

**Partisan Politics and Foreign Pressure:
The Ratification of the 2015 Iran Nuclear Agreement in the US Congress**

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Declaration of Originality

I, Harrison J. Falk, declare that this thesis is my own work and has not been submitted in any form for another degree or diploma at any university or other institute of tertiary education. Information derived from the published and unpublished work of others has been acknowledged in the text and a list of references is given in the bibliography.

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Abstract

This thesis employs Robert Putnam's concept of foreign pressure ("suasive reverberation") to analyze the battle in the US Congress over the 2015 Iran nuclear accords. Drawing on the public statements of key players, journalistic sources, and the congressional record, I contend that the most important factor in determining whether undecided lawmakers voted for or against the agreement was lobbying by other states. Specifically, the survival of the deal can be credited to appeals from France, Germany, and the United Kingdom, as well as to a lesser degree from Russia and China. Working in close conjunction with the Obama Administration, representatives of these states successfully pressured wavering members of Congress to support the agreement. I also argue that, counter-intuitively, the government of Israel's suasive reverberation in opposition to the Iran accords probably contributed to the deal's survival. The methods and rhetoric used in Israel's lobbying were perceived as partisan and sparked a backlash among Democratic members of Congress, leading them to close ranks and vote to approve the deal. Through examination of these divergent outcomes, this paper provides empirical support for the importance of suasive reverberation and sheds light on the conditions underlying its use, success, and failure.

Introduction

In April 2016, President Obama made a high-profile trip to the United Kingdom. In addition to attending tea with the Queen, the President issued a very public plea for the UK to remain in the European Union, an issue to be decided in a referendum later that year.¹ Reaction to Obama's appeal was predictably mixed. Proponents of Brexit decried attempts at what they deemed 'meddling', while opponents cheered the President's support and hoped that the popular American leader's voice might help sway an undecided electorate. In the end, Britain voted narrowly, 51.9% to 48.1%, to leave the EU.² The impact of the President's message may never be known – perhaps it slightly aided the Remain campaign, perhaps it backfired and helped the Brexit cause, or perhaps it was simply ignored. The two-month period between Obama's visit and the date of the vote, while perhaps necessary for the President to avoid charges of interfering directly with the referendum, probably had the result of blunting the effect of Obama's message, for better or worse.

Regardless of its ultimate impact, Obama's transatlantic overture illustrates a phenomenon that has largely escaped scholarly attention, as it falls squarely into the gap between the disciplines of international relations and political science. State leaders can and do cross national boundaries to appeal directly to foreign politicians, parties, and public opinion, and these appeals can and do have a significant impact on target states' politics. By altering domestic equilibria, these appeals can fundamentally reshape international relations. This phenomenon, *suasive reverberation*, is the focus of this paper.

Putnam (1988) was the first to formalize the concept of *suasive reverberation*, as part of his influential 'two-level game' model of interstate negotiations. In his model, executives ('Chief of Governments', or COGs) simultaneously conduct two interlocking sets of negotiations, one with their foreign counterpart(s) to formulate an international agreement, and one with their own domestic constituencies (e.g. publics, parliaments, and interest groups) to ratify and successfully implement the agreement.

As a corollary, Putnam introduced the concept of 'winsets', defined as the range of all possible agreements a given player finds acceptable. He argued that the calculus of the two-level game lay in attempts to expand or contract winsets of players at both levels through threats, promises, side payments, and other devices. He gave one type of strategic technique the newly coined label "*suasive reverberation*" and defined it as

¹ Obama gave a joint speech with Prime Minister Cameron, accessible at: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2016/04/22/remarks-President-obama-and-prime-minister-cameron-joint-press> and also wrote an editorial for the *Telegraph*, accessible at: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/04/21/as-your-friend-let-me-tell-you-that-the-eu-makes-britain-even-gr/>

² Erlanger 2016

“messages from abroad [that] can change minds, move the undecided, and hearten those in the domestic minority”.³ In sum, suasive reverberation represents attempts by foreign governments to influence the domestic politics of a negotiating counterpart by expanding (or contracting) the winsets of its key domestic players.

Suasive reverberation has not received the attention it deserves in the scholarly literature. Short of invasions or sponsoring coups, it represents one of the most dramatic forms of foreign interference in the supposedly autonomous domestic politics of other states. Examples can be ripped from the headlines, like the Ukrainian foreign minister campaigning on the streets of Amsterdam for a ‘yes’ vote on a Ukraine-EU association agreement.⁴ Seminal instances can also be found throughout history, like Sadat’s 1977 speech to the Knesset,⁵ and Gorbachev’s 1989 visit to Beijing.⁶

Indeed, the very nature of some of the world’s most intractable political problems, along with the magnifying effect of advances in telecommunications and social media technology,⁷ suggest that the importance of suasive reverberation as a political tool will only increase in the future. For example, Shamir and Shikaki (2005) suggest that bold, self-binding suasive reverberation could be the only way to break the current impasse of the Israel-Palestinian conflict. The festering legacies of World War II that continue to strain relations between the Koreas, China, and Japan are likewise highly sensitive, for good or ill, to suasive reverberation. For example, a single ill-considered remark from Japanese leaders triggers riots on the mainland, but that same intensity of feeling means that genuine attempts at public reconciliation might move mountains.⁸ And above all, the looming threat of global climate change as a quintessential collective action problem will also likely invite attempts by other states to interfere in the domestic politics of potential holdouts and free riders.⁹

Design and Research Aims

This study is not a comprehensive application of the two-level game model to the Iran nuclear negotiations. Instead, I will focus exclusively on the role suasive reverberation played in the domestic ratification process of the JCPOA (Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action) in the US Congress. Specifically, I will examine two opposing attempts at suasive reverberation targeted at Congress: one, from Israel, attempting to convince

³ Putnam 1988 455

⁴ Tomkiw 2016

⁵ Stein 1993

⁶ Chung 2001 79-82

⁷ See, for example, the US State Department’s “21st Century Statecraft” manifesto, accessible at <http://www.state.gov/statecraft/overview/index.htm>

⁸ He 2007

⁹ See Newell 2006 27-28; Lisowki 2002; Kroll and Shogren 2008.

legislators to reject the JCPOA, and the other, from the nations of France, Germany, and the UK, and to a lesser degree Russia and China (the 'P5 + 1') to convince them to approve it. I will also retain the term *winsset* from Putnam's original article because it provides a useful frame of reference for conceptualizing how *suasive reverberation* operates within a domestic political environment.

The US debate over the JCPOA represents an ideal test case because it provides us with not one but two simultaneous and opposing attempts at *suasive reverberation*, each from highly contrasting sources. The result is something approximating an experimental design – two different attempts, targeted at the same domestic players – potentially yielding deeper insights as to why *suasive reverberation* succeeds or fails than a simpler monothematic case.

And that is the aim of this study: to shed light on a fundamental set of puzzles about how *suasive reverberation* operates. My analysis focuses particularly on how partisan politics and ideological affinities affect the reception of *reverberation* attempts. Additionally, I seek to explain how and why COGs sometimes collude and sometimes clash in the course of *suasive reverberation*, and how recent historical events might function as a lodestar for domestic players in interpreting foreign appeals. These areas of investigation culminate in my research question: *Why did Israel's attempts at suasive reverberation fail while the P5 + 1's attempts succeeded?*

To answer this question, I will employ process tracing within the context of a case study, relying on press reports, the congressional record, and, most importantly, the public statements key legislators released when announcing their decisions on the JCPOA.¹⁰ The latter are invaluable primary documents offering a glimpse into how domestic players factored various attempts at *suasive reverberation* into their decision-making processes.

If my contentions about the importance of *suasive reverberation* are correct, we would expect to find implicit or explicit traces of *suasive reverberation* in these various sources. Targeted congresspeople might refer directly to speeches, writings, or meetings with foreign representatives, and would ideally stress such influences as key factors in their decision-making. Alternatively, we could find evidence for the impact of *suasive reverberation* if the talking points and rhetoric of foreigners' *suasive reverberation* are imitated either loosely or verbatim in legislators' justificatory statements, even if the foreign source is not explicitly credited. Another, more subtle method of demonstrating influence is to look closely at the timing of 'yes' or 'no' decisions. If, for example, five Senators held a meeting with the Israeli ambassador and then the same five Senators announced their 'no' decision en masse the following day, this might be taken as (circumstantial) evidence of the effectiveness of the Israeli lobbying.

¹⁰ Specifically, this paper employs what Collier 2012 describes as the method of "descriptive inference" and Van Evera's 1997 conception of case studies.

Conversely, if certain attempts at suasive reverberation were not effective, we might expect to find explicit rejections of these attempts, such as lambasting ‘foreign meddling’, questioning the motives of those nations performing the lobbying, and even engaging in personal attacks on the relevant foreign leaders themselves. Importantly, this negative reaction to suasive reverberation must come from the specific target group, and should not be conflated with negative reaction from other domestic players. That is, if Democratic Senators or Texas politicians are the intended target of the foreign lobbying, than umbrage from Republicans or from Iowans, while fascinating and worthy of study, is of little import to the specific argument at hand.

Literature Review

Three main areas of scholarly work are most relevant to a study of the suasive reverberation directed towards Congress vis-à-vis the Iran nuclear agreement. The first is the two-level game literature, which generated the term suasive reverberation and which contains the few examinations of suasive reverberation that have been carried out to date. The second is work drawn from the discipline of political science, focusing on the current domestic politics of foreign affairs in the United States. This is useful for establishing a sketch of the conditions under which suasive reverberation surrounding the Iran deal was received in Congress. Finally, a smaller subset of political science studies concern the US pro-Israel lobby. While this lobby consists of domestic persons, it obviously has an intimate connection with the state of Israel, and the foreign (especially Israeli) attempts at suasive reverberation surrounding the JCPOA cannot be understood in isolation from this significant force in Congressional foreign policy.

Two-Level Game Literature

Much of the two-level game literature (for example, Krauss 1993; Paarlberg 1997; Milner 1993; Patterson 1997; Hosli 2000; Larsén 2007) concerns trade negotiations involving banks, industries, or union lobbies whose interests are purely economic and narrowly rational. Appeals from foreign governments are unlikely to be effective in redefining or otherwise swaying these clear and easily quantifiable interests.¹¹

Two level-game studies focusing on undefined public goods like security (e.g. Eichenberg 1993; Stein 1993; LeoGrande 1998; Knopf 1993; Trumbore 1998; Chung 2007; Kapur 2011) more closely fit our case.¹² Although even these studies rarely place suasive

¹¹ Moravcsik 1993 29

¹²This suggests intersections with constructivist and Copenhagen School conceptions of security as a socially constructed value. See Wendt 1992 “Anarchy is What States Make of it” and Buzan 1983 *People, States, and Fear*.

reverberation at the center of their analyses, they can still illuminate important aspects of the Iran nuclear debate. For example, Knopf's examination of INF (intermediate nuclear force) talks in Western Europe shines a light on the subtle role that the alliance nations of two primary negotiating parties can play. Eichenberg's analysis of the same issue persuasively integrates German domestic partisan politics in a way that provides a good model for this study. LeoGrande's two-level evaluation of the impact of Cuban exile groups on Congress's Cuba policy is usefully analogous to an examination of the US pro-Israel lobby's role in the Iran debate. Most importantly, Stein's analysis of the Camp David Accords is one of the few two-level studies where suasive reverberation plays a somewhat prominent role. Her analysis of how Sadat's dramatic trip to Jerusalem favorably realigned the balance of power inside the Israeli parliament provides the closest analogue to the suasive reverberation examined in this paper.

Domestic Politics of US Foreign Policy

This literature looks at the current state of the domestic politics of US foreign policy. A recent and useful overview is provided by Milner and Tingley (2015) who explain how the President, Congress, special-interest lobbies, bureaucracies, and public opinion interact to shape foreign policy. My starting point for analysis of partisan and ideological factors is Kupchan and Trubowitz (2007). Their description of the splintering of the bipartisan "liberal internationalist" compact that held for most of the post-WWII era captures elegantly the framework within which the Iran deal was debated in Congress. Building on this, Beinart (2008) and Gries (2014) lay out the case that the determining characteristic of present US foreign policy is not the pressures of the international system but partisanship, and at a deeper level, ideology, "widely shared and systemic beliefs about how the world does and should work".¹³ Gries identifies two broadly opposed categories of US ideology, liberals and conservatives. Understanding the roots of the tension between these two camps is absolutely indispensable for understanding how the JCPOA battle played out in the US Congress. Additionally, Dueck (2010) provides a useful historical overview of the Republican Party's foreign policy. Rathbun (2012) analyzes the worldview of the powerful Tea Party movement – uncompromising and influential opponents both of President Obama generally and of negotiations with Iran.

Unfortunately, there are few substantial scholarly analyses of the Democratic party's foreign policy as a whole. There is, however, a significant literature analyzing the linkages between liberal politics, the Democratic Party, and the American Jewish community that is key to understanding the Democratic reaction to the suasive reverberation attempts surrounding the Iran deal.

¹³ Gries 2014 5

The Pro-Israel Lobby

Taking Walt and Mearsheimer's (2005) seminal work as a starting point, this study will also cautiously employ the controversial and polemic-tinged literature on the US pro-Israel lobby. Oren (2011) performs a insightful Allisonian bureaucratic politics analysis that finds a nexus between the pro-Israel lobby and its allies in Congress as one of the main forces pushing the US away from negotiations and towards conflict with Iran. In a related vein, Beattie's (2016) study of Congress and Middle Eastern foreign policy is particularly useful, as it focuses on the often-overlooked mundanities of influence over that body, such as phone calls, constituent letters, and VIP meetings. Another series of projects, notably Seliktar (2002) and more recently Waxman (2016) trace the increasingly tense relations between the broadly liberal US Jewish community, the broadly liberal Democratic party, and the increasingly right-leaning pro-Israel lobby and Israeli government. This is vital to our study because, as will be explained in detail below, these divisions had the effect of creating political breathing room for certain lawmakers to approve the Iran deal.

What the scholarly literature largely lacks, however, is a study putting suasive reverberation first.¹⁴ This paper, drawing on the insights of two-level games, studies of the politics of American foreign policy, and examinations of the pro-Israel lobby, aims to do just that. Making suasive reverberation the center of analysis will not only shed light on that topic itself, but also generate additional insights about the role of domestic politics, partisanship, and ideological affinities in foreign affairs more broadly.

Research Findings

Congressional Ratification Procedure

At the time of the Iran deal, the 114th Congress, the key ratifying institution for any nuclear deal with Iran, was dominated by the Republican Party. They controlled the Senate 54 to 46 and the House by an even larger margin, 246 to 188.¹⁵ Recognizing this hostile reality, and having been stung before when presenting international agreements to Congress, President Obama initially tried to avoid playing any sort of two-level

¹⁴ There is an extensive literature (founding texts include Finnemore and Sikkink 1998, Risse 1995, Keck and Sikkink 1998) that focuses on transnational advocacy, or how norms, ideologies, and ideas from abroad can permeate other societies and states and lead to political change. See also Haas 1992 on 'epistemic communities'. This project is more concerned with specific, discrete, and directly observable instances of lobbying perpetrated by government actors (COGs) in the form of speeches and visits linked to a specific international issue or crisis, instead of the more gradual and less visible processes the above scholars analyze.

¹⁵ Manning 2015

game.¹⁶ By carefully crafting and presenting the JCPOA as a non-binding political commitment¹⁷ as opposed to a formal treaty or congressional-executive agreement,¹⁸ the Administration hoped to avoid having to seek congressional approval.¹⁹ The President and his legal team exploited the interstices of constitutional power, relying on a combination of executive orders and waiver clauses built into previously passed sanctions legislation to offer Iran financial relief without having to go to Congress to actually repeal any sanctions laws or indeed ratify the agreement in any way.²⁰

However, both Democrats and Republicans resisted the President's efforts to cut Congress out of the equation. Even those members who supported diplomacy with Iran wanted a say in the process. Congress fought to defend its relevance on a potentially explosive foreign policy issue.²¹ In mid-May 2015, approximately two months before the JCPOA was concluded, overwhelming bipartisan majorities (98-1 in the Senate²² and 400-25 in the House²³) passed restrictive legislation called the Iran Nuclear Agreement Review Act, commonly known as 'Corker-Cardin' after its main authors. This nearly unanimous support forced the President to sign the legislation, and thus to play the two-level game.

Corker-Cardin imposed temporary restrictions on the President's ability to give Iran sanctions relief through the sanctions waiver clauses mentioned above. Specifically, the President was not permitted to "waive, suspend, reduce, provide relief from, or otherwise limit the application of statutory sanctions" for a 60 day period after the transmittal of any agreement to Congress.²⁴ During this 60 day period, Congress could block the lifting of sanctions, and hence scuttle the JCPOA, by passing a resolution of disapproval of the deal.

¹⁶ See Peake et al. 2012 on the travails of New START, President Obama's one attempt to pass a significant international agreement as a formal treaty. See Skidmore 2012 on the failure of agreements like the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea to even be considered by Congress due to Republican opposition.

¹⁷ Political commitments are essentially promises COGs make to each other, and are not legally binding under the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties. See Munch 1969; Schachter 1977; and Lipson 1991.

¹⁸ Under Article II of the US Constitution, treaties require the assent of two-thirds of the Senate. Congressional-executive agreements, an alternative mechanism to enact legally binding international agreements, require simple majorities of both the House and Senate.

¹⁹ Obama's behavior accords well with the so-called 'evasion thesis' of Lindsay 1994; Margolis 1986; and Nathan and Oliver 1994; which argues that Presidents seek to cut out recalcitrant legislatures through informal mechanisms, as well as the similar 'stealth multilateralism' of Kaye 2013.

²⁰ Rennack 2016

²¹ For example, see the statement of Democratic Senator Chris Coons, as quoted in Weisman and Baker 2015: "If the administration can't persuade 34 senators of whatever party that this agreement is worth proceeding with, then it's really a bad agreement."

²² Carney 2015

²³ French 2015

²⁴ *Iran Nuclear Agreement Review Act of 2015*, PL 114-17 Sec. 135 B, U.S. Statutes at Large (2015). Accessible at <https://www.congress.gov/114/plaws/pub17/PLAW-114pub17.pdf>

However, Corker-Cardin was less onerous than it might have appeared. To pass a joint resolution of disapproval would initially require only a simple majority in both the House and the Senate. But the President could veto such a joint resolution, meaning that, following the Constitution, the bar would then be raised to a two-thirds majority in both Houses in order to overturn the veto. In that case, opponents of the deal would have to rely on significant Democratic support in both chambers. Specifically, the Republicans would have to gain 13 Democratic or Independent Senators and 43 Democratic Representatives to override a veto of a negative resolution.

In short, the Obama team was on favorable ground as they worked to drum up support for the JCPOA. All they had to secure was the support of 34 senators. This is the mirror opposite of the numbers game they would have faced if the JCPOA was formulated as a formal treaty.²⁵ Because, as will be discussed below, Republican disapproval of a deal with Iran was virtually universal,²⁶ Democrats were the domestic group targeted by all foreign parties for influence. Thus the stage was set for the debate in Congress over the deal, and the two examples of suasive reverberation that form the core of this paper.

Before discussing these attempts, however, I will say a few words about a key calculation underlying the strategies of both the main foreign players as well as the domestic supporters and opponents of the deal. Putnam writes that the decision of domestic actors whether or not to ratify an international agreement is always evaluated in the context of the cost of 'no-agreement'.²⁷ The lower a player's perceived cost of no-agreement, the smaller her winset and thus the more selective she will be with regard to what agreements she finds acceptable. Conversely, the higher the perceived cost of no-agreement, the more accepting of an imperfect bargain a player is likely to be.²⁸

Here, I would propose an elaboration on Putnam's basic theory. No-agreement is a more complex phenomenon than it appears at first glance. Specifically, the permanence of no-agreement is itself a contested quality. If a deal is rejected at the domestic level of one of the signatory parties, no-agreement could theoretically mean a total end to dialogue *or* a prompt (or eventual) return to the negotiating table, depending on the particular circumstances involved.²⁹ Perceptions of a proffered

²⁵ This suggests COG strategic choice of agreement format as an important (and largely unexplored) factor in the two-level game.

²⁶ See Byrnes 2015. The one Republican senator considered a potential vote for the agreement, Jeff Flake, announced his opposition on August 15, 2015. In the end, no GOP representative (out of 246) supported the agreement either.

²⁷ Putnam 1988 442

²⁸ *Id.* 443

²⁹ Many factors might affect willingness to renegotiate after such an 'involuntary defection': prior investment of time, complexity of the issue involved, how many states or organizations are parties to the agreement, how close the failed agreement came to ratification, changes in regional or global political context that make a borderline deal more acceptable, a change in COG leadership, and a electoral

bargain's finality are key to understanding domestic evaluations of the cost of no-agreement. Opponents of the JCPOA had a low estimate of the cost of no-agreement because they argued that Iran could easily be forced back to the negotiating table if the JCPOA was rejected.³⁰ The Obama administration, in contrast, went to great lengths to depict the JCPOA as final and rate the cost of no-agreement as high as possible.³¹

This explains the most consistent theme the Obama administration used, that the rejection of the JCPOA would lead to war. In his most prominent speech on the agreement, the President stated "Let's not mince words: The choice we face is ultimately between diplomacy and some form of war — maybe not tomorrow, maybe not three months from now, but soon" and that "Congressional rejection of this deal leaves any U.S. administration that is absolutely committed to preventing Iran from getting a nuclear weapon with one option — another war in the Middle East".³² This message was echoed by Secretary of State John Kerry and the administration's allies in Congress. Specifically, the President targeted Democrats by linking the potential failure of the JCPOA's diplomatic efforts with Iran to the 2003 failure of diplomatic overtures to Iraq that eventually led to invasion and a highly unpopular war.³³

Unsurprisingly, those opposed to the JCPOA disputed this framing of the issue and accused Obama of presenting a false choice between a bad deal and war.³⁴ Both sides put so much emphasis on these competing narratives of no-agreement because both realized that this evaluation, and not necessarily the specifics of the JCPOA itself, would likely be the deciding factor in the minds of the group of legislators that would decide the fate of the deal. Consider the position of wavering Democrats: voting for a necessarily imperfect compromise agreement with a distrusted pariah state is hardly a political walk in the park. If these legislators were convinced that the JCPOA could realistically be renegotiated and strengthened to the benefit of the US and Israel, they

realignment among domestic players, among others. See Faure and Zartman 2012 at 8, who make the key point that negotiations failure can be "classified according to the degree of immobility of the process".

³⁰ This was perhaps the most common theme in opposition to the JCPOA. Critics repeatedly urged the US to push for "a better deal" (Senator McConnell, quoted in Cornwell 2015) or to go "back to the negotiating table" (e.g. the statement of Rep. Trott, accessible at <https://trott.house.gov/Iran>).

³¹ For example, Secretary Kerry said that: "It is a presumption there that Iran will come back and renegotiate. But that's not going to happen" and that if the JCPOA was rejected, "the United States Congress will prove the ayatollah's suspicion, and there's no way he's ever coming back" (as quoted in Goldberg 2015). Treasury Secretary Jack Lew claimed that the idea of forcing Iran back to the table through intensified sanctions was "a dangerous fantasy, flying in the face of economic and diplomatic reality" (Lew 2015).

³² Obama 2015

³³ For example, the President argued that "many of the same people who argued for the war in Iraq are now making the case against the Iran nuclear deal" Obama 2015

³⁴ Senator Coats' comments are representative: "We must ignore the coming public relations campaign that will trumpet this deal as a victory for diplomacy and the false premise that the deal is a choice between peace and war" (quoted in Walsh and Barret 2015).

would likely follow the path of least political resistance and reject it. Consider the words of one key Democratic senator: “If I thought there were a better deal possible, and a determined effort really could force all our key allies back to the table, that would be my preferred course” and “If members really believed there was a better deal waiting in the wings, they would have voted no”.³⁵

To forestall this eventuality, the Obama administration strategically employed foreign suasive reverberation to underscore the cost of no-agreement. Fascinatingly, the White House was also opposed in this effort by significant foreign suasive reverberation aimed at minimizing the perceived cost of no-agreement and thus killing the deal. The next section of this paper will discuss these opposing lobbying efforts. It will then conduct an in-depth analysis of the lengthy public statements issued by each Democratic Senator announcing and justifying their decisions. These statements show that foreign suasive reverberation was key to the ultimate survival of the JCPOA in Congress.

Suasive Reverberation: Israel

Opposition to the JCPOA stemmed from a nexus between the Republican Party, the state of Israel, and various US pro-Israel lobbying organizations.³⁶ Most famously, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, in a fascinating attempt at suasive reverberation, addressed an extremely high-profile joint session of Congress in March 2015 to try and convince that body to reject the still un-finalized deal. Put in context, this was roughly two months before the final approval of Corker-Cardin, and approximately four and half months before the JCPOA was actually concluded in Vienna.

Netanyahu must have known that the agreement was already opposed virtually unanimously by Republicans, who did not require any suasive reverberation to vote against it. This means that if Netanyahu was interested in more than just preaching to the choir, there were only two feasible (but not necessarily mutually exclusive) rationales for seeking such a dramatic venue for his address: either Netanyahu must have thought that his lobbying would raise pressure on wavering

³⁵ Sen. Chris Coons, as quoted in Peterson and Lee 2015.

³⁶ See Oren 2012; Beattie 2015. This paper will examine only the most prominent example of official reverberation attempts from the Israeli government, Netanyahu’s speech. Unfortunately, space precludes an in-depth analysis of the visits of ambassador Ron Dermer to key congressmen. Also, various US domestic groups like ‘Citizens for a Nuclear Free Iran’ paid for millions of dollars of advertisements designed to pressure vulnerable Democrats to kill any Iran deal (O’Connor 2015). Despite the intimate links of these organizations to Israel, their lobbying cannot be unambiguously defined as foreign suasive reverberation, and so will not be analyzed here.

Democrats and tip the scales against the agreement, or he saw his speech as a useful device to shore up his re-election chances back in Israel.³⁷

The latter possibility, although fascinating in and of itself, is outside the scope of this essay. The former is evidenced by the fact that the central strategy of the address was to attempt to narrow Congressional win-sets by lowering the perceived cost of no-agreement. This was a strategy completely wasted on Republicans, who were unconcerned with the cost of no-agreement. It was, however, carefully designed to appeal to wavering Democrats distrustful of a deal with Iran and fearful of any adverse geo-political and electoral consequences of supporting the deal, but loath to oppose their President and worried that no-agreement might lead to another Middle Eastern war.

It is not necessary to read between the lines to discover this strategy in Netanyahu's speech. Netanyahu directly confronted "the argument that there's no alternative to this deal" by claiming that "Iran's nuclear program can be rolled back well beyond the current proposal by insisting on a better deal and keeping up the pressure on a very vulnerable regime". Netanyahu overtly minimized the cost and likelihood of Iran rejecting a tougher deal: "Now, if Iran threatens to walk away from the table — and this often happens in a Persian bazaar — call their bluff. They'll be back, because they need the deal a lot more than you do". Netanyahu argued that "no deal is better than a bad deal" and that "the alternative to this bad deal is a much better deal". Netanyahu then ended his address with a list of characteristics of this "better deal".³⁸

This speech represented Netanyahu's recognition of the emerging outlines of the debate over the JCPOA in Congress. It constituted a pre-emptive strike against the Administration's likely rejoinder stressing the high cost of no-agreement. President Obama indeed responded to Netanyahu's address in precisely these terms, saying that "the alternative that the Prime Minister offers is no deal, in which case Iran will immediately begin once again pursuing its nuclear program".³⁹

If the main objective of Netanyahu's speech was to stoke Democratic opposition to the deal, it was, with the benefit of hindsight, counterproductive, and offers a quintessential example of negative suasive reverberation. In layman's terms, Netanyahu provoked a backlash. His central strategy — to attempt to shrink the win-set of Democrats by de-emphasizing the cost of no-agreement — fell on deaf ears. On the most basic level, few Democrats, or at least few Democrats that were previously undecided, bought his arguments. His strategy failed because it played neatly into a Democratic

³⁷ A critical and closely contested Israeli election was scheduled for two weeks after his address. Netanyahu's Likud narrowly won and was able to form a government. See Rudoren 2015.

³⁸ The full text of Netanyahu's speech is accessible online at <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-politics/wp/2015/03/03/full-text-netanyahus-address-to-congress/>

³⁹ As quoted in Baker 2015.

suspicion that the opponents of a deal with Iran were simply tearing down the President's proposals without offering anything constructive as a replacement.

For example, Sen. Barbara Boxer stated that "He [Netanyahu] seemed to say that there was no way [to] ever trust Iran. Which says to me you can't have a deal with Iran. And then he said, 'Well, why don't you work for a better deal?' So it was confusing".⁴⁰ Likewise, Rep. John Yarmuth stated that "Prime Minister Netanyahu basically said that the only acceptable deal was a perfect deal, or an ideal deal" adding that "It's like the child that says, I want to go to Disneyland every day, eat ice cream and drink Coca-Cola every day, and not go to school".⁴¹ Rep. Lloyd Doggett said that "He [Netanyahu] is a rejectionist. There is no agreement that this administration could achieve with Iran that would be good enough for him".⁴² This sort of reaction to Netanyahu's speech was not confined to those Democrats perceived as having only lukewarm ties to Netanyahu or to Israel. Rep. Brad Sherman, a noted Israel hawk, agreed with Netanyahu that "This [emerging Iran agreement] is a bad deal," but added that "He [Netanyahu] showed us why this deal is a bad deal. The alternative to a bad deal is we're in a bad situation. And he did not give us a clear road map to a good deal".⁴³

Why were Congressional Democrats so suspicious and distrustful of Netanyahu, the longtime leader of one of the US's closest allies? There are two interlocking second-order explanations: the more superficial contends that the manner of the speech's arrangement offended Democrats and led to a 'rally 'round the President' effect that increased support for the deal. On a deeper (but related) level, the speech might also have backfired because of an emerging partisan split on Israel, or, more precisely, a partisan split on an Israel increasingly dominated by right-wing political forces.

The first explanation is relatively straightforward. Congressional Democrats had reason to be upset with Netanyahu because, in an action without precedent in US history, he had come to criticize a sitting President in a speech to Congress that had been arranged through secret consultations with Republican leaders without the notification of any Democrats or the Administration.⁴⁴ It was also no secret to Congressional Democrats that Netanyahu and the Likud Party generally were no friends of their President, had consistently frustrated his policy aims in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, and had openly supported his Republican opponents in past Presidential

⁴⁰ As quoted in DeBonis 2015, an article headlined "Decrying 'Insult,' House Democrats Seethe After Netanyahu Address".

⁴¹ House Democratic Press Conference, 3 March 2015. Transcript accessible online at <http://www.c-span.org/video/?324646-1/house-democrats-response-prime-minister-netanyahu-address-congress>

⁴² *Id.*

⁴³ As quoted in Rogers 2015, headlined "Reaction to Netanyahu Speech Divides Along Partisan Lines".

⁴⁴ See Ravid 2015 for a detailed account. The idea for the speech apparently originated with House Republican Speaker John Boehner and was "swiftly and positively" accepted by Netanyahu, with Israel's ambassador to the US, Ron Dermer, acting as a go-between.

elections.⁴⁵ Approximately seventeen percent of Senate Democrats and more than twenty-five percent of House Democrats even refused to attend the speech at all in response to what they viewed as a political stunt and a personal snub to the President.⁴⁶ It is likely that the minority who took the overt step of refusing to attend or of issuing public criticism represented the tip of the iceberg of Democratic dissatisfaction with the speech. Netanyahu had to sway Democrats to have a chance at blocking the deal, but his speech and visit to Washington were arranged through connivance with their bitter political rivals. This mismatch between target group and methodological approach (the mechanical *how* of suasive reverberation) didn't bode well for the success of Netanyahu's appeals.

The second reason Netanyahu's speech was unsuccessful requires a deeper look into contemporary US-Israel relations. Tellingly, many of the negative statements on the speech were careful to emphasize their affection for Israel but not for Netanyahu himself. For example, Rep. Steve Cohen said that "Netanyahu is not Israel just like George W. Bush wasn't America".⁴⁷ This is a revealing quote, because the need for such a protestation subtly indicates the contrary: despite the requisite declarations of enduring, everlasting support for Israel, the policies of Netanyahu, Likud, and the Israeli right were increasingly driving Democrats away from policy lockstep with the Jewish state. Many liberals increasingly view an Israel dominated by such parties as no longer genuinely interested in peace with the Palestinians,⁴⁸ bent on expanding the deeply controversial settlements⁴⁹ and even preaching open racism against Israel's Arab minority.⁵⁰ These developments represented severe cognitive dissonance for a liberal party like the Democrats.⁵¹ According to this explanation, the negative reaction to Netanyahu's speech cannot be divorced from the Democratic party's perceptions that the right-wing government of Israel had formed a *de facto* alliance with the party in the

⁴⁵ The two have clashed on Israel's settlement policy, the peace process generally, Netanyahu's comments about Israel's minority citizens, the Iran deal, and the proper response to the Arab Spring, among other issues. See Shalev 2016, which describes Netanyahu and Obama as having "the most dysfunctional relationship on earth", and Goldberg 2016, which describes the disappointment Obama feels for Netanyahu to be "in a category of its own". Netanyahu even arranged a high-profile visit to Israel for Obama's 2012 Republican Presidential opponent, Mitt Romney, whom Netanyahu has been friendly with since the 1970s when the two worked at the same consulting firm. His actions infuriated Obama, who viewed Netanyahu as actively aiding Romney's election attempts. See Ravid 2012 for an analysis.

⁴⁶ Calculations performed by the author, using data from Jaffe 2015.

⁴⁷ As quoted in Weisman 2015, an article titled "Netanyahu's Visit Bringing Uninvited Problems for Jewish Democrats".

⁴⁸ Ravid 2015b

⁴⁹ Rudoren and Ashkenas 2015

⁵⁰ Eglash 2015

⁵¹ See Seliktar 2002; Waxman 2016

US that shared its alliances with religious fundamentalists, disinterest in the peace process and distaste for international opinion – the Republicans.⁵²

In sum, Netanyahu's speech only reinforced for Democrats the perception that the Iran deal was a choice between allegiance to a Democratic President and loyalty to a foreign nation increasingly distant ideologically and seemingly aligned with the Republican Party.⁵³

It is difficult to speak with absolute certainty, but virtually no statements or other documentary evidence show that Netanyahu's speech convinced any Congressperson not already opposed to the Iran agreement, and considerable evidence suggests he actually hurt his own cause. For example, the bad blood fostered by Netanyahu's speech might have been a factor in several more hawkish Democrats changing their prior positions and promising to hold off on imposing new sanctions before an important negotiating deadline for the Iran deal.⁵⁴ One anonymous pro-Israel activist was quoted as saying "that there was a chance of actually reaching a veto-proof majority" in favor of a new sanctions bill, but that Netanyahu's conduct, which the activist called "scary" and a "huge error" led to its defeat.⁵⁵ Greg Rosenbaum, chairman of the National Jewish Democratic Council and a proponent of a deal with Iran, said that the Netanyahu visit "made it easier for him to drum up support among lawmakers for giving the administration time to negotiate with Iran".⁵⁶ Perhaps the best summary came from an anonymous official with AIPAC, the powerful pro-Israel lobbying committee: "Netanyahu's speech in Congress made the Iranian issue a partisan one [...] As soon as he insisted on going ahead with this move, which was perceived as a Republican maneuver against the President, we lost a significant part of the Democratic party, without which it was impossible to block the agreement".⁵⁷

The Netanyahu speech contretemps illustrates how mishandled attempts at foreign suasive reverberation can trigger a backlash, even in states with such close historical and cultural ties as Israel and the US. Putnam states that "Negative reverberation is probably less common empirically than positive reverberation, simply

⁵² See a 2014 Pew study finding that "since the 1970s, the partisan gap in Mideast sympathies has never been wider" accessible online at <http://www.people-press.org/files/2014/07/7-15-14-Israel-and-Palestine-release.pdf>.

⁵³ Avishai 2015 notes that both Netanyahu and his chosen ambassador to the US, Ron Dermer, have extensive contacts with the Republican Party and few with Democrats. He goes so far as to argue that "in their wars of ideas and political networks, Netanyahu's Likud and his American supporters are an integral part of the Republican Party's camp, and Israel is too involved in the American political landscape and defense establishment for Netanyahu to be considered as distant as a foreign leader".

⁵⁴ *Id.*

⁵⁵ See Guttman 2015 "Why Israel Lobby is Biggest Casualty of Feud over Benjamin Netanyahu's Speech"

⁵⁶ Mufson 2015

⁵⁷ Avishai 2015b. AIPAC later distanced itself from these comments, saying that they did not represent the organization's official views.

because foreigners are likely to forgo public pressure if it is recognized to be counterproductive".⁵⁸ This suggests that Netanyahu miscalculated, unsurprising considering that attempts at suasive reverberation are necessarily conducted with incomplete information.⁵⁹

As we see above, the root of Netanyahu's miscalculation was his underestimation of the partisan split towards him personally and towards the right-wing turn in Israeli government generally. Putnam's original article limits itself to observation that suasive reverberation emanating from a "source [...] generally viewed by domestic audiences as an adversary rather than an ally [is] more likely to be perceived as negative".⁶⁰ But this statement can be sharpened. Unspoken is the implication that domestic partisan and ideological alignments play a key role in the reception of suasive reverberation attempts.

Specifically, in many nations, including the US, there are sharp internal divergences on attitudes towards certain states. A nation one domestic faction favors might be met with ambivalence or outright hostility by a different faction. For example, in a trend that burgeoned after 9/11 and especially after the 2003 Iraq War, the contemporary Republican Party has consistently criticized 'European elites', 'European socialism', and 'Old Europe', with France and the Scandinavian nations receiving particular mockery as godless, snobbish and emasculated welfare paradises.⁶¹ This visceral disdain has complex roots that are beyond the scope of this essay, but its effects can easily be discerned in Republican foreign policy actions and statements, most famously the Bush Administration's disdain for and complete rejection of European attempts to avert war with Iraq in 2003.

It seems reasonable to argue that attempts at suasive reverberation from foreign powers are less likely to succeed if the domestic group targeted is historically ambivalent or actively hostile to the source. Consider this hypothetical: In the run-up to the 2003 Iraq War, if Democrats had secretly invited Jaques Chirac to Washington to

⁵⁸ Putnam 1988 456

⁵⁹ Harsanyi 1967; Milner 1997. While leaders who attempt suasive reverberation have strong knowledge of their own internal coalitions and motivating forces, their perception of their target's circumstances is likely to be incomplete, even if, like Netanyahu, they have been sophisticated political observers of the target nation over many decades.

⁶⁰ Putnam 1988

⁶¹ Kahler 2005 shows how a close relationship with Europe was once "the least controversial element in American foreign policy" and a bipartisan "sacred cow", but has since become a wedge issue. Kahler traces this development to American domestic politics. He concludes that "Republican administrations have had more troubled relationships with European allies than Democratic administrations" and "the more conservative the administration, the sharper the conflict".

speak out against the impending invasion, how many House and Senate Republicans would likely have been persuaded?⁶²

Suasive reverberation probably only very rarely results in drastic shifts from one end of a given issue's political pendulum to the other. As the following section on P5 + 1 reverberation will illustrate, in situations governed by high levels of partisanship, foreign persuasive reverberation is more effective at the margins. Its usefulness lies chiefly in pressuring ambivalent or conflicted members within a 'friendly' party or domestic constituency that might be tempted to defect or abstain.

The European example is of course an imperfect analogy. The Democratic image of Israel has not reached, nor is likely to reach in the near future, the caricature of Europe that many Republicans seem to have internalized. However, Netanyahu's well-publicized antagonism with President Obama, his settlement policy, and his other controversial actions have accelerated the process of uncoupling the Democratic party from reflexive alignment with Israel. Netanyahu failed to recognize this changing reality, and as a result, his attempts at persuasive reverberation by narrowing Congressional Democrats' winsets were perceived by many Democrats as attempts to destroy President Obama's good-faith attempts at negotiations without offering anything constructive in their place. Unsurprisingly, this was not a winning strategy.

In sum, partisan perception of foreign powers can function as the medium through which foreign persuasive reverberation is interpreted. This suggests that foreign leaders who overtly align themselves with one domestic political faction are playing a dangerous game. If they miscalculate, they can lose more in political support from the other side of the aisle than they gain in the unquestioned allegiance of their domestic suitor. It seems likely this tendency would be particularly pronounced in nations with two dominant and roughly equally powerful parties like the US, the UK, Canada, and Australia. This is because if two political factions represent virtually the only outlets for political expression, overt alignment with one represents the writing off of roughly half the balance of political forces in the state.

Indeed, the success of Israel in influencing the American behemoth for more than half a century was predicated on bipartisanship.⁶³ As numerous commentators have pointed out, in the long term, it would prove extremely costly for Israel to lose the undivided support of the United States by alienating one of its two major parties.⁶⁴ Netanyahu's ungainly attempt – and ultimate failure – to stop the Iran deal represented a significant step down this road. This is why centrist pro-Israel advocates, including

⁶² President Obama posed this very hypothetical during an interview addressing Netanyahu's speech, accessible online at <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-obama-transcript-idUSKBN0LY2J820150302>

⁶³ See Cavari and Nyer 2014 for a comprehensive study of past bipartisan congressional support for Israel, and a glimpse into an emerging split they label "congressional dysergia".

⁶⁴ For example, See Judis 2015 "The Breakup" and Horowitz 2015 "Do the Democrats and Israel Have a Future Together?".

Abraham Foxman, head of the Anti-Defamation League, and Michael Oren, Netanyahu's former ambassador to the US, called for the speech to be cancelled.⁶⁵ They recognized danger and the potential for a backlash, even when Netanyahu himself did not.

Suasive Reverberation: the P5 + 1 Nations

The final form of the nuclear agreement with Iran was reached in Vienna on July 14th, 2015. Six days later, the Obama Administration formally transmitted the JCPOA to Congress, triggering Corker-Cardin's 60-day review period. Both sides mobilized, focusing primarily on the Senate.⁶⁶ This paper contends that the pivotal date for securing enough Democratic support to ensure the JCPOA's survival was August 4th. On that day, the ambassadors of all the foreign P5 + 1 negotiating states (the UK, France, Germany, Russia, and China) met with 25 to 30 Democratic Senators on Capitol Hill in an extraordinary attempt to convince them to support the agreement. This meeting was only the most prominent part of a coordinated lobbying campaign by the P5 + 1 powers (especially its European members), whose ambassadors and deputy mission chiefs crisscrossed Washington in the months leading up to the JCPOA vote. In parallel to our discussion of Israel's efforts, this analysis will recount only official P5 + 1 attempts at suasive reverberation, with the August 4th meeting as a focal point.⁶⁷ Within the P5 + 1, it will concentrate on the European nations, although Russia and China also played important but less high-profile roles.

European states had ample reason to press strongly for the JCPOA's survival. After all, these nations had begun the negotiation process with Iran in 2003, and were determined to see their more than decade-long odyssey to a successful end. They viewed the deal on its merits as positive for the security of the EU (which was much closer to a potential Iranian nuclear threat than the US) as well as for Israel.⁶⁸ To varying degrees, Russia, China, and the nations of the EU, particularly Germany, had also foregone fruitful economic links with Iran by imposing their own sanctions designed to

⁶⁵ See Haaretz [2015](#) and Guttman [2015b](#)

⁶⁶ Enough Democratic votes in either the House or the Senate would have guaranteed the deal's survival. The Obama administration probably focused its lobbying efforts on the Senate for the practical reason that it was easier to gauge the support of and tailor messages to a relatively small group of senators than to the much larger and more heterogeneous House Democratic caucus.

⁶⁷ An extraordinary Washington Post editorial in favor of the deal coauthored by the leaders of Germany, France and the UK will not be discussed at length here because it was published after the critical mass to ensure the deal's survival was achieved. See https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/cameron-hollande-and-merkel-why-we-support-the-iran-deal/2015/09/10/a1ce6610-5735-11e5-b8c9-944725fcd3b9_story.html?postshare=5081441905624312

⁶⁸ See the above-referenced editorial: "Israel's security matters are, and will remain, our key interests, too. We would not have reached the nuclear deal with Iran if we did not think that it removed a threat to the region and the non-proliferation regime as a whole."

lead to the JCPOA, and were eager to see normal trade ties restored, especially energy links.⁶⁹ There was also a complete absence of the domestic debate roiling the US; European publics and parties were virtually unanimous in support of a deal with Iran.⁷⁰

The August 4th meeting on Capitol Hill was arranged by Dick Durbin, a Democratic senator from Illinois (President Obama's home state) with long-standing personal ties to the White House. Durbin was also the Senate minority whip, a position responsible for ensuring party unity and discipline. In short, he was the ideal liaison between the Administration and the Senate.⁷¹ It is hard to imagine that such a meeting occurred without extensive coordination between congressional allies, the heads of state of the P5 + 1, and the White House. These networks gave the P5 + 1 privileged access to Democratic senators. The date of the meeting, the day before President Obama's main speech in support of the agreement at American University, suggests that it was a carefully timed part of a larger roll-out effort. Indeed, the P5 + 1 meeting and the messages it delivered apparently followed a "communications game plan" crafted by the US and European nations at the conclusion of negotiations in Vienna.⁷² This alone is fascinating because it suggests that suasive reverberation was such an integral part of the deal that it was discussed alongside the negotiation of the substantive content of the agreement itself.

What has emerged from the August 4th meeting makes it clear that the P5 + 1's strategy for suasive reverberation was the mirror image of Netanyahu's. Their goal was to foreclose the easy way out for wavering Democratic senators – the tempting idea that the JCPOA could be rejected and that Iran would return to the negotiating table, and that more diplomacy, not war, would ensue. The ambassadors aimed to convince Democratic senators that if the JCPOA were rejected, they would not fight for 'a better deal'. Instead, the message of the P5 + 1 nations, anticipating the President's the next day, was that Congressional rejection would mean that support for the international sanctions regime would collapse in Europe, China, and Russia, and that the Iranians would not return to the negotiating table but would instead likely accelerate their nuclear program. In short, the P5 + 1's role was to emphasize the high cost of no-agreement and thus expand the winsets of Democratic senators.

⁶⁹ See Patterson 2013; Shirvani and Vuković 2015. Unlike the US, which has not had significant trade with Iran since the 1979 Revolution, the EU sacrificed a significant financial relationship with Iran by signing on to sanctions. One estimate by a pro-deal organization put Germany's losses between 2010 and 2012 alone at between \$23.1 and \$73.0 billion dollars, and France's at between \$10.9 and \$34.2 billion dollars. See NIAC report, accessible at <http://www.niacouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/Losing-Billions-The-Cost-of-Iran-Sanctions.pdf>

⁷⁰ Bohlen 2015, "Europe Doesn't Share U.S. Concerns on Iran Deal"

⁷¹ See DeBonis 2015, "How Sen. Durbin Spent His Summer Saving the Iran Deal" for details.

⁷² Crowley 2015, headlined "Old Europe pushes Iran Deal On Capitol Hill"

No transcript of the closed-door meeting was taken, but the basic outline of what was said can be reconstructed through journalistic accounts, the public remarks of P5 + 1 officials, and an analysis of Democratic senators' statements in support of the deal. According to a report⁷³ in *Foreign Policy* magazine, during the meeting, "a number of Democrats expressed genuine confusion about how world powers would react if Congress rejected the deal, and whether a 'better deal' could be struck in the future." The P5 + 1 diplomats then "pushed back" against this suggestion. The British ambassador, Peter Westmacott, told the senators that the chances of getting a better deal were "far-fetched". He also speculated that the global sanctions regime against Tehran would fall apart if Congress blocked the JCPOA – a view that was seconded by Russian Ambassador Sergey Kislyak. The arguments the ambassadors made during the meeting almost certainly paralleled their many public statements. For example, on another occasion, Ambassador Peter Witting of Germany stated that: "I think many of the emerging countries would consider Congress blocking this deal as – maybe as a trigger to at least question the present sanctions regime[...][If] the international community comes to the conclusion that it's not Iran that is to blame, then the international solidarity that has been quite strong on the recent years would most probably erode."⁷⁴

Ample evidence suggests that this attempt to broaden Democratic win-sets by emphasizing the cost of no-agreement worked. Although it is impossible to quantify just how important the P5 + 1 strategy was for senators weighing a host of competing demands, a mass of anecdotal evidence suggests that it was a decisive factor.⁷⁵ Even if the P5 + 1's message was privately considered by Democrats as "not intellectually valid but politically useful",⁷⁶ it still provided the necessary cover to vote yes and thus guaranteed the survival of the agreement.

Almost every Democratic senator released a public statement explaining his or her decision on the JCPOA. Usually, a senator's statement on votes, even on highly controversial topics, are short and rarely contain in depth-analysis or argumentation beyond the soundbite level. Luckily for us, however, the statements Democrats released in response to the Iran deal took the form of heavily researched *cri de cœurs*. For example, Senator Bob Casey's statement – surely breaking some kind of Senate record – was over seven thousand words long. These documents offer an invaluable glimpse into the mindsets and motivations of Democrats concerning the Iran deal and the competing attempts at suasive reverberation surrounding it.

⁷³ Hudson 2015, headlined "P5+1 Nations Press Senate Democrats to Support Iran Deal"

⁷⁴ Panel discussion at the Atlantic Council, Washington DC, 28 May 2015. Accessible online at <http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/news/transcripts/europe-and-the-iran-nuclear-deal>

⁷⁵ See comments by Democratic senators in DeBonis 2015: "That meeting [with the P5 +1] was as close to a turning point as there was in the Senate, because the ambassadors were clear as day in their assessment that there would be no second negotiation."

⁷⁶ Putnam 455

42 Democratic and independent senators voted in favor of the JCPOA. Of these, 27 (64%) explicitly cited the meeting with the P5 + 1 ambassadors in their explanatory statements.⁷⁷ This squares perfectly with the estimated number of senators at the meeting, suggesting that virtually every Senator who attended was swayed by the P5 + 1's strategy. Due to space limitations, not every statement can be reproduced here, but it is important to stress that those that follow below are not cherry-picked examples. The great majority of Democratic senators seem to have accepted some variation of the P5 + 1's arguments.

Sen. Franken, for instance, wrote that "some say that, should the Senate reject this agreement, we would be in position to negotiate a 'better' one. But I've spoken to representatives of the five nations that helped broker the deal, and they agree that this simply wouldn't be the case."⁷⁸ Sen. Klobuchar said that she "recently met with the Ambassadors representing the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Russia, and China, and not one of them believed that abandoning this deal would result in a better deal".⁷⁹ Sen. Gillibrand stated: "In a meeting earlier this week when I questioned the ambassadors of our P5+1 allies, it also became clear that if we reject this deal, going back to the negotiation table is not an option".⁸⁰ Sen. Hirono cited this intriguing exchange when she explained her positive vote: "In fact, at a recent meeting of leaders from our partner nations, I specifically asked the Ambassadors to the U.S. from China, the United Kingdom, and Russia whether their countries would come back to negotiate again should the U.S. walk away from the deal. They unanimously said, 'No', that there was already a deal – the one before Congress."⁸¹

Importantly, the August 4th meeting was also a factor in swaying Democrats from conservative or battleground states where their seats were more vulnerable to potential Republican challengers. For example, Sen. Bill Nelson of Florida argued that "If the United States kills the deal that most of the rest of the world is for, there is no question in this Senator's mind that the sanctions will start to erode, and they may collapse altogether. We just had a meeting with all the P5 + 1 Ambassadors to the United States, and they reaffirmed that exact fact".⁸² Sen. Bob Casey, of the key swing state of Pennsylvania, not only cited the P5 + 1 meeting in his statement but even

⁷⁷ Calculations performed by the author in a comprehensive analysis of every senatorial statement.

⁷⁸ Statement accessible at <http://edition.cnn.com/2015/08/13/opinions/franken-iran-deal/>

⁷⁹ Statement accessible at <http://www.klobuchar.senate.gov/public/2015/8/senator-amy-klobuchar-s-statement-on-iran-nuclear-agreement>

⁸⁰ Statement accessible at <https://www.gillibrand.senate.gov/newsroom/press/release/gillibrand-why-im-supporting-an-imperfect-iran-deal>

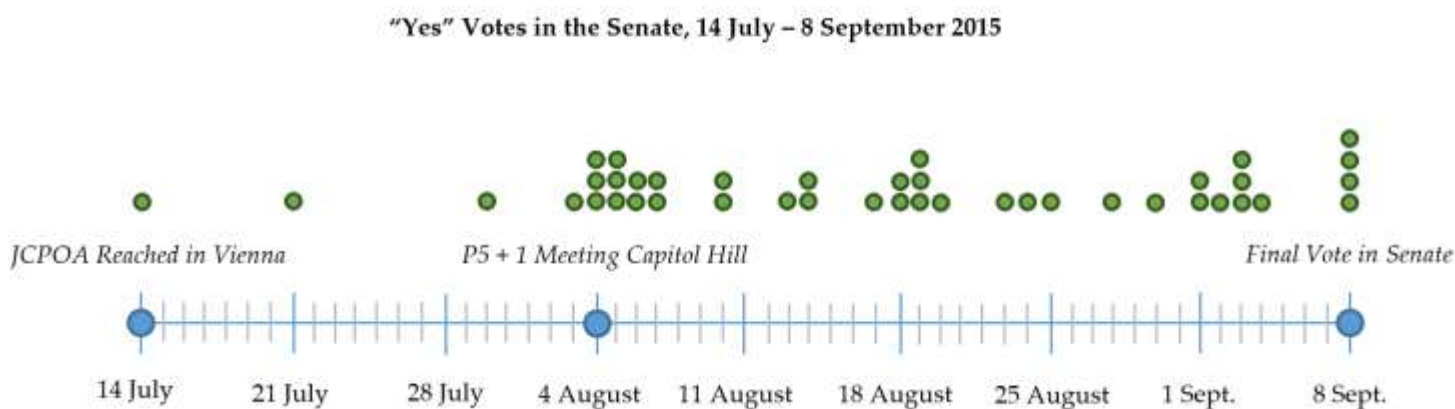
⁸¹ Statement accessible at <https://www.hirono.senate.gov/press-releases/statement-from-us-senator-mazie-k-hirono-on-the-iran-nuclear-agreement>

⁸² Statement accessible at <https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/CREC-2015-08-04/pdf/CREC-2015-08-04-pt1-PgS6263-2.pdf#page=2> 6264-6266

directly reproduced within it a quote from the UK Deputy Head of Mission in support of the deal.⁸³

An even greater number of senators, 38, or 90% of yes votes, employed arguments that echoed the thrust of the P5 + 1’s rhetoric, even if they did not cite the August 4th meeting explicitly. This suggests that the P5 + 1’s argument spread widely within the Democratic caucus and filtered down even to Senators who did not attend the meeting. For instance, Sen. Shaheen stated that “If we walk away from this agreement, we’ll see the sanctions regime fall apart, we will be there by ourselves, and Iran will continue its march to a nuclear weapon”.⁸⁴ Sen. Schatz argued that “We do not have the luxury of being able to pick this deal apart. The United States negotiated this deal with the other major world powers; and if we walk away now, the multilateral sanctions that the United States helped put in place to bring Iran to the negotiating table will certainly crumble”.⁸⁵

Finally, the timing of many Democratic senator’s announcements provides circumstantial evidence that the P5 + 1 meeting was a decisive factor. Before August 4th, only four Senators had publicly announced their support for the JCPOA. Within four days of the P5 +1 meeting, ten senators announced their support. 38 of 42 yes votes (over 90%) were announced on or after the day of the meeting. Of course, the mere date that these statements were issued does not prove causation, and it is understandable that many senators delayed a decision on this difficult topic until the last possible moment. However, when the timing depicted in the below chart is combined with the content of the senators’ statements, August 4th clearly emerges as a turning point in the fight over the JCPOA.



⁸³ Statement accessible at <https://www.casey.senate.gov/newsroom/releases/casey-statement-on-iran-agreement-full>

⁸⁴ Statement accessible at <https://www.shaheen.senate.gov/news/press/release/?id=71222814-e95e-4022-b832-3a9847b42600>

⁸⁵ Statement accessible at <http://www.schatz.senate.gov/press-releases/schatz-statement-on-iran-nuclear-agreement>

Why were the P5 + 1 so successful? On the most basic level, we can say that their arguments were simply more compelling than Israel's, and that the JCPOA's naysayers never offered a better alternative. This is all well and good, but, as with the Israeli attempts, it is worth exploring the broader context within which the P5 + 1 appeals were interpreted. Such an investigation can perhaps suggest why the P5 + 1 succeeded where Israel failed.

First, it is important to note that the attempts at suasive reverberation were coming from sources – Western Europe specifically, and the international community more broadly – that the target group was already inclined to respect. Democrats and liberals, in sharp contrast to Republicans and conservatives, generally ascribe substantial importance to multilateral diplomacy, institutional cooperation, and the will of the international community, especially with regard to arms control.⁸⁶ Tellingly, with the sole exception of Israel, conservatives express less favorable views than liberals of nearly every country in the world.⁸⁷ This is an ideological phenomenon of long standing, dating back at least to the formative period of modern American foreign policy after the end of World War II.⁸⁸

The role that Western Europe (with the exception of the UK) and the world community performed in opposing the Iraq War would also have resonated favorably in the minds of undecided Democratic senators. The debate over the Iran deal resurrected lingering memories of the previous presidency, with the Bush administration's 'with us or against us' mentality, disdain for diplomacy and international institutions, and vigorous unilateralism. It is likely that many Democrats were wary of a rush to war of 2003 vintage and reluctant to align themselves with many of the individuals responsible for that effort, who, coincidentally or not, were mostly those leading the charge against the JCPOA.⁸⁹ These circumstances left Democrats especially unenthusiastic about rejecting a diplomatic option supported nearly unanimously by the global community. These conditions – general affinities with and respect for Western Europe nations and international opinion, a belief in the value of diplomacy, and the specific historical legacies of the recent past – made Democrats highly vulnerable targets for suasive reverberation emanating from the P5 + 1. Putnam said as much when he proposed "that international pressure is more likely to reverberate negatively if its source is generally viewed by domestic audiences as an

⁸⁶ For example, see Busby et al. 2012, (although their conclusions are antithetical to my argument, their data is not) accessible at <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2012-05-30/american-foreign-policy-already-post-partisan>, especially the section on "principles". This trend also holds beyond the US, see Rathbun 2004.

⁸⁷ See Gries 2014, "Introduction".

⁸⁸ *Id.*

⁸⁹ Some examples include Netanyahu himself, neoconservative intellectuals like William Kristol, former Vice President Dick Cheney, and many others.

adversary rather than an ally"⁹⁰ but the interesting thing here is the unpacking of the term "domestic audiences" to mean political parties and ideological coalitions.

This episode suggests that suasive reverberation attempts targeted at liberals are more likely to be effective the more multilateral they are, especially if they seem to encompass virtually the entire global community of nations. The P5 + 1 did not say anything truly novel during their Capitol Hill visits — they simply echoed the Obama administration's previous arguments — but they provided vital credibility for those claims. Instead of having to take the President's word on what the reaction of the US's sanctions partners would be to a Congressional rejection of the JCPOA, Democrats could hear directly from the relevant nations themselves. As one British diplomat who attended the Capitol Hill meeting put it: "It's not often you hear those five ambassadors [of the P5 + 1] all saying they agree with each other. I think the demonstration of unity behind this deal was really striking."⁹¹ Being presented with a united front of five of the world's greatest powers, and knowing that they represented the opinion of virtually every nation in the world except for Israel, must have been extremely compelling for Democratic senators.

Another key factor that differentiates the P5 + 1's attempts at suasive reverberation from Israel's is that the P5 + 1 were perceived as being 'on the same side' as a Democratic President and working to support his agenda. In particular, the leaders and ambassadors of these states (with the possible exception of Russia) had none of the personal baggage and animosities with the White House that Netanyahu and Dermer did. Unlike Netanyahu, whose personal history left him compromised, these states and their representatives were perceived as objective and disinterested in the domestic political ramifications of the deal. To Democrats, they appeared wholly focused on the substantive issues surrounding the JCPOA. This is in sharp contrast to Netanyahu, whom Democrats knew all too well was a foe of the President and a friend to Republicans. His attempts at suasive reverberation appeared less credible because it was difficult for Democrats to distinguish between Netanyahu's perhaps sincere concerns regarding the substance of the JCPOA and his partisan goals and allegiances, both at home and in the US.

Conclusions

This paper suggests several preliminary conclusions regarding how suasive reverberation operates. First, states attempting suasive reverberation should keep in mind that the apparent choice domestic players face between 'deal' and 'no deal' is not always straightforward. No deal is always a contested concept; a key strategy of those

⁹⁰ Putnam 1988 456.

⁹¹ Beatty 2015

opposing any given agreement will be to suggest that no deal really only means a better deal in the future, while those supportive of the agreement will likely respond by stressing the finality of the agreement on the table, whether this representation is accurate or not.

Secondly, my findings suggest that a fundamental distinction should be made between 'hostile takeover' attempts at suasive reverberation and those attempted through COG collusion. Specifically, suasive reverberation attempts coordinated with the permission and assistance of the COG of the target country are more likely to succeed than those attempted without such coordination, and are especially more effective than appeals actively opposed by the target state's COG. This is because COG assistance can act as a 'force multiplier' and 'guide' by helping to coordinate the foreign source's message with friendly domestic forces and by providing inlets into the closed, unfamiliar, and often byzantine domestic political institutions of the target country.

Thirdly, in multi-party democracies, partisan (ideological) perception of foreign powers can function as the medium through which foreign suasive reverberation is interpreted. Liberal parties generally, including those in the United States, are likely to be more responsive to multilateral appeals, as well as to suasive reverberation originating from international institutions. Perhaps the most powerful suasive reverberation for liberals is that of a group of respected foreign leaders speaking on behalf of 'the world community' or 'global opinion' – precisely what prevailed in the case of the JCPOA.

In contrast, conservative parties, predisposed to suspicions of 'meddling' and preoccupied with sovereignty concerns, are only likely to heed suasive reverberation from a few countries perceived as key allies. For the United States, this list is small: Israel and perhaps Great Britain. It is even possible that increasing levels of multilateral involvement might make conservative domestic players *less* responsive to suasive reverberation attempts, due to the exceptionalist beliefs and seeming contempt for other nations that are a readily detectible strain at least in American conservative political thought. In short, suasive reverberation attempts targeted at conservative parties will more often than not fail. Side payments, threats, and other 'hard' forms of pressure will probably be more productive methods for foreign states wishing to influence these domestic players than normative or rhetorical appeals.

In this unforgiving landscape, nations attempting foreign suasive reverberation who ambitiously want to appeal to both liberal and conservative domestic players and thus maximize their odds of success should take care that both their appeals and their delivery mechanism for such appeals are unimpeachably non-partisan. It is not enough to be non-partisan in only one of these aspects. Netanyahu's speech itself went out of its way to appear neutral by praising the President, Democratic leaders in Congress, and avoiding any hint of favoring Republicans over Democrats. However, such effusions of

naïveté were accomplished by a decidedly (to Democrats) cynical method of secret consultations with Republican leaders, and so were discounted.

Fourthly, and in a related vein, personalities matter. Democratic knowledge of the bitter split between President Obama and Prime Minister Netanyahu, as well as the obvious favor Netanyahu showed the Republican party over his long career, predisposed Democrats to distrust him. In contrast, Democrats perceived Angela Merkel, David Cameron, and François Hollande (and their respective ambassadors) as cool, non-partisan players. It is easy to imagine that a more centrist Israeli COG lobbying against the JCPOA (say an Ehud Barak or Shimon Peres) without Netanyahu's toxic personal history and enconcement in the US political system might have been better received by Democrats.

Finally, nations attempting suasive reverberation must also be cognizant of the historical context in which their attempts will be interpreted. Those who can successfully play off recent history and weave their message into a broader narrative attractive to their target will be more likely to succeed. Those who ignore this imperative and fail to craft a credible counter-narrative to their opponent's spin on events ("those who started the Iraq war want to start another with Iran") will likely see their attempts at suasive reverberation subsumed into a depiction that will end in an unfavorable result for their cause.

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