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Why did France toss a wrench in the Iran nuclear talks?

By BENJAMIN WEINTHAL JERUSALEM POST
CORRESPONDENT
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France's resistance to a perceived woefully inadequate deal prompted surprise among Iran observers and pure rage from Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

BERLIN – France blocked an agreement on Sunday to curb Iran's nuclear program because, to cite French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius, it did not want to be part of a con game that would allow Tehran to continue with its illicit atomic program.

France's resistance to a perceived woefully inadequate deal prompted surprise among Iran observers and pure rage from Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who described Paris on his Twitter feed as "openly hostile" toward Iran and "inept." Al Jazeera reported that "diplomats at the talks said the last-minute objections [from France] came as a surprise and complicated the chances of agreement."

However, did France, in fact, ambush Iran's clerical regime and veteran Iran watchers? According to Middle East experts in the US and Israel, France's policy is far from shocking and part and parcel of its security-conscious approach to Iran's destabilizing foreign policy.

Speaking from Washington to *The Jerusalem Post*, Michael Doran, a senior fellow at the Saban Center for Middle East Policy at the Brookings Institution, said that the French "take Iran very seriously" and their "diplomats have a lot of Iranian expertise." They "love Iranian culture" but realize "they have to take an aggressive position when negotiating with them."

Doran, who served as US deputy assistant secretary of defense and a senior director at the National Security Council during the George W. Bush presidency, said France demands the elimination of Iranian uranium stockpiles and the closure of its Arak nuclear facility. "Will the French hang tough on this?" asked Doran.

The BBC's State Department correspondent Kim Ghattas wrote on Sunday, "French diplomats have told me in recent years they believed the Obama administration was willing to concede too much too soon."

The French-born Israeli political scientist Dr. Emmanuel Navon told the *Post* that France sees "the Americans and Germans as giving too much to Iran." He cited French President François Hollande's interventionist foreign policy. He is "not a pacifist" and showed his willingness to use "military force" in Mali to stop an al-Qaida insurgency earlier this year.

Navon, the director of the political science and communications department at the Jerusalem Orthodox College, and teacher of International Relations at Tel Aviv University and at the Interdisciplinary Center Herzliya, said France sees an agreement that "must remove the threat of Iran reaching military capability" with respect to its nuclear program.

Navon pointed to Hollande's willingness to confront Iran's proxy – the regime of President Bashar Assad in Syria, which was a French Mandate following the collapse of the Ottoman Empire – with military force.

He “gave the orders to shoot” but US President Barack Obama pulled the plug on missile strikes and deferred the dispute to Congress for approval.

Richard Landes, a distinguished historian at Boston University with an expertise in French history, told the *Post*, “The fact is that his [Hollande] administration has proven to be tougher than [former French president Nicolas] Sarkozy.”

Landes noted that Hollande rapidly made the decision to go into Mali. Commentators “did not anticipate this kind of backbone.”

The perceived lack of US tenaciousness and seriousness toward Iran’s drive to build a nuclear weapons device was captured in the US media.

Writing on the blog of the conservative *The Weekly Standard* website, Daniel Halper titled his blog entry: French Socialist Administration Tougher on Iran than Obama Administration. Traditionally, France showed reluctance to pick fights in the Middle East over security and promotion of democracy.

But, unsurprisingly, its policy toward Iran remains consistently robust. The alliance of Iran with Assad and Hezbollah to decimate Syria has added greater urgency to France’s skepticism toward Tehran’s nuclear program.

Benjamin Weinthal is the Post’s European affairs correspondent and a fellow at The Foundation for Defense of Democracies.



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