

US Foreign Policy Designs, Geopolitical Roulette: Why the Iran Nuclear Talks Failed

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The three day nuclear negotiations between Iran and the so-called P5+1 group of world powers that started on November 7th came to an unsuccessful end when, apparently, France balked at the proposed interim deal as not sufficiently controlling Iran's nuclear technology.

Whether the French objected independently or as part of a good cop bad cop game to sabotage the proposed deal is of secondary importance. The more important point is that Western nuclear powers backed-off from their own demands and proposals despite the fact that they represented a number of significant one-sided concessions by the Iranian negotiators.

Although details of the issues discussed during the 3-day negotiations are kept "confidential," especially by the Iranian negotiators, the leaked information by Western negotiators and media indicate that under the potential deal, Iranian negotiators would agree:

- (a) to halt its enrichment of uranium to 20 percent purity;
- (b) to render unusable its existing stockpile of such (20 percent) fuel for further enrichment;
- (c) to limit its enrichment of uranium to only 3-5 percent purity;
- (d) not to use the more advanced IR-M2 centrifuges for enrichment, which can enrich nuclear fuel five times faster than older centrifuges;
- (e) to consent to more intrusive inspections;
- (f) not to activate its heavy-water reactor in Arak, capable of producing plutonium.

And what would Iran get in return for all these concessions? Not much. The U.S. and its allies would agree:

- (a) to unfreeze some of the tens of billions of dollars of Iran's oil revenues frozen in bank accounts overseas, largely in China, South Korea and Japan;
- (b) to consider easing sanctions banning trade in precious metals and some petrochemicals.

The most crippling sanctions on Iran's oil and banks would remain intact under the proposed interim deal.

Despite the obvious unfairness to Iran of an agreement based on these one-sided concessions, it was the other side, not Iran, that balked at its own proposed deal! The question is why?

Negotiating in Bad Faith—Iran's Nuclear Program as a Pretext for Regime Change

The fact that the U.S. and other Western powers quashed their own proposed deal is an undeniable indication that, true to the pattern of a number of previous negotiations during the past 10 years, these nuclear powers did not negotiate in good faith: they demanded a number of one-sided concessions from the Iranian team ostensibly hoping that the Iranians would not accept them. But when Iran's negotiators agreed to sign on the proposed interim deal based on those demands, Western nuclear powers recoiled!

The publicly stated reasons by Western negotiators for suppressing the proposed deal range from the future of Iran's heavy-water nuclear reactor in Arak, the fate of Iran's stockpile of enriched uranium to the level of 20% purity, the degree and the range of intrusive inspections, and more. The main reason, leaked by the Iranian media and officials (and confirmed by the Russian negotiators), however, lies elsewhere:

The U.S. and its allies had made a promise to the Iranian team that if Iran authentically and satisfactorily complied with its "obligations" under the proposed "confidence building" interim deal for six months, they would at the end of the interim period reciprocate by: (a) recognizing Iran's legal and legitimate right to peaceful nuclear technology; (b) recognizing its right to uranium enrichment to the level of 5 percent purity, the level needed for nuclear power plants; and (c) loosening and/or lifting sanctions on its oil and the banking system.

Similar promises in 2005 led Iran to suspend its uranium enrichment for two years without any reciprocity in terms of the promised loosening of economic sanctions. Having learned from that experience, Iranian negotiators insisted this time that the above-mentioned three promises must be made in writing. And that's when the Western nuclear powers' bad faith negotiation was exposed, as they refused to put their promises in a written, guaranteed form.

This shows, once again, that, in violation of the Non-Proliferation Treaty, which clearly recognizes the right of member countries to peaceful nuclear technology, the real goal of the United States and its allies is to deny Iran this legal and legitimate right. More fundamentally, it shows that Iran's nuclear program is used essentially as a pretext to change Iran from a sovereign to a client state.

Iranian ruling circles seem to be well aware of the ulterior motives of the U.S. and its allies of the nuclear negotiations. Yet, they keep going back to the negotiating table—which, as far as the United States and its allies are concerned, is essentially a charade table—each time providing its adversaries the pretext they need to escalate the sanctions. The question is why? Why would one take a step knowing that it would be into a trap?

Iran's Miscalculations

A popular answer to this question is that, because of the crippling sanctions and the threat of war, Iran is forced to continue nuclear negotiations despite the fact that it is not

optimistic about the outcome of the negotiations. While there may be elements of truth to this argument, the more fundamental reason seems to reside with a major miscalculation on the part of Iranian nuclear policy makers:

They have always reasoned that since Iran's nuclear program is for civilian/peaceful purposes, and it is therefore in full compliance with Non-Proliferation Treaty, it is not afraid of negotiations. In other words, since Iran is in the right, the reasoning goes, it would sooner or later prevail in proving its nuclear interlocutors wrong, and eventually procure their acceptance of its legal and legitimate nuclear rights. This is a major miscalculation, as it is tantamount to trying to prove a negative.

One definition of stupidity, according to Albert Einstein, "is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results." Iranian nuclear negotiators are, of course, far from stupid. They are, indeed, known to be among the savviest of world politicians and international negotiators. Nonetheless, when the verdict or judgment of nuclear negotiations is predetermined it is vain to expect a different outcome. Iran's futile efforts to change the outcome of nuclear negotiations (i.e. to prove a negative!), has proven to be very costly in terms of the escalation of economic sanctions: each round of heightened sanctions has come about at the end of a new round of nuclear negotiations.

Of course, this does not mean that in the absence of nuclear negotiations there would be no economic sanctions and/or other acts of aggression against Iran; only that the nuclear pretext for escalating sanctions would be removed if the negotiation game of charade is not played along.

The Role of President Rouhani

In addition to the problem associated with the folly of playing along with the negotiation charade—which applies, more or less, to all Iranian negotiators over the past ten years, President Rouhani and his negotiating team could also be faulted for an added miscalculation, or perhaps misconception. While Ahmadinejad and the Iranian negotiators during his presidency had no illusions about the intentions of the United States and its allies and, therefore, resisted demands for one-sided concessions, Mr. Rouhani and his team seem to harbor such illusions; which explains why they consented to the above-mentioned list of one-sided concessions during the latest round of negotiations.

The illusions stem from a rather trusting or imprudent perception that the policies behind economic sanctions against Iran (or imperialistic policies of aggression in general) could be swayed by polite language or diplomatic decorum. Accordingly, they blamed a great deal of sanctions (and the concomitant economic paralysis in Iran) on the previous president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, for his "unrefined" manners, "confrontational" behavior and/or "extremist" policies. This blatant scapegoating of his predecessor was vividly on display during Mr. Rouhani's presidential campaign of May-June 2013.

Whether the blaming of the previous administration for economic sanctions stemmed from sincere convictions or opportunistic political calculations, the fact remains that, in so doing, President Rouhani significantly weakened the bargaining position of his own nuclear negotiators in Geneva by, perhaps inadvertently, placing the onus of finding a solution to the nuclear stalemate on them. Conceivably, this explains, as already pointed out, why during the latest round of negotiations (November 7-9) the Iranian team agreed to make a number of significant concessions. That the United States and its allies refused to sign on to

the proposed deal (because they claimed that the concessions did not sufficiently limit Iran's nuclear program) does not alter the fact that the Iranian team was ready to sign on it.

To sum up:

The latest round of nuclear talks between Iran and the P5+1 group failed not because Iran did not make substantial concessions but because the United States and its allies refused to recognize Iran's NPT-guaranteed legal and legitimate right to peaceful civilian nuclear technology.

The policy of the United States toward Iran (or any other country, for that matter) is based on an imperialistic agenda that consists of a series of demands and expectations, not on diplomatic propriety, or the type of language its leaders use. These include Iran's relinquishing its lawful and legitimate right to civilian nuclear technology, as well as its compliance with the US-Israeli geopolitical designs for the Middle East/Persian Gulf region. They also include Iran's opening its economy/market to unhindered U.S. trade and investment.

It is altogether reasonable to argue that, therefore, once Iran allowed U.S. input, or meddling, into such issues of national sovereignty, it would find itself on a slippery slope the bottom of which would be giving up its national sovereignty: the United States would not be satisfied until Iran becomes another client state, more or less like Jordan, Saudi Arabia and the like.

Most Iranian politicians and/or policy makers are keenly aware of this. However, like former presidents Rafsanjani and Khatami, President Rouhani tends to be ambivalent about the imperialistic doctrines or designs of U.S. foreign policy. The sooner he and his co-thinkers recognize and/or acknowledge such designs and intentions the better.

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