

No Deal Between Washington And Tehran On Nuclear Issues

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WASHINGTON – The Geneva negotiations between the West and Tehran on Iran's nuclear program produced zero results. While there will be more talks at a future date, many analysts fear that Iranian president Hassan Rouhani's 's objective here is not to come to a real deal, but to improve the atmosphere a bit, so that Iran can get concessions (the lessening of the crippling economic sanctions) without giving up its nuclear program.

America in a tough spot

Indeed, politically America right now is in a tough spot. Absent any substantive changes to Iran's nuclear program, other countries are supposed to curtail even further their purchases of Iran's oil. Should they fail to do so, then America could punish them by imposing trade sanctions on them. However, if the Iranians manage to create the impression that they are now flexible while America is unreasonable, then it would be politically difficult, in fact impossible, for Washington to punish the countries that do not cut down their oil imports from Iran. All of a sudden America would gain a lot of political enemies without advancing its goal of stopping Tehran's nuclear programs via diplomatic means.

And this seems to be Rouhani's end game. He wants to create the impression that a reasonable deal is possible in order to soften Iran's image and gain points with world opinion. Tehran needs to end its political isolation. By appearing more reasonable, it will provide political cover to the sanction breakers who could argue that, since Iran is willing to

negotiate, this is an appropriate time to show equal good will by ratcheting down the sanctions regime.

So, this is about public relations; and not about coming to a real, solid agreement.

Iran should simply comply with the Non Proliferation Treaty

Look, if Iran had turned a real corner, it would take its government just a few days to assuage the world's concerns. Rouhani would simply need to comply with all the mandates and obligations imposed by the Non Proliferation Treaty and enforced via the International Atomic Energy Agency, (IAEA), the nuclear watchdog, on all countries that want to pursue peaceful nuclear energy programs, but have no intention to develop nuclear weapons.

Iran would need to do what Japan, Germany, South Korea and many others do. The Iranians would open up all their facilities, guarantee total access to the IAEA inspectors and cease any type of activities that are inconsistent with a peaceful nuclear energy program. This is not complicated. Doing so however is premised on the unequivocal intent to fully comply with all the mandates of the Non Proliferation regime.

No intention to stop enrichment

Iran of course keeps saying that it simply wants to pursue a peaceful nuclear energy program, just as other countries have done and do today. All very well, except that Iran is engaged in activities, when it comes to uranium enrichment, that can be explained only in the context of a nuclear weapons program. And so far the Iranian regime has shown no intention of stopping these activities. Hence the strong suspicions of the IAEA and of the broader international community, first and foremost in Washington. As Iran is unwilling to give up these enrichment programs, we can conclude that it is not negotiating in good faith.

This is a public relations campaign

However, if Iran's new urbane and smiling President Rouhani gains points in his clever public relations campaign, then it would be hard for Washington and the other Western countries to keep the pressure on Tehran via the sanctions. China, Japan, India and others who depend on Iranian oil will have an excuse to keep buying it saying that now Iran is more flexible and therefore the international community should respond by being more accommodating.

And this would be a bad turn of events. If Tehran sees a way out of the tough sanctions regime without giving up its uranium enrichment program, then there will be zero chance of resolving this long crisis by peaceful means. In that case, America's only option to stop this emerging nuclear threat would be to bomb Iran's nuclear facilities.