

Should the US Conclude a Nuclear Agreement with Iran?

Des Moore, 9 March

An editorial in today's Australian (see below) suggests that on balance President Obama is probably right in characterising IS as a more immediate and universal threat to peace than a de facto alliance with Iran. If one looks at the existing situation in Iraq/Syria perhaps that is correct. But is it desirable to determine foreign even military policy on situations based on the outcome of negotiations with the current top dog?

As Netanyahu's Congressional address indicated, the negotiations between the US and Iran are between governments with two utterly different philosophies. In these circumstances how likely is it that an undertaking by the existing and probable future Iranian governments not to produce a nuke would be maintained over the next ten years? The idea that there would be "inspectors" to ensure Iran sticks to an agreement seems naive –why are they needed if Iran is trustworthy?

True, Iraq and Iran have different interpretations of the Koran and Shia and Sunni groups fight each other. But there is no indication that Iran has any substantively different approach to IS's in regard to Western countries. Rule by Sharia law is the objective of both and both are prepared to attempt to achieve that by using militants who are prepared to be martyrs.

Just as importantly, how much trust can one put on the Obama administration to judge the credibility of an Iran agreement? As pointed out by prominent US commentator Charles Krauthammer (see attached), "It had been the policy of every president since 1979 that Islamist Iran must be sanctioned and contained. Obama, however, is betting instead on detente to tame Iran's aggressive behaviour and nuclear ambitions". Some bet!

It is also clear that former Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, cooperated with Obama in falsely asserting that the destruction of the Benghazi consulate was not driven by an Al Qaeda group (see attached). This deception over interpreting the religious basis of terrorist groups adds to concern about the US negotiations with Iran.

More generally, we know that Obama has refused to accept that Islamic terrorist groups are driven by religion. Yet it is clear that they are so driven. The fact that IS is not a recognised country while Iran is one does not alter that underlying picture. What is missing from US policies under Obama is a recognition that Islamic-driven policies are not acceptable to Western countries and agreements with the acceptors of such policies cannot be based on trust. Every opportunity must be taken to prevent such acceptors acquiring nukes.

This is not to deny that the US faces a very difficult situation in negotiating with an Iran arguing that it needs nukes to defend itself. But the US should take the line that Iran is not under threat if it accepts the existence of Israel and should continue sanctions until that acceptance has existed for a considerable period.

Des

Netanyahu's focus too narrow

The Australian, March 09, 2015

THE rapturous response Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu received from the US congress last week may assist him in a tight Israeli election race. Mr Netanyahu's intense focus on containing Iran's nuclear ambitions was understandable. It would also be hard to disagree with his assertion that the battle against Islamic State does not turn Iran into a friend of the US.

At the same time, it is in the interests of the US, the West and Israel itself to recognise how profoundly the emergence of Islamic State has transformed the strategic landscape of the Middle East.

Confronted with this growing international menace, realpolitik demands that the US and the West recognise the possibility that Shia Iran — especially if it undergoes a process of economic modernisation — could play a crucial role in fighting the Sunni legions of Islamic State.

The calculation in dealing with Iran is finely balanced. Perceptions of an emerging de facto alliance between the US and Tehran, forged by common interests in the battle to defeat Islamic State, have raised the ire of major Arab nations such as Saudi Arabia, as well as Israel. The government in Riyadh has warned Iran is “taking over” Iraq, pointing out that Iranian generals are now in command of the 30,000-strong Iraqi force of mainly Shia militiamen trying to retake the Iraqi city of Tikrit from Islamic State fighters.

Mr Netanyahu regards the proposed nuclear deal between the US and Tehran — with agreement on its political framework due by the end of this month — as a major threat to peace. But on balance, Barack Obama is probably correct when he says Islamic State poses a more immediate and universal threat. The majority Republican congress’s invitation to Mr Netanyahu at such a delicate stage of negotiations between the US and Iran was mischievous.

Provided the President and Secretary of State John Kerry hold fast to the principle that Iran will never be allowed to acquire nuclear weapons, it would be advantageous to conclude a deal with Iran. Lifting the sanctions that cripple the Iranian economy and opening it up to the positive, moderating influences of the global economy and trade might assist the long-term strategic interests of the West.

Negotiations appear headed towards an outcome that would see Tehran, in return for sanctions being lifted, agreeing to freeze its nuclear capacity for 10 to 15 years. Such an outcome would allow it to remain a so-called nuclear threshold state, with the technical ability to resume its program later. Mr Obama and Mr Kerry insist, however, that whatever the agreement, Iran will remain bound by the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and forever forbidden from building a nuclear weapon.

Mr Netanyahu’s apprehensions about such an outcome are understandable. As he told congress, even since the supposedly moderate Hasan Rowhani became Iran’s President in 2013, internal repression in Iran had worsened. Iran had intensified its support for the murderous Assad regime in Syria, gained control of Yemen through its Houthi proxies and continued to arm and use Hezbollah in Lebanon and Hamas in Gaza. An Iran freed from sanctions would be even more aggressive, Mr Netanyahu argued.

The collapse of the negotiations between the US and Iran, however, would not abolish Iran’s nuclear program. Nor would it do anything to diminish the threat to Israel and the wider region. Iran would simply continue its advance towards building nuclear weapons. Bombing Iran’s nuclear facilities, as is sometimes touted, is not an option. The ayatollahs have ensured those facilities are beyond the range of any attack.

The only realistic path to containing Tehran is through hard-headed negotiations for a nuclear deal based on absolute guarantees of non-proliferation and Israel’s security. The emergence of Islamic State has changed the Middle East irrevocably. A more modern, outward-looking Iran could play a formidable role in combating it.

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Hillary Clinton emails ‘put US security in jeopardy’

TOBY HARNDEN, The Sunday Times,
March 09, 2015

A FURORE over Hillary Clinton’s use of personal emails to conduct official business while she was secretary of state is set to intensify after former senior intelligence officials said this had “almost certainly” allowed Chinese or Russian spies to hack into her account.

As she prepares to make her long-awaited announcement of a run for the White House, former CIA and FBI officials said that, by using a private email server during her four years as the top US diplomat, Mrs Clinton had put the security of the country at grave risk.

The revelation that she refused to have an official email account, allowing her to circumvent freedom of information requirements, has revived a damaging controversy over her penchant for secrecy.

“It’s inconceivable that a foreign intelligence service hasn’t been reading all her email for years,” said former CIA officer Kevin Carroll.

He was echoed by former US State Department official Paul Janiczek, who said: “I would bet all of my savings right now that the Russians, the Chinese, the French and the Israelis have a copy of every single email that went through that server.”

Others experts identified India, Iran, Israel and North Korea as also having the capability and the intent to compromise a “home brew” email account. Mrs Clinton’s server has been traced to her residence in Chappaqua, New York.

Republicans have seized on the email issue, linking it with a separate controversy over foreign donations to her family foundation and the revolving door of staff moving between the foundation, the government and her election campaigns.

Senior Clinton advisers have sought to calm Democratic fears by stressing that she will announce her White House bid early next month, allowing her to respond more vigorously to Republican attacks.

“It’s all systems go,” said a leading figure in her bid. “You can expect an announcement soon after the start of the next financial quarter (April 1).”

Some Democrats, however, are encouraging other candidates to run against her, arguing she needs to be fully tested in the party primaries to guard against an implosion in the election.

Her sole use of the private email account with the address hdr22@clintonemail.com was uncovered by a Republican-led congressional committee investigating the 2012 attack on Benghazi that left the US ambassador and three other Americans dead.

It contravened her directive to diplomats to “avoid conducting official department business from your personal email accounts” and has opened up a rift with the White House, which learnt of the issue last August.

The Sunday Times