



# Obama's Iran Gamble Flops

November 4, 2015 **Lawrence J. Haas** *U.S. News and World Report*

**Related Categories:** Islamic Extremism; Iran

Like the optimistic boy in Ronald Reagan's charming quip who searches through pile-high manure in hopes of finding a pony, the Obama administration continues trying to entice the cooperation of Iran on regional issues even in the face of its growing hostility toward the United States.

In his latest gambit on this front, President Barack Obama reversed a longstanding U.S. position and invited the Islamic Republic to participate in global talks over how to bring Syria's horrific civil war to an end.

And, in a tortured effort to build support for this gambit, Obama also reversed his longstanding position that Syrian strongman Bashar Assad – whose murderous response to his country's Arab Spring protests in early 2011 launched a civil war that has left more than 200,000 Syrians dead, millions of people homeless, his nation playing host to a growing array of jihadists, and Europe experiencing a refugee crisis that's overwhelming its political and social systems – must leave office.

Now, U.S. officials say that, as part of a negotiated settlement that isn't on the horizon to begin with, the United States would accept a transition in which Assad remains in office temporarily. This concession seems designed to win the cooperation of both Tehran, Assad's long-time partner in terror sponsoring, and Moscow, his long-time patron and weapons supplier.

Never mind that neither Tehran nor Moscow is signaling that it's willing to dump Assad – or, more broadly, that it wants to resolve Syria's civil war at the bargaining table rather than on the battlefield. In fact, when Deputy Secretary of State Antony Blinken told reporters that Moscow is rethinking its support for Assad due to concerns over its deepening military involvement in Syria, Russian officials said his comments reflect a "perception is more important than reality" ideology."

And never mind, with regard to Tehran, the hostility, dismissiveness and downright contempt with which the Islamic Republic increasingly treats the United States on regional issues of mutual concern.

As he drove July's global agreement with Iran over its nuclear program, Obama directed U.S. negotiators to limit the talks to that program and not extend them to such related issues as Iran's ballistic missile program, terror sponsorship, threats to annihilate Israel or efforts to topple other regional governments.

As he explained more than once, Obama hoped that, in return, Iran would use the more than \$100 billion in sanctions relief to bolster the living standards of its people while also easing its hostility toward the West – enabling Washington to make progress with Tehran on all of those other related issues.

Consider, however, the developments of recent weeks:

Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, the country's ultimate decision-maker, banned further talks between the United States and Iran beyond the nuclear deal – thus undercutting not only Obama but also Iranian President Hassan Rouhani, who had expressed interest in such U.S.-Iranian discussions.

Iran joined with Russia in a major military operation in Syria to bolster Assad (mocking U.S. contentions that only diplomacy will resolve this long-running horror show), conducted a ballistic missile test in violation of United Nations Security Council resolutions and the spirit of the global nuclear agreement, and announced that it will send warships to the Atlantic Ocean.

Then, with key U.S. lawmakers protesting Iran's conviction of Washington Post reporter Jason Rezaian for espionage after imprisoning him more than a year ago, Tehran responded with a poke-in-the-eye arrest of Iranian-American Siamak Namazi, a prominent oil executive who had promoted stronger U.S.-Iranian ties – trashing his home, seizing his computer and launching cyberattacks against his e-mail contacts. That brings to at least four the number of Americans that the regime is holding.

Also mocking Washington's hopes of warmer U.S.-Iranian ties, a majority of Iranian lawmakers voted this week not to abandon the nation's "Death to America" slogan, which is chanted at Friday prayers and public protests, terming it a "symbol of the Islamic Republic and all struggling nations." Khamenei echoed the sentiment, asserting, "America is the main part of the problem in the region, not part of the solution."

Thus, rather than accept Obama's invitation to build on the nuclear agreement and nourish warmer U.S.-Iranian relations, Tehran is preparing to pocket the sanctions relief that the deal will bring – thank you very much – while doubling down on all of its other points of conflict with the U.S.-led West.

For Obama, the lesson is clear: you reap what you sow.