

For Iran, How Do You Spell Relief? B-I-D-E-N

by Hugh Fitzgerald



Iran is elated after Joe Biden's apparent victory. On January 20, Tehran will likely no longer be dealing with an implacable Donald Trump, who pulled out of the JCPOA and reimposed crippling sanctions that sent Iran's economy into a tailspin, but with a most pliable Joe Biden, eager to remove those sanctions and to return to the Iran deal. Iran has announced that it has moved an advanced centrifuge plant, similar to the one that Israeli saboteurs destroyed at Natanz earlier this year, underground at the same site. "Iran's nuke program 'present' to Biden," by Yonah Jeremy Bob, [Jerusalem Post](#), November 11, 2020:

On Wednesday, reports surfaced from the International Atomic Energy Agency that Iran has already installed a first cascade of advanced centrifuges in the underground Natanz uranium enrichment plant that its deal with major powers says can only be used for first-generation IR-1 machines...

In other words, Iran is not only violating the JCPOA agreement which it still has with five remaining members – the U.K., Germany, France, China, and Russia – but is doing so blatantly. It announced to the world that it moved an “advanced centrifuge plant” underground. By that Iran means a plant to manufacture centrifuges more advanced than the IR-1 machines to which it was supposed to be limited by the Iran deal. But why should Iran be worried? In two months, Biden will probably be in the White House.

If Biden thought that the ayatollahs might slow the progress of their nuclear program so that he has time to transition into his office and deal with the novel coronavirus crisis, he might have been mistaken.

Why would Iran, our implacable enemy, want to give Biden “time to transition” and “deal with the coronavirus crisis”? Tehran has a stake, instead, in Biden being overwhelmed with so many subjects – he is, as one can see from his public appearances, easily deflected from one subject to another – that he won’t be able to concentrate sufficiently on the Islamic Republic, as it inexorably proceeds, sanctions now lifted, with its nuclear program.

The Iranians assumed, along with everyone else, that Biden would win, and that they could now afford to act openly in ways that they would likely not have dared had Trump won a second term. They did not even wait for the IAEA report on November 4, but announced to the world several days earlier that they had moved an advanced centrifuge underground at Natanz.

The IAEA has discovered – quelle surprise! – that Iran has been violating its commitment to reveal all the sites where its nuclear program is being worked on. The IAEA inspectors, however, found evidence – those tell-tale “particles” were uranium – of nuclear work going on at sites that Iran had

claimed were not part of its nuclear program. Iran came up, apparently, with preposterous lies – “War is deceit,” after all – including describing one site where uranium particles were found as a “carpet cleaning establishment.” The IAEA demurely described these absurdities as “unsatisfactory explanations.”

The IAEA has said it will “maintain pressure on Tehran” to “explain those discrepancies.” How many months will pass, do you think, before Iran offers its new and improved explanation of how nuclear-related material turned up at those sites where no work on the nuclear project was supposed to be going on? And how likely is it that the IAEA can convince all six members of the Iran deal – the U.S. (having returned under Biden), U.K., France, Germany, Russia, and China, to impose sanctions on meretricious Iran? Haven’t the other five states – though not the U.S. – already shown how reluctant they are to impose sanctions? Some of those countries’ policies toward Iran are based on pusillanimity, that is the fear of offending an unpredictable and aggressive Iran, that they have long treated with kid gloves, and several of them, above all China and Russia, have shown an eagerness to make extensive economic deals with the Islamic Republic.

Iran is limited under the JCPOA deal to use only IR-1 centrifuges. It violated that commitment; it is using more advanced IR-2m centrifuges. We are supposed to be glad, however, that it is not using – at least not yet – the even more advanced IR-4 and IR-6 centrifuges. In other words, the “good news” is that Iran violated the agreement, but not by as much as it could have.

So it may just be that Iran is trying to restore what it already had above ground.

No, Iran is doing much more than “restoring” what it already had above ground at Natanz. In the first place, as the author,

Yonah Jeremy Bob, himself notes, it will have more advanced centrifuges in this new facility. In the second place, the centrifuges are now below ground, which will make a very big difference to those – i.e., Israel – who in the future may need to destroy those underground facilities but lack bunker-busting bombs. One hopes that in all the discussion about how to maintain Israel's QME (Quantitative Military Edge), that bunker-busting bombs (MOPs) are high on the list, and will soon be provided. Israel has wanted them for years; Tehran's placing of nuclear facilities both deep underground and inside mountains, makes clear why the Jewish state needs them.

And if the volume of new IR-2ms stays low and if IR-4 and IR-6s are not installed, Tehran will not get appreciably closer to developing a nuclear bomb than it is now.

What is the likelihood that the Iranians will not make full use of the IR-2m centrifuges? Why did they install them, if not to use them? And if Iran has been working tirelessly on the still more advanced IR-4 and IR-6s, until it finally succeeded in getting them to work in 2020, won't they do everything in their power to install them, while deceiving the IAEA inspectors as long as they can? As we learned from the nuclear archive that the Israelis spirited out of Tehran, Iran has an impressive record of deception about its nuclear program.

But the signal from Iran to Biden is clear: he will not be able to ignore them for long.

Iran thinks that with Trump gone, it will be able to continue to deceive the IAEA, and then, when found out, delay the imposition of sanctions, perhaps by offering new economic benefits to certain members of the JCPOA – China and Russia. We can only hope – what else can we do but hope? – that Joe Biden will surprise us all.

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