

# Time to Take It to Iran

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## The nuclear deadlock cannot be broken unless Washington reengages in the myriad conflicts plaguing the region, particularly now that Yemen is vulnerable and the Saudi royal family is in a state of turmoil.

**T**he nuclear negotiations between the United States and Iran appear stalemated. Meanwhile Iran is on the march in the Middle East with its forces supporting the coup in Yemen, buttressing the Assad war-machine in Syria, mediating between factions in Iraq, and plotting with Hezbollah operatives on the periphery of Israel. Today, the American alliance system stands bruised and battered while our friends in the region perceive Iran and its resistance-front galloping across the region.

These two simultaneous developments -- the deadlock in nuclear talks and Iran's aggressive moves in the region -- are not coincidental. They are intimately linked, and that should be a lesson for President Obama: The nuclear deadlock cannot be broken unless Washington reengages in the myriad conflicts and civil wars plaguing the region, particularly now that Yemen is vulnerable and the Saudi royal family is in a state of turmoil following the death of King Abdullah on Thursday.

During the course of the nuclear negotiations over the past year, Iran has been the beneficiary of a generous catalogue of concessions from the West. The 5-plus-1 has conceded to Iranian enrichment, agreed that Tehran need not scale back the number of its centrifuges significantly or dismantle any facilities and could have an industrial-size program after passage of a period of time. The Iranians have, during the course of the ten years of negotiations,

grown accustomed to having their interlocutors return to the table with concessions meant to meet their mandates while offering only limited compromises of their own.

Despite that, no agreement was achieved at the end of the one year time-frame of the Joint Plan of Action -- and Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei continues to signal that Iran can live without an agreement. In fact, his negotiators are pressing for more concessions while not offering any of their own.

Hence it is time to acknowledge that we need a revamped coercive strategy, one that threatens what the Islamic Republic values the most -- its influence in the Middle East and its standing at home. And the pattern of concessions at the negotiating table must stop if there is to be an acceptable agreement. Iranian officials must come to understand that there will be no further concessions to reach an accord and that time is running out for negotiations.

Historically, the Islamic Republic has adjusted its behavior only when its leaders saw high costs in not doing so. Iran needs to see that we are not so concerned about reaching a deal on the nuclear issue that we are indifferent to its behavior in the region. Should we seriously act to change the balance of power on the ground in Syria, we could raise the costs to Iran of supporting the Assad Dynasty, with the added potential benefit of making a political outcome in Syria possible. In Iraq, we should be concerned about what increasingly appears to be Iran's invasion of the country under the banner of disarming the Islamic State. That should be the task of the Iraqi military working in close coordination with the United States and its Arab allies. And in the Gulf, it is time for Washington and Riyadh to collaborate on securing the waterways and isolating Iran in its immediate neighborhood. The guardians of the theocracy will only contemplate serious nuclear concessions once they see that all the walls around them are closing.

Along these lines, the United States should consider a political warfare campaign against Tehran to complement its economic sanctions policy. The administration's officials and its broadcast services should draw attention to the unsavory nature of the theocratic regime and repressive behavior. Such language will not just showcase our values but potentially inspire political dissent. A regime stressed at home and under pressure abroad may yet consider the price of its nuclear intransigence.

As they once more meet their Iranian counterparts next week, the American diplomats should not be afraid to walk away from the table and even suspend the talks should they continue to meet an unyielding Iran. Another way of pressing Tehran would be to publicize all the concessions that the 5-plus-1 have made and how little Iran has moved. In doing so, we would expose the emptiness of the Iranian claim that all they want is civil nuclear power and clearly signal to their leadership that we don't need an agreement as much as they do and that we are prepared to create conditions for international support for increased pressure.

While it may be difficult now to foster the impression of a unified domestic American front, the White House would be wise to engage Congress on various legislation working its way through the Hill. The congressional concerns regarding the direction of the talks are not unreasonable. To be sure, the administration has its own diplomatic equities and legitimate concerns regarding the unity of the 5-plus-1. The White House has constructive interlocutors on the hill and a sincere dialogue might yet produce an accommodation on these thorny issues. In the end, the absence of congressional involvement and approval could well mean that any deal negotiated by the White House will not survive the Obama presidency.

The United States and Iran are destined to remain adversaries. It may be possible for enemies to negotiate an arms-control compact, but the path to such an accord will not come from additional concessions by the 5+1; if we want an acceptable deal at this stage, Iran's leaders need to see they have more to lose than gain by not concluding one.

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