

Over the past five months, we've learned much about the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action and the intentions of Iran's ayatollahs.

We know the nuclear deal will release billions of dollars to the terror-sponsoring Iranian regime.

We know Qasem Soleimani and other terrorists who have killed Americans will be relieved of international sanctions.

We know that side deals between the IAEA and Iran — side deals we've yet to see — may entrust the Iranian regime to collect its own verification samples at its most secret nuclear facilities, allowing Iran to monitor itself instead of insisting on real, verifiable, and independent inspections.

We know the right to enrich at all, which this administration conceded early on in these negotiations, will trigger an arms race in the Middle East. Just this week, the Ambassador from the United Arab Emirates told the Chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee that, if this deal goes through, the UAE may no longer abide by its nonproliferation commitments and may begin an enrichment program. I fear Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Turkey, and other countries may follow suit.

We know the ayatollahs — fresh from the negotiating table in Vienna — continue to lead Quds Day crowds in chants of "Death to America," and issue threats at our President and our people.

And we know that the deal will begin to expire in 10 to 15 years, unleashing a nuclear-capable Iran on the world, free of international sanctions, with a healthier economy, and without the restraints that American diplomacy has so painstakingly cultivated over the past decade.

But in the end, our vote on the Iran nuclear deal won't turn on any of these particulars. Ultimately, this vote isn't about specific centrifuge numbers, or enrichment levels, or the exact scope of sanctions relief.

No. It's much simpler than that.

This vote is about history. It's about the responsibility of this Senate in the greatest republic in history. And it's about where we want the course of history to lead for our children and grandchildren.

This vote is not about a party or a president. After all, the Iranians chant death to America, and not death to Republicans or death to Democrats or death to our president. Just this week, the Iranians again labeled America the Great Satan. This vote is about empowering an evil, terror-sponsoring regime and continuing this history or seizing the moment to change history.

Because if this deal is approved, in just a few years, Iran may test a nuclear device, as North Korea did in 2006, just 12 years after a similar nuclear agreement.

With a rumbling explosion that will shake the earth, Iran may announce its status as a nuclear power and the opening of a second nuclear age that our nation has struggled so long to prevent.

If Iran goes nuclear, history will not remember kindly the senators who supported this nuclear deal. It won't remember your hand-wringing, your anguished speeches, or your grave brow-furrowing. It won't remember your gullible beliefs about the flawed inspections system or unworkable enforcement mechanisms. It won't remember your soft rationalizations that this deal is "better than nothing" or "the only alternative to war."

History will remember your vote and only your vote. It will remember that you opened the gate to Iran's path to a nuclear weapon. It will remember you as the ones who flipped the strategic balance of the Middle East and the world toward the favor of our enemies.

And it will remember you, this Senate, and this president as the ones who — when given the chance to stop the world's worst sponsor of terrorism from obtaining the world's worst weapons — blinked when confronted with that evil.

A world menaced by a nuclear-capable Iran is a terrifying prospect. Over the past three decades, Iran has waged a low-intensity war on the United States and our partners. Iran has financed and trained Hezbollah and Hamas terrorists to do its bidding by proxy. Iran fueled the virulent insurgency whose roadside bombs and suicide attacks devastated Iraq and sadly killed or maimed thousands of American troops. And Iran has sowed unrest throughout the Middle East and propped up Syrian dictator Bashar al-Assad, creating a crisis that has engulfed the entire region and that is fast spreading beyond its borders to other parts of the world.

Iran has done all this without nuclear weapons. Should it be allowed to continue enrichment and conduct research and development on nuclear technology — as this deal lets it — the ayatollahs will grow even more brazen, fearsome, reckless, and insulated from conventional forms of deterrence and pressure. Upon the expiration of the deal — or its repudiation by the ayatollahs at a time of their choosing — Iran's strategy of terror and intimidation will become nuclearized.

That is the world we may face in a few short years because of your votes. That is the threat we will confront if you bestow your blessing on a nuclear program run by the anti-American, anti-Israel, jihadist regime in Tehran.

So we should soberly recognize that the context for this vote isn't the debate that is fast coming to a close. The context isn't the demagoguery and backroom pressure of a lame-duck president. And it isn't the effect of this vote on our political fortunes.

The context for our vote is the broad sweep of history.

In late 1936, Churchill spoke on the years of British appeasement in the face of German rearmament. He observed, "The era of procrastination, of half-measures, of soothing and baffling expedients, of delays, is coming to a close. In its place we are entering a period of consequences."

Churchill's words are as true today as they were then. We are entering a period of consequences. Because of your votes, the consequences may well be nuclear. God help us all if they are.