

Remaining 'en garde'

Relations with Iran are like a fencing bout. In fencing, the two opponents begin in the protective "en garde" position, and conclude with a salute and handshake. The goal is to reach that end point – that final, polite exchange – in victory. My coach often warns me that until the bout is over, I must not relax my position, but must stay en garde, with bent knees and a ready blade.



Ben Gladstone

The recent interim agreement reached between Iran and Western powers, known as the Joint Action Plan, has been a long time coming.

The inevitable goal of sanctions has always been to eventually reach a peaceable resolution to the nuclear crisis, and efforts by the president,

Commentary

the secretary of state and others have given Western governments an opportunity that should not be missed. It even appears, from the outside at least, that progress is being made.

Nevertheless, this opportunity to end the Iranian nuclear weapons program through diplomatic means must be reinforced by further congressional economic steps. As much as the Joint

nuclear program is fully disabled. According to the World Nuclear Association's curve of "effort" required for the enrichment of weapons-grade uranium, the agreement demands that Iran undo only about 4.62 percent of its current stock of 20 percent-enriched uranium, whereas – according to estimates reported by the BBC – Iran will regain about 16.15 percent of its lost oil revenues from 2012. While uranium enrichment and oil sanctions are not the only issues in the negotiations, they are good indicators of the direction in which talks are heading. If we continue at this rate, Iran will still have a vibrant nuclear weapons program when the final sanctions are lifted.

Furthermore, there is no certainty that the Iranians will continue to compromise, and we must be prepared to continue pressuring Iranian leaders until they do. President Hassan Rouhani was Iran's chief nuclear negotiator in 2003 when he deceived the West into lifting sanctions without effectively delaying his country's nuclear program. He simply advanced the program through means that were not mentioned in the deal. Moreover, Rouhani answers to Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, the same hawkish religious figure under whom former President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad called for the destruction of Israel and the United States. Even though Iran is sending some encour-

Action Plan is a source of excitement, it cannot also become a source of naïveté. In fencing, even when it seems that the point is won, I'm careful not to leave any target area open. I'm ready to retreat and defend myself if need be.

In recent weeks, a significant bipartisan bloc of congressmen has backed legislation supporting new sanctions against Iran. Those congressmen have not done this to undermine the Joint Action Plan, but as a means of strengthening the president's position in negotiations. The plan does not prohibit Congress from passing sanctions legislation; it only requires that the administration not *impose* new sanctions while talks are ongoing. Congressional passage of additional sanctions simply empowers the president to implement such sanctions if negotiations fall apart. In practice, the threat of additional sanctions would encourage Iran to stay at the table while not violating the commitments that have been made under the Joint Action Plan.

The current formula under the Joint Action Plan is unsustainable. Under the agreement, American sanctions will be fully lifted before the Iranian

aging messages right now, we must be prepared for the worst.

As a fencer, I must know my opponents: their dominant hand, their weaknesses, their preferred moves. In that way, when I face them again, I will be able to anticipate, defend and win. We have enough history with the Iranian decision-makers to be able to prepare, anticipate, defend and hopefully, to win.

My coach tells me that if a strategy is working, I shouldn't abandon it until the bout is won or the strategy stops working. As long as the current negotiations are working, they should continue; however, if they fail, the president needs to be empowered by Congress to reimpose even stronger sanctions so that we can undermine Iran's ability to quickly ramp up its nuclear program as it did in 2003. Even though our goal is to end the bout, we must remain en garde until that goal is achieved.

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The nation's relations with Iran can be likened to a fencing bout.

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