

The Harbour League



A NEW DEAL ON IRAN

By Herbert I. London

March 11, 2009

The buzz at Foggy Bottom is that Secretary of State Hillary Clinton is in serious negotiation with her Russian counterparts to squash the deployment of an anti-missile system in Eastern Europe.

In return for this non-deployment – which the Putin led government regards as an incitement even though this system is aimed at thwarting a possible Iranian attack – the United States wants Russian diplomats to urge Iranian cessation of its nuclear weapons ambition.

On every level this negotiation is foolhardy. It should be clear to everyone by now that the benefit of nuclear weapons for Iran far exceeds the pain the West can inflict for their development. Nuclear weapons immediately give Iran hegemony in the Muslim Middle East and inspires its imperial aspirations. President Ahmadinejad has already noted that the program "has no brake and no reverse gear."

Moreover, even the so-called moderates in Iran (a terminology I use loosely), Khatami and Rafsanjani, have promoted the nuclear weapons program. Despite all of the blandishments European and American diplomats have offered, the Iranian regime adamantly pursues its uranium enrichment program, and at this point, probably has enough fissile material to produce a nuclear bomb.

It should also be noted that even if the Russians agree to this arrangement, there isn't any way to verify the results since the IAEA has been powerless to monitor the dispersed nuclear sites in Iran. Should

negotiations take place between Russia and Iran, the diplomatic conversation could serve as appropriate cover for Iran to build and test a nuclear device.

Russian complaints about a missile system in eastern Europe belie a Putin led belief that Russia has a sphere of influence over those nations that border it, notwithstanding the break-up of the Soviet Empire. In accepting Russian demands to cease construction on missile defense, the United States would be conceding Russian ambitions to control the "near abroad."

And if that isn't bad enough, this deal also suggests that the United States must make its eastern European allies in Hungary, the Czech Republic, Poland and other states vulnerable to a potential Iranian threat. How can the United States sacrifice the bonds of its alliances for such a slim reed of hope?

The question that arises from this deal is why would the State Department pursue an arrangement in which we give up so much in return for so little. The answer, of course, is that no one knows what to do about Iran and since the Russians have been enablers in the Iranian nuclear program, perhaps they can be coaxed into being disenablers. One might describe this is the "frustration policy."

Secretary Clinton has said, "we are under no illusions about Iran and our eyes are wide open." The policy being pursued, however, is entirely illusory and State Department eyes may be wide open, but so are their minds. Seeking a solution to this Iranian problem baffled the Bush administration, even though the erstwhile president continually said an Iran with nuclear weapons is unacceptable.

Now a new diplomatic gambit is being pursued in large part because the government is unwilling to concede that only a military option – as horrible as the prospect is – offers any hope that this matter can be resolved. As a consequence, we will engage in mind bending acrobatics to convince ourselves this latest negotiation will work, and in the process we will give the Russians tacit control over the near abroad and sacrifice our allies to potential nuclear blackmail.

***Herbert London** is president of Hudson Institute and professor emeritus of New York University. He sits on the Harbour League's board of Trustees. He is the author of **Decade of Denial** (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2001) and **America's Secular Challenge: The Rise of a New National Religion** (Encounter Books, 2008). London maintains a website, www.herblondon.org.*