamic Republic. Some of these reasons are concerning to the United States. Iran could use nuclear weapons, for example, to gain greater leverage against Israel, the most important ally of the United States in the Middle East.

The conflict between Israel and Iran primarily consists of hostile rhetoric exchanges. The inflammatory statements of Iranian leaders that imply Israel does not deserve to be recognized as a state, or exist at all, have led "the Israel state to consider self-defense measures that could include a preventive or preemptive strike."⁸⁸ While Israel's threats are defensive and not offensive, Iran still might want to be prepared to deter Israel. In early 2012, Israel stated that its intelligence officers had evidence that Iran was nine months from being able to withstand an Israeli attack. Israel wanted to attack Iran to wipe out its nuclear program before the Islamic Republic was capable of making nuclear weapons but was eventually persuaded not to, primarily by the United States.⁸⁹ Israel refrained from attacking Iran in 2012, but its threat to strike demonstrated that

Israel considers Iran a threat and may one day claim self-defense to justify striking the Islamic Republic.

There are various other ways Iran could use nuclear weapons to undermine American influence in the Middle East. Iran has, in the past, adopted various strategies to promote its ideals and influence in the region. These include providing “support for Islamist terrorist groups, disruption of the Arab-Israeli peace, and undermining US efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan.”⁹⁰ If Iran had nuclear weapons, it could give them to Shia terrorist groups such as Hezbollah and Hamas to further undermine American interests in the Middle East. Because there is no way for the international community to closely monitor nuclear weapons that are in the hands of terrorist groups, this could have disastrous results for the safety of those targeted by these extremists.⁹¹ Allowing Iran to achieve its strategic goals in the Middle East could be detrimental to the interests of the United States, Israel, and efforts to impede the spread of terrorism. The serious potential consequences of a nuclear-armed Iran gives the United States several reasons to pressure the Islamic Republic to cease nuclear development.

A Lack of Transparency and the Origins of Iran’s Nuclear Program

The United States and its allies were not always against the idea of a nuclear Iran. In 1956, the Shah’s government initiated a series of talks with the government of the United States. These talks culminated in the 1957 signing of an agreement between the two countries that allowed Iran to begin developing peaceful nuclear energy technologies. The Shah ordered the establishment of the first Iranian atomic research center in 1959 at

Tehran University, and the United States demonstrated continuing involvement in Iran's industrialization process by donating a five-megawatt research reactor to the university.⁹²

After the Iranian Revolution, however, nuclear development slowed down significantly in the Islamic Republic for a variety of reasons. For example, most of the countries that were helping Iran develop nuclear reactors were wary of the new Islamic state, and they ceased to honor the bilateral agreements they had signed with the Shah before the revolution. Several nuclear reactors were left unfinished and even more were destroyed during the Iran-Iraq War.⁹³

The Iran-Iraq War changed the Iranian regime's opinion on nuclear weapons and motivated the Islamic Republic to once again pursue nuclear development. Iran believed that modern nuclear technology might allow it to deter Iraq as well as the United States. During the war, the United States believed that an Iraqi victory would help balance the anti-Western Islamic Republic. The United States deployed the American navy in the Persian Gulf to help Iraq fight Iran and to prevent the Islamic Republic from emerging as a regional power. The involvement of the United States in the Iran-Iraq war supported Iranian perceptions of America as the Great Satan, keen on manipulating Iranian affairs. America provided Iraq with arms, diplomatic support, and training for Iraqi soldiers. American aid to Iraq was perceived by Iran as evidence that the United States was still intent on influencing Iranian affairs and did not support the new Islamic Republic.⁹⁴

During the Shah's rule, Iran progressed to the point of establishing a civil nuclear energy program that could be used to pursue peaceful technologies allowed under the NPT.⁹⁵ Towards the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s, Iran signed nuclear

cooperation agreements with various countries, including China and North Korea. This was done “to help increase [Iran’s] supply of feedstock and equipment for enriching uranium and establish more nuclear reactors...but under IAEA safeguards.”⁹⁶

In 2003 Iran began to draw the attention of the IAEA, which reported that there was evidence of an unmonitored diversion of nuclear material from Iran. The IAEA demanded that Iran reveal all the details of its nuclear activities and suspend enrichment. Iran agreed to these requests as a gesture of good faith.⁹⁷ Iran failed, however, to fully suspend all enrichment activities and obstructed IAEA inspections by not allowing inspectors to see all nuclear facilities to verify that they are being used for peaceful purposes.⁹⁸

In 2004, Iran signed another deal but continued to defy its agreement with the IAEA.⁹⁹ Shortly after President Mohammed Ahmadinejad was inaugurated in 2005, he announced that Iranian nuclear scientists had resumed their work enriching uranium. Under his rule, Iran escalated its defiance of the NPT and other international non-proliferation treaties that had begun in the early years of the twenty-first century. In 1973, Iran signed The Application of Safeguards in Connection with the Treaty on Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons with the IAEA. The goal of a safeguard is to “ensure that nuclear material is not diverted for use in the production of nuclear weapons or nuclear explosive devices.”¹⁰⁰ This is done in three ways:

- (1) implementation of accounting measures to require a country to report all kinds and quantities of fissionable material to the IAEA;
- (2) enforcement of containment and surveillance measures through the use of seals on nuclear-material containers and filmed or televised recordings of key areas at nuclear facilities to detect the presence of unauthorized material;
- and (3) the conducting

of inspections to make sure that the declared quantities of nuclear material are where they are declared to be, and that there is no undeclared nuclear material in the country.¹⁰¹

Iran has violated its safeguard with the IAEA in multiple ways, including by failing to report nuclear material, facilities, and activities. In 2009, the IAEA discovered a nuclear facility on a military base near the city of Qom, southwest of Tehran, believed to be capable of housing 3,000 centrifuges.¹⁰² IAEA investigators also accused Iran of failing to admit possession of sophisticated P2 advanced centrifuges that could potentially be used to enrich uranium for nuclear weapons. This is a huge problem for the IAEA and its inspectors, who have been unable to access these centrifuges to investigate if they are being used to build weapons.¹⁰³ These various failings, referred to collectively as “Iran’s policy of concealment,” show that Iran’s nuclear program lacks transparency.¹⁰⁴

President Ahmadinejad, who was elected in 2005, believed that the international community was “ganging up on Iran” and infringing upon the Islamic Republic’s right under the NPT to pursue peaceful nuclear technology.¹⁰⁵ Iran, however, has failed to prove that its program is intended for peaceful use only. Iranian leaders have refused to publicize the details of Iran’s nuclear program and have thus failed to adhere to the provisions of the NPT and the nuclear safeguard. This makes it impossible for the IAEA to do two things: (1) confirm that Iran’s program will not be used for violent purposes such as attacking Israel, and (2) ensure that nuclear technology is not transferred out of Iran to terrorist groups or other entities with militaristic intentions.

The successful monitoring of nuclear technology gained additional strategic importance for the United States after 9/11. For the book *The Atlantic Alliance Under*

Stress: US-European Relations After Iraq, Marc Trachtenberg wrote a chapter entitled “The Iraq Crisis and the Future of the Western Alliance.” While his chapter deals with Iraq and not Iran, his discussion of the dangers of Iraqi proliferation is applicable to the issue of Iran’s nuclear program. In 2002, Vice President Dick Cheney gave a speech where he warned that the Iraqi threat was growing and must be dealt with soon. Vice President Cheney was one of several politicians who accused of Iraq of continuing to build Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) after claiming to have ceased doing so at the end of the first Gulf War.

Like Iran, Iraq was also accused of working to keep “inspectors in the dark. The inspection regime had thus not been able to guarantee that Iraq’s [WMD] had shut down permanently.”¹⁰⁶ Trachtenberg explains that those advocating against the necessity of striking Iraq argued that if Iraq did have nuclear weapons, it would not use them because the United States would be able to deter a nuclear strike. While the United States would be able to retaliate against an Iraqi nuclear strike, Trachtenberg explains that “*direct* threats would not have been issued, and the operation would have been conducted clandestinely, perhaps with a foreign terrorist organization serving as a vehicle of attack.”¹⁰⁷ An indirect attack through a third party would be harder to link back to Iraq to justify American retaliation. Even if solid evidence was found that Iraq was responsible for the attack, a counter-strike against a nuclear-armed Iraq would be dangerous.¹⁰⁸

Since 9/11, the issue of Iran’s nuclear program has grown more urgent as the United States has grown increasingly preoccupied with terrorist threats. As with Iraq, the United States is concerned that Iran would orchestrate a nuclear attack through a third

party. The prospect of a nuclear attack by a third party makes deterrence more difficult and complicates America's defensive strategies. As terrorism has become a prominent threat, stopping the nuclear proliferation of certain states has become an integral part of the United States' national security strategy.

President George W. Bush's "Axis of Evil" Speech

In his State of the Union address on January 29, 2002, President George W. Bush referred to North Korea, Iraq, and Iran as the "Axis of Evil": "States like these, and their terrorist allies, constitute an axis of evil, arming to threaten the peace of the world. By seeking weapons of mass destruction, these regimes post a grave and growing danger."¹⁰⁹ At the time President Bush made this speech, the United States was still reeling from the devastating 9/11 attacks. Foreign policymakers were scrambling, trying to figure out what to do next.

Terrorist groups are a complex and elusive enemy to the United States because they are not restricted by geographic borders. President Bush's comments played to the traditional American notions of foreign adversaries. Conflicts between the United States and the outside world are frequently constructed and perceived as "clear struggles between good and bad forces, even if, as with the world wars (and worldwide communism during the Cold War), they actually were complicated multilateral affairs with varieties of interests within the warring coalitions."¹¹⁰ Within President Bush's definition of Axis of Evil, the complex organizations and power dynamics involved in the War on Terror disappear. The Axis of Evil speech was an attempt to restructure the American understanding of the War on Terror. By citing specific nations, President Bush

created a dynamic that fit traditional American notions of conflict: in the War on Terror nations can either be good or be evil.¹¹¹ Nations are either supporters of terrorism and against the United States, or against terrorism and with the United States.¹¹² According to President Bush, any nation that fell within the former category had to face punitive action.

President Bush demonized the three states in the Axis by explaining the ways in which their governments failed to uphold democratic values and threatened to disrupt the peace of both the United States and American allies.¹¹³ His speech portrayed countries with links to terrorism as threats that the United States could and would protect itself against. The Islamic Republic fit perfectly within the Axis of Evil metaphor because Iran was already viewed as an adversary of the United States. The media coverage of the hostage crisis had perpetuated the narrative that Iranian religious fanatics had captured innocent American civilians, and President Bush built on these preconceived notions of the Islamic Republic.

In his speech President Bush said, "Iran aggressively pursues [weapons of mass destruction] and exports terror, while an un-elected few repress the Iranian people's hope for freedom."¹¹⁴ He critiqued the Islamic Republic's failure to uphold its duty as a nation state to promote non-proliferation and fight terrorism. President Bush demonized Iran by saying, not just that Iran sponsors terrorism, but also by implying that the Islamic regime is against democracy. President Bush saw Iran as a non-democratic state-sponsor of terrorism, a severe danger to American values and interests, at home and abroad.¹¹⁵ Iran's failure to adhere to the standards of the NPT further supports President Bush's assertion

that Iran intends to harm the United States and its allies. Believing Iran is trying to conceal violent intentions leads to the conclusion that Iran is a dangerous, irrational nation, that must face defensive, punitive action rather than be engaged with diplomacy.

Iran's Indignation and the Continued Elusiveness of Diplomacy

To Iran, President Bush's Axis of Evil speech was nonsensical. Before President Bush made his comments, Iranian-American relations had been improving. In March 2000, Madeleine Albright publicly apologized for the United States' involvement in the 1953 coup against Mossadeq. Iran subsequently reached out to the United States after 9/11. The Islamic Republic expressed a deep interest in helping the United States overthrow the Taliban and "envisaged a new geopolitical role in Afghanistan and Central Asia, in alliance with the United States."¹¹⁶ President Bush crushed any chance the United States and Iran had to repair diplomatic relations. He categorized regimes in black and white terms, as either against the United States or with the United States, as either evil or not evil. The Axis of Evil speech "was a slap in the face to those who trusted the USA" and supported Iran's offers to help the United States in Afghanistan.¹¹⁷

Because the Axis of Evil speech triggered a wave of anti-American sentiment in Iran, President Ahmadinejad was able to use anti-Western rhetoric to help him win the election in 2005. By defeating the moderate former president Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, President Ahmadinejad changed the political landscape of Iran. His campaign harkened back to one of the key bases of the Iranian Revolution, the rejection of American domination and the Great Satan, and his election "tilted the balance of Iran's foreign policy from cooperation to confrontation."¹¹⁸ A political hardliner, President

Ahmadinejad frequently stated his intention to promote Iran's interests and protect the Islamic Republic from the oppression of the United States and Western influences.¹¹⁹ The Axis of Evil speech angered Iranians, made politicians unwilling to engage the United States in diplomacy, and prompted President Ahmadinejad to continue Iran's nuclear program as a sign of defiance against America.

Conclusion: Path Dependency Continues

President Bush's policy for Iran focused on damaging the country's ability to proliferate. The Bush administration impeded the economic growth of Iran through actions like extending the Iran Libya Sanctions Act by five years. The purpose of the sanctions—which punished firms that did business with Iran or Libya—was to decrease development of Iran's oil and gas industries so as to hurt the Islamic Republic's economy and diminish its ability to finance nuclear development. President Bush even attacked President Ahmadinejad through more symbolic acts—for example, by criminalizing the members of Iran's Revolutionary Guard, one of the Iranian president's most significant constituencies.¹²⁰

President Bush used President Ahmadinejad's controversial politics, including the continuation of Iran's nuclear program, to defend his decision to contain rather than engage Iran.¹²¹ After the 9/11 attacks, Iran offered to help President Bush fight the War on Terror. Specifically, Iran wanted to aid the United States in overthrowing the Taliban in Afghanistan. President Bush was faced with a choice: he could accept Iran's assistance and begin the process of overcoming decades of hostility between the two countries, or he could refuse the offer.

An important element of path dependency is inflexibility, meaning “the farther into the process we are, the harder it becomes to shift from one path to another.”¹²² When President Bush entered office, more than twenty years had passed without a diplomatic relationship between the United States and the Islamic Republic. American policymakers were unfamiliar with the potential consequences of a new Iran policy that involved engagement rather than containment. Engaging Iran, which was known to sponsor terrorist groups, be hostile towards Israel, and have leaders who gave speeches condemning America as the Great Satan, was an unfamiliar strategy fraught with risk.¹²³ Certain politicians and policymakers believed that Iran was constructing nuclear weapons to gain power in the Middle East by attacking America’s allies, including Israel. Others feared another attack like 9/11 and worried that Iran was searching for a way to have a nuclear bomb reach the United States. Seeking rapprochement with Iran was condemned as a mistake, one that could encourage the Islamic Republic “to rise” and fight to extend Iranian influence at the cost of American interests.¹²⁴

In his discussion of how domestic politics influence international negotiations, Putnam explains that the size of win-sets is determined, in part, by the cost of “no-agreement, [which] often represents the status quo.”¹²⁵ If the cost of no-agreement is low, a country becomes less motivated to pursue international agreements and diplomacy becomes more evasive.¹²⁶ The continued absence of diplomatic agreements with Iran was a safe scenario for the Bush administration to pursue. Attempting to renew diplomatic ties would have been difficult and risky. A lack of diplomacy with Iran was a familiar

situation to the United States and even offered immediate domestic political benefits to President Bush.

When he made his Axis of Evil speech, President Bush was speaking to an American public that was confused and afraid. In the past, the United States had been involved in conflicts with nation-states that were defined by clear borders. How could terrorism be combatted when the government was unable to even locate terrorist groups or their leaders, such as Osama Bin Laden? President Bush's Axis of Evil speech framed the War on Terror as a conflict involving the United States and any nation known to support terrorism. He did so in order to appear as a leader who understood the threats facing the United States and was willing to take action to defend America's safety and ideals.¹²⁷

President Bush's speech, by spurring anti-American feelings in Iran, helped President Ahmadinejad win his campaign on the promise of standing up to the United States. The speech also motivated President Ahmadinejad to continue spouting anti-American rhetoric after he was elected. President Ahmadinejad claimed that Iran had reached out a hand to President Bush after 9/11 and that President Bush rejected it in order to attack Iran's right to a nuclear program.¹²⁸ President Ahmadinejad saw President Bush's actions as a violation to Iran's right under the NPT to pursue peaceful nuclear technology. Iran, however, made no effort to allow the United States to verify President Ahmadinejad's promises.¹²⁹

President Bush and President Ahmadinejad trapped their respective countries in an antagonistic loop. Both leaders were motivated by domestic politics to act in a way

that supported path dependency. Each time the United States refused to engage Iran, the refusal spurred anti-American sentiment in the Islamic Republic, which in turn enhanced the belief in the United States that the Islamic Republic is a dangerous “rogue” nation. The tension between President Bush and President Ahmadinejad impacted President Obama’s decision to use policies of containment, including sanctions, to try and prevent both Iran and its allies from dominating the balance of power in the Middle East.

Chapter Four: President Barack Obama's Dilemmas

Relations With Iran at the Beginning of the Obama Administration

When President Barack Obama was sworn into office in January 2009, Iran was in the midst of choosing who would next be president. This coinciding of elections led to the optimistic belief that the United States and Iran could start repairing their relationship. The hope was that Iran would be willing to engage President Obama because he could offer America and the Islamic Republic a fresh start.

As the newly elected president, President Obama had a plan for his Iran policy that was full of promise and that stood in sharp contrast to the confrontational politics of his predecessor, President George W. Bush. "Iran would be a symbolic corrective to Bush's approach to addressing international crises, which was heavy on pressure and light on diplomacy."¹³⁰ President Obama's goal was to launch a diplomatic initiative that would culminate in a deal between Iran and the international community regarding Iran's nuclear program. With the help of his advisors, President Obama drafted a campaign to engage Iran that "entailed public appeals, back-channel communications, and forays at negotiations."¹³¹ Unfortunately, President Obama's early attempts to bring Iran to the negotiating table made little headway, and his plan of engagement was put on the back burner completely after the 2009 presidential elections in Iran.

Despite his original success in winning over the Iranian people when first elected in 2005, President Mohammed Ahmadinejad's popularity ultimately experienced a downturn. He had numerous policies that contributed to the decimation of the Iranian economy. He dismantled the Plan and Budget Organization, which manages the

government's budget, and the Money and Credit Association, which sets monetary policy. In 2007, President Ahmadinejad fired the industry minister and the oil minister, sending both ministries spiraling into crises. President Ahmadinejad increased inflation by "lowering interest rates for poorer borrowers, canceling some debt of farmers, and increasing social welfare payments and subsidies."¹³² The lack of government infrastructure, combined with international sanctions that already made Iran look unappealing to foreign investors, left Iran's economy mismanaged and in shambles. As President Ahmadinejad's presidency progressed, his policies created a rift in Iranian politics. While the affluent and urbanite sectors of Iran condemned President Ahmadinejad for increasing inflation, poorer Iranians perceived President Ahmadinejad's actions as evidence that the president was attentive to their economic plight.¹³³

Iran was also divided over President Ahmadinejad's foreign policy. Certain leaders, including Ayatollah Khamenei, applauded President Ahmadinejad's defiance of the international community. The Ayatollah publicly praised President Ahmadinejad for defying the United States and upholding the revolutionary ideal that Iran's economy must be free from dependence on foreign nations and entities. Other Iranian leaders and portions of the population expressed concern that President Ahmadinejad's was isolating the Islamic Republic by defying the United Nations and the international community on various issues, including Iran's nuclear program. This group of less conservative Iranians was growing concerned that Iran, due to its severe economic decline, could not afford to remain isolated from the United States and its allies. To the moderate Iranian, President

Ahmadinejad's frequent meetings with anti-United States figures such as Venezuela's Hugo Chavez were more harmful than they were strategic.¹³⁴

Although he lost the support of many Iranians, due to his economic and foreign policies, President Ahmadinejad was reelected in 2009 with 62.6 percent of the vote. President Ahmadinejad was accused by many Iranians of stealing the presidency from the more moderate Mir-Hossein Musavi, who officially received 33.75% of the vote. After the results were announced, Musavi supporters flooded the streets to protest the election. These outraged voters cited the following evidence to support their claim that President Ahmadinejad did not rightfully win the presidency: "the infeasibility of counting 40 million votes so quickly; the barring of candidate observers at many polling stations; regime-shut-down of internet and text services; and repression of postelection protests."¹³⁵ The protestors hoped that Ayatollah Khamenei would annul the elections, but their hopes diminished when the Ayatollah held a prayer sermon on June 19 to refute allegations of voter fraud and then threatened to crackdown on future protests. The next day, state media reported that at least ten protestors had been killed. A total of about 2,500 protestors were arrested at the height of the crackdown. In late October 2009, one hundred remained in jail and at least eight protest figures were condemned to death by the government.¹³⁶

President Obama wanted to initiate a policy of engagement with Iran that balanced non-interference in Iranian affairs with preserving the primary goal of reaching a deal over Iran's nuclear program. The 2009 political turmoil in the Islamic Republic complicated President Obama's Iran policy, leaving him trapped between two sides of

Iranian politics. If President Obama engaged the opposition movement, he would isolate the Iranian government, the only entity that could participate in negotiations on Iran's nuclear program. Negotiating with President Ahmadinejad and his government, however, would also be problematic for President Obama. Several allies of the United States, including France, Britain, and Germany, had harshly criticized Iran's crackdowns against protestors. A joint statement issued at the G-8 Summit meeting, held in Italy in July 2009, criticized Iran's treatment of protestors.¹³⁷ To engage President Ahmadinejad and his government would require diplomacy with a leader known for his provocative statements and a government that had been internationally condemned. President Obama's administration began to default to punitive action. Deterred by regional politics and the rhetoric of President Ahmadinejad, President Obama's Iran strategy began to mirror that of his predecessor in many ways.¹³⁸

Following President Obama's election, the UN Security Council plus Germany (P5+1) invited Iran to partake in negotiations over Iran's nuclear programs. Publicly, President Obama pledged to Iran's leaders that he wanted to cooperate with them, but his actions at both the domestic and international level sent a different message: "in the aftermath of the disputed 2009 elections in Iran and the violence that followed, the focus of the debate in Washington soon shifted back toward punitive measures."¹³⁹ President Obama filled his cabinet with people who were hardliners with their approach to Iran, meaning they supported using harsh measures to try to force Iran to abandon its nuclear program. Stuart Levy, a neoconservative lawyer who spearheaded Bush's sanctions policy, retained his position as undersecretary of the treasury for terrorism and financial

intelligence. Hillary Clinton, who was firmly against the Iranian government and an avid supporter of Israel, was appointed Secretary of State.

Regarding international negotiations, President Obama has rejected various Iranian amendments to proposed deals. At the 2009 talks, for example, the P5+1 “made a new proposal in which most of Iran’s low-enriched uranium would be shipped to Russia for processing to 20 per cent enrichment and then on to France for processing into fuel rods before being returned to Iran.”¹⁴⁰ With this deal, Iran would get fuel for its research reactors, and the United States would get the low-enriched uranium out of Iran. This would create more time for negotiations without the threat of Iran pursuing serious nuclear technology, and possibly nuclear weapons.¹⁴¹ Iranian conservatives, furious at the idea of surrendering Iranian nuclear technology and bowing down to the will of foreigners, pressured President Ahmadinejad to make a counterproposal. President Ahmadinejad asked to have a simultaneous rather than sequential exchange of low-enriched uranium for fuel. President Obama refused to accept the counterproposal. He said that the original proposal could not be modified, and the talks stalled.¹⁴²

Tehran had hoped that President Obama would be more willing to accept the idea of a nuclear Iran. The combination of President Obama’s hardline cabinet appointments and his inflexibility with regards to international negotiations with Iran turned politicians in Tehran into skeptics. His actions failed to match his promises to engage the Iranians. President Bush’s refusal to negotiate with Tehran directly and his preoccupation with Iraq had given Iran time to develop more advanced nuclear technology without scrutiny.¹⁴³ While President Bush punished Iran with economic sanctions, Iran continued to work

towards perfecting the nuclear fuel cycle. In September 2009, President Obama and French and British leaders revealed that intelligence indicated Iran was developing a uranium enrichment site on a Revolutionary Guard base near Qom, and the site appeared unsuitable for purely civilian use.¹⁴⁴ When President Obama took office in 2009, he was facing not just a confrontational Iran, but also an emboldened one with increasingly more sophisticated technology. President Obama underestimated the Iranians, and now had to find a way to contain Iranian proliferation before it was too late.

Iran, the Gulf States, and the Risks of a Grand Bargain

Iran's foreign policy is rooted in the ideology of the Islamic Revolution and functions to promote Iran's national interests. "Some interpret Iran's objectives as the overturning of the power structure in the Middle East, which Iran believes favors the United States, Israel, and their 'collaborators'-Sunni Muslim regimes such as Egypt, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia."¹⁴⁵ Iran is the largest and most powerful country in the Middle East and has a dominant Shia Muslim population. The vast majority of the other Muslim countries in the region have prominently Sunni Muslim populations. The difference between Sunnis and Shias dates back to the death in 632 of Islam's founder, the Prophet Mohammed. The majority of Muslims backed Abu Bakr, a friend of the Prophet and father of his wife Aisha, and became the Sunni sect. The rest thought Muhammad's kin were the rightful successors and became the Shia sect. While all Muslims agree that Allah is the only God and Mohammad the only messenger, Shias see their ayatollahs as reflections of God on earth, which has led Sunnies to accuse Shias of heresy.¹⁴⁶

A significant component of Iran's regional policy is its relationship with the kingdom of Saudi Arabia, which has opposing influences and interests in the Middle East. Both Iran and Saudi Arabia are ruled by religious governments, and Islam is the base of each country's set of laws and methods of governing. Saudi Arabia sees itself as the leader of the Sunni Muslim world and is alarmed by Iran's attempts to increase its Shia influence in the region.¹⁴⁷ While Saudi Arabia's leaders have refrained from publicly supporting military action against Iran, the kingdom has made several subtle protests against Iran's burgeoning influence. Saudi Arabia does not support Iraq's Shia prime minister Nuri al-Maliki, who has ties to Iran after having lived there during his period of exile, and repeatedly raises past issues involving Iran. For example, Saudi Arabia blames Iran for instigating violent demonstrations at annual Hajj pilgrimages to Mecca in the 1980s and 1990s. Iran claims this is untrue, but Saudi Arabia has not retracted its accusations.¹⁴⁸

The states that form the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) with Saudi Arabia—the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Qatar, Bahrain, Oman, and Kuwait—vary with regard to their opinions on how to approach Iran. The Sultan of Oman, for example, is closest politically to Iran and has refused to criticize Iranian policies or support policies that isolate Iran. The Sunni ruling family in Bahrain, on the other hand, refuses to engage Iran and has repeatedly accused the Iranian government of supporting Shia dissidents in Bahrain.¹⁴⁹ Despite these variances, the GCC functions as a political block which primarily adheres to Saudi Arabian politics and seeks to constrain Iranian influence in the Middle East whenever possible. The Gulf states disagree on how to engage Tehran

politically. Because of their proximity to the Islamic Republic, however, they agree on the importance of preventing an emboldened Iran from emerging and instigating an Arab-Persian conflict.¹⁵⁰

One of the options available to President Obama is a grand bargain with Iran, which would entail offering Iran “a series of concessions, including normalised relations, security guarantees, a more central role in Gulf politics and recognition of its right to a fuel cycle....”¹⁵¹ Washington would do this in exchange for a promise that Iran would adhere to the IAEA’s monitoring conditions to prove the Islamic Republic has not developed nuclear weapons capability.¹⁵² A bargain would likely appease Iran by accepting Iran’s one non-negotiable demand, the right to a nuclear fuel cycle under the NPT. The concern is that a deal with Iran has the potential to alienate GCC states, several of whom, particularly Saudi Arabia, are important allies of the United States.¹⁵³

GCC states are concerned about the various possible consequences of a nuclear-armed Iran. Such consequences include, but are not limited to, “a nuclear accident, a regional nuclear arms race and, above all, an emboldened Iranian effort to achieve regional hegemony.”¹⁵⁴ Each of these outcomes has the potential to disrupt the balance of power between the Sunni ruled Gulf states and Shia Iran. Even though a grand bargain might encourage Iran to make its nuclear activities more transparent, the Gulf states are uncomfortable with President Obama giving Tehran a larger and more influential role in regional affairs and “granting Iran the hegemonic position it craves.”¹⁵⁵

The GCC would likely respond to a grand bargain with Iran in a manner that could potentially be detrimental to American interests. The fear of being isolated by a

United States-Iran deal would cause the GCC to become more accommodating to Tehran. This would not be problematic if the grand bargain worked. But if President Obama's gamble were to fail, "Washington would find its ability to restore a regime of containment and sanctions, or to pursue a military option, greatly undermined."¹⁵⁶ The GCC would likely hesitate to become involved in punitive action after feeling that its interests had been sacrificed to pursue a deal with Iran. President Obama has thus far avoided a grand bargain because engaging President Ahmadinejad, a confrontational president easily influenced by Iranian conservatives, is a great risk. The potential price of failure—upsetting important regional allies and damaging the possibility of future containment pursuits—is too high.

Israel's Fears and the Pressures to use Military Force

America's most significant ally in the region, Israel, sees Iran's possession of nuclear weapons as a direct and immediate threat. President Ahmadinejad, keeping with his habit of engaging in confrontational politics, was known for his tirades against Israel. In 2005, President Ahmadinejad spoke at a program entitled "A World Without Zionism," which was attended by about 4,000 students in preparation for an annual anti-Israel demonstration on the last Friday of the holy month of Ramadan. It was at the rally that President Ahmadinejad made what is perhaps his most provocative and famous statement, publicly declaring his agreement with the Ayatollah's remarks that Israel must be "wiped off the map."¹⁵⁷ Translators said a more accurate interpretation of President Ahmadinejad's remark is that Israel would collapse, a less violent sentiment. The translators' comments were lost in a wave of hysteria that swept across Israel in reaction

to the Holocaust denying Iranian president. The statement “wiped off the map” spread and became accepted as an accurate representation of Iranian views towards Israel.¹⁵⁸ For many people in the Jewish nation, the threat of a nuclear Iran is too great of a risk to waste efforts negotiating a grand bargain. Israel maintains that “a deterrence relationship with Iran is not possible because the Iranian leadership is not rational.” The phrase “wiped off the map” was evidence for Israel that Iran is threatening and irrational.

Even Israeli politicians who are more optimistic about diplomacy with Iran oppose the idea of a nuclear Iran because of the consequences this would pose for Israel’s regional position. Hezbollah, a militant Lebanese group with anti-Israeli tendencies, is sponsored by Iran and could be encouraged to attack Israel under the protection of a nuclear Islamic Republic. A nuclear Iran could also be detrimental to Israel’s diplomatic efforts. Arab states such as Egypt, Jordan, and Palestine, compelled to adhere to the demands of a powerful, nuclear Iran, might abandon peace talks with Israel.¹⁵⁹

After President Obama’s election in 2008, the Israeli National Security Council outlined two possible diplomatic developments that could hurt Israel. In his book, Parsi explains that these developments are “a U.S. initiated dialogue leading to a rapprochement between Iran, the United States, and the Arab world, or the U.S. building a wide international coalition against Iran for which Israel might be forced to pay a price.”¹⁶⁰ Diplomacy between the United States and Iran could impact Israel because of the “risk of diverging American and Israeli redlines on the nuclear issue.”¹⁶¹ Israel believes that once Iran understands the mechanisms of building and controlling a nuclear fuel cycle, Iran can and will weaponize at any moment. Consequently, Israel believes that

Iran's nuclear program must be stopped as soon as possible so that there is no risk of Iran reaching the "redline" of producing weapons-grade enriched uranium. To Israel, cooperative diplomacy between the United States and Iran risks giving the Iranians more time to master their knowledge of the nuclear fuel cycle.¹⁶²

President Obama's initial attempts to engage Iran were concerning to Israel, whose leaders wanted Iran to have zero-enrichment capabilities. Since Iran has showed no signs of sacrificing its uranium enrichment program, Israel has come to believe that the only way to stop Iran is through the threat or use of force. Israel began pressuring the United States to use military force against Iran in the spring of 2008 but President Bush, well into his last year as president, had no interest in starting another conflict in the Middle East. In 2009, during President Obama's first year, Israeli policymakers made great efforts to pressure the United States into attacking Iran or at least providing Israel with the military support necessary to destroy Iran's nuclear facilities.¹⁶³

A military strike against Iran is risky and would have various, perhaps severe, consequences. The military option is an all or nothing choice and while it might destroy Iran's nuclear facilities, it would certainly destroy any possibility for engagement. If the military strike were to fail, the United States would face an enraged Iran that could not be assuaged through diplomatic avenues. The use of force by the United States would anger moderate Iranian politicians who had been more receptive to negotiations.¹⁶⁴ Despite these likely consequences, Israel has continued to pressure the United States to attack Iran, believing it will not be safe until Iran's nuclear program ends.¹⁶⁵ Throughout his first term, President Obama's Iran policy was frozen by his wariness to upset regional

politics. It seemed that no matter what path President Obama may have chosen regarding Iran, a regional ally would be unhappy with his final decision.

Conclusion: What Can President Barack Obama Do?

When he took office, President Obama was determined to engage Iran and come up with a mutually agreeable way to delay, and eventually end, Iran's nuclear program. President Bush's policy of non-engagement fueled anti-American sentiment and encouraged Iran to continue nuclear development. The Islamic Republic ultimately proved too important to ignore: "its geostrategic location, vast oil and gas reserves, and significant influence on public opinion in the Muslim world, and especially the Shia part of it, all conspire against America being able to act as though the Islamic Republic does not exist."¹⁶⁶ President Bush refused to engage the Persian nation, thereby eliminating the possibility that Iran could help promote American interests in Afghanistan and, perhaps, elsewhere. President Obama's initial strategy was the opposite of that of his predecessor, and he hoped to further the United States' position in the Middle East through cooperation, not through confrontation.¹⁶⁷

When Iran reelected President Ahmadinejad, President Obama's plans to engage Iran fell apart. He was hesitant to negotiate with a president who had threatened Israel and been condemned for his crackdown on protestors through an official joint statement at a G-8 Summit meeting.¹⁶⁸ As he struggled to adopt a new Iran policy, President Obama's subsequent actions did little to change the nature of American-Iranian relations. Political actors often make choices that support path dependency because of "the strong status quo bias associated with the decision rules that govern most political

institutions.”¹⁶⁹ President Obama chose to uphold the status quo of American-Iranian relations when he rejected a fuel swap deal with the Islamic Republic in 2009. Unsure of what the consequences would be if he engaged President Ahmadinejad, President Obama chose policies with familiar outcomes until he could figure out the best way to approach the controversial Iranian president

Once it became clear that engagement would not have been as easy as he hoped, and the fuel-swap deal fell apart, President Obama continued to struggle to decide how to approach the Islamic Republic. He could bargain with Iran and offer the Islamic nation some sort of consolation in exchange for limiting nuclear development. Alternatively, he could try to eliminate Iran’s nuclear program through a military strike. Both options are far from perfect, and each would lead to a series of consequences that could upset the current political balance in the Middle East.

When analyzing the relationship between domestic politics and international negotiations, Putnam explains that domestic groups behave differently from national governments. The former pursue their own interests and try to increase their chances of reelection by pressuring the government to adopt the policies their constituents favor. The latter seek to satisfy domestic pressures while simultaneously “minimizing the consequences of adverse foreign developments.”¹⁷⁰ A politician involved in a two-level game, as Putnam puts it, must avoid upsetting both foreign contingents at the negotiating table and domestic groups in his home country. Angering a key player in global negotiations could damage chances for successful diplomacy, while failure to respect the interests of domestic groups could result in a decline in popularity and the loss of a

politician's position.¹⁷¹ Within Putnam's definition of win-sets, President Obama must create a policy that satisfies both Iran and domestic constituents.

Putnam discusses how domestic constituents impact international negotiations, but there is an additional entity that can impact negotiations. Negotiating a deal over Iran's nuclear program is a multi-level game, one that involves not just domestic constituents but also regional allies of the United States. President Obama must keep in mind how these third-parties will react because whatever he chooses to do will affect the United States' relationship with their allies. A lasting agreement with Iran will account for the win-sets of countries such as Saudi Arabia and Israel, who have close ties to the United States and are also invested in the outcome of negotiations over the Iranian nuclear program.

President Obama's policy towards Iran is trapped between cooperation and confrontation. Cooperation with Iran would anger some of America's most important allies. Confrontation would be supported by Israel and other countries, but would damage America's diplomatic capabilities. As his presidency has progressed, President Obama has tried several times to create an Iran policy that balances engagement with containment. Negotiations with Iran have been difficult for President Obama because he has struggled to create a policy that satisfies all of the key players: Iran, regional allies, and domestic constituents. Whether or not he can create a policy that slows or stops nuclear development and allows him to avoid choosing between bargaining and a military intervention remains to be seen.

Chapter Five: The Constraints of American Domestic Politics and the Limitations of Sanctions

America's Special Relationship With Israel

Israel is a prosperous country, with a per capita income ranked twenty-fifth largest in the world as of 2012. Since 1976, the United States has given more money to Israel than any other recipient of American aid. United States' aid to Israel drastically increased after the 1973 Yom Kippur War between Israel and a coalition of Arab states led by Syria and Egypt. Israel now receives about three billion dollars a year in direct foreign assistance from the United States, roughly one-fifth of America's foreign aid budget. American aid to Israel contains many special allowances. Israel is the only country that receives all of its aid at the beginning of the fiscal year as opposed to quarterly installments, and therefore earns extra interest money. Israel is allowed to use roughly twenty-five percent of its aid allotment to subsidize its own defense industry and does not have to account for how that aid is spent. This exemption allows Israel to use the aid "for purposes the United States opposes, like building settlements in the West Bank."¹⁷²

Israel gets consistent, usually unconditional, diplomatic backing from the United States in regional disputes. This means the United States supports Israel even when Israel does things the United States opposes, such as increasing occupation in Palestinian territories.¹⁷³ The United States has vetoed more than thirty United Nations Security Council Resolutions that were critical of Israel. Arab nations have attempted to have Israel's nuclear arsenal placed on the IAEA's watch list, only to be blocked by the United States. America has come to Israel's rescue during times of crisis, going back to when

President Richard Nixon supplied Israel with arms during the Yom Kippur War. More recently, President George W. Bush took Israel's side during the 2007 war with Lebanon, opposing calls for a ceasefire in order to give Israel another chance to go after Hezbollah.¹⁷⁴

Judging by Israel's economic status, American aid is based on politics rather than charity. During the Cold War, Israel was a strategic asset to America and helped contain Soviet expansion the Middle East. The American-Israeli partnership, however, has not always been equally beneficial to the United States. For example, the partnership has complicated the United States' relationship with the Arab world. President Nixon's decision to provide \$2.2 billion in aid during the Yom Kippur War triggered an Arab oil embargo. In addition, Israel's military is not strong enough to protect American interests in the Middle East. During the Islamic Revolution, Israel was unable to provide military support to protect Persian Gulf oil supplies. At times, Israel has even been a strategic burden. During the first Gulf War, the United States was unable to use Israeli bases because doing so would anger the Arab anti-Iraq coalition. The same thing happened again in 2003 when President Bush chose not to use Israeli bases out of fear of Arab opposition.¹⁷⁵

Despite these strategic consequences, American leaders have sought to maintain the United States' partnership with Israel. In the Middle East, where politics are complex and the opinions of countries on America feel like they change daily, Israel is a consistent ally. Particularly after 9/11, American "support for Israel has been justified by the claim that both states are threatened by terrorist groups originating in the Arab or Muslim

World, and by a set of 'rogue states' that back these groups and seek [weapons of mass destruction]."¹⁷⁶ Iran is one of the "rogue states" that is a threat to both the United States and Israel. President Ahmadinejad's tirades against Israel have been perceived as evidence of an ideological clash between the Jewish nation and the Islamic Republic. As Parsi explains:

On one side was Israel, portrayed as a democracy in a region beset by authoritarianism and an eastern outpost of Enlightenment rationalism. On the other side was the Islamic Republic of Iran, viewed as a hidebound clerical regime whose rejection of the West and aspiration to speak for Muslims everywhere were symbolized by its refusal to recognize Israel's right to exist.¹⁷⁷

But framing the tensions between Israel and Iran as a conflict of ideals negates the history of strategic cooperation between the two countries. Israel and Iran worked together during the Cold War in order to further the mutual goal of preventing Soviet expansion. During the Iran-Iraq War, Israel provided arms to Iran because an Iraqi victory would threaten Israel's position in the region. An Arab alliance with Iraq could have easily allowed Iraq to pass through Jordan and threaten Israel's eastern front.¹⁷⁸

The shift in Iranian-Israeli relations from cooperation to open hostility resulted from the sweeping geopolitical changes that slammed the Middle East in the early 1990s. Iraq's defeat in the Gulf War and the collapse of the Soviet Union eliminated the threats that Iran and Israel shared. Iraq was no longer balancing Iran, which was left unchecked in a new security environment. This and the ambiguity of Israel's strategic utility to the United States after the collapse of the Soviet Union made Israel profoundly worried.¹⁷⁹

Israel, acting on its worries, has used the United States' path-dependent relationship with Iran to its advantage. American politicians are predisposed to accept and

perpetuate the idea that the Islamic Republic is a threat. Iranian citizens executed a direct attack against American citizens during the hostage crisis, and Iran continues to threaten America's relationship with its Arab allies. After 9/11, when American ideals were deemed to be under attack, it was easy for Israel to perpetuate the notion that Iran was a threat to the promotion of democracy in the Middle East. Israel consistently pressures the United States to implement harsh measures against Iran, and Washington follows suit with the hope of restraining the Islamic Republic.¹⁸⁰ Iran, however, has not been restrained. There is growing evidence that Iran's nuclear program is continuing to expand, including the facilities discovered at Qom. In order to appease domestic constituents who worry about the ideological threat of the Islamic Republic, Washington still promotes containment despite evidence that suggests this policy is not working.

The Logic and Impact of Sanctions

Under President Bush, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice devised the use of a dual-track policy with Iran in order to achieve an end to the Iranian nuclear program. Dual-track policy is a political strategy in which one country imposes penalties against another country while simultaneously remaining open to negotiations. Secretary Rice proposed implementing sanctions against Iran while also making it clear that the United States would be willing to lift them in exchange for Iranian concessions over its nuclear program. Washington, however, remained weary of talks and did not invest energy into the negotiation facet of Rice's dual-track policy.¹⁸¹

President Bush wanted a punitive course of action that would satisfy regional allies who were also concerned about Iran, including Saudi Arabia, the United Arab

Emirates, and Israel. Sanctions signaled that the United States would not accept the idea of a nuclear Iran and was willing to take tough action against the Islamic Republic.

Sanctions also allowed President Bush to be aggressive towards Iran without actually starting a war. This is part of why the Obama administration has also continued to rely on sanctions when dealing with Iran. With sanctions, President Obama can avoid the choice between bargaining and war. Sanctions are punitive action that encourage Iran to engage the United States. To receive sanctions relief, Iran has to respect the demands of the United States. This dynamic is appealing to American domestic entities who do not want concessions to be given to the Islamic Republic. While sanctions effectively cause short-term economic damage to the sanctioned country, their long-term consequences are limited.¹⁸²

Economic Effects of Sanctions

The United States has issued two types of economic penalties against Iran since the Islamic Revolution: trade sanctions and financial sanctions. Trade sanctions are penalties that severely limit Iran's ability to trade with the United States. One of the biggest trade sanctions issued against Iran was Executive Order 12959, imposed by President Bill Clinton on May 6, 1995. This Order banned all United States trade with and investment in Iran. The ban was intended to "blunt criticism that U.S. trade with Iran made U.S. appeals for multilateral containment of Iran less credible."¹⁸³ Only food and medical supplies can be provided to Iran, and only on a case-by-case basis. Every March since 1995, the current presidential administration has renewed the ban. Additional legislation has also been issued that extends the impact of the original order to other

foreign entities. The Comprehensive Iran Sanctions, Accountability, and Divestment Act, for example, mandates sanctions on foreign firms that invest threshold amounts in Iran's energy sector.¹⁸⁴

Financial sanctions, which limit the amount of money that Iran receives, are trickier to implement since supranational entities are involved in regulating international finances. The United States has directly by implementing "financial measures deprived Iran from financing by the Export-Import bank, export credits, loan guarantee and export insurance."¹⁸⁵ Indirectly, the United States instructs its representatives at international financial institutions, including the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, to vote against any form of financial assistance to Iran. Financial sanctions impede Iran's ability to borrow funds and to finance oil development projects.¹⁸⁶

The total cost of sanctions, both trade and financial, varies slightly each year but tends to be rather high: "the sanctions introduced against Iran as part of the dispute over Tehran's nuclear program cost the country over \$40 billion in export revenues in 2012 or about \$3.4 billion per month, according to [the] International Energy Agency."¹⁸⁷ Trade and financial sanctions have succeeded in damaging Iran's economy, but their political effects have been minimal.

Political Effects of Sanctions

Iranian politicians have not been easily swayed by the effects of sanctions. Financial sanctions hurt Iran's poorer citizens, but have relatively little impact on the upper classes and ruling elite. Trade sanctions affect Iran's population more evenly, but their disadvantage is that Iranian markets adjust to trade sanctions over time. When a

trade embargo was first implemented against Iran, the economy of the Islamic Republic suffered a swift downturn. Before the Islamic Revolution, Iran was dependent on the United States for trade. The loss of the United States as a trading partner was devastating to Iranian markets. Over time, Iran has adjusted and discovered alternative trading partners. It was easy to find new countries to buy for oil, for example, because there is always a need for oil, and the world market for that particular commodity is competitive. Unburdened by financial sanctions and able to work around trade sanctions, Iranian politicians have not been easily swayed by the effects of such penalties.¹⁸⁸

Sanctions are effective in terms of the damage they cause, but they are not necessarily effective at changing policy behavior. Those who advocate against sanctions are concerned that “the reasons Iran craves nuclear status run too deep for it to be swayed by economic pressure.”¹⁸⁹ Iran wants nuclear capability so that it can gain more credibility as a regional power and have a stronger chance of balancing the influence of Israel and the United States. Iranian rulers have expressed their belief that sanctions are attempts to weaken Iran militarily and challenge the Islamic regime’s legitimacy. This hardline view dominated Iranian politics throughout Ahmadinejad’s presidency.¹⁹⁰ Sanctions failed to change the behavior of his administration and only encouraged President Ahmadinejad to promote Iran’s nuclear program. Far from deterring the Islamic Republic, sanctions caused Iran’s nuclear program to evolve from strategic pursuit to symbolic defiance of the United States.

The Israel Lobby and Congress

New sanctions against Iran tend to pass with ease, supported by a majority of American congress members. The Nuclear Iran Prevention Act of 2013, for example was drafted to broaden economic sanctions and passed in the House of Representatives by a 400-to-20 vote in July.¹⁹¹ Both members of the Democrat Party and the Republican Party seek tough action against the Islamic Republic through legislation. The Nuclear Weapon Free Iran Act of 2013 is the most recent piece of legislation that shows how preventing Iranian nuclear capability is often framed as a bipartisan issue. Democrat Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Robert Menendez and Republican Senator Mark Kirk drafted the Nuclear Weapon Free Iran Act in response to the interim agreement between Iran, France, Germany, Britain, China, Russia, and the United States. Two dozen other senators introduced the bill with Senators Menendez and Kirk in December of 2013, which garnered fifty-nine co-sponsors by early January.¹⁹²

Senators Menendez and Kirk wrote the Nuclear Weapon Free Iran Act with the goal of bolstering American diplomatic efforts to prevent Iran from achieving nuclear weapons capability. If passed, the bill would present Iran with various consequences, including sanctions, that would be implemented if talks were to fail. President Barack Obama requested that no additional sanctions be issued during the six-month period of regular talks established by the November agreement. For this reason, if the bill passes, new sanctions would be suspended for a year after the bill was passed. Sanctions could be suspended further if Iran stipulated to an agreement during talks that was deemed compatible with America's security interests. There are three key points to the Nuclear

Weapon Free Iran Act as stated on the American Israel Public Affairs Committee's (AIPAC) website: (1) America must prevent Iranian nuclear weapons capability, (2) diplomacy must be backed by the threat of new sanctions, and (3), America must stand with Israel. The bill is a way to show Iran that the United States can and will take action if Iran does not make concessions.¹⁹³

AIPAC lobbyists quickly started a campaign to pressure congressional members to support the Nuclear Weapons Free Iran Act, and this was not the first time AIPAC has expressed its support for sanctions. When President Obama first showed a willingness to engage Iran in 2009, six thousand members of AIPAC traveled to Capitol Hill to push for the passage of sanctions bills before Iran's elections.¹⁹⁴ At the time, the House did not move forward with a bill to increase sanctions, choosing instead to support President Obama's efforts to directly engage Iran. In March 2010, Israel angered the United States by expanding illegal Israeli settlements in Palestinian territory. Vice President Joe Biden went to Israel to talk to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. During this visit, the Prime Minister announced that another 1,600 apartments would be built in a settlement in Arab East Jerusalem. President Obama and members of his administration were infuriated.¹⁹⁵

Vice President Biden reportedly told Netanyahu that his decision would undermine the security of American troops in the Middle East and endanger regional peace. A week later, Netanyahu's visit to Washington coincided with AIPAC annual national conference. To show support for the Israeli government, AIPAC wrote a letter to Secretary of State Hillary Clinton that was signed by 326 members of Congress in three

days: “it is in U.S. national security interests to assure that Israel’s security as an independent Jewish state is maintained.”¹⁹⁶ The controversial elections in Iran in 2009 combined with President Ahmadinejad’s confrontational ways changed the general attitude of Congress towards Iran and President Obama’s policy of engagement, which was now a seemingly futile strategy. Politicians needed another way to show the American public that they were taking proactive measures against Iran, and AIPAC offered a solution: show support for Israel.

With every new development regarding the political puzzle that is Iran’s nuclear program, AIPAC pressures Congress to support punitive action against Iran. AIPAC’s annual policy conference is a source of major Congressional lobbying about Iran. In 2010, for example, AIPAC delegates held approximately five hundred meetings with Congressional members and staff. Harsh sanctions against Iran were one of the main issues raised by lobbyists at these meetings. AIPAC keeps a roster on the members of Congress, tracking their position on and support for legislation geared towards protecting Israel’s interests. This helps AIPAC target specific members of Congress in order pressure them to support legislation favored by the Israeli lobby.¹⁹⁷

Maryland Democrat Senator Barbara Mikulski is a recent example of a politician that AIPAC lobbyists have targeted directly. As of January 2014, she had still not decided whether to vote for the Nuclear Weapons Free Iran Act. AIPAC sent an e-mail action alert to supporters in Maryland, urging recipients to contact the Senator’s office directly and ask her to show support for the pro-Israel community by co-sponsoring the bill, “a diplomatic insurance policy against Iran.”¹⁹⁸ At the time of the e-mail campaign, sources

close to the process said that sixteen Democrats had signed on to co-sponsor the bill, and the threshold of sixty-seven votes necessary to make the bill veto-proof had been reached.¹⁹⁹

Supporting sanctions has become a way for members of Congress to express their solidarity with Israel and their refusal to accept a nuclear Iran. American politicians favor Israel because of the bond between the Jewish nation and the United States. Israel has been an important ally of the United States since the Cold War, but the country's importance to America has evolved even further in the years after 9/11. A beacon of democracy in the Middle East, Israel is a partner in a chaotic part of the world that is perceived as containing myriad threats to American values. The tension between Israel and Iran mirrors the tension between the United States and Iran. When an Iranian leader threatens Israel, he is threatening the nation in the Middle East with which the American public identifies most.

Congress members are encouraged by lobby groups to take a hardline approach. AIPAC encourages tough political action by publicly pressuring members of Congress who do not support or are hesitant about strict legislation against Iran. The Nuclear Weapons Free Iran Act already had enough supporters to ensure a veto-proof majority, yet AIPAC continued to lobby for the vote of Senator Mikulski. With regard to this particular act and future legislation, Senator Mikulski's possible actions are now framed as a choice between Israel and Iran: either she will support an ally of the United States or choose to engage with a country that is a danger to American interests.

In Washington, there is a sense of urgency regarding Iran's nuclear program. When President Netanyahu visited the United States in 2009 amid growing tensions between Jerusalem and Washington, Republican Senator Lindsey Graham spoke to a cheering crowd at AIPAC conference, saying "all options must be on the table' and 'you know exactly what I'm talking about,' indicating his support for military action against Iran. 'Sometimes it is better to go to war than to allow the Holocaust to develop a second time.'"²⁰⁰ As a whole, Congress has favored punitive action against Iran since the early years of President Obama's first term. If sanctions fail to motivate Iran to make concessions, certain Congressional members like Senator Graham support wiping out Iran's nuclear program through military force.²⁰¹

Iran's lack of transparency has aroused suspicions, and the confrontational rhetoric of Iranian politicians such as those who say "Israel should be wiped off the map" support the notion that the Islamic Republic has sinister intentions. For certain members of Congress and their constituents, a grand bargain cannot be reached with a nation as seemingly dangerous as the Islamic Republic. Iran is viewed as a nation that functions to promote its own regional interests and ideology, not to respect diplomatic agreements. Congress as a whole, therefore, has not proposed a bill that supports increased engagement with Iran. From the standpoint of the Israeli lobby and its supporters in Congress, the safety of the United States and Israel demands that we prevent Iran from reaching nuclear weapons capability. Iran will either be persuaded to cease nuclear development by sanctions or forced to do so through swift military force.²⁰²

Conclusion: Are Sanctions the Answer?

In February of 2014, AIPAC surprised Republican senators by stating that the Nuclear Weapons Free Iran Act should be held back from an immediate vote. This occurred after the bill's author, Senator Menendez, took to the Senate floor and criticized Republican senators for asserting that the prevention of a nuclear Iran is a partisan issue. In its official statement, AIPAC agreed that bipartisan support is needed.²⁰³ AIPAC's motivations are unclear, however, as the group still supports the Nuclear Weapon Free Iran Act. Perhaps AIPAC's leaders felt more time is required to target Democrats and create a wider pool of support for the bill. Whatever AIPAC's logic is, the reluctance of Democrats to support further punitive actions against Iran is likely a small sign of their faith in the November 23 deal. Congressional members who support waiting to vote on the Act, or voting against the Act if it is put to a vote, will help give diplomacy a chance to work.

America's special association with Israel is, in part, a result of the path-dependent relationship between the United States and Iran. As previously discussed, Americans, both politicians and their constituents, support Israel because the Jewish state is threatened by the same terrorist groups that pose a challenge to the United States.²⁰⁴ Pierson explains that "a crucial feature of most collective action in politics is the absence of a linear relationship between effort and effect. Instead, collective action frequently involves many of the qualities conducive to positive feedback."²⁰⁵ Congress frequently takes collective action against Iran in favor of protecting Israeli interests, and

congressional members are rewarded for doing so by their constituents and the Israel lobby.

One way for Congress to demonstrate a commitment to protecting the United States' interests in the Middle East is to help maintain America's relationship with Israel. Israel is a country that shares the democratic ideals American policymakers want to defend from the threats of "rogue states" like Iran.²⁰⁶ AIPAC uses this framework to help lobby support against the development of a nuclear Iran, arguing Iran would use nuclear weapons to "wipe Israel off the map." Politicians can either protect Israel, a democratic ally, or choose to engage with Iran, a country that has threatened both the United States and its allies. By supporting tough action against Israel, congressional members can demonstrate to their constituents a commitment to protecting countries that share American interests and ideals.²⁰⁷

Issuing sanctions in conjunction with diplomacy is seen as a way to protect the interests of the United States during negotiations by placing pressure on Iranian leaders. This was part of the argument put forward by Condoleezza Rice when she pushed for the use of dual-track policy during President Bush's administration. Sanctions are not intended to prevent diplomacy; rather, they are meant to motivate Iran to agree to a satisfactory deal regarding its nuclear program. If enacted, the Nuclear Weapons Free Iran Act would signal to Iran that a lack of compliance with American demands will lead to further economic punishment.²⁰⁸

Sanctions legislation frequently passes with bipartisan support in both Houses of Congress out of convenience. Through sanctions, Washington takes punitive action

against Iran and protects the interests of the United States and Israel without going to war. In other words, sanctions are an alternative choice to a grand bargain or military strike. The problem with sanctions is that, on their own, they are unable to effectively generate long-term policy change in Iran. While sanctions have provided strategic benefits in terms of domestic politics, the issue of Iran's nuclear program remains unresolved. Sanctions have damaged Iran's economy but have done little to change policy behavior. Iran continued to develop a nuclear fuel cycle during President Bush's administration as well as when President Obama unsuccessfully offered to engage early in his presidency, all while sanctions were in place.²⁰⁹

Iran has viewed previous sanctions as a groundless attack on the country's right to pursue peaceful nuclear technology under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. Sanctions will do little to help the United States and the Islamic Republic repair diplomatic ties. New sanctions could make Iran question whether the United States truly wants to reach a cooperative deal with the Islamic Republic or just wants to pressure Iran to abandon all nuclear research. Congressmen who want to implement more sanctions hope to appeal to domestic constituents, but Iran is less likely to accept a deal if more sanctions are issued. Additional sanctions could, therefore, make it harder for foreign policymakers to successfully negotiate with Iran.

Offering to lift sanctions shows the Islamic Republic that it can benefit from diplomacy with the United States, but many in Congress do not unconditionally support sanctions relief. After the interim agreement expires, Congress may want to issue additional sanctions to encourage Iran to make more concessions regarding its nuclear

program. In this scenario, the win-sets of the United States and Iran may not overlap. The differences in what Iran and the United States want from a nuclear deal could make it difficult to negotiate a new agreement that satisfies both countries. Many domestic constituents in Iran do not want to sacrifice nuclear technology, while many in the United States want a nuclear-free Iran. If Iran refuses an agreement that requires the country to make more concessions to receive sanctions relief, the United States may cease engagement efforts. A new strategy is needed, one that encourages non-path-dependent behavior by rewarding both Iran and the United States for implementing policy changes. It will be difficult, however, for foreign policymakers to commit to such a strategy if Congress continues to see diplomacy with Iran as a betrayal of Israel.²¹⁰

Chapter Six: The November Interim Agreement and the Fragile Promise of Diplomacy

When Diplomacy Fails: The Case of the Tehran Declaration

Even if the leaders of both the United States and Iran express an interest in engagement, diplomacy is not easy. Just a few years before the November interim agreement, President Obama had a chance to reconcile with the Islamic Republic but rejected the opportunity for various reasons. Two countries, emboldened to prove their diplomatic prowess, came forward with a possible answer for the Obama administration's Iran dilemma: Brazil and Turkey.

Brazil and Turkey were an unlikely pair to tackle the Iran issue. They are not part of the P5+1 permanent group within the United Nations (UN) Security Council, nor are they economic powers. As emerging nations, both wanted to prove they were capable of solving international problems.²¹¹ The issue of Iran's nuclear program presented itself as the perfect opportunity for Brazil and Turkey to bolster their reputations. Each had some level of personal investment in resolving the growing threat of a nuclear Iran. Turkey was concerned that a lack of engagement with Iran would lead to war and, perceiving itself as a bridge between the East and West, wanted to prevent such a crisis. Both Turkey and Brazil traded with Iran and feared sanctions would be detrimental to business.²¹²

Brazil and Turkey engaged Iran by offering a fuel-swap deal, such as the one that was proposed at the Geneva convention in 2009. The Brazilian-Turkish version of the fuel-swap deal was called the Tehran Declaration. The Declaration "stipulated that 20-percent-enriched nuclear fuel was to be provided to Iran for its use in the Tehran Research Reactor, which produces medical isotopes, in exchange for the removal of 1,200

kilograms of 3.5-percent-low-enriched uranium (LEU) to Turkey.”²¹³ The United States was immediately wary of the deal. Under the Tehran Declaration, there would still be twenty-percent-enriched uranium inside Iranian territory. Despite doubts, America endorsed Brazil and Turkey’s plan to talk to Iran and offer the deal because Washington expected it would be unsuccessful.²¹⁴

In May 2010, Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Brazilian President Luiz Inácio “Lula” de Silva traveled to Tehran. After two days of negotiations, Iran signed the Tehran Declaration. Washington dismissed Brazil and Turkey’s success by criticizing their deal for “handing Iran too much and getting too little in return.”²¹⁵ In doing so, the Obama administration showed it was still weary of making concessions to Iran. Sticking to the implementation of sanctions was perceived to be safer than accepting the Tehran Declaration.²¹⁶

The Obama administration made immense political investments in sanctions, “including acts such as personal calls from Obama to other world leaders and high-level visits.”²¹⁷ Backing away from sanctions would have been detrimental to international opinions of the administration. America would have faced cheers of victory from Iran and condemnation from allies such as Israel and Saudi Arabia. Diverging from the sanctions path would have threatened the various deals and concessions that had been made to countries such as Russia and China to secure unanimous P5+1 support. These factors, combined with immense pressure from Congress and AIPAC, had siphoned the Obama Administration’s political capital.²¹⁸ In the end, the Tehran Declaration was too great of a political risk for the Obama administration to accept.

Following the United State's rejection of the Tehran Declaration, new sanctions were passed at both the domestic and international level. Congress passed the gasoline sanctions on Iran with an overwhelming majority, 408-8 in the House and 99-0 in the Senate, and on July 1 President Obama signed the bill into law. UN sanctions had unanimous support and were passed. America's rejection of the Tehran Declaration was seen, by some, as a diplomatic failure.

A former senior Obama administration official remarked, "the impression, right or wrong, that was created was that we could not take yes for an answer. That was not what I would call a triumph of diplomacy."²¹⁹ Political actors are preoccupied with the short-term consequences of their actions because "the decisions of voters are taken in the short run....[Thus, political actors] will pay attention to long-term consequences only when these become politically salient or when they have little reason to fear short-term electoral retribution."²²⁰ The Obama administration's concern over the costs of the Tehran Declaration reveals how difficult it will be for Iran and the United States to change the nature of their relationship from antagonistic to cooperative.

A Historic Breakthrough Agreement

In the early hours of the morning in Geneva on November 24, 2013, Iran reached an interim deal with the United States, China, Russia, France, Britain, and Germany. The purpose of the interim deal is to "give international negotiators time to pursue a more comprehensive pact that would ratchet back much of Iran's nuclear program and ensure that it could only be used for peaceful purposes."²²¹ After two more months of tedious negotiations between Iran and these six world powers, the interim agreement went into

effect on January 20, 2014. The agreement, which is renewable, will be in place for six months and requires Iran to restrict nuclear activity.

Iran has agreed to stop building centrifuges and to stop enriching uranium beyond five-percent, a level that is sufficient for energy purposes but insufficient for making a bomb. Iran's stockpile of twenty-percent-enriched uranium, which is close to being weapons-grade, is to be diluted or converted into oxide so that it cannot be used militarily. Additionally, Iran will demonstrate a willingness to restrict nuclear capacity by dismantling links between networks of centrifuges. In exchange for compliance, the United States has agreed to offer between six and seven billion dollars in sanctions relief. Roughly \$4.2 billion of that relief will be in the form of oil revenues that have been frozen in foreign banks.²²²

The United States and Iran each exhibited cautious optimism over the agreement, and Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, an adamant supporter of Iran's nuclear program, provided a crucial endorsement. The Ayatollah's approval is vital because he has the power to override the Iranian president's decisions. Ayatollah Khamenei has since tempered his support, warning he is not optimistic negotiations with the United States can lead to a deal that respects Iran's right to nuclear technology.²²³ Congress, the majority of which supports full Iranian nuclear dismantlement, also expressed concerns to President Barack Obama and his cabinet. Since President Obama was able to provide sanctions relief via executive order, however, the comments of Congress did not impede implementation of the interim agreement with Iran.²²⁴

In February of 2014, a new round of negotiations began between Iran and the six world powers that negotiated the formulation of the interim agreement in November. The purpose of these talks is to create a consensus on what to do when the agreement expires after six months.²²⁵ Resolving the nuclear standoff may prove difficult for the United States and Iran. As Ayatollah Khamenei says, “I am not optimistic about the negotiations. It will not lead anywhere, but I am not opposed either.”²²⁶ Diplomacy is possible, as exemplified by the November agreement, but vulnerable to existing antagonisms between the two countries.

Who is Hassan Rouhani? The Potential for a Moderate Regime

Hassan Rouhani was elected president of Iran in June 2013 and helped push for the November agreement. Prior to winning the presidency, Rouhani was the National Security Advisor to the President of Iran from 1989-1997 and again from 2000-2005. He also served as Iran’s chief nuclear negotiator from 2003-2005. Before the 1979 Revolution, President Rouhani was a prominent Islamic activist. In his presidential campaign, Rouhani promised to bring great change to Iran, save the economy, and ease international sanctions by negotiating an end to the nuclear stand off with the United States.²²⁷ This, combined with his past experience, appealed to a wide range of Iranians.

President Rouhani has long exhibited more moderate behavior than that of President Ahmadinejad. As chief nuclear negotiator, Rouhani briefly suspended uranium enrichment in exchange for the promise of talks about renewing trade with France, Germany, and the United Kingdom.²²⁸ Rouhani only called for uranium enrichment to begin again when he was pressured to do so by the newly elected President Ahmadinejad.

After becoming President, Rouhani was quick to move away from the radical policies of his predecessor towards more moderate politics.

In an attempt to undo the damage caused by President Ahmadinejad, President Rouhani has reinstated several previously fired professionals to key managerial positions. In just the first one hundred days of President Rouhani's term, "Tehran's stock market shares [went] up 25%...thanks to increasing confidence in his economic policies and capital returning to the bourse from parallel markets like gold."²²⁹ Despite these successes, Iran still has grim economic problems. Iran's currency has lost about half its value since mid-2012. At least one out of four young adults is now unemployed. Inflation hovers somewhere between thirty-six and forty-two percent, leaving Iranian citizens impoverished and disgruntled. In 2012, crude oil exports dropped by forty percent to 1.5 million barrels per day, the lowest level in over twenty-five years.²³⁰ With more countries agreeing to sanctions, the market for Iranian oil is shrinking rapidly. Iran's economic situation has become too dire to ignore the value of diplomacy with the United States. President Rouhani knows that to effectively fix Iran's economy, he will have to convince the United States and the international community to lift sanctions.²³¹

President Rouhani has taken various steps to show that his administration is interested in finding a diplomatic solution with the United States to resolve the tension over Iran's nuclear program. His first move was to do something that no other Iranian president has done since the Islamic Revolution, call an American president on the phone. This was the first and only direct conversation between the leaders of Iran and the United States in over thirty years. President Rouhani called President Obama as they were both

leaving the UN General Assembly in September 2013. The call was a reflection of the comments President Rouhani made to the Assembly, where he reached out to America and discussed the possibility of an opening for diplomacy between the two countries.²³² In a related gesture, President Rouhani sent Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif to meet his American counterpart, Secretary of State John Kerry, for the first time.²³³

To give credence to his efforts, President Rouhani has used social media to publicize feelings of good will towards America and its allies. He has two Twitter accounts in his name, one in Farsi and one in English, which allows him to use Twitter to communicate both domestically and internationally. President Rouhani has composed several tweets exhibiting hope that old antagonisms will not overshadow the importance of diplomacy. Four days after he was elected, for example, President Rouhani tweeted a decade-old picture of himself standing next to an American female medic at a United States field hospital set up after the devastating 2003 earthquake in Bam, Iran. The picture was meant to show that President Rouhani sees the merits of American-Iranian cooperation. President Rouhani's twitter accounts also have tweets directed at Israel, including one that wished all Jewish people a happy Rosh Hashanah. Social media has allowed President Rouhani to spread the image of himself as a centrist leader who favors reconciliation over confrontation.²³⁴

Despite President Rouhani's moderate messages regarding the importance of diplomacy and engagement with the United States, there are still doubts regarding Iran's intentions. Since President Rouhani's election, there has not been a significant effort to

improve Iran's human rights record or end ties to terrorist groups. A dozen political prisoners were released the day before President Rouhani left for the UN General Assembly, but human rights groups have dismissed this as nothing more than a weak gesture to distract from ongoing violations. Approximately 800 political prisoners remain in jail, and public executions have continued. Iran still provides funding, weapons, and training to Hamas and Hezbollah, which are categorized as terrorist groups by the United States and the UN.²³⁵ Failing to make an effort to change Iran's reputation for being a nation who demotes human rights and promotes terrorism could be detrimental to President Rouhani's mission.

At his first press conference, President Rouhani said:

[R]elations between Iran and the United States are a complicated and difficult issue. It's nothing easy. This is a very old wound that is there, and we need to think about how to heal this injury. We don't want to see more tension. Wisdom tells us both countries need to think more about the future and try to sit down and find solutions to past issues and rectify things.²³⁶

The solutions President Rouhani speaks of will be difficult to find. His enthusiasm for talks might not be enough for diplomacy to be successful if the United States finds reasons to doubt the sincerity of his intentions. The United States must be led to believe that President Rouhani's moderate message is sincere and not just a superficial ploy to garner sanctions relief. President Rouhani has made efforts to show his desire to reconcile with America, but he also vehemently supports Iran's nuclear program. He has expressed, like many Iranian leaders, that under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, Iran has a right to develop nuclear technology to bolster the economy.²³⁷ For diplomacy to work, President Rouhani needs to give the United States something that President

Ahmadinejad never did: a reason to believe Iran does not want a nuclear bomb to attack America and its allies.

Reactions in Iran to President Rouhani's Actions

When President Rouhani returned from the UN General Assembly on September 28, 2013, he was met at the airport by a crowd of Iranians. Approximately 200-300 supporters gathered to applaud his message of cooperation to the UN and his decision to make a phone call to President Obama. Many Iranians, suffering from economic hardships, want to see an end to sanctions and Iran's international isolation. Supporters of President Rouhani greeted him with optimistic chants, excited to see he had made this first step towards negotiating an end to sanctions and bolstering Iran's international position. Shouts of "Rouhani we thank you" and "Iran calls for moderation" were heard throughout the crowd as people held up portraits of their new leader to express their appreciation for his efforts.²³⁸

A smaller group of people at the airport had a very different message to share with President Rouhani. About 60-100 hardliners gathered to protest the President and throw eggs and stones at the new Iranian leader's car. Some also threw shoes or banged angrily on the side of the car. As President Rouhani left the airport, the conservative protestors shouted "Death to America!"—a chant that has become standard at radical rallies in Iran since the Islamic Revolution. Protestors also yelled "no compromise or surrender to our national interests" to show they were angry that President Rouhani had reached out to the United States.²³⁹

Based on an analysis of social media activity, most Iranians support President Rouhani's outreach campaign. Iranians at home and abroad posted hundreds of messages on Foreign Minister Mohammad Zarif's Facebook page, expressing their satisfaction with President Rouhani and his administration's conduct at the General Assembly. The messages were optimistic: "You have made the people of Iran happy, especially the phone call with Obama," read one. "We are proud of you," said another. "Don't be tired. We are hopeful that one day there will be direct flights from Tehran to Washington," said a third."²⁴⁰ Since the September phone call between President Rouhani and President Obama, supporters of the Iranian president have had a positive reaction to negotiations with the United States. Nevertheless, the voices of these more moderate Iranians risk being drowned out by conservative disapproval.

On the 35th anniversary of the Islamic Revolution in February 2014, protestors flooded the streets of Iran. The largest rallies, traditionally organized by "hard-line factions that have shown strong skepticism about the negotiations," were held in Tehran.²⁴¹ Protestors exhibited their cynicism by distributing posters and placards with slogans referencing Secretary of State John Kerry's remarks that a military strike remained a viable option if the talks proved unsuccessful. While marching through the streets, protestors shouted the traditional conservative chant "Death to America!" and carried posters that contained statements such as "We are ready for the great battle." Others expressed anger at specific people, yelling "Death to Obama!" or "Death to Kerry!"²⁴²

Expressions of nationalism were also rampant at the protests. Actors re-enacted scenes from the Iran-Iraq war. A famous Iranian children's television puppet named Pangool appeared onstage to praise children for turning up to the rally, saying their presence was an important response to help neutralize American threats. The Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps tried to increase the crowd's energy by playing songs from the Islamic Revolution.²⁴³

The protestors who celebrated the 35th anniversary of the Revolution do not represent the sentiments of all Iranian citizens, but rather the opinions of the most vocal. Their rhetoric, however, is loud and threatening enough to have the potential to destabilize diplomacy. They could sway President Rouhani to take a more conservative approach to negotiations and reject future deals offered by the United States that entail further restrictions on Iran's nuclear program.

What Does Iran Really Want? President Rouhani and The Ayatollah

There is concern among the United States and its allies that Iran will manipulate the outcome of negotiations to enhance Iranian power and regional influence. President Rouhani needs to demonstrate that his centrist messages are not just a ploy to obtain sanctions relief and that Iran is becoming a more moderate nation under his leadership. If the Iranian president makes too many appeasements to conservative Iranians, the United States, which is already feeling pressure from the Gulf and Israel, may walk away from the negotiating table. President Rouhani, however, has to have some elements of conservatism in his foreign policy or else he will lose Ayatollah Khomeini's approval. The Ayatollah is the ultimate executive authority in Iran. He has veto power over

everything from cabinet appointments to foreign policy. Alienating the supreme leader would be detrimental to the Iranian president's ability to implement his international policy objectives.²⁴⁴

Ayatollah Khomeini is the second Supreme Leader to have led Iran since the Islamic Revolution. He has been in power since 1989, has seen three American presidents come and go, and entered office when President Obama entered law school. President Rouhani may be able to formulate policy, but Ayatollah Khomeini is the spiritual leader of the Iranian people with more experience than the Iranian president or President Obama.

The Ayatollah's rhetoric does not always match his actions. In his early days in office, he did not want nuclear weapons, believing them to be incompatible with his vision of an Islamist nation. Eventually, he allowed them after being persuaded of their benefits.²⁴⁵ Having the capability to build a weapon, but not actually building one, can bring Iran prestige. Nuclear weapons capability would "serve as a public symbol solidifying the independence of Iran from Western dominance...."²⁴⁶ Iran would emerge as a leader in the Persian Gulf, something the Islamic Republic has wanted since the Revolution. Most importantly, perhaps, is the fact that nuclear capability gives states the power to "establish their identity as technologically advanced, independent powers deserving of special recognition."²⁴⁷ Iran's acceptance of the November agreement, which slows its nuclear program prevents weaponization, may be evidence that Iran is not trying to build a bomb to use in offensive strikes.

Perhaps what Iran wants is a tougher, more influential role in international politics. The Ayatollah insists that Iran's nuclear research “will not be halted at all,” yet he signed off on the November agreement and continues to support international talks.²⁴⁸ The discrepancy between the Ayatollah’s rhetoric and his actions shows that, despite what he says, he is willing to slow nuclear research in exchange for concessions such as sanctions relief. As the country’s supreme leader, however, he has to be careful to show conservatives that he can stand up to the West. The international community has started to seriously listen to Iran. What the Ayatollah needs now is for President Rouhani to negotiate a deal that the supreme leader can sell to the hardliners in Iran.

President Rouhani is in a tough political situation. To win support for his initiatives, “he will have to navigate a balance between hardline principlists (so called for their rigid revolutionary principles) at one end of the spectrum and reform sentiments on the other, with many political shades between the two poles.”²⁴⁹ More moderate than his predecessor, President Rouhani understands that Iran needs sanctions relief and cooperative international relationships. The Iranian president must make sure agreements reached with the international community do not appear to sacrifice the ideals of the Islamic Republic. Otherwise, the Ayatollah will reject the agreement to protect his own image. President Rouhani’s challenge is to balance diplomacy with the ideology of the Islamic Republic. As he said in a debate on foreign policy during his election campaign, “it is very good for [nuclear] centrifuges to spin...but it’s also good for the lives of people to spin.”²⁵⁰ On the anniversary of the Revolution, President Rouhani said that Tehran is ready to continue negotiations and determined to engage in fair and constructive talks

with the United States. These statements reflected his efforts to balance reformist messages with conservative politics.

Nervous Remarks from the Gulf and Israel's Outrage

American allies in the Gulf had mixed reactions to the agreement. Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), the Gulf's smaller states, saw the agreement as a positive first step towards a more secure Middle East: "We welcome this agreement if it will end the fear of any weapons of mass destruction in the region," said Bahrain foreign minister Khalid bin Ahmed Al Khalifa.²⁵¹ The UAE, despite public praise, critiqued the United States for leaving the UAE and other Gulf states out of negotiations. The UAE increased sanctions against Iran after being pressured to do so by the United States, a move that was detrimental to the UAE's economic interests. Previously, the UAE had been a hub for trade and commerce with Iran, but sanctions have led to economic losses.²⁵² In contrast to Bahrain and the UAE, Saudi Arabia was more hesitant to express approval of the agreement. Saudi Arabia remains concerned that rapprochement between the United States and Iran will make it easier for the Shia nation to gain influence over the Middle East.²⁵³

Saudi Arabia's concerns, while great, are not as forthright as those of Israel, which is actively trying to manipulate American foreign policy. Relations between the United States and Israel have become increasingly tense as America gets closer to rapprochement with Iran. In March of 2013, the United States began conducting secret, backchannel negotiations with Iran. Israel was not informed of these exclusive meetings until September of the same year. The talks were the first step towards opening up the

diplomatic channels that led to the agreement reached at Geneva, and Israel saw them as a betrayal.²⁵⁴ Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu issued a public statement condemning the November agreement with Iran the same day it was reached, saying it was a “historical mistake.”²⁵⁵

At the opening of his meeting with his cabinet, Prime Minister Netanyahu said: “Today the world has become a much more dangerous place because the most dangerous regime in the world has taken a significant step toward attaining the most dangerous weapons in the world.”²⁵⁶ Across Israel’s political spectrum, political officials condemned the agreement. Justice Minister Tzipi Livni, a moderate, said that the agreement was a threat to the safety of the entire world. The minister of intelligence, Naftali Bennet, expressed his distrust of Iranian leaders, saying that the pact is based on “Iranian manipulation, and on self-delusion.”²⁵⁷

Secretary of State John Kerry responded to Jerusalem’s concerns by saying the agreement “makes Israel safer. We believe very strongly that because the Iranian nuclear program is actually set backwards and is actually locked into place in critical places, that is better for Israel than if you were just continuing to go down the road and they rush towards a nuclear weapon.”²⁵⁸ His statement did nothing to quell Israel’s fears, and Israeli politicians continued to publicly denounce the agreement.

Hesitations in Congress

While both Democrats and Republicans have cautioned against sanctions relief, the Republican Party offered the harshest critiques against the terms of the November agreement. Like Israeli prime minister Netanyahu, many Republicans “are insisting on

zero enrichment as a condition for relaxing any sanctions against Iran. Some would even like to authorize the use of military force.”²⁵⁹ They believe that a zero enrichment policy, which the November agreement does not entail, is the only way to guarantee protection of America’s interests and Israel’s safety. Allowing Iran to possess any amount of enriched uranium requires America to trust that the Islamic Republic will not secretly continue to convert enriched uranium to build bombs.²⁶⁰

Republican politicians used Twitter to show that they believe Iran is not worthy of that level of trust. Several Republicans condemned the agreement as an act of abandonment of American allies, specifically Israel. Former White House Press Secretary Ari Fleischer tweeted, for example, “The Iran deal and our allies: You can’t spell abandonment without OBAMA.”²⁶¹ Others used Twitter to express their outrage that the United States would cooperate with Iran, a nation whose sponsorship of terrorism contradicts American values. Republican Representative John Culberson from Texas tweeted, “Worse than Munich.” He attached two images juxtaposing Secretary of State John Kerry and Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif with Adolf Hitler and former British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain.²⁶² Republican Representative Michele Bachmann from Minnesota also attacked President Obama and his staff, calling the agreement a “total surrender by [the] Obama administration.”

Other Congressional members demonized Iran, including Republican Representative Vern Buchanan from Florida who wrote, “Placing your trust in #Iran is like betting on a blind horse on a wet track.”²⁶³ These tweets show why breaking away from path dependency will be difficult for the United States and Iran. Many Congress

members appear to still think of Iran in the way it was portrayed by United States' news outlets during the hostage crisis, as a country populated by American-hating religious fanatics. Any time protestors are captured on camera chanting "Death to America!" or politicians make a speech against Israel, this fuels the fears of Congress.

Critics of American-Iranian cooperation justify their unconditional opposition of Iran's nuclear program by saying Iran is untrustworthy, and that engagement with Iran entails betraying our allies in the region. If Iran wants to cooperate, then why do Iranians call us the Great Satan and cheer in support of America's demise? Iran sponsors terrorism, has captured American citizens in the past, and the catchphrase of radical Iranians is the aggressive phrase "Death to America!" At the same time, the reverse can also be asked: If Iran wishes for our demise, then why are President Rouhani and his ministers taking the time to pursue engagement? The opinions of radical Iranians, however frightening, are the opinions of only one group. The November agreement is temporary, just six months, and is a stepping stone towards more productive negotiations. Only time and continued diplomacy can reveal the Islamic Republic's true intentions.

If Iran fails to follow through on its promises and aggressively ratchets up nuclear development, sanctions can be reimplemented to slow technological advancement while other options are pursued. But if the Obama administration succumbs to Israeli and Congressional distrust and demands the complete dismantlement of Iranian nuclear facilities, Iran will likely cease to engage in diplomacy with the United States. President Rouhani cannot afford full dismantlement of Iran's nuclear facilities, for this would pit him against his more conservative constituents. Negotiations would therefore fall apart,

and Iran would pursue nuclear development without giving the United States any opportunity to impact how Iran's nuclear program is conducted. If Iran reveals violent motives, it would be easier to revert to punitive actions than try to restart negotiations with a peacefully intentioned Islamic Republic spurned by distrust.

Conclusion: The Fragility of the November Agreement

The November agreement opened a window of opportunity for the United States and Iran to change their path-dependent relationship. Decades ago, before the Islamic Revolution, American-Iranian relations consisted of trust. The November deal offers a glimmer of hope that such mutually beneficial cooperation can be restored. The historic nature of the agreement, the first diplomatic accord between the two nations since the hostage crisis, raises the question: Why now?

For more than thirty years, the United States and Iran have been hostile towards one another. When Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi was overthrown by the Islamic Revolution, American-Iranian relations started to crumble. The subsequent 444-day capture of American citizens by Iranian students changed the relationship between the Islamic Republic and the United States. The consequences of the hostage crisis were severe enough to continue to impact American and Iranian views of one another, decades after the hostages were freed.

In the case of the United States and Iran, renewed relations could be beneficial for each country. The agreement was a way for the newly elected, more moderate President Rouhani to gain credibility for the promises he made to his constituents to restore trust between Iran and the United States.²⁶⁴ The sanctions relief that the November agreement

provided will help ease some of the pressures currently placed on the Iranian economy, for which many citizens are grateful. With respect to the United States, the November deal “opened up a new path toward a world that is more secure, a future in which [America] can verify that Iran’s nuclear program is peaceful and that it cannot build a nuclear weapon.”²⁶⁵ The United States saw the election of President Rouhani as an opportune moment to solve the issue of Iran’s nuclear program through diplomacy. Doing so could prevent the necessity for a military strike and allow the United States to have a stronger guarantee that Iran will not attack America or American allies with a nuclear weapon.²⁶⁶

Despite the benefits for each country, the negotiations that have taken place since the November agreement was implemented in January could fail to lead to a replacement deal. As discussed by Putnam, domestic politics have a huge influence on encouraging political actors to push for change. Diplomacy is not easy for leaders whose efforts are perceived by some as concessions to the enemy. After the 9/11 attacks, there was a small window of opportunity for rapprochement. The Islamic Republic saw an opportunity to increase Iranian influence in the Middle East and was willing to cooperate with the United States to achieve that goal. But America felt more vulnerable than ever before, and President Bush spurned the Iranians in his Axis of Evil speech. The political cost of cooperating with a country that had previously threatened American citizens, and that still sponsors terrorist groups, was too high.

American-Iranian relations after 9/11 demonstrated there has to be a belief among domestic agencies and their constituents that an international agreement will be

beneficial. In his conclusion, Pierson summarizes why path dependency occurs, explaining:

[T]he claims in path dependent arguments are that previously viable options may be foreclosed in the aftermath of a sustained period of positive feedback, and cumulative commitments on the existing path will often make change difficult and will condition the form in which new branchings will occur.²⁶⁷

A country's leaders and foreign policymakers are not easily motivated to act against path dependency because various entities put pressure on them to maintain the international status quo. In Iran, the Ayatollah will only endorse an agreement if he believes he can ultimately convince the majority of the Iranian people to support it. As it stands in the United States, most American congresspersons will only support an agreement that is not perceived as a threat to Israel's interests.

American and Iranian leaders are often rewarded by various agents that have "commitments" for not enacting change. President George Bush, for example, garnered support for the War on Terror, in part, through the demonization of Iran and other countries. In Iran, President Mohammed Ahmadinejad attacked the United States during his election, gaining the votes of the country's conservatives and winning the presidency. President Obama and President Rouhani now face the challenge of engaging in diplomacy while facing opposition from those who supported their predecessor's policies.

Since he was sworn into office, President Obama has struggled to pick up the pieces of President Bush's policy of non-engagement and formulate a new strategy to approach Iran. Leaders often make choices that support path dependence because they are

fearful of the consequences of change. President Obama's plan to engage Iran was impeded by the reality of the complicated nature of the Iranian nuclear program. Congress has encouraged him to take punitive action, and regional allies such as Saudi Arabia threaten President Obama's ability to negotiate with Iran. Allies in the Gulf, most notably Saudi Arabia, want to prevent Iran from encroaching on their influence, and Jerusalem claims that the Islamic Republic is a direct threat to Israel's safety.

When the Obama administration realized it would be difficult to engage Iran, two choices emerged: a grand bargain or a military strike. Bargaining with Iran could be detrimental to trade relations with the Gulf, but a military strike to eliminate Iran's nuclear facilities, as Israel wants, would have disastrous consequences. The Obama administration has pursued sanctions to avoid the choice between a bargain or offensive strike. Sanctions are a safe and appealing form of punitive action. They are not as risky as military intervention, and they appease American allies as well as the Israel lobby and Congress.²⁶⁸

The Obama administration has relied on sanctions to avoid making a choice between engagement or war, but the effectiveness of sanctions has proven limited. Sanctions support path dependency by failing to generate long-term political behavioral change. On their own, sanctions are insufficient to convince Iran to slow uranium enrichment for various reasons, including that Iran can partially adjust to the economic impact of sanctions by doing business with other nations. Punitive action against Iran's economy gives vocal Iranian hardliners evidence to support their claim that the United States is wrongfully punishing Iran and disregarding its right to peaceful nuclear

technology. This sentiment can be detrimental to negotiations between the United States and Iran by making the Islamic Republic less receptive to diplomacy.

Various influences in the past have encouraged President Obama to support sanctions, even though their effectiveness is limited. When Brazil and Turkey presented an alternative fuel-swap deal, for example, President Obama rejected the new option because the political costs of backing away from sanctions were too high. Congress, influenced by the Israel lobby, views punitive legislation against Iran favorably and was with the November agreement because “there is strong criticism of any agreement that does not fully dismantle Iran’s nuclear program.”²⁶⁹ The Obama administration has been rewarded with positive feedback from Congress and constituents for additional implementation of sanctions. President Obama can cease enforcing sanctions, but the cost would be accusations from Congress that he was disrespecting legislative authority and failing to enforce the law.²⁷⁰

President Rouhani could also refrain from agreeing to a deal with the United States if Iranian domestic agencies attack him for offering too many concessions to America. Putnam explains that foreign policymakers account for domestic constituents, in part, to protect their chances in the next election. President Rouhani can run for reelection, but he has to be careful not to anger hardliners in his country or risk losing too many of their votes. Conservative Iranians are skeptical about the United States’ intentions and do not want the Islamic Republic to succumb to the influence of America, the Great Satan.²⁷¹ President Rouhani also has to make sure that Ayatollah Khomeini, who has extensive veto power, approves any new agreement. The Ayatollah wants to

appeal to the country's conservatives and will support an agreement if he can convince hardliners that Iranian interests are not being sacrificed in favor of cooperation with the Great Satan.²⁷² President Rouhani's willingness to offer further restrictions on Iran's nuclear program is finite because of the limitations placed on his power as president and the need to appease constituents to protect his position.²⁷³

The fact that the history of American-Iranian relations is so tumultuous means that one misstep from either side could negate the significant progress of the November deal. If the voices of radical Iranians chanting "Death to America!" grow too loud, the United States will lose the motivation to trust Iran. The United States needs to be convinced that Iran is not the nation it appeared to be in 1979, a nation full of hatred towards America. Iran, in turn, needs to believe that the United States is not the meddling Great Satan, intent on manipulating Iranian affairs to serve American and Israeli interests.

The current negotiations with Iran are full of fragile promise. Engaging Iran will make it easier for the United States to influence how Iran conducts its nuclear program. In exchange for continued and increased Iranian transparency, the United States can offer sanctions relief. If negotiations fall apart, these options will be unavailable to the United States, and Iran will continue enriching uranium unmonitored. Only through continued diplomacy can the United States and Iran come to an agreement that is beneficial to the interests of both countries. By maintaining a dialogue, the two countries reach an agreement that allows their respective leaders to be rewarded domestically for non-path-dependent behavior. If President Obama can formulate an improved Iran policy, his time

in office could mark the beginning of a new era of understanding between the United States and the Islamic Republic.

Afterword

On April 11, 2014, the Obama administration said it would block Iran's nominee for ambassador to the United Nations, Hamid Aboutalebi, from entering the United States. The decision to deny a visa to the diplomat, "who was allegedly involved in the 1979 seizure of the U.S. Embassy in Tehran, followed intense political pressure on the administration from Republicans and Democrats on Capitol Hill."²⁷⁴ Despite the tensions between the United States and Iran, Iran has a notable presence at the United Nations, and Iranian representatives have never been prohibited from entering the UN's host country. Aboutalebi denies the accusations against him and says he was not involved in the capture of the embassy. President Rouhani's government says it will continue to stand by its nominee, and Tehran plans to use official UN channels to challenge Washington's decision.²⁷⁵

Regardless of whether Aboutalebi was actually involved in the hostage crisis, the decision to deny him entry, which potentially violates the duties of the United States as the host country for the UN, is representative of the tensions that still plague American-Iranian relations. Iran has underestimated how much the hostage crisis continues to affect American perceptions of the Islamic Republic. Unless Iran issues a formal apology for the hostage crisis, something it has never done, the United States likely will continue to exhibit distrust.

The Obama administration, however, should be careful. Iran has held up its end of the bargain by stalling nuclear enrichment, providing information about facilities and allowing IAEA inspectors to enter the country.²⁷⁶ The United States has been slower to

deliver promised sanctions relief. Iranians say they have experienced little economic aid, and many doubt that the November agreement has been beneficial for their country.²⁷⁷ In order to reach a replacement deal after the November agreement expires, the Obama administration should give more concessions. Sanctions relief could also be a way for Washington to show a continued willingness to engage Tehran. If the Obama administration sweetens the pot, Iranians could see that diplomacy with the United States is beneficial. Perhaps, then, Iran would also be willing to unclench its fist and apologize for past grievances, thereby demonstrating the Islamic Republic is neither inherently nor perpetually an enemy of the United States.

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