

Carrots for Iran?

Lessons from Libya

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Brief Analysis

This is the first part of a two-part series on diplomacy surrounding the Iranian nuclear program and looks at U.S.-European relations. [Read Part II. \(templateC05.php?CID=2213\)](#)

As European and Iranian officials began negotiations December 14 on whether to make permanent Iran's temporary suspension of uranium enrichment, eight former Western foreign ministers issued a joint statement calling on Washington to support the European efforts by engaging with Iran. There is a growing chorus claiming that Iran will keep its nuclear program suspended only if offered significant incentives by the United States, such as security guarantees, an end to hostility, or at least normal relations.

It is instructive to consider Iran's situation in light of Libya's agreement one year ago, on December 19, 2003, to end its weapons of mass destruction (WMD) programs and to fully engage in the war against terror. Several factors were involved in bringing Libya to a deal involving tradeoffs made by the United States and the West.

Normalization In Exchange for WMD and Terror

In order to secure a normalization of relations with the United States, Libya had to agree to both fully engage in the war against terror and give up all of its WMD programs -- chemical, nuclear, and long-range missiles (those with a range over 300 km and a payload of over 500 kg). Libya also agreed to extraordinarily intrusive inspections and to extensive access to its WMD scientists and technicians -- Muammar Qadhafi realized that if he really was getting out of the WMD business, it was in his interest to have his actions verified by the West and the UN.

The lessons of Libya have been applied in part in the November 14 Paris Accords between France, Britain, Germany (the E3) and Iran, which state: "Irrespective of progress on the nuclear issue, the E3/European Union (EU) and Iran confirm their determination to combat terrorism, including the activities of Al Qa'ida and other terrorist groups such as the MeK [Mujahedin-e Khalq]." That is a recognition that Iran's relations with the West cannot be fully normal until Iran addresses the terror problem.

Resolving the al-Qaeda issue referred to in the Paris Accords will not be easy. The Iranian attitude was well illustrated by the statement this week by Abbas-Ali Alizadeh, Tehran Justice Administration director general, "All

the cases of the Al Qaeda members arrested in Iran have been attended to and the religious and legal rulings have been issued." (He also said, "I don't know the exact number [of al-Qaeda detainees] but there are many.") The clear implication was: do not expect any further action against these individuals. This while Iran continues to refuse to provide even a list of the names of the al-Qaeda members on its soil, much less to hand over to the Saudis those responsible for ordering (from Iranian territory) the May 2003 bombing in Riyadh.

But in addition, an important lesson from the experience with Libya is that it is not enough to renounce some types of terrorism -- what is needed is full engagement in the global war on terror. In particular, Palestinian attacks on Israeli civilians are now financed mainly by Iran, which also provides important technical support by which Palestinian terrorists have become more sophisticated. British prime minister Tony Blair says "the Middle East peace process is the single most pressing political challenge in our world today," requiring "a massive mobilization of international effort and will." European leaders often complain that the United States is not doing enough about Middle East peace. If Europe is serious about regarding Middle East peace as a priority, then it should actively reengage on the issue -- and there is no better opportunity for it to make a difference than in its security dialogue with the leading supporters of the terrorists out to sabotage Middle East peace, namely Iran.

By addressing the full scope of terrorism and WMD problems, Washington and Tripoli now have normal relations. But they do not have good relations. In particular, the United States has used these normal relations to press Libya on human rights issues: the fate of Libyan dissidents, access by international human rights groups, and especially the death sentences of six Bulgarian nurses falsely convicted of spreading AIDS to Libyans. In the event of a normalization of U.S.-Iranian relations, Washington would use those normal relations to raise the full range of its concerns about human rights and democracy, just as Iran would be free to raise its concerns about U.S. policies.

Since U.S. statements about Iranian human rights are regularly criticized by Iranian hardliners as being in fact U.S. calls for regime change, it seems unlikely those hardliners would relish the prospect of normalization and the attendant regular exchange with Washington on these issues. Nor does it seem plausible that these hardliners would welcome a U.S. embassy that would risk being crushed by the onslaught of Iranians seeking visas. So it is not entirely clear if in fact normalization of relations with the United States is so desirable for Iran's hardliners that to achieve it, they would agree to give up their nuclear program. The many voices in Europe suggesting that only a U.S. offer for normalization could save the deal with Iran about suspending its nuclear program sounds rather like an excuse. That is, it appears that the Europeans have concluded that the deal with Iran is going to fall apart, and they are looking to blame this on Washington.

Sticking to Your Guns Works

If one important lesson from the experience with Libya is that both WMD and terrorism must be addressed, another is the usefulness of U.S. unilateral sanctions. The multilateral UN sanctions on Libya were suspended in 1999 and totally lifted in September 2003. The breakthrough with Libya only came after those UN sanctions were gone. The Libyans made clear that their major motivation was ending sanctions and trade restrictions, at a time when the only such limits were the U.S. unilateral sanctions. The case with Iran has many similarities. Iranian leaders -- and even more so the Iranian public -- are well aware of the high price their country has paid for the years of unilateral U.S. sanctions. Indeed, the current calls for Washington to offer Iran normalization of relations are tacit recognition of just how much impact the U.S. sanctions have had.

The experience with Libya also shows that sanctions were not enough. Also necessary was a demonstrated willingness to use military force when necessary -- both against Libya and against other countries of proliferation concern, i.e., Iraq. After years of on-and-off probing, Libya opened serious negotiations as U.S. and allied troops massed to invade Iraq, and Tripoli took the final decision only after the October 2003 U.S. interdiction of a German ship carrying centrifuge components for the Libyan nuclear program.

As the Libyan record shows, progress in one arena (i.e., Iraq) contributes to progress elsewhere. All of which goes to say that progress on Iran is most likely if Afghanistan continues to progress and if Iraq becomes more stable. In particular, if post-election Iraq has a government with which the vast majority of Iraqi Shiites identify, Iran will have poor prospects of meddling in Iraq: few Iraqi Shiites will want to sacrifice their hold on power for the benefit of Tehran, and Iran is not well positioned to reach out to the Sunni Arab insurgents. The greater the stability in Iraq and Afghanistan, the less plausible any Iranian calculation that it could meddle against the West there to fend off pressure about the Iranian nuclear program, and the more Tehran has to be concerned that the United States is in a position to ratchet up pressure on Iran.

Another lesson of Libya is that success took years. The 1999 breakthrough about the Pan Am 103 case took long, hard negotiating and active Saudi mediation. In spring 2001, the U.S. and British governments presented the Libyans with a script about what else was needed. It was only two years later that serious talks about eliminating Libya's WMD program got under way. Almost all of these talks and soundings were conducted out of the public eye by officials of Libya and the United States (and United Kingdom) -- a sort of contact for which intelligence agencies are best suited. Only once the two sides had been able to work out in secret what a deal would consist of could they go public. Whenever an U.S.-Iranian deal is eventually worked out, it is likely to follow a similar path.

Next Steps on Iran

If Europe wants U.S. assistance, Europe will have to listen to U.S. advice -- a trade-off it is not clear Europe is willing to make. Instead, European negotiators went out of their way to keep Washington in the dark about the Paris Accords with Iran and the subsequent negotiations about an International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) resolution. Rather than addressing U.S. concerns that Iran could continue its eighteen-year record of misleading IAEA inspectors, Europe agreed to water down the IAEA resolution to reduce the power of inspectors to look into whether Iran has a nuclear weapons program -- which more or less guarantees that the IAEA will continue to say it has no proof of such a program, since it has few powers to look for one.

And this attitude continues. For instance, the statement by eight former foreign ministers (including Madeleine Albright and former ministers of Britain, France, Italy, Spain, Netherlands, Denmark, and Canada) is couched as a call for trans-Atlantic unity, but the only advice is that Washington should "consider launching commercial and diplomatic engagement with Iran" (that is, adopt the European position) while Europe proves to Iran that if the talks break down, Tehran will face "severe political and economic consequences," i.e., Europe takes the military option off the table. If in fact Europe wants to reach a trans-Atlantic consensus about Iran, then Europe would do well to remind Iran that the military option remains on the table. The EU "Strategy Against Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction" (adopted by the European Council on December 12, 2003) states, "coercive measures under Chapter VII of the UN Charter and international law (sanctions, selective or global, interceptions of shipments and, as appropriate, the use of force) could be envisioned" when political and diplomatic measures are unable to stop WMD proliferation. It is only fair to ask Europe to remind Iran of the official EU position.

The reason that EU-U.S. cooperation is important is that when Iran has been convinced that it faced a united insistence by the major powers it has made major concessions, as seen in the October 2003 initial Iranian suspension of uranium enrichment. Now, Iran's main concern is the UN Security Council. Former Iranian envoy to the IAEA Ali Akbar Salehi recently said, "We will be anxious and tense if we do not reach agreement with [the Europeans] and if our case is referred to the Security Council. However, our hands won't be tied. We have seen indications that countries such as China, Russia, and Brazil will enter the arena on Iran's side." The most important way for Washington to move the current negotiations forward would be to convince China and Russia to quietly inform Iran that they would not stand in the way of Security Council action. How to promote unity on the Iran issue among the five permanent members of the UN Security Council (the P5) will be the subject of part II of this series.

Steps to promote P5 unity would do more to facilitate the European negotiations than would any U.S. offer to engage Iran, which would only bog down the negotiations in bitter disputes about what Iran must do against terrorism and whether the United States will continue to criticize Iran's regime. The argument that the European negotiations hinge on whether Washington offers Iran a carrot look like a pre-emptive excuse for the likely breakdown of the EU-Iranian talks.

Patrick Clawson is the deputy director of The Washington Institute. ❖

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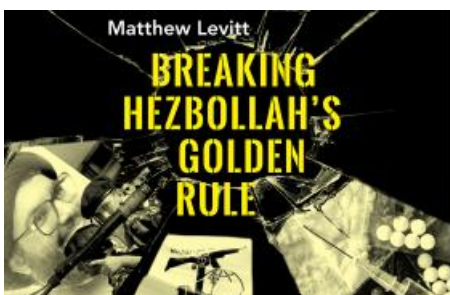
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