

## ***Can We Reach an Agreement with Iran? Some Senators Would Rather Vote Now and Debate Later.***

In the next few days, the ongoing negotiations between Iran and five nuclear powers will reach a milestone. The parties are seeking an agreement to limit the pace and focus of Iran's nuclear development program in return for ending Western economic sanctions. They hope to be able to announce some sort of framework by the end of March and to reach final terms by the end of June.

Two outside parties to these negotiations have been outspoken in their opposition to an agreement: the government of Israel under Benjamin Netanyahu and the US Republican party in Congress. More than a month ago, these opponents joined forces when House Speaker John Boehner invited Netanyahu to address a joint session of Congress in the midst of Netanyahu's reelection campaign.

Sixty members of the House and Senate boycotted the speech and others who attended were angered that a foreign leader had been invited to undermine ongoing diplomacy. The speech itself simply asserted, without any evidence, that the possible agreement would be too weak to justify reducing sanctions on Iran. It is unlikely that the speech changed many minds, though it did help Netanyahu rally his own base of support when he won a strengthened coalition in the Israeli elections on March 17.

At the same time, the speech helped focus US public opinion on the growing alliance between Israel and the Republican party. In the past, support for Israel was considered a bi-partisan matter in the US, but many Democrats have grown critical of Israel's failure to negotiate a final status agreement with the Palestinians on the occupied territories of Gaza, the West Bank and Jerusalem, as well as Israel's harsh conduct as an occupying power for almost 50 years. By contrast, Republicans have increasingly advocated both sanctions and military initiatives in the Middle East to advance US economic and political interests. When these initiatives, like the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, fail to achieve their

promised goals, Republicans have generally argued that the failure was due to too little force being used.

But now the US along with four other nuclear powers is deeply engaged in diplomacy with Iran's newly elected government, seeking an agreement that would limit Iran's capacity to create a nuclear weapon in return for an end to existing economic sanctions against Iran. The Obama administration argues that if Iran had nuclear weapons, a nuclear arms race would ensue in the region, especially because Israel already has nuclear weapons.

The full terms of an agreement with Iran won't be developed before July, but opponents in the Senate, including key Democrats like NJ Senator Menendez, NY Senator Schumer and CT Senator Richard Blumenthal are already supporting legislation that will attempt to block the president from making an agreement. Their hope is to pass the legislation BEFORE the end of June, when a final agreement with Iran is expected, in hopes that Iran will conclude that the Senate opposes ANY agreement, and will therefore abandon the negotiations.

For those of us who believe that America does not need to encourage more endless and fruitless wars in the Middle East, it seems more sensible for the Senate to defer considering such legislation until AFTER the terms of an agreement with Iran are known.

You can take action right now to make that point by calling Senator Blumenthal's office and letting them know that you want him to stop supporting the legislation proposed by Senator's Corker and Menendez.

You can reach Senator Blumenthal at: 860-258-6940 (Hartford) 202-224-2823 (Washington) or by email: [www.blumenthal.senate.gov/contact](http://www.blumenthal.senate.gov/contact).

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