

Possibility of Less Sanctions Has Iran Spinning Out of Control

Sometimes when friends call or write from overseas to ask what Israelis think about a certain current event, it gives me pause to step back and consider what things we are seeing, feeling or taking for granted in Israel. This has been happening increasingly with the issue of Iran sanctions and the threat of war before us.

As fast as the **Iranian** centrifuges are spinning, by estimations in excess of 18,000 of them, keeping Iran one step from the breakout point of becoming a nuclear state, the most dangerous and erratic of them in the world, so, too, is the political spin dizzying. Negotiations with the Iranians to set back their nuclear ambitions and abilities continue apace, as it was revealed that the Obama administration has been holding secret back-door negotiations with the Iranians. The White House has pulled out all stops to lobby and twist arms of congressional leaders to back its position and even tried to coax American **Jewish** organizations to do so as well.

France has emerged as Israel's strongest ally on maintaining a firm stance on sanctions—an odd-couple pairing, given France's past relations with **Israel** being less than supportive of Israel's positions. Other strange alliances are rumored to be forming as well. And more and more Israelis are aware of the very simple fact that no matter who may appear to be standing firmly with Israel in its position that **Iran** must be stopped at all costs, we cannot rely on others to guarantee our safety and security, and Israel can and should do whatever is needed to ensure its national interests which, *vis a vis* Iran, are existential.

On the negotiations with the Iranians involving the P5+1, a trusted friend with many more political and diplomatic contacts than I have summed it up like this: "Can you believe BH0 and the Iranian nonsense? He is willing to give a suspension of sanctions in return for Iran not demanding that the international community acknowledge its right to develop a nuclear capacity!" More colorful remarks followed, but in essence, that sums up the situation.

In short, somehow the Obama administration sees appeasing **Iran** as its national interest and a strategy that makes sense globally. However, the Iranians have lied repeatedly, made their intentions known clearly, and have no history of any reliability in international politics or diplomacy, other than being the world's leading backer of terrorism. Is this someone to make such a deal with? I don't think so, and most Israelis don't either. It's really not rocket science, pun intended.

It's hard to say why the **French** have taken a principled stand against such a deal, as France is not particularly known for its principled stands. Vichy comes to mind, but there are many more recent examples. While clouded in some early conflict, the French president's visit to Israel this week was like a heroic homecoming of close friends. He had some tough things to say regarding peace talks with the **Palestinians** building in the West Bank (Judea and Samaria), which was largely wrong, but his visit was feted as being a heroic welcome of our new *friend du jour*. It remains to be seen how principled and firm the French position will remain regarding Iran, but despite the fanfare, Israelis are mindful the tide can change at any moment and we'll be standing alone again.

Some people more closely attuned to domestic American issues have noted that the naïve (at best) Obama push to relieve sanctions on Iran is as much to do with his false belief that the Iranians are a reliable and trustworthy partner, possibly colored by the fact that it wouldn't look too great for a Nobel Peace Prize recipient to initiate a **military action**

against Iran, and that he is using the Iranian issue as a smoke screen to appear rational and appeal to Americans' anti-war sensibilities while deflecting attention from the unraveling of his flagship legislation, Obamacare.

There's another strange parallel in Obama's full-court press on Congress, and it's equally and eerily uncomfortable that the case being made is like the verbal equivalent of Three-Card Monte. In this case, Obama has chosen to take his case to the Congress directly, using some of his best assets to make his case and prevent Congress from throwing a wrench in his appeasement of the Iranians. It almost seems that he's given his word to the Iranians and is afraid to be seen as lacking integrity to one of the countries in the world that most embodies a lack of integrity. It's widely known that in seeking to build a congressional backing for the administration's positions, the White House has turned to leading American **Jewish** organizations to get their backing, or at least to get them not to lobby against the administration. Thankfully, most have politely but firmly declined the White House requests.

However, when it came to Syria just a few months ago, the **Obama administration** was perceived as punting and fumbling miserably, less lobbying Congress and more opening it up for a congressional free-for-all. Then, whether Obama had established a red line regarding Syria's use of chemical weapons, Congress was not too interested in the president's integrity or his word.

Also differently, the White House successfully appealed to some American Jewish organizations to back his words and lobby Congress for a limited military response in Syria, albeit while putting these organizations in the unbearable position of backing a president's position that he himself didn't really back and about which he seemed all too happy when it died from successive knockout punches of Congress and the Russians.

All this to say that sitting in Jerusalem, it's very hard to feel much comfort from an administration that seems confused at best, whose policies make no sense, one person of which comes into this lacking credibility and integrity, and the implementation of whose policies make war in the Middle East more likely than less likely. Remember this when gas hits \$10 a gallon!

Not to be a total pessimist, there is one potential silver lining to all this—an unintended consequence that the Obama administration may not be sophisticated enough to understand, but if it does, it may not like: Reports are flying that Israel is quietly engaging the Saudis and other (moderate) Arab Gulf states who are equally concerned over the Iranian drive for **nuclear weapons**. Rumors abound that the Saudis and others might allow Israel to use their air space in order to facilitate a military strike on Iran, something entirely unprecedented. It's strange that the U.S., which used to try to be a reliable neutral partner to bridge Arab and Israeli differences, may now have driven a wedge between itself and some Arab states, so much so that they are drawn toward Israel as a reliable ally. Go figure.

This shows that **Israel** is not only *not* the core of the problems of the Middle East but in fact part and parcel of the solution, and that many Arab states know this. It shows that peace is possible, but it takes a great deal more sophistication than the White House is demonstrating its capacity for.

What to do? Join me in calling upon your congressional leaders (after all, I am also a proud American citizen, paying taxes and voting) in no way to back the easing of sanctions against Iran unless and until they cease their drive for **nuclear weapons** altogether.

And pray.

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