

Obama Administration Shifts Its Tactics On Iran

by JACKIE NORTHAM



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AFP/Getty Images

Should the U.S. frame sanctions in protest of human rights violations or of Iran's nuclear program?

February 13, 2010

text size A A A

When President Obama took office just over a year ago, he embarked on what many people believed — and hoped — was a new era for U.S.-Iran relations. Obama wanted to engage with the Islamic republic to help break the impasse created by Iran's suspected nuclear program.

But analysts say his efforts were rebuffed. And earlier this week, the U.S. Treasury Department announced sanctions on companies run by Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps.

Flynt Leverett, a senior research fellow at the New America Foundation, says Obama may have had some forward-leaning impulses when he took office, "but it seems they were just that — impulses," he says.

Leverett says the new sanctions show the administration did not have a fully thought-out strategy about how to realign relations with Iran.

"They've essentially fallen back into the same-old, same-old, and it's hard to say beyond some specimens of nicer rhetoric, what, in substance, is really different about their policy from what George W. Bush's policy was by the time he left office," Leverett says.

Reuel Marc Gerecht, a senior fellow at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, says the administration now has few options but to slap sanctions on the Iranian regime. However, Gerecht says, the administration should change how it frames those sanctions, focusing them on human rights violations rather than on Iran's nuclear program.

"I think it's important that any sanctions implemented be clearly labeled and understood by the Iranian people as being sanctions on their behalf," Gerecht says.

He adds that if the Obama administration labels sanctions as in support of Iranian democracy or free elections, there would likely be significant support inside the country for the measures, even if they end up hurting people economically.

The concern over human rights abuses is gaining traction. Over the past eight months, there have been mass arrests and intimidation of anti-government protesters and their families, and at least two executions by the Iranian authorities.

The U.S. and European Union issued a statement earlier this week calling on the Iranian government to fulfill its human rights obligations. Sens. John McCain and Joe Lieberman also introduced the Iran Human Rights Sanctions Act, which would identify and impose sanctions on human rights abusers in Iran.

Gerecht says the administration should make it clear the sanctions are not aimed at harming the Iranian people. Still, Gerecht says, this may be a hard sell — because everyone knows at the end of the day it's the nuclear program that concerns the U.S. the most.

Ted Galen Carpenter, vice president for defense and foreign policy studies at the Cato Institute, agrees that the nuclear issue is of vital interest to the U.S. But he says it shouldn't overshadow every other issue between the two countries.

"If there will ever be a normal relationship between the United States and the government of Iran, a number of those other issues will have to be addressed at some point," he says. "The main issue I suspect will be Iran's overall role in the region. We need to get a better feel about Iran's ambitions, what kind of role it wants to play."

It's hard to say beyond some specimens of nicer rhetoric, what, in substance, is really different about their policy from what George W. Bush's policy was by the time he left office.

- Flynt Leverett, senior research fellow at the New America Foundation

Carpenter says for three decades the U.S. has been trying to isolate Iran with no real success.

Geneive Abdo, an Iran analyst with The Century Foundation and editor of insideiran.org, says she is buoyed by recent talk of other options for dealing with Iran, such as empowering the opposition there.

Abdo says one way to do this would be to provide technology to prevent the Iranian authorities from cutting Internet and mobile phone services in an effort to cripple protest organizers.

"So that whenever the regime blocks the Internet and Facebook and Iranians' access to the Internet, there can be technology to overcome this," she says. That way, Abdo says, people inside the country can communicate with one another and continue to organize protests, and they can also communicate with Iranians helping the opposition who live outside the country.

Abdo says if the U.S. decides to help the opposition in Iran, it has to be careful to avoid any perception of outside interference. The Iranian government has long alleged that the U.S. and other Western governments are behind the opposition movement.

"So obviously, if the United States publicly comes out and says, 'We support the efforts of the opposition,' the regime could definitely use this against the movement," she says.

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Recent First



Mark Halpern (Markhalpernhere) wrote:
HEY EYDER PERALTA, BOGUS LITTLE ISRAELI "MODERATOR"!!!

HOW COME YOU HAVEN'T CENSORED ALL MY POSTS YET??? :0

WHAT'S WRONG WITH YOU THESE DAYS??? Can't do your JOB properly? Can't keep up with the old JJ?

You're not doing your JOB, little Joseph Goebells Zionist wannabee! What a shame. Your Israeli masters must be upset you're leaving all this material here for everyone to see.

Do your JOB, Peralta. Everyone knows now that's why you are being paid.

Come on little girl, do your JOB and censor our good old free speech...so I can repost 10 times more if I want to lol.

Gotta put food on your table, eh Peralta?
Tue Feb 16 2010 10:41:37 GMT-0500 (Eastern Standard Time)

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Mark Halpern (Markhalpernhere) wrote:
dan decker: "Arab/Iranian provocation constantly stirring the pot."

Provocation??? What provocation? Insisting on developing a nuclear program they have the RIGHT to develop under the NPT treaty they signed??? Because in case you didn't notice, that's all Iran has been doing.

Mon Feb 15 2010 21:29:36 GMT-0500 (Eastern Standard Time)

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Mark Halpern (Markhalpernhere) wrote:



dan decker: "@Craig: Maybe you haven't noticed but yes, we do have an issue with Iran."

No we don't. Our media and politicians are FABRICATING "issues" and spreading disinformation, intox and hoax about psudo-nuclear threats" that do not exist (like they did with Iraq, remember?) in order to find alibis to continue aggress them for possible regime change.

Did they attack you in the past?

Did they threaten to attack you?

Did they invade other countries?

Do they threaten to invade other countries?

Are they stealing land that is not theirs like Israel does daily?

Did they kill 400 foreign children and babies lately, like Israel did again last year with your money, weapons, and blessing?

Did they develop a stockpile of nukes like Israel did in secrecy?

Are they refusing IAEA inspections of whatever the IAEA wants to inspect, like Israel does?

Did they refuse to sign the NPT, like Israel does?

Mon Feb 15 2010 21:27:18 GMT-0500 (Eastern Standard Time)

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dan decker (sjdan) wrote:

@Mark: If you want the US public to pause and consider the justification of any anti-zionist cause you have got to do better than, ". . . but look what they did to us . . ." when confronted with ample evidence of Arab violence. I don't like being baited into sending our blood and muscle to clean up the block for Israel but am not going to win the argument with a steady stream of Arab/Iranian provocation constantly stirring the pot. Drop all the inflamed rhetoric. There isn't an innocent party in the middle east and eventually all of the finger-pointing starts to look childish and becomes a steady drone of background noise that is easy to forget.

Israel itself has it's own critics of Israel's policies and they are far more pursuasive than any litany of Israeli crimes against humanity coming from the bloodstained Arab/Iranian camp.

Mon Feb 15 2010 21:24:43 GMT-0500 (Eastern Standard Time)

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Mark Halpern (Markhalpernhere) wrote:

A HISTORY OF AMERICAN AGGRESSION AGAINST IRAN

All those facts are easily verifiable in whatever source you want.

1) it's the US and Britain who killed Iran's emerging democracy back in 1953. Search "Mossadegh" and "Operation Ajax" if you are in doubt.

And we accuse them of not being "democratic" enough now??? Fu*k those Western hypocrites who also support, arm, and fund Jewish Israeli terrorism anyway.

2) we imposed on the Iranians a bloody dictator, Shah Palavi, a dynastic king, who tortured and killed thousands of his opponents, women included. For those who like yummy details, one of their favorite torture methods back then, when it came to women, was inserting electrodes in their vaginas.

And it was the CIA that trained the Shah's secret Savak police, did you know that?

Here's a video with a few basic facts that was posted by another guy:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R0J6zJGDaE>

Definitely partisan but still better than this amnesia or selective memory Americans have about all this.

3) we sustained that regime from 1953 till 1978, for a quarter of a century. Then they finally kicked us out.

4) that was apparently not enough harm done to Iran. So, in the early 1980s, when Saddam ATTACKED Iran and tried invade it, we, the "Freedom Nation" backed him up 100%, militarily, financially, politically, etc., and we tried help Saddam destroy Iran. He did not succeed but he killed over a MILLION Iranians including hundreds of thousands of civilians, and we sure helped him do that.

During that war of aggression, under Reagan, the U.S. supplied money and weapons to Saddam, reopened diplomatic channels, lifted restrictions on the export of dual-use technology, oversaw the transfer of third party military hardware, provided operational intelligence on the battlefield, and more.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iran-Iraq_war

Now wait, here comes the BEST part :)

5) THE US CONTINUED TO SUPPORT, ARM, AND FUND SADDAM EVEN AFTER HE HAD GASED IRANIAN CIVILIANS--AND HIS OWN IRAQI KURDS! (see 1986-1988 lethal al-Anfar campaign where Ali Hassan al-Majid, Saddam's cousin, won the nickname "chemical Ali" and for which he was executed. Well, well, well, guess who was a big ally of Iraq back then both before, during, AND after that campaign lol, since the US support to Saddam continued well into 1989 and yep, feel free to fact-check all this.)

6) And my all-time favorite:

Anyone remembers who Reagan sent as his special envoy to meet Saddam in Baghdad and offer him the help of the U.S. in his attempt to destroy Iran?

Recognize someone here?

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r42oejmpkgw>

Now can anyone explain what exactly Iran had done to the US to merit this?

Who's been the mad and crazy dog and the more civilized one here throughout that history outlined above?

Mon Feb 15 2010 20:43:48 GMT-0500 (Eastern Standard Time)

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dan decker (sjdan) wrote:

Craig: Having never seen a comment by James Miller or Bronco I can't possibly comment on why they have been banned!

What relevance is Ahminijad's popularity to anything we are talking about. I don't care if he is loved or hated, right or wrong. The issue at hand here is how the US deals with Iran and Ahminijad is a player in the issue but his popularity is irrelevant to the justification for US action or inaction.

Mon Feb 15 2010 17:42:14 GMT-0500 (Eastern Standard Time)

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dan decker (sjdan) wrote:

@Syed, Craig: Unfortunately I agree with many of Craig's positions but find the delivery offensive making it possible that he is getting pushed off the site due to offensive and abusive language rather than anti-zionism.

Mon Feb 15 2010 17:28:29 GMT-0500 (Eastern Standard Time)

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Syed Naqi (Syed_Naqi) wrote:

Michael & Dan: Look, they took Craig Duvall (CraigDuvall11) out again!! He's gone...

It could be anyone of us next time, there goes our freedom of speech...

Beware, the NPR Minder can get to you if you say the wrong thing!!!

Mon Feb 15 2010 16:41:50 GMT-0500 (Eastern Standard Time)

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dan decker (sjdan) wrote:

@Syed: Don't get distracted. I am in substantial agreement with you regarding the actions of the Israeli state. However, the minds of the average US citizen begin to drift a little when any discussion about the middle east includes a comment starting with, "Yes, but Israel . . .".

You fill in the blanks. There may indeed be a substantial link between US and Israeli opposition to Iran but you can't sell the argument to the average citizen when any discussion of UN resolutions shifts to UN action/inaction vs Israel.

Mon Feb 15 2010 15:26:52 GMT-0500 (Eastern Standard Time)

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Syed Naqi (Syed_Naqi) wrote:

dan decker (sjdan) wrote:" The problem with Iran is that it may not be the US interests at stake but Israels and I'm not interested in sending US blood and muscle to further Israeli interests."

Now you see the picture. Neither am I.

Then why are we getting out undergarments in a wad here??

Why are we spending our precious financial and political resources to destabilize Iran???

Mon Feb 15 2010 14:53:29 GMT-0500 (Eastern Standard Time)

2/16/2010

Obama Administration Shifts Its Tactic...

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