

Let's Take a Long View of the Iran Deal.
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The exhausted negotiators had been at it for 20 months, the last many hours of which were nearly non-stop, with the possibility that this important deal might collapse. The United States, Iran, five members of the UN Security Council, and the EU had labored over this negotiation to convince Iran that it was in its best interest to reduce its nuclear program's potential of developing nuclear weapons. Iran had long (and unconvincingly) claimed its nuclear interests were peaceful only, but the world knew otherwise.

What made this deal ultimately possible was a confluence of factors:

- o Extraordinary diplomatic skills of US Ambassador John Kerry and Iran's tightrope-walking Mohammad Zarif, both under great pressure from their respective homelands.
- o The carrot and stick of smothering sanctions in Iran that, despite their denials, compelled them to the negotiating table. They were hurting badly.
- o The usual spoilers on the negotiating team, Russia and China, really did not want a nuclear Iran on their borders either, and China wants good relations with the US.
- o China and the Europeans would all like Iran to stop being a pariah state and reenter the world business community where they belong. This deal would begin this process.
- o President Obama's longstanding political philosophy stated when he took office is that you talk to your enemies! Negotiating can open doors inconceivable when you were shunning them. His policies have since opened Burma (Myanmar) with growing improvement, Cuba (about time!), and Iran---which, I believe, will have the same results that opening China had. The Revolutionary Guard in Iran are already afraid of that.

Now, let us look at negotiation-making. It is like sausage making. It must be done behind closed doors until it is done. It was disgusting to see, on the day that the negotiation signing was announced, that all sorts of political figures who had not seen the document at all were asked by the press to weigh in with their uninformed opinions! Their opinions are political, not technical, nor informed. This is bad journalism and totally ignores the historic long view. What are their various objections and their alternatives?

- o Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu considers the deal a disaster. He also considered the interim deal a disaster, yet it was not. His preferred deal would be no nuclear program in Iran at all, which the Iranians would never accept. The alternative would be open warfare with Iran, which the world will not accept.
- o The Republican candidates for President (and leading Republicans) all condemned the deal before reading it. Reading it might be nice. The issue appears to be that President Obama would get credit for a peace initiative they did not want him to have. Their alternative would be to make war on Iran, something the American public most certainly does not want. A unilateral sanctions system would be terrible.
- o The Iranian public is jubilant about this agreement. They are heartbreakingly eager to rejoin the world community. The Islamic hardliners are gnashing their teeth, fearing this very thing. There will be trouble over this.
- o President Obama has made the point that by taking the nuclear issue off the table, we can really focus on Iran's current bad behavior in a range of other areas: the Americans they are holding in their prisons, their support for terrorists, their support for Assad in Syria, and more. But there are also areas in which we can have common interests: ISIS is one of them, as Al Qaeda was in Afghanistan.

The agreement stretches over a decade and longer. As a historian, I find it very difficult to imagine Iran still being an Islamic Republic then. This is 2500-year-old Persia we are talking about! Islam is an unnatural fit for them, and the aging Ayatollahs and the Iranian youth loathe the Republican Guard.

When we look at the Middle East in a decade or more in the future, it is going to be a very different place than it is today. In my next column, I want to look at Turkey, the Arab world, and the re-emergence of modern Persian Iran.

678 Words

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