



The Days After: Are Iran's Deadlines Endless?



THE INTER-UNIVERSITY CENTER FOR TERRORISM STUDIES

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Are Iran's Deadlines Endless?

The Honorable Bijan R. Kian

Highest ranking Iranian-American to serve two U.S. presidents. He also held other senior government positions. In addition, he had a distinguished career in both business and academia (e.g. former Senior Fellow, Naval Postgraduate School)

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The Honorable Bijan R. Kian

Today, I wish to reflect on three questions: 1) who got what in this deal? Who is the winner? 2) Is the world better off after this deal? 3) Is the Islamic Republic of Iran on its way to becoming a peaceful member of the world community?

Who is the winner?

As I have shared from this podium before, I don't look at politics as a game. Decisions made by political leaders affect ordinary people's lives. These are extremely serious matters.

However, if this were to be assessed as a game, I can say with clarity and confidence that the Islamic Republic of Iran has been the decisive winner. None of the objectives set by the United States have been achieved in this prolonged series of negotiations. This is not an assessment by a passionate Iranian-American who opposes the tyranny and terror of the Islamic Republic of Iran. A quick look at the facts will clearly show the skillful negotiations by the Iranian side. In fact, the Iranian negotiators should be congratulated for this significant win.

Three factors handed this decisive victory to the Iranian side: 1) Russia and China's objectives were never the same as the U.S., U.K., France and Germany; 2) the Iranian side designed a better negotiations plan with a clear end game; and, 3) at the end, the U.S. negotiators clearly showed sympathy for the Iranian negotiators in their challenge to "sell" the deal to the hardliners in the Iranian Parliament and the Revolutionary Guard (IRGC). With opponents turned advocates, with Russia and China clearly on the Iranian side, and with an extremely motivated U.S. team, the Iranians got to keep all leverage and ask for more! Their eleventh hour "ask" is to lift sanctions on their missile program.

This brings me to two anecdotes about the art of negotiations, Middle Eastern style!

First, I remember a child in my family who would get up in the morning on a weekend and cry nonstop asking to be taken out for ice cream. His parents tried to dissuade the little boy all day long, but he did not stop crying and asking for ice cream. Finally, the parents gave in at five o'clock in the afternoon. "Okay," they said to the little boy, "let's go out for ice cream." The boy would stop crying and ask his parents, "What else would you get me if I come out with you for ice cream???"

Second, I just asked my colleague what he would say if he were the owner of a carpet store and saw me walking into his store pointing to a beautiful carpet on the wall and I asked him, "How much is that carpet?" Carl answered quickly, "I would ask you back, 'how much are you willing to pay for it?'" Carl's answer was a perfectly logical response. The store owner wants to show that he is motivated to "work" with me (the customer) with the ultimate goal of selling that carpet. There is only one major issue with this exchange: that is not how negotiation is done in the Middle East! The store owner's most likely response to the inquiry would be, "That carpet is NOT for sale!" All this to result in a more enthusiastic buyer and the probability of a higher price.

These anecdotes are clearly analogous to the negotiations between P5+1 and the Islamic Republic. Not only did the Iranian side receive all they could have imagined in the deal, but they got to place another "ask" on top of the "ice cream"!

According to our own State Department, the Islamic Republic of Iran is the world's most active sponsor of terror. Iranian-made IEDs have killed American soldiers in Iraq. The Islamic Republic takes pride in having created Hezbollah in Lebanon, and has been a steady terror partner with Hamas. IRGC has unleashed its brutal force on opponents of Bashar al-Assad in Syria. Tehran routinely flexes its muscles against smaller countries in the neighborhood, and wants to wipe Israel off the map. The Islamic Republic's leaders chant "Death to America" with clenched fists in the air during their Friday prayers.

A passionate question is often asked, "Why are we negotiating with terrorists?" And the calm, authoritative voice of our respected pundits responds, "You don't negotiate with your friends, you negotiate with your enemies!" What is often overlooked in using this broad justification for the exercise of diplomacy is that if you don't know *how* to negotiate with your enemies, you will lose. This, in my view, has been the case in our attempt to negotiate with Tehran. The Islamic Republic will continue to enrich uranium. None of its enrichment infrastructure will be impaired. The centrifuges will simply be unplugged; the most secretive, known, hardened facility at Fordo will not be inspected. In fact, no military sites will be subject to inspections. Sanctions will be gradually lifted, and, all-in-all, Tehran gets to keep all it has and gives up nothing in this process.

Why should the Iranian negotiators give up anything? Their opponent has lost. As we celebrate our success by claiming that our sanctions brought the Iranians to the negotiation table, the Islamic Republic leaders whisper in each others' ears, "We bamboozled the United States. Washington says we don't negotiate with terrorists, but we brought them to sit down and negotiate with us while their own State Department keeps publishing reports placing us on top of the list of state sponsors of global terror."

Is the world better off after this deal?

The world must not forget why it is set to prevent the Islamic Republic from having an atomic bomb. The proponents of the regime's policies in the nuclear arena are not shy about advocating for Tehran. They say, "Pakistan has it, India has it. Israel has it. Why can't Iran have it too?" The short answer is that none of these countries are on the list of state sponsors of terror. The Islamic Republic has established itself as having a long arm when it comes to supporting terror networks. Would Tehran stop its support for Hamas and Hezbollah? Would it stop antagonizing the smaller countries in the region? Would it stop fueling the Shia-Sunni war in Syria? Would it stop its destabilizing activities in Iraq? IRGC's Quds Force Commander, Major General Ghassem Soleimani, is partnering with Mr. Hadi al-Amiri to stop the 100,000 strong sons of Iraq Sunni Force and instead, augment the Badr Army to act as "Sons of Iran" in Iraq. Would Tehran stop its operations in support of the Houthis on Saudi Arabia's southern border with Yemen? Would the Islamic Republic stop fortifying its strategic military and security partnerships in Central and South America? Would the leaders of the Islamic Republic erase

from their official calendar Quds Day, the last Friday in the month of Ramadan, named after the goal of eliminating Israel from the face of the earth?

The Islamic Republic has left no doubt that it wishes to reach the status of a "nuclear threshold state." With this deal in place, will it not be closer to that goal? Russia and China want to sell more missiles to Iran. According to Sergey Lavrov, the Russian Foreign Minister, the most serious issue on the table now is to lift sanctions on the Iranian intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) program, which Iran is aggressively expanding. Three missile silo sites in Tabriz (northwest), Semnan (north central), and Khorramabad (west) are set to create a long lever of ICBM threat in the Islamic Republic's military power toolbox.

We should ask a few simple questions: what exactly did we accomplish after nearly two years of intense negotiations? What indications do we have to believe that massive compromises made by P5+1 will help create a safer world? What indications do we have that Tehran will give up its newly-gained upper hand on all issues related to its nuclear program? Is the world not headed toward another North Korea?

Is the Islamic Republic on its way to return to the international community as a full partner in trade and investment?

Tehran is about to receive tens, if not hundreds, of billions of dollars with this deal. How will the Islamic Republic use this windfall?

Will the Islamic Republic invest in updating its aging oil industry to raise oil production to 4-5 million barrels per day? Is it going to enact job creation programs for its massively unemployed, extremely talented, and educated young population? Will Tehran start mega projects to solve the country's severe water shortage? Would it invest heavily in reviving its drying lakes? Would the Islamic Republic start serious programs to tackle its population's problem with addiction? What would the Iranian Supreme Leader tell Sheikh Hassan Nassrallah, the leader of Hezbollah? Would he say something like, "We can no longer sacrifice the wellbeing of our own people to strengthen Hezbollah's position, or pay for your insatiable appetite for missiles and heavy arms against Israel." Or would Mr. Khamenei say something like, "Now that we enjoy a free hand and improved financial status, we are in a position to give more generously to Hezbollah."

I could imagine similar conversations with Bashar al-Assad. On the other hand, how would the relationship between Moscow and Tehran evolve? Russia is already dictating to Tehran on its gas sales to Georgia. An active gas pipeline to Georgia is only utilized at a fraction of its capacity because Moscow has ordered Tehran to restrict the export of its natural gas. What would Moscow collect from Tehran as payback for Russia's role in handing a nuclear victory to the Islamic Republic? Mr. Putin is not known for charitable political activities! Can Tehran turn into a vassal state for Moscow?

How about on trade and investments? Advocates for the Islamic Republic claim that there is a vibrant and independent private sector in Iran. Practitioners, like me, don't see this. IRGC owns the Iranian economy. No serious business can be conducted in Iran without the blessing of

the massive foundations under its control. The United States' Foreign Corrupt Practices Act and the United Kingdom's Anti-Bribery Act are serious problems for both a) companies that wish to do business with Iran, and b) corrupt IRGC commanders who are used to influencing foreign trade and investment for personal gain.

How is foreign capital protected in the Islamic Republic of Iran? Would a commercial dispute between a foreign investor and a local Iranian partner be settled by a revolutionary court? Following what laws? Would a globally recognized brand name in heavy construction equipment or power generation or aviation feel safe in entering transactions with either the public or private sector in the Islamic Republic? What would it take for exporters to certify by any measure of confidence that no bribes have been paid to secure a transaction? How does a global brand shield itself from the irreversible reputation risk of unknowingly supporting a terrorist network?

I wish I could stand here and say that all of the hostility toward the Islamic Republic of Iran has been an unfair and unwarranted act throughout the past 36 years. I wish I had a smidgen of evidence to be hopeful that the Islamic Republic of Iran will soon join the international community as a viable partner for trade and investment. I wish I had any indication to say that the future is bright with opportunities for the Islamic Republic and the United States to become allies in the fight against global terrorism and partners in reducing tension in the Middle East, promoting peace between the Palestinians and Israel.

I am positive these hopes will become reality in the long run. I place my bet on the Iranian youth. They will eventually take their stolen freedoms back from the clerics who made false promises of a better life to previous generations. Sadly, the clerics' unfulfilled guarantees of freedom and dignity have turned into the miserable reality of war and moral and economic bankruptcy, leading the Iranian people to earn the distinction of being among the unhappiest in the world.

The clerical regime has brutally degraded the image of a proud people whose ancestors wrote mankind's first declaration of human rights; a people who have contributed so significantly to art, poetry, philosophy, and sciences. As a result, much to my dismay, it has become acceptable for political leaders to call all people of Iranian origin liars, cheaters, and terrorists. This has been the gift of the Islamic Republic to its people, and sadly, this deal serves neither the international community nor the Iranian people. The good news is in the pages of history. Tyrannies don't last. An ancient Persian belief holds that the forces of good and evil are at constant battle, but in the end, good prevails. This is my belief.

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