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ON IRAN :HOW DID COMPLIANCE CHANGE OVERNIGHT TO UNACCEPTABILITY?

By Ardeshir Zahedi

On April 18, 2017, U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson wrote to the Speaker of the House Paul Ryan to certify that the administration of President Donald Trump believed that Iran was complying with the P5+1 Nuclear Agreement. However, two days later, he abruptly announced that the U.S. would review its entire Iran policy. He went on to unfairly associate Iran with North Korea and stated that Iran and its people were a threat to world peace and regional security.

It was both amazing and confusing to see that Secretary Tillerson spoke of the failure of strategic policy and of losing patience with Iran.

Can one so easily ignore that the Saudis and their money were behind recent terrorist acts and support for ISIS and other radical groups? If the Secretary had looked more carefully into the history of Iran and the composition and character of the large community of Iranian-Americans in U.S., he would have certainly concluded that Iranians are not terrorists.

America should welcome and not oppose relations with Iran. Iranians have made great contributions to the scientific, academic and economic progress of the U.S.—as well as to other countries of the world.

Secretary Tillerson surely knows that decades of sanctions and suspension of relations with Iran and other nations has only led to further division, misunderstanding, and the suffering of the people of those countries. During my service as Foreign Minister and as a diplomat representing Iran I repeatedly stated at the United Nations and to other international bodies that the age of gunboat diplomacy and colonial attitudes are over; the roars of cannons should cease, and



that international conflicts can and should be resolved through the gentle voices of dialogue.

The wisdom of diplomacy ended four decades of vain, futile, fruitless and devastating conflict with Iran over nuclear projects. The Vienna agreement between participating countries paved the road to reconciliation and peace.

On July 1, 1968, I had the honor on behalf of my beloved homeland, Iran, to negotiate and sign the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, which helped prevent the spread of nuclear arms around the world. Since then, for nearly fifty years, Iran has been bound by international law and the commitments of that treaty.

There is no need for threats, sanctions and the waste of time and energy in eternal quarrels. I have every reason to consider all the sanctions imposed on Iran throughout recent years as baseless and against the letter and principles of international law. These threats and sanctions go against the goals and missions of the United Nations, the United Nations Atomic Energy Commission, and other global organizations. It is regretful that more than 80 million innocent Iranians have suffered as a result. This is much ado about nothing.

Many years ago, in 1946, as a young college student in Utah, I was elected to represent the students in the local Fourth of July parade. On the banner, I carried with me was written: "**Above all Nations is Humanity.**"

Since 1954, beginning with John Foster Dulles, I have had the privilege of working closely and in cordial relationship with 14 Secretaries of State from both parties. Since my exile from Iran after the 1979 Revolution, I have continued my friendly relations with them and their families. In all these long years, this is the first time I have heard such regrettable and ill-advised remarks about my country by the head diplomat of this great nation.

On January 26, a few days after taking office, the Trump administration decreed a temporary ban and restrictions on the entry into the U.S. of people of several nationalities including Iranians. The order completely



disregarded the American constitution. It established discriminatory religious tests and priorities for those wanting to visit.

Iran is a nation with more than two and a half millennia of proud history and peaceful co-existence. It has enriched the world with its culture, literature and philosophy. Immigrants from all nations and creeds have helped build America and today, hundreds of thousands of Americans of Iranian origins live in the U.S. They, like their brothers and sisters around the globe or in their native land, are men and women of talent; scholars; artists; scientists; physicians; industrialists; and successful business people. Americans have admired their work and I am proud to be their compatriot. They are the promise, the future and the hope of our countries.

It is normal that at times, we have had differences of opinion with our American counterparts over certain issues: arms deals, the price of oil, trade, the situation of the Kurds, the Vietnam War, and Palestine. However, in the end, we solved our problems peacefully through goodwill, amiability, constructive approaches and discussions; and remained friends and allies.

I find it difficult to believe what I read in The New York Times. I cannot digest the unpleasant words of the Secretary of State about my noble and beloved Iranian brothers and sisters.

In the first two volumes of my memoirs, I have given examples of numerous cases of world and regional crises which were settled by face to face discussion. Through humility, empathy and dialogue we can convert the greatest conflicts into understanding and peace, and save human lives. When sincerity and goodwill exist, even hardened terrorists can be convinced to lay down their arms and talk. Human beings have hearts and are responsive to love, understanding and generosity of mind.

When I was serving as Ambassador to the Court of Saint James, after the failure of the Tehran oil talks, I had discussions with Mr. Edison of British Petroleum, Howard Page of Standard Oil (now Exxon), and John Loudon of Royal Dutch Shell. Behind the scenes, Foreign Secretary George Brown and Lord Shawcross helped push towards an agreement.



The differences over the price of oil and some misplaced remarks from a participant could have led to a breakdown of negotiations and a new world crisis. But, through the employment of warmth, patience, and goodwill; and after a long sleepless night, the Iranians and our British friends reached a compromise late in the morning. It made everyone happy, brought the East and the West closer and calmed the financial markets. The following day we celebrated the diplomatic triumph by sharing a Christmas lunch of brotherhood at our embassy.

Today, the sad recollections of the tragedy of September 11 and the 1993 World Trade Center bombing are still in our minds. We continue to witness regular atrocities and ominous acts of terror committed by ISIS throughout the world. In cases where allies are involved, the U.S. often turns a kind eye. Through acts of terror, more than 3,000 innocent Americans have been killed on their own soil. Many more have died throughout the rest of the world including the Riyadh and Khobar Tower terror attacks of 2003 and 2004 in Saudi Arabia. Who were these terrorists and who supported them? Where did they come from? The 9/11 hijackers had Saudi passports. They were not Iranians and were not supported by Iran. Why are Iranians, my brothers and sisters, unfairly blamed?

In an editorial in The New York Times on May 3, the editors question the interest of the Secretary of State in the job he had accepted. It was a timely reminder to the reader that to find solutions for the problems of the world in this current turmoil, and in a Middle East in total chaos Mr. Tillerson needs a much broader policy and better communication with the diplomats and senior officers of the State Department. He needs their experience to be able to see and examine a wider range of solutions that a diplomatic approach can always offer.

Threats of war, the brandishing of military might, the use of weapons or sanctions can only lead to greater unrest and more catastrophe in the world. We should all learn from the experiences of Vietnam, Afghanistan, Libya, and Iraq. We should look again into the mirror of history and stop confusing the might of arms which cause only massive destruction with the legitimacy of rights.



Secretary Tillerson has accused Iran of following the footsteps of North Korea. I respect every nation on earth, be it great or small, but I need to remind the secretary that Iran is not North Korea. I share his view expressed in the April 18 letter to Speaker Ryan and not what he said in the regrettable interview two days later.

All the parties to the negotiations, in fact the whole world, admitted that the nuclear agreement had made the world a safer place and had set a good example of diplomacy and political maturity. Secretary Tillerson's change of heart and mind in a matter of hours surprised everyone, especially America's allies, and raised questions about the stability of American diplomacy.

I warmly recall the fifties and sixties when America was the harbinger of peace; defender of the rights of nations; and the liberator of colonies. The U.S. was admired throughout the world and had a special place in our hearts. The path of peace and brotherhood of nations should not have so easily been abandoned. Why should we boast and brag when we can settle our differences with dialogue and patience?

Today, all leaders of world should listen to the humane, clear and courteous call of Pope Francis on his visit to Cairo in April of 2017. The pontiff visited the ancient land with a message of reconciliation, summoning Muslims, Christians and Jews to end cynicism, cruelty and tribalism and inviting the world to "**faith, humility, peace, tolerance, dialogue and tenderness.**" (NYT editorial: "A Humane Papal Message in Egypt," May 2, 2017).

There is no problem, no matter how serious, to which a diplomatic solution cannot be found.

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