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WILL THE IRAN NUCLEAR DEAL SURVIVE THE LITMUS TEST?

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‘Nothing will be agreed to *until everything is agreed to*’.ⁱ These words of President Obama in 2013 were not just to comfort the US Congress and domestic audiences, but to provide the much needed solace to international apprehensions about US intentions and positive accommodating moves towards Iran. Iran on the other hand, being under sanctions and international isolation, had also made an intentional move towards cooperation. The process saw several ups and downs and delays, but was finally concluded in July, 2015 with a Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, though backing Rouhani’s hard work and attempts, was seen asserting that, ‘Iran’s direct talks with Washington were limited to the nuclear issue and that there could not be any dialogue with Washington over other issues’ⁱⁱ. John F. Kerry, the US Secretary of State, too was humming the same tune. Iranian President Hassan Rouhani has pledged that his nation will abide by its commitments in times to come. In April, 2015 he declared that the upcoming deal would open a ‘new page’ⁱⁱⁱ for his country. The ‘new page’ surely points towards probability of cooperation to transcend the nuclear dimension for Iran. There are possibilities that Iran would no longer be perceived as ‘a world threat’. These assertions go much beyond casual image correction of Iran and prompt a long pending mainstreaming for the country.

Will the Iran Nuclear Deal Survive the Litmus Test? The probability of success lies in promise keeping. Observance and maintenance of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) would be a move to not just strengthen the needed relationship of Iran with the majority of the world as manifested by the P5+1; but also reinforce the nuclear non-proliferation regime. A brief analysis of the probable incentives and barriers for both the parties to value their respective pledges in the future would be worthwhile.



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Iran: Incentives and Barriers to Maintenance of the Deal:

Will Iran renege on its word? The implications and probabilities of its stepping back from the promises of the deal would not just lead the Obama administration towards hard times, and facing discomfiture- both domestically and internationally- but would also have severe consequences for Iran.

1. Sanctions, Isolation and Attack

No one is better acquainted with the consequences of deception than the leadership of Iran. The sanctions Iran is well acquainted with would be back, along with severe international isolationism. Another apprehension is a likely military attack on the Iranian nuclear facilities in case it shuts its doors to IAEA and the promises made in the JCPOA. 'Iran reaffirms that under no circumstances will (it) ever seek, develop or acquire any nuclear weapons'^{iv}. A combination of sanctions with further isolation would be counterproductive to Iranian dreams of integrating with the world. An attack on all nuclear facilities is also not desirable. Thus, disappearance of all three- sanctions, isolation and threat of attack- would result in a big incentive for Iran. Therefore, to continue on the new path of the JCPOA and not to move away from the agreed deal seems reasonable for Iran.

2. Change in Leadership

Another difficulty for Iran to continue to adhere to its promises could be a change of leadership in Iran. President Rouhani has come up as an Iranian who can be trusted. His recent tweet that said, 'No doubt, deal will lead Iran to closer relations with neighbours', signals its co-existence in the region with others, especially Israel. He also regards 'the nuclear deal with world powers...a legal, technical and political victory for Iran'^v. Iran of his dreams is certainly far from the past image of a black sheep of the nuclear regime. The gradual benefits that will come the Iranian way through the JCPOA would assure only if the politics of Iran and its leadership remain stable.



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3. Regional National Security Threat

A barrier to abiding with the deal by Iran could be a rejuvenation of its national security priorities in the West Asian region. Iran, when faced with an adversity challenging it or a nuclear blackmail in the region from Israel, could stray from JCPOA and move to acquire nuclear weapons. The initiation of the desire to come to the negotiating table has largely come from the Iranian side. Economic compulsions had overtaken the national security priorities of Iran, but a regional security threat to Iran could reprioritize national security over economic compulsions. So, a regional security threat could bring Iran to step down from the JCPOA.

The P5+1: Incentives and Barriers for Maintenance of the Deal

The P5+1 as a party to negotiate with, signifies a 'single window clearance' for Iran in its pursuit of integrating with the world. JCPOA is the best deal for Iran. The presence of all the permanent members of the UN Security Council as one party for negotiation of a deal, with the other party being an individual country, seems tempting strategically. The JCPOA, therefore, is qualitatively higher than any bilateral negotiation. Much of the prevalent anxiety of the strategic community and analysts has been automatic in assuming Iran as a potential defaulter who could default in the near future. The future and success of any deal depends on the intentions and inducements for deviating from the promises made by both the parties. Therefore the incentives and barriers for P5+1 are also worth analysing:

1. The Fragility of the West Asian region

The region already has many fires yet to be extinguished. The threats from the ISIL and the Houthi group demanded that USA and the major powers of the world unite. The recent change in the Iranian leadership provided the much needed scope for cooperation of Iran with the rest of the world. The threats to nuclear security in a destabilized regional atmosphere are ever imminent. Thus, it is in the interest of the P5+1 to continue to cooperate with Iran on its promises in the JCPOA.



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2. Strengthening of the Nuclear Non Proliferation Regime

Overall, Iranian cooperation appears to be a jewel in the crown of the nuclear non-proliferation regime. The US and others don't seem to be shying away from the JCPOA on this front, so long as Iran continues to abide by the provisions set out in the deal. Obama's recent assertion- 'Every pathway to a nuclear weapon for Iran is cut off'^{vi}, signifies the celebration of a victory. On one side, with the Indo-US Civilian Nuclear Cooperation and the Separation plan, US had affirmed its faith in the impossibility of nuclear proliferation from India. On the other, through the Iranian deal, it has halted an addition of an illegal nuclear weapon state in the regime. Overall, the deal has incentives when viewed from the nuclear non-proliferation lens.

3. The Israel Factor

'The real fear of that region should be that you don't have the deal'^{vii}. These words of Kerry indicate the severity of the threat - Iran going nuclear, which would have dire consequences for the region. The entire region of West Asia, post-Iranian nuclear deal, would be left with only one nuclear weapon state - Israel. Though it is neither a declared or recognized nuclear weapon state, yet Israel being fully submerged in related activities is an open secret. The deal appears both realistically and strategically a victory for Israel. Keeping in mind the proximity of the US and Israel, regional security situation for Israel will actually improve with the P-5+1 abiding by the JCPOA. The Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's open war of words, slamming the negotiations as a 'mistake of historic proportions' and giving Iran a 'sure path to nuclear weapons', therefore, seems unconvincing. Iran, in the wake of getting economic sanctions lifted, has compromised on its national security guarantee through nuclear weapons. On the other hand, Israel is going to gain national security with Iran shedding its nuclear weapon ambitions. The Israel card thus, has bleak chances of preventing the US from going ahead with the deal provisions.

Conclusion

The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action largely appears to be a deal which deserves the jubilation it is getting, with bleak chances of any of the parties stepping back in the near future. The barriers are



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minuscule and lesser when compared with the incentives for both the parties to continue on the path they have carved for themselves with hard work and courage. The deal seems ripe to face the litmus test.

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

ⁱ President Barak Obama, “President Obama Statement on Agreement with Iran” *SPEECH*, available at: <http://www.c-span.org/video/?316459-1/president-obama-delivers-statement-iran-nuclear-talks> , Accessed on 20 July, 2015.

ⁱⁱ Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, “Nuclear deal will not alter policies with ‘arrogant’ US”, at: <http://www.middleeasteye.net/news/khamenei-nuclear-deal-will-not-alter-policies-arrogant-us-1995139681> , Accessed on 20 July, 2015.

ⁱⁱⁱ President Rouhani, “Iran will honour its nuclear deal promises”, at: <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/04/rouhani-nuclear-deal-open-page-iran-150403150526090.html> , Accessed on 20 July, 2015.

^{iv} “The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action”, Date 14 July, 2015, at: http://eeas.europa.eu/statements-eeas/docs/iran_agreement/iran_joint-comprehensive-plan-of-action_en.pdf , Accessed on 20 July, 2015.

^v President Rouhani, “Nuclear deal 'political victory' for Iran”, at: <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/07/rouhani-nuclear-deal-political-victory-iran-150715100849846.html> , accessed on 20 July, 2015.

^{vi} President Barak Obama, “Obama on Iran: 'Every pathway to nuclear weapon is cut off’”, *SPEECH*, available at: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-33522258> ,accessed on 21 July, 2015.

^{vii} John F. Kerry, US Secretary of State, “No alternative to Iran nuclear deal”,

at: https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/kerry-puts-on-full-court-press-to-defend-iran-deal/2015/07/19/1f7904b7-ea0b-47d0-ace8-35c6cfdc28c4_story.html , accessed on 20 July, 2015.