

Against Undiplomatic Diplomacy

The loudest voices in the Senate call for strategies that make negotiation and peace harder.

By [Sen. Rand Paul](#)

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When ambassadors or secretaries of State come before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, I ask them to detail what policy changes have been achieved as a result of America's sanctions on Russia, China, Iran, or North Korea.

To date, no official of our government has been able to describe behavioral changes due to the sanctions we impose. The response I have received that came the closest to an answer was that sanctions under President Barack Obama prompted Iran to come to the negotiating table to forge the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) agreement. Perhaps. But one might argue that it was the lure of removing sanctions that actually brought Iran to the table.

Too often, loud voices on both sides of the aisle appear to believe that imposing more and more sanctions will change an adversary's policy, rather than understanding that it is actually the offer of *removing* sanctions that can move our adversaries.

When the Iran agreement was initially negotiated, I had my doubts. I felt the U.S. could have insisted upon a more gradual release of impounded funds to Iran based on continued compliance with the pact. But as time went on, inspectors ascertained that Iran adhered to the uranium enrichment restrictions. In fact, the loudest criticism of Iran was not that they abrogated the JCPOA, but rather their continued development of ballistic missiles that were not restricted in the JCPOA.

Subsequently, the Trump Administration pulled out of the JCPOA, not because Iran was evading the pact but because Iran was building and improving weapons not regulated by the pact. But Trump and then-Secretary of State Mike Pompeo's maximum pressure campaign did not, in fact, influence or change Iran's behavior in the least, nor did leaving the Iran agreement.

Instead, if we desire a ballistic missile treaty with Iran, the first thing to do is to ask why Iran develops ballistic missiles. Iranians live in a world dominated by nuclear powers. Europe, the U.S., Russia, China, Israel, Pakistan, and India all have nuclear weapons. In addition, Iran sees the Sunni sheikdoms as its adversaries.

Under what circumstance would Iran choose to limit their ballistic missiles as the surrounding Sunni sheikdoms enhance their own missiles and house U.S. troops? Anyone seriously desiring a ballistic missile pact with Iran should understand that no such agreement will ever occur between the U.S. and Iran unless it includes the Sunni sheikdoms. A useful diplomatic goal would be to have a regional dialogue among the countries actually in the Middle East.

Now, some may reasonably argue that the U.S. can only use the removal of sanctions as a negotiating tool if sanctions are imposed in the first place. Fair enough. But while we have imposed sanctions on Iran, Russia, China, and North Korea for decades, there has been little U.S.-led dialogue about trading sanctions relief for policy change. The Russian-Ukraine war should present such an opportunity.

Instead, the loudest voices in the Senate continue to shout about labelling the killing of civilians in Ukraine a genocide, as if that will somehow push the Russians to the negotiating table. Contrary to what those noisy Senators assert, pushing a narrative that ultimately requires Russian leaders to be tried at the Hague for war crimes and jailed in perpetuity is unlikely to facilitate negotiations.

No one questions that the war has caused and continues to cause civilian deaths, or that Russia started the war and is the aggressor nation in defiance of all international norms. But genocide has a definition; it is a mass killing of an ethnic or religious group of people. To those eager to label Russia's killing of civilians a genocide, how would they respond to a Japanese claim that the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki were genocide? Fortunately for the U.S., Japan was in no position to make such claims; Japan's defeat was unconditional surrender.

But most wars do not end with unconditional surrender. Most wars end through negotiation.

Now, the people who want to label the killing of civilians in Ukraine a genocide also oppose negotiation in Ukraine. They argue that there should be no negotiations until every Russian leaves all Ukrainian territory. I don't doubt the sincerity of the no-negotiations-until-victory crowd, but someone must also assess what Ukraine will ultimately look like if this war drags on interminably.

In addition to \$100 billion already sent from U.S. taxpayers to Ukraine, the loud voices against negotiation are already talking of a trillion-dollar reconstruction plan for Ukraine. I guess they assume China will continue to loan us the money. One thing is certain, though: Instead of 1 to 2 percent interest on the borrowed money we airmail to Ukraine, the rate will likely be double that. Last year, the U.S. interest on our debt was about \$400 billion. Expectations are that U.S. interest rates will continue to rise to over a trillion dollars a year over the next decade, ultimately exceeding what we spend on our military.

To those who advocate endless intervention in every foreign war on the planet, it might be prudent to ask if our national security is enhanced by having debt payments that exceed our defense spending.

No negotiation until victory resembles a position of no peace until unconditional surrender. Over and over again, the strategy of more and more sanctions has proved ineffective. The loud, chest-thumpers on Capitol Hill may believe they are the noble ones, but as the destruction of Ukraine continues, history may ultimately judge them the naïve.

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Rand Paul serves as the junior United States senator from Kentucky.

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