

## Iran ignores sanctions, so action must start

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THE announcement by the Iranian regime that its nuclear programme is advancing should sound loud alarms as the time for decisions on the Iranian nuclear crisis grows ever closer. Yet, Barack Obama's US administration continues to lag in responding while seemingly banking on sanctions to bring the ayatollahs around.

But what if sanctions do not succeed? Should the world accept a nuclear armed Iran? Let's start with basics. The world community agrees that Iran cannot be allowed to develop nuclear weapon capabilities. Yet, all indications are that this is Tehran's ultimate objective.

When Obama became president, a new approach towards Iran was one of the cornerstones of the administration's foreign policy, and he cannot be faulted for wanting to test engagement once again. But the US gave this policy too much time – time that Iran used to continue to develop its nuclear capability. Thus, Iran today is much closer to obtaining a nuclear bomb than it was when Obama took office.

One clear lesson is that oppressive regimes view diplomacy as a one-way street. They accept concessions and then stall when asked to reciprocate. Meanwhile, they continue their nefarious behaviour.

A prime example of this lesson is the issue of the principal Iranian opposition movement, the People's Mojahedin Organisation of Iran (PMOI/MEK).

It was branded a foreign terrorist organisation in the 1990s by the State Department in an effort to induce a more "moderate" behaviour by the Iranian regime. That moderation never occurred, but the MEK remained shackled, even though there is not a scintilla of evidence connecting the MEK to terrorism.

After the MEK succeeded in being delisted by the UK and EU, it took its case to the District of Columbia Court of Appeals, which ruled in its favour and asked the State Department to provide facts to show that the MEK had not been denied due process. No facts have been provided because there are no facts to provide.

In a rare bipartisan initiative, more than 100 members of Congress urged Secretary of State Hillary Clinton to delist the MEK. They have been joined by dozens of senior national security officials of the past four administrations.

The administration responds only that the situation is under review. Meanwhile, the mullahs keep getting closer to acquiring the bomb, which would be a real game-changer.

At present, the Iranian regime rules through domination and suppression; it is devoid of any popularity at home and any relaxation of that control will cause the regime to fail.

That is exactly why the mullahs are paranoid about Camp Ashraf in Iraq, where 3,400 members of the MEK have been residing for the past 25 years. The mullahs are bent on annihilating the organised resistance at any cost, especially at Ashraf because it stands as a beacon of resistance and hope for the Iranian population and the Iranian diaspora.

Beyond the political considerations, the US has a moral and legal obligation to protect Ashraf residents with whom the US entered into an agreement at the end of the Iraq war to protect them. But since it turned the camp over to the Iraqi government in 2009, the people there have lived in peril.

The Iraqi government has staged violent raids on the camp twice at the behest of Tehran mullahs, killing dozens and wounding hundreds of defenceless citizens. The residents have agreed to move to Camp Liberty, a former US military base near Baghdad airport, so long as they are protected and placed in a location that provides them with the human dignity they deserve.

But that is not what the Iraqis have in mind. Camp Liberty is now a virtual prison where residents will apparently be denied access to lawyers, to their own property and without freedom to leave that camp.

Now that we are in a new era in the Middle East, an era in which people who have gained freedom decide the future of their countries, the US and the international community need to support the Iranian people's desire to attain this right.

That would be done by siding with Iranian resistance as it strives to bring about much needed change in Iran. That would be the ultimate solution to the Iranian nuclear dilemma as well. A free Iran would not seek nuclear weapons, which would be good news for the world community. The only losers would be the oppressive dictators in Tehran.