

My Take on the Iran Deal -Matot 2015
Delivered by Rabbi Krupnick 7/18/15

This Shabbos, I'd like to speak to you about my impressions of the new Iran deal that the president and his team have negotiators have put forward. In 60 days' time the Congress will vote on it, and so now is the time for us to gain a deeper understanding of the deal and its implications. Of course, I assume that all of you have read about the deal, and likely have already formed your own opinions. My purpose today is to share my opinion, and my heart with you as your Rabbi.

The first statement I would like to make, categorically, is that it is not anti-American to oppose this deal, AND it is not traitorous to Israel or your Zionist ideals to support it. We do ourselves no favors as Jewish People to attack one another. This agreement has some achievements and advantages as well as risks and costs, and thinking it through means deciding on which side of the balance the scale tips. And indeed, there are some notable achievements. In 1995, during the Clinton administration, Israeli government officials came to Washington worried about Iran getting a nuclear weapon and really no one took them seriously. I can remember going to Washington to encourage my Congressman, Rob Andrews to support sanctions on Iran. Fortunately, Rob was already way out in front leading the charge that likely helped bring Iran to the negotiating table now. But it took years to convince Congress to even consider sanctions. Twenty years later, the president and the Israelis share the same grave concern, even as they differ on how to deal with it. And, whereas monitors were barred from Iran's nuclear facilities in the past, this agreement allows for inspections. It's not anywhere, anytime, but at least some of the secrecy would be lifted. And the goal of integrating Iran into the world economy is a noble one. In addition, I understand the administration's noble goal of trying to keep the world's most dangerous nation from getting the world's most dangerous weapon, even if only for ten years. I also understand that a rejection by Congress, especially by a 2/3 majority, would cause all sorts of diplomatic problems - at home between the Executive and Legislative branches as well as between the US and a number of our allies, particularly in Europe. And so, any decisions we make, as individuals, as a nation, as Americans and as Jews must be sober and thoughtful ones - about a complex deal in complex times.

But a rejection of Congress will not, I believe, lead to war. It will lead to a host of issues, but the rush of Iran to make a nuclear bomb will likely not be one of them. In fact, Iran might still push for some other sort of deal without the Americans because they want an end to sanctions more than they want a bomb. And, they want to show that the Supreme Leader's fatwah that said it is against Islamic law to make a nuclear weapon was not in fact just a ruse. (Although I realize that there are some who do not believe such a fatwah even exists.) So to me, the choice is not between this deal and war, but, to my mind, this deal or a better deal. And with that I quickly get to my bottom line: America, Israel, and our Arab allies need us to reach a better deal that is in the best interests of all of us.

I am not a politician nor a political pundit. You will obviously get a more thorough, and likely more insightful analysis elsewhere... And, like many of you, I am teetering on the brink of information overload. I have turned this issue over and over in my mind. So I was talking with a friend the other day, weaving arguments pro and con, when finally he said to me - "Aaron, what does your GUT tell you?" And you all know me well enough by now, I only share from this

pulpit what is in my heart. And my gut tells me that this deal is too dangerous and too risky to let pass without a fight. We need a better deal.

- My gut tells me that Iran is an anti-Semitic country with centuries of deep seated hatred for the West, but particularly for the State of Israel, and there is very good reason to take Iran at its word that it will try to destroy the State of Israel.
- My gut tells me that when the political leadership of Israel, who are routinely at each other's throats, are united (and they are) in urging Congress to reject this dangerous deal we should not only pay attention, but do what we can to help.
- My gut tells me that when Israelis feel that this would put their lives on the line like never before, which is what my friends there from across the political spectrum tell me, I cannot simply turn off the TV, and hope that I'll have a lovely country to visit as a tourist the next time a I go. These are my brother and sisters. These are people who live with gas masks in their home. Who have had SCUD attacks and knew how to handle them. But they wonder, "How do you 'handle' a nuke?" Israel is crying out about the dangers of this deal. We need to listen.
- My gut tells me that when much of the Arab world joins with Israel in opposing it, and the leaders of Syria and Hezbollah publically applaud it, we are on the wrong track.
- My gut tells me that the \$100 billion windfall that Iran will get will be surely used to arm the enemies of Israel - and it will be even easier once the Iran arms embargo is lifted as part of this deal.
- My gut tells me that any deal that does not take into consideration Iran's bad behavior, and its global plan for world terror (which seems to be working quite effectively right now) is dangerous, not just for Israel, but for Americans here and abroad.
- My gut, my head, my heart tell me that now is the time to tell Congress, starting with our own representatives, that this deal is not good enough and we can do better. A better deal will take into consideration the lives of those most affected by the decision, and for me that starts with the citizens of Israel. We are in this together with them.

Look, you and I made a decision not to live in Israel, even though we could if we wanted to. And in that sense, we are no different than many of the people we read about in this week's Torah portion. Of the full 12, only nine and half tribes actually wanted to go into Israel. It's not that the other two and half - Reuven, Gad and half the tribe of Mennasheh couldn't go. They just said, "You know what, we are going to stay here. It's better for us outside the Land of Israel." And it may shock you that they did not want to go to Israel even when they had the opportunity to do so, but the truth is that this has been the pattern throughout Jewish history. And we American Jews, by and large, we do the same thing. We say to ourselves, it's better to stay here even though it has never been easier to move to Israel. So it should be no surprise that the same thing happened in the Torah itself. Some Jews went and some Jews didn't. But we must remember what Moshe says to Reuven, Gad and the half tribe of Mennashe: He doesn't say "You can't stay there, you have to go to Israel..." He says, "OK, you can stay outside of the Land of Israel on one

condition: You have to fight for the Land." That is the tax, the price you have to pay for living outside of the Land of Israel, he says. And what they owed back then, we still owe today. You have to fight for the Land.

This is a complex issue, one that we face during complex times. But my duty, I believe our duty is to fight for the Land, and in this case that means holding out for a better deal than the one on the table. And over the next couple of weeks, a clearer plan of action will come into place. As your Rabbi, I cannot and will not tell you how you must respond. I only ask of you what I have asked of myself. "What does your gut tell YOU?"

Here is the contact information for Representative Donald Norcross of the 1st Congressional District: <https://norcross.house.gov/contact>

Here is the contact information for Senator Corey Booker - <http://www.booker.senate.gov>

You can also reach their offices via Facebook.