

Edmonton Journal/Roche on Iran

By Douglas Roche

US President Obama said it's a "good deal." Iran President Rouhani pledged his nation "will abide by its commitments." Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu accused Iran of "congenital cheating." Russia's foreign minister Sergey Lavrov, said, "The result is encouraging."

Around the world, governments are reacting to the framework nuclear deal that, when completed in three months, will close the pathway to Iran developing a nuclear weapon. Despite the rejectionists, the weight of world opinion appears to be supporting the deal, which will center on the lifting of economic sanctions against Iran once the International Atomic Energy Agency certifies that Iran's reduced nuclear program is not making a nuclear weapon.

The Canadian government, which maintains skepticism about all things Iran, is contributing \$3 million to support the IAEA's efforts to monitor Iranian compliance.

Ronald Regan used to say about arms control agreements: "Trust but Verify." There doesn't seem to be any trust these days, but at least keeping a daily inspection over the whole of the nuclear supply system in Iran will provide some positive reassurance.

The nuclear spotlight will remain on Iran for some time. But to understand the potential for world disaster that nuclear weapons represent, we have to stand back and look at the wider scene.

Nine countries (the US, Russia, China, the UK, France, India, Pakistan, North Korea, and Israel) possess 16,300 nuclear weapons, with the US and Russia accounting for about 95 percent of these arsenals. All these nations are modernizing their nuclear systems. Three-quarters of the states at the UN have voted to commence comprehensive negotiations for the elimination of nuclear weapons. But the big powers resist such negotiations because nuclear weapons have become the currency of power.

Strong efforts are under way now, by both governments and civil society, to make the public realize the “catastrophic humanitarian consequences” of the use of even one nuclear weapon. In fact, in 2013, Iran’s President Rouhani, speaking at the United Nations on behalf of the 120-nation Non-Aligned Movement, proposed early commencement on a comprehensive convention on nuclear weapons, prohibiting their possession, development and use or threat of use. He said: “Nuclear weapons have no place in Iran’s security and defence doctrine and contradict our fundamental religious and ethical convictions.”

Rouhani has committed Iran to join in a world effort to rid the world of nuclear weapons, but Western countries have ignored this statement. When President Obama expressed the same goal in 2009, he won the Nobel Peace Prize. Poisoned political and diplomatic relationships in the world today are preventing any forward movement.

The new Iran deal should help us to shift the focus to the Non-Proliferation Treaty, the largest (190 states) arms control agreement in the world, which was designed not only to stop the spread of nuclear weapons

but to negotiate their complete elimination. The 45-year-old treaty will undergo a quinquennial review later this month at the UN.

We should concentrate on two of the NPT's provisions: Article IV says states have an "inalienable right" to develop nuclear energy for peaceful purposes, which has been Iran's claim throughout its long dispute with the West. And Article VI commits all parties to "pursue negotiations in good faith" for nuclear disarmament, an obligation which has been upheld unanimously by the International Court of Justice.

Neither Iran nor any other country should obtain a nuclear weapon. But how do we expect to obtain global security if there is one law for the powerful and another for the weak? The great lesson of our time is that we must have common security to ensure the world is safe for all.

We can only get there through a vision that embraces dialogue and diplomacy. If President Rouhani is sincere in wanting a comprehensive treaty prohibiting any state from possessing nuclear weapons, why not test this by starting a process for a legal agreement?

Unfortunately, Middle East politics stands in the way of global security. Israel has always said it wants a comprehensive peace deal in the Middle East before it will discuss nuclear weapons. But the Iran-Israel hatreds are reducing the chances of both a comprehensive peace deal in the Middle East and a treaty to abolish all nuclear weapons. Maybe the successful implementation of the new Iran deal will help us all to lift our sights.

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