

Iran: New Year, Same Old Problems

Written by Stephen McGlinchey

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STEPHEN MCGLINCHEY, MAR 23 2014

As Iranians celebrate Nowruz, their New Year, they wake up to the same old problems.

Following news on Iran is rarely boring, but it is somewhat predictable. Last week, three notable things popped up.

Firstly, it appears that Iran is (for whatever reason) building a life size mock-up of a US aircraft carrier, complete with fake fighter jets. The story might seem almost unbelievable ... but not when Iran is involved. Perhaps Iran is venturing into big budget feature films, or perhaps it will be used in a piece of regime propaganda as in similar cases in the near past – such as Iran's supposed stealth fighter, which was really closer to a toy model. We may never know.

Secondly, Iran's Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei used his Nowruz sermon to describe the Holocaust as "an event whose reality is uncertain and, if it happened, it's uncertain how it happened." Yikes. It seems that even as Iran embarks on diplomacy with the P5+1 again over its nuclear programme, the Regime cannot depart from its purposefully inflammatory mindset. Surely any pragmatic leader would at least tone down / edit out such rhetoric during a time of high crisis and high-level diplomacy?

This takes me on to my third point. On 22 March, President Obama received a letter from 23 US Senators (echoing an earlier letter signed by 395 members of Congress). Hilary Clinton also joined the chorus. The letter called for the US to stand firm in negotiations with Iran. For readers who do not know what this means, it refers to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's red line of not allowing Iran to possess full and independent mastery of the nuclear fuel cycle (which would allow the regime to weaponize if it so chose). This echoes the policy position put in place during the Bush administration over a decade ago. According to published intelligence, Iran is within a small number of months at most from crossing that line. Hence, the importance of the current round of negotiations.

What these three topical developments portray is the lack of progress in 'dealing' with the Iran 'problem' (from the 'western' point of view). Sure, following one stream of news reporting may indicate progress as Iran and the P5+1 negotiate seemingly in good spirits. But, at the same time any momentum that is underway is being reversed in other areas as Iran continually behaves in ways that invites more suspicion in an atmosphere where trust is already highly difficult to come by, and political views in the US remains unchanged.

A truly new Iranian year would be one without the Clerical Regime. But, perhaps that's a wish that cannot come true, at least in the years ahead.

On a lighter note, perhaps Obama may find negotiating with Iran a bit easier than negotiating with the Republicans!

About the author:

Dr Stephen McGlinchey is the Editor-in-Chief and Publisher of E-International Relations and Senior Lecturer of International Relations at UWE Bristol. His publications include *Foundations of International Relations* (Bloomsbury

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2022), *International Relations* (2017), *International Relations Theory* (2017) and *US Arms Policies Towards the Shah's Iran* (Routledge 2021, 2014). You can find him on twitter @mcglincheyst or LinkedIn.