How to Avoid the Middle-Eastern Shuk

Two out of every three Americans, and 75 percent of Israelis, are opposed to the administration’s deal with Iran because it does not block the world’s No. 1 sponsor of terrorism from acquiring nuclear weapons. On the contrary, it legitimizes the very nuclear program Iran denied they had, and allows for their full acceptance as a nuclear state at the end of the agreement

There is a very good possibility that in early September, Congress will be able to muster the votes to at least bring about a show down with the administration, if not actually produce a veto-proof majority vote. One thing is for sure, during the week of the vote, the halls of Congress will be filled with thousands of American citizens lobbying their members of Congress against the deal thanks to a number of groups planning lobbying days, press conferences and rallies then.

Opposing the deal is one thing. But, the question that everyone wants answered is: What is the alternative? Its opponents say the alternative is to broker a better deal. However, the fact is that the American negotiating team will not be able to broker a better deal unless they learn to negotiate like an Iranian.

The Middle-Eastern Shuk

Most Middle Easterners can negotiate Americans under the carpet, because they literally grow up negotiating everything, from the cost of fruits and vegetables in the *shuk* (market) to higher-priced items like appliances and home goods. Americans only negotiate when they purchase a car or a house. So, what can we learn from the Middle-Eastern *shuk*?

No. 1: Never pay the stated price. A shopkeeper will not quote the price that he expects you to pay but an inflated price that leaves room for negotiating. Never agree to the stated demand. Always offer less.

No. 2: Never start where you want to end. Once a price has been stated, respond with an offer that is so ridiculously low that it is embarrassing. This is where many Americans stumble, because they do not want to look like they are cheap, nor do they want to insult the poor merchant. But if you do not counter low, you will end up paying too much.

No. 3: Make them think it really hurts. Middle Easterners love to play along with their opponent by telling how much the counter offer hurts while displaying great emotion and perhaps emphatic gestures. Compare this to the average American who usually avoids any display of emotion. They are not used to such reactions, so they will quickly give in and pay the high price thinking they may have insulted or hurt the feelings of their negotiating partner.

No. 4: Don't trust your opponent. Americans are at heart a very honest people, and look down on any type of lying. So, they assume everyone else is telling the truth like they are! In the Middle East though, truth can be sacrificed to achieve the goal of leaving the negotiations with honor and respect back home. Therefore, don't believe everything your opponent says.

No. 5: Be prepared to walk away. When the stakes are high, and the deal being brokered is just not good enough, then the buyer has to be willing to walk out the door. The merchant knows then that he has lost the sale, and he will run after the buyer with a new offer. Being too eager to make a deal is perceived as weakness and will be taken advantage of. Always be willing to walk away.

Only those privy to the negotiations know how well or how poorly the American team did. But, based on their eagerness to close a deal, and the response of the Iranians, who said they got everything they wanted, it appears the American team was out-negotiated.

To broker a better deal with Iran, perhaps we should consider bringing in the Israelis to negotiate for us. They have much more experience in the Middle Eastern *shuk*.

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