
Iranians: Geneva is 'Treaty of Hodaybiyyah'



by Clare M. Lopez
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Iranian President Hassan Rouhani says the deal brokered in late November 2013 in Geneva between the P5+1 allows Iran to "[continue its \[nuclear\] enrichment](#)" activities. U.S. Secretary of State [John Kerry](#) says that the deal does not recognize a "right to enrich." (Here's the text of the so-called "Joint Plan of Action" - <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/uploads/Documents/other/IranP5plus1jointplanofaction131124en.pdf> - the Iranians are right.)

President Obama hailed the Geneva agreement as the most "[significant and tangible](#)" progress to date toward ensuring that Iran "[cannot build a nuclear weapon](#)." Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Marzieh Afkham said "[There is no treaty and no pact](#)." (It's a "[letter of intent](#)," say the Iranians.) For his part, the Iranian negotiator, [Foreign Minister Javad Zarif](#), exulted that the document explicitly recognized the inclusion of an Iranian enrichment program in the final deal (it does).

There's at least one major point of agreement, however, for both Americans and Iranians (although it's doubtful the U.S. negotiating team actually understands what it means). That single point of agreement is about the temporary nature of the pact/letter/Joint Plan of Action: first it was going to be for six months, then it would be for six months after a few more details were worked out, then the technical discussions in Vienna collapsed on 11 December, then Secretary Kerry said the [talks would continue](#) in a few days. And then Mohammad Sadeq Al-Hosseini, formerly a political advisor to Iranian President Khatami and now a TV commentator, clarified everything.

"[This is the Treaty of Hodaybiyya in Geneva](#)," he said, speaking on Syrian News TV on 11 December 2013. Although it is doubtful that any of Kerry's advisers is even remotely familiar with this key episode in the accounts about Muhammad and the early Muslims, the Center for Security Policy explained the story in its 2010 book, "[Shariah: The Threat to America](#)." The context is about situations in which Muslim forces might lawfully enter into a treaty or truce with the enemy. With troubling ramifications for current day negotiations, those situations demonstrate the centrality and importance of deceit in any agreement between Muslims and infidels. As it is recounted, in the year 628 CE, Muhammad (whose forces already controlled Medina) agreed to a 10-year truce with the pagan Quraysh tribe of Mecca, primarily because he realized that his forces were not strong enough to take the city at the time. Islamic doctrine in fact forbids Muslims from entering into a jihad or battle without the reasonable certainty of being able to prevail. In such cases, as with Muhammad, Muslims are permitted to enter into a temporary ceasefire or *hudna*, with the proviso that no such truce may exceed 10 years (because that's the length of the agreement Muhammad signed). And so, Muhammad agreed to the Treaty of Hodaybiyyah. But just two years later, in 630 CE, now with some 10,000 fighters under his command, Muhammad broke the

treaty and marched into Mecca.

The authoritative *ahadith* of Bukhari provide context for Muhammad's actions: "War is deceit," is a saying Bukhari attributes to Muhammad (52:269). Another says "By Allah, and Allah willing, if I take an oath and later find something else better than that, then I do what is better and expiate my oath." (Bukhari: V7B67N427) [Yasser Arafat](#), head of the jihadist Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), provided one of the clearest examples in modern times for how this works. He understood his Islamic obligations well, as demonstrated by his repeated public references to the Treaty of Hudaibiyyah following the signing of the Oslo Accords in 1993. And while Western political leaders missed the significance entirely, Arafat's Arabic-speaking audiences understood perfectly that his Camp David agreement meant nothing more than a temporary *hudna* or ceasefire that would give the PLO the time it needed to build up its forces to renew the jihad against Israel...which is exactly what happened.

The [shariah \(Islamic Law\)](#) in general discourages Muslim forces from making a truce, citing Qur'anic verse 47:35, which says, "So do not be fainthearted and call for peace, when it is you who are the uppermost." The main reason Islamic forces are to avoid ceasefires, treaties and the like is that "[it entails the nonperformance of jihad, whether globally or in a given locality...](#)" Of course, the Iranians know all of this doctrine and history very well. The country's constitution, in fact, dedicates its armed forces (the Army and the IRGC-Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps) to "[the ideological mission of jihad in the way of Allah...](#)" So, when a senior political commentator such as Mohammad Sadeq Al-Hosseini, who lives and works in Tehran, appears on an international TV broadcast interview and refers to the agreement (however tentative) reached by the P5+1 and Iran in Geneva as a "[Treaty of Hudaibiyya](#)," we may be sure that he has chosen his words carefully. We also may be fairly certain that the Iranian regime and its sly and smiling Foreign Minister, Javad Zarif, at least tacitly agree with Al-Hosseini's characterization.

We can only hope that someone tells senior Western leaders what the reference means, because there is no doubt that the Muslim world, especially the Sunni Muslim world, got it immediately. The Saudi royal family in particular clearly is under no illusions about Iran's nuclear weapons ambitions-and is deeply alarmed, as much over the millennialist zeal of the arch rival Shi'ite Persians as the perceived perfidy of an American administration that has just switched sides, leaving Riyadh scrambling to cobble together a new defense policy. Thus the deliberate leaks about possible [discussions with Pakistan](#) concerning a nuclear weapons capability for the Saudis and the astonishing sight of a senior member of the Saudi royal family [publicly shaking hands](#) with a top Israeli diplomat.

As Ilan Berman notes in a 17 December 2013 piece entitled "[The Real Cost of Geneva](#)," the balance of power in the Middle East is shifting, even before Iran has demonstrated a deliverable nuclear weapons capability. The U.S. pivot towards the Shi'ite jihadis (Iranians and Hizballah) leaves erstwhile allies among the Sunni jihadis (Saudi royals) aghast. Recognizing the new rising "strong horse" in the region, smaller Sunni sheikhdoms like the [United Arab Emirates](#) already are seeking to normalize relations with Tehran. All trends are not towards stability, however. The collapse of American leadership and acquiescence to Iranian hegemony in the region instead are encouraging Israel and others to pursue their own defense strategies in ways that soon could prove deeply destabilizing.

Whether or not the nuclear negotiations with Iran yield clear results in coming weeks or drag out inconclusively for months or more, the U.S. already has signaled its willingness to allow (and even facilitate) a dangerous realignment of power in the Middle East that favors the Shi'ite axis over the Sunni

one. Reactions and counter-reactions already have been set in motion that could change the geo-strategic landscape, not just in the region, but globally. The Iranian commentator Mohammad Sadeq Al-Hosseini may have been projecting from a distinctly Shi'ite perspective, but as the Iranians see it, first comes the Treaty of Hdaybiyyah in Geneva, and then "[it will be followed by a conquest of Mecca.](#)"

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