

The Nuclear Agreement with Iran: A Plus for Regional Stability

Statement from Middle East and International Relations Scholars

The nuclear deal with Iran (The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action - JCPOA) is a strong and positive step towards stabilizing the Middle East, beyond its undeniable non-proliferation benefits.

The Middle East is in turmoil. It is suffering from a broad range of problems that all, one way or another, contribute to the instability plaguing the region. Increasingly, the instability is not in the form of inter-state violence, but rather intra-state bloodshed with the eventual collapse of the states themselves.

While the region's problems have many sources, one critical driver of instability has been the dysfunctional relationship between the West and Iran in general, and US-Iran tensions in particular.

For the past 36 years, the US and Iran have been embroiled in a zero-sum geopolitical struggle. The arena for this contest has been the larger Middle East, where the two have sought to undermine each other at every given opportunity, at the expense of the stability of the region as a whole.

In both Iraq and Afghanistan, US-Iran competition significantly contributed to the destabilization of these two countries. In other countries, the two have funded and backed rivaling groups, adding fuel to an already destabilizing fire.

Even at moments where both sides desired an opportunity to tame their rivalry, the absence of a dialogue between the US and Iran closed off all paths towards de-escalation.

While the JCPOA is primarily a non-proliferation agreement that successfully closes off all weaponization pathways in the Iranian nuclear program, it carries with it significant peace dividends by making diplomacy and dialogue available for conflict resolution – a necessary step to tackle all of the region's sources of tensions, be they terrorism, sectarianism, or unilateralism.

The region suffers from a diplomacy deficit and the mere fact that the US and Iran can talk to each other again is in and of itself a stabilizing factor for the Middle East and an encouragement for regional rivals to pursue dialogue instead of proxy fights.

Indeed, the carnage in Syria can not be ended in the absence of US-Iran diplomacy. Nor can the threat of the ISIS be neutralized without US-Iran dialogue and possibly cooperation. The plague of sectarianism will not be halted unless the US has the ability to engage with all sides of that divide. The deal can prod constructive diplomacy in ever wider circles across the region in part by providing a successful example of patient, win-win negotiations.

Clearly, the nuclear deal will not automatically or immediately bring stability to the region. But reactivating diplomatic channels between the United States and Iran is a necessary first step. Ultimately, a Middle East, where diplomacy is the norm rather than the exception, will enhance US national security and interests.

Conversely, a Congressional rejection of the deal will further destabilize the region. Such a move will isolate the United States while Iran will be freed from the nuclear constraints the deal would impose on it. Beyond the proliferation risk this would entail, US-Iran tensions will increase once more and reignite Washington and Tehran's gravitation towards a military confrontation.

As such, we urge the members of the US Congress, as well as the leaders of the P5+1 states and Iran, to swiftly endorse the JCPOA and fully implement it. The historic agreement will prevent the spread of nuclear weapons and can prove that through creative diplomacy, the most complex conflicts can be resolved peacefully

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