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Panel: Reordering the Middle East

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Talking Points for: Kwon Hee-seog, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, ROK

With the interim deal reached on April 2 between P5+1 and Iran, the outcome of Iran's nuclear negotiations will have profound repercussions on the broader Middle East. Three possible scenarios are envisaged. First, should the nuclear negotiations go nowhere, the region would witness a deepening crisis between Iran and neighboring countries. A diplomatic flurry in the UN Security Council would bring about a tougher sanctions resolution in parallel with U.S. congressional actions. Israel would threaten airstrikes on nuclear facilities in Iran. The world should be worried about which comes first: back down or breakdown by Iran.

If the talks are successfully concluded, Iran may pursue a regional status, expanding its power and influence and seeking to reassert its traditional role in the region. On the other hand, Iran could make a different choice by playing a constructive role in managing and pacifying the Shia belt and consolidating its leadership position in the Shiite world, which would balance against Sunni powers and extremists such as ISIL and the Taliban.

This would lead to the creation of a new dividing line based on sectarian identity, and transform the Middle East created by the Sykes-Picot Agreement to be based on pseudo-nation states. The time has come to buttress sovereignty and the territorial integrity of the region against sectarian politics.

* The views expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the views of the Asan Institute for Policy Studies.