

# Unwinding the Iran Nuclear Deal

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*The big mistake, apparently about to be made by **President Trump**, in undoing the nuclear agreement made by **President Barack Obama** with Iran is not just that he intends to go backwards, it is that he doesn't intend to go forwards. (To be fair, neither did Obama.)*

What the Iranians negotiated about was not so much the “bomb” – to be or not to be – but about their pride and their position in the world and their right to become a thriving economic and political power inured from sanctions or military threats. (Sanctions were imposed before the nuclear issue came to the fore.)

The nuclear program was first and foremost about creating leverage so that Iran could regain the sort of respect that the offspring of the Persian Empire once was given. Second, it was about making sure that Iran is not found short when its oil reserves start to shrink. (Iran also has heavily invested in solar energy.)

For Iran, negotiations were a suggestive game of hide and seek, played in front of all-angled, reflecting mirrors. They were not about actually building a bomb or, as we used to say in Pakistan's pre-bomb days, of being “a screwdriver away from completing a bomb”.

I don't actually believe that Iran ever had the intention of building a nuclear bomb. But it was not unhappy that the West thought it was. It did want to frighten the West. It did want to forestall what it believes is the Americans' true ambition – to bring about “regime change”.

**Ayatollah Ali Hosseini Khamenei**, Iran's Supreme Leader, has spoken a number of times about how nuclear weapons go against the principles of Islam. Islam is a language of love and brotherhood, not of a nuclear holocaust. I believe him, not out of naivety, but because I know Iran is a deeply religious society and that the ayatollahs take Islamic teaching earnestly. Children are brought up to take values seriously, to love not hate, and to take care of the poor and widowed. War is a last resort. Reading the Koran, nuclear weapons could never be justified.

Iran doesn't go easily to war. **Saddam Hussein** inflicted war on Iran for no good reason, other than to demonstrate the muscle of a dictator. Iran had never tried to build up a deterrent against Iraq. (The US and the UK supported Saddam and provided him with weapons.)

**Akbar Ganji**, an Iranian journalist and dissident, wrote in *Foreign Affairs* that Khamenei

“is not a crazy, irrational or reckless zealot searching for an opportunity for aggression. Khamenei considers science and progress to be “Western civilization’s truth”.

He is a great reader of Western novels and considers **Victor Hugo’s** “Les Miserables” “to be the best novel that has been written in history”.

He is an intellectual who enjoys the company of other intellectuals including secular opposition ones. Unfortunately, he was attracted as a young man to the writings of the Egyptian, Sayyid Qutb, whose severe Islamic thinking inspired Osama bin Laden. He has since moderated his opinions.

Nevertheless, he wants, as does most of Iran’s elite, for the most populated country in the Middle East, after Egypt, be treated as a force to be reckoned with in Middle East politics. He does not like Iran being ignored when it comes to how to deal with Syria, Afghanistan or Israel.

Obama didn’t want to be seen to “cosy up” to Iran’s government, so the nuclear deal was as far as he was prepared to go. This was an opportunity forgone.

So what happens? Iran is seen as a “spoiler” who gets in the way of rational Western policies and supports the Syrian government, deploys Hizbullah and like-minded armed groups and supports Hamas in Palestine to counter Western, Israeli and Saudi Arabian interests.

I doubt if it has ever crossed Trump’s mind that by cutting Iran in he could achieve quite a lot. No, cut it out and squeeze it even more than it ever has been.

He has the tool at hand – reneging on the Obama deal. All he has to do is to persuade the intelligence agencies to manufacture some sort of a case that Iran is not doing its part to honour the deal. Hence the enormous pressure he has put on them.

If Trump succeeds in his aim will other countries party to the solemn agreement ratified unanimously by the UN Security Council go along with him?

China won’t for a start – it purchases 30% of Iran’s oil. Is Trump going to punish China just when it needs Beijing’s help over the real bombs in North Korea?

The EU will think on not dissimilar lines. Airbus needs that big new market – 173 new planes so far have been ordered.

Again, the world has to find a way to stop Trump in his tracks.

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