

The Iran Nuclear Deal - Debunking A Myth. A Short List of “Negative” US Foreign Policy Decisions

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With the first anniversary of the Iran nuclear deal, known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, or JCPOA, recently having passed, and the Obama Administration near its end, this seems to be a good time to consider one (there are a number) of the myths about the deal, and put it soundly to bed. Within the Obama Administration and in fact among those within the Beltway that support the JCPOA is the notion that “Iran needs the agreement, but we want it”.

The truth is that Iran needs the agreement as does the current Administration of the United States. It is embarrassing for a superpower to acknowledge such a need. It suggests vulnerability, a state of mind anathema to the American political psyche, too difficult to tolerate, and so better to flip the truth with a distortion.

Turning to key statements from the Obama Administration is one means to uncover this need. Take, for example, national security advisor Susan Rice, stating in 2013:

“The Iranian nuclear issue remains one of the gravest threats to international security”. (1)

Take her word at face value for a moment – no such statement could more indicate dire need. Obama himself touts the agreement as a prevention of war with Iran.

Obama, as well as Rice, are politicians. It is difficult to know whether they truly believe their own words, but they have provided them. Putting their words aside and looking at track record in foreign policy is far more compelling, revealing and closer to the truth of how need has propelled the Administration. Also, exposure of selective negotiated elements within the 165 page JCPOA helps to show in a practical way how need has been played out.

Someone needs only to imagine that they are President Obama and the following short list of foreign policy negative decision-making and pronouncements leaps out. With your Administration, you have:

- Entrenched yourself as history’s greatest arms merchant, including exceptional promotion of arms to the most unstable part of the world, the Middle East
- Planned a \$1 trillion dollar modernization of the U.S. nuclear weapons arsenal, after being awarded the Nobel Prize for Peace with no real accomplishment to show for it but for speaking and advocating for a nuclear weapons free world.

- Announced in the 2008/2009 period broadly that Al Qaeda was so decimated as to be essentially buried. Reasonably informed private citizens recognized the remarkable ignorance of the comments. Events throughout Africa, the Arabian Peninsula, Syria and other locations have proven the statement to be hollow.
- Stated more currently, in early January '16 and two days before the horrific ISIS attack on Paris that "We had contained ISIS" in Syria and Iraq. Assuredly the same reasonably informed portion of the public recognized that the assertion would prove to be empty.
- With special influence from Hillary Clinton, decided that a policy of unprovoked war against the country of Libya in 2011 was both sensible thinking and a reflection of "Smart Power". Refusals to accept two different cease fire/peace accords, one in fact worked out between the American military and Libya's army, with endorsement by Libya's Colonel Gaddafi, led to mayhem, evident today. After launching 67 cruise missiles on the country in the first day of "operations" decidedly refused to call this a war, but a "kinetic military action". Most of mankind surely recognized the offensiveness of such language. By virtue of the war, Libya went from being one of the most advanced countries in Africa (though not without problems, assuredly) to state disintegration, to the point of it being officially declared a failed state.
- Officially supported the development of ISIS in Syria, from 2012 until 2015, as official Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) declassified documents revealed. In 2015, claiming to be fighting ferociously against ISIS, mysteriously failed to bomb the ISIS stolen-oil truck convoys running from Syria into Turkey, until Russia shamed your Administration by bombarding these itself. And at least indirectly, supported the Al-Qaeda affiliate in Syria, the Al-Nusra Front, working hand in glove with countries such as Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar to provide financing and weapons, and to push a military agenda in the already horrendous civil war in Syria.
- Deliberately provoked Russia in Ukraine by supporting a coup d'état, and thereby created tensions that never should have been and which could well have been either avoided altogether, or greatly lessened. In an effort apparently unparalleled since the Cold War, have launched a deliberate policy of blame, this against Vladimir Putin for virtually every ill, and have been so intent to poison the atmosphere of relations with Russia that your press secretary was allowed to criticize the way Mr. Putin sat when speaking with another head of state.
- Were exposed by Edward Snowden for promoting the massive National Security Administration surveillance program, so widespread as to even be tapping the phone of Angel Merkel, head of state of Germany, one of America's most reliable allies. Even the sleepy American public was alarmed.
- Failed to offer any real support to the plight of the Palestinians, never mind justice, in either seriously trying to prevent excessive, disproportionate violence by Israel against them, or stand up to Prime Minister Netanyahu when Israel continued to build West Bank settlements.
- Announced in 2008 the coming "most transparent Presidency". In a remarkably secretive manner, proceeded to design the TPP trade agreement. The content and

details of the Agreement have been shrouded, except for those multi-national corporations which would be the expected biggest beneficiaries.

Could a President with such a record ever not need some self-defined signature foreign policy achievement? The answer is easy. American Presidents, Obama among them, are obsessed with their “legacy”, or what they leave in their wake. The media’s promotion of legacy adds to the obsession. The Iran nuclear agreement was to be an essential part of Obama’s legacy, given his track record in so many places around the world. While there are other reasons assuredly for having the agreement, it is debatable that they might reflect need more than want. Among them would be prospects for multi-nationals to work deals with Iran. The foreign policy track record suggests no debate, however.

The fact that there even has been an agreement with Iran is proof that the Administration line of want, not need is empty rhetoric. Successive American Administrations, Clinton-Bush-Obama, maintained consistent stances in “negotiations” or behavior toward Iran that reflected what Mohamed El-Baradei, Director General of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) from 1997-2009 described as at times bullying, prodding, dominating and refusing to show respect to Iran as a nation.

Consider his quote:

“The Western notion of how to approach Iran was like going into a souk and offering the proprietor a fair sum for the desired merchandise but also threatening to burn down the shop if he didn’t accept. While the tactic might play well in a Clint Eastwood movie, it was doomed from the start in Tehran.”
(2)

He was also very critical of Iran, but the point here is that bullies do not enter into agreements simply when they want to – they enter when they need to enter. The power posturing reared its head even during the opening of negotiations, with Wendy Sherman, Obama’s chief negotiator for the Iran negotiations, offering the accusatory line that “lying is in the DNA of Iran”.

Elements of the JCPOA with Iran

Enter the elements of the JCPOA. The Agreement was negotiated between Iran and collectively the United States, Britain, France, Germany, Russia, and China, defined as the E3/EU+3. There are negotiation outcomes that would not likely have been secured by Iran if the E3/EU+3 merely wanted the agreement. A tortuous and even pathological distrust has existed for decades between the United States (especially) and Iran, working in both directions. This type of distrust does not tend to promote concessions unless an opposing party, in this case Iran, insists upon them, and the other driving party (United States) feels a strong need for the agreement.

- An Administration that really needed an agreement might well relent on an “anytime, anywhere” provision regarding inspecting Iran’s nuclear facilities, and this is exactly what the Obama Administration did. Anytime anywhere refers to unannounced inspections by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the international watchdog agency for nuclear proliferation. Iran would not allow this. In other words, just don’t show up. Requests are required. The Fordow Fuel Enrichment Plant, long a facility of concern by western powers, is one such example. It is to be converted into a

nuclear and physics research center. (3)

- Additionally, consistent with its policy of refusing to recognize Iran's right to safeguarded enrichment, the Administration and its predecessor worked hard to thwart negotiations with Iran unless Iran first suspended its nuclear program, including enrichment. Iran repeatedly refused. The Obama Administration never got the precondition of suspension, including in the interim agreement to the JCPOA, whose terms were published by the European Union in its "Factsheet" of 17 January, 2014. (4) This was another striking example of need over want.

- While the west would never have preferred the following protective language for Iran, it conceded, out of need. When requesting access per the JCPOA, "good faith, with due observance of the sovereign rights of Iran" must be honored, and "such requests will not be aimed at interfering with Iranian military or other national security activities".(5) The latter refers in part to the Parchin military complex, which America and its European allies have long had suspicions about as to use and research but which Iran has maintained has no nuclear application.

- To prevent feared United States double-standards, Iran achieved language whereby once the IAEA is satisfied that all nuclear material in Iran is for peaceful purposes, the US will seek legislative action to end or encourage the end of nuclear-related sanctions on the acquisition of nuclear commodities or services, "to be consistent with the US approach to other non-nuclear-weapon states under the NPT" (the nuclear non-proliferation treaty). (6) A superpower never wishes to have language in an agreement restricting its ability to use double standards unless it in fact needs the agreement.

- The agreement also contains language that requires the United States and its allies to "take all measures required to lift sanctions and will refrain from imposing exceptional or discriminatory regulatory and procedural requirements in lieu of the sanctions and restrictive measures covered by the JCPOA". (7)

As well the U.S. specifically will "take appropriate steps" and "will actively encourage officials at the state or local level to take into account the changes in the U.S. policy reflected in the lifting of sanctions". (8) These possible preventive measures by Iran signal its understanding of the long political reach of sanctions in the U.S. Concessions to this understanding reflect something other than a mere we want.

Unfortunately, the evidence of need does not assure the JCPOA's success, and the pattern of implementation leaves a sense of skepticism, not due to Iran, which has met its requirements on schedule and well, but for the EU/EU+3 (primarily the U.S., France and Britain) who are stumbling along dealing with the effects of the needless atmospheric poison they worked so hard to create about Iran, but now need to detoxify, if the parties to the Agreement are to reap the benefits they anticipated.

Notes

1. Peter Jenkins, Asia Times, March 15, 2013, "A strange way to build trust with Iran".
2. Mohamed El Baradei, The Age of Deception (Macmillan, 2011), page 196
3. The JCPOA, page 17
4. European Union FACTSHEET, Terms of the agreement on a Joint Plan of Action, 17 January, 2014: www.eeas.europa.eu

5. The JCPOA, page 22
6. The JCPOA, page 7
7. The JCPOA, page 8
8. The JCPOA, page 7

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