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The Wall Street Journal

Vive La France on Iran

Editorial

Nov. 10, 2013 -- We never thought we'd say this, but thank heaven for French foreign-policy exceptionalism. At least for the time being, François Hollande's Socialist government has saved the West from a deal that would all but guarantee that Iran becomes a nuclear power.

While the negotiating details still aren't fully known, the French made clear Saturday that they objected to a nuclear agreement that British Prime Minister David Cameron and President Barack Obama were all too eager to sign. These two leaders remind no one, least of all the Iranians, of Tony Blair, Margaret Thatcher, Ronald Reagan or George W. Bush. That left the French to protect against a historic security blunder, with Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius declaring in an interview with French radio that while France still hopes for an agreement with Tehran, it won't accept a "sucker's deal."

And that's exactly what seems to have been on the table as part of a "first-step agreement" good for six months as the parties negotiated a final deal. Tehran would be allowed to continue enriching uranium, continue manufacturing centrifuges, and continue building a plutonium reactor near the city of Arak. Iran would also get immediate sanctions relief and the unfreezing of as much as \$50 billion in oil revenues—no small deliverance for a regime whose annual oil revenues barely topped \$95 billion in 2011.

In return the West would get Iranian promises. There is a promise not to activate the Arak reactor, a promise not to use

its most advanced centrifuges to enrich uranium or to install new ones, a promise to stop enriching uranium to 20%, which is near-weapons' grade, and to convert its existing stockpile into uranium oxide (a process that is reversible).

What Iran has not promised to do is abide by the Additional Protocol of the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT), which imposes additional reporting requirements on Iran and allows U.N. inspectors to conduct short-notice inspections of nuclear facilities. The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) has complained for years that Iran has refused to answer its questions fully or provide inspectors with access to all of its facilities. IAEA inspectors have been barred from visiting Arak since August 2011.

In other words, the deal gives Iran immediate, if incomplete, sanctions relief and allows it to keep its nuclear infrastructure intact and keep expanding it at a slightly slower pace. And the deal contains no meaningful mechanisms for verifying compliance. "What we have to do is to make sure that there is a good deal in place from the perspective of us verifying what they're doing," President Obama told NBC's Chuck Todd in an interview Wednesday. What we have is the opposite.

The President also told Mr. Todd that if Iran fails to honor the deal the U.S. can re-apply existing sanctions: "We can crank that dial back up."

That's also misleading. Once sanctions are eased, the argument will always be made (no doubt by Mr. Obama) that dialing them back up will give Iran the excuse to restart enrichment. Any "interim" agreement gives more negotiating leverage to Iran. If Iran really intends to cease its nuclear program, it should be willing to do so immediately and unconditionally. All of this echoes the strategy Iran pursued after its illicit

nuclear facilities were discovered in 2002. Current Iranian President Hasan Rouhani was his country's nuclear negotiator from 2003 to 2005, when Iran briefly suspended its civilian and military nuclear work in the teeth of intense international pressure (and American armies on its borders with Iraq and Afghanistan). That previous suspension is treated by U.S. negotiators as a model of what they might achieve now. It's really a model of what they should beware. "Tehran showed that it was possible to exploit the gap between Europe and the United States to achieve Iranian objectives," Hossein Mousavian, Mr. Rouhani's deputy at the time, acknowledged in his memoir. "The world's understanding of 'suspension' was changed from a legally binding obligation" to "a voluntary and short-term undertaking aimed at confidence building." Now the U.S. seems to be falling for the same ruse again. This time, however, Iran is much closer to achieving its nuclear objectives. No wonder Israel's Benjamin Netanyahu felt compelled to warn the Administration and Europe that they risked signing "a very, very bad deal," a blunt public rebuke from a Prime Minister who has been notably cautious about criticizing the White House. The Saudis, who gave up on this Administration long ago, are no doubt thinking along similar lines. The BBC reported last week that the Kingdom has nuclear weapons "on order" from Pakistan. The negotiators plan to resume talks on November 20, and France will be under enormous pressure to go along with a deal. We hope Messrs. Hollande and Fabius hold firm, and the U.S. Congress could help by strengthening sanctions and passing a resolution insisting that any agreement with Iran must include no uranium enrichment, the dismantling of the Arak plutonium project and all centrifuges, and intrusive, on-

demand inspections. Anything less means that Iran is merely looking to con the West into easing sanctions even as it can restart its program whenever it likes.

[Article 2.](#)

CNN

Why the U.S. and Israel are split over the Iran deal

Aaron David Miller

November 10, 2013 -- The failure of the P5+1 (the United States, United Kingdom, France, China, Russia plus Germany) to reach agreement with Iran Saturday in Geneva is a good thing if it allows the United States and Israel to sort out what really divides them on the Iranian nuclear issue before negotiations resume in coming days.

That the French -- not the United States -- seem to have taken the lead in stiffening the allies' demands with Iran is in itself a reflection of those differences.

And while a high-ranking U.S. delegation headed to Israel Sunday to brief the Israelis on the talks, bridging the gap there won't be that easy.

Where you stand in life has a great deal to do with where you sit.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's fierce reaction to the effort to reach an interim agreement reflects the realities of a small power with much less room to maneuver on a critical security issue than a great one.

And it reveals the sensitivities of an Israeli leader who's far more invested politically in seeing a nuke-free Iran, far more

suspicious of Iranian motives and far more worried about the consequences of a bad deal for Israel than a U.S. President who's concerned more about what happens if there's no deal and Israel or the United States slides toward military confrontation with the mullahs who rule Iran.

That gap between the United States and Israel is real. And it should neither be trivialized nor exaggerated. But short of a final deal in which Iran abandons its nuclear ambitions, it may not be bridgeable. These two allies will need to manage it as best they can. And here's why.

Big and Small Powers

With non-predatory neighbors to its north and south and fish to its east and west, the United States enjoys a level of physical security unprecedented in the history of great and small powers. That gives America a margin for error that the small power simply cannot afford.

Indeed, Americans have a hard time internalizing what it's like to be a small nation living on the knife's edge, whose tiny physical size, isolation and sense of vulnerability exists alongside its power and strength.

I don't think Iran wants nuclear weapons to launch a first strike against Israel. But it's impossible to ignore, let alone trivialize, Israeli security concerns and vulnerabilities in this regard, particularly in the face of Iran's rhetoric, regional ambitions and support for terrorism over the years.

Israel isn't some hapless victim, a piece of driftwood bobbing about on a turbulent sea; it's a dynamic nation (and a nuclear weapons state) with great military power with the capacity if need be to deal with Iran too. But that doesn't take away from the reality that it's a small country living in a dangerous neighborhood.

Netanyahu's World View

All Israeli Prime Ministers are said to sleep with one eye open. Benjamin Netanyahu sleeps with two eyes open. No Israeli Prime Minister can afford to take Israel's security for granted. And none does.

But ever since I've known him, the key to understanding this Prime Minister is that he's immersed in the proposition that Israel's very survival can't be taken for granted either. All Israeli leaders function in a high threat environment. But in Netanyahu's case, it defines his world and creates an us-against-them sensibility that extends to Israel's adversaries and its friends too. He has been deeply suspicious of American motives for many years and believes the United States doesn't understand the Arabs or Israel's security predicament. You live in Chevy Chase, he's said to me on more than one occasion; we live in a dangerous neighborhood with little margin for error. I never argued with him. What was the point? Unlike Israel, there is no existential threat to the United States from any external enemy largely because of where we are. But Israel's history has been marked by a continuous series of threats -- large and small -- by virtue of where the Israelis are. However powerful they have become, that legacy endures. And combined with the dark history of the Jewish people culminating in the Nazi genocide, it has left an enduring mark. The notion that Israelis fight the Arabs during the day and win and fight the Nazis at night and lose carries particular resonance with this Israeli Prime Minister. The late Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin never used Holocaust imagery to describe the contemporary threats to Israel's security. Ehud Barak refused to use Hitler analogies when discussing Iran. Netanyahu does, repeatedly. Iran is Nazi Germany;

former Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad is Hitler and we're in 1938 on the nuclear issue. It infuses his rhetoric and his world view. And while Rouhani has changed the tone and may be genuinely looking for an agreement, the charm offensive hasn't dulled the acuteness of Netanyahu's suspicions.

Consequences of Israeli-American Tensions

This world view poses enormous challenges for a U.S. administration, partly because it's validated by Iran's own past rhetoric and actions and because Iran has tried to hide suspected military aspects of its nuclear program. Leaving an angry, aggrieved Israel in the wake of an interim deal with Iran that is judged to be a bad deal carries tremendous risk and consequence.

First, the focus is now on an interim agreement -- a first step. That means that we won't know the end state for at least six months. Time is both an enemy and an ally here. The step-by-step approach creates time to test intentions.

It also affords time for Iran to continue to advance aspects of its nuclear program and to develop a break-out capacity to dash for weapons. And they are going to be a rocky six months if Netanyahu concludes that the interim arrangements reached in Geneva work to Iran's advantage.

Going right to the endgame would be ideal. But it's just not feasible. There's too much suspicion and mistrust. And neither Iran nor the United States are prepared for that. So there's built in U.S.-Israeli tension inherent in the structure of the talks themselves.

Second, while the Prime Minister's fierce reaction to events in Geneva is driven by genuine anger and concern, it's also designed to begin to stir up opposition in Congress. And it

won't take much stirring. There's zero capacity in Congress to give Iran the benefit of the doubt on anything. And Congress is already inclined to adopt the Israeli view that what's required now is more pressure on the mullahs rather than less, including additional sanctions. The idea that the Obama administration would want to place itself in a position of defending a deal with Iran that Israel and much of Congress oppose -- and appear implicitly to be defending the Iranians in the process -- defies the laws of political gravity, particularly for a much weakened president. To overcome these political downsides and go into battle mode, the administration would really have to have a compelling interim agreement that's sound and defensible.

Third, the United States is measuring an agreement with Iran at this stage not against an ideal end state -- Iran capitulates and surrenders any hope of maintaining the capacity to enrich uranium, let alone make bombs. It's evaluating success in terms of what's practical and what will happen if no deal is reached, namely the slide toward the use of military force against Iran.

Israelis don't want a war with Iran either; but they are much more comfortable with threatening military action and conditioned to accept the possibility that force may have to be used, even if the end state is an imperfect one and Iran sets about rebuilding a nuclear program. The key issue is putting time on the clock to delay Iran getting nukes -- preferably through diplomacy, but if necessary by force.

Fourth, an already problematic Israeli-Palestinian peace process is going to get a lot more complicated. Narrowing the gaps on borders, refugees and Jerusalem was always going to be tough; but now getting Netanyahu to make decisions will be

almost impossible.

Israel-Palestinian peace process at risk

Whether the administration thought through the overlapping of a peace process with a nine-month timeline and a negotiation with Iran of six months now aligned to come to fruition right around the same time isn't clear. But the coincidence of the timing couldn't be worse.

The odds that this Prime Minister would make decisions on historic issues with the Palestinians before there was clarity on Iran's nuclear program were always slim to none. For Netanyahu, the Palestinians are a long-term challenge; Iran is an imminent, acute problem. And a Netanyahu who believes the Americans aren't taking him seriously on Iran is certain to be withholding when it comes to the peace process.

To satisfy Israeli requirements, an interim agreement would have to do at least three things: first, avoid doing anything that dismantles the sanctions regime and removes real pressure on Iran to cut the final deal; second, make it impossible for Iran to use the next six months to advance in a significant way any of the aspects of its nuclear program -- not just to freeze Iran's program but to actually set it back significantly. And finally, not to do anything with regard to sanctions that can't be reversed.

All of this may not be possible. But in the next 10 days before negotiations with Iran resume, everything should be done to try to make certain that Washington and Jerusalem understand one another and to ensure that there's as much confidence and trust going forward as possible.

An orchestrated good cop/bad cop routine between allies could be helpful in negotiating with Iran. A rift that signals the United States and Israel are fundamentally out of step is not.

There are no happy or perfect endings here. At best, the choice is between an imperfect interim agreement that buys six months to determine whether Iran is prepared to give up its quest for a nuclear weapons capacity or no agreement and an inevitable slide toward military confrontation.

As of now the United States sees the advantage of the former; Netanyahu doesn't. The United States has no stake in concluding an agreement with Iran that leaves Israel angry, aggrieved and vulnerable. So, the two sides will find a way to work this through. But for now, buckle your seat belts. We could be in for one bumpy ride.

Aaron David Miller is a vice president and distinguished scholar at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars and was a Middle East negotiator in Democratic and Republican administrations.

[Article 3.](#)

The Financial Times

Iran will test Obama's diplomatic game plan

Edward Luce

November 10, 2013 -- Having tiptoed up to a historic deal with Iran, the west – chiefly France – got cold feet. But they will try again next week and a deal is still within reach. There is little doubt how badly the White House wants one. An Iran deal could rejuvenate Barack Obama's presidency and retrospectively earn him his 2009 Nobel Peace Prize. Equally, it could show how easily he gets outflanked by tougher

players. As diplomatic challenges go, it is about as tricky as it gets. Mr Obama's mercurial handling of the Syria crisis suggests we should hope for the best but expect the worst. Just ask the French.

The forces opposed to almost any kind of a deal are formidable. In addition to France's misgivings, Mr Obama faces the challenge of convincing Iran there is only one US negotiating stance. At the moment it must look to Tehran as though there are at least two. Two months ago Congress made it clear it would reject Mr Obama's request for military strikes on Syria. Now Congress is itching to rebuff Mr Obama's request for it to delay passing new sanctions on Iran. In matters of both war and peace, Mr Obama has less sway over Capitol Hill than France.

Opposition is solidly bipartisan. A number of Democratic and Republican senators, including Mark Kirk from Mr Obama's home state of Illinois, have vowed to press ahead with a new layer of sanctions on Iran – an automatic deal breaker – unless Tehran agrees to dismantle its enrichment programme. This undermines the trade-off that John Kerry, Mr Obama's secretary of state, offered in Geneva. His outline required Iran merely to freeze enrichment for a fixed period in exchange for releasing some overseas assets. In contrast, the hawks in Congress want a full Iranian climbdown before they will consider any financial reward.

Which is the actual stance of the US?

In days gone by, the Middle East would have viewed dissonance between the two main branches of US government as a form of good cop/bad cop routine that was ultimately one act. Few read Washington that way any more.

Mr Obama's word inspires neither fear nor love. For four

years, Congress has failed to agree on a US budget. Yet it could probably rustle up a majority for tighter Iran sanctions by close of business on the same day. The danger now is that Congress will press ahead with sanctions and scupper the next round of Geneva talks before they begin.

Mr Obama's second challenge will be to muffle the ire of Benjamin Netanyahu, Israel's prime minister, who attacked Mr Kerry's proposal as the "deal of the century" for Iran. Mr Obama's relations with Mr Netanyahu were abysmal for most of his first term – the latter relished any chance to humiliate the White House. The US president eventually started to return the contempt with which he was treated. Mr Obama's victory last year over Mitt Romney, Mr Netanyahu's friend, whom he explicitly backed, seemed to give the Israeli prime minister pause for thought.

Now relations are turning icy again. Mr Netanyahu has made it clear that he sees Mr Rouhani as a "wolf in sheep's clothing" – worse even than his predecessor, Mahmoud Ahmadi-Nejad. It is a blatant misportrayal. But if there is to be a tug of war on Capitol Hill between Mr Obama and the influential American Israeli Public Affairs Committee, which usually takes Mr Netanyahu's cue, the latter will have the upper hand. An open breach is possible in the coming week. To reach his destination Mr Obama must neutralise Israel's opposition.

Third, America's Middle East alliances are rapidly crumbling – not just the US-Israel relationship. Mr Obama has shown conviction in bringing Iran to the verge of an initial deal.

These are the first US-Iran talks since the mullahs took over in 1979. Reports of longer-running back-channel negotiations between the US and Iran show that Mr Obama can set a strategy and pursue it – with Mr Kerry's indefatigable help.

Yet in the process the US is losing sway with almost every ally it has in the Middle East.

Egypt's generals laughed off Mr Obama's threat earlier this year to suspend \$1.8bn in US military aid following their coup. A smaller portion was held back. Saudi Arabia and others instantly stepped into the breach with \$12bn in commitments.

The Saudis, meanwhile, are terrified Iran is poised once again to profit from a clumsy US-led initiative. Under George W Bush, Iraq was in effect handed to Iran on a platter. Now in the Saudi view, Mr Obama is cementing the grip of Iran's client regime in Syria and dangling the prospect of at least a temporary stay on Tehran's nuclear programme. Mr Obama will also need to find a way to assuage Riyadh's hostility. The key fact underlying all this is Mr Obama's good sense in sticking to the path of negotiation. The other options of either going to war with Iran or accepting its nuclear ambitions are far worse. Most of the world is hoping Mr Obama will use every tool at hand to exploit what could be a once in a generation opening. But he will have to play beyond his normal limits to avoid losing Israel and Congress. France, too, remains to be convinced that Iran is not getting the better of the bargain.

Mr Obama is giving diplomacy his best shot to confront arguably the world's most intractable problem. Whether that will be nearly enough is open to doubt.

[Article 4.](#)

The Wall Street Journal

The Case for Stronger Sanctions on

Iran

Mark Dubowitz Reuel Marc Gerecht

Nov. 10, 2013 -- Was the deal that Iran came close to negotiating with six world powers in Geneva over the weekend likely to keep Tehran from developing a nuclear weapon? Not according to French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius, who said that the proposed agreement—to relax economic sanctions while reining in only parts of Iran's nuclear program—was a "sucker's deal." All indications are that it was Mr. Fabius and the French government whose skepticism blocked the bargain intensely sought by the Obama administration and the mullahs in Tehran.

Over the past two decades, no country has been more consistent than France in recognizing Iran's unrelenting mendacity about its nuclear ambitions. The White House now will undoubtedly try to pressure French President François Hollande to relent. With talks set to resume on Nov. 20, lawmakers on Capitol Hill who want to encourage Mr. Hollande to stand firm now have an opportunity to do so—and to stymie the administration's efforts—by enacting more hard-hitting economic sanctions on Iran.

Yet in Geneva, even France seems to have joined its partners—the U.S., Russia, China, the U.K. and Germany—in being ready to grant de facto recognition of the Islamic Republic's "right" to enrich uranium. Iran has plenty of low-grade uranium because its spinning centrifuges have been implicitly accepted by President Obama and U.S. allies. What seems to have troubled the French about the negotiations—but no one else—was that construction would continue on Iran's heavy-

water reactor, giving Tehran a pathway to a plutonium bomb, and that not a single piece of Iran's nuclear infrastructure would be dismantled.

The perplexing thing about the Obama administration's recent diplomacy regarding Iran: Messrs. Obama and Secretary of State John Kerry don't seem to recognize that they will likely never again have as much economic leverage over Tehran as they do right now.

The impact of Euro-American sanctions on Iran is what helped to jump-start the presidential campaign of Hasan Rouhani, who was elected in June on promises to court the West and rescue the economy. Electoral opinion has, of course, never overridden theocracy in the Islamic Republic. But to whatever extent Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei fears popular unrest provoked by sanctions, that trepidation will lessen once economic pressure is relaxed.

The efficacy of sanctions depends on the threat of escalation, where an ever-expanding web of restrictions scares off foreign businesses. Even when sanctions on Iran were violated, that didn't really matter, because Washington—Congress, really—created an impression that it intended to encircle Iran with an economic minefield.

The sanctions game with Iran has been as much psychological as legal. When the Obama administration sends a signal that it is willing to reduce economic sanctions for little in return, the general impression abroad—reinforced by French objections to the soft American position in Geneva—is that the White House's resolve is waning.

The White House similarly forfeited whatever military leverage it had over Iran in September by bungling matters in Syria, where Tehran strongly backs Bashar Assad's regime.

When Assad used chemical weapons on his own people, France was unambiguous about its willingness to strike at Assad militarily; it was the U.K. and then the U.S. that backed down.

So where does that leave us? Reports out of Geneva indicate that the Obama administration was ready to unfreeze Iranian assets and ease sanctions on exports, including gold, petrochemicals and the Iranian auto sector, which would have brought tens of billions of dollars to the regime. The White House seems not to appreciate the ironic effect of its attempted deal-making. Any concession on sanctions that releases hard currency to Tehran provides cash that it could spend on its nuclear program—or to aid the Assad regime or any of Iran's other unsavory friends.

According to the administration's narrative, Iran's nuclear pacification is going to happen through a series of ever-increasing "carrots" (read: bribes) delivered by the U.S. and Europe and sold by the "moderate" Rouhani to the hard-core guardians of the Islamic revolution as a reason to devote their nuclear program to purely peaceful purposes.

Epiphanies do happen. It is possible, though highly unlikely, that Mr. Rouhani—the former right-hand man of Hashemi Rafsanjani, who drove the nuclear program in the 1980s and 1990s—now wants to forsake his nuclear legacy. But why would the prospect of easing sanctions help him persuade the Revolutionary Guards and Supreme Leader Khamenei to abandon the cause? They have already invested their pride, billions of dollars and much of their religious authority on the cherished goal of a nuclear-armed Iran. The Geneva negotiations indicate that Mr. Rouhani's bosses are willing only to make concessions that are easily revoked or not much

of a nuclear impediment to start with.

The U.S. and its allies seem much more likely to get the attention of the supreme leader and the Revolutionary Guards if the pain from sanctions is so intense that a choice has to be made between economic collapse and the nuclear program. America's capacity to inflict more pain on those who are driving Tehran's nuclear effort is substantial. New financial sanctions could lock up all of Iran's currency reserves—around \$70 to \$80 billion—held abroad, which would effectively shut down non-humanitarian imports and collapse the rial, Iran's currency. Financial relief would only come when Iran takes steps to verifiably and irreversibly dismantle its military-nuclear program—and only through controllable accounts, in Europe, where Tehran could exchange funds for industrial goods.

Even new sanctions may not be enough to stop the Islamic Republic's nuclear ambitions. But after the debacle of American policy in Syria, sanctions are really the only hammer the U.S. has left. America would have a strong hand in negotiations with Iran if President Obama were serious about leaving "all options on the table"—including the threat of military action. His hand might be decent if he were prepared to play economic hardball. But he has to be prepared to fail in order to win. It's the price of admission to power politics in the Middle East.

Mr. Dubowitz is the executive director of the Foundation for Defense of Democracies and heads its Iran sanctions and nonproliferation projects. Mr. Gerecht, a former Iran-targets officer in the CIA's clandestine service, is a senior fellow at the foundation.

Foreign Affairs

Why Iran's Military Won't Spoil Détente with the U.S.

Akbar Ganji

November 10, 2013 -- It is fair to assume that any deal between Iran and the United States to freeze Iran's nuclear program will be greeted by the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps with cries of "Death to America!" Hassan Rouhani was elected president earlier this year with a mandate to seek just such a deal. But he still has to reckon with the fact that Iran's most powerful military force has traditionally been a bastion for ideological hard-liners uninterested in building closer relations with the United States.

At the same time, any hope that the Revolutionary Guards have of playing the spoiler in a U.S.-Iranian rapprochement will be undermined by the fact that the force is implacably divided against itself, between those who are dead set against closer relations with the United States and those who are likely to support a deal.

This is not to suggest that the Revolutionary Guards don't pose a threat to détente; its most hard-line factions certainly do. And those tend to be the most vocal -- or at least the most visible.

On September 30, just a few days after Rouhani's breakthrough telephone conversation with U.S. President Barack Obama, the chief of the Guards, Mohammad Ali Jafari, labeled the move a "tactical error," adding that his forces

would be monitoring the issue in the future so that it could issue “necessary warnings.” Two weeks later, on October 13, Jafari declared that “the people have figured out what [the reformists] are up to and will not be duped by their provocations in the interests of the enemy.” That same day, Yahya Rahim Safavi, a general in the Guards, expressed the Islamic Republic’s standard ideological line against relations with Washington when he said that the United States had proved repeatedly that it could not be trusted.

Around the same time, however, other prominent Guardsmen were offering a strikingly different message, by way of a revisionist interpretation of recent Iranian history. In early October, the former president Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, who served as commander in chief of the Guards during the Iran-Iraq War, published an article recounting that Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, the founder of the Islamic Republic, had repeatedly made clear in the early 1980s that he wanted the Iranian government to stop needlessly taunting the United States with the slogan “Death to America.” Rafsanjani also pointed out that, in April 1980, Khomeini said that “Should our awakened and noble nation permit, it will establish a very normal relationship with the United States, just as with other countries.” A founding member of the Guards, Mohsen Rafighdoost, gave an interview on October 21 concurring with Rafsanjani's assessment of Khomeini's views, pointing out that Khomeini dissuaded him from setting up the Guards' headquarters at the former U.S. Embassy in Tehran. “Why do you want to go there?” Rafighdoost recounts Khomeini asking him. “Are our disputes with the U.S. supposed to last a thousand years? Do not go there.”

This emphasis on Khomeini's overlooked pragmatism is

entirely consistent with the preferred self-image of an increasing number of Guardsmen. Although the Guards were founded as an ideological organization, they have become vastly more pragmatic as they've acquired more power in the Iranian establishment. The Revolutionary Guards are no longer simply a military institution. They are among the country's most important economic actors, controlling an estimated ten percent of the economy, directly and through various subsidiaries. And those economic interests increasingly trump other concerns. And, although the force can corner a greater share of the domestic market under the sanctions regime imposed by the United States because the private sector has a chronic shortage of funds, many Guardsmen are aware that they stand to gain much more if Iran strengthens its ties to the rest of the world. Companies controlled by the Guards would likely win a lion's share of new foreign investment. But that would require, of course, reaching some sort of accommodation with the United States on the nuclear program. The Guards have also always shown signs of pragmatism when it comes to military strategy. They are aware that if talks between Tehran and Washington break down, the United States could begin to seriously consider a military intervention. Few leading Guardsmen are eager for that; unlike the clerical establishment that preaches resistance to the West, the Guards are very capable of calculating the material and strategic costs of escalation. On June 3, Brigadier General Hossein Alaei, a veteran of the Iran-Iraq War and a highly respected IRGC commander, declared in a public speech that war in the region has only ever resulted in "increased killing of the Muslim people, particularly the Shiites." Commanders are increasingly framing their military tactics and

political goals to avoid direct confrontation. After the Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu's declaration that Iran was building "intercontinental ballistic missiles" capable of striking Washington, the IRGC quickly responded that "the range of even our long-range missiles is only two thousand kilometers" and suggested that it had no intention of building missiles with a longer range.

Further, there is no shortage of high-ranking Guards offering explicit support for the idea of rapprochement with the United States. Often, this support is framed as calls for cooperation on Washington and Tehran's mutual interests in the region. In a speech on October 16, Major Hassan Firouzabadi, chief of staff of the armed forces, was even more explicit. He called on the United States to take advantage of the "historic opportunity" to cooperate with the Islamic Republic in combatting extremist groups such as al Qaeda and in providing stability in the Middle East. "Obama's domestic opponents are trying to scuttle these negotiations, because they do not want this winning card to belong to Obama," he said. "Obama must save himself by resisting them."

To be sure, it would make no difference if the entire Revolutionary Guards wanted rapprochement if Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei was opposed. But even he seems to have given his quiet backing to pragmatism. Rear Admiral Ali Shamkhani, a commander of the Guards who was personally appointed by Khamenei to become the secretary-general of the Islamic Republic's National Security Council, has endorsed Rouhani and Obama's approach. On October 14, he commended both for their "commitment to diplomacy to solve and eliminate the differences" between the two countries, and for creating "a positive basis for managing their differences."

Clearly, there are members of the IRGC who would vehemently disagree with any kind words for the U.S. president, but Khamenei's tacit endorsement would not be taken lightly.

Of course, the only members of the Guards who are on the record on this issue -- on either side -- are officers at or near the top of the organization's hierarchy. Just as important will be what the group's rank and file make of the idea of better relations with the United States. And on that question, there are grounds for even greater optimism. The younger members at the middle or toward the bottom of the IRGC organization are largely drawn from the lower strata of society, which has been hardest hit by the international sanctions regime. They have no memories of the Islamic Revolution, or of the searing experience of the Iran-Iraq War. If they do share the older generation's ideological framework, it is only in an attenuated form. Indeed, what informal polling exists on the matter suggests that when members of the Revolutionary Guards have been given the chance to freely vote in presidential elections, they have been most likely to vote for moderates, and even reformists. (In the 1997 presidential election, 70 percent of the Guards are estimated to have voted for the reformist candidate Mohammad Khatami.) The rank and file can be manipulated (and forced) by their superiors into calling for the United States' downfall. But like their colleagues in the upper echelons of the Guards, they are likely hoping for a new era with fewer tensions and greater mutual respect.

So long as the Guards are divided between themselves, the decisive factor will be the group's sworn loyalty to the country's highest clerics. That explains why Khomeini's views on the United States have now become such contested terrain

for people like Rafighdoost and Rafsanjani. Hard-liners may have resisted accepting détente when it is advocated by reformists. But one should not be surprised if they accept such a policy when there is evidence of its backing from Khomeini and Khamenei.

AKBAR GANJI is an Iranian journalist and dissident. He was imprisoned in Tehran from 2000 to 2006, and his writings are currently banned in Iran.

Article 6.

Huffington Post

Israel Has Reached Childhood's End -- It's Time to End U.S. Aid to Israel

Steven Strauss

"I believe that we can now say that Israel has reached childhood's end, that it has matured enough to begin approaching a state of self-reliance ... We are going to achieve economic independence [from the United States]."

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to a Joint Session of the United States Congress - Washington D.C., July 10, 1996 (Source: Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs)

11/10/2013 -- It's been over 15 years since PM Netanyahu's speech to a joint session of Congress stating Israel's goal of economic independence. In 1997, Israel received \$3.1 billion in aid from the U.S. In 2012, Israel was still receiving \$3.1 billion annually in U.S. aid. We haven't made much progress towards PM Netanyahu's goal. For Israel's sake, as well as for

America's, it's time to reduce U.S. annual aid to Israel -- to 0 -- over some reasonable adjustment period (perhaps 5 to 10 years), leaving open the possibility, of course, for emergency aid.

Let me emphasize that this isn't a call to end America's close and special relationship with Israel. Israel certainly isn't a perfect society. But its ideals of freedom of speech, freedom of religion, and tolerance are closer to America's ideals than any other country's in its region.

Nor is this a call for America to disengage from the vital task of keeping Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons, a common interest of both the U.S. and Israel. Israel -- as with our other close allies (such as the UK) -- should still have access to American weapons. But it should pay for them on normal commercial terms, rather than receiving them as part of an aid package. The U.S. should move to a more normalized relationship with Israel because:

A) Israel has become an affluent and developed country that can afford to pay for its own defense. Israeli GDP is about \$250 billion dollars/year, and its per capita income is about \$33,000/year. In other words, replacing all American aid would cost Israelis about 1 percent of their income per year, hardly an outrageous sum. Aside from the financial metrics, Israel has a well developed economy in other ways. For example, on the UN Human Development Index, Israel ranks 16th (between Denmark and Belgium). Israeli life expectancy at birth is 81 years, compared with only 79 years in the United States.

Also, as a general principle, people and institutions make better choices when they have to internalize costs. If the U.S. ends aid to Israel, Israelis may make better choices about their

national defense and foreign policy.

B) Other countries/programs could better use this aid money. Although somewhat related to the above point, this matter is worth highlighting separately. To the extent the U.S. is committed to helping other countries, there are many of the world's nations in far more desperate situations than Israel. More than 20 nations have life expectancies below 60 years, and many also have appallingly high infant mortality rates. All of these countries could benefit from the aid the US directs to Israel.

Even domestically, the aid that goes to Israel could be useful. Detroit is bankrupt, and our Congress is cutting back on food stamps, and making other painful budget cuts.

C) Israel and the United States have increasingly different visions about the future of the Middle East. We shouldn't subsidize a country (even an ally) that is undermining our policy goals. The U.S. has long-term goals in the Middle East (including avoiding the humanitarian and financial catastrophe of another major war in the region). A major (bipartisan) goal of the United States has been the two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Israel has legitimate security concerns, and a just peace will not be easy to achieve. However, the current Israeli government is clearly not committed to the U.S. vision, and has done everything possible to sabotage American efforts. Israel's continued building of random settlements -- all over what's supposed to become the State of Palestine -- directly conflicts with American policy goals. As Secretary of State Kerry recently commented, the United States believes the Israeli settlements in Palestine: "are illegitimate. And we believe that the entire peace process would in fact be easier if these settlements were not taking

place. ... if you say [Israel is] working for peace and [Israel] want[s] peace, and a Palestine that is a whole Palestine that belongs to the people who live there, how can [Israel] say we're planning to build in a place that will eventually be Palestine? So it sends a message that perhaps [Israel] is not really serious."

In exchange for \$3 billion dollars/year in aid to Israel, the least the U.S. should expect is that the Israeli government be serious about negotiating peace with the Palestinians.

If the Netanyahu government can afford to build additional settlements, it can afford to do without American aid.

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Article 7.

The Washington Post

John Kerry's Middle East dream world

Jackson Diehl

November 10, 2013 -- Imagine a world in which the Middle East is not descending into carnage and chaos but is on the brink of a monumental series of breakthroughs. By next spring, Iran's nuclear program will be secured and Egypt will be a liberal democracy. Syrian dictator Bashar al-Assad has stepped aside. And, not least, Israelis and Palestinians have settled on the terms for a Palestinian state.

This is the world that John Kerry inhabited as he shuttled across the world last week: a fantastical realm created by his

billowing vision of what he can accomplish as secretary of state. Meanwhile, on this planet, aid agencies reported starvation and an outbreak of polio in Syria; Egypt's last elected president was put on trial; Israeli and Palestinian leaders described their U.S.-brokered peace talks as broken; and France's foreign minister suggested the would-be accord with Iran was "a fool's game."

Call it Kerry's Magical Mystery Tour. On Nov. 3 in Cairo, he announced that "the road map [to democracy in Egypt] is being carried out to the best of our perception," after failing even to mention the politicized prosecution of deposed president Mohamed Morsi.

On Tuesday, Kerry offered the following explanation of why the Syrian peace conference he's pushing will succeed: "The Assad regime knows full well that the purpose of" the conference is "the installation of a provisional government." And "the Syrian government has accepted to come to Geneva." It apparently follows that Assad will show up and placidly agree to hand over power. If not, Kerry ventured, "the Russians and the Iranians . . . will make certain that the Syrian regime will live up to its obligation."

Kerry's optimism was far from exhausted. His next stop was devoted to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, both of whom had broken a vow of silence to say the negotiations Kerry persuaded them to begin in July had gone nowhere. Not to worry, said Kerry: "I am convinced from my conversations" with them "that this is not mission impossible; this can happen."

All this was before his weekend trip to Geneva for what became a failed attempt to close a deal with Iran on its nuclear

program. Kerry's conclusion: "I can tell you, without any reservations, we made significant progress."

Stipulated: The mission of the U.S. secretary of state is to tackle big problems diplomatically, even if it means taking on missions impossible. Still, it's hard to think of a previous chief of Foggy Bottom who has so conspicuously detached himself from on-the-ground realities.

To those outside the Kerry bubble, Egypt is ruled by a regime more repressive than any in decades, with a muzzled media and thousands of political prisoners. Syria is mired in an anarchic struggle whose most likely winners appear to be Assad and al-Qaeda, with neither inclined to negotiation. Israelis and Palestinians are further apart on the terms for a settlement than they were at the turn of the century. And the emerging conditions for a deal with Iran threaten to drive a wedge between the United States and some of its closest allies. This raises the question: Does Kerry really believe his rhetoric? In fact, it appears he does, particularly on the Israeli-Palestinian account. Desperate for a legacy at the end of his long career, the former senator has convinced himself that a) the terms for a settlement are readily apparent and b) he has the political skills to convince Netanyahu and Abbas to accept them. Kerry, like President Obama, also is convinced that detente, if not a "grand bargain," has all along been possible between the United States and Iran, if only the right people (like him) are at the table.

Other Kerry stances are the logical result of Obama's decision to radically retrench U.S. policy in the Middle East. Obama decided at summer's end to restrict U.S. activity to "core interests" that don't include the defense of democracy, preventing humanitarian catastrophe or ending "someone

else's civil war." That means that Kerry, who once pushed to arm the Syrian opposition as a way of "changing Assad's calculations," is left with little recourse other than to plead with Russia and Iran to accomplish what the United States will not.

Faced with Obama's dictum that U.S. cooperation with Egypt's military will continue, Kerry must pretend that the generals are installing a democracy and pray that they take the cue.

If any one of Kerry's dreams comes true, the world would be better off, so I hope skeptics like me will be proved wrong. If not, this secretary of state will be remembered as a self-deceiving bumbler — and his successor will have some large messes to clean up.