

“War is Addictive”: The GOP, Iran and Diplomatic Sabotage. Tom Cotton’s Letter signed by 47 Senate Republicans

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Theme: [US NATO War Agenda](#)

“They’re [the Republicans] contacting a foreign power in the middle of a war. It’s a damn bad mistake.” – President Lyndon B. Johnson, 1968

War is addictive. It is also sweet to those who do not know it. There is always someone else who fights it on their behalves. The GOP is better at that than most – their desperation to keep seats in Congress and win others has propelled them to lunatic belligerence. Middle Eastern states have been removable furniture for some time – at least when it comes to their regimes – and the GOP strategists seem to think that a pulverising strike on Iran might not be the worst option available.

None of the recent cantankerousness towards Iran seems fortuitous. The Boehner invitation to Israel’s prime minister without White House approval, a mote in the eye of Obama; the Netanyahu pageantry of proposed violence and illegal war regarding Iran’s nuclear ambitions; and now, Tom Cotton’s letter signed by 47 Senate Republicans suggesting that the war trumpets are being readied with constitutional flyers. “Senate Republicans have moved from mere opposition to Obama’s foreign policy to outright sabotage”.^[1]

The letter to Tehran, dated March 9, reads like a childish exclamation, an impetuous feeling that its authors are being left out in the cold of history.^[2] “It has come to our attention while observing your nuclear negotiations with our government that you may not fully understand our constitutional system.” (Cotton, the callow Arkansas freshman behind the note, evidently repays such ignorance by not knowing the Iranian constitutional system.)

With school teacher dourness, the note goes on to defang and denude any agreement that might arise between the Obama administration and that of Ayatollah Khamenei and his colleagues. “Congress,” it reminds the readers, “plays the significant role of ratifying [international agreements]”.

The signatories, bursting with pride, suggest the limiting nature of the president’s office – the occupant in the White House can only ever be there a maximum of two four-year terms, “whereas senators may serve an unlimited number of 6-year terms.” The sense of staleness would be hard to avoid, and the readers in Tehran will be justified in thinking that the occupants in the great thieving house that is Congress have lost their marbles. “We hope this letter enriches your knowledge of our constitutional system and promotes mutual understanding and clarity as nuclear negotiations progress.” The prelude to any attack usually comes in the form of a lecture.

The opportunity to convert this absurd event into a partisan spectacle was hard to resist.

Democrat Senator Debbie Stabenow of Michigan suggested that she “never would have sent a letter to Saddam Hussein.” Senator Dick Durbin of Illinois could only heave a sigh of resignation. “It’s just, I could not think of a more overt effort to jeopardize peace negotiations” (*Politico*, Mar 9).

There is even a suggestion that the Republicans might have been flirting with the sirens of treason, though the Democrats have hardly been immune from the business of seeking war when some vague sense of patriotic debauchery demanded it. Hillary Clinton, seeing a golden opportunity, suggested that, “Either the senators were trying to be helpful to the Iranians or harmful to the commander-in-chief.”[3] The Clintons have never been averse to resorting to the gun in international non-diplomacy, and Clinton’s reptilian manoeuvres should come as no surprise.

Iran’s Foreign Minister Javad Zarif was merely cool in reaction. “In our view, this letter has no legal value and is mostly a propaganda ploy. It is very interesting that while negotiations are still in progress and while no agreement has been reached, some political pressure groups are so afraid even of the prospect of an agreement that they resort to unconventional methods, unprecedented in diplomatic history.”[4]

Not quite. America’s political nest of intrigue and damnation has had a few twists and turns that demand caution in using the term “unprecedented”. The prolonging of the Vietnam War in 1968 had every bit to do with the machinations of presidential contender Richard Milhous Nixon even as a struggling Lyndon Baines Johnson was trying to cut some peace measure with his North Vietnamese counterparts.

There was one vital obstacle to any settlement: the South Vietnamese. On October 29, 1968, the Johnson administration got a sense that Nixon was seeking to block any peace settlement, hoping to prolong the war. In what reads like a seedy backroom conspiracy, Johnson’s Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs, Eugene Rostow, received word from Wall Street financier Alexander Sachs that collusion was taking place between financiers and bankers over frustrating any peace deal. Money was to be made, and peace was not going to help.

Eugene passed the material on to his brother, the national security advisor Walt Rostow. “The speaker,” explained Eugene, “said he thought the prospects for a bombing halt or a cease-fire were dim, because Nixon was playing the problem... to block... They would incite Saigon to be difficult, and Hanoi to wait.”[5] The content of FBI wiretaps on GOP behaviour incensed Johnson, who did use the “treason” word.

The derailment of the Paris talks by the Nixon-Kissinger union was the stellar performance of an empire running out of ideas, largely because it was readying itself for the imperial and ultimately decaying rule of the Nixon administration. Sabotage, political attainment, survival – these are the ghoulish synonyms of party ambitions.

In the GOP’s case, dabbling with disruptive verve in the diplomacy of the incumbent administration may have worked in the past, but it comes with its risks. Various Republican senators refused to pen their name to the letter, not through any act of virtue, so much as strategy. Cotton and his colleagues were being foolish in their zeal. “I knew,” claimed Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Bob Corker, “it was going to be only Republicans on [the letter]. I just don’t view that as where I need to be today.”[6]

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Notes:

- [1] <http://www.vox.com/2015/3/10/8183851/cotton-iran-2016>
- [2] http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2015/03/09/world/middleeast/document-the-letter-senate-republicans-addressed-to-the-leaders-of-iran.html?_r=1
- [3] <http://www.vox.com/2015/3/10/8184427/clinton-iran-letter>
- [4] http://www.nytimes.com/2015/03/10/world/asia/white-house-faults-gop-senators-letter-to-irans-leaders.html?hp&action=click&pgtype=Homepage&module=first-column-region®ion=top-news&WT.nav=top-news&_r=1
- [5] <http://truth-out.org/progressive-picks/item/13994-how-richard-nixon-sabotaged-1968-vietnam-peace-talks-to-get-elected-president>
- [6] <http://www.politico.com/story/2015/03/iran-letter-could-backfire-gop-dissenters-say-115922.html>

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