

The K.F. Stone Weekly

(Formerly "Beating the Bushes")



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GO SET A WATCHMAN

Over the past decade or more, it has become the tradition that within minutes of the president delivering his State of the Union Address, a hand-picked member of the opposition will deliver his (or her) party's official rebuttal -- a speech finding fault



with anything and everything the president just said. Of course, the opposition member's rebuttal was written, rehearsed and recorded hours before the State of the Union was delivered, which, logically, means that their opposition is purely a matter of partisan politics. Period. Ideally, if it were a matter of taking apart what the president said - analyzing his proposals, weighing what's best for the country and then responding - the opposition speech might not take place for at least, say, 24 hours. But such is obviously *not* the case; their opposition isn't based on *what* was said or proposed, only on *who* said or proposed it.

It's kind of like reviewing a book before it's been published . . . or damning to hell the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPA) even before it was signed. The latter is, of course, the official name for the recently concluded agreement between Iran and the U.S., the U.K., France, Germany, the E.U., Russia and China which would

suspend economic sanctions against Iran and enable it to resume selling oil, rejoin the international financial system and get access to about \$100 billion in



Frozen assets once the watchmen of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) verify its compliance with restrictions on its nuclear development

Long before the JCPA -- [all 159 pages of it](#) -- was concretized and its minutia committed to paper -- let alone signed -- all Republicans and some Democrats here America -- as well as all Lekudniks and some Laborites in Israel, were screaming that it was "a historic mistake" . . . "an act of appeasement" . . . "the worst possible way to deal with Iran" . . . a "sure-fire way of setting off a nuclear and conventional arms race." And since the pact became official last Tuesday, the rhetoric hasn't changed one whole hell of a lot. In other words, once again it's a case of the rebuttal being given even before the speech (or in this case, the agreement) has been delivered.

Predictably, virtually every contender for the Republican presidential nomination has weighed in with scathing comments and prophetic warnings of doom and destruction:

- **South Carolina Senator Lindsey Graham** said the *Plan of Action* is "a death sentence for the State of Israel."
- **Former Arkansas governor Mike Huckabee** vowed that, if elected, he would "keep all options on the table, including military force, to topple the terrorist Iranian regime and defeat the evil forces of radical Islam."
- **Florida senator Marco Rubio** said: "President Obama has consistently negotiated from a position of weakness, giving concession after concession to a regime that has American blood on its hands, holds Americans hostage, and has consistently violated every agreement it ever signed."
- **Wisconsin governor Scott Walker** tweeted that President Obama's "nuclear agreement with Iran will be remembered as one of America's worst diplomatic failures."
- **Former Florida Governor Jeb Bush**, argued that the deal's leniency in key areas actually "paves Iran's path to a bomb."

On the other side of the aisle, all of the Democrats in the race for president embraced the deal:

- **Former secretary of state Hillary Clinton** said: "Based on what I know now, this is an important step in putting the lid on Iran's nuclear program,"
- **Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders** said the deal was "a victory for diplomacy over saber-rattling and could keep the United States from being drawn into another never-ending war in the Middle East."
- **Former Maryland governor Martin O'Malley** said "diplomacy is the best path to a nuclear-free Iran."
- **Former Virginia senator Jim Webb** said "This is an important moment in terms of the future of American foreign policy."
- **Former Rhode Island governor Lincoln Chafee** said he salutes Obama and Kerry, the primary negotiators for the U.S., for what Chafee called a "historic breakthrough . . . Strong, patient diplomacy should continue to be the model for resolving conflicts."

And on and on. One wonders if any of the Republican detractors are aware that their idol, Ronald Reagan, actually *sold* weapons to Iran -- the same Iran that had recently taken over the American Embassy, holding everyone in the building hostage. Be this as it may, none of the comments made by the Republicans referenced above *after* the agreement was reached are substantially different from what they were saying *long before* anyone could even predict that an agreement would ever be reached. None of those voicing powerful objections and predicting "apocalypse soon" have offered anything even remotely resembling a workable alternative -- short of even stronger sanctions or bombing the daylights out of Iran. One might recall that these are the same folks who *derided* and made fun of the sanctions as being weak-kneed while they were in place ("Economic sanctions? Oh wow, that's really showing 'em . . .")

And now comes the fight on Capitol Hill. Although it certainly won't be smooth sailing for President Obama, I have to believe that in the long run, the JCPA will receive the necessary votes. Those who are pledged to do everything in their power to see it go down to defeat -- or cancel it on their first day as president if need be -- probably haven't contemplated what such a defeat would mean for the United States in the eyes of our allies and partners -- for the very position we occupy in the world. To say -- as some have -- "*Hey, what do we care what they think? We're the United States of America; the greatest, most powerful country in the history of the world*" -- makes for a great sound bite, but betrays an extraordinary lack of understanding about how things work in the real world.

OK, the JCPA is far, far from perfect. There is always the possibility that Iran will go back on its word; that they will hide uranium; that they will do whatever they can to get around the various safeguards they have agreed to. There's always the fear that the \$100 billion or more they are going to have released to them sometime in early 2016 will go to the further funding of terrorist activities around the globe. And hey, not 24 hour after the pact was made public there was Grand Ayatollah Ali Khamenei up to his old rhetorical tricks, calling America names and declaring *"Our policy regarding the arrogant U.S. government will not change We don't have any negotiations or deal with the U.S. on different issues in the world or the region."*

But the fact of the matter is that Iranian diplomats would not -- indeed, could not -- have signed on to the agreement, let alone even engaged in the four-year process leading up to the pact without Khamenei's blessing. And in the same way, the relatively moderate Hassan Rouhani would never have been able to run for president -- let alone win -- without Khamenei's blessing . . . rhetorical thunderbolts notwithstanding. As much as one might revile Khamenei the theocratic anti-Semite and warmongering Shiite, it still must be recognized: the man *is* a pragmatist. Otherwise, he never would have given his Islamic imprimatur to the discussions leading up to the JCPA.

Those who imply that the only alternatives to the JCPA's program of watchmen-in-exchange-for-cash-and-recognition or either ever harsher sanctions or bombing Iran back to the Stone Age are out of their minds. Beside the fact that most of the Irani centrifuges are either deep, deep underground where bombs wouldn't likely destroy them, or on military bases which are heavily fortified, such a tactic might -- might -- *at best* set back Teheran's nuclear ambitions by 2 to 3 years. By comparison, *if* the JCPA works the way it's supposed to (admittedly a big "if") it will set back these designs by *10 to 15 years*. And, during that decade to decade-and-a-half, it is likely that Ayatollah Khamenei (who turned 76 last Thursday) will depart this mortal coil and be replaced by a younger, God willing less bellicose theocrat. Then too, it will be another decade to decade-and-a-half for the younger generation to become even more disgusted by their authoritarian, religiously unforgiving government. "Yeah, yeah" I can hear people scream, ". . . but what about all those young men screaming 'Death to America!' at all those public gatherings?" Well, what's to say that all those rallies with all those angry fist-waving young men aren't staged, just as political rallies here in the United States are staged -- having one's rabid supporters in attendance as far as the camera eye can see? The younger generation is connected to the world via Facebook, Twitter and a dozen other social network sites -- just like young folks all over the world. This might have a salient, liberalizing effect over the next ten to fifteen years.

To be certain, I, like everyone else weighing in on this issue, don't have a crystal ball; I, like everyone else -- including the president, Secretary Kerry, anyone running for president, the diplomats from the U.K., France, Germany, the European Union, Russia

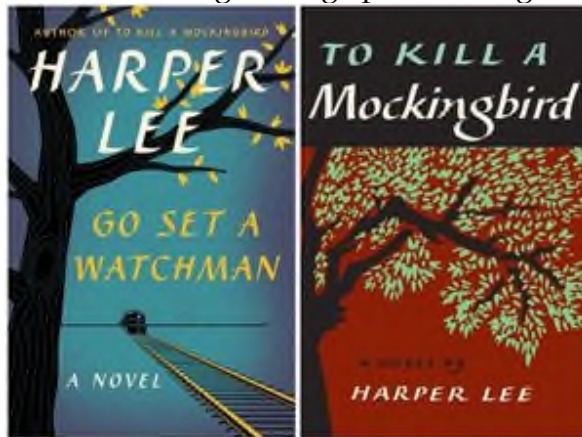
and China -- don't know what the future portends. Anyone who permits their fears -- or their fantasies -- to be treated as reality is, once again, rebutting a speech before it's been delivered . . . wailing before the watchman has arrived.

Many accuse President Obama and Secretary Kerry of having being "overly anxious" when it came to reaching an agreement. "Overly anxious?" If this were true, why oh why did the JCPA take 4 years? Why? Because diplomacy is a slow agonizing process wherein parties begin with what they must have, progress to what they want and wind arriving at what they both can live with.

Obviously, Ayatollah Khamenei's -- and thus Iran's -- gains in the deal are more tangible than President Obama's. While the Supreme Leader got significant sanctions relief for his ailing economy, and the launch pad for Iran to become a more formidable Mideast power, President Obama stretched Iran's nuclear "[breakout time](#)" (defined as "the time required to produce enough weapons-grade uranium [WGU] for one nuclear weapon") from a few months to over a year with strengthened inspection rights. But according to top administration officials, Mr. Obama has always been after something much bigger than capping Iran's nuclear program, and he got it--the strategic opportunity to begin converting Iran from foe to "friend." On the surface, this sounds like the childish fantasy of a starry-eyed idealist.

According to [Leslie Gelb](#), President Emeritus of the [Council on Foreign Relations](#), and a former senior State and Defense Department official, *"Iranian negotiators understood well what's been driving the U.S. president, and they have used the prospect of becoming 'a friend' as their best bargaining card. For over a year now in small private conversations and strolls, they have been painting rosy pictures of Iranian-American cooperation The Iranian list of possibilities goes to most of Washington's principal worries about the broad Middle East. They would step up their fighting alongside Iraqi troops to combat the so-called Islamic State (ISIS or ISIL) in central Iraq. And they would do much more in Syria to go after the headquarters and main forces that ISIS has there. They spoke of finding 'solutions' to the civil war in Yemen between Sunnis and Iran-backed Shiites. They raised hopes of forging better relations with America's 'partners' in the Gulf. They pressed the idea of renewing the cooperation they once had with the U.S. fighting the Taliban at the beginning of the Afghan war."*

Am I the only one who finds a chilling irony in the fact that the day before Iran and the rest of its negotiating partners agreed to the much anticipated JCPA -- to set



nuclear watchmen into their country -- that 55 years and 2 days after the initial publication of *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Harper Lee's new (or very old) sequel (or discarded first draft of *Mockingbird*) novel hit the bookstores and Internet? And that its title, amazingly, is *Go Set a Watchman*. Ever since last February, when Harper Collins first announced the work's existence -- and their intention to publish it -- readers and critics have been going back and forth about what the novel would contain; about whether it could ever live up to the cultic brilliance of *Mockingbird*. In a sense, some were reviewing *Watchman* before it had even been published. Sort of like those who were criticizing (or praising) the JCPA long before it became settled. In its first week, *Go Set a Watchman* has sold 1.1 million copies -- hardcovers, e-books and audio books. And reviews range from "brilliant" and "mesmerizing" to "a mess" and "the tarnishing of Atticus Finch's halo." In other words, there is no agreement as to its merit . . . only time will tell. And yet, I prefer to live in a reading world in which there is a "new" Harper Lee novel regardless of how good, bad or indifferent it may be.

Likewise, I prefer to live in a world in which there is a JCPA, regardless of how good or bad it may turn out to be.

Go set a watchman in Iran . . . and let's all pray for a better future.