

Is the Iran Deal Good for Us?

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By Scott Johnson

Intelligence Squared US arranged one of its excellent debates on the upper West Side of Manhattan this week. The debate had as its subject the merits of President Obama's pending arrangement with Iran. Addressing the proposition that the deal is good for the United States, the debate matched Philip Gordon and Amb. Thomas Pickering (for the affirmative) with Michael Doran and Mark Dubowitz (for the negative), with moderator John Donvan cracking the whip in impressive fashion. The audience votes on the proposition before and after the debate; the team that maximally moves the dial is declared the winner.

Intelligence Squared has made resources on the debate accessible [here](#). The video is below; the transcript is [here](#).

Gordon and Pickering's defense of the deal is, in my opinion, devastating to their case. Mark Dubowitz's critique of the deal — of its "seven deadly flaws" — is particularly devastating to the case for the deal, such as it is. If you don't make time for anything else, make time for Dubowitz's argument at 34:00-41:00.

[Jennifer Rubin](#) evaluates the arguments advanced in the debate. [Lauri Regan](#) summarizes and scores the debate round by round. Regan concludes:

The takeaway in my view is that Americans are uninformed about the realities of what the deal involves and what that means. On a positive note, people were engaged enough to come out and spend almost two hours listening and learning. However, 50% of the people in attendance either didn't learn anything or are too ignorant to understand what they heard. There was simply no way to leave with the knowledge imparted without shaking in your boots that Obama is not only giving away the store, but putting the entire world in mortal jeopardy for an imaginary legacy. The Iranians are being paid tens of billions of dollars to go nuclear thanks to Barack Obama, aka the tooth fairy.

There is no more pressing issue in our immediate future. This debate is worth your time; it is illuminating in a number of respects. The Obama administration seeks, as usual, to exploit the ignorance of the American people. Debates like this should complicate the administration's task, however slightly.

Quotable quote 1 (Thomas Pickering, pro): “[T]he notion that Iran is somehow going to enjoy, when it does get this money, the opportunity to play havoc in the Middle East is both strange and unusual. Certainly we watch carefully what Iran does.”

Quotable quote 2 (Michael Doran, con): “Now, there are two stories out there that are being told. One is the story that the Obama administration is telling, and the other story is the one that our allies in the Middle East are telling. The story the Obama administration is telling us goes something like this: Back in — back in April of 2013, there was an election in Iran which brought to power this guy Rouhani, who is a reformer. And Rouhani wanted to change relations with the West....And that then has led to this process that we have here before us today. That’s not the story that our allies are telling. They’re saying that this process is not the result of a strategic change in Iran. It’s the result of a strategic change in Washington. The United States — the United States started this process with major concessions. It ripped up six Security Council resolutions that called for zero reprocessing and zero enrichment. It gave Iran, in the first step, as part of the interim agreement, it gave it the right to enrich, and it said also that the restrictions on its program would be temporary, right? So the negotiation after that — after the initial interim agreement and the negotiations were over how long would that period of temporary restriction be? And under what — how big would the restrictions on the — on the program be?”