

The Negotiator-In-Chief Gets What He Wants

President Obama is not an idiot. When he negotiates away U.S. security, he's doing it on purpose.
by [Paul Bonicelli](#)

Watching President Obama negotiate on behalf of the United States for the last six years has revealed his motives and goals. On the one hand, he appears quite the loser if you think his goal is to enhance American security and strength. On the other hand, there is method to his presumed madness if you know his real goals.

Take the cases of Iran, Eastern Europe missile defense, the China-U.S. climate-change agreement, and trade normalization with Cuba. Each diminished national interests or security. Since 2009, the United States has been in retreat while our enemies have advanced. We could chalk this up to Obama being a bad negotiator, but he is a smart guy and being too dumb to do this well is unlikely. Rather, the truth appears to be that Obama is getting what he wants. I find plenty of evidence that the deals he has made fit perfectly with his stated ideas and philosophical formulations about international relations, U.S. foreign policy, and what he sees as our rightful place in the world.

Here's What President Obama Wants

Much can be said about each of these cases, but let me review three of them briefly:

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1) *The Iran framework* we have right now finds the president accepting Iran as a nuclear threshold power with all the equipment, stockpiles, and secrecy it insists upon in exchange for repealing all sanctions and a more-or-less free hand in the Middle East. This is a significant climb-down from his demand three years ago that Iran not enrich, keep no stockpiles, and hide nothing. So, what did the president actually get? He fulfilled his desire to try to prove that extending the hand of friendship to the United States' greatest enemy will bring peace to the Middle East and increase our security.

2) *The missile defense system for Eastern Europe* is not so much an agreement but an extension of Obama's failed reset with Russia along with a further attempt to woo Iran. Ignoring evidence and arguing implicitly that neither the Russians nor the Iranians were threats to us regarding missiles, Obama delighted them both by balking on installing the defense shield for our allies that his predecessor had arranged. Today, Russia and Iran are on the march, and Russia has announced it will actually be the one extending missile defense capabilities—to Iran. So what did the president actually get? He fulfilled his desire to try prove that U.S. defenses are actually threats to other states.

3) *The climate deal with China* traded mandates on the U.S. economy to drastically reduce emissions for mere Chinese promises to curb the *growth* of their emissions—promises from an authoritarian government that can't stay in power unless it maximizes the use of fossil fuels. So, what did the president actually get? He fulfilled his desire to be the most forwarding-leaning president ever on left-wing environmental issues.

President Obama's Worst Deal: With Cuba

But perhaps the worst deal Obama has worked is with Cuba. The president announced in December his desire to establish normal relations with the Castro dictatorship, without advancing a single long-standing U.S. interest. The only thing the White House can point to is that 53 political prisoners (out of thousands) were to be released and that, "in the long run," the Cuban government will become more normal and treat its citizens better as it enjoys increased trade with and visits from people in the United States.

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Cuba has been trading with most of the world (at least, with those countries to which it has actually paid what it owed) and that has not improved its economy. It receives plenty of tourists and other visitors from around the world, and that has not improved its politics. Add to that the fact that the United States actually does do several hundred million dollars in legal trade with Cuba annually (in agriculture, in particular) and lots of Americans legally visit—with no improvement in the tyrannical government or the destitute economy.

In the negotiation between the United States and Cuba over the new policy, Cuba demanded, among other things: to be taken off the terrorist list; to have normal relations and embassies reopened; to be allowed normal commercial relations. That is, to be treated like any other country. And they are getting it.

What did the United States demand? Pretty much nothing.

Castro's response to the president's extended hand was to affirm clearly that nothing would change about the regime's political or economic policies. As to the prisoner release, there was no clear accounting before the deal of who they were and their disposition, so we found out later that some of the 53 had already been released and still later we learned that some who were released after the deal's announcement were re-arrested. We also know from human-rights organizations that the pace of incarceration and harassment of dissidents actually picked up from the time Obama began his overtures to right up to the point of the meetings between Assistant Secretary Roberta Jacobsen and her Cuban counterparts.

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Mothers and wives who go to church together wearing white to show solidarity with their imprisoned relatives still are beaten by thugs and arrested for their stand. Even at the Summit of the Americas last weekend that included the historic meeting of an American president with a Castro, thugs attacked Cuban dissidents simply for demonstrating in a neutral country. As to economics, Cubans still are not allowed to use dollars, so they are shut out of any of the economic benefits of trade—and Raul Castro categorically denied that would change.

What President Obama Should Have Done Instead

How could Obama have negotiated better with Castro? Well, that is not the question. He negotiated just fine with Castro, given that what the president wanted was simply to embrace the Cuban government. The better questions are what should the president have wanted, and how should he have gone about it. With different goals in mind, he might have gotten not only a good deal for the United States and the Cuban people but probably improved his foreign-policy legacy.

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With Venezuela's ability to keep the Cuban regime in power in serious jeopardy, Obama could have gathered Congress, the Chamber of Commerce, and those who work for a free Cuba, and hammered out a list of demands based on both American principles and reality. That would mean that normalization, ending the embargo, and removal from the terrorist-sponsoring list could occur when Cuba democratizes, respects human rights, stops harboring terrorists, and allows all Cubans to participate in the economy as opposed to relegating all but party elites to the peso economy.

This last part is important, because the Obama administration and apologists for Castro falsely argue that if the embargo were gone then prosperity would flow to the average Cuban. But it is impossible for Cubans to enjoy any economic benefits from increased commerce if they are forced to use only worthless pesos—which is current law. It bears repeating: decades of free trade with Europe and Latin America have not benefitted the Cuban people for this very reason; why should it be any different just because more commerce with America takes place?

So what is it that Obama has really wanted out of his deals? To recap, he wants to validate his theory that as the United States recedes, the world will improve. We have been too big, too powerful, and too present, and he's aimed to change that. He's had six-plus years to prove his theory, but so far it isn't being validated very well. The globe is in turmoil, and we are much to blame for our poor leadership.

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