

In the two weeks since the Iranian nuclear agreement was reached, more attention has been focused on the politics surrounding the deal than on the merits of the agreement itself.

Much of the spotlight has been on the strong — even frantic — opposition of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who said the agreement marked “one of the darkest days in human history.”

The rush of Israeli politicians — and American-Jewish organizations to line up behind him — obscures the fact that a growing number of highly-respected Israeli voices and the majority of Jewish-Americans actually support the Iran deal.

In fact, in recent days, people like former Mossad Chief Efraim Halevy and former Shin Bet director Ami Ayalon have stepped forward to differ with the prime minister. That’s no easy task in the heated political environment of Israel. Netanyahu has been issuing dire warnings evoking the threat of a second Holocaust for years. Anyone who contradicts him risks being labeled as “weak on security.”

Perhaps, this explains why distinguished former top officials of the Israeli security services — whose service, knowledge and experience are unquestionable, have been the first to step forward in favor of the agreement. Their credentials also make their voices exceptionally important to this debate.

It is equally difficult for American-Jewish leaders, who tend to align themselves with any and every policy adopted by Israel’s government, to do otherwise now. But their full-throated opposition does not reflect what polling tells us about the views of the majority of Jewish-Americans.

In a poll of American Jews sponsored by the Los Angeles Jewish Journal and released on July 23, 49 percent backed the deal while 31 percent opposed it, compared to 28 percent and 24 percent of all Americans in polled in that survey (the rest were not sure). Fifty-three percent of American Jews wanted Congress to approve the deal, versus 35 percent who wanted Congress to reject it. In the general population, according to that poll, those numbers were 41 percent approve, 38 percent disapprove.

“The findings ... demonstrate a significant divide between the positions of major Jewish groups such as the American Israel Public Affairs Committee and many Jewish Federations, which have publicly opposed the deal, and the majority of American Jews. The thousands of American Jews publicly protesting congressional approval of the deal obscures the reality that most American Jews want Congress to approve it,” the newspaper wrote.

All of us in the pro-Israel community in the United States take Israel’s security extremely seriously. Israelis understandably feel threatened when Iranian leaders threaten to wipe them off the map and deny the Holocaust. They are justifiably alarmed by the massive arsenal of rockets and missiles Iran’s client Hezbollah has amassed just across the Lebanese border, all of them pointing at Israeli cities.

The question that warrants serious debate is whether Israelis will be safer facing a nuclear-armed Iran or an Iran without nuclear weapons. Will they be safer facing Hezbollah under an Iranian nuclear umbrella or Hezbollah without such protection?

If the answer to these questions is the latter, then the pro-Israel position would be to support an agreement that blocks all of Iran’s paths to acquiring such weapons. Without the deal, the Iranians will be free to move their nuclear program ahead without international monitoring or inspections and with a crumbling international sanctions regime.

This is precisely the argument Ayalon, Halevy and others have been making. “In the Middle East 10 to 15 years is an eternity,” Ayalon said in an interview with the Forward. “And I don’t believe that 10 or 15 years from now the world will stand by and watch Iran acquire nuclear weapons.”

Halevy, writing on Ynet News, said: “Without an agreement, Iran will be free to do as it pleases, while the sanctions regime will anyway crumble, as many of the world’s countries will rush to Tehran to sign profitable contracts.”

Such voices may not command the attention they should amid the political posturing. Heading into the 2016 presidential race, and with Hillary Clinton strongly backing the deal, Republican presidential contenders are vying to outdo each other with bellicose statements. Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker even suggested that the next president might have to take military action against Iran on Inauguration Day.

Sound bites designed to appeal to Republican primary voters are, however, no substitute for serious arguments about how to promote American and Israeli security.

Israelis are right to be worried about Iran – as are Americans. And security must be the standard against which we judge this agreement. So let’s have an informed debate that will educate Americans about what this deal does and what it does not do – about its strong points and its potential vulnerabilities.

And let’s listen to the military and security experts here and in Israel who are lining up by the dozens in support of this agreement.

If it truly encourages a debate on the merits, Congress will listen to the experts and decide not to stand in the way of this important agreement.

The more information that comes out about the Iranian nuclear arms arrangement, the more ludicrous it becomes.

Rumors were rampant in July about secret side deals between the UN and Iran, and now we know why the Obama administration was so keen to cover them up. Nowhere has the line “you can’t make this stuff up” ever been more relevant than with the latest revelation about John Kerry’s diplomatic masterpiece with Iran.

On Wednesday, it was revealed that the rumors appear to true and worse than many people suspected.

According to the Associated Press and several other major news organizations, the agreement allows Tehran to use its own experts and equipment at the Parchin nuclear facility to monitor inspections.

As one U.S. senator said, “That’s like the NFL allowing a player to test his own urine sample for drug abuse.”

Since the agreement in Vienna, the White House has been conspicuously quiet regarding the Parchin facility. Now we know why. Former UN inspector Oili Heinonen, who was deputy director of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) for five years, told the AP that allowing a country to conduct independent inspection of its own facilities was unprecedented.

No kidding.

Naturally President Barack Obama is already in damage-control-mode, making masterful use of his empty rhetoric to “explain” the deal. Obama and Kerry have already been under fire for allowing Iran 24 days’ notice before inspectors will be allowed to enter a site.

Heinonen was also responsible for that alert in July.

As a writer who goes by the name Allahpundit wrote,

“I could understand keeping it under wraps if the secret side deal amounted to a huge capitulation by Iran; in that case, you’d want to keep it out of the media so that Iran’s hardest fanatics don’t revolt against the deal as a national humiliation. But in reality, the side deal is a huge capitulation to Iran. What reason is there to keep it classified except to spare Obama and his European partners some enormous political difficulty in selling this deal to the suckers in their electorates?”

Sen. Jim Risch, R-Idaho, was taken aback during his questioning of Secretary of State Kerry at a senate hearing when he learned that the UN would not be allowed to gather its own soil samples for testing of uranium, but would be forced to rely on specimens provided by Iran.

Kerry responded that it was important to keep everything secret in order to maintain credibility with Iran and that though the information would be kept secret from the American public, it would be revealed to Congress through a classified hearing.

Since the agreement announcement President Barack Obama has been proudly claiming that his deal includes “unprecedented verification” of Iran. Based upon assessments by Oili Heinonen, Obama is 100 percent correct in his evaluation; the verification process is, indeed, “unprecedented.”

What Obama has failed to include is that they are unprecedented because they are in favor of Iran.

As the Associated Press reports, “the administration’s briefings on these side deals have been totally insufficient – and it still isn’t clear whether anyone at the White House has seen the documents.”

Meanwhile, the plethora of distractions continue, ranging from Jimmy Carter’s health to Hillary Clinton’s e-mail and Donald Trump’s “whatevers.”

Viable, important stories all, yet they still provide a smokescreen for Barack Obama and his advocacy for Islam while enhancing the opportunity for Iran to build a nuclear weapon.

After four and a half hours of contentious questioning, three cabinet secretaries deployed Thursday by President Obama to the Senate to defend his nuclear deal with Iran appeared to keep Democrats largely lined up as a bulwark against Republican opposition.

The hearing before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee was the Obama administration's first public defense of the agreement before Congress since it was unveiled this month. Secretary of State John Kerry, Energy Secretary Ernest J. Moniz and Treasury Secretary Jacob J. Lew parried questions — at times hostile — as they tried to stave off a resolution of disapproval that could come before lawmakers in September.

Mr. Kerry told skeptical lawmakers that the recently negotiated accord was the only chance to curb Iran's nuclear ambitions, and that failure to enact the agreement would isolate the United States internationally.

"If the U.S., after laboriously negotiating this multilateral agreement with five other partners, were to walk away from those partners, we're on our own," Mr. Kerry told the committee. A congressional rejection of the accord, he said, would amount to "a great big green light for Iran to double the pace of its uranium enrichment, proceed full speed ahead with a heavy water reactor, install new and more efficient centrifuges, and do it all without the unprecedented inspection and transparency measures that we have secured."

As Mr. Kerry defended the deal, President Hassan Rouhani of Iran told his own domestic critics that the alternative would be an economic "Stone Age."

Speaking frankly about the toll crippling international sanctions have had on the Iranian economy, Mr. Rouhani said a nuclear deal was precisely the reason he was elected two years ago.

While Republican opposition in Washington appeared implacable, the White House could take heart that Democrats held their fire. If congressional leaders proceed with a resolution to shoot down the Iran deal, Mr. Obama needs Democrats to sustain a promised veto of the resolution.

At the hearing, only Senator Bob Menendez, Democrat of New Jersey and a longtime critic of the Iran negotiations, openly opposed it.

Others, like Senator Tim Kaine, Democrat of Virginia, were far more supportive. "This is a deal that produces a dramatically better position for 15 years than the status quo," Mr. Kaine said, though he did ask pointed questions on what would happen after that period.

The hearing also served as a platform for presidential politics, with Senator Marco Rubio of Florida, one Republican presidential candidate, warning that the next administration would be "under no obligation" to abide by the deal, while another White House hopeful, Senator Rand Paul of Kentucky, adopted a more measured tone.

For his part, Senator Bob Corker, Republican of Tennessee and the committee chairman, revealed a level of deep skepticism that he had tried to keep in check. "What you have done is codify a personally aligned pathway for Iran to get a nuclear weapon," Mr. Corker said. "I believe you've been fleeced."

Beyond the politics, the testimony at times revealed facts about the agreement and its potential consequences that had not been widely shared. Mr. Lew, for instance, said the Treasury Department has estimated that the lifting of sanctions would give Iran's government access to around \$50 billion — not the \$100 billion widely reported — because half of Iran's frozen assets have already been obligated, including for projects with China.

"Iran is in a massive economic hole from which it will take years to climb out," Mr. Lew said.

A new point of contention also emerged over a separate, and confidential, side agreement between Iran and the International Atomic Energy Agency regarding inspections of a facility called Parchin, where Iran is suspected of carrying out prohibited work on high explosives related to the development of nuclear weapons.

Under that side agreement, Republicans charged, Iran would be responsible for taking the samples, which Mr. Corker likened to asking athletes to mail in their own urine samples for drug testing.

Senator Jim Risch, Republican of Idaho, said, "Even the N.F.L. wouldn't go along with this." Both Mr. Corker and the committee's ranking Democrat, Senator Benjamin L. Cardin of Maryland, demanded that the agreement be shared with Congress.

The Obama administration says it does not have a copy of the side agreement. But Mr. Kerry said American officials had been briefed on the details, which he did not disclose, and believed the arrangement worked out by the atomic energy agency can work — with, he hinted, a few adjustments suggested by Mr. Moniz.

Mr. Moniz also defended a provision in the deal that sets a 24-day deadline for resolving disputes between Iran and the atomic energy agency over access to suspicious sites.

The energy secretary said any work involving nuclear materials could not be covered up over three-week period, but he acknowledged that non-nuclear work — such as research into high-explosive triggers that could be used in nuclear weapons — would be harder to detect.

Olli Heinonen, a former deputy director of the atomic energy agency, told Congress on Wednesday that a 24-day deadline might enable the Iranians to remove the evidence of some important nuclear work at small-scale sites before the inspectors gained access.

“Twenty-four days do not cover credibly all plausible scenarios,” he said.

Still, the three cabinet secretaries were unequivocal in their statements that the accord was the best that could be achieved and that without it, the international sanctions regime would collapse.

Mr. Kerry mocked the belief in “some sort of unicorn arrangement involving Iran’s complete capitulation” as “a fantasy, plain and simple.”

That certitude — and the uniform animus of Republicans — seemed to embolden Democrats. Senator Barbara Boxer, Democrat of California, chastised Senators Corker and Risch for “being disrespectful and insulting.”

Senator Tom Udall, Democrat of New Mexico, said he sided with the experts at the nuclear weapons laboratories in his state, Los Alamos and Sandia, who helped devise the inspection and verification regimes.

Senator Chris Coons, Democrat of Delaware and a skeptic of the deal, said, “I do wonder what the alternative is.”

Democratic support is vital. Under the Iran Review Act signed in May, Congress has 60 days to examine the accord, then must decide whether to pass a motion of approval or disapproval — or do nothing. Mr. Obama has said he will veto any congressional move to disapprove the accord, meaning 34 Senate Democrats or 145 House Democrats could sustain that veto and ensure the deal goes into force.

To that end, the president met in the White House Cabinet Room on Thursday with about a dozen undecided House Democrats who he believes could be influential in holding the line on a veto.

“I was struck by how passionately engaged in this issue the president is,” said Representative Adam B. Schiff of California, the ranking Democrat on the House Intelligence Committee, who attended the meeting. He remains undecided, and said after the meeting that a large enough group of Democrats remained on the fence to make a veto override still very possible.

One Republican, Senator Jeff Flake of Arizona, appeared at least open to considering the accord.

“I’m not looking to play ‘gotcha’ at all,” he told the cabinet secretaries. “I’m in support of these negotiations.”

Mr. Paul, a libertarian-minded Republican perhaps seeking to separate himself from the bellicose responses of other presidential hopefuls, was also circumspect.

“I continue to support a negotiated solution and think it preferable to war,” he said.