

April 8, 2015

John Hinderaker of Power Line calls our attention to a piece by Daniel Pipes on the administration's serial foreign policy failures.

Daniel Pipes reviews the wreckage of Barack Obama's foreign policies:

*"Count the mistakes: Helping overthrow Muammar Qaddafi in Libya, leading to anarchy and civil war. Pressuring Hosni Mubarak of Egypt to resign, then backing the Muslim Brotherhood, leading now-president Sisi to turn toward Moscow. Alienating Washington's most stalwart ally in the region, the Government of Israel. Dismissing ISIS as "junior varsity" just before it seized major cities. Hailing Yemen as a counterterrorism success just before its government was overthrown. Alarming the Saudi authorities to the point that they put together a military alliance against Iran. Coddling Recep Tayyip Erdoğan of Turkey, encouraging his dictatorial tendencies. Leaving Iraq and Afghanistan prematurely, dooming the vast American investment in those two countries.*

*And, most of all: Making dangerously flawed deals with the nuclear-ambitious mullahs of Iran."*

*As always, the question is: is Obama failing, or succeeding? As Glenn Reynolds keeps pointing out, that depends on what he is trying to achieve. Pipes continues:*

*"Is this a random series of errors by an incompetent leadership or does some grand, if misconceived, idea stand behind the pattern? To an extent, it's ineptitude, as when Obama bowed to the Saudi king, threatened Syria's government over chemical weapons before changing his mind, and now sends the U.S. military to aid Tehran in Iraq and fight it in Yemen.*

*But there also is a grand idea and it calls for explanation. As a man of the left, Obama sees the United States historically having exerted a malign influence on the outside world. Greedy corporations, an overly-powerful military-industrial complex, a yahoo nationalism, engrained racism, and cultural imperialism combined to render America, on balance, a force for evil.*

*Being a student of community organizer Saul Alinsky, Obama did not overtly proclaim this view but passed himself off as a patriot, ..."*

Caroline Glick, writing in the Jerusalem Post says the Middle East is now on the "diplomatic path to war."

*... No one trusts Obama to follow through on his declared commitment to prevent Iran from becoming a nuclear power.*

*No one trusts Washington when Obama claims that he is committed to the security of Israel and the US's Sunni allies in the region.*

*And so we are now facing the unfolding disaster that Obama has wrought. The disaster is that deal or no deal, the US has just given the Iranians a green light to behave as if they have already built their nuclear umbrella. And they are in fact behaving in this manner.*

*They may not have a functional arsenal, but they act as though they do, and rightly so, because the US and its partners have just removed all significant obstacles from their path to nuclear capabilities. The Iranians know it. Their proxies know it. Their enemies know it.*

*As a consequence, all the regional implications of a nuclear armed Iran are already being played out. The surrounding Arab states led by Saudi Arabia are pursuing nuclear weapons. The path to a Middle East where every major and some minor actors have nuclear arsenals is before us.*

*Iran is working to expand its regional presence as if it were a nuclear state already. It is brazenly using its Yemeni Houthi proxy to gain maritime control over the Bab al-Mandab, which together with Iran's control over the Straits of Hormuz completes its maritime control over shipping throughout the Middle East.*

*Israel, Jordan, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Sudan and Eritrea, and their global trading partners will be faced with the fact that their primary maritime shipping route to Asia is controlled by Iran.*

*With its regional aggression now enjoying the indirect support of its nuclear negotiating partners led by the US, Iran has little to fear from the pan-Arab attempt to dislodge the Houthis from Aden and the Bab al-Mandab. If the Arabs succeed, Iran can regroup and launch a new offensive knowing it will face no repercussions for its aggression and imperialist endeavors. ...*

**Roger Simon** asks, "Munich, anyone?"

*When Barack Obama told us on [dozens of occasions](#) that we could keep our previous health plan and doctor under the Affordable Care Act, he was doing it for one of two reasons. Either he was ignorant of his own legislation (unlikely) or he was deliberately lying to get it passed. He knew best what was good for us and if he had to prevaricate, so be it.*

*The so-called framework agreement on Iranian nuclear activities is almost exactly the same. Obama again believes it is best for us, but if we are to believe Amir Taheri (and I do), this "agreement" (that the Iranians are calling merely a press release) is understood completely differently by both parties. We have been told another series of lies in order to get something passed — or in this case not to oppose it.*

*Only there is one huge difference. Obamacare is reversible. Nuclear armageddon is not.*

And **Jonah Goldberg** says the Iran deal is no deal at all.

*The first thing one needs to know about the nuclear deal with Iran is that it is not, in fact, a deal. You might be confused about this point, given that so many news outlets refers to a "deal" that doesn't exist.*

*In fairness, many do so simply for expediency's sake. The various parties to the talks did come away with an agreement, but it was an agreement to haggle more about what a deal might look like. We don't have a good word for such things, so people use "deal" as a placeholder.*

*But in any other realm of life, if you left a negotiation where things stand in Lausanne, Switzerland, you wouldn't think you had a deal. The known disagreements are profound and the room for further disagreements vast.*

*When you have a deal with a car salesman, money changes hands and papers are signed. But if you left a car dealership with this kind of understanding, you might never get a car at all, or*

*you might expect that the salesman will ultimately sell you a new Porsche while the dealer is equally confident you'll come down to the lot next weekend to pick your used Zamboni. ...*

**Kevin Williamson** says 1970's scandals seem almost tame in comparison to today's. ... *Richard Nixon was a snake who understood himself as such but had sufficient vestigial conscience to be ashamed of his snakery. When Tricky Dick wanted to spread a nasty rumor about a political rival, he insisted on a few degrees of separation between the deed and himself; when Harry Reid wants to spread lies about someone, he does so from the Senate floor and then laughs about it. In Nixon's time, the political misuse of the IRS was considered a serious crime; today, it happens quite in the open without consequence. When Nixon insisted that his attorney general violate his official responsibilities for political reasons, Elliott Richardson understood what duty required, and resigned; Eric Holder, by way of comparison — suffice it to say that he understands his duty somewhat differently. ...*

*... If the other side is evil, then anything is permissible. Of course Harry Reid doesn't feel guilty about lying about Mitt Romney: "He didn't get elected, did he?" Of course so-called progressives are willing to lock up nonconformist bakers or merrily cheer on those who promise to set their businesses on fire. Of course the Obama administration will try to sign us up for a phony nuclear deal with Tehran that undermines our national security — and that of our allies — in the service of its own political interests. ...*

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## **Power Line**

### **[Daniel Pipes: The Obama Doctrine Serves Up One Disaster After Another](#)**

by John Hinderaker

[Daniel Pipes](#) reviews the wreckage of Barack Obama's foreign policies:

Count the mistakes: Helping overthrow Muammar Qaddafi in Libya, leading to anarchy and civil war. Pressuring Husni Mubarak of Egypt to resign, then backing the Muslim Brotherhood, leading now-president Sisi to turn toward Moscow. Alienating Washington's most stalwart ally in the region, the Government of Israel. Dismissing ISIS as "junior varsity" just before it seized major cities. Hailing Yemen as a counterterrorism success just before its government was overthrown. Alarming the Saudi authorities to the point that they put together a military alliance against Iran. Coddling Recep Tayyip Erdoğan of Turkey, encouraging his dictatorial tendencies. Leaving Iraq and Afghanistan prematurely, dooming the vast American investment in those two countries.

And, most of all: Making dangerously flawed deals with the nuclear-ambitious mullahs of Iran.

As always, the question is: is Obama failing, or succeeding? As Glenn Reynolds keeps pointing out, that depends on what he is trying to achieve. Pipes continues:

Is this a random series of errors by an incompetent leadership or does some grand, if misconceived, idea stand behind the pattern? To an extent, it's ineptitude, as when Obama bowed to the Saudi king, threatened Syria's government over chemical weapons before changing his mind, and now sends the U.S. military to aid Tehran in Iraq and fight it in Yemen.

But there also is a grand idea and it calls for explanation. As a man of the left, Obama sees the United States historically having exerted a malign influence on the outside world. Greedy corporations, an overly-powerful military-industrial complex, a yahoo nationalism, engrained racism, and cultural imperialism combined to render America, on balance, a force for evil.

Being a student of community organizer Saul Alinsky, Obama did not overtly proclaim this view but passed himself off as a patriot, though he (and his charming wife) did offer occasional hints of their radical views about "fundamentally transforming the United States." On ascending to the presidency, Obama moved slowly, uneager to spread alarm and wanting to be reelected. By now, however, after six full years and only his legacy to worry about, the full-blown Obama is emerging.

The Obama Doctrine is simple and universal: Warm relations with adversaries and cool them with friends.

Which implies that America's adversaries are not Obama's.

Several assumptions underlie this approach: The U.S. government morally must compensate for its prior errors. Smiling at hostile states will inspire them to reciprocate. Using force creates more problems than it solves. Historic U.S. allies, partners, and helpers are morally inferior accessories. In the Middle East, this means reaching out to revisionists (Erdoğan, the Muslim Brotherhood, the Islamic Republic of Iran) and pushing away cooperative governments (Egypt, Israel, Saudi Arabia).

Of these actors, two stand out: Iran and Israel. Establishing good relations with Tehran appears to be Obama's great preoccupation. As [Michael Doran](#) of the Hudson Institute has shown, [Obama](#) during his entire presidency has worked toward rendering Iran what he calls "a very successful regional power ... abiding by international norms and international rules." Contrarily, his pre-presidential friendships with truculent anti-Zionists such as Ali Abunimah, Rashid Khalidi, and Edward Said point to the depth of his hostility toward the Jewish state.

One gets the feeling that when Obama sees Iran's Supreme Leader leading crowds in chants of "Death to America!" it doesn't strike him in quite the same way it strikes you and me.

The Obama Doctrine demystifies what is otherwise inscrutable. For example, it explains why the [U.S. government](#) blithely ignored the [Iranian supreme leader's](#) outrageous "Death to America" yelp in March, dismissing it as mere domestic pandering, even as Obama glommed onto the [Israeli prime minister's](#) near simultaneous electoral campaign comment rejecting a two-state solution with the Palestinians during his term of office ("we take him at his word").

The doctrine also offers guidelines to predict possible developments during Obama's remaining tenure, such as: Wretched P5+1 deals with Iran compel Israel's government to attack Iranian nuclear facilities. Gentle policies toward Damascus clear the way for the Assad regime to re-extend its power. Ankara chooses to provoke a crisis in the eastern Mediterranean over Cypriot gas and oil reserves.

So what happens next? Will the Obama Doctrine survive its author?

The great question ahead is how, in their wisdom, the American people will judge the Obama Doctrine when they next vote for president in 19 months. Will they repudiate his policy of shuffling and contrition, as they comparably did in 1980 when they elected Ronald Reagan over Jimmy Carter? Or will they choose four more years of it, thereby turning the Obama Doctrine into the new norm and Americans into [European-style remorseful masochists](#)?

Their verdict in 2016 has potentially world-historical implication.

## Jerusalem Post

### [The diplomatic track to war](#)

by Caroline Glick

The world powers assembled at Lausanne, Switzerland, with the representatives of the Islamic Republic may or may not reach a framework deal regarding Iran's nuclear program. But succeed or fail, the disaster that their negotiations have unleashed is already unfolding. The damage they have caused is irreversible.

US President Barack Obama, his advisers and media cheerleaders have long presented his nuclear diplomacy with the Iran as the only way to avoid war. Obama and his supporters have castigated as warmongers those who oppose his policy of nuclear appeasement with the world's most prolific state sponsor of terrorism.

But the opposite is the case. Had their view carried the day, war could have been averted.

Through their nuclear diplomacy, Obama and his comrades started the countdown to war.

In recent weeks we have watched the collapse of the allied powers' negotiating positions.

They have conceded every position that might have placed a significant obstacle in Iran's path to developing a nuclear arsenal.

They accepted Iran's refusal to come clean on the military dimensions of its past nuclear work and so ensured that to the extent UN nuclear inspectors are able to access Iran's nuclear installations, those inspections will not provide anything approaching a full picture of its nuclear status. By the same token, they bowed before Iran's demand that inspectors be barred from all installations Iran defines as "military" and so enabled the ayatollahs to prevent the world from knowing anything worth knowing about its nuclear activities.

On the basis of Iran's agreement to ship its stockpile of enriched uranium to Russia, the US accepted Iran's demand that it be allowed to maintain and operate more than 6,000 centrifuges.

But when on Monday Iran went back on its word and refused to ship its uranium to Russia, the US didn't respond by saying Iran couldn't keep spinning 6,000 centrifuges. The US made excuses for Iran.

The US delegation willingly acceded to Iran's demand that it be allowed to continue operating its fortified, underground enrichment facility at Fordow. In so doing, the US minimized the effectiveness of a future limited air campaign aimed at significantly reducing Iran's nuclear capabilities.

With this broad range of great power concessions already in its pocket, the question of whether or not a deal is reached has become a secondary concern. The US and its negotiating partners have agreed to a set of understandings with the Iranians. Whether these understandings become a formal agreement or not is irrelevant because the understandings are already being implemented.

True, the US has not yet agreed to Iran's demand for an immediate revocation of the economic sanctions now standing against it. But the notion that sanctions alone can pressure Iran into making nuclear concessions has been destroyed by Obama's nuclear diplomacy in which the major concessions have all been made by the US.

No sanctions legislation that Congress may pass in the coming months will be able to force a change in Iran's behavior if they are not accompanied by other coercive measures undertaken by the executive branch.

There is nothing new in this reality. For a regime with no qualms about repressing its society, economic sanctions are not an insurmountable challenge. But it is possible that if sanctions were implemented as part of a comprehensive plan to use limited coercive means to block Iran's nuclear advance, they could have effectively blocked Iran's progress to nuclear capabilities while preventing war. Such a comprehensive strategy could have included a proxy campaign to destabilize the regime by supporting regime opponents in their quest to overthrow the mullahs. It could have involved air strikes or sabotage of nuclear installations and strategic regime facilities like Revolutionary Guards command and control bases and ballistic missile storage facilities. It could have involved diplomatic isolation of Iran.

Moreover, if sanctions were combined with a stringent policy of blocking Iran's regional expansion by supporting Iraqi sovereignty, supporting the now deposed government of Yemen and making a concerted effort to weaken Hezbollah and overthrow the Iranian-backed regime in Syria, then the US would have developed a strong deterrent position that would likely have convinced Iran that its interest was best served by curbing its imperialist enthusiasm and setting aside its nuclear ambitions.

In other words, a combination of these steps could have prevented war and prevented a nuclear Iran. But today, the US-led capitulation to Iran has pulled the rug out from any such comprehensive strategy. The administration has no credibility. No one trusts Obama to follow through on his declared commitment to prevent Iran from becoming a nuclear power.

No one trusts Washington when Obama claims that he is committed to the security of Israel and the US's Sunni allies in the region.

And so we are now facing the unfolding disaster that Obama has wrought. The disaster is that deal or no deal, the US has just given the Iranians a green light to behave as if they have already built their nuclear umbrella. And they are in fact behaving in this manner.

They may not have a functional arsenal, but they act as though they do, and rightly so, because the US and its partners have just removed all significant obstacles from their path to nuclear capabilities. The Iranians know it. Their proxies know it. Their enemies know it.

As a consequence, all the regional implications of a nuclear armed Iran are already being played out. The surrounding Arab states led by Saudi Arabia are pursuing nuclear weapons. The path to a Middle East where every major and some minor actors have nuclear arsenals is before us.

Iran is working to expand its regional presence as if it were a nuclear state already. It is brazenly using its Yemeni Houthi proxy to gain maritime control over the Bab al-Mandab, which together with Iran's control over the Straits of Hormuz completes its maritime control over shipping throughout the Middle East.

Israel, Jordan, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Sudan and Eritrea, and their global trading partners will be faced with the fact that their primary maritime shipping route to Asia is controlled by Iran.

With its regional aggression now enjoying the indirect support of its nuclear negotiating partners led by the US, Iran has little to fear from the pan-Arab attempt to dislodge the Houthis from Aden and the Bab al-Mandab. If the Arabs succeed, Iran can regroup and launch a new offensive knowing it will face no repercussions for its aggression and imperialist endeavors.

Then of course there are Iran's terror proxies.

Hezbollah, whose forces now operate openly in Syria and Lebanon, is reportedly active as well in Iraq and Yemen. These forces behave with a brazenness the likes of which we have never seen.

Hamas too believes that its nuclear-capable Iranian state sponsor ensures that regardless of its combat losses, it will be able to maintain its regime in Gaza and continue using its territory as a launching ground for assaults against Israel and Egypt.

Iran's Shiite militias in Iraq have reportedly carried out heinous massacres of Sunnis who have fallen under their control and faced no international condemnation for their war crimes, operating as they are under Iran's protection and sponsorship. And the Houthis, of course, just overthrew a Western-backed government that actively assisted the US and its allies in their campaign against al-Qaida.

For their proxies' aggression, Iran has been rewarded with effective Western acceptance of its steps toward regional domination and nuclear armament.

Hezbollah's activities represent an acute and strategic danger to Israel. Not only does Hezbollah now possess precision guided missiles that are capable of taking out strategic installations throughout the country, its arsenal of 100,000 missiles can cause a civilian disaster.

Hezbollah forces have been fighting in varied combat situations continuously for the past three years. Their combat capabilities are incomparably greater than those they fielded in the 2006 Second Lebanon War. There is every reason to believe that these Hezbollah fighters, now perched along Israel's borders with Lebanon and Syria, can make good their threat to attack and hold fixed targets including border communities.

While Israel faces threats unlike any we have faced in recent decades that all emanate from Western-backed Iranian aggression and expansionism carried out under a Western-sanctioned Iranian nuclear umbrella, Israel is not alone in this reality. The unrolling disaster also threatens the moderate Sunni states including Jordan, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates. The now regional war in Yemen is but the first act of the regional war at our doorstep.

There are many reasons this war is now inevitable.

Every state threatened by Iran has been watching the Western collapse in Switzerland.

They have been watching the Iranian advance on the ground. And today all of them are wondering the same thing: When and what should we strike to minimize the threats we are facing.

Everyone recognizes that the situation is only going to get worse. With each passing week, Iran's power and brazenness will only increase.

Everyone understands this. And this week they learned that with Washington heading the committee welcoming Iran's regional hegemony and nuclear capabilities, no outside power will stand up to Iran's rise. The future of every state in the region hangs in the balance. And so, it can be expected that everyone is now working out a means to preempt and prevent a greater disaster.

These preemptive actions will no doubt include three categories of operations: striking Hezbollah's missile arsenal; striking the Iranian Navy to limit its ability to project its force in the Bab al-Mandab; and conducting limited military operations to destroy a significant portion of Iran's nuclear installations.

Friday is the eve of Passover. Thirteen years ago, Palestinian terrorists brought home the message of the Exodus when they blew up the Seder at Netanya's Park Hotel, killing 30, wounding 140, and forcing Israel into war. The message of the Passover Haggada is that there are no shortcuts to freedom. To gain and keep it, you have to be willing to fight for it.

That war was caused by Israel's embrace of the notion that you can bring peace through concessions that empower an enemy sworn to your destruction. The price of that delusion was thousands of lives lost and families destroyed.

Iran is far more powerful than the PLO. But the Americans apparently believe they are immune from the consequences of their leaders' policies. This is not the case for Israel or for our neighbors. We lack the luxury of ignoring the fact that Obama's disastrous diplomacy has brought war upon us. Deal or no deal, we are again about to be forced to pay a price to maintain our freedom.

**Roger L. Simon**

### **[Munich, Anyone? Obama's Iran Agreement in Translation](#)**

When Barack Obama told us on [dozens of occasions](#) that we could keep our previous health plan and doctor under the Affordable Care Act, he was doing it for one of two reasons. Either he was ignorant of his own legislation (unlikely) or he was deliberately lying to get it passed. He knew best what was good for us and if he had to prevaricate, so be it.

The so-called framework agreement on Iranian nuclear activities is almost exactly the same. Obama again believes it is best for us, but if we are to believe Amir Taheri (and I do), this "agreement" (that the Iranians are calling merely a press release) is understood completely differently by both parties. We have been told another series of lies in order to get something passed — or in this case not to oppose it.

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Taheri (bilingual in Farsi and English) has [extensive comparisons](#) between the Iranian, American and Europeans versions of what was supposedly agreed to. A sample:

The Iranian text opens by insisting that it has absolutely no “legal aspect” and is intended only as “a guideline for drafting future accords.”

The American text claims that Iran has agreed to do this or that, for example reducing the number of centrifuges from 19,000 to 6,500.

The Iranian text, however, says that Iran “shall be able to . . .” or “qader khahad boud” in Farsi to do such a thing. The same is true about enrichment in Fordow [underground reactor]. The Americans say Iran has agreed to stop enrichment there for 15 years. The Iranian text, however, refers to this as something that Iran “will be able to do,” if it so wished.

Sometimes the two texts are diametrically opposed.

The American statement claims that Iran has agreed not to use advanced centrifuges, each of which could do the work of 10 old ones. The Iranian text, however, insists that “on the basis of solutions found, work on advanced centrifuges shall continue on the basis of a 10-year plan.”

The American text claims that Iran has agreed to dismantle the core of the heavy water plutonium plant in Arak. The Iranian text says the opposite. The plant shall remain and be updated and modernized.

It goes on. It’s worth reading it all, if you haven’t. It’s almost like an episode of *Fawlty Towers*.

What we have here is not “a failure to communicate,” but Obama’s moral narcissism gone berserk. Forget his [former proclaimed views on Iran](#). Driven by his need for legacy and his conviction that “he knows best” about world peace, the future, whatever, he has reversed course and powered through to what he thinks, or wants *us* to think, is the framework for a deal that would prevent Iran from fabricating nuclear weapons. Only — as in Gertrude Stein’s Oakland and Amir Taheri’s translations — there’s no there there.

But never mind. His troops seem to be rallying. Democrats who were initially skeptical are apparently folding in and Senator Menendez, Obama’s greatest thorn on the Democratic side, is currently and conveniently being hounded out of office and possibly into prison.

Meanwhile, Dianne Feinstein — whose greatest worry is making sure her and her husband’s hundreds of millions are kept legally separate — is telling Benjamin Netanyahu — whose greatest worry is a second Holocaust — to “[contain himself](#).” (Anyone who thinks a new Holocaust unlikely should read Howard Jacobson’s magnificent new [J: A Novel](#).)

And Iran, the mending of whose evil ways was never addressed by the negotiators, is up to its usual mischief, not just expanding across the Middle East from Iraq to Syria to Yemen (we know that), but now — at the same time Obama has told his lap dog [Thomas Friedman](#) that America “has Israel’s back” — is making a [new alliance with Hamas](#):

Iran has sent Hamas’s military wing tens of millions of dollars to help it rebuild the network of tunnels in Gaza destroyed by Israel’s invasion last summer, intelligence sources have told *The Sunday Telegraph*.

It is also funding new missile supplies to replenish stocks used to bombard residential neighbourhoods in Israel during the war, code-named Operation Protective Edge by Israel.

Munich, anyone?

## USA Today

### Iran Nuke Deal, No Deal At All

*What Obama really wants is to end Tehran's isolation, but at what cost?*

by Jonah Goldberg

The first thing one needs to know about the nuclear deal with Iran is that it is not, in fact, a deal. You might be confused about this point, given that so many news outlets refers to a "[deal](#)" that doesn't exist.

In fairness, many do so simply for expediency's sake. The various parties to the talks did come away [with an agreement](#), but it was an agreement to haggle more about what a deal might look like. We don't have a good word for such things, so people use "deal" as a placeholder.

But in any other realm of life, if you left a negotiation where things stand in Lausanne, Switzerland, you wouldn't think you had a deal. The known disagreements are profound and the room for further disagreements vast.

When you have a deal with a car salesman, money changes hands and papers are signed. But if you left a car dealership with this kind of understanding, you might never get a car at all, or you might expect that the salesman will ultimately sell you a new Porsche while the dealer is equally confident you'll come down to the lot next weekend to pick your used Zamboni.

The other thing you need to know is that even if the White House gets what it wants, that [won't stop Iran](#) from being able to get a nuclear bomb. No matter what, Iran keeps all of its [research facilities](#) and would ultimately be limited to a one-year "breakout time." Also, nothing in the "deal" — see I'm even doing it — [addresses](#) ballistic missile development. So, in theory, Iran could have everything else ready to go, once it decides to sprint for a bomb.

President Obama is OK with all this because his larger goal is more ambitious than a mere arms control agreement with the world's leading state sponsor of terror. He says he wants to bring Iran out of the cold, to "[break through](#) (their) isolation" and help them become a "[very successful regional power](#)."

Last February, a former National Security Council senior director, Michael Doran, showed that [much of what passes](#) for foreign policy dithering and incompetence, can better be understood as Obama's attempts to seduce Iran into a new strategic role. The purpose of the nuclear talks is less about stopping the bomb as it is launching a new era of engagement with Iran. To keep the talks going, Obama has become [Iran's air force](#) in Iraq, let [Vladimir Putin](#) literally [get away with murder](#) in Ukraine, and grown increasingly deaf to warnings from the [French](#) to the [Israelis](#) to the [Saudis](#).

To be fair, Obama's goal is a good one. A civilized Iranian regime would presumably stop [supporting Hamas](#) in Gaza, [Hezbollah](#) in Lebanon, [Houthis](#) in Yemen, [Bashar Assad](#) in Syria

and [Shiite militants](#) in Iraq. It'd even stop routinely calling for the [destruction of Israel](#) and "[Death to America!](#)"

Who wouldn't want that?

No one denies it'd be great if the ruling mullahs changed their stripes. No one disputes that it would be wonderful if the National Institutes of Health could make chewing gum that cures cancer, either.

The question is: Is a new Iran possible? And, just as important, if it is possible, are the costs worth it?

There's little reason to believe the answer to the first question is, yes. If the Iranian regime were interested in being a constructive member of the international community, it would have been acting like one already, right?

But maybe Obama sees something no one else does. At home and abroad, Obama has an invincible confidence that he understands everyone's self-interest better than they do. Maybe, for once, he's right.

Unfortunately, the players in the region don't think so, which is why Sunni Saudi Arabia has launched a [bloody proxy religious war](#) with Shiite Iran and is even [pondering](#) its own nuclear weapons program. Israel, which would only gain from a reformed Iran, [doesn't think](#) Obama's quest for a legacy will pay off either.

Which brings us to the costs. So far, Obama has calculated that the bloodshed, chaos and frayed alliances are worth it if he can be remembered as the president who opened the door to Iran. Those benefits, if they ever arise, may come at the expense of losing a hell of a lot more.

*Jonah Goldberg, American Enterprise Institute fellow and National Review senior editor, is a member of USA TODAY's Board of Contributors.*

## **National Review**

### **[Down from Watergate](#)**

***Scandals in the rearview mirror appear smaller.***

by Kevin D. Williamson

‘Who is G. Gordon Liddy?’ There are some questions that no normal ten-year-old asks, and that is one of them. This was some time ago; I had been asked to watch the boy while his father tended to an unexpected business matter, and he had found his way into a computer game that he was not supposed to play (*Leisure Suit Larry*, if you’re wondering). The Liddy inquiry was part of the game’s age-screening protocol, a series of questions designed to keep little ones from participating in Larry’s adult-themed adventures. I asked the boy if his father allowed him to play that game, and he assured me that this was the case. “Let me call him and confirm that,” I suggested. His story changed ricky-tick.

Liddy, now retired, ended his career in public life as a sort of minor folk hero, a sort of beloved crazy uncle. He ran a security company for a while, as reformed burglars sometimes do, and

when asked about how his felony conviction in the Watergate affair affected his ability to offer armed services, he explained: “Mrs. Liddy has an extensive collection of firearms, some of which she keeps on my side of the bed.” It probably was inevitable that figures from the Watergate scandal — which at the time was the biggest controversy in American history since the impeachment of President Andrew Johnson — would eventually end up being, like *Leisure Suit Larry* living on in a *Grand Theft Auto* world, emblems of a more innocent time. That is one of the few consolations of conservatism: Given a long enough timeline, a great many crimes and scandals look better in retrospect — witness the occasional outbreaks of Clinton nostalgia on the right.

Richard Nixon was a snake who understood himself as such but had sufficient vestigial conscience to be ashamed of his snakery. When Tricky Dick wanted to spread a nasty rumor about a political rival, he insisted on a few degrees of separation between the deed and himself; when Harry Reid wants to spread lies about someone, he does so from the Senate floor and then laughs about it. In Nixon’s time, the political misuse of the IRS was considered a serious crime; today, it happens quite in the open without consequence. When Nixon insisted that his attorney general violate his official responsibilities for political reasons, Elliott Richardson understood what duty required, and resigned; Eric Holder, by way of comparison — suffice it to say that he understands his duty somewhat differently.

*Plus ça change*: The worst interpretation of the Iran-contra affair was that senior figures in the Reagan administration, conspiring in secrecy, negotiated the sale of arms to the Iranians in order to secure the release of Americans being held hostage by Hezbollah, using the profits from that exchange to aid those fighting against the murderous Soviet proxy in Nicaragua. Sneaky and illegal but intended to secure real American national-security interests — surely, somewhere in the penumbras of the federal government, there is a black-budget agency chief who has approximately that as a job description. The Democrats howled about the sale of those anti-tank missiles to Tehran, of course, and one of the loudest howlers was John Kerry — who has just signed off on a deal delivering Tehran a nuclear weapon in a blue Tiffany box. Exactly what vital national-security interest that secures remains a mystery.

Nixon complained that he could not get a break from the liberal press, that the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times* would go after him no matter what, that journalism had been replaced by vendetta. In 2015, when mobs threatened to descend upon a nonconformist pizzeria and burn it to the ground, the so-called liberals in the media cheered for the arsonists and argued that a business being threatened with violence for the unpopular political opinions of its owners is only getting “exactly what it deserved.”

The Indiana hysteria is an excellent indicator. Ron Fournier of *National Journal*, who for some reason is generally esteemed, argued with a straight face that Indiana’s freedom-of-religion law is “not unlike Jim Crow laws at all,” which is true if you ignore the slavery and categorical subjugation and the use of state violence in the service of a program of general political and social repression and the first few centuries of American history and all. Moral panics have their uses: If you convince yourself that your opponent is evil — not wrong, not operating from a set of values at variance with your own, but evil — then there is no crime of which he might not be suspected — and, more important, no crime that one might not commit oneself in order to frustrate his wicked aims.

Needless to say, this line of thinking can be suspended when the politician is confronted with real but politically convenient evil, e.g., those Sandinistas that the Reagan administration was fighting. This is why in the popular history of 20th century, the bad guys aren’t the Communists

who murdered 100 million people and their American enablers, but the meanies such as Richard Nixon and Joe McCarthy, who tried to expose them.

If the other side is *evil*, then anything is permissible. Of course Harry Reid doesn't feel guilty about lying about Mitt Romney: "He didn't get elected, did he?" Of course so-called progressives are willing to lock up nonconformist bakers or merrily cheer on those who promise to set their businesses on fire. Of course the Obama administration will try to sign us up for a phony nuclear deal with Tehran that undermines our national security — and that of our allies — in the service of its own political interests.

"Who is G. Gordon Liddy?" Among other things, a criminal who did his time. Who is Lois Lerner? A criminal who almost certainly will never hear the prison door slam shut behind her, who probably will live out her days on a generous pension paid for by the very same taxpayers whose government she converted into a weapon to be used against them.

There are those who call this "progress."



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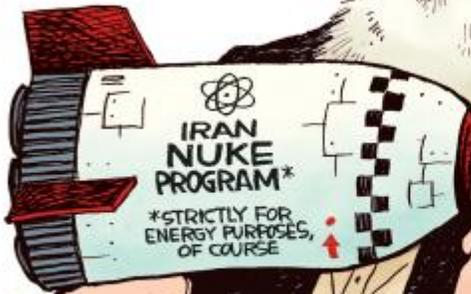


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DO WE HAVE A  
CONSENSUS ON A  
RESOLUTION TO HAVE  
AN AGREEMENT ON  
A FRAMEWORK FOR  
A DEAL...?

WE DON'T  
NEGOTIATE  
WITH TERRORISTS!

...BUT IN YOUR CASE,  
WE'LL MAKE AN  
EXCEPTION...



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