

Middle East Notes
Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns
September 3, 2015



Please note: Opinions expressed in the following articles do not necessarily reflect the opinion of the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns.

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The six featured articles and links to five other articles in this issue of Middle East Notes focus on the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, otherwise known as the Iran nuclear agreement. Senate and House members will vote later this month either to support the position of President Obama, leaders and people of most of the nations of the world, and the advice of most nuclear scientists, OR to support the position of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, his government, and the lobbying efforts of the American Israeli Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC).

Commentary: The Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns strongly supports the Iran nuclear agreement and has worked closely with a number of other organizations, such as [Pax Christi](#), to promote the deal in Congress. The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, many Christian churches and groups, Jewish and Muslim communities, and almost all the nations of the world support this agreement.

Congress has until September 17 to vote on a “resolution of disapproval,” which would eliminate the president’s ability to waive all sanctions on Iran imposed by the U.S. Congress, a key component of the agreement. President Obama has promised to veto the disapproval resolution if it passes; with the announcement on Sept. 2 by Sen. Barbara Mikulski (D-MD) that she supports the Iran deal, 34 senators will vote to sustain his veto. Therefore, the agreement is presumably secured, though its future would be safer if the expected disapproval resolution fails to pass in the first place (which means 41 senators must vote against it.)

- Bishop Oscar Cantu, chair of the International Justice and Peace committee of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), sent a letter to every member of Congress encouraging them to support the Iran nuclear agreement.
- Jonathan Weisman and Alexander Burns note in the New York Times that the vitriol surrounding the accord between Iran and six world powers has become so intense that Jewish leaders now speak openly of long-term damage to Jewish organizations, and possibly to U.S.-Israeli relations.
- The Friends Committee on National Legislation (FCNL) has published the letter of 53 Christian leaders urging Congress to vote for diplomatic agreement with Iran. The letter states that there is no question we are all better off with this deal than without it, and that rejection of this deal would be a rejection of the historic progress our diplomats have made to make this world a safer place.
- Nahal Toosi writes in Politico that faith-based groups are pushing a coordinated campaign in support of the nuclear agreement with Iran. Many of these groups are very concerned about the well-funded push by opponents of the deal who have intensified their lobbying of lawmakers.
- Akiva Eldar emphasizes in Al Monitor that following its deal with world powers, Iran seems to be opening up to the world, including to its regional nemesis, Saudi Arabia, while Israel stands alone in the world in its opposition to the agreement.
- Karen DeYoung in a Washington Post article reports that three dozen retired generals and admirals released an open letter in August supporting the Iran nuclear deal and urging Congress to do the same. The letter called the agreement “the most effective means currently available to prevent Iran from obtaining nuclear weapons.”
- Links to additional articles and resources
- Book review: *Tell me lies: Propaganda and media distortion in the attack on Iraq*, written by David Miller

1) Bishop Cantú welcomes P5+1/Iran nuclear agreement

July 14, 2015

Dear Senator/Representative:

As Chair of the Committee on International Justice and Peace of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, I welcome the momentous agreement just reached between the United States and its P5+1 partners with Iran. This significant achievement aims to curb Iran's development of nuclear weapons while allowing them to use nuclear energy for peaceful purposes.

More importantly, this agreement signals progress in global nuclear non-proliferation. In January 2015, Pope Francis said, "I express my hope that a definitive agreement may soon be reached between Iran and the P5+1 Group regarding the use of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes, and my appreciation of the efforts already made in this regard."

Since 2007, our Committee on International Justice and Peace, reflecting the longstanding position of the Holy See, has urged our nation to pursue diplomacy to ensure Iran's compliance with its obligations under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. For years, we have supported dialogue and a negotiated resolution of the conflict in collaboration with international partners.

It is no small achievement that the United States, the United Kingdom, the Russian Federation, China, Germany and France have reached this agreement with Iran. We hope that the full implementation of the agreement will gradually foster an environment in which all parties build mutual confidence and trust, so that progress will be made toward greater stability and dialogue in the region. In that spirit, our Committee will continue to urge Congress to endorse the result of these intense negotiations because the alternative leads toward armed conflict, an outcome of profound concern to the Church. ...

2) Iran deal opens a vitriolic divide among American Jews

Jonathan Weisman and Alexander Burns, New York Times, August 28, 2015

... "I've been accused of being treacherous, treasonous, even disloyal to the United States," said Representative Nita M. Lowey of New York, one of a half-dozen Jewish Democrats who have come out against the Iran deal. ...

In an open letter this week, Ms. Lowey, Eliot L. Engel and Steve Israel, all Jewish Democrats from New York opposed to the deal, wrote, "No matter where you stand on the Iran deal, comparisons to the Holocaust, the darkest chapter in human history; questioning the credentials of longstanding advocates for Israel; and accusations of dual loyalty are inappropriate." ...

Beyond the name-calling is real concern about geopolitical implications. With momentum on Mr. Obama's side, the chances that Congress can scuttle the deal appear remote, and Mr. Engel, the ranking Democrat on the House Foreign Affairs Committee, said leaders in both parties needed to look at new security policies for Israel and the Middle East if the accord goes into force.

The agreement is likely to foreclose Iran's path to a nuclear weapon for at least 15 years, even many opponents say, but the lifting of economic sanctions will give Iran more cash that it could use to destabilize the region, support terrorism and assert its authority. "Whether this passes, whether this fails, we always have to be looking at next steps," Mr. Engel said. "And there has to be a rapprochement between the United States and Israel. There just has to be." ...

3) 53 Christian leaders urge Congress to vote for diplomatic agreement with Iran

Friends Committee on National Legislation (FCNL), August 24, 2015

As Christian leaders in the United States, we are writing to urge you to vote in support of the negotiated settlement over Iran's nuclear program. We live by God's call to "seek peace and pursue it" (Psalm 34:14). After decades of hostility, the international community has crafted a nuclear accord to limit Iran's nuclear program and prevent the United States from moving closer toward another devastating war in the Middle East. ...

This is a moment to remember the wisdom of Jesus who proclaimed from the Sermon on the Mount, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God" (Matthew 5:9). This agreement moves us further away from the possibility of war and another nuclear-armed nation. There is no question we are all better off with this deal than without it. Rejection of this deal would be a rejection of the historic progress our diplomats have made to make this world a safer place.

The stakes on this matter have never been higher. That is why more than 40 national organizations, including more than a dozen faith-based groups, wrote a letter earlier this year urging lawmakers to vote in support of this deal. ...

4) Calling in the God squad to save the Iran deal

Nahal Toosi, Politico, August 17, 2015

The White House campaign to save the Iran nuclear deal is getting a boost from the God squad. Faith-based groups, many of them increasingly nervous about the well-funded push by opponents of the deal, are intensifying their lobbying of lawmakers ahead of an important congressional vote on the agreement. ...

The campaign is led largely by Catholic and Quaker groups, such as the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops and the Friends Committee on National Legislation, and it reflects many of the organizations' traditional anti-war stances. It also comes as themes of anti-Semitism and Islamism have risen in the debate. ...

The campaign against the deal is being led by groups such as the American Israel Public Affairs Committee and the Republican Jewish Coalition, and as much as \$40 million or more is believed will be spent by the opposition on ads and other efforts, including sponsoring town halls to confront wobbly lawmakers. ...

The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops has long supported the deal; the Vatican also has spoken favorably of the agreement, which was negotiated by the United States, Iran and five other countries. An official with the bishops' conference said it wouldn't be surprising if Pope Francis, who is scheduled to visit Washington in September just days after the congressional vote on the deal, will mention it during his speech on Capitol Hill. ...

5) Israel increasingly isolated as Iran opens up to region

Akiva Eldar, Al Monitor, August 18, 2015

If U.S. President Barack Obama manages to overcome congressional opposition to the Iran deal, Israel will go down in history as the only country in the world that tried to rescind the international agreement endorsed unanimously by the UN Security Council.

If the deal's opponents get the upper hand, Israel will bear sole responsibility for a conflict between the United States and Iran and for dealing a serious blow to the prestige of the world's leading superpower, a country vital to Israel's security. ...

Saudi Arabia isn't just sitting in the gallery watching Netanyahu and Obama descend into fisticuffs. Riyadh is also sending conciliatory messages to Iran. At an Aug. 10 press conference in Berlin, Saudi Foreign Minister Adel al-Jubeir said his country would be prepared to establish diplomatic relations with Iran provided Tehran stop intervening in internal Saudi affairs. The Saudi statesman said absolutely nothing about the need to rescind the nuclear agreement with Iran. ...

6) Dozens of retired generals, admirals back Iran nuclear deal

Karen DeYoung, Washington Post, August 11, 2015

Three dozen retired generals and admirals released an open letter Tuesday (August 11) supporting the Iran nuclear deal and urging Congress to do the same. Calling the agreement "the most effective means currently available to prevent Iran from obtaining nuclear weapons," the letter said that gaining international support for military action against Iran, should that ever become necessary, "would only be possible if we have first given the diplomatic path a chance." ...

Other articles on the Iranian nuclear agreement:

- [Former senators and representatives urge Congress to support the Iran nuclear agreement, WinWithoutWar, August, 31, 2015](#)
- [Activists in Iran pen open letter to Americans on nuclear deal, Nick Gass, Politico, August 31, 2015](#)
- [Ugly summer for U.S. Jews as Iran debate morphs into war, Peter Joseph and Charles Bronfman and Susie Gelman, Ha'aretz, August 23, 2015](#)
- [340 rabbis urge Congress to support nuclear deal with Iran, Ameinu, August 16, 2015](#)
- [Hundreds of U.S. rabbis sign petition against Iran deal, JTA, Ha'aretz, August 25, 2015](#)

Other articles of interest:

- ["Economy of Occupation": Cornerstone, a publication of Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Theology Center, Summer 2015](#)
- [Petition pushes for end to Israel's Gaza blockade, Megan O'Toole, Al Jazeera News, August 25, 2015](#)
- [It's time to admit it. Israeli policy is what it is: Apartheid, Bradley Burston, Ha'aretz, August 17, 2015](#)
- ["Impact of the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions Movement" Statement by Matthew Duss - President, Foundation for Middle East Peace, Washington, D.C., presented to Subcommittee on National Security, Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, July 28, 2015](#)
- [Palestinian boycott activists salute the 1,000+ Black activists, scholars and artists for endorsing BDS for Palestinian rights, BDS Movement, August 25, 2015](#)
- [Churches for Middle East Peace Bulletin, August 28, 2015 - West Bank tensions rise; Gaza's public institutions strike](#)
- [Churches for Middle East Peace Bulletin, August 14, 2015 - As tensions rise, Israeli extremist supports burning churches](#)
- [Former Shin Bet head: Jewish terror slow-growing "cancer," Akiva Eldar, Al Monitor, August 11, 2015](#)
- [Major Islamic climate change declaration released, GreenFaith, August 18, 2015](#)

Book review: [Tell me lies: Propaganda and media distortion in the attack on Iraq, David Miller, Pluto Press](#), reviewed by Paul de Rooij, Washington Report on Middle East Affairs, June 2004, page 88

The 2003 U.S. war on Iraq was accompanied by one of the largest propaganda campaigns in history—in which the American and British publics were subjected to a barrage of misinformation, lies and outright attempts to induce fear. Opposition to the war in Europe and elsewhere required a massive campaign to cow people into silence while George Bush and Tony Blair pursued their elective war.

The implications of this propaganda campaign range much wider than just the policy consequences in the Middle East, extending to the survival of Western democracy and the nature of our societies. *Tell Me Lies*, David Miller's very important book, helps us understand what we were subjected to, how this was done, how this has evolved in recent history, and what media alternatives are available to counter this trend. A multifaceted examination of this phenomenon, Miller's book is a welcome addition to an expanding literature on this topic. ...

The implication is that television—the main source of information—is not providing the general population with basic contextual information. Propaganda campaigns are effective because they target a population with poor general knowledge of political issues. Because they don't have key contextual information, most people don't realize they are being manipulated. One disturbing implication of these findings is that propagandists may seek to keep this general level of knowledge very low so that media deceptions will be effective. ...

The answer to the mass media deception campaigns is not to switch off the TV or turn to light entertainment. For the implications of inaction are far too stark—wars, the misery of millions of people, and democracy itself are involved. The only alternative is actively to confront propaganda and seek out alternative information. ...