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Trita Parsi. *Losing an Enemy: Obama, Iran, and the Triumph of Diplomacy.* New Haven: Yale University Press: 2017. ISBN: 9780300218169 (hardcover, \$32.50).

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Introduction by Robert Jervis, Columbia University

With the Trump administration debating whether to certify that Iran is complying with the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), colloquially known as the Iran Nuclear Deal, this Roundtable on the tortuous path to its conclusion is timely. Our reviewers bring special expertise to the task. Robert Gallucci was the lead negotiator for the 1994 Agreed Framework that sought to end the North Korean nuclear weapons program and is a longtime student and practitioner of nonproliferation policy; Richard Nephew served in both the Bush and the Obama administrations, working on sanctions policies, and is cited in Parsi's book; Gary Sick was on the Carter National Security Council staff and has continued to study Iran ever since; Mike Singh worked on Iran policy in the Bush administration. From their biographies, one can guess that they will not agree in their evaluations of Parsi's history of the negotiations with Iran.

They do broadly agree in their views of its strengths and weaknesses, however. Among the former are its being the fullest treatment of the negotiations, especially under Obama, that we are likely to get for a considerable length of time. Parsi draws freely on his access to American and, especially, Iranian participants. Indeed, his view from 'the other side of the hill' makes this contribution unique. He also writes well and tells a gripping story with many human details. You will not be bored, I guarantee you.

All agree on some striking weaknesses as well. The book's treatment of the Bush administration is not only unsympathetic, but thin, if not confused. While the narrative is often detailed, even the reviewers who evaluate the study more favorably than Singh do not dissent from his judgment that Parsi "takes a black-and-white view of the participants in the events he describes." This gives the story some of its drive, and in addition to the unsurprising criticisms of leading Republicans, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, and the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), he takes the French to the woodshed, which few Americans are likely to dispute.¹ The reviewers also agree that Parsi's endorsement of the Iranian argument that economic sanctions retarded rather than contributed to reaching an agreement is almost certainly incorrect. On a personal note, I might add that at the time I thought the Congressional insistence on tighter sanctions was a tactical error, but now believe that this probably was necessary in order to reach an agreement. In any event, I agree with the reviewers that Parsi's treatment of the sanctions issue is excessively dismissive.

Although faulting President Barack Obama and Secretary of State Kerry on occasion, Parsi gives them great credit for their commitment to pursuing negotiations to a successful end. Critics argue that the administration's commitment removed powerful bargaining cards from its hand and led to a less favorable agreement than would have been possible under a more skeptical administration. Standard bargaining theory endorses this position, but it should also be noted that perhaps only an administration so averse to letting the negotiations fail could have mustered the effort necessary to overcome all the obstacles, domestic and foreign, in its path.

Although they see similar strengths and weaknesses, the reviewers weigh them differently. Gallucci, Nephew, and Sick are more favorable than Singh, and I think the latter's explanation is correct that "ultimately, supporters of the JCPOA will cheer Parsi's work and opponents will be riled by it." Scholars who believe that

¹ For the self-serving account by the French Foreign Minister, see Laurent Fabius, "Inside the Iran Deal: A French Perspective," *Washington Quarterly* 39 (Fall 2016): 7-38.

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our descriptions of and explanations for what has happened can be cleanly separated from our policy preferences may be slow to accept this reality, but I think it provides yet another bit of evidence that the study of international politics, past or present, is inevitably political.

Parsi provides a spirited reply, reiterating and bolstering his arguments that far from helping produce an agreement, American sanctions had little impact on Iran's nuclear program or bargaining position and that an agreement on terms that would have been better for the West was achievable in earlier years before sanctions were applied. The main effect of sanctions, he avers, was to show Washington that economic coercion would not produce the desired effect and that it had to recognize Iran's enrichment program in order to start negotiations, rather than withholding this card to play at the very end.

These debates are not likely to be settled in the near future, but Parsi's book and this Roundtable move us several steps forward.

Participants:

Trita Parsi is an award winning author and the 2010 recipient of the Grawemeyer Award for Ideas Improving World Order. He is the founder and president of the National Iranian American Council and an expert on U.S.-Iranian relations, Iranian foreign politics, and the geopolitics of the Middle East. He received his Ph.D. from Johns Hopkins' School for Advanced International Studies. He is the author of *Treacherous Alliance: The Secret Dealings of Iran, Israel and the United States* (Yale University Press 2007), the silver medal winner of the 2008 Arthur Ross Book Award from the Council on Foreign Relations; *A Single Roll of the Dice - Obama's Diplomacy with Iran* (Yale University Press), which was selected by *Foreign Affairs* journal as the Best Book of 2012 on the Middle East; and *Losing an Enemy: Obama, Iran and the Triumph of Diplomacy* (Yale University Press, 2017). His articles on Middle East affairs have been published in the *Washington Post*, *Wall Street Journal*, *New York Times*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Financial Times*, *Jane's Intelligence Review*, the *Nation*, *The American Conservative*, the *Jerusalem Post*, *The Forward*, and others. He is a frequent guest on CNN, PBS's NewsHour with Jim Lehrer, NPR, the BBC, and Al Jazeera.

Robert Jervis is Adlai E. Stevenson Professor of International Politics at Columbia University. His most recent book is *How Statesmen Think* (Princeton University Press, 2017). He was President of the American Political Science Association in 2000-2001 and has received career achievement awards from the International Society of Political Psychology and ISA's Security Studies Section. In 2006 he received the National Academy of Science's tri-annual award for behavioral sciences contributions to avoiding nuclear war.

Robert L. Gallucci is a Distinguished Professor in the Practice of Diplomacy at Georgetown University's Walsh School of Foreign Service, and the Chairman of the US-Korea Institute at Johns Hopkins University's School of Advanced International Studies. From 2015 until 2016 he was Director of the Kluge Center at the Library of Congress, and from 2009 until 2014 he was President of the MacArthur Foundation. During the previous thirteen years, Gallucci was the Dean of the SFS at Georgetown University. This followed more than twenty years of service with the U.S. government and international organizations where he held positions as Ambassador at Large, Assistant Secretary of State for Political-Military Affairs, Deputy Executive Chairman of the UN Commission charged with the disarmament of Iraq after the first Gulf War, and Deputy Director General of the Multinational Force and Observers—the Sinai peacekeeping force. He holds a BA from Stony Brook University and an MA and Ph.D. from Brandeis University. He is the author of *Neither Peace nor*

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Honor: *The Politics of American Military Policy in Viet-Nam* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975) and co-author of *Going Critical: The First North Korean Nuclear Crisis* (Brookings Institution Press, 2005).

Richard Nephew is Senior Research Scholar at the Center on Global Energy Policy, Columbia University. He is the former Deputy Coordinator of Sanctions Policy at the U.S. Department of State, in which capacity he also served as the lead sanctions negotiator with Iran from 2013-2014. Prior to that, he had multiple positions at the U.S. Departments of State and Energy, as well as served as the Director for Iran at the National Security Council from 2011-2013.

Gary Sick teaches U.S. foreign policy in the Persian Gulf at Columbia University and runs the Gulf2000 internet project.

Michael Singh is Lane-Swig Senior Fellow and Managing Director of The Washington Institute for Near East Policy. He worked on Iran policy at the US National Security Council from 2005-2008.

Review by Robert L. Gallucci, Georgetown University

Trita Parsi has written a good book. For those who are not Middle-East specialists, the great strength of his treatment of the Iran nuclear deal is in his political analysis of the regional context and motivation of key players, Iran, Israel, and Saudi Arabia, and of the internal politics in Iran. His treatment of the Iranian elections, particularly those of 2013, captures the complexity of the contest in Tehran. Everyone should appreciate the insider look at a complicated and protracted diplomatic engagement, and the detailed characterization of American domestic politics in action. Parsi truly had excellent access to Iranian and American diplomats and political leaders, and he made good use of it.

Before taking on my assignment—a view through the lens of the North Korea nuclear issue—a few general comments are in order. Frist, the early narrative in the book is strangely hard to follow. The author must have had his reasons for not providing an historical background to the negotiations ordered by time, but he still could have been more generous with the dates of events so that the reader could better understand the flow of things.

Second, Parsi's particular perspective of unrelenting criticism of Israel's position as represented by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, of the Republicans in Congress, and of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) in opposition to the deal, and, *en passant*, of the French, (which was admittedly enjoyable as that always is), is weakened by his failure to give fair treatment to the deal's failings. He may be right, that, "The primary reason that the president and his allies won the battle on Capitol Hill was the strength of the deal itself" (346). But it was not, after all, perfect. Even if one stipulates—and I would—that, *on balance*, this negotiated outcome was far better than any plausibly anticipated alternative, the critics did not have to be either stupid or dishonest in their opposition; that is, there were reasonable grounds for opposition. Parsi does recite some of the criticisms of the deal, but too quickly deploys the counterarguments so that the objections may be dismissed as meritless. Not all would agree, even now.

To continue, there is a whole chapter entitled "The 'Concession.'" This to describe how the U.S. came to concede that Iran could continue to enrich uranium, though without acknowledging its *right* to enrich it. Parsi presents the American reluctance to make that concession as some sort of atavistic stubbornness, in light of Iran's absolute need to have enrichment proceed on its territory as a matter of sovereignty and scientific development. He does not explain that the precedent of accepting and so legitimizing a national enrichment program in a country that was a party to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) but nevertheless had a long-standing secret program to develop nuclear weapons, and acquired the enrichment technology in question secretly from a rogue Pakistani supplier, was a precedent the U.S. should not have been enthusiastic about setting. In fact, there is a many decades-long U.S. policy of selectively opposing the spread of national enrichment facilities, even to NPT parties in good standing where there is no evidence of secret nuclear weapons development.

Similarly, the inspection regime in the deal is short of the 'anyplace, anytime' standard that nuclear inspectors favor. The Secretary of Energy was correct in his defense of the language that Parsi repeats, about the difficulty of cleaning up a nuclear site in the three weeks that the deal would permit an inspection to be delayed, but that is only if the site contained radionuclides. If we are talking about a secret centrifuge cascade that had not gone 'hot' just yet, the failure to have prompt access could make all the difference. Those of us who did inspections in Iraq after the first Gulf war are deeply steeped in the many ways in which the failure to achieve immediate access can be used to support a bogus claim of innocence at a nuclear weapons-related

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facility. Then there is the matter of access to military sites, a potentially critical point over which Iranians and Americans seemed to differ when they separately addressed the issue after the deal was completed. This issue may not be settled until there is a disputed case

More generally, there is the question of just how important an Iranian nuclear weapons program was, or should have been, to Israel, Saudi Arabia, and the United States. The ‘news’ in Parsi’s analysis, the assertion that is contrary to conventional wisdom, is that an Iran with nuclear weapons was not the principal concern of the Israelis or Saudis: it was the legitimization of Iran as a potential hegemon in the region, unopposed, if not supported, by the U.S. undercutting the position of existing American de facto allies. I do not know if I accept that, but I certainly think that the prospect of Iran as a nuclear power in the Middle East is and was chilling to the leadership in Washington, across administrations. It was a driver of policy. But Parsi’s book does not really treat that concern. There is no discussion of the Iranian program, its secrecy and robust character, or the durability of Iran’s commitment to achieving nuclear weapons status, rather than simply creating the option.

Parsi writes, “Secretary Kerry has already suggested that the Iran talks can be used as a ‘model’ for how to deal with North Korea.” (361) Perhaps. Certainly there is a view that North Korea violated its commitments in the Agreed Framework with secret work on uranium enrichment, using centrifuge equipment and technology secretly acquired from Pakistan, as Iran did. The U.S. has had periods of diplomatic engagement aimed at restraining the North’s nuclear-weapons program, followed by attempts at containment, supported by national and international sanctions aimed at driving the country to the negotiating table in the right frame of mind. A similar course was followed with Iran. The United States does not have a free hand in dealing with North Korea since the security of its ally, the Republic of Korea, is vulnerable to the North Korean threat, not unlike the concern the U.S. has for Israel’s security in the face of the Iranian threat. And perhaps most telling, advocates of negotiations with the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) often frame the choice as one between war and peace, that there is no alternative to stopping the advance of the North’s nuclear program other than military action, which can be expected to ignite a second Korean War. It was a similar framing of the decision to engage Iran that was thought so effective in defending that deal. And finally, there are those in Congress, the Trump Administration, and the broader Washington policy community who believe that what is and always has been needed are even tougher sanctions on North Korea rather than negotiations, just as there were and are advocates of a policy of pressure on Iran in Israel and among Republicans in the Congress, who were opposed by those in the Obama Administration who were pursuing negotiations then and who favor preservation of the deal now

And there are obvious differences. To the best of the United States’ knowledge, Iran never produced or had possession of the fissile material necessary to build a nuclear weapon, while North Korea has the plutonium and probably the highly enriched uranium to construct between ten and twenty weapons, is still producing more, and has already tested five devices. The parallel here may best be between stopping or limiting the North’s capability to deliver a nuclear weapon with an ICBM to American soil, and stopping Iran from producing fissile material and its first nuclear weapon. As Parsi argues, Iran’s ballistic missiles only mattered because of its nuclear weapons program. And now, for North Korea, its nuclear weapons program only matters for some in the U.S. because of its ballistic missile program, which makes the U.S. vulnerable; the Bush and Obama administrations arguably already accepted North Korean nuclear weapons that could be used against the United States’ allies, the Republic of Korea (ROK) and Japan.

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The question of sanctions is particularly interesting. Parsi argues that they were extremely painful to Iran, especially the bilateral U.S. sanctions on financial activity and the European Union's on trade and petroleum, during the five years before the nuclear deal was made. Gaining sanctions relief, as well as acceptance of a national enrichment program, were key Iranian objectives. But, Parsi argues, sanctions would never cause the regime or its population to give up the right to enrichment, which was seen as essential to scientific and technological development. So sanctions alone would not have led to the achievement of the P-5 +1 objectives; pressure and more pressure alone would have failed. But combined with a policy of engagement, they were important.

In the North Korean case, there are those who argue, sometimes including Administration officials, that sanctions and more sanctions ought to be pursued instead of engagement. Most analysts see China as limiting or undercutting the effectiveness of sanctions on North Korea and thus preventing exactly what sanctions advocates hope to achieve, namely sufficient pain in Pyongyang to crash the regime or force it to the negotiating table. But sanctions advocates, including those in the Trump Administration, continue to hold out hope that Beijing can be induced to change its calculation and decide to join the sanctions-pressure bandwagon. So far, this has not happened.

The differences between the ROK and Israel for an American president hoping to pursue engagement are many. Israel was reliably hostile to a negotiated settlement with Iran and even threatened to use military force itself to prevent what it considered a U.S. sell-out at the negotiating table. The ROK is reliably interested in U.S. policy towards North Korea but, depending on who has the presidency in Seoul, may be to the left or right of the U.S. administration. In 1994, President Kim Yum Sam was a critic of the talks from the right. President Moon Jae-in seems to be to the left of the Trump administration. Seoul can cause trouble for U.S. policy in Washington, but there is no similarity between raising concerns about the alliance and the threat of punishment at the ballot box, which was implicit in AIPAC activity.

Finally, there is the question of whether or not the advocates of engagement with the North can effectively argue that absent a negotiated restraint on the North's ICBM capability, military action and war are the only way, and the inevitable way, for the U.S. to deny an irrational and hostile regime in Pyongyang the ability to target American cities. With Iran, President Obama was persuasive that the U.S. would have to use force to deny Iran a nuclear-weapons capability; deterrence would not do. It is unclear if the same kind of argument can be made over North Korea's ballistic missile capability.

Review by Richard Nephew, Columbia University

Dr. Trita Parsi's recent book on nuclear diplomacy between the United States and Iran sets out its viewpoint and perhaps even agenda from the earliest pages: articulating a strong, positive case for direct negotiations between the United States and Iran as a means of addressing the range of problems that exist between the two countries. The nuclear deal – or Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), as it is formally known – is only the most visible manifestation of what could be a revolution in relations between the two countries. Parsi's assessment is that the history of nuclear negotiations prior to the JCPOA is evidence enough of the ineffective results of a strategy based instead on coercion and pressure; rather more is achievable, he conjectures, through a strategy based on respect, tolerance, and accommodation.

Losing an Enemy certainly provides enough well-sourced comments from diplomats and experts on both sides of the negotiating table. His access to Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif, U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry, and a number of other crucial players from the negotiations that began in earnest in 2013 and ended in 2015 is the strength of the book. Parsi is able to recreate scenes from the talks—more or less accurately—that help to underscore the difficulty of the negotiations but also the persistence of the negotiators. Parsi also weaves in some of the history and current events that surrounded the talks to give the process grounding, including, for example, the complexity of negotiations over Iran between the United States and Russia while the annexation of Crimea was underway.

However, this positive mostly applies to the second half of the book, where the story transitions to focus on the talks that ended with the JCPOA. The first 80 pages or so of the book are far from linear in their explanation of U.S. Iran policy, the Middle East regional environment, and the context for the work of the Obama Administration after 2009. Though I worked in the U.S. government in various capacities starting in 2003 and continuing until 2015 (with a particular focus on the Middle East), I found myself needing to pause and regroup while reading these introductory portions due to the somewhat jumbled sequence of events laid out, particularly the chapters on the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq and subsequent Bush and Obama Administration regional policy. This took away from the overall presentation of the material as well as muddled the main message of the book.

Perhaps most problematic, this organizational issue exposed a deficiency in the book itself: an almost total failure to consider the diplomatic efforts of the Bush Administration to resolve the nuclear issue with Iran. In fact, three years of Bush-era participation in the “P5+1” process (so called because it composed the five permanent members of the UN Security Council and Germany) is essentially ignored in this rendering, leaving the impression that a) the George Bush administration ignored diplomacy and engagement with Iran altogether; and, b) the Obama administration entered office with a completely blank slate. Neither conclusion is correct. In fact, though the United States did not directly negotiate with Iran, it agreed to two package offers that were extended to Iran (the first in June 2006, the second in May 2008) that were intended to be a path to direct talks and a comprehensive solution to the Iranian nuclear program concerns identified by the international community. Then Under Secretary of State Bill Burns was even permitted to join those talks with Iran, albeit in a silent capacity, in July 2008. Though there is no comparison to the direct dialogue established during the Obama administration, this history—particularly for a book that begins its recitation of U.S.-Iran diplomatic history at the first Gulf War—is an essential part of the story. Its omission is a disservice to readers and to Parsi's own argument.

Relatedly, the book also mischaracterizes much of the Obama policy development process in 2009 and therefore its evolution up until 2013. I participated in some—though certainly not all—of the conversations then underway at the White House. Contrary to the assertion of a quoted British diplomat on page 99, it is not true that the Obama team had no “Plan B” when dialogue with Iran failed to take off in 2009. From the start, the Obama team endorsed the concept of the dual-track strategy of engagement and pressure that – in its most direct rendering – began under George Bush with the P5+1 package in May 2006. Obama intended to inject urgency into both tracks, starting with the engagement offer conveyed in his first letter to Supreme Leader Sayyid Ali Hossein Khamenei. But, while engagement was the first element to be pushed, additional sanctions pressure was always part of the mix, so much so that by mid-2009, I was helping to develop the roster of measures that later became the sanctions game-plan followed by the Obama administration. Getting this part of the history right is critical because one of the assertions of Parsi’s book is that a lack of planning, combined with pressure from outside the Administration, led the Obama team to embrace a sanctions strategy that it did not believe in. In my experience, and in light of the record of the Obama administration in imposing sanctions against Iran, this narrative does not hold water. Regardless, a more thorough rendering of the full period of nuclear negotiations with Iran from 2002 through 2015 would have demonstrated considerable continuity between Bush and Obama teams, with various parts of the dual-track strategy receiving more or less emphasis depending on the circumstances with Iran, politics in Washington, and international environment writ large.

Likewise, a more complete picture of the overall pace of development in Iran’s nuclear program and in the application of sanctions would have enhanced the book. This trade-off is after all the center-point of the book, in which Parsi argues throughout that sanctions were at best a minor aspect of Iranian calculus and, at worst, a potential source of fatal friction. Here, it offers compelling new reporting on the views and considerations of Iranian officials, particularly during the Rouhani administration. One comment in particular – that of Mohammad Nahavandian, who served as Rouhani’s chief of staff and argued that “we felt we had to resist despite the cost because we were presented with a choice: either resist despite the cost or capitulate and show a green light for the West to pressure us on other issues...” (187)—was illuminating and ought to be considered alongside more positive readings of the utility of sanctions against Iran. Parsi’s description of the 2013 era Obama Administration’s concern that sanctions were a wasting asset is also an accurate reflection of our mood and concern that sanctions had outlived their usefulness. But, in recounting these views, Parsi neglects to accord the role of sanctions in creating a need for Iran to accept compromises that it might have otherwise rejected and in creating a recognition in the United States that there were limits to how far pressure could go in accepting those compromises. Were it not for the sanctions campaign starting in 2006, the United States could have found itself with inadequate tools to divert interest in a military attack against Iran. And, were it not for the sanctions campaign starting in 2006, Iran might have felt considerably less urgency to make concessions and compromises in 2015. All of this is conjecture but, importantly, so too is the conjecture offered by Parsi that agreements reached in 2005 or 2010 would have been more durable or more attractive in total than what resulted in the JCPOA. For a book that asserts much about the lack of utility in sanctions pressure altogether (rather than one that might suggest there are boundaries to its use), this is a notable omission in analysis.

Another striking element of this book is its sparse treatment of the Iranian nuclear program itself. Absent any outside context or information, one could be forgiven for believing that the entirety of the Iranian nuclear issue was of Israeli invention, which the Iranian government later appropriated for its own domestic ‘rally-round-the flag’ and international leverage building purposes. While I recognize that this is not a book about Iran’s nuclear program per se, it is the case that the text does not discuss at any reasonable length the

considerable efforts made by the Iranian government to obtain nuclear technology on the black market, including from A. Q. Khan, the father of the Pakistani nuclear weapons program. Instead, the book treats the nuclear issue as a convenient fiction, drummed up by hawks in Israel and in the United States to support their broader objective of turning Washington against Tehran. This is simply not the case. The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) has outlined in many of its reports the extensive nature of Iran's attempts to acquire nuclear technology illicitly, Iran's evasion of its obligations under the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty and the Safeguards Agreement it has with the IAEA, and even Iran's attempts to develop a ballistic missile warhead capable of delivering a nuclear payload. These were all real problems that needed to be addressed by the international community, and issues that Iran had to respond to as part of any diplomatic resolution. Beyond that, the illicit nature of Iran's nuclear program provides some rationale – even if reasonable people can disagree as to whether it is a reasonable rationale – as to why the Bush Administration took a hardline stance toward Iran's nuclear program and the central question of Iranian uranium enrichment in a nuclear agreement. Like the Obama Administration's decision to reject the May 2010 agreement reached by Brazil, Turkey and Iran—described in Parsi's book as a decision made in order to pursue sanctions as a preferred course—this disregard of the technical details of Iran's nuclear program and the kind of agreement on offer tilts the page in favor of diplomacy at all costs and objections to proposals as minor technical details. Deficiencies large and small may have cost the United States and Iran agreements in 2005 and 2010, but the book fails to consider (or at least to describe in any detail) the consequences of those agreements both to the issue of resolving the nuclear problem with Iran and the larger endeavor of improved relations. A more grounded reading of the history and nature of Iran's nuclear program would have aided and balanced these sections of the book tremendously.

Altogether, *Losing an Enemy* is an important contribution to the history of the Iran nuclear talks. It offers much by way of contemporary views of the negotiations and thus will remain an important resource to policy analysts and experts in the years to come. A future revision of the text could potentially address some of these issues and make it a more complete history.

Review by Gary Sick, Columbia University

If journalism is the first draft of history, then Trita Parsi's account of the negotiation of the Iran nuclear deal (the so-called Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action—JCPOA) is a solid second draft. Written in a conversational tone, with plenty of documentation but no jargon, it is a highly readable chronological account of the diplomatic encounters and maneuvers that dominated U.S. Middle East politics in President Barack Obama's second term. Parsi is the President of the National Iranian American Council, an advocacy organization in Washington, D.C., and he followed the diplomatic action moment by moment. This book is a companion piece and continuation to Parsi's two previous books: *Treacherous Alliance: The Secret Dealings of Israel, Iran, and the United States* (2007) and *A Single Roll of the Dice: Obama's Diplomacy with Iran* (2012).¹

The strength of this account is its first-hand insight into the politics and strategies of Israel, Iran, and the United States, the same three protagonists that featured in Parsi's dissertation and first book. He revisits some of the same sources as in his previous work, but here expands his scope to include the latest cast of characters involved in the marathon three-year negotiation of this unique non-proliferation agreement. Parsi conducted serial interviews with key figures in his three key countries. He was physically present outside the room during many of the critical negotiating sessions, and he was briefed regularly by the Obama administration as part of its public outreach. He was also part of an advocacy network lobbying for the JCPOA and participated in the policy battle in Washington essentially as an insider.

As indicated by the title of his book, Parsi leaves no doubt about his own position. He supported the negotiation process at every point and reveled in its successful completion. His own background as a thoroughly Americanized Iranian expatriate, who is the founding president of an organization that advocates for better understanding of Iran, will inevitably be cited as evidence of his bias. Those who see the JCPOA as a terrible mistake will regard Parsi's account as a whitewash. They will be wrong.

Parsi adds an important element to the story. He listens to the Iranian side as well as the American side, and he explains Iran's negotiating strategy. Very few Americans, even those who followed the JCPOA negotiations with some interest, will have heard a straightforward analysis of how Iran approached the negotiations, the internal politics that greatly complicated its efforts, and the concessions Iran made in pursuit of its own national interests. Based on my own observations over the same period, I think Parsi gets it right.

Similarly, Parsi offers a forthright evaluation of Israel's strategies, particularly the obstructive role played by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Parsi thinks the Israeli PM was wrong, and so do many of the top former security officials in Israel, as Parsi elaborates at length on pages 156-158. Again, this part of the story, which is critical to understanding the complex politics of the American side, received only sporadic coverage in the American media. Those who share Netanyahu's dark vision of the Iranian threat will see this aspect of the book as politically biased. It might better be seen as a corrective to an existing bias. Parsi's analytical construct of "losing an enemy," applies to Israel even more strongly than to the United States.

¹ Trita Parsi, *Treacherous Alliance: The Secret Dealings of Israel, Iran, and the United States* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007); Parsi, *A Single Roll of the Dice: Obama's Diplomacy with Iran* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012).

The very argument that “losing an enemy” is a political hindrance and strategic obstacle will no doubt strike some as excessively glib. If one accepts Netanyahu’s alarms that Iran is the greatest threat to world peace and an existential threat to Israel, perhaps so. But those who agree with the Israeli general staff in its latest ranking of strategic threats to Israel, where a nuclear Iran features not at all,² might be led to wonder about the perceptual gap. Parsi believes that the Netanyahu threat assessment is more politics than reality. That is not a view that gets a lot of attention in the U.S. media, and Parsi deals with it in a forthright and non-confrontational way (319-322). Some may find that refreshing; others in this highly partisan environment will not.

But Parsi is no prophet. This coherent but very hasty retelling of the JCPOA negotiations was scarcely out of galleys when serious questions began to be raised about the ability of the agreement to survive the Trump presidency. Clearly, this story is far from over, and the “triumph” may be short-lived. The full account will have to await a broader historical perspective, including not only whether or how the agreement survives at all, but also how it fits into the forty decades and counting of the U.S. relationship with revolutionary Iran and the broader question of U.S. intervention in the Middle East post-9/11. For that, another book will be required.

² Graham Allison, “Is Iran Still Israel’s Top Threat?,” *The Atlantic*, 8 March 2016, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2016/03/iran-nuclear-deal-israel/472767/>.

Review by Michael Singh, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy.

Few foreign policy issues in recent years have commanded as much political, public, and media attention as Iran's nuclear program. When the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) was being debated in the summer of 2015, it dominated headlines. Two years later, amid a sea of foreign policy troubles elsewhere, President Donald J. Trump's utterances on the deal continue to captivate.

Yet the focus on the JCPOA can mask the deeper dynamic that produced it. International agreements tend to reflect reality more than they shape it. By 2015, the Obama Administration sought to prevent Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapon, but worried just as much about a U.S.-Iran war. The vaunted 'military option,' though usually regarded as a source of U.S. leverage, actually acted as leverage against the United States.

Iran, for its part, appears not to have been in a rush to actually acquire a nuclear weapon. Indeed, even as its nuclear infrastructure expanded and its 'breakout' time diminished, the obstacles to weaponizing remained fraught with risk, primarily of devastating military attack. Perhaps as a result, Iran seems to have aimed instead to preserve the option to produce nuclear weapons in the future—retaining its fuel enrichment, R&D, and missile capabilities—while shedding the burden of sanctions.

Reading the JCPOA in the context of the long arc of crisis over its nuclear program, beginning in the early 2000s, one could easily get the impression that Iran prevailed. Once-clandestine nuclear facilities remain open; efforts to halt enrichment on Iranian soil or dismantle Iranian nuclear infrastructure were largely abandoned. The JCPOA bears a close resemblance to Iran's own proposals from 2005, before the escalatory cycle of sanctions and nuclear expansion began.

Yet President Barack Obama and his partners in the P5+1—the UK, France, Germany, Russia, and China—got what they sought, as well, even if it is not spelled out in the text of the deal. They got a reprieve from more war in the Middle East, with which the U.S. and Europe in particular were mightily fatigued. Whether Obama was right to focus on this goal, or whether he gave away too much for it, was and remains contentious. What seems clear, however, is that the trend has continued—despite tough talk, President Trump seems to share Obama's desire to reduce rather than add to American military commitments.

In *Losing an Enemy*, Trita Parsi relates the events leading up to the conclusion of the nuclear agreement. Yet the book is not truly a work of history or analysis, but rather an effort to persuade. Parsi wishes to convince the reader first and foremost of the merits of the JCPOA; second, of the futility of sanctions against Iran specifically and as a tool of foreign policy broadly.

Parsi is not writing as an impassive observer, but as a participant in the events he describes, and one with a clear point of view. He was a leading advocate for U.S. diplomacy with Iran, and for the JCPOA itself. To his credit, he states this explicitly, and—in one of the book's most useful contributions to the historical record—sheds light on the composition and workings of the coalition of organizations and individuals involved in that advocacy, who scored an impressive victory in the summer of 2015 by shepherding the nuclear deal through Congressional review. (In the spirit of full disclosure, I was also a participant in the events covered by the book, working on Iran policy during the George W. Bush administration, and as a public commentator critical of the JCPOA during the Obama Administration.)

The book is at its strongest in relating, blow by blow, the fevered diplomacy of 2012-2015 that produced the nuclear accord. Parsi clearly had excellent access to the U.S. and Iranian teams. He uses that access to construct an engaging narrative of the diplomatic endgame that both supporters and critics of the JCPOA will find illuminating. He offers up details that will interest those who follow Iran, nuclear nonproliferation, or international negotiations - see, for example, his discussion of how the Iranian approach to negotiating sanctions relief surprised and wrong-footed the American team (299). Until the participants in the talks themselves inevitably publish their own accounts, Parsi's will stand as the most complete accounting of this stage of the diplomacy.

In making its case, however, *Losing an Enemy* suffers from many of the flaws common to polemics.

In marshalling his arguments, Parsi often omits context or elides complex chapters of history. Parsi gives short shrift to the nuclear diplomacy that preceded President Obama, as well as to the lengthy history of U.S.-Iran engagement, which makes Obama's policies seem like a starker break from precedent than was actually the case. The book also provides little detail on Iran's non-nuclear foreign policy. This missing context is vital for understanding the worries of Iran's adversaries about Iranian nuclear activity, which Parsi dismisses as "alarmist" (25). He offers instead that by 2015 Iran's policy was becoming "markedly more moderate" (322) despite the fact that this was a period in which Iran was expanding its involvement in conflicts in Syria, Iraq, Yemen, and Afghanistan - none of which is meaningfully addressed in the book.

In other cases, the facts Parsi presents seem to contradict rather than support his case. Parsi explains that Iran in 1993 "would have been willing to go along with an Israeli-Palestinian accord"—rather than call Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) Chairman a "traitor to the Palestinian people" and ramping up funding for Palestinian rejectionists—"if the United States had been willing to accept a leading Iranian role in the region" (a phrase that is not explained, 30). While Parsi presents this as an example of Iran's unjustified marginalization by the United States, policymakers in Washington are more likely to see it as evidence of Iran's willingness to destabilize the region and act as a spoiler for the sake of self-aggrandizement.

Likewise, Parsi asserts that Bush's 'axis of evil' speech in January 2002 ended any chance of U.S.-Iran dialogue, but a few pages later indicates that in late spring 2002 a U.S.-Iran channel was reopened, resulting in Iran playing a helpful role in Iraq (47). The reader cannot help but conclude that either Iran's helpfulness in Iraq, or the impact of the 'axis of evil' label, is exaggerated. Nor is it easy to square Parsi's suggestion that Obama was pressured into supporting sanctions with the claim he relays that sanctions were the "top issue" in the President's bilateral meetings in 2011 (120); the juxtaposition leaves the impression either that Obama was extraordinarily malleable, or—far more likely—that he sincerely felt that sanctions were an important element of his policy.

Finally, Parsi takes a black-and-white view of the participants in the events he describes. In this narrative, there are good guys and bad guys. The good guys, while fallible, tend to be enlightened and sincere. In the 1990s, for example, Parsi suggests that Iran supported terrorist groups because Washington's refusal to "grant Iran its legitimate role in the region" left Tehran with "no choice" (21).

Even when the good guys misstep, Parsi is quick to absolve them. For example, he takes Obama gently to task for failing to support human rights in Iran during the 2009 Green Revolution. Yet he implicitly credits Obama with inspiring that uprising in the first place by speculating that "If the Bush Administration were still in power and continuing to provoke confrontation with Iran, Mousavi would probably not have disputed the

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voter fraud and called for street protests” (85-86). This unconvincingly turns domestic Iranian affairs into a function of U.S. policy.

The bad guys, on the other hand—Republicans, Israel, Saudi Arabia, and the French—are portrayed as unfailingly cynical, never arriving honestly at their views. Israel, for example, is accused of inventing the Iranian threat in the early 1990s to deflect domestic criticism of peace overtures to the PLO. Yet little attention is given to the Iranian policies that might have caused Israel concern. Critics of the JCPOA also receive Parsi’s scorn. To them, he says, the “details of the nuclear deal [were] irrelevant” (317) as they were in reality motivated by the fear of “losing an enemy” (374) or “Iran’s political rehabilitation” (322).

The bad guys are not just wrong, but unpleasant. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu “growl[s]” (248) and is “angry and bitter” (225). Israeli minister Moshe Yaalon is “hysterical” (321). American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) staffers are “screaming loonies” (340) and French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius is accused in bold print of throwing a “temper tantrum” (235). As for the benighted JCPOA critics, they are the “same group of usual suspects” (351) offering “second-rate arguments” (346).

Yet the reader has to take Parsi’s word for all of this because—despite the number of pages he devotes to them—Parsi does not cite any of those he criticizes, despite his impressive list of interviews with the nuclear deal’s supporters. This is in keeping with his failure to take the concerns of Iran’s adversaries seriously, which may serve the effort to persuade but also limits the book’s analytical contribution. Allowing the possibility that these parties arrived at their concerns might have forced a deeper examination of Iran’s policies, in which Parsi is well-positioned to engage.

Indeed, what is most disappointing about *Losing an Enemy* are not the shortcuts taken in the effort to persuade, but the opportunities it misses to probe more deeply Iran’s internal dynamics. Parsi notes that during the negotiations Iran ultimately gave up its longstanding insistence that its “right” to enrich uranium be recognized, but he does not explain why this shift occurred (239). Likewise, he describes how Iran on at least two occasions insisted that any agreement also cover regional issues (146-147), yet later indicates that Iran’s Supreme Leader Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei demanded that the talks address only the nuclear issue (168). Again, no explanation for these shifts is given. In this case the omission is particularly unfortunate, since one of the main criticisms of the JCPOA by U.S. regional allies is that it ignored regional issues, and the Obama administration’s frequent rebuttal was that regional issues were never part of the negotiations. Parsi’s narrative seems to suggest that the Iranians were ready to discuss those issues, at least for a time.

Another Iranian official is quoted lamenting Iran’s declining “soft power” in the Middle East (136); elsewhere the reader learns that following 2009 Khamenei was increasingly dependent on hardline constituencies for his power (186). In each instance, additional examination of how Iran arrived at its decisions, and how regional and domestic factors influenced its nuclear policy, would be welcome additions that would enhance readers’—and policymakers’—understanding of Iran.

In making the case against sanctions, Parsi only half succeeds. He persuasively details how key concessions by the Obama administration were instrumental in securing a deal—foremost among them the U.S. retreat on uranium enrichment, which he rightly terms “The Concession” with a capital “C” (174). But his effort to argue that sanctions were irrelevant to the outcome relies almost exclusively on the testimony of Iranian officials, who have a clear interest in promoting that view.

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Parsi fails to buttress his argument by citing the actual impact of sanctions on Iran's economy, or engaging with the arguments of sanctions experts (including both supporters and critics of the JCPOA) who cite empirical data to argue that sanctions against Iran were effective. As a result, he does not adequately address the possibility that U.S. concessions and sanctions were both important to the final result, much less make the broader case against sanctions as a foreign policy instrument. Indeed, Parsi's narrative more clearly supports than rebuts the idea that diplomacy backed by sanctions was an effective approach.

Ultimately, supporters of the JCPOA will cheer Parsi's work and opponents will be riled by it. He is a formidable debater, and his work describes the final round of nuclear talks in greater detail and more competently than any other thus far. Yet Parsi has a clear point of view, and his persuasive effort would have been strengthened had he taken seriously the counterarguments. And when the book seeks to go deeper—to explain not just what happened but why—it falls short. That is a story which remains to be written.

Author's Response by Trita Parsi, the National Iranian American Council

Few countries have in the past decades been as controversial in the United States as Iran, its foreign policy, and the very nature of its ruling clerical regime. The political sensitivity around everything Iran, combined with the exceptional lack of knowledge in the U.S. about the Tehran's calculations, interests, and internal machinations has helped create a rather curious Washington discourse that has been decisively disconnected from Iranian realities. A mere decade ago, for instance, Washington was genuinely debating whether Iran was a rational actor or a suicidal, messianic state. What was not understood was deemed irrational, and to contend that Tehran was a problematic, yet self-interested and rational player was a highly controversial position that would earn you both scorn and resentment.

Today, Iran's rise in the region stands as a stark reminder of the cost of underestimating it. The surreal Washington debate on Tehran's rationality did not undermine the Iranian regime; it only further limited the United States' understanding of Iran's real calculations, which in turn inhibited Washington's ability to deal with Iran effectively.

Though the Barack Obama administration rejected Washington's conventional wisdom on Iran and adopted a policy based on the idea that Tehran follows a rational cost-benefit analysis and that it carefully calculates its interest, it neither tried nor succeeded in changing Washington's overall understanding of Iran.

As such, any attempt to analyse Iran in the United States will inescapably be seen through this highly politicized—and largely uninformed—Washington lens. In his review of my book on the Obama administration's nuclear deal with Iran, veteran Iran watcher Gary Sick recognizes this. Sick asserts that rather than being written from a political lens, any work on Iran will be *read* from a political lens. Robert Jervis points out in his introduction that the debate about my book reinforces the notion “that the study of international politics, past or present, is inevitably political.” Such is the current political climate in the United States, and such has been the political climate in Washington on all matters Iran for decades.

This did not escape me when I began the process of writing the book on Obama's diplomacy with Iran. Not unexpectedly, the reviews of the book tend to follow this pattern, where the reviewers' own political perspectives are the primary lens through which the analysis of the book is assessed. This does not take anything away from the reviews. In fact, I feel honored to have such a prestigious and well-respected group of practitioners and scholars, most of whom I have known for years, review the book. They bring important political assessments and considerations into the discussion. On the matter of the utility of sanctions in particular—a matter that I personally believe receives far too little scrutiny—the reviews may move the debate several steps forward.

The reviewers generally agree that the book is “the fullest treatment of the negotiations, especially under Obama, that we are likely to get for a considerable length of time,” while filling a hole left by most books on the topic published in the U.S., given my access to Iranian officials in order to give a more in-depth and accurate description of their calculations and perceptions. This is also the main reason why I think the book differs from the general Washington narrative on Iran, as it is informed by the perspectives of Western *and* Iranian decision-makers alike.

Moreover, the reviewers are also generally in agreement on two predictable points. First, that any criticism of France's conduct will be warmly received. Robert Gallucci writes that my critique of the French “was

admittedly enjoyable as that always is.” Secondly, that any questioning of the U.S.'s coercive instruments—that is, primarily sanctions—will be treated with a degree defensiveness.

The Sanctions Mythology

Which brings us to one of the main points of disagreement and the area where the book fundamentally questions conventional wisdom in Washington: The role of economic sanctions in securing the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). The D.C. discourse asserts that crippling sanctions brought Iran to its knees and forced it to back down from its uncompromising position. Consequently, in the absence of sanctions, Iran would never have agreed to any compromises and the deal could not have been secured.

Jervis contends that the questioning of this narrative is an “Iranian argument” that is “almost certainly incorrect”—but does not provide any evidence in support of Washington’s conventional wisdom. The efficiency of sanctions is simply an article of faith—no evidence is required. The evidence to the contrary that I provide in the book is not addressed, but rather dismissed as an argument from the other side. Michael Singh echoes this and argues that the role of sanctions is belittled since the analysis “relies almost exclusively on the testimony of Iranian officials.” In reality, the opposite is true. The analysis is quite clearly based on the actual chronology of events coupled with data provided by the International Atomic Energy Agency on the uninterrupted growth of the nuclear program versus the pain inflicted on the Iranian economy by sanctions. Moreover, it is the testimony of *American* and not Iranian officials that completes the picture, as it was their accounts that explained why the first major concession was given by Washington, rather than sanctions forcing Tehran to retreat before the U.S. could show flexibility.

Here I think it is worthwhile to review the evidence since the reviews largely overlook it. First of all, there is the fallacy that economic pain is the measurement of success. There is no doubt that sanctions inflicted significant pain on the Iranian economy. Tehran truly underestimated Obama’s ability to win international buy-in for sanctions, including oil sanctions and measures cutting Iran off from the international financial system. But the ability to inflict pain is not tantamount to the success of sanctions. For success to be achieved, that pain must translate into a desired shift in specific Iranian policies. This did not happen. On the contrary, the Iranian response was to double down on the very policy from which Washington hoped to force Iran to retreat: its enrichment of uranium. (Iran only agreed to limit its program *after* Washington did an about face on the matter of enrichment.)

This brings us to the second sanctions fallacy: The failure to account for the alternative cost of sanctions. While sanctions certainly provided Washington with additional leverage for future negotiations, time did not stand still in Iran. While the Obama administration amassed sanctions, the Iranians too amassed leverage in terms of growing their enrichment program and reducing their breakout capability (the time it would take Iran from deciding to build a bomb to having the material for a nuclear weapon).

As both Iranian and American officials explained to me, it became a race between three clocks: The sanctions clock, where the U.S. sought to cripple the Iranian economy and force it to capitulate; the centrifuge clock, where Tehran sought to present Washington with a nuclear fait accompli, and the wildcard of the Israeli clock, where Israel might initiate war without coordination with the U.S. The question was: which clock ticked the fastest?

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The progression of Iran's nuclear program is instructive here. Iran had roughly 150 centrifuges in 2003. By the time George W. Bush left office—despite the 2006 sanctions imposed by the Bush administration which Richard Nephew lauds in his review—Iran had 8,000 centrifuges. It went from a non-existent stockpile of low enriched uranium (LEU) to roughly 1,500kg of LEU—enough to build one bomb if enriched to higher levels. Despite sanctions, sabotage, cyber warfare, and even assassination of Iranian scientists, the program continued to grow.

By early 2013, a new sense of urgency dawned on the White House. In January 2012, then-Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta publicly stated that Iran's breakout capability stood at 12 months. By January 2013, the U.S. intelligence assessment read that Tehran's breakout had dramatically shrunk to only 8-12 weeks—while the pain of sanctions on Iran had started to wane.

Clearly, the nuclear clock was ticking faster than the sanctions clock. The sanctions pressure had not brought Iran to its knees, nor had it even caused a split in the Iranian government on the key issue of enrichment. Unless something changed, Obama realized that the U.S. would soon be faced with only two options: Either accepting Iran's nuclear *fait accompli* or taking military action. Unless, that is, the U.S. changed. This is what prompted the Obama administration to return to the secret talks in Oman and for the first time to equip its negotiators with a carefully worded statement on how and under what circumstances the U.S. would be willing to accept enrichment on Iranian soil—that is, a major break with past U.S. policy by accepting Iran's non-negotiable red line.

The circumstances surrounding this about-face further raise doubts about the potency of the sanctions policy. In the book, I provide testimony of *U.S. officials* as to why Obama made this crucial move while Mahmoud Ahmadinejad was still President, while the earlier secret meeting in Oman had been a complete failure since the Iranians showed no flexibility *absent U.S. acceptance of enrichment*, and while Obama's original plan was to play the enrichment card at the end, and not at the outset, of a negotiation. These circumstances are quite instructive and far more consequential than the testimony of Iranian officials, whose accounts were of secondary importance.

I find it noteworthy that Nephew does not question any of this in his review. He served in the Obama administration, helped design the sanctions regime, and partook in some of the secret talks in Oman where the Obama administration conceded enrichment. He knows the validity of this account. He does not question that the acceptance of enrichment in Iran was the United States' most valuable negotiation card and that it was played prior to Tehran offering the U.S. an equivalent concession (Singh also concedes this point). Nor does he question that this concession was given by the Obama administration as a result of the realization that the nuclear clock was ticking faster than the sanctions clock. In fact, he acknowledges that sanctions had become "a wasting asset." Thus, Nephew in his review seems to reject the mythology that sanctions had brought Iran to its knees and that had the U.S. simply continued on the sanctions path, a better deal was in the offing. (That is the position currently adopted by the Trump administration).

Instead, he very interestingly shifts the argument to whether Iran would have been willing to accept limits to its enrichment program had it not been for the economic pressure that had been built up since 2006. He argues that speculating whether a better deal could have been achieved without the sanctions at an earlier stage, and whether Iran would have been willing to agree to the compromises it made in 2013 to 2015 in the absence of sanctions, is conjecture.

But in fact there is no symmetry between the incompleteness of information leading to the latter conclusion compared to the former. Here, again, the chronology of events, the testimony of Western officials, as well as the preponderance of evidence contradict Washington's sanctions narrative. Consensus amongst all the officials I interview was that no deal could be achieved in the absence of the U.S. accepting enrichment. Nephew does not dispute this point in his review. In fact, Tehran showed no flexibility on enrichment until *after* the U.S. agreed to give up the zero-enrichment objective. All the pressure and sanctions that Washington and the European Union (EU) had imposed on Iran did not cause it to budge on this issue. Senior White House official Ben Rhodes even suggested to me that John Kerry "essentially had played the enrichment card"—without coordinating with the White House in order to entice the Iranians to agree to the Oman channel. (189-190.) As a result, the evidence overwhelmingly points in the direction that had the U.S. stuck to the sanctions path and refused to concede enrichment, no deal could have been reached—regardless of the sanctions pressure. In fact, war was the most likelihood then, according to senior Obama officials I interviewed.

There is, however, data that supports the notion that a more attractive deal could have been achieved much earlier, without many of the sanctions, if Washington at an earlier stage had agreed to engage Iran directly (and not via Europe as the George W. Bush administration did) and to shift its position on enrichment.

For instance, in 2003, when Iran had roughly 150 centrifuges, no stockpile of LEU, no Fordo enrichment facility and very little knowledge of the fuel cycle, it offered the Bush administration a grand bargain negotiation that included opening up the nuclear program for full transparency. The Bush administration dismissed the proposal out of hand and even reprimanded the Swiss diplomat who had delivered it to Washington.¹

In March 2005, Tehran made a last offer prior to Ahmadinejad being elected President. Iran offered to cap its nuclear program at 3,000 centrifuges (this proposal is also publicly available).² The EU did not even bother to send the proposal to Washington, knowing that anything above zero would not even be considered by the Bush administration. Iran's Foreign Minister Javad Zarif told me in an interview that 3,000 was just an opening position, and that Iran would have settled for 1,000 centrifuges.

Skeptics will claim that Iran was just bluffing, and that there is no certainty Tehran would have followed through. The reason we cannot answer that question with certainty is that Washington refused to engage Iran on these proposals. But we do know that Iran did sign the Tehran Declaration in 2010, brokered by Brazil and Turkey, which at its core was an American proposal. But crucially, the Turkish-Brazilian version of the

¹ A copy of the 2003 Iranian proposal is available in Trita Parsi, *Treachorous Alliance – The Secret Dealings of Israel, Iran and the United States* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 341-346.

² "Elements of Objective Guarantees, Presented by Iran in the Meeting of Steering Committee, Paris-March 23, 2015," http://www.isisnucleariran.org/assets/pdf/Iran_Proposal_Mar232005.pdf.

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American proposal recognized up front Iran's continued enrichment activities.³ Again, Washington dismissed the deal.

Thus, it is not conjecture to claim that absent sanctions, Iran would not have agreed to any meaningful concessions, because there are numerous examples in which Iran—prior to sanctions being imposed—offered and even agreed to limit its enrichment program, granted that the West would not deprive it of enrichment altogether.

Moreover, by any account, Iran's leverage, measured by its nuclear assets—both knowledge, technology and material—grew during the sanctions years. While the JCPOA limits Iran's centrifuges to 5,060 after massive sanctions, the opening bid of the Iranian offer in 2005—prior to the sanctions—was to limit it to 3,000 centrifuges. Moreover, if measured by breakout capability, Tehran went from 12 months in January 2012, to 8-12 weeks in 2013, then back to 12 months after the JCPOA - that is, the deal brought it back to where it was only one six months before the first secret meeting in Oman in July 2012. That breakout time, most importantly, is still far shorter than what Tehran enjoyed between 2006-2012, during the height of the sanctions years.

As a senior U.S. negotiator said during a meeting at the White House in early 2014—the U.S. would jump on some of the proposals the Iranians had made prior to the sanctions years if those ships had not sailed.

The real value of the sanctions may have lain elsewhere. It is understandable that Washington would not have wanted to concede enrichment until it had fully exhausted all efforts—however unlikely they were—to coerce the Iranians to give up the technology. I recall numerous closed meetings in Washington in which any suggestion of a shifting of positions on enrichment was deemed 'throwing in the towel' prior to seeing what sanctions and pressure could achieve. Nephew hints at this as well; that there simply was a need to explore how far sanctions could go before considering a shift to an approach more centered on incentives rather than coercion. In that sense, it was not so much about exploring Iran's willingness to concede, but rather, to explore the United States' ability to coerce. Ironically, however, as Washington was exploring the limits of the coercive power of sanctions, Iran expanded its nuclear program even further and gained a net advantage over the U.S. in terms of leverage.

A similar reality exists in regards to Nephew's argument that sanctions played an effective role in diverting the pressure for war. To the extent that there is validity to that point, it further underscores the fact that sanctions were a function of internal U.S. politics as well as its relationship with Israel; the sanctions were not about Iran. That is quite different from claiming that sanctions worked on Iran, since Tehran is not the reason that U.S. domestic politics are exceptionally susceptible to pressure from Israel.

Does Bush deserve more credit?

Several of the reviewers argue that the book treats the Bush administration unfairly and that the diplomatic efforts of Bush's officials deserve greater praise. Nephew argues that the book suffers from "an almost total failure to consider the diplomatic efforts of the Bush Administration to resolve the nuclear issue with Iran."

³ Also, the Tehran Declaration provided Iran with a mechanism that minimized the risk that the West could renege on the deal.

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This a peculiar assessment, especially since Nephew notes that the Bush administration refused to engage Iran directly and instead outsourced the actual interaction with the Iranians to Europe. However adept Europe may be at diplomacy, European diplomacy is no substitute for American diplomacy. The Bush administration's refusal to engage directly - despite its approval of two non-starter packages prepared by the Europeans - reflected its skepticism and to a certain extent, its disingenuity with regards to its diplomacy. As a U.S. official serving the Bush administration explained to me, diplomacy at the UN Security Council level during the Bush years was just a box that needed to be checked in order to move closer to a military confrontation with Iran. There simply is no comparing the investments that the Obama and Bush administrations made in diplomacy.

Is the book insufficiently focused on Iran's nuclear program?

Some reviewers believe that the book does not sufficiently detail the Iranian government's efforts to expand its nuclear program, including through illicit purchases on the black market. Yet the book is not about the nuclear program per se, but the diplomacy that saw the stand-off resolved. And perhaps even more importantly, the unique contribution of the book is that it takes the issue out of the myopic non-proliferation lens through which the Washington narrative almost exclusively has looked at it (one observer quipped during the standoff that the West tends to view Iran as a nuclear program attached to a country, rather than a country with a nuclear program), and puts the issue in its correct geopolitical context. This does not in any way belittle the dangers of the nuclear program—indeed, I point out throughout the book that the issue became one of war and peace—but explains why and how in the eyes of many of the actors involved, the nuclear program was the *symptom* of a deeper problem rather than the *root* of the problem. Indeed, the myopic non-proliferation lens cannot explain why today, the Trump administration, encouraged by Israel, Saudi Arabia and the UAE, are seeking to kill the nuclear deal. Geopolitical factors, however, can.

In conclusion, I wish to reiterate my gratitude to both H-Diplo/ISSF and the reviewers for taking the time to critique my book. My hope is that this discussion will advance our understanding of the utility as well as weakness of the sanctions instrument. And perhaps most importantly, by understanding what went right with Obama's Iran diplomacy, the United States will be in a better position to duplicate its success with future potential proliferators.