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In the very near future, the United States and its partners may demand that Iran suspend its uranium-enrichment program. If Iran refuses to do so, the United States might try to sponsor a United Nations Security Council resolution imposing tougher sanctions upon Iran. Earlier attempts by the United States met with Chinese and Russian opposition. The question is will Russia respond favorably to U.S. wishes and join the call for tougher sanctions? Will the Moscow summit and the process of “resetting” U.S.–Russian relations pass this test?

In my opinion, before Joe Biden’s visit to Georgia and Ukraine and prior to his caddish, offensive and condescending remarks concerning Russia in his interview with the *Wall Street Journal*, one could still hope that under certain conditions some progress was feasible. But after such scandalous behavior by the U.S. vice president, any sort of progress on the sanctions front is highly unlikely.

It is imperative that our U.S. partners understand that maintaining friendly, mutually advantageous relations with Iran meets the strategic interests of the Russian state. Russia and Iran are serious trade and economic partners. Iran is a market for Russian high-technology products. Russia attaches great significance to keeping its experts, workforce and technologies in the area of nuclear energy. And Iran is a customer since its leadership intends to continue the construction of nuclear power plants. Besides, Iran is a market for Russian military technology. Finally, Iran is a neighboring country and is not trying to cause any problems for Russia either in the Caucasus or Central Asia, which it could have done by stoking the Chechen conflict. In order to have Russia give up all the aforementioned aspects of its relationship with Iran, the United States has to come up with something that would outweigh everything that the current Russian-Iranian relations have to offer.

Can the United States offer anything that would make Russia walk that extra mile toward fulfilling American wishes? America must give in order to receive, and thus far the relationship feels very one-sided.

At last month's Moscow summit, Russia unilaterally met the requests of the United States and opened its territory for the transport of military supplies to Afghanistan, which is of great importance for supporting U.S. troops. It appears that American leaders, or at least some of them, took this step for granted instead of seeing it as a goodwill gesture aimed at showing the United States that Russia is in fact prepared to reset and improve the relationship, and take American concerns into account.

This does not mean, however, that Russia is ready to do this ad infinitum and without receiving something in return. To get Russian help on Iran, it is no longer enough to give hollow promises that there will be no NATO expansion to the east, that missile-defense systems will not be deployed in the Czech Republic and Poland, that the Georgian army will not be rearmed, that there will be no blunt and unceremonious interference in the internal affairs of the former Soviet republics, and that there will be no support of political forces that are hostile to Russia.

In reality, one really needs to understand that if Russia makes a step toward fulfilling American wishes pertaining to Iran, it will have to be duly compensated. This is especially important because if Moscow backs punitive measures against Tehran, Russia may end up having a hostile state at its border that has considerable potential to destabilize Moscow's neighbors, and even Russia itself (there are a great number of Muslims living in the Northern Caucasus and in the Volga River area). The Russian leadership certainly sees a hypocrisy in the demands by the United States and the West that Russia support them against Iran, and then after those decisions are taken with Russia's participation, the West quickly bids adieu to the Kremlin and recommences all those activities in Russia's near abroad that so frustrate Moscow.

And there are those American politicians and analysts who see no reason for quid pro quo and argue that the United States should grant no concessions to Russia if it changes its Iran policy. They hold that the prospect of Iran becoming a nuclear power scares Russia so much that it is going to join America sooner or later. This runs absolutely counter to reality. Today, as in the near future, there is not a single problem between Russia and Iran that could generate a conflict between them. Recent decades not only saw the development of mutually beneficial Russian-Iranian economic relations, as well as closer military ties and technical cooperation, but also witnessed Russian-Iranian cooperation in reestablishing peace and stability in Tajikistan during the civil strife, and joint efforts to counteract the Taliban and provide support to the Northern Alliance. Given this close relationship, Russia is probably the last country in the world against which Iran would want to use nuclear weapons if it does get them.

If the United States (and maybe Israel) take the unilateral route and make preventive strikes against Iran, it is quite obvious to any man in the street that Russia will come out on top. In this scenario, America would bypass the UN Security Council and stir up the ire of the entire Muslim world, which would force even moderate Muslim countries to assume a tough stance against the United States. Furthermore, Iran can unleash large-scale terrorist activity against America and its allies, which would destabilize the situation in the Middle East and cause an inevitable immediate upturn in oil prices. The United States would be even more heavily mired in the confrontation with the Islamic world, robbing it of huge resources, energy and opportunities. The upsurge in oil prices would make Russia a major winner, giving it the necessary financial resources to restructure its economy and allow for further economic development and increases in living standards.

Our American partners would do well to understand that, for Russia, a change of position on Iran is a truly momentous issue which requires a careful balancing of all the risks. While balancing these risks, every state has the right to know what it is getting in return. It is unclear what Russia would receive if it changed its stance—whether it would be further contemptuous comments from American leaders, or real decisions on inviting Russia to join NATO, on extending NATO Article 5 status to Russia, and more intense economic, military, and political cooperation between the United States and Russia on a number of other important issues besides Iran. Only a prospect of very serious, far-reaching, and profound relations between America and Russia will allow the Russian leadership to change its attitude toward Iran and lean more toward helping the United States.

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