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# It's Time for Republicans to Abandon Their Short-Sighted Approach to Iran

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Republican intransigence over the Iran nuclear deal has proven to be futile, with Democratic senators successfully filibustering a Republican motion of disapproval last Thursday. However, this has not prevented the GOP from pursuing other inventive ways to derail this landmark diplomatic achievement. Sadly, the main consequence of dead-end Republican revanchism over the Iran deal is that it has reinforced highly insular mindsets -- characterized by an "us-against-them" mentality -- with respect to Iran.

In no circumstance has black and white moralizing ever given an accurate depiction of reality, least of all in regards to modern day Iran -- a society far more complex and pluralistic than what many Westerners believe. By constantly shouting crude slogans denigrating Iran and spinning a spider's web of misinformation about the country, Iran deal obstructionists are in fact acting in ways wholly counterproductive to the cause of international peace and security.

I am confident that the overwhelming number of opponents of the Iran deal do not know Iran. I am ready to publicly debate any U.S. presidential candidate or Republican member of Congress who believes in imposing additional sanctions or launching military strikes against Iran in lieu of this agreement. In short, the Iran deal will have positive reverberations in three major areas: on Iran's nuclear program itself, on non-proliferation in the Middle East and on the regional and global geostrategic landscape.

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The Iran nuclear deal represents the most comprehensive agreement ever negotiated on non-proliferation. It contains the most intrusive transparency and verification mechanisms in the history of the nuclear non-proliferation treaty. It shuts down all "pathways" to possible weaponization through overt or covert means, even as, is frequently overlooked, the U.S. intelligence community reported in 2007 and 2011 that it had no evidence that Iran was pursuing a nuclear weapons program or that it had even made the decision to pursue one.

Contrary to claims that Iran's nuclear activities will fuel a regional arms race, this deal is a positive step towards a Middle East free of weapons of mass destruction. It sets a new standard for non-proliferation which goes to strengthening the current scope of the NPT. If the principles of this agreement are implemented by other Middle Eastern countries, the initiative of a Middle East Nuclear Weapons Free Zone first proposed by Iran in 1974 would be realized.

The implementation of the Iran deal also bodes well for broader cooperation between Iran, the United States and other powers on regional issues. There are many mutual security interests between Iran and the United States, with perhaps the most important being their joint goal to eliminate the threat posed by terrorist groups like the Islamic State, Al Qaeda and Jabhat al-Nusra. Detractors of such engagement with Iran, whether in the United States or in Israel, will be quick to point out that Iran has supported groups on the State Department's list of terrorist organizations, namely Hezbollah and Hamas. These naysayers should be cognizant of the fact that Iranian support for these groups -- which significantly are among the few movements in the Arab world to win democratic elections -- pales in comparison to support emanating from U.S. allies in the Persian Gulf to far more virulent groups like ISIS, Al Qaeda, Jabhat al-Nusra, Ahrar al-Sham and Boko Haram.


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Congressional Republicans frequently argue that more sanctions should be imposed against Iran. What they seemingly forget is that Iran has been under such pressure, economic and otherwise, for the past 36 years. Such sanctions reached their zenith in the past several years, but were still not effective in achieving any of the objectives of the United States. Iran responded to the unprecedented unilateral and multilateral sanctions regime imposed on it by expanding its nuclear program, increasing its centrifuges from 200 to 22,000, raising the level it enriched at from 3.67 percent to 20 percent and amassing an 8,000 kg stockpile of enriched uranium. The fruits of engaging Iran and reaching a deal, on the other hand, have resulted in Iran cutting the number of its centrifuges by more than two thirds, limiting its enrichment to 3.67 percent and eliminating 97 percent of its stockpile of enriched uranium.

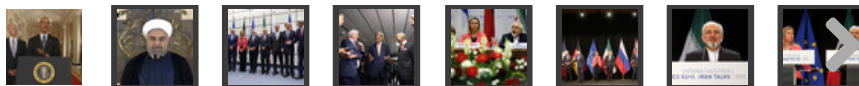
Despite all the different forms of pressure it has come under, Iran has become the most stable and influential power in the Middle East, all while U.S. allies that have been propped up economically and militarily have become more vulnerable than they have ever been. This proves that the coercive approach to Iran has never worked and that the idea of reapplying sanctions on Iran should become obsolete.

Instead of relying on empty rhetoric to excite a handful of donors, Republican members of Congress should be more far sighted and enlightened on the Iran deal. They should abandon efforts to sabotage the agreement and acknowledge that security -- particularly on this issue -- is better achieved through diplomacy than through militarism.

 *Historic Iran Deal*



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