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IRAN NUCLEAR GAME:

TALK SOFTLY & KEEP THE CENTRIFUGES SPINNING; WEST DESPERATE FOR A DEAL, EVEN A BAD ONE

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A Bad Deal is the Only Kind Iran is Offering: [Jonathan S. Tobin, *Commentary*, Oct. 14, 2013](#)—Secretary of State John Kerry sounded a note of appropriate caution this past weekend when he said that although he believed the window for diplomacy with Iran was "cracking open," he believes "no deal is better than a bad deal."

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THWARTING IRAN: THE SECRET ALLIANCES

Neville Teller

[*Jerusalem Post*, Oct. 14, 2013](#)

There are two distinct groupings of Interests opposed to Iran's nuclear ambitions, but each – to misapply Oscar Wilde's aphorism – is "a love that dare not speak its name." Binyamin Netanyahu has been taking the lead for one of these covert community of interests. Ahead of the 6-party diplomatic talks taking place in Geneva on October 15 and 16, where Iran is facing the US, Russia, the UK, France, China and Germany, Netanyahu has been undertaking a diplomatic and media blitz. He's been on a whirlwind tour, both of TV studios and the world, voicing the case for maintaining the sanctions pressure on the Iranian regime until soft words are matched by hard action.

He does not oppose diplomatic initiatives to avert a nuclear Iran but, like the range of states and groupings he implicitly represents, he fears that the international community will accept a compromise on this issue, allowing Tehran to avoid dismantling its nuclear weapons facilities and having its stocks of enriched uranium removed from the country.

His fears seem all too justified, for behind his back – and the backs of most European and Gulf state leaders – it seems as though a secret deal on Iran’s nuclear program has already been worked out between the White House in Washington, the Kremlin in Moscow and the Tehran office of Iran’s Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. This US-Russian-Iranian grouping represents the second secret alliance – though how far it will go towards curbing Iran’s nuclear ambitions remains to be seen.

Sergei Kiriyenko, director of the Russian Atomic Agency Rosatom and the builder of Iran’s first nuclear reactor at Bushehr, is one of Putin’s most trusted advisers on nuclear affairs. Reports indicate that he has been in Iran for most of the summer and that, under his guidance, the text of a nuclear accord was drawn up by a team of Farsi-speaking Russian nuclear scientists for Tehran and Washington to sign.

Drafts of this text, which was modeled on the US-Russian accord for the elimination of Syria’s chemical weapons, were then passed between the US and Russian presidents until they saw eye to eye, and finally it was referred to US Secretary of State John Kerry and Russian foreign minister Sergey Lavrov, to be shaped into a document that can be put on the negotiating table at Geneva as agreed proposals.

It is reported that President Obama has briefed Netanyahu in detail on the understandings reached with Tehran, including Iran’s concessions on its nuclear program. Obama has also informed him that Washington will soon start easing certain economic sanctions against Iran. Neither European nor Gulf leaders, including Saudi Arabia, had been let in on the scale of reciprocal concessions approved between Obama and Iran’s Supreme Leader, although by now an indication has probably leaked out via the diplomatic grapevine.

Certainly the Wall Street Journal on October 8 reported, one assumes from informed sources, that Iran will offer to limit its operational centrifuges, cease 20 per cent uranium enrichment and agree to greater international supervision of its nuclear program, in return for a lifting of sanctions on its financial system and oil market. On October 14 the London Daily Telegraph reported that Iran had drawn the line at removing all the uranium already manufactured in its facilities, and insisted on keeping access to nuclear enrichment – since that would leave the potential for a relatively short dash to build a nuclear weapon. They seem to have won the day. “Western diplomats have indicated privately,” said the Telegraph, “a deal is likely to include access to limited enrichment.”

Whether it was a done deal before the principals ever took their places at the negotiating table, time will tell. What is certain is that Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states have not been party to any backstairs discussions, and that they view the apparent success of Iran’s charm offensive with alarm. Their concern is for their regional interests. They fear that Obama may be tempted to strike a deal allowing Iranian allies to go on dominating Arab countries such as Lebanon, Syria and Iraq in return for Iran’s agreeing to inspections of its atomic sites. They are also desperately concerned about Iran’s ambition to achieve hegemony over the Gulf, and its continuing effort to orchestrate political foes across half a dozen Arab countries.

All this fear was revealed in the 250,000 confidential US documents that were published in November 2010 by WikiLeaks. They showed that, contrary to their public positions, Arab leaders strongly supported, and indeed campaigned for, a US attack on Iran’s growing nuclear programme. According to the leaked documents Saudi Arabia’s King Abdullah “frequently exhorted” the US to bomb Iran and “cut the head off the snake.” He warned Washington that if Iran acquired nuclear weapons, “everyone in the region would do the same, including Saudi Arabia.” Abu Dhabi’s crown prince said that Iran was seeking regional domination, and urged Americans to “take out” its nuclear capacity, or even send ground troops. Iran “is going to take us to war ... it’s a matter of time.” The king of Bahrain said the US “must terminate” Iran’s nuclear program, “by whatever means necessary”. Zeid Rifai, then president of Jordan’s senate, said: “Bomb Iran, or live with an Iranian bomb.” Hosni Mubarak, then President of Egypt, expressed a “visceral hatred” for the Islamic Republic.

In short, no Arab government accepted Iran’s claim that its nuclear programme was merely peaceful. More to the point, perhaps, the WikiLeaks documents revealed that Iran loomed as the largest source of concern to the Arab world. As far back as summer 2010 Dubai’s chief of police, Dahi Khalfan, one of the most

outspoken security officials in the United Arab Emirates, warned of an "international plot" to overthrow the governments of Gulf Arab countries. Then United Arab Emirates officials announced that authorities were investigating a foreign-linked group planning "crimes against the security of the state."

This perhaps explains reports that Israel has recently been holding a series of meetings with prominent figures from a number of Gulf and other Arab states, supervised directly by PM Netanyahu. The Arab and Gulf states involved in the talks have no diplomatic ties with Jerusalem, the report noted. What they share with Israel is the concern that Iran's President Rouhani's new diplomatic approach will fool the US and lead to a US-Iran diplomatic agreement which provides for "less than the dismantling of the Iranian nuclear program." Which, as it now appears, and with Russia's blessing, is indeed the most likely outcome.

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IRAN WANTS THE BOMB — AND SANCTIONS RELIEF

Reuel Marc Gerecht and Mark Dubowitz

[Washington Post](#), October 11, 2013

Iranian President Hassan Rouhani is lying when he says the Islamic Republic has never had any intention of building an atomic weapon. Defecting Iranian nuclear engineers told U.S. officials in the late 1980s that the mullahs' program, then hidden, was designed exclusively for such arms. Everything Western intelligence services have tracked since then matches those early revelations.

U.S. participation in the upcoming negotiations doesn't appear to be premised on an expectation of Iranian veracity. If it were, President Obama wouldn't send his secretary of state until Tehran had come clean about its past deceptions. The exemplary behavior of South Africa's often-mendacious apartheid government when it decided to go non-nuclear — total transparency about the militarization of its atomic program — isn't expected from Iran. The clerical regime has already dropped the bar through its "facts on the ground" intransigence: more than 19,000 centrifuges built and a heavy-water plant nearing completion. Washington doesn't want to go to war again in the Middle East, and the Iranians know it.

The administration and Congress are gambling that sanctions will be enough to overcome the regime's chronic dishonesty. Economic pain will be so intense, the theory holds, that eventually Tehran will play by Western rules. In other words, supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, the Revolutionary Guards and Rouhani — who had a not-insignificant role in developing Iran's nuclear program in the 1990s — would be willing to admit that "evil incarnate" (Khamenei's update to the "Great Satan"), against which the Islamic Republic's very identity has been built, has defeated their nuclear aspirations.

Every country has an economic breaking point. But achieving that moment in the Islamic Republic will be extraordinarily difficult because such compromise is tantamount to spiritual suicide. U.S. foreign policy elites play down or ignore God's role in foreign affairs since the divine has no part in the U.S. worldview. In Western media, Rouhani is a "pragmatist," as was his mentor Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, the former major-domo of the political clergy; and as was Khamenei before he backed the election of populist firebrand Mahmoud Ahmadinejad as president in 2005. All of these men have been critical to Iran's nuclear-weapons program. All, even Ahmadinejad, have been politically pragmatic. This doesn't make them less religious, less anti-American or averse to viewing terrorism as both statecraft and soulcraft.

Iranian leaders probably are entering these negotiations for one reason: to test Barack Obama's mettle. They want to see whether Tehran can have the bomb and sanctions relief. The strategy for doing so isn't complicated. The regime could suspend work at the Arak heavy-water facility, the regime's plutonium path to a bomb, and stop enriching uranium to 20 percent, the big step in processing it to weapons-grade. But without a verifiable end to centrifuge production, the regime could continue to manufacture centrifuges, shrinking the time required to convert unprocessed uranium to bomb-grade stock. With enough advanced

centrifuges, a 20 percent stockpile becomes operationally much less relevant given the increased speed of processing.

The only real compromise Khamenei would be making here is with the nuclear calendar. More time would be needed to develop a rapid, undetectable “breakout” capacity, which nuclear expert David Albright has estimated will happen by mid-2014. If the regime could trade heavy-water processing and uranium enriched to 20 percent in return for weakening of the interbank transfer sanctions, regaining the right to trade in gold or loosened restrictions on using euros, then it could easily gain \$20 billion — a big sum for a regime that has only \$20 billion in fully accessible hard currency. Tehran still has about \$50 billion of locked-up cash that can be used for barter trade in a handful of countries. Given Iran’s currency reserves, even without a lessening of economic pressure, nuclear physics is still outpacing sanctions and diplomacy.

Obama has been clear that he isn’t going to war to stop low-grade enrichment, so Tehran needs to figure out whether the president has any “red line” on 3.5 percent enrichment. If Khamenei had to export most of Iran’s stockpile enriched to that amount, a nuclear weapon would be significantly delayed — provided centrifuge production was curtailed and the number of machines spinning reduced.

Khamenei can’t allow the West to stop centrifuge manufacturing. He cannot allow Washington to know where all of the centrifuges are being built or how the regime has avoided sanctions on “dual-use” imports. Such knowledge could massively delay or even end the weapons program, either through a preemptive strike or better sanctions enforcement.

Nor can Iran’s supreme leader implement any additional protocol of the Non-Proliferation Treaty that would allow U.N. inspectors to track centrifuge plants, search military bases (where the regime probably hides its most sensitive nuclear-weapons research) or debrief all of Iran’s nuclear scientists.

The administration and Congress would be wise to hit Tehran with more sanctions immediately. The United States shouldn’t be fooled by false divisions within the regime. Abandoning the long quest for atomic weapons would be an extraordinary humiliation for Iran’s ruling class. That isn’t going to happen unless Iran’s supreme leader and his guards know with certainty that the Islamic order is finished if they don’t abandon the bomb.

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IS IRAN A LUNATIC STATE OR A RATIONAL ACTOR? NEITHER

Barry Rubin

[Real Clear World](#), October 14, 2013

"One of the great unresolved questions of Barack Obama's presidency," says Time magazine, "is whether he can peacefully resolve America's conflict with Iran over its nuclear weapons program."

Er, wrong.

One of the great unresolved questions of Barack Obama's presidency is whether he can successfully resolve America's conflict with Iran over its nuclear weapons program. Time continues that the Obama- Rouhani handshake "would be the most important... handshake since the historic grip between [Yitzhak] Rabin and [Yasser] Arafat." Again, wrong.

Remember that while it has still not been admitted by the United States, that event, 20 (!) years later, has proven a costly failure. Israel now must satisfy seemingly monthly American demands by releasing terrorists who murdered Israelis.

The handshakes of prime minister Neville Chamberlain with Hitler (the Munich agreement) and of the Nazi foreign minister and Stalin (the Nazi-Soviet pact) were also historic, peaceful gestures - but ultimately

unsuccessful ones. Time continues, "It would only be a symbolic act, to be sure. But when it comes to international diplomacy, symbolism can go a long way." Alas, it is not a mere symbolic act, but the start of a foolish deal that Iran will break.

SO IS Iran a lunatic state or a rational actor? Well, it's a hell of a lot more rational than US foreign policy is today. After all, the UN just elected Iran Rapporteur for the General Assembly's main committee on disarmament and international security, without Tehran having to do anything in return. And Obama will blame Congress for diplomatic failure if it increases sanctions. In fact diplomats doubt Iran will actually do anything anyway. That's not "moderate," but radical - the smart kind of radical.

Put more politely, Iran is a rational actor in terms of its own objectives. The issue is understanding what Iran wants. Policy is always best served by truth, whether or not people like it: Iran is an aggressive, rational actor.

Remember: The problem is not that Iran is eager to use nuclear weapons but that the Obama administration is not going to apply containment properly and credibly. And that encourages Iran's non-nuclear aggression and terrorism. The hysteria over Iran, however, had also better be gotten under control, without belittling the real, very threatening situation developing regarding the Islamic Republic.

The fact is that the history of the Iranian Islamic regime does not indicate suicidal recklessness. A key reason for this is that the leaders of Iran know they can be reckless without risking suicide. If apparently suicidal rhetoric does not result in suicide but serves a very specific purpose, that rhetoric is not in fact suicidal.

What, then, does Iran want? Its basic goal was and is to be as powerful a regional hegemon as possible - including control over Syria and Lebanon. It would like to take leadership of all Muslims in the area. Today, however, it is clear that the Sunni Arabs reject Tehran's leadership and will fight against it. In other words, the ultimate extent of Iran's zone of influence could only include part of Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, southwest Afghanistan, Bahrain and the eastern province of Saudi Arabia. That is the maximum, and Iran is far from achieving that goal. And it will probably never achieve it.

Iran's influence is limited by the location of Shia Muslims. Not all Shia Muslims favor Iran, and pretty much all Sunni Muslims oppose it. Therefore, whatever the outcome is in Syria - in other words if the regime wins - Iran will at most keep its current levels of influence. But if the regime wins, the Sunnis will hate Iran even more and will fight against it harder. So Iran still wants to get as much power as it can, while minimizing the associated risks. Nuclear weapons are thus for Iran primarily a defensive shield enabling it to carry out conventional aggression with impunity.

As I've insisted for many years, it is increasingly clear that Iran will get nuclear weapons. We should start discussions in that framework. The recent brilliant decision of the Iranian elite - which is not only more ruthless but strategically smarter than Western leadership - to make President Hassan Rouhani its representative to the West guarantees it. The only question is when Iran will get them. The evidence seems to show that this is several years away. (It will be interesting if that development comes too late to affect Syria's civil war, and such will probably happen.)

Why will Iran certainly get nukes? First, the West isn't going to take strong enough action to stop it, because the alternatives are deemed - perhaps accurately so - too risky. No surgical Israeli strike is going to stop it, and President Barack Obama will never support such a strike. Of course, there is also lots of money at stake. The sanctions may seem tough, but have more holes than Swiss cheese. After Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, there is perhaps a better moneymaking climate. His successor Rouhani will further soothe Western willingness to battle on this issue. Of course, no one really cares that much about potential genocide in Israel.

Second, with international support at a low point, the logistical difficulties, and an incredibly reluctant US president, Israel is not going to attack Iran. What Israel should and will do is make clear it will attack Iran if

there is any reason to believe Tehran might launch nuclear weapons. It will build up a multilayer defensive and offensive system. This is not mere passive containment, but assured massive retaliation.

Note that there is more than one potential victim of Iran's nuclear weapons. People, including the Israelis, talk a lot about Israel, yet the Sunni Arab states are increasingly involved in shooting situations with Iranian proxies. Unlike Israel, they won't do anything and perhaps can't, except to beg the US to take strong action. But the US won't. And of course everyone can just hope everything will turn out all right.

In other words, against Israel, the Tehran regime talked a big game but did relatively little. On other issues, too, Iran did not act like a country bent on suicide. Against its Arab enemies, it did not take considerable risks. Iran could wage a proxy war against America in Iraq because the US let it. All of the above in no way discounts an Iranian threat. Yes, of course, Iran sponsored terrorism and sought to gain influence and spread revolution. Yet it did not attack a single country in terms of open warfare. Remember, Iran was invaded by Iraq. And when Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini himself was persuaded that the US was entering the war against him, he quickly ended it, though he said that doing so was like eating snakes and scorpions, but was necessary to preserve the regime.

Iran is the kind of aggressor once described by Winston Churchill as a thief who went down the street rattling doors to find one that was open. Second, Iran sought to defend itself by threatening antagonists with total destruction and by obtaining the ultimate deterrence: nuclear weapons. This does not mean one should sympathize with Tehran since, after all, it sought nuclear weapons to ensure its defense while it continued aggressive policies.

Iran can also complain about American encirclement, but there wouldn't be a US motive for such efforts without Iran's aggressive policies. The point, however, is that the claim Iran is seeking nuclear weapons so it can destroy itself by attacking Israel is just not supported by the facts.

Thus, Iran is not a demonic, crazed, kamikaze country. It is simply a typical aggressor that wants insurance against having to pay the price for such activity. North Korea and Pakistan sought nuclear weapons for the same reason, and it is working for them. The use of nuclear weapons causes the loss of the security the mere possession of nuclear weapons confers. The problem is not that Iran is eager to use nuclear weapons but that the Obama administration is unlikely to apply containment properly and credibly. And then its version of containment might fail.

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A BAD DEAL IS THE ONLY KIND IRAN IS OFFERING

Jonathan S. Tobin

Commentary, Oct. 14, 2013

Secretary of State John Kerry sounded a note of appropriate caution this past weekend when he said that although he believed the window for diplomacy with Iran was “cracking open,” he believes “no deal is better than a bad deal.” His willingness to admit that there was such a thing as a bad deal with Tehran was a sign that there were some limits to the wave of optimism sweeping through official Washington and the foreign policy establishment about the supposedly moderating influence of new Iranian President Hassan Rouhani on Iran’s position on its drive for nuclear capability.

But coming as it did the same day that an Iranian government spokesman made it clear that all Tehran would offer the West tomorrow when the diplomats convene in Geneva for another round of the P5+1 talks was exactly the kind of bad deal that Kerry said he fears, it is by no means clear as to whether his stance is more than rhetoric aimed at soothing the fears of a gathering of supporters of AIPAC to whom Kerry’s remarks were directed.

It remains an open question as to whether the U.S. would adhere to President Obama’s declared refusal to countenance an Iranian bomb and therefore insist that they cease refining uranium and export all of their existing stockpile even if that means passing up the opportunity for an agreement that would end the danger

of a conflict over the issue. Just as important, it is also uncertain that even if Kerry means what he says about an American refusal to accept an obviously inadequate agreement whether its European allies would follow suit. As last week's signals from Britain and France to Israel showed, the rest of the members of the P5+1 negotiating team are united mostly by their desire to get out from under their commitments to stopping Iran rather than following through with more sanctions or force if a deal is never reached. If France and France jump ship and join Russia and China in seeking to put the issue aside with a deal that Iran can easily ignore or break, then Kerry's promise may soon be put to the test.

Caution notwithstanding, it's clear that the administration is more than eager to play along with the Rouhanimania that has caused the West to revive a P5+1 process that has repeatedly failed. For all of the fact that President Obama and Kerry have always said the right thing about stopping Iran, their actions have never matched their rhetoric. From the point of view of this U.S. foreign policy team, the "window of diplomacy" they constantly refer to, is never closed no matter how often the Iranians have shut it in their faces. Their commitment to diplomacy and engagement with Iran is not so much a tactic as it is a function of their near blind faith in international agreements, the United Nations and multilateralism.

The Iranians know that as their decision to make it clear that they will never agree to the export of their stockpile of enriched uranium illustrates. They also know that the Europeans have never swerved from their intention to craft a nuclear deal that would allow the ayatollahs to hold onto a functioning nuclear program, albeit one with safeguards that would theoretically prevent it from being converted to nuclear use.

Thus rather than give the Iranians an incentive to face facts and give up their nuclear dream, the prelude to the latest talks have given them good reason to give nothing in their proposals that impinge on their ability to flout any deal and move quickly to realizing their nuclear ambition much as North Korea did after a similar round of diplomatic appeasement aimed at stopping them.

In Kerry's favor is the fact that he won't be in Geneva tomorrow, a source of no small amount of frustration for the Iranians. If he was offered the opportunity for a dramatic announcement and photo op, it's hard to imagine that he would have the character or the principles to turn it down even if meant accepting a bad deal. What the Iranians are clearly hoping is that by using their time honored tactics of prevarication and delay, they can not only drag out the process — and thus buy their scientists even more time — but to lure Kerry to a future gathering where such a temptation might prove too much for him.

By now the administration should have learned that the only deal they would ever get from Iran is a bad one. No amount of economic pain felt by their citizens can convince Rouhani's boss, Supreme Leader Grand Ayatollah Ali Khamenei to see reason and abandon their nuclear ambition. Nor do they believe in Obama's threats. The ayatollahs see the president as a paper tiger that will never make good on the promise to use force as a last resort. And their contempt for him will grow if they can peel off his European allies away from the flimsy coalition against Iran that the president built. But in the long run, with Washington as enthralled by the false promise of Iranian moderation as London and Paris (let alone, Moscow or Beijing), the odds of Kerry being able to retain his aversion to a bad deal must be considered slim.

ON TOPIC

[How Iran Will Play the West on Nukes:](#) Amir Taheri, *New York Post*, Oct. 13, 2013—A new round of talks between Iran and the five permanent members of the UN Security Council plus Germany, the 5+1 Group, starts Monday night in Geneva amid a tsunami of expectations.

[The Negotiations Game Begins Anew:](#) Joseph Klein, *Front Page Magazine*, Oct. 15, 2013—While President Obama refuses to negotiate with congressional Republicans over the terms for opening the government and passing an increase in the debt ceiling, he is perfectly happy to negotiate for the umpteenth time with the treacherous Iranian regime.

[Iran: Peace-Dripping Nuclear Lamb:](#) Ali Salim, *Gatestone Institute*, Oct. 8, 2013—Russia's Putin calculates his every move, and only goes to war to win. Considering the might of the West balanced against his own weakness, he apparently saw that the smart thing, should the U.S. decide to attack Syria, would be to stand on the sidelines and let Assad, his ally, tough it out alone.