



J STREET POLICY MEMO: Next Steps on Iran

For months now, lawmakers supporting the JCPOA correctly and wisely emphasized that no diplomatic negotiation is perfect, that additional efforts could be made to complement the JCPOA, and that by definition this agreement -- and the sanctions that made it possible -- aimed to resolve only the pressing nuclear issue which had galvanized the world, demanding that other vital challenges with Iran must be addressed through other initiatives.

Engaged lawmakers who aim to play a constructive role in ensuring not just the JCPOA's success, but in contributing to a broadly successful American strategy in the Middle East -- a strategy that advances American interests, helps counter dangerous Iranian behavior, and strengthens our friends and allies, including Israel -- are rightly asking, where do we go from here?

What follows is J Street's policy agenda on next steps regarding Iran -- an outline of the "Do's and Don'ts" essential to making the contentious and complex period ahead one that results in successful implementation of the nuclear agreement while advancing policies that complement that effort and advance priorities that strengthen the security interests of the United States, our ally Israel, and our partners in the region.

We are guided by four principles in this effort:

First -- oppose the inevitable effort to treat the nuclear agreement like a foreign policy version of the Affordable Care Act, with direct or stealth efforts to kill it in the cradle. We anticipate legal challenges, riders to defund U.S. contributions to the IAEA, and myriad efforts to pass new sanctions to blow up the agreement. This is the "Groundhog Day" scenario. Opponents will find new and increasingly desperate ways to dismantle what they failed to derail through the Iran Nuclear Agreement Review Act. Some of these efforts will be dressed up in tempting terminology but will be no less destructive. We have to remain vigilant and steadfast.

Second -- like the oath every doctor swears to uphold, the goal should be to "do no harm." In many ways, the debate engendered by the INARA has been heartening in that so many lawmakers took the time to dive deeply into the issues, seeking out expert analysis, and reasonably, soberly measuring the agreement's strengths and weaknesses. It has been a marked contrast to some of the hurried policy-making that led the United States into the Iraq War and empowered Iran a decade ago. Rushing to pass new legislation too quickly, without weighing all its potential implications and consequences, would not be in the actual interests of the United States, Israel, or our other allies.

Third -- identify the constructive steps to a) strengthen our ally Israel and our Middle Eastern partners and b) counter dangerous Iranian behavior such as its support for terror proxies or its destabilizing activities in Syria, Yemen, and Lebanon. Many times in the last months, the point has been made correctly by deal proponents that Soviet aggression in places like Afghanistan did not prevent the United States from

reducing the risk of nuclear confrontation; likewise, today we must be able to continue and enhance US efforts to address the full range of threats posed by Iran and a deeply unstable region.

Fourth – engage above and beyond the purely legislative arena. While there are going to be legislative efforts that will be constructive, Congress has many ways to impact the policy process without necessarily passing even a single piece of legislation. Congressional travel to the Middle East and to Europe that underscores our continued opposition to Iranian misbehavior and our commitment to Israel, speeches and congressional letters, and engagement with our P5 + 1 partners to send a unified message about planning for snap-back sanctions is imperative. After a domestic debate that has showed our partners divisions at home and a presidential race that may only highlight those divisions, sending messages of commonality are equally important.

Given these four principles, what might the policy agenda look like for those who have supported the nuclear agreement and want to ensure it succeeds as part of a broader American strategy in the Middle East?

- A. **Insist on Strong Oversight and Planning.** Congress should hold this administration and subsequent administrations accountable for enforcement of the nuclear agreement by making the most of its oversight responsibility. Committees of jurisdiction -- including Intelligence, Armed Services, Energy, Foreign Relations, and Banking – can not only hold hearings and briefings in both classified and unclassified settings, but can and should pass legislation requiring relevant cabinet agencies to report annually – including through a classified annex as needed -- on every element of the implementation of the nuclear agreement. Similarly, creating a congressionally mandated bi-partisan “Iran Study Group” composed of senior and expert policy-makers to report to Congress on a broader Middle East strategy to counter Iran and leverage more constructive Iranian behavior would underscore to the world – and to our Sunni Gulf Allies and Israel – that we will remain engaged on this issue for the long term in a serious and thoughtful way.
- B. **Sanctions.** Strategically and tactically, it would be an enormous blunder for Congress to seek or appear to seek to “reapply” the nuclear sanctions under the guise of counteracting other activities or entities of Iran. Not only would it give Iran an excuse to walk away from the nuclear agreement, but it would isolate the United States from our allies -- the very allies whose acquiescence gave the sanctions regime its teeth in order to bring Iran to the table. However, appropriately strengthening existing sanctions enforcement for terrorism is a wise course of action. Increasing pressure on Hezbollah in particular would be not just wise, but could draw greater international – particularly European – support given the lives Hezbollah has taken on European soil, too often with impunity. Unity around crushing Hezbollah should become a rallying cry for the community of nations.
- C. **Restore the Bi-partisan Consensus Around Israel - Constructively.** More than enough ink has been spilled in Israel and the United States debating the many blunders and miscalculations of the current Israeli government in handling the relationship with the United States over the nuclear issue. What everyone agrees on is that the relationship must be solidified and that Israel is strongest when the American commitment to Israel is bi-partisan and constructive. Acting quickly and in unison with the Administration this year to renew the Memorandum of Understanding with Israel on American military aid – set to expire just as the next administration takes office -- and lengthening the duration of a new M.O.U. would underscore that the United States Government, across the board, is solidly committed to ensuring Israel’s military capacity and kinetic advantages for the long haul, no matter which party controls the government in either Washington, D.C. or Jerusalem.