

December 2, 2013

Today we have a long look at the Iran agreement. Streetwise Professor is up first. *The United States, and the other countries in the 5+1 group, have reached some sort of agreement with Iran which trades a relaxation in sanctions for some temporary limitations on Iran's nuclear program. Most of the discussion has focused on the specifics of this deal, but that is short sighted. All parties admit that this is just an interim step along the path towards a more permanent settlement. We need to look forward and try to anticipate where that path will lead. It is unlikely to lead anywhere good, from an American perspective, and likely to be highly favorable to Iran.*

*The dynamic will favor Iran because it is easy for them to delay or evade any substantive cutbacks in their efforts to obtain nuclear weapons, and because it will be difficult for Obama to resist Iranian demands. Look at the protracted and frustrating and largely futile attempt to stop the North Korean nuclear program: Obama's personal investment in the Iran initiative will make the US even more likely to make concessions in order to keep the process alive.*

*Other news illustrates exactly how this process works. The Russians have repeatedly violated the Intermediate Range Nuclear Forces Agreement but the administration has refused to make these violations public because . . . well, you have to read it to believe it:*

*Inside the meeting, Kerry expressed anger and frustration about the Russian cheating and warned that if the violations became widely known, future efforts to convince the Senate to ratify arms control treaties would be harmed.*

*In other words, we can't possibly acknowledge treaty violations because that would impede our ratification of treaties . . . that would be violated. Treaty-making becomes an end unto itself, rather than a means of securing American interests. That mindset gives anyone we are negotiating with a tremendous advantage: they know they can play us for patsies because we are so obsessed with the process, rather than the results. ...*

*... In sum, Obama has entered into an agreement that will not be honored, will subject him and the US to increasing demands that he cannot refuse, will strengthen and embolden a sworn enemy of the United States, will destabilize the region and increase the risks of conflict, and betrays and confuses our allies.*

*Given that this endeavor is inimical to American interests, reputation, and prestige (both of which affect our ability to advance our interests) one wonders about the motivation. Folly or blunder based on a desire to achieve a legacy or a fundamental misunderstanding of reality are actually the least frightening alternatives. The more sinister possibility is that Obama is acting on a view of American interests and proper place in the world that is at odds with the mixed idealist-realist view that has shaped US policy since at least WWII. I usually adhere to the maxim not to attribute something to malice which can be explained by stupidity, but it gets harder to do that every day.*

## Comments from [Mark Steyn](#).

*... In Geneva, the participants came to the talks with different goals: The Americans and Europeans wanted an agreement; the Iranians wanted nukes. Each party got what it came for. Before the deal, the mullahs' existing facilities were said to be within four to seven weeks of nuclear "breakout"; under the new constraints, they'll be eight to nine weeks from breakout. In return, they get formal international recognition of their enrichment program, and the gutting of sanctions – and everything they already have is, as they say over at Obamacare, grandfathered in.*

*Many pundits reached for the obvious appeasement analogies, but Bret Stephens in the Wall Street Journal argued that Geneva is actually worse than Munich. In 1938, facing a German seizure of the Sudetenland, the French and British prime ministers were negotiating with Berlin from a position of profound military weakness: it's easy to despise Chamberlain with the benefit of hindsight, less easy to give an honest answer as to what one would have done differently playing a weak hand across the table from Hitler 75 years ago. This time round, a superpower and its allies, accounting for over 50 percent of the planet's military spending, were facing a militarily insignificant country with a ruined economy and no more than two-to-three months' worth of hard currency – and they gave it everything it wanted.*

*I would add two further points. First, the Munich Agreement's language is brutal and unsparing, all "shalls" and "wills": Paragraph 1) "The evacuation will begin on 1st October"; Paragraph 4) "The four territories marked on the attached map will be occupied by German troops in the following order." By contrast, the P5+1 (U.S., U.K., France, Russia, China plus Germany) "Joint Plan of Action" barely reads like an international agreement at all. It's all conditional, a forest of "woulds": "There would be additional steps in between the initial measures and the final step..." In the post-modern phase of Western resolve, it's an agreement to reach an agreement – supposedly within six months. But one gets the strong impression that, when that six-month deadline comes and goes, the temporary agreement will trundle along semipermanently to the satisfaction of all parties. ...*

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*But look at it this way: It's been clear for some time that the United States was not going to take out Iran's nuclear facilities. That leaves only one other nation even minded to keep the option on the table: Israel. Hence the strange new romance between the Zionist Entity and the Saudi and Gulf Cabinet ministers calling every night to urge them to get cracking: In the post-American world, you find your friends where you can, even if they're Jews. But Obama and Kerry have not only taken a U.S bombing raid off the table, they've ensured that any such raid by Israel will now come at a much steeper price: It's one thing to bomb a global pariah, quite another to bomb a semi-rehabilitated member of the international community in defiance of an agreement signed by the Big Five world powers. Indeed, a disinterested observer might easily conclude that the point of the plan seems to be to box in Israel rather than Iran. ...*

The UK's Spectator is harsh.

*'Yes, we can heal this nation. Yes, we can repair this world. Yes, we can!' With these exuberant assurances, the young candidate, buoyed by an unexpectedly strong showing in the Iowa caucuses, vowed to carry on his crusade. One year later, in January 2009, the candidate became president and set out to make good on his promises.*

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*As for the President himself, the verdict is in: when it comes to repairing and healing, no, he can't. In retrospect, it's hard to fathom why so many people succumbed to the illusion that he could. ...*

*... Altogether, Obama's record of achievement has to rate as modest. No wonder the cheers have turned to jeers. 'When I hear a man applauded by the mob,' H.L. Mencken observed, 'I always feel a pang of pity for him. All he has to do to be hissed is to live long enough.' Obama has lived long enough to make the journey from rock star to something between laughing stock and object of pity. ...*

While we're on foreign affairs, let's have a look at events in Venezuela, courtesy of John Hinderaker of Power Line who says they're "doubling down on stupid."

*Venezuela is reaching the end point of socialism: economic collapse. Its government, headed by Hugo Chavez's successor and acolyte Nicolas Maduro, has followed the classic left-wing playbook, with the result, inter alia, that you can no longer buy toilet paper in Venezuela. Producing such a complex product evidently is beyond the capacity of the state.*

*Naturally, Venezuela suffers from rampant inflation, currently running at over 50% annually. So the government has imposed price controls. With an election impending, President Maduro has vowed to intensify enforcement of penalties for "price gouging."*

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## **Streetwise Professor**

### **[The Iran Deal: Folly, Blunder, or Something Worse?](#)**

by Craig Pirrong

The United States, and the other countries in the 5+1 group, have reached some sort of agreement with Iran which trades a relaxation in sanctions for some temporary limitations on Iran's nuclear program. Most of the discussion has focused on the specifics of this deal, but that is short sighted. All parties admit that this is just an interim step along the path towards a more permanent settlement. We need to look forward and try to anticipate where that path will lead.

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The dynamic will favor Iran because it is easy for them to delay or evade any substantive cutbacks in their efforts to obtain nuclear weapons, and because it will be difficult for Obama to resist Iranian demands. Look at the protracted and frustrating and largely futile attempt to stop the North Korean nuclear program: Obama's personal investment in the Iran initiative will make the US even more likely to make concessions in order to keep the process alive.

Other news illustrates exactly how this process works. [The Russians have repeatedly violated the Intermediate Range Nuclear Forces Agreement but the administration has refused to make these violations public because . . . well, you have to read it to believe it:](#)

Inside the meeting, Kerry expressed anger and frustration about the Russian cheating and warned that if the violations became widely known, future efforts to convince the Senate to ratify arms control treaties would be harmed.

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rather than a means of securing American interests. That mindset gives anyone we are negotiating with a tremendous advantage: they know they can play us for patsies because we are so obsessed with the process, rather than the results.

And Iran is pressing its advantage. It claims that the agreement recognizes its right to enrich uranium, which the administration denies: in response Iran released a statement calling the administration a liar. Moreover, it announced that it is commencing talks with international oil companies, thereby signaling its belief-expectation, actually, or demand, actually actually-that sanctions will be lifted.

And why not? They know Obama has entered the bazaar, and can't get out. It would be a humiliating setback for Obama to admit that his initiative has failed, and knowing that, the Iranians will keep upping the price for a deal. They further know that Obama's domestic political weakness, courtesy of Obamacare, makes him all the more dependent on claiming a major foreign policy achievement. Obama's approval rating is around 40 percent. This represents rock bottom for him: these 40 percent would support him even if he mandated adoption of [Swift's A Modest Proposal](#) by executive order. Admitting failure would help cement his loss of power and influence.

The costs of this are already large, and will only grow over time. In the short run, the biggest cost will be endured by Syrians, who have been consigned to the tender mercies of Assad and the jihadis: Obama cannot simultaneously pursue an agreement with Iran and confront Iran's major ally in the region. This casts Obama's decisions regarding Syria in August and September into a whole new light. Following through on his threat to attack Iran's client Assad would have seriously complicated, and likely derailed, a deal with the Iranians. Although political considerations and his incautious off-teleprompter "red line" remark forced him to make noises about attacking, he was desperate to find a reason not to, which the Russians graciously offered.

And no doubt the Russians were aware of his predicament, and the Iranian angle to that. The Saudis found out about the US-Iran talks, and tipped off the Israelis. It is inconceivable that the Russians weren't aware as well, given all the potential sources of information. No wonder they found it so easy to give Obama a deal he couldn't, and wouldn't, refuse, even though it made him look craven and feckless.

Viewed in retrospect, the administrations actions during the weeks leading up to the CW deal with Syria look all the more bizarre and discreditable.

The longer run consequences will be even more malign. Iran, already an aggressive power with dreams of hegemony in the Middle East will be emboldened, and will have more resources to fund their ambitions. And again, they know that Obama will be reluctant to push back, lest he admit that his initiative was ill-conceived. In response, other powers in the region, notably Saudi Arabia, will take a more independent and aggressive posture, knowing their interests are no longer aligned with those of the US at least as long as Obama is president: Saudi Arabia may well go nuclear by placing a carry-out order with Pakistan. Feeling threatened and abandoned, the risk of an aggressive Israeli response is also greater. Iran's Lebanese client, Hezbollah, will be strengthened, raising the odds of conflict in Lebanon and between Hezbollah and Israel. The diversion of Israeli resources to counter a more powerful Hezbollah will encourage attacks by Hamas.

This makes the administration's response to those criticizing the *rapprochement* all the more disgusting. Carney and some Congressional Democrats (like Nelson of Florida) have claimed that refusing the deal and increasing sanctions on Iran would actually be a "march to war." This is truly a false choice: particularly outrageous coming from a president who always accuses his political opponents of advancing false choices. An emboldened, richer Iran increases rather than reduces the odds of conflict in the region.

Doubts about the prudence-and even sanity-of Obama's initiative are only deepened by one of the justifications given for it: namely that it is a response to the strengthening of moderate elements in Iran, and will bolster the moderates' strength going forward. Unbelievable. We've heard about "Iranian moderates" since 1979, and numerous previous US attempts to deal with chimerical Iranian moderates have ended in American tears, for the Iranians play American delusions about moderates like a violin. Just ask Robert McFarlane. Many defenders of Obama on Twitter harken to Reagan's Arms for Hostages debacle, claiming "at least Obama isn't selling weapons to the mullahs." This is a defense? Fool me once, shame on you. Fool me twice, shame on me. The Reagan experience should be a stern warning of how treacherous the Iranians can be. They responded to payments for releasing hostages by taking more hostages. That should make one all the more reluctant to deal with the mullahs today.

Obama is also disregarding Iran's long running and relentless terrorist campaign against the US. The attacks on the US embassy and Marine barracks in Beirut and on the American Air Force personnel in Khobar Towers are only the most egregious examples.

Khobar Towers is of particular interest. After an extended investigation, US intelligence concluded the Iranians were behind the attack. This was extremely awkward for the Clinton administration, because at the time it was in the midst of an attempt to open relations with the . . . wait for it . . . "moderate" Iranian president Khatami. Clinton sent a secret letter to the Khatami demanding that Iran punish those responsible, which the then reigning Mr. Moderate dismissed with the back of his hand. Either the moderates aren't really moderates, or the moderates don't call the shots. Either way, same result: basing strategies on the influence of Iranian moderates is as delusional as making plans dependent on the intervention of magical unicorns.

In sum, Obama has entered into an agreement that will not be honored, will subject him and the US to increasing demands that he cannot refuse, will strengthen and embolden a sworn enemy of the United States, will destabilize the region and increase the risks of conflict, and betrays and confuses our allies.

Given that this endeavor is inimical to American interests, reputation, and prestige (both of which affect our ability to advance our interests) one wonders about the motivation. Folly or blunder based on a desire to achieve a legacy or a fundamental misunderstanding of reality are actually the least frightening alternatives. The more sinister possibility is that Obama is acting on a view of American interests and proper place in the world that is at odds with the mixed idealist-realist view that has shaped US policy since at least WWII. I usually adhere to the maxim not to attribute something to malice which can be explained by stupidity, but it gets harder to do that every day.

## Orange County Register

### U.S. boxes in Israel, not Iran

by Mark Steyn

“Iran, U.S. Set To Establish Joint Chamber Of Commerce Within Month,” reports Agence-France Presse. Government official Abolfazi Hejazi tells the English-language newspaper Iran Daily that the Islamic Republic will shortly commence direct flights to America. Passenger jets, not ICBMs, one assumes – although, as with everything else, the details have yet to be worked out. Still, the historic U.S.-Iranian rapprochement seems to be galloping along, and any moment now the cultural exchange program will be announced, and you’ll have to book early for the Tehran Ballet’s season at the Kennedy Center (“Death To America” in repertory with “Death To The Great Satan”).

In Geneva, the participants came to the talks with different goals: The Americans and Europeans wanted an agreement; the Iranians wanted nukes. Each party got what it came for. Before the deal, the mullahs’ existing facilities were said to be within four to seven weeks of nuclear “breakout”; under the new constraints, they’ll be eight to nine weeks from breakout. In return, they get formal international recognition of their enrichment program, and the gutting of sanctions – and everything they already have is, as they say over at Obamacare, grandfathered in.

Many pundits reached for the obvious appeasement analogies, but Bret Stephens in the Wall Street Journal argued that Geneva is actually worse than Munich. In 1938, facing a German seizure of the Sudetenland, the French and British prime ministers were negotiating with Berlin from a position of profound military weakness: it’s easy to despise Chamberlain with the benefit of hindsight, less easy to give an honest answer as to what one would have done differently playing a weak hand across the table from Hitler 75 years ago. This time round, a superpower and its allies, accounting for over 50 percent of the planet’s military spending, were facing a militarily insignificant country with a ruined economy and no more than two-to-three months’ worth of hard currency – and they gave it everything it wanted.

I would add two further points. First, the Munich Agreement’s language is brutal and unsparing, all “shalls” and “wills”: Paragraph 1) “The evacuation will begin on 1st October”; Paragraph 4) “The four territories marked on the attached map will be occupied by German troops in the following order.” By contrast, the P5+1 (U.S., U.K., France, Russia, China plus Germany) “Joint Plan of Action” barely reads like an international agreement at all. It’s all conditional, a forest of “woulds”: “There would be additional steps in between the initial measures and the final step...” In the post-modern phase of Western resolve, it’s an agreement to reach an agreement – supposedly within six months. But one gets the strong impression that, when that six-month deadline comes and goes, the temporary agreement will trundle along semipermanently to the satisfaction of all parties.

Secondly, there are subtler concessions. Explaining that their “singular object” was to “ensure that Iran does not acquire a nuclear weapon,” John Kerry said that “Foreign Minister Zarif emphasized that they don’t intend to do this, and the Supreme Leader has indicated there is a fatwa which forbids them to do this.” The “Supreme Leader” is not Barack Obama but Ayatollah Khamenei. Why is America’s secretary of state dignifying Khamenei as “the Supreme Leader”? In his own famous remarks upon his return from Munich, Neville Chamberlain referred only to “Herr Hitler.” “Der Führer” means, in effect, “the Supreme Leader,” but, unlike Kerry (and

Obama), Chamberlain understood that it would be unseemly for the representative of a free people to confer respectability on such a designation. As for the Führer *de nos jours*, Ayatollah Khamenei called Israel a “rabid dog” and dismissed “the leaders of the Zionist regime, who look like beasts and cannot be called human.” If the words of “the Supreme Leader” are to be taken at face value when it comes to these supposed constraints preventing Iran from going nuclear, why not also when he calls Jews subhuman?

I am not much interested in whether “the Supreme Leader” can be trusted. Prudent persons already know the answer to that. A more relevant question is whether the U.S. can be trusted. Israel and the Sunni monarchies who comprise America’s least-worst friends in the Arab world were kept in the dark about not only the contents of the first direct U.S./Iranian talks in a third-of-a-century but even an acknowledgment that they were taking place. The only tip-off into the parameters of the emerging deal is said to have come from British briefings to their former Gulf protectorates and the French getting chatty with Israel. A couple of days ago, Nawaf Obaid, an adviser to Prince Mohammed, the Saudi Ambassador in London, was unusually candid about the Americans: “We were lied to, things were hidden from us,” he said. “The problem is not with the deal struck in Geneva but how it was done.”

“How it was done”: Some years ago, I heard that great scholar of Islam, Bernard Lewis, caution that America risked being seen as harmless as an enemy and treacherous as a friend. The Obama administration seems to have raised the thought to the level of doctrine. What has hitherto been unclear is whether this was through design or incompetence. Certainly, John Kerry has been unerringly wrong on every foreign policy issue for four decades, so sheer bungling stupidity cannot be ruled out.

But look at it this way: It’s been clear for some time that the United States was not going to take out Iran’s nuclear facilities. That leaves only one other nation even minded to keep the option on the table: Israel. Hence the strange new romance between the Zionist Entity and the Saudi and Gulf Cabinet ministers calling every night to urge them to get cracking: In the post-American world, you find your friends where you can, even if they’re Jews. But Obama and Kerry have not only taken a U.S bombing raid off the table, they’ve ensured that any such raid by Israel will now come at a much steeper price: It’s one thing to bomb a global pariah, quite another to bomb a semi-rehabilitated member of the international community in defiance of an agreement signed by the Big Five world powers. Indeed, a disinterested observer might easily conclude that the point of the plan seems to be to box in Israel rather than Iran.

If it were to have that effect, the Sunni Arab states would be faced with a choice of accepting de facto Shia Persian hegemony – or getting the Saudis to pay the Pakistanis for a Sunni bomb. Nobody in Araby believes the U.S. can “contain” Iran, even if it wants to. And, since the Geneva deal, nobody’s very sure the U.S. wants to.

Meanwhile, through the many months they kept their allies in the dark, Washington was very obliging to the mullahs. According to the Times of Israel, among the Iranian prisoners quietly released by the U.S. as a friendly predeal gesture is Mojtaba Atarodi, arrested in 2011 for attempting to acquire nuclear materials. Iran has felt under no pressure to reciprocate. America is containing itself, in hopes of a quiet life.

Will it get one? The Guardian reports that, last Saturday night at the Geneva InterContinental, the final stages of the P5+1 talks were played out to the music bleeding through from the charity bash in the adjoining ballroom. At one point, the band played Johnny Cash:



*"I fell into a burning ring of fire*

*I went down, down, down and the flames went higher*

*And it burns, burns, burns*

*The ring of fire ... ."*

So it does.

## **The Spectator, UK**

### **The Iran deal just shows how badly Obama has failed**

***If he had real foreign-policy achievements, no one would be getting excited about it***

by Andrew J. Bacevich

'Yes, we can heal this nation. Yes, we can repair this world. Yes, we can!' With these exuberant assurances, the young candidate, buoyed by an unexpectedly strong showing in the Iowa caucuses, vowed to carry on his crusade. One year later, in January 2009, the candidate became president and set out to make good on his promises.

That Barack Obama possessed the ability to heal the nation and repair the world seemed in many quarters all but self-evident. As he donned the mantle of the 'most powerful man in the world', the expectations that had lifted him into the Oval Office qualified as nothing short of messianic. A dark and depressing interval of American history, symbolised by place names such as Guantánamo and Abu Ghraib, was ending. A new era of hope had begun. Nothing seemed beyond reach. So at least many Americans believed.

In surprising numbers, observers further afield shared these happy expectations. For a brief moment, Obama's rising star cast its light well beyond America itself. He was, or appeared to be, everyone's president. As if speaking for all humanity, the Nobel Committee ratified this proposition, awarding its annual peace prize on an anticipatory basis, the recently inaugurated president not actually having done anything to promote peace. Obamamania was sweeping the planet.

Well, going on six years later, the fever has long since broken. In beleaguered, war-torn Syria, polio may be making an unwelcome comeback. But the infection that was Obamamania is gone for good.

As for the President himself, the verdict is in: when it comes to repairing and healing, no, he can't. In retrospect, it's hard to fathom why so many people succumbed to the illusion that he could.

In Washington, members of the commentariat have now essentially written off the Obama presidency. The astonishingly inept roll-out of the administration's signature healthcare reform programme has fostered the image of a chief executive who is disengaged, lackadaisical and not fully in command — perhaps more interested in basketball or golf than in governing.

The ongoing intelligence scandal reinforces this impression. Did Obama know that the NSA was eavesdropping on German Chancellor Angela Merkel and other allied leaders or not? To answer that question in the affirmative is to raise serious questions about the president's judgement. To answer in the negative is to suggest that someone other than the putative commander-in-chief is at the helm of the world's most powerful national security establishment.

Then there are the disappointments on the international scene, above all in the Islamic world. Remember the hopes raised by Obama's Cairo speech of June 2009? Entitled 'A New Beginning', the speech offered a wide-ranging vision of reconciliation between civilisations and peoples long at odds with one another. In practical terms, that vision has yielded little of note. However necessary and even commendable, Obama's principal foreign policy achievements — withdrawing US troops from Iraq and 'getting' Osama bin Laden — have paid few strategic dividends. Indeed, Iraq shows signs of unravelling while al-Qa'eda has shown a remarkable capacity for opening up new franchises. With regard to the events that are actually shaping the future of the region — revolutions, coups and uprisings along with various unhelpful actions by the government of Israel — the President has been more bystander than architect. The deafening applause that greeted Obama's brief phone call to Iran's President Rohani and the subsequent deal to kinda, sorta curb that country's nuclear programme offer one measure of the diminished expectations that are now the administration's signature. Look, they don't always fumble!

Oh, and lest we forget: the prison at Guantánamo that Obama fervently vowed to close within a year remains open. Most of its detainees have still not been charged with any crime despite having spent up to 12 years behind bars and in solitary confinement.

Altogether, Obama's record of achievement has to rate as modest. No wonder the cheers have turned to jeers. 'When I hear a man applauded by the mob,' H.L. Mencken observed, 'I always feel a pang of pity for him. All he has to do to be hissed is to live long enough.' Obama has lived long enough to make the journey from rock star to something between laughing stock and object of pity.

For their part, major American news outlets are moving on. Although Obama has not reached the midway point in his second term, attention has already turned to handicapping the 2016 presidential race. Reporters eagerly declare that New Jersey governor Chris Christie and former secretary of state/senator/first lady Hillary Clinton have the nominations of their respective parties all but locked up. The next contest to save America, thereby enabling America to save the world, is about to be joined.

Apart from its transient entertainment value, such journalistic speculation can be safely ignored — reporters might as well be trafficking in stock tips. Only in one sense does the here-comes-the-next-election hoopla matter: growing preoccupation with a contest three years in the future suggests that the very propensity that once elevated Obama to the status of demigod is now beginning to reassert itself. Obama himself may have turned out to be something of a dud, but the cult of presidential personality that has dominated American politics for decades now still persists. And that's a problem.

In the United States, presidential elections serve as an as excuse to avoid serious thought. Since at least the election of John F. Kennedy, now more than half a century ago, winning the presidency has been a theatrical exercise. Image has mattered more than substance. The whole point of the exercise is to transform the party's candidate into a character. The side that

enjoys greater success in doing so — its character embodying, however briefly, the concerns and aspirations of enough voters to capture a majority in the electoral college — wins. Depicting the opposing party's candidate as an unworthy and even villainous character also helps.

The inevitable result is to create inflated expectations of the victor as someone able to divine and redirect the very course of history. Each of the last three presidents — Bill Clinton and George W. Bush, along with Obama himself — apparently persuaded himself that providence (in Bush's case, God) had summoned him to do just that. Clinton fancied that he could employ the wonders of globalisation to Americanise the world. Launching his 'Global War on Terrorism' after 9/11, Bush vowed to expunge evil itself.

Yet steering history turns out to be a daunting enterprise. Regardless of whose hand is on the tiller, powerful undercurrents evade human control. The beginning of wisdom lies in understanding that the 'most powerful man in the world' is really not all that powerful. History's determinants — beginning with the weight of the past itself — mock the absurd pretensions of presidents, their handlers and their acolytes.

So whether the issue falls in the realm of culture and religion (reconciling Islam with modernity) or of statecraft (reconciling Iranian security interests with those of Israel) or of political economy (reconciling America's appetite for consumption with its depleted wallet), looking to the president to 'fix the problem' is to indulge in a vast delusion, inevitably leading to disappointment. Worse, it amounts to a collective abdication of responsibility on the part of citizens, who by now ought to know better. Americans, along with the rest of the world, would do well to ratchet down expectations of what any president is likely to accomplish. Doing so constitutes a necessary first step toward returning American politics to a more realistic plane, one where posturing takes a back seat to solving problems that can be solved and steering clear of those that can't. Rather than promising world peace, for example, settle for balancing the budget.

Americans who don't care for the trajectory their country has followed in recent years shouldn't blame Obama. They should blame themselves. Those fancying that a President Christie or a second President Clinton will do any better obviously haven't been paying attention and richly deserve what awaits them. After all, there was only one Messiah and even His attempts to heal and repair met with considerably less than complete success.

*Andrew J. Bacevich is professor of history and international relations at Boston University.*

## **Power Line**

### **Venezuela Doubles Down On Stupid**

by John Hinderaker

Venezuela is reaching the end point of socialism: economic collapse. Its government, headed by Hugo Chavez's successor and acolyte Nicolas Maduro, has followed the classic left-wing playbook, with the result, *inter alia*, that you can no longer buy toilet paper in Venezuela. Producing such a complex product evidently is beyond the capacity of the state.

Naturally, Venezuela suffers from rampant inflation, currently running at over 50% annually. So the government has imposed price controls. With an election impending, President Maduro [has vowed to intensify enforcement](#) of penalties for “price gouging.”

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“We’re not joking, we’re defending the rights of the majority, their economic freedom,” Maduro said on Friday, alleging price irregularities were found in nearly 99 percent of 1,705 businesses inspected so far this month.

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He says “capitalist parasites” are trying to wreck Venezuela’s economy and force him from office.

I suppose they are actually trying to stay in business, but undoubtedly one of Venezuela’s biggest problems is a shortage of “capitalist parasites.” Don’t laugh, it could happen here, too.

“The inspections are continuing daily and have let us see into the under-world of capitalism,” Maduro said in his latest speech to the nation, warning of severe sanctions starting Saturday against businesses maintaining unjustifiably high prices.

Government officials say companies have been marking up prices by as much as 1,000 percent over cost, though many retailers say they have been forced to hike prices sharply due to lack of access to foreign currency at the official rate.

“Cost” equals cost at the official exchange rate. However, you can’t obtain hard currency or foreign goods at the official exchange rate since it is a fiction dictated by the Venezuelan government; nor can you buy much of anything in Venezuelan currency because Venezuela’s economy can’t produce much. More:

And in another populist move, the president said interest rates for savers on low incomes would be hiked to 16 percent, from 12.5 percent currently.

“This is just a first step to reward savers,” Maduro said.

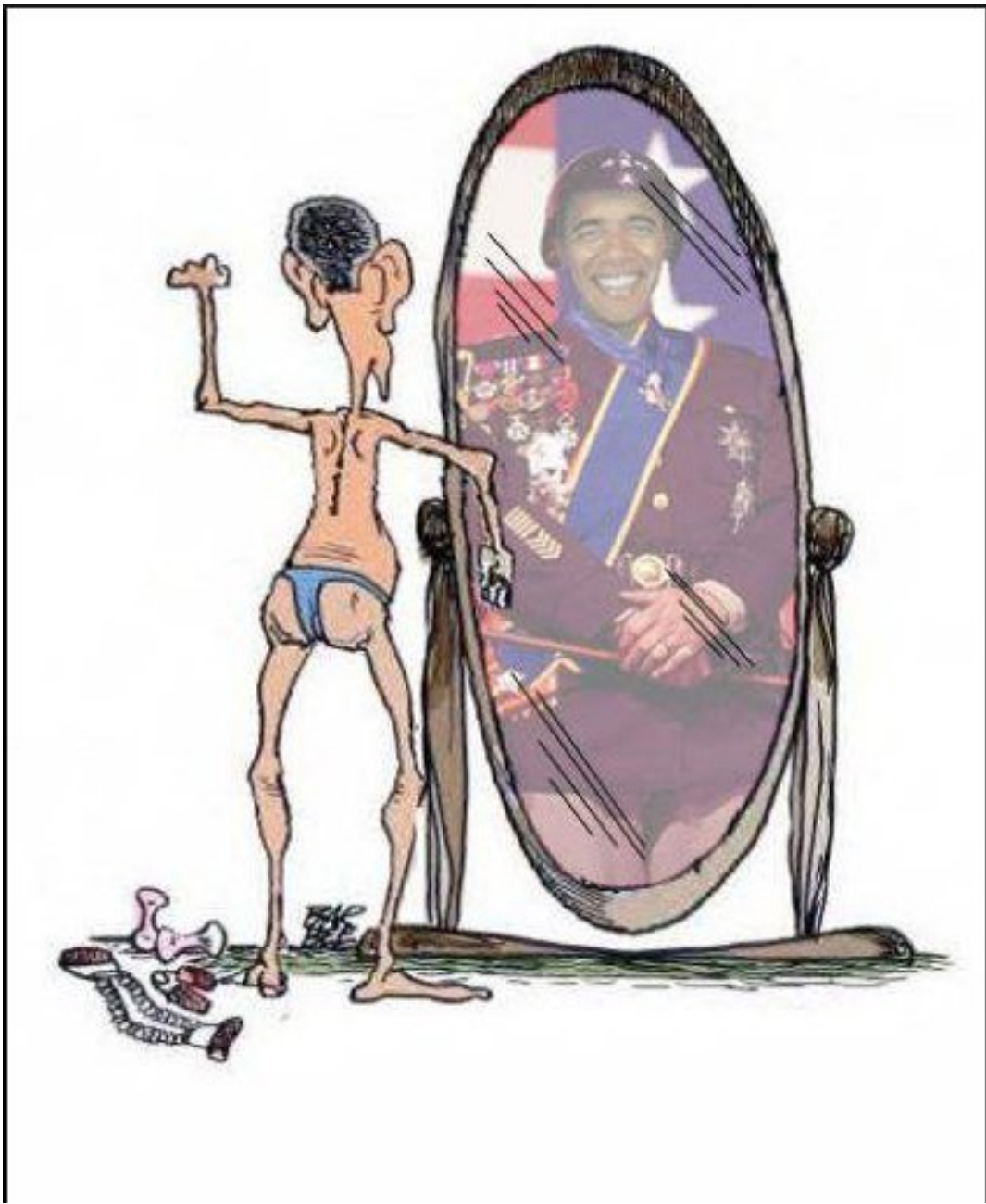
Great reward! Inflation at 54%, interest at 16%. Yes, that’ll work!

None of this is hard to figure out. The amazing thing is that there are apparently are still Venezuelans willing to vote for economic collapse:

Having narrowly beaten opposition candidate Henrique Capriles to win April’s presidential vote, Maduro and his supporters are gearing up for a new test at the polls with nationwide municipal elections on December 8.

The opposition is painting the vote as a referendum on Maduro's record, but any voter backlash over the economic problems may be tempered by his recent populist measures.

It is easy to laugh at a government as dumb as Maduro's, but these days the laughter may be a little uneasy. One wonders: is Barack Obama's goofball approach to health care much different from Nicolas Maduro's theory of toilet paper production? Democrats have already begun denouncing "greedy, overpaid doctors." Obamacare's arithmetic doesn't add up, which means that price controls can't be far behind. So let's not be too quick to laugh at the Venezuelans.





# IRAN'S DEAL OF THE CENTURY

## IRAN GETS:

- \$3 billion in cash
- \$9.6 billion in gold
- \$5+ billion in petrochemicals
- \$1.3 billion in automobiles
- Enriched uranium for 1 bomb
- 3,000 new centrifuges
- 1 plutonium reactor

## WE GET:

- 0 centrifuges dismantled
- 0 ounces uranium shipped out
- 0 facilities closed
- No delay on plutonium reactor
- No stop in missile testing
- No stop in terrorism
- No stop in human rights abuses

**"This is a very, very bad deal."**  
- Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu



**If Iran likes  
their nuclear  
program they  
can keep their  
nuclear program.  
Period.**



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SO...  
WE GET TO KEEP  
ON ENRICHING  
URANIUM...

WHILE  
THE AMERICANS  
DESTROY THEIR  
OWN  
HEALTH CARE  
SYSTEM?



EXCELLENT.

The Kerry Agreement