

How Insensitive: John Kerry on Israel

Though the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) endorsed by unanimity the nuclear arms agreement of July 14, 2015 between Iran and the P5+1 powers, the United States Congress is expected to vote on it by September 17. The UNSC agreed to lift the economic sanctions on Iran it imposed by Resolution 1696 on July 31, 2006, after Iran refused to suspend its uranium enrichment program, if it believes that Iran has curbed its nuclear activities. The U.S. Congress has 60 days to decide whether to lift the separate U.S. sanctions.

Countless appropriate questions can be asked about the deal. Does it sufficiently limit Iran's nuclear weapons capability? Can accurate verification of Iran's actions truly be done? Was it appropriate to make the deal by U.S. executive agreement and not by treaty, thus deliberately making it more difficult for Congress to reject it? Was there really no alternative to the deal except war, as both President Barack Obama and Secretary John Kerry have maintained? Would rejecting the deal, as Kerry asserted, pit the U.S. against the rest of the world?

In view of Iran's well-known record on the issue, not everyone can agree that, as Kerry remarked, everything in the agreement was verifiable and that it meant a process by which we would know what Iran is doing. Iran has been given 24-day notice for international inspection of suspect sites, and the likelihood of its cheating is high. Indeed, already Iran has stated that the inspectors of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) will be denied access to the country's military sites.

It is to Kerry's credit that he pressed the Iranian government to stop calling for the destruction of Israel, and, in

somewhat restrained language, informed it that chants of "Death to America" are not helpful. Apparently he was unsuccessful. One wonders if Kerry was chagrined that on the very day the deal was signed, the supreme leader of Iran, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, called publicly for death to America.

In view of his attempts at rapprochement, Kerry must have been bothered and bewildered by the statement on July 24, 2015 of the Iranian foreign minister, who criticized the uselessness of U.S. empty threats against the nation of Iran.

There are serious legitimate issues to be debated in the complex deal. One can appropriately discuss the vital question of whether the present agreement is the best way to limit Iran's ability to get a nuclear weapon. One can question Kerry's view that a nuclear arms race in the Middle East would be more likely without the deal, rather than the reverse with sanctions continued against Iran.

What is certain is that the deal provides for removal of sanctions, which will provide Iran with \$150 billion in frozen assets, and assurance of the lifting within a decade of the bans on conventional arms and ballistic missiles.

It is disappointing that among the core problems are the self-righteous stance of the Obama administration and its insensitivity to both the U.S. legislature and to Middle East countries, particularly Israel and Saudi Arabia. Kerry was right in saying there is a lot of politics going on, but it was not going on in the way he implied.

It is understandable that the Obama administration and Kerry personally will be embarrassed if Congress rejects the Iran deal. However, it seems impertinent and slighting regarding his former colleagues in the legislature for Kerry to have remarked that if Congress refuses to agree to the deal, Iran and others will say, "Let's go negotiate with the U.S.; they have 535 secretaries of state." What a humiliating and disparaging comment! Kerry is more concerned with the

sensibilities of undemocratic Islamic countries than with the legitimate powers of Congress.

There are indeed major issues that Congress must discuss about the deal. Will it lead to greater regional stability? Is it helpful in dealing with the Islamist terrorist threat? What does it imply for the State of Israel?

Taking the issue of Israel first, it was the height of insensitivity for Kerry to make two particular remarks. One was to mock Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's speech and the cartoon of a bomb he had drawn at the United Nations, and to state that Netanyahu had not offered a real alternative to the deal he had been long criticizing. The other was to warn Congress that a vote against the Iranian deal could mean that Israel will find itself more isolated in the international arena and "more blamed."

No one can accuse Kerry of being anti-Semitic or of being unfriendly toward Israel, yet his remarks have overtones of conspiracy theory, of a Jewish or Zionist lobby pulling the strings of a deferential Congress. The 535 members cannot be happy to be regarded as automatons automatically responsive to the will of the Zionists. It was obtuse of Kerry to suggest that in his view, Israel will be blamed if Congress rejects the deal.

Kerry did not make U.S. policy completely clear. At various moments he asserted different factors. It would be a "huge mistake" for Israel to take unilateral military action against Iran; at no stage of the negotiations did the U.S. promise to help Iran defend itself from any Israeli attack; the U.S. plans to "be fully coordinated" with Israel.

Has the Obama administration bought time in limiting temporarily the nuclear progress of the Islamic Republic of Iran? Whether one refers to the deal as appeasement of Iran or not, the result is the likelihood of Iran's regional

prominence in the Middle East. This is troubling for Saudi Arabia, from both a religious and a geopolitical point of view.

It is doubtful that Obama has chosen a closer affinity with the Shiite forces of Islam rather than with the Sunni or predominantly Sunni countries headed by Saudi Arabia. It is even more doubtful, especially now that sanctions will be moved and Iran will have access to prodigious assets, that Iran will reduce its support of terrorist organizations, or be helpful in confronting the Islamist threat of al-Qaeda and the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria.

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