

by [Stephen Zunes](#) April 5, 2015

[Hardliners on All Sides Undermining Iran's Nuclear Talks](#)

Reaching an interim nuclear deal with Iran would have been difficult enough even without hardliners in both Iran and the United States seeking to undermine them.

Many U.S. critics of the draft treaty deny this, however, naively assuming Iran is as weak as it was several decades ago, when foreigner powers could impose policies and even replace governments at will. Not only have such imperialist intrigues become more difficult overall, the reality is that Iran has, for better or worse, reemerged as a major regional power—as it has been for much of the past two and half millennia.



If President Obama and other Western leaders could dictate terms of a nuclear agreement, they certainly would. They realize they cannot, however. Republican opponents of the talks naively want a return to Bush administration policy of threats and ultimatums, during which Iran's nuclear program dramatically expanded. By contrast, thanks to the Obama administration's insistence on negotiations, the expansion of Iran's nuclear capabilities has been halted and even rolled back.

Anyone familiar with the process of negotiations is that, in order to get the other party to do what you want them to do, there must be incentives as well as punishment. Imposing harsh sanctions without the hope of partial relief short of total capitulation is simply unrealistic, especially against a country with a strong a sense of nationalism and a history of humiliation by the West. There must be ways for both sides to declare victory. It now appears that, despite Republican efforts to sabotage such an agreement, this has been achieved.

Though some analysts have stressed the role of the so-called "Israel Lobby" in encouraging Congressional hostility, there is little new in GOP opposition to the administration's efforts. The Republican right has consistently opposed arms control treaties, including SALT II, the Nuclear Freeze, the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, the Small Arms Treaty, and the ban on weapons outer space. There's no reason they should act differently in this case.

Meanwhile, Iranian negotiators have been faced with pressure from their own hardliners, who have skillfully manipulated Iranians' strong sense of nationalism in pointing at Western double standards in trying to limit their nuclear program.



Iran nuclear discussions in Switzerland on March 20. (Photo: US Mission Geneva-Eric Bridiers/flickr/cc)

Up until the 1970s, the U.S. government encouraged American companies to sell nuclear reactors to the Iranian government, then under the dictatorial rule of the Shah, despite fears that his megalomania would lead him to divert the technology for military purposes. Despite the subsequent rise of an anti-American regime in that country, the United States is still obligated under the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty to allow signatory states in good standing to have access to peaceful nuclear technology, including nuclear reprocessing, as long as there are sufficient safeguards to prevent weaponization.

The Obama administration justified strict sanctions on Iran on the grounds the country was violating a series of UN Security Council resolutions demanding special restrictions on Iran's nuclear programs. The Iranians note, however, that not only has the United States blocked enforcement of UN Security Council resolutions targeting Israel, Pakistan, and India—which, unlike Iran, already have nuclear weapons—the United States provides all three countries with nuclear-capable jet fighters and has recently expanded its nuclear cooperation with India.

Iran has joined the vast majority of Middle Eastern countries in calling for the establishment of a nuclear weapons-free zone for the entire Middle East—similar to the NWFZs already established in Africa, Latin America, Southeast Asia, Central Asia, Antarctica, and the South Pacific—in which all nations of the region would be required to give up their nuclear weapons and weapons programs and open up to strict international inspections and forbid foreign countries from bringing nuclear weapons into the region. The Obama administration has failed to support such a proposal, however, instead singling out Iran.

Iranians also point out that the United States, Russia, Great Britain, China, and France, which—along with Germany—are leading the negotiations seeking to restrict its nuclear program are themselves in violation of the Nonproliferation Treaty, article VI of which obligates them “to pursue negotiations in good faith on effective measures relating to cessation of the nuclear arms race at an early date and to nuclear disarmament, and on a treaty on general and complete disarmament under strict and effective international control.”

It is important to remember that the only country to actually use nuclear weapons in combat is the United States, in the 1945 bombings of two Japanese cities, a decision most American political leaders still defend to this day.

Ultimately, the most successful means of curbing the threat of nuclear proliferation in the Middle East is to establish such a law-based region-wide program for disarmament, in which all countries – regardless of their relations with the United States – must be a part.

And, ultimately, the only way to make the world completely safe from the threat of nuclear weapons is for the establishment of a nuclear-free planet, for which the United States – as the largest nuclear power – must take the lead.

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[Image credit: Mohammadali F.](#)