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## The Politics of the Prisoner Swap

By Justin Raimondo  
January 17, 2016

Even as advocates of peace in the Middle East celebrate the release of the five American prisoners held in Iran's jails, as well as the release of the Iranians – most of them dual citizens of the US and Iran – either convicted of violating US sanctions or charged with doing so, a dark cloud obscures this sunlit moment. I'm talking about the political response – from both parties – to the prisoner swap, which bodes ill for the future.

Frontrunner Donald Trump simultaneously condemned the prisoner swap while taking credit for it. "So I've been hitting them hard," he said, "and I think I might have had something to do with it." Yes, it's all about *him*: a typical Trumpian response. And yet on the other hand, this was another "bad deal," like – in Trump's view – the nuclear deal:

*"We give them \$150 billion, we give them essentially 22 people – 21, 22 people – but these are people that really did have problems, and we're getting back four people ... That's the way we negotiate. That's the way we negotiate. It's so sad. It's so sad."*

It's not at all surprising that this nonsense is coming from a megalomaniacal lunatic like Trump. What's disturbing, however – although not the least bit surprising – is that a more sophisticated version of this is coming from the frontrunner on the other side of the partisan divide. While paying lip service to the Obama administration's "achievement" in securing the nuclear deal – and now the release of the five Americans held by Tehran – Hillary Clinton has proposed undoing all that by imposing new sanctions on Iran:

*“Hours after the U.S. dropped sanctions on Iran as part of the nuclear deal, Democratic primary front-runner Hillary Clinton called for new sanctions on the nation for its ballistic missile program....*

*“Iran is still violating UN Security Council resolutions with its ballistic missile program, which should be met with new sanctions designations and firm resolve,’ she said. ‘These prisoners were held unjustly by a regime that continues to threaten the peace and security of the Middle East. Another American, Bob Levinson, still isn’t home with his family.’*

*“Clinton said, as president, her policy toward Iran would be to ‘distrust and verify’ ... ‘The treatment of our Navy sailors earlier this week was offensive, including the release of demeaning and provocative videos,’ she added.”*

She wants wider sanctions than those imposed on five Iranian individuals, as well as companies in the United Arab Emirates and China, announced by the US Treasury Department on Sunday – which would effectively torpedo the nuclear deal.

It’s important to note that it isn’t just the Republicans in Congress who are campaigning to nullify the Iran deal: a letter signed by 21 Democratic Senators urges the President to take “unilateral” action against Tehran in response to their recent ballistic missile tests. Their missive was a virtual carbon copy of the one sent by 35 Republican Senators, although the text of the GOP version veered into loony-tunes by asserting that “Iran is developing ICBM capabilities for the sole purpose of enabling delivery of a nuclear weapon to the United States.” Iran is at least a decade away from developing the technology to achieve this – and the nuke deal has defanged whatever potential threat is posed by their missile program.

With Iran’s neighbors, notably Saudi Arabia and Israel, arming to the teeth in order to confront what they view as the Iranian threat, Tehran is unlikely to agree to any restrictions on missile development, which they say – not without justification – is necessary for their own defense. Neither the Saudis nor the Israelis face any restrictions on ballistic missile development.

The UN resolution invoked by Mrs. Clinton was originally tacked on to existing resolutions in order to pressure Iran to sign on to the nuke deal: it would be beyond ironic if it led to the undoing of that historic agreement. Yet Clinton’s statement is sending the Iranians a signal that the next President, no matter who it is, is going to do everything in her or his power to destroy the developing détente between Washington and Tehran.

With the exception of Sen. Rand Paul, all of the other Republicans in the race for the White House are calling for the re-imposition of sanctions. Paul’s response, however, was – as usual – fraught with contradictory waffling. While praising the release of the American prisoners – and the sailors caught in Iranian waters – as “a sign that Iran does want to be part of a community of civilized nations,” he went on to say “I have always been hopeful about the Iranian agreement, I just haven’t been supportive of it.”

Translation: The Israel lobby scares me to death.

The rest of the Republican pack is far worse: Cruz echoed Trump in denouncing the very idea of negotiations with Tehran. Marco Rubio, who is running campaign ads demanding that the US stop spying on Israel – without mentioning their aggressive spying on us – tried to outdo his Republican rivals by maintaining that “this tells us everything we need to know about the Iranians – that they take people hostage in order to gain concessions.” That’s quite a stretch, since some of the prisoners had been languishing in Iranian jails for years, well before the nuke deal was a glimmer in the Obama administration’s eye.

In the Bizarro World of the Republican party, the success of diplomatic efforts to rein in Iran is cited as evidence of Tehran’s alleged implacability. What explains this skewed logic is the fact that these candidates are all faithfully echoing the Israeli position that peace with Iran is impossible – and undesirable in any case.

Mrs. Clinton doesn’t go quite that far: she claims it’s desirable, and yet continues to advocate policies that would make it well nigh impossible. Is it a coincidence that the diplomatic process leading to the Iran deal didn’t begin to show results until Hillary left the State Department?

The Iran deal – and the subsequent prisoner swap – is the Obama administration’s greatest diplomatic achievement, and we here at Antiwar.com – who have not been fans of this President – must give credit where it is due. Obama defied the two most powerful foreign lobbyists in Washington – the Israelis and the Saudis – and won.

Iran has released their hostages – now if only Israel would release the US Congress, we’ll be home free.