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Iran negotiations and other nonsense

Steve Bakke March 24,2022

My political orientation is based significantly on what impresses me as common sense. Many actions by our government seem counter intuitive. They don't make sense.

Consider the flawed 2015 Iran nuclear "agreement" which Trump voided in 2018. The current administration is trying to "stumble" back into an agreement that many observers consider worse than the first. It's easy to speculate that the President is using the Ukraine situation to distract the public from the Iran agreement negotiations.

Reports indicate the new agreement will impose fewer limitations than the original. The Revolutionary Guard Corps would have its "terrorist" designations dropped and many terrorist officials would have their sanctions lifted, in exchange for Iran's promise of better behavior in the region. Iran would gain a pathway to nuclear weapons and receive frozen assets worth tens of billions.

Russian negotiator, Mikhail Ulyanov, recently stated: "Iran got much more than it could expect." Many sanctions would be removed, and Iran could enrich uranium which would be placed in the "protective custody" of Russia. What could go wrong with that arrangement? Support for this agreement, requires one to first believe that Iran has rational leadership. It doesn't. I find it hard to reconcile that reality with the fact that the U.S. is still reassuring Israel and others that Iran will never have nuclear weapon capabilities.

Truth can be stranger than fiction. Iran won't negotiate directly with the U.S., so Russia is leading the negotiations. Senator Tom Cotton expressed my own astonishment: "Joe Biden is personally relying on Vladimir Putin to negotiate a bad deal with the terrorists of Iran. This is madness."

The latest development is that Russia has decided to use its leverage and influence in the negotiations to attempt to remove economic sanctions imposed after the Ukraine invasion. Will that demand bring an end to the Iran negotiations? Let's hope so.

My next example deals with the Ukraine invasion and the push for sanctions against Russian oil and gas. That has put Europe in a tough spot. Europe is heavily dependent on Russian fossil fuels and needs a new supply. This could have been an opportunity for the U.S. to become Europe's emergency fossil fuel supplier. However, the U.S. can't deliver on that opportunity.

Our energy independence and production flexibility ended when Biden cancelled U.S. pipeline development, reduced availability of drilling contracts on public lands, and generally made it tougher to produce oil and gas. If the President changed his attitude and rallied with the fossil fuel industry, the U.S. could supply Europe with the oil and gas they need.

However, the President would rather beg for assistance from human rights abusers like Saudi Arabia, and even Iran and Venezuela. Biden's progressive energy policies have forced the U.S. to forfeit energy independence, thereby giving up positive economic and national security advantages. The U.S. lost an opportunity to take leadership and beef up our European alliances which are so critical in this dangerous world.

My final example recalls that early in 2020, soon after the pandemic began gathering steam, we became sensitized, perhaps even startled, when we learned how much we rely on imports from other countries. And when we started shopping for pandemic medical equipment and supplies, like masks and sanitizers, we learned how dependent we are on adversary countries like China.

Here's what China has been supplying the U.S. in significant numbers and proportions of our total requirements: medical devices, medical face masks, protective clothing, penicillin, aspirin, acetaminophen, prescription drug ingredients, and some vitamins. China is now second only to Canada in terms of exporting drugs and biologics to the United States. And China is a dominant provider of generic drugs. I won't even list the household supplies, appliances and hardware coming from China.

Rare-earth metals are essential for technology production, and China controls much of the world supply. The U.S. is obviously one of their biggest customers. U.S. security requires ending China's dominance in supplying the U.S. with these elements.

Despite recent limited attention to supply chain improvements and import diversification, anything less than attacking this with focused determination is irresponsible. Our experience with COVID, and now with the potential for significant military conflict, should have made that abundantly clear.