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By Reza Kahlili



In his first news conference after re-election, President Obama said there was still time for a diplomatic solution on Iran's nuclear program and that Iran could enjoy "peaceful nuclear power" if it meets international obligations.

Diplomacy has failed and international sanctions, though having some effect, have not persuaded the radicals ruling Iran to stop their illicit nuclear program. The economic screws must be tightened.

Iranian leaders did not hide their satisfaction in Mr. Obama's re-election and the prospect of more negotiations, which, in their view, will buy them more time to develop nuclear weapons.

Professor Pirooz Mojtahedzade, who teaches political geography at Tehran University, said in a recent interview, "Perhaps one reason for Obama's success in his re-election campaign was his opposition to the warmongering Prime Minister [Benjamin Netanyahu] of Israel, which officially eliminated the effect of the Zionist lobby in presidential elections, and the result of this is that the Israel lobby will not have much effect on U.S. politics in the next four years.

"I have no doubt that the U.S. desires negotiations. We must remember the promises by Obama in his first four years to change U.S. politics internally and externally to address international matters peacefully, including Iran's nuclear energy program through negotiations and peaceful means," Mr. Mojtahedzade said.

His thoughts were echoed in several other analyses in Iranian media. One said America is in no way looking for a confrontation with Iran and, in fact, has such a confrontation as its red line. Therefore, it's only natural that the Islamic republic is aware of this limited U.S. strategy and will benefit from it, the analysis argued.

Proof of that claim, the analysis said, is the recent incident in which Revolutionary Guards fighter jets shot at a U.S. drone. America reacted to the incident cautiously, not militarily, diplomatically or even publicly.

It is with this belief that the regime has successfully dragged out international talks about its illicit nuclear program over the past four years while making significant progress toward nuclear weapons.

When Mr. Obama took office in 2009, the Islamic regime had barely enough enriched uranium for one nuclear bomb. Today, it has enough for six, if further enriched. In 2009, Iran was enriching uranium at one facility in Natanz. Today, enrichment goes on with thousands more centrifuges spinning at another facility in Fordo. The latter is deep underground and immune to airstrikes. In 2009, the regime was limited to 3.5 percent enrichment. Now, it is enriching to 20 percent, a significant step toward weaponization. Most alarming is that the regime is within days of ramping up production of 20 percent-level uranium, doubling its output. This would cut in half the time needed to acquire enough highly enriched uranium for a bomb.

A Nov. 16 report by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) indicated that it has received further information that "Iran has carried out activities that are relevant to the development of a nuclear device." This is while Iran has stonewalled an IAEA request for months to inspect the military site at Parchin, where it is believed the regime tested an explosive device that could help with the development of a nuclear weapon.

I revealed recently that one secret site at which Iran is conducting nuclear work is in the outskirts of Najafabad, in the province of Isfahan. A team of Iranian scientists headed by Mohsen Fakhrizadeh-Mahabadi, the father of Iran's nuclear program, has been secretly testing a neutron detonator and implosion system, designing and building a nuclear warhead to arm Iran's Shahab-3 ballistic missile and working on separating plutonium for a plutonium implosion-type fission bomb.

Despite the 2007 U.S. National Intelligence Estimate saying Iran had halted work on nuclear weapons as early as 2003, the Iranians never did — something that the Nov. 16 IAEA report also verified.

With the current crises in the Middle East and Iran arming Hamas, Islamic Jihad, Hezbollah and other terrorist groups, one thing is certain: If the regime becomes nuclear-armed, proliferation will become a nightmare, world stability and the global economy will become its hostage, and uncertainty and instability will rule.

On Nov. 18, Mr. Obama supported Israel's right to defend itself. At the same time, reports indicated that the State Department has refused visas to Iranian officials to attend a U.N. meeting on human rights. These actions may dent Iran's favorable outlook toward Mr. Obama's second term.

However, in order to avoid war, similar messages of strength must be sent to Iran so that we make sure the Islamic regime will not underestimate U.S. resolve, or the war we want to avoid will be the war we will see on a much greater scale.

The Middle East today resembles the Wild West in which radical characters operate within a U.S. void. History shows that such a perception only leads to trouble for the world. Mr. Obama must change that perception by standing up for our values and guiding the world to a better future. No more Mr. Nice Guy toward the barbaric Islamic regime.

*Reza Kahlili is a pseudonym for a former CIA operative in Iran's Revolutionary Guards and author of the award-winning book "A Time to Betray" (Simon & Schuster, 2010).*