The great American writer, F. Scott Fitzgerald, made an important observation: “The test of a first-rate intelligence is the ability to hold two opposed ideas in mind at the same time and still retain the ability to function.” This is not only a truism, but a tremendous challenge.

One idea: The recent deal with Iran is a disaster for the Western World and an immediate threat to Israel. Iran will continue with its nuclear aspirations, and enjoy an economic boom that will enable it to increase its support of terrorism throughout the Middle East and beyond.

Another idea: The recent deal with Iran is a testimony to responsible international diplomacy. It promotes peace and decreases the possibility of war. It is a step toward reconciliation between Iran and the Western world that will prove advantageous to all.

One can find truth in both of these ideas, even though they are antithetical to each other. Critics of the deal focus on the first idea; supporters of the deal focus on the second idea. Those with “first-rate intelligence” see validity in both ideas and try to retain the ability to function. This is surely not an easy task! These two approaches cannot both be correct, and the consequences of choosing the wrong one will be disastrous.

The fact is that the deal has been reached, whether we approve or not. It is highly unlikely that the United States Congress will defeat President Obama on this issue. The question isn’t: is this good for the U.S? Nor is it: is it impossibly dangerous for Israel? Rather, the question is: how can we ensure that this deal will produce the most positive results and the least negative consequences?

We certainly hope that the Western powers will carefully monitor Iran’s nuclear projects. We certainly hope that Iran will adhere to its side of the agreement. We certainly hope that Iran will become “normalized” and will curtail its support of terrorism and aggression against Israel.

While President Obama thinks these hopes are realistic, many others are far more skeptical. We will all be watching to see how the future unfolds. Surely, the State of Israel will look out for its own interests and in its own defense. Prime Minister Netanyahu has been quite vocal in his opposition to the Iran deal, and feels that an emboldened Iran will pose a direct and immediate threat to the State of Israel. After all, Iranian leaders have openly and brazenly declared their intention to annihilate the Jewish State.

While the threat to Israel is real, we also note that leading Israeli military and political figures have indicated that Israel is quite capable of dealing with any Iranian military action. Ehud Barak has stated that Israel can live with a nuclear Iran. Israel is mighty enough to defend itself, and Iran knows the price it would pay if it were to attack Israel.
I think it is a mistake for us to frame the Iran deal as a “Jewish issue,” or as an “Israeli issue.” The public should realize—or be made to realize—that the issue is an “American issue” or a “Western allies issue.” The more it is viewed as a parochial Jewish issue or as a partisan political issue, the worse it will ultimately be for Israel.

Mr. Netanyahu would be more effective, I believe, if he would back off a bit in his public criticisms of the deal. Everyone knows his views. His position would be immeasurably strengthened if he faded more into the background, and let other Middle Eastern figures speak up. If the leaders of the Arab world, especially Saudi Arabia, would be at the forefront of critique of the Iran deal—this would demonstrate that the entire Middle East, not just Israel, is deeply concerned with an ever more powerful Iran.

While American Jewish organizations certainly feel strongly about the Iran deal, their positions would be greatly enhanced if they did not make this seem like a “Jewish issue.” Bi-partisan political leadership, including people of various religions and backgrounds, will be a far more effective strategy.

We need to retain the ability to function—and to plan intelligently for the future—while struggling to balance two opposed views, each of which has merit, and each of which has flaws. Sometimes it is important to speak out stridently and forcefully. Sometimes it is important to speak quietly, or to remain silent.

While we pray that the best and most peaceful scenario will ensue, we must plan as though the worst and most dangerous results will arise.

And in the meanwhile we must retain the ability to function prudently and with “first-rate intelligence.”

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