



Three Ways the Obama Administration has Weakened America's Hand on the Iran Deal

RACHEL HOFF, MAX MEIZLISH | SEPTEMBER 10, 2015

Summary

- With the proposed Iran nuclear agreement, the White House has failed to ensure that the Islamic Republic will not develop nuclear weapons in the future.
- The Obama Administration undermined American leverage at the negotiation table with Iran by repeatedly going back on stated red lines.
- The White House and Senate Democrats are seeking to limit congressional review of the proposed nuclear agreement by either vetoing the critical resolution of disapproval or filibustering the vote altogether.
- Weak enforcement mechanisms will allow Iran to violate terms of the proposed agreement and ultimately continue development of its rogue nuclear weapons program.

Introduction

This week, the Obama Administration [secured](#) enough votes in Congress to guarantee that the proposed Iran nuclear deal will move forward. While the agreement does not have majority support in Congress, the minority voting for the deal is now large enough to overcome the resolution of disapproval—either by Senate filibuster or White House veto.

Policymakers from both sides of the aisle agree that the goal of U.S. Iran policy should be preventing the Islamic Republic from obtaining a nuclear weapon. There is also broad bipartisan agreement that diplomacy is the best way to reach that goal, especially compared with other alternatives such as military options.

While a negotiated agreement ensuring a non-nuclear Iran is the ideal policy solution, it is worth asking whether this particular deal will achieve that result. In many ways, the United States has weakened its own hand when it comes to the Iran nuclear deal. These failures raise concerns that this agreement falls short of the ultimate goal of preventing a nuclear Iran.

Changing the Standards for Success

Since it began negotiations with Iran two and a half years ago, the Obama Administration has consistently modified its own requirements for what would constitute a successful agreement. In doing so, the administration has weakened America's hand at the negotiating table and undermined the international community's collective commitment to prevent Iran from developing nuclear weapons.

As early as December 2013, both Secretary of State [John Kerry](#) and chief U.S. negotiator [Wendy Sherman](#) indicated that the dismantling of Iran's nuclear infrastructure would be a critical element of the nuclear negotiations. According to Sherman, any negotiated agreement would require "a lot of dismantling of their infrastructure." However, the proposed agreement does not require Iran to dismantle any of its centrifuges or permanently close any of its disclosed nuclear facilities. Rather, it allows Iran to continue enriching uranium (albeit at lower levels) with over 5,000 of its more than 18,000 current centrifuges. Furthermore, just ten years after the agreement's implementation, Iran will be allowed to utilize its [remaining](#) advanced centrifuges.

Changing the standards for successful agreement after talks begin inherently weakens a party's position at the negotiating table. While compromise is necessary in any negotiation, red lines must be red lines—and dismantling Iran's nuclear infrastructure should have been non-negotiable. Changing the standards for successful negotiations demonstrates one thing that has long been clear: the Obama Administration thought any deal would be better than no deal.

Blocking Congressional Review

Despite opposition from a majority of members of Congress, the Iran deal will go forward. This was all but guaranteed from the beginning, as President Obama [promised](#) to "veto any legislation that prevents the successful implementation of this deal" when he first announced the agreement this summer. Now, with 42 Senate Democrats supporting the Iran deal, there are enough votes to stage a filibuster so the resolution of disapproval never reaches the president's desk.

Either option would undermine an important aspect of pursuing smart policy: congressional review. The Iran deal contains many complex details that deserve thorough, thoughtful debate and consideration. To this effect, Congress [passed](#) the [Iran Nuclear Agreement Review Act](#) earlier this year with overwhelming bipartisan support. The legislation passed 98-1 in the Senate and 400-25 in the House. Leaders of both parties supported this effort to give Congress a chance to weigh in on behalf of the American people. Senate Democrats may now reverse course, rejecting their own request to have a say and effectively denying the American people a voice. Notably, recent [polls](#) show a majority of Americans want Congress to reject the Iran deal.

If Senate Democrats choose not to filibuster and let the resolution of disapproval come to a vote, it will pass—as four Democrats have announced they will join the 54 Republicans in voting for the resolution. The White House fears that both its political capital and overall image will be tarnished if President Obama has to issue a veto, despite having already [secured](#) the votes necessary to sustain it. Nevertheless, President Obama's potentially embarrassing and politically inconvenient predicament should not come at the expense of elected representatives having the opportunity to vote on behalf of the American people.

Whether through a veto or filibuster, the White House and Senate Democrats may undermine the role of Congress in one of the most defining moments in American foreign policy. Such disregard for congressional review not only renders the American people voiceless but also prevents the United States from achieving the best possible deal.

Undermining the Enforcement Regime

Under the deal, enforcement will be the last line of defense against a nuclear Iran. Yet, a weak inspection and verification regime is already emerging. Reports of [side deals](#) to the Iran nuclear agreement reveal an ineffectual

inspection process. Rather than allowing the United States to independently verify compliance, these side deals would have America rely on international inspectors and, in some cases, Iran itself for verification. The Iranians will be allowed to self-inspect the infamous [Parchin](#) military complex outside of Tehran.

These parameters clearly violate the Obama Administration's [promise](#) that any Iran deal would include "anywhere, anytime" inspections. When announcing the final agreement, the president himself [said](#) it "contains the most comprehensive inspection and verification regime ever negotiated to monitor a nuclear program."

A negotiated agreement is only as good as its enforcement mechanism. When a weak inspection and verification regime is built into the deal itself (or side deals, for that matter) it renders the entire agreement impotent.

While supporters of the agreement argue that rejecting the deal would weaken American power by ceding influence over the inspections regime, it is actually clear that the United States does not have a leadership role in enforcing the deal. This administration has already [agreed](#) to Iran's demand that no American inspectors will be permitted to enter Iranian nuclear sites.

Conclusion

By changing the standards for success, blocking congressional review, and undermining the enforcement regime, the Obama Administration has weakened America's hand on the Iran deal. As a result, the world is no closer to the ultimate policy goal: a non-nuclear Iran.