



ROGUE NUKES

The Secret History of the Joint Nuclear Program of Iran and North Korea

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Executive Summary

- * The much heralded agreement with Iran, attained in the early morning hours of 14 July 2015, is based on the premise that Iran will honor its commitment not to seek nuclear weapons in return for an array of economic and political incentives.
- * The top priorities of the rogue leaders in both Tehran and Pyongyang are self-survival and self-preservation. When these leaders study the US proposals regarding their own nuclear weapons programs they remember two things: First, it's an article of faith that had Saddam Hussein had "The Bomb" he would still be alive and in power. Second, Qadhafi believed the US, disarmed fully, and was then toppled by the US. Therefore, nobody at the top of Tehran and Pyongyang is going to surrender their real capabilities and thus their guarantees of survival against a hated and mistrusted US/West no matter how cajoling Obama might be.
- * Presently, a quarter of a century after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the beginning of pax-Americana, the international posture finally permits the dramatic breakout of the rogues-led oppressed of the third world. It is finally possible to not only start undermining the Western-imposed world order - but also to exact painful revenge for centuries of real and perceived abuses. To assume that the US-led West can negotiate - under the banner of arms control or any other banner - a reversal of this breakout is the heights of folly.

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Analysis

The much heralded agreement with Iran, attained in the early morning hours of 14 July 2015, is based on the premise that Iran will honor its commitment not to seek nuclear weapons in return for an array of incentives. These economic and political incentives range from the lifting of the sanctions to the resumption of economic and military ties with both east and west, to the reversal of the isolation and ostracizing of Iran.

President Obama rushed to praise the deal and its timeliness. "This deal makes our country and the world safer and more secure," he said. "If we don't choose wisely, I believe future generations will judge us harshly for letting this moment slip away." The next day, Obama stressed further the imperative to address the Iran nuclearization issue through negotiations. "Either the issue of Iran obtaining a nuclear weapon is resolved diplomatically, through a negotiation, or it's resolved through force, through war," he explained. "Those are the options." Obama stressed he led the world in choosing the peaceful option.

This is not the first time the US led international negotiations for the last-minute prevention of the nuclearization of a rogue state. Back on 18 October 1994, then President Clinton hailed the agreement just reached with North Korea. "I am pleased that the United States and North Korea yesterday reached agreement on the text of a framework document on North Korea's nuclear program. This agreement will help to achieve a longstanding and vital American objective: an end to the threat of nuclear proliferation on the Korean Peninsula. This agreement is good for the United States, good for our allies, and good for the safety of the entire world. It reduces the danger of the threat of nuclear spreading in the region. It's a crucial step toward drawing North Korea into the global community." On 9 October 2006, North Korea conducted its first acknowledged nuclear test - signaling Pyongyang had different priorities in mind.

The 2015 nuclear agreement with Iran, just like the 1994 agreement with North Korea, is based on the Western article of faith that the signatories have so much to benefit from the return to the community of nations and to comprehensive economic relations with them (including foreign aid) - that they recognize that it is in their own vested interests and to their own benefits to keep the agreement and refrain from acquiring military nuclear capabilities. It was inconceivable to the Clinton White House in 1994, just as it is inconceivable to the Obama White House in 2015, that their interlocutors actually give far higher priority to the acquisition of nuclear weapons and strategic delivery capabilities in order to attain their respective regional objectives than to benefitting from what the White House has to offer.

Ultimately, the top priorities of the rogue leaders in both Tehran and Pyongyang are self-survival and self-preservation. When the leaders in Tehran and Pyongyang study the US proposals regarding their own nuclear weapons programs they remember two things: First, it's an article of faith that had Saddam Hussein had "The Bomb" in 1991 and 2003 - President Bush Sr would not have dared to evict Iraq from Kuwait and President Bush Jr would not have dared to invade Iraq and topple Saddam. Second, Muammar Qadhafi believed the assurances of Bush Jr, made a deal with the US and disarmed fully, and then Obama capitalized on this weakness to topple and kill Qadhafi and his family. Therefore, nobody at the top of Tehran and Pyongyang is going to surrender their real capabilities and thus their guarantees of survival against a hated and mistrusted US/West no matter how cajoling Obama might be.

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The acquisition of nuclear weapons and strategic delivery systems by Iran and North Korea is an integral part of a profound phenomenon - irreconcilable hostility to the Western-dominated world order by a few rogue powers and their determination to challenge it at all cost. The rogue powers - led by Iran and North Korea - are adamant on destroying the existing world order and establishing a new system under their own hegemony - at least in their regions. Their urgent imperative to acquire nuclear weapons and strategic delivery systems is an expression of the dire need of the rogue powers to establish credible deterrence against US-led Western intervention (of the kind demonstrated in Libya) in the breakout of world order and the ascent of the rogue powers.

Presently, the leading players are Iran and North Korea. They are the last holdouts with Libya destroyed, Syria unraveling, and Pakistan wavering. Roots of the system of the rogue states go back to the Tricontinental Conference in Cuba in 1966 and subsequent Soviet coaching (particularly after the Khomeini revolution of 1979). The mutual bonds evolved with the growing independence of the leading radical leaders in Tehran, Pyongyang, Damascus and Tripoli during the tumultuous 1980's. They all realized during the Iraq-Iran War that long-range ballistic missiles were a must, and that chemical weapons no longer sufficed as instrument of strategic deterrence. There was no substitute for nuclear weapons to guarantee their respective self-survival, they concluded.

Thus, the rogues' quest for nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles started in the 1980's with close cooperation for both political and strategic-technological reasons. Pakistan, Iran and North Korea were leading the technological effort, while Libya lavishly funded the undertakings through both direct and clandestine venues (including the illegal acquisition of technologies in the West). As well, Chinese technology, radioactive materials and subsystems were provided to Pakistan as part of their special relations and determination to prevent Pakistan from falling completely under US influence. Some China-origin technologies and subsystems were then transferred by Pakistan to the rogue allies - Iran, North Korea and Libya. Meanwhile, North Korean missile technology was shared with Pakistan.

In the aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet Union and the 1990-91 Gulf Crisis, there grew the apprehension of a coming US-led Western suppression of the rogue states as a component of the new era of pax-Americana. In May 1990, Pakistan put the perception to a test - instigating and provoking a nuclear crisis with India that brought Washington into intervening and changing policy solely for fear of nuclear escalation. The success of the Pakistani gambit, coupled with fears of US interventionism in the wake of the Gulf Crisis, led the rogue governments to commit to acquiring doomsday capabilities as measures of last resort protection of the leaders and their regimes. Beijing was the first to identify the significance of these decisions as a long-term strategic mega-trend. Beijing exploited this phenomenon in the early 1990's while starting the Chinese ascent into the realm of global superpower.

By now, the strategic-nuclear programs of Iran and North Korea were increasingly integrated to the point that it became nearly impossible to tell where one national program ended and the other began. Meanwhile, in the aftermath of the Gulf Crisis Iran launched an all-out effort to purchase operational nuclear weapons and military knowhow from the former Soviet Central Asia. Iran succeeded in early-1992 - crossing an irreversible threshold for all the rogue regimes. There followed a joint effort with North Korea to acquire a large number of warheads from an ex-Soviet bunker in Siberia (which contributed to the discovery of the Iran-made \$100 super-notes). Concurrently, the North Koreans focused on launching indigenous production with know-how received from Pakistan as well as Iranian-North Korean espionage in the West. The North Korean progress was



gradually shared with Iran. North Korea reached initial operational capabilities in the early-1990's. Encouraged, North Korea also acquired nuclear technologies needed by Iran in order to develop their own indigenous warheads on the basis of the nuclear infrastructure and knowhow then existing in Iran.

Stymied in its efforts to produce operational nuclear weapons, Iran kept purchasing nuclear weapons and specialty delivery systems during the 1990's. These included SCUD warheads that were sent to North Korea for up-grading as well as anti-shipping cruise missiles. Iran went to great length preparing for a possible nuclear challenge to the enduring US presence in the Persian Gulf and the Arabian Peninsula. Iran shared the acquired weapons, technologies and overall know-how with its partners and especially China in return for self-production capacity and military technologies including ballistic, cruise and underwater missiles.

The widespread dread of the US-led Western assertiveness continued to grow at the onset of the 21st Century. Indeed, the US championed both military offensives - particularly the US and allied invasion of Iraq with the stated objective to disarm Saddam Hussein - and political coercion - particularly the inducement of Muammar Qadhafi to self-disarm in return for being embraced by the West. The question of credible nuclear capabilities loomed high for the rogue leaders. The entire third world was convinced that had Saddam Hussein had "The Bomb" the US would not have dared to invade Iraq and topple him. This conviction would now dominate the rogues' race for "The Bomb".

Hence, the rogue states markedly accelerated the race to mature strategic-military capabilities and indigenous warheads in quantities and qualities far exceeding concurrent Western estimates. By the mid-2000's, these efforts culminated in the establishment of dedicated national command structures, a mature doctrine for nuclear offensives as demonstrated in both Iranian and North Korean command post and communications exercises starting 2004-5, ballistic missile surprise attack capabilities as exercised starting 2006, and jointly-developed warheads (tested in North Korea). Equally important was the Iran-led development of anti-US Navy defenses through denial - from swarming to nuclear anti-carrier strikes - that was shared with North Korea. The concurrent US-led international ignoring of both the build-up and repeated violations under the guise of negotiation processes only emboldened the rogue alliance. Indeed, Iranian and North Korean military documents asserted that senior officers must ignore the reports of deals and understandings with the US-led West.

Obama assumed office promising a profound improvement of relations with the rogue states, and particularly Iran. However, he soon demonstrated political inconsistencies and penchant for liberal populism that scared the prudent and super-cautious rogue leaders. Exploiting Obama's zeal for the grand rapprochement with Iran, Tehran focused on expediting self-production capabilities and improving strategic military capabilities. Pyongyang, that did not enjoy a comparable quest for improving relations, focused on being able to deliver a nuclear strike on the US (from ballistic missiles, to EMP, to nuclear Special Forces). The rogue regimes were shocked but not completely surprised by the US-led R2P attack on Libya leading to the overthrowing and killing of Qadhafi. The leaders resolved to exploit the Obama doctrine in order to consolidate strategic political posture that, in turn, would guarantee the regimes' survival against all threats and odds, their ability to surge regionally, and even to wage vindictive global wars (the Glorious Juche War and the War on Oil) in case of US-led threats to the regimes and their vital interests.

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The reaction of the rogue states to the nuclear agreement with Iran was profoundly different than that of the West.

In Tehran, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei quickly asserted the continuation of Iran's policy. "Whether this [nuclear deal] is approved or disapproved, we won't stop supporting our friends in the region," he said. "The oppressed Palestinian nation, Yemen, Syria, Iraq, Bahrain, the honest resistance fighters in Lebanon and Palestine will enjoy our constant support." Khamenei stressed that Iran intends to persevere with its regional anti-American strategy. "Even after this deal our policy toward the arrogant US will not change," he stated. "US policies in the region are 180 degrees in contrast to Iran's policies." Hence, Iran does not rule out escalation to conflict and even war with the US, Khamenei explained. Should war erupt nevertheless, he warned, the US and its allies would "exit the battle with their heads down."

On 20 July, Iranian senior officials stressed the preeminence of Iran's strategic capabilities over any negotiated compromise. "For me, as a military official, what is more important than anything else ... is the protection and promotion of Iran's defensive abilities," asserted IRGC Chief Mohammad Ali Jafari. "Some points included in the draft [are] clearly contrary to and a violation of the red lines of the Islamic Republic of Iran, specifically of Iran's arms capabilities and will never be accepted by us." Defense Minister Hossein Dehqan elaborated, "Missile-related issues have never been on agenda of the nuclear talks and the Islamic system will resolutely implement its programs in this field." Iran must resolutely pursue its own strategic programs because "independent nations and governments can never trust the US." The next day, Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif concurred that the main outcome of the negotiations is the world's realization that "no one can ever threaten an Iranian." Iran's main objectives were "maintaining Iran's dignity and might, establishing the nuclear program, enrichment and retaining the heavy-water reactor." The agreement will not be honored at all cost. "Reversibility [is] also an option for Iran," Zarif stated.

In Pyongyang, the official media ignored the agreement for the first few days. However, North Korean senior officials pointed out to previous statements of policy as being relevant. Back in late-November 2014, the DPRK's National Defense Commission (NDC) defined a harsh human rights report as a "war declaration" because it mentioned Kim Jong-Un by name. "The dignity [of the Leader] cannot be bartered for anything," the NDC declared. "The US and its followers will be wholly accountable for the unimaginable and catastrophic consequences to be entailed by the frantic 'human rights' racket against the DPRK." The NDC warned that "if a nuclear war breaks out" Seoul would not survive and Japan could "disappear from the world map for good." Then, in mid-March 2015, Washington attempted to restore nuclear negotiations with Pyongyang. At the time, North Korean senior officials rejected the idea off hand - stressing that Pyongyang would rather "continue to pursue nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles" than succumb to a US-led negotiations process.

Pyongyang finally reacted to the Iran agreement on 21 July via a KCNA statement that was distributed by senior officials. "It is not logical to compare our situation with the Iranian nuclear agreement because we are always subjected to provocative US military hostilities, including massive joint military exercises and a grave nuclear threat," the statement said. "We do not have any interest at all in dialogue for unilaterally freezing or giving up our nukes." Hence, Pyongyang demands to be recognized and treated as a world power rather than the object of unacceptable negotiations proposals. North Korea "is a nuclear weapons state both in name and reality, and [just as other] nuclear powers have their own interests, it has interests as a nuclear weapons state," asserted the senior officials.

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Presently, a quarter of a century after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the beginning of pax-Americana, the international posture finally permits the dramatic breakout of the rogues-led oppressed of the third world. It is finally possible to not only start undermining the Western-imposed world order - but also to exact painful revenge for centuries of real and perceived abuses. To assume that the US-led West can negotiate - under the banner of arms control or any other banner - a reversal of this breakout is the heights of folly.

Remarks: Opinions expressed in this contribution are those of the author.

About the Author of this Issue

Yossef Bodansky has been the Director of Research at the International Strategic Studies Association [ISSA], as well as a Senior Editor for the *Defense & Foreign Affairs* group of publications, since 1983. He was the Director of the Congressional Task Force on Terrorism and Unconventional Warfare at the U.S. House of Representatives between 1988 and 2004, and stayed on as a special adviser to Congress till January 2009. In the mid-1980s, he acted as a senior consultant for the U.S. Department of Defense and the Department of State.

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