

Position Papers

The Iran Nuclear Deal:

A Monumental Mistake by the Obama
Administration or a New Beginning?

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[Getty]

Abstract

The nuclear deal reached between Iran and the P5+1, China, France, Germany, Russia, the United States and the United Kingdom, will be scrutinized by diplomats, military experts and politicians for months and years to come. Statesmen and politicians will interpret the deal differently and each will vie to use the argument which suites the audience and the domestic base she/he represents. However, the psychological, economic, political, and military implications of the deal on the United States, Europe and many Middle Eastern countries will be monumental. The deal will impact the balance of power in the Middle East and will change its dynamics forever, change the dynamics of the energy markets in Europe, Thus creating tension between Russia and Europe, and will ignite a fierce security debate between Democrats and Republicans in the United States on the culture of regime change and the use of force. The deal will bring the subject of regime change to the political forefront in the US and will raise a serious question on whether the use of force is the only effective mechanism to change the behavior of states in order to achieve favorable outcomes. Both Republicans and Democrats used force as a tool for regime change, however the Obama administration is advocating for new means: diplomacy.

Regime Change and the Use of Force in the United States

Since World War II, the majority of Republicans and some Democrats have favored the use of force against opponents as a tool of regime change when faced with a challenge anywhere around the world. For instance, the Kennedy administration's use of force to remove Fidel Castro in 1961, the Nixon administration's use of force to remove Salvador Allende in Chile from power in 1973, the Reagan Administration's use of force to remove a Marxist regime in Grenada in 1983, and the George W.H. Bush Administration use of

force to remove Manuel Noriega, the president of Panama from power in 1989. Similarly, George W. Bush used force to remove the Taliban from power in 2001, and Saddam Hussein in 2003. These examples serve as a reminder for the tradition of the use of force in the United States.

However, President Obama has been advocating a different approach to regime change and to the practice of American diplomacy since he came to office in 2009. Obama's political and foreign policy philosophies were spelled out in his first inaugural speech in Washington D.C. He promised a new beginning with enemies and friends alike. He proposed and advocating for a new beginning with the world and began advocating several new approaches to the practice of American foreign policy. Since he assumed the presidency, Obama has been encouraging dialogue, engaging the enemy, unclenching your fist, and allowing diplomacy to take its course before resorting to the use of force. Obama's approach to foreign policy reflects a new dynamic and a new logic and a fresh start to the conduct of American diplomacy around the world. Many of his predecessors favored the use of force over any other method to achieve their desired outcome. But, president Obama struck a new tone at the beginning of his tenure with the Muslim World, Cuba, North Korea, Iran, Syria, Al-Qaeda, and many more to change their attitudes. He invited all to open up and look at things through different and more positive angles to arrive at a common ground and better understanding for the challenges that face all societies.

Obama's Approach to Foreign Policy

The Iran deal, the diplomatic opening to Cuba, and the historic visit to Myanmar in 2014, demonstrate the president's commitment to shake the foundation of American foreign policy. Obama's diplomatic moves struck a shift and redefined the American approach to regime change and to the practice of diplomacy around the world. It is clear that the president prefers diplomacy over any other method to bring a change to the behavior of other states. The president's diplomatic approach with Cuba, Iran and Myanmar are a new experiment in regime change from within. The president hopes that the people will join forces to change their regimes after an economic boom takes place. This philosophy could work in theory or with countries that have very limited colonial and imperial ambitions. But, Iranian politicians have been crystal clear about their intentions for the region. Iran has political, economic, military, and cultural ambitions and seeks to expand in the Middle East and risk destabilizing the region for decades to come. Therefore, a deal with Iran that does not completely settle all the core issues: arms race, sectarian violence, nuclear proliferation, and balance of power is likely to cause

more harm than good and threatens regional security for decades to come. In addition, a deal with Iran that does not link a change of behavior to lifting sanctions will lead to more destabilizations and will complicate any attempts by moderates to challenge the regime and start an internal change.

Obama Justification for the Iranian Deal

Many will argue that the Obama administration rushed a nuclear deal with Iran, especially because Iran cannot be seen through the same security prisms as Cuba and Myanmar. Iran is a country with declared nefarious intentions that seeks to expand, and to dominate its neighbors. For instance, Iran has been meddling in the affairs of Iraq since 2003, has been spoiling any attempt for a peaceful resolution in Syrian, has been dragging Lebanon to the abyss, and has been agitating the situation in Yemen. Iran does not hide its intentions and desire to controlling capitals and geographic terrains in the Middle East and beyond. Iran, aspires to expand ideologically in the region by spreading its version of Shi'a Islam through its Shi'a proxies. It has been employing and deploying a great deal of its human and financial resources in order to accomplish these tasks. For instance, Iran has been building cultural centers, mosques, seminary schools, and sending huge caches of weapons to arm its supporters and facilitate its infiltration into the Arab and Islamic worlds.

Therefore, this paper stresses that the Obama administration should have been more careful with this deal and should not have deconstructed it to a nuclear agreement only. The Obama administration should have insisted on negotiating a comprehensive deal with the Iranian, and not only a nuclear deal. After the agreement was signed President Obama, gave an interview to the New York Times' Thomas Friedman and said the following " Don't judge me on whether this deal transforms Iran, ends Iran's aggressive behavior towards some of its Arab neighbors, or leads to détente between Shiites and Sunnis." Judge me on one thing: "Does this deal prevent Iran from breaking out with a nuclear weapon for the next 10 years and is that a better outcome for America, Israel, and our Arab allies than any other alternative on the table?" The President's logic harms his allies and arms his opponents giving them all the necessary ammunition to attack him and argue that this was a monumental mistake rather than a new beginning. Iran's nuclear project could have been stopped by many other peaceful mechanisms. For instance, sanctions, cyber-attacks, diplomatic isolation, economic hardships, working with reforms from within Iran, working with IAEA and the UN, and using soft power effectively. All the aforementioned tools could have stopped Iran from developing a nuclear device and would have pressured Iran to seek a genuine new beginning with the

international community. Therefore, the president erred when he asked to be judged by that only. The president's goal reflects a lack of a comprehensive strategy to solving the nuclear issue and rather a narrow focus on a nominal diplomatic victory that will strengthen the hardliners in Iran and not lead to a regime change from within or usher in a new beginning with Iran anytime in the foreseeable future.

To have a new beginning with Iran, the administration should have opted for more than a cosmetic change and delved into the core destabilizer of the region: the Iranian aggressive behavior, in Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, and Yemen, and should have insisted that any deal must put an end to meddling, expanding, arming, and financing groups who seek disorder in the Middle East. Rushing a deal was unnecessary at this stage since the Obama Administration is likely to see no results of it. The implementation of the deal may begin in 2016 and lifting the international sanctions and the American imposed sanctions could take a year or two to materialize. Hence, a deal should have been delayed to achieve better results in order to safeguard and ensure regional stability and security. The acclaimed deal will complicate many political, economic, and military aspects in the Middle East and Europe and will destabilize the region by igniting more wars and justifying an arms race in the Arab Gulf region.

For the US, the deal will hardly be a game changer due to the high level of mistrust between American decision makers and Iran. In addition, 2016 is an election year, thus law makers from both parties will not rush to ratify the deal or lift any American imposed sanctions on the Islamic Republic. In fact, Democrats and Republicans will distance themselves from the deal and will demand more evidence on Iran's compliance with the deal before voting to lift or ease any economic restrictions. Furthermore, the new president in 2017, Democrat or Republican will find her/himself a hostage to an agreement that he/she played no role in negotiating. This could complicate the relationship between Europe and the United States, and could hinder or derail relations between US, Russia and China. The new president could ask for more verifications, or could succumb to more domestic pressure to renegotiate certain aspects of the deal especially when the public becomes aware of certain articles in the agreement that do not allow robust and intrusive inspections to all the nuclear facilities. These ambiguities will represent serious challenges to any new administration. Therefore, the deal was not negotiated diligently enough and has many gaffes and fallacies especially those pertaining to verifications and implementations.

Problems with the Deal (Verification and Implementation)

The deal has some loopholes that may endanger the balance of power in the Middle East, degrades the political prestige of the United States, and poison the relationship between the US and Europe and the US and China and Russia. For instance, the deal states that "if Iran violates the agreement then international sanctions will be restored in 65 days." The 65 days sanction will work as follows: if a state suspects that Iran has violated the agreement, it will be able to file its complaint with an arbitration board comprising of members of six world powers, the European union and Iran itself." The committee will have 30 days to vote on whether to bring the complaint to the United Nations Security Council (SC). In that case the SC will have 30 days on whether to restore sanctions, and has the option of extending the deliberation by five days. In addition, before any sanction to be restored, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) has to testify on whether Iran is complying and fulfilling all its commitments on the deal.

The mechanisms in place remind us with the League of Nations' and its failure to stop wars and aggression in the early decades of the Twentieth Century. Article 15th of the League's covenant required verifications, voting, and arbitration before an aggression or a violation could be countered, stopped, or declared illegal. Japan invaded Manchuria and Italy invaded Abyssinia under the watchful eyes of the League. In the case of Manchuria, it took the League more than a year to send a commission to investigate the incident and report back in order to declare that Japan had to withdraw. The League's precedent teaches us an important lesson about verifications and the nature of balance of power between and among competing nations belonging to any institution in an anarchic international system. The imbalance between the parties and their disregard to international law led to the demise of the League and World War II.

The nuclear deal with Iran represents a similar case, the six powers should have agreed on what constitutes a violation rather than leaving it for an interpretation. The Russian and the Chinese may not agree with the Europeans and the Americans on the definition of a violation or on what would be considered as cheating in this case. In addition, when a violation comes before the UNSC, any country can use its veto power to freeze the process. Any debate among the six powers will happen while Iran is selling oil on the market and rebuilding its infrastructure. Therefore, the deal is not as strong or as durable as the Obama administration would like the international community to believe and may lead to more instability and chaos in the Middle East and it will hardly usher in a new beginning in the region.

Conclusion

The president's diplomatic approach with Cuba and Myanmar could be justified politically and economically. Both countries are neither resourceful nor ambitious nor do they have the capacity to threaten any of their neighbors. In addition, the rapprochement to them could be understood as a balance of power move to deprive China from Myanmar and Russia from Cuba. Cuba's proximity to the homeland vindicates Obama's tactics and sends a clear signal to the Russians about the US' priorities in its sphere of influence. Also, Myanmar's closeness to China explains the urgency for the United States to open diplomatic relations with it in order to have more allies when it pivots to Asia. Therefore, a regime change from within in both cases is likely after some economic prosperity and diligent nudging by the US. But, Iran is economically very rich and politically very ambitious. Therefore, the P5+1 will have great difficulties in influencing events on the ground once the sanctions are lifted.

The deal will lift economic sanctions off Iran and allow Iran access to global markets and restore all Iranian frozen assets. This concession allows Iran to free itself from economic sanctions, diplomatic isolation, the threat of any military strike, while maintain all the necessary ingredients for pursuing its nuclear agenda with better resources and stronger infrastructure. The Iranians will keep their know how technology, more than 5000 centrifuges, all the facilities intact, and the ability after 10 or 15 years to resume all of their operations with very little obstacles. Also, the deal will strengthen the hardliners and will give them more resources to consolidate their power rather than empower the moderates and facilitate a regime change inside Iran. For these reasons, this deal may end up to be a monumental mistake rather than a new beginning.

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