



Is the Iran Nuclear Deal in the best interest of the U.S.?

October 6, 2015

President Obama and members of congress have been butting heads over the administration's proposed Iran deal. Generally speaking, the basic details of the deal have had little to no media coverage in comparison to the political mud-slinging fest between Republicans and Democrats. Both sides have been incessantly tossing the same rhetorical quips at one another since the deal was announced (e.g. Republicans claiming the Obama administration doesn't care about Israel or Democrats accusing Republicans of being paranoid war mongers, etc.). Yet, the grounds for such rhetoric are rarely brought into the spotlight. What is the Iran deal and what would it mean for middle eastern foreign policy and international relations with Iran in general?

To summarize, the deal is an agreement in which Iran would allow for the international regulation of their nuclear facilities and in exchange, the international community would lift the sanctions that have been put on Iran. The purported reason for this deal is that Iran will not be able to develop atomic weapons and they will be re-integrated into the larger world economy.

Iran has repeatedly claimed that their nuclear facilities have always been solely for energy-related purposes – a claim that the international community has, for the most part, never believed. This is undoubtedly due to Iran's propensity for "bad behaviour", such as antagonizing their neighbours, meddling in international affairs, supporting Shia militia groups and regularly calling for the destruction of Israel. Since the inception of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the nation has had sanctions but these sanctions were expanded in 1996 in response to their refusal to stop their uranium enrichment program. Since then, sanctions have effectively crippled the Iranian economy.

According to the BBC, Iran has lost "more than \$160 Billion in oil revenue since 2012" and if the deal is passed they stand "to receive more than \$100 Billion in assets frozen overseas, and will be able to resume selling oil on international markets and using the global financial system for trade".

Iran is by no means a "cooperative" member of the international community and is only now willing to begrudgingly flesh out a deal – but their sudden willingness to cooperate has been brought about by years of sustained economic damage.

Republicans claim that Obama's proposed deal does not do enough to prevent Iran from developing a nuclear weapon and that there are too many loopholes that the government of Iran could take advantage of.

They also claim that Iran is still engaged in the funding of international extremist groups and is actively trying to expand its reach in the region through groups such as the southern Shia militias in Iraq or Houthi rebels in Yemen.

Also, Iran's political rhetoric has not changed dramatically over the years either – their leaders still routinely call for the death of America and the destruction of Israel. To make matters worse, Iran's relations with many of its neighbours, especially Saudi Arabia and the Sunni gulf states, is at an all-time low, as is evidenced by their funding of the Shia Houthi rebels in Yemen who the Saudi military have been trying to eradicate. Beyond the particular aspects of the regulatory measures of the deal and Iran's recent activity – it should also be asked how the lifting of sanctions could possibly change their behaviour.

Isolating states from the international economy means that in some ways they have less of an incentive to play by the rules. Pariah states like Iran and North Korea have less to lose in comparison to economically integrated states when it comes to how they conduct foreign policy.

Conflict between two nations that are heavily dependent on each other's economic cooperation, such as the US and China, would be disastrous for both sides. Putting sanctions on a nation forces them to become more economically independent and such a state isn't concerned with losing the business of their neighbours when there is no business to be had – there is a reason the fascist nations of the early 20th century strived to achieve complete autarky. Lifting sanctions would allow for Iran to become part of the international market, which brings with it enormous benefits in trade, international investment, and economic growth.

According to an article on the positive relationship between trade and peace by the Cato Institute, "In the more than half a century since the end of World War II, no wars have been fought between two nations that were outwardly oriented in their trade policies."

Once Iran becomes part of the international economic framework, more of its businesses and income will be derived from external sources.

If Iran attempted to make a nuclear weapon today there would be little to "hold over their heads" other than military intervention. If Iran attempted to make a nuclear weapon a few years down the road after becoming integrated into the international economy, the threat of sanctions (and the subsequent loss of billions in annual revenue and the collapse in income for millions of Iranian citizens – who would be undoubtedly infuriated at their government's reckless behaviour) would be a strong incentivizing tool at the international community's disposal.

People tend to fight harder to not lose what they already have rather than fight for something they don't have – as they are aware of what it's like to not have the former. Letting Iran experience the enormous value of being part of the international market may be more effective at curbing their bad behaviour than any regulatory oversight ever would be.