

Trump Stages an Iran Retreat

Editoriale

President Trump is touting his latest cease-fire deal with [Iran](#) as peace in our time, but the world is more likely to see it as a strategic retreat short of achieving his war aims. To reopen the Strait of Hormuz, Mr. Trump is accepting Iran's promises merely to negotiate over its nuclear program.

Most of the press has been hostile from the start, but we've supported the President's Iran policy. We've done so because a nuclear Iran would be an existential threat, and because we want Presidents to succeed when they go to war.

Mr. Trump's willingness to use military force when no one else would has set back Iran's nuclear program, military and industrial base. The result isn't "Obama deal 2.0" because, unlike in 2015, Iran's key nuclear facilities are in rubble and its enrichment of uranium has been halted for the first time in 20 years. The media critics and Democrats who now savage the President would have stood by while a nuclear bomb became a *fait accompli*, as in North Korea.

But there's no denying that Mr. Trump is retreating from his main goals as political pressure has built at home and finishing the job requires greater military risk. Despite Israel's urging, he never authorized a mission to seize Iran's enriched uranium. He never tried to reopen the Strait of Hormuz by force.

Those who say Mr. Trump had no alternative to this retreat ignore that the U.S. blockade was squeezing Iran more by the day, while Iran's blockade was leaking. Mr. Trump simply didn't want to endure higher oil prices for longer. This is his choice, not a strategic imperative.

The new deal extends the cease-fire for another 60 days, though our guess is that it will be renewed, perhaps many times. The U.S. blockade will end, as Iran de-mines

the Strait on a timetable so traffic can be unrestricted. This seems to be Mr. Trump's main goal, which will mean lower gasoline prices before the midterm elections. But Tehran says Hormuz won't return to the status quo ante, and it claims it will charge "fees" not tolls, as if that's more than a semantic difference.

The full memorandum of understanding text hasn't been released, and Mr. Trump says some of it is "a little conceptual." Which is the problem. It would defer most matters of the nuclear program to 60 more days of talks, with oil and other sanctions relief along the way in exchange for diplomatic progress.

This linkage is crucial, but pushing off the most difficult nuclear issues in talks with "dishonorable people" who don't deal "in good faith," as the President called them on Friday, doesn't inspire confidence. If the regime won't agree to dismantle its nuclear program now, why would it do so after weeks of oil exports and other relief? A strong nuclear deal isn't hard to define: Zero uranium enrichment and plutonium reprocessing, no stockpile of enriched uranium, all relevant nuclear facilities, centrifuges and manufacturing sites dismantled, complete disclosure and unrestricted inspections. Iran's attestation that it doesn't seek the bomb is meaningless. It has always said that—and done the opposite. A good deal has to remove capabilities.

A promise now to find a solution for the enriched uranium over 60 days means little, unless it specifically commits Iran to removing, diluting or destroying the entire stockpile on a reasonable timetable. Merely disposing of the "highly enriched uranium" doesn't work when enrichment even to the low-seeming 3.67% is already 70% of the way to weapons-grade.

Meanwhile, allowing oil exports will rescue the regime financially, and resuming sanctions enforcement won't be easy when Iran can threaten the deal—and the Strait—in reply. Granting the regime access to billions of dollars in frozen funds before nuclear negotiations would be another bailout. Mr. Trump's talk of investing in Iran suggests he's making the Barack Obama mistake of thinking the revolutionary regime wants Iran to be a normal country. There's no evidence it does.

The deal also includes no Iranian commitments on its missiles and terror proxies. These will be put off to “regional discussions” from which no one expects much. This poses risks to Israel from Hezbollah, which the deal could protect in Lebanon, as well as to the Gulf Arab states that bore the brunt of Iran’s attacks. An irony of this deal is that the Gulf states will need greater U.S. defense commitments if Iran is allowed to rebuild its missile arsenal—or they will make their own accommodations to Iran.

The biggest risk is if Mr. Trump sees this deal as a de facto partnership with Iran’s regime. Like Mr. Obama, he might overlook violations to strike the final deal or preserve it once it is signed. The people of Iran, whom Mr. Trump promised to help, would be the big losers.

Iran’s new leaders are likely to conclude that Mr. Trump has no desire for more conflict, and they will negotiate accordingly. Congress should scrutinize any final agreement Mr. Trump makes with Iran—and reject it if it props up a regime that still says “death to America.”