



HABEMUS DEAL: IRAN, ITS NUCLEAR PROGRAMME AND THE WORLD

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In the long and arduous process of the negotiations, it is an undeniable fact that the European Union played a very significant role. European diplomacy, represented by the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and foreign ministers of a number of EU member states, played a crucial part in the talks not only by creating a positive climate in the deliberations but also by successfully promoting the idea that a common understanding is a prerequisite for any solution. What is more, as President Obama correctly noted, it is also to be acknowledged that Russia was another important player, particularly in the closing stages of the negotiations, in persuading Tehran to accept a series of demanding conditions, with the aim of ensuring regional security.

Both in terms of its scope and its details, this agreement paves the way for the development of an entirely new international landscape. It is very likely that the accord will encourage the strengthening of a regional coalition of Islamic forces in order to effectively deal with the threat of Sunni fundamentalism and extremism, as in the cases of Daesh and al Qaeda. The West will eventually recognise the absurdity of both continuing to fight against those who have been actually defending it, such as the Kurds or the Iranians, while keeping its support towards forces that in fact provide a threat to it.

An essential component in this effort is to keep on encouraging a direct dialogue between Iran and the main Sunni states in the Middle East, primarily Saudi Arabia and Egypt. In particular, supporting the establishment of an open and continuous channel of communication between Tehran and Riyadh can, on the one hand, help create the conditions for stability in the Gulf region and cohabitation between Sunni and Shiites, and, on the other hand, isolate the most extremist forces in the Islamic world. In the past, Saudis have been too indulgent towards these forces, but these forces now appear to pose an increasing threat to the stability of the country, a country that has been the very cradle of Islam.

Towards a more secure Israel

Despite the Israeli Right's continuous declarations to the opposite, détente between the West and Iran can also create the conditions for a more secure Israel. This is not only due to the strict controls included in the agreement that are expected to be able to impede the capacity of Iran to develop a nuclear weapon. Perhaps more importantly, it is also because the re-establishment of political, trade and cultural relations between Iran and the West will most likely act to strengthen the more open and more democratic elements of the Iranian civil society that prefer a less confrontational regional order.

Unfortunately, the initial strong reaction by the Israeli Right confirms that Jerusalem's hawks are not interested in peace, but are rather keen on maintaining a climate of tension in the region, in order to justify Israel's settlements in the West Bank as well as the stalemate in the peace process with Palestine. We can hope that the accord with Iran will allow the current US Administration – whose foreign policy had for a long time not been particularly brilliant, but which now seems to be moving in the right direction, as evidenced by its recent diplomatic successes like the normalization of



relations with Cuba – to play its part in re-launching the peace initiative between Israel and Palestine. In this effort, the European Union has to be actively involved in order to exert maximum pressure on the Israeli leadership. Following the Iran deal, the issue of securing a just solution to the Palestinian question is of paramount importance, as the lack of any prospect for such a solution has been one of the main forces behind fuelling fundamentalism and extremism in the Arab world, therefore posing a serious threat to regional and European security.

An equally important point to make is that further cooperation with Iran, as is expected to happen following the nuclear agreement, can also play have a beneficial effect on the complex and perilous status quo in Central Asia. On a de facto basis, this cooperation has been up until now de facto tested in the concerted effort to contain the Taliban and fight against drug trafficking from Afghanistan to the Western countries. But now, the new political relations inaugurated by the nuclear agreement in Vienna provide the framework to take this cooperation one step further. This development is of great significance, particularly if one takes into account the fact that it coincides with the gradual withdrawal of NATO forces from Afghanistan.

A new Iran?

Last but not least, the breakthrough that this agreement represents can also have a transforming, positive effect on Iran's domestic situation, favouring those domestic social forces that are more interested in the modernization of the country rather than in fuelling new conflicts in the region. The dynamics behind such an evolution are already in place; indeed, the very fact that a nuclear agreement has become a reality could not have been possible had it not been for the country's recent reformist turn, which began with President Rouhani's victory in the last presidential elections. In this sense, the accord is expected to encourage and strengthen the moderate elements within the Iranian society.

During my visit to Tehran in December 2013, I had the chance to personally verify these dramatic changes in the atmosphere, in particular when delivering a speech at the Institute for Political and International Studies of the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the very same institute that during the Ahmadinejad presidency promoted a conference to deny the Shoah. In my speech, I took the stance of defending Israel's position before an audience that I knew was far from supportive, yet I found the audience to be very much open to listening and discussing. If that was the reality I faced back in 2013, I believe that in the months to come, with the isolation and the difficulties created by the sanctions, which will be gradually lifted, it will be much easier for the reformists within Iran to become the primary political force within the country. I also am of the opinion that it will be one of the main tasks of the European Union to support Iran bring about a change in this direction.

Not least because of its outstanding cultural heritage, its extremely energetic younger generations and its increasingly lively civil society, Iran is one of the most extraordinary countries of the Middle East region. Having achieved an agreement vis-à-vis its nuclear programme, the country now has the potential to look beyond the inflexibility of its Pasdaran, push for a progressive, democratic turn, and, in so doing, become once more one of the main actors on the international scene. Ultimately, one cannot be absolutely certain that the nuclear accord will serve as the catalyst of change in this direction, but this is perhaps the most interesting and important prediction to make for the future.