Beware another US sellout to Tehran

written by David M. Weinberg | 02.06.2023

Believe it or not, the Biden administration apparently is once again offering the mullahs of Tehran a sweetheart deal: the release of $10 billion or more in frozen Iranian assets and clemency for Iran's near-breakout nuclear advances of recent years, in exchange for Iranian release of American hostages and warmed-over pious Iranian pledges to freeze the Shiite atomic bomb program.

This, even though Washington would be freezing the Iranian nuclear program with 16 cascades spinning to enrich uranium to 60% purity, which is just shy of weapons-grade. In February, Iran was caught with some uranium enriched to 84% purity and was called-out for manufacturing uranium metal, a material used in nuclear weapon cores.

This month, intelligence photos showed Iran again digging tunnels at its Natanz nuclear site – supposedly deep enough to withstand an American or Israeli military strike. This tells us that Iran has what to hide, a clear sign that it has not given up on its quest for a nuclear bomb.

Nevertheless, US President Joe Biden may grant Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi an end to all past and current International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) investigations into Iran's nuclear violations alongside the suck-up deal above.

Biden also seems happy to ignore Iran's other regional muckraking and hegemonic advances, including its harassment of internationally flagged merchant ships in the Straits of Hormuz, and its placement of "floating terror bases" (civilian ships converted into mini-aircraft and commando carriers) in the strategic waterway. The situation there is so bad that in protest the UAE last month pulled-out of a US naval alliance group meant to protect shipping in the Arabian Gulf.

John Hannah and Richard Goldberg of the Washington-based Foundation for the Defense of Democracies warned this week in a special alert publication that the above contours would be "a bad, even a desperate, deal made from a position of American weakness."

“It looks like the administration is reviving an idea out of the old Obama playbook because it’s not willing to do what’s necessary to stop Iran’s program by restoring deterrence through coercive diplomacy. Biden is scared to death that if Iran keeps advancing its nuclear program, either the United States or Israel will be forced to make good on their promise to stop Iran militarily.”

“From the administration’s perspective, paying Iran off is the easiest way to hold at bay the worst-case outcomes of a nuclear Iran, on the one hand, or another major military conflict, on the other. And suspending sanctions to get there is a lot easier and less risky in their minds than doing the hard work and committing the resources needed to establish a credible US military option to destroy the Iranian program.”

“But the price for America will be stabilizing and strengthening a terror-supporting Iranian regime now under pressure not only from sanctions but from profound domestic discontent and turmoil among its own population,” they added.

Equally distressing, they warned, is that “Biden risks undermining American support for the war in Ukraine by asking Congress to approve billions of taxpayer dollars to support Kyiv while offering Iran billions of dollars to help resupply Moscow.” (It has been well documented that Iran is supplying Russia with military attack drones and other critical technologies with which to clobber Ukraine.)

Given that Washington appears unwilling, even now, to place hard limits on the crucial elements of Iran’s illicit nuclear weapons program (fissile material production, weaponization, and means of delivery/missile development), and is unwilling to apply maximum economic pressure (as President Trump did) or to present a credible military threat to Iran – it is no surprise that Israel is ramping-up its preparations for confrontation.

At the Herzliya Conference last week, IDF Chief-of-Staff Lt. Gen. Herzi Halevi said plainly, in a rare speech focused directly on Iran, that Israel may “take action” against Iran’s nuclear facilities because of “possible negative developments on the horizon. We have the ability to hit Iran, and we are not indifferent to what Iran is trying to build around us.” National Security Advisor Tzachi Hanegbi added that “there is no place that can’t be reached” (referring to the new Natanz tunnels).

THIS IS WHERE broader regional diplomacy comes into the picture and

complicates Israel's calculations.

Washington expects Israeli acquiescence in the emerging US surrender to Iran in exchange for a series of other things important to Israel. These include US backing for Israel against escalated Palestinian assaults expected this fall in UN forums, toning down US criticism regarding settlement and security matters (at a time when the IDF is going to have to intensify its anti-terrorist operations in Judea and Samaria), an easing of US pressures on Israel in connection with domestic matters (like judicial reform), a warm Washington visit for Prime Minister Netanyahu (which is not just a political concession but rather is critical to Israel's overall deterrent posture), and most of all, significant American moves towards reconciliation with Saudi Arabia (which is critical to driving a breakthrough in Israeli-Saudi ties).

It is worth dwelling on the latter point because renewed close cooperation between Washington and Riyadh is central to the stability of the region and is the cornerstone of what should and can be Saudi entry to the Abraham Accords. In other words, the road to Israel-Saudi normalization runs through Washington.

It will take serious intent and deft maneuvering from America to get there, and there is good reason to doubt that Biden is prepared or capable of paying the mostly justified Saudi price for renewed close Saudi-US partnership. (This may include a defense treaty, high-quality arms supply, a comprehensive economic agreement, and most controversially, US agreement to a Saudi civilian nuclear program. Israel may have a problem with parts of this package too.)

The further problem is that even an expensive package of US "concessions" to Saudi Arabia will not truly compensate for US capitulation to Iran (something we know from experience will only embolden the hegemonic ambitions of the mullahs). And this capitulation will make it more difficult for the Saudis to publicly embrace Israel (although the quiet security coordination between the two countries assuredly will continue to grow).

In the end, Israel must prioritize its most naked, existential security interests – which clearly are stopping Iran's nuclear bomb effort and scuttling Iran's attempts to encircle Israel with well-armed proxy armies. Accepting another ruinous US nuclear deal with Iran is not in accordance with these interests.

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