

## Republicans, Democrats alike still level threats at Iran

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The 2015 Iran nuclear deal should have curbed the longstanding bellicose rhetoric coming from Republican and Democratic political leaders toward the Muslim country. Signed by Iran and six other nations (including the US) and ratified by the United Nations Security Council, the comprehensive agreement contains strict provisions limiting Iran's nuclear capabilities to well below the threshold necessary to develop atomic weapons and subjects Iran to the most rigorous inspection regime in history. The result has been dramatically reduced regional tensions and the elimination of any potential threat to US national security.

Despite this, the Republican and Democratic platforms adopted at their respective conventions last month are both more belligerent toward Iran than they were four years ago.

The Republican platform claims that the U.N.-sponsored and -endorsed treaty was nothing more than "a personal agreement between the President and his negotiating partners and non-binding on the next president." Despite making it technologically impossible to weaponize Iran's fissionable material, the platform instead claims that the agreement has somehow enabled Iran to continue to "develop a nuclear weapon."

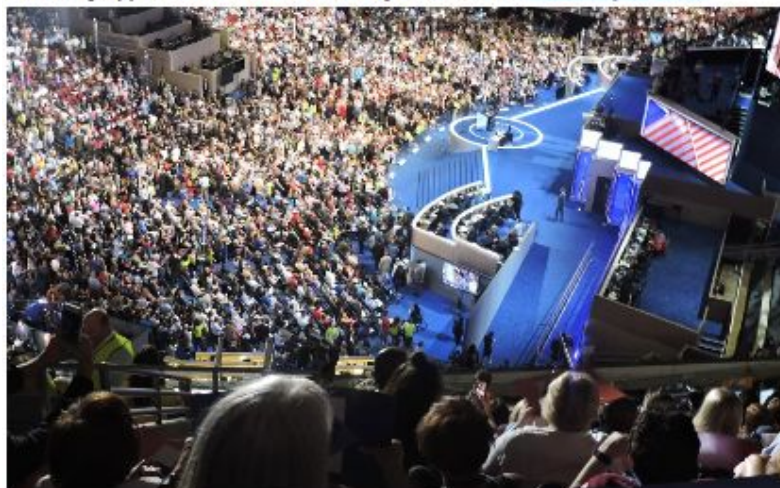
It even blames the treaty for somehow allowing Iran to "sponsor terrorism across the region," "abuse the basic human rights of its citizens" and other crimes that were not addressed in the agreement.

Insisting that, despite the agreement, Iran is somehow "close to having" nuclear weapons and therefore "gravely threatens our security, our interests, and the survival of our friends," the platform insists that a Republican president "must retain all options" in dealing with Iran.

Unlike the Republicans, the Democratic platform does endorse the nuclear deal. However, it declares that a Democratic president "will not hesitate to take military action" if Iran violates the agreement.

The promise to "not hesitate" to launch what would inevitably be a major war with disastrous consequences is disturbing on a number of levels. Among these is the fact that in the unlikely event Iran decided to violate the agreement, it would take Iranians at least a few years to rebuild their nuclear program to the point where they could develop even a single nuclear weapon, thereby allowing plenty of time for the international community to apply nonmilitary pressures to force the regime to resume its compliance.

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Delegates to the Democratic National Convention and other attendees can be seen July 26 at the Wells Fargo Center in Philadelphia. (CNS/Elizabeth Evans)

U.N. Security Council Resolution 2231, which codifies the agreement, was adopted under Article 41 of the U.N. Charter, which empowers the Security Council to "decide what measures not involving the use of armed force are to be employed to give effect to its decisions." This is distinct from Article 42, which allows for military force only if nonmilitary means "have proved to be inadequate" and only if the Security Council specifically authorized it.

Therefore, the Democrats' insistence that the United States should "not hesitate to take military action if Iran violates the agreement," like the Republicans' promise to "retain all options" regarding Iran, is nothing short of rejection of U.S. obligations under the United Nations Charter.

Hillary Clinton's insistence that the 2016 Democratic Party platform include the threat to unilaterally resort to military action against Iran in response to potential violations of limits on its nuclear program bears disturbing parallels to her insistence that the United States had the right to unilaterally resort to military action against Iraq due to its alleged violations of limits on its nuclear program.

Indeed, during the 2008 presidential campaign, she accused Barack Obama of being "naive" and "irresponsible" for wanting to engage with Iran diplomatically. According to a story in *Time* magazine on her tenure as secretary of state, Obama administration officials noted how she was "skeptical of diplomacy with Iran, and firmly opposed to talk of a 'containment' policy that would be an alternative to military action should negotiations with Tehran fail."

While there are many legitimate criticisms of Iran's reactionary theocratic regime, the two party platforms appear to go overboard with their accusations. For example, Iran is the only country mentioned by name in the Republican platform as being a "sponsor" of "Islamic terrorism," despite the fact the majority of such groups are Salafist and strongly oppose the Iranian regime. Iran has been directly involved in fighting such groups in Syria, Iraq and elsewhere.

In a similar manner, the Democratic platform states that "Iran is the leading state sponsor of terrorism," though many analysts would argue that Saudi Arabia plays a more significant role in that regard. (Ironically, the Democratic platform calls for the United States to "maintain our robust security cooperation" with Persian Gulf countries, such as Saudi Arabia.)

The Democratic platform also blames Iran for its alleged "support for terrorist groups like Hamas" and pledges to "push back" against such actions. However, despite some limited aid to Hamas for a short period several years ago, the Iranians have since severed their ties due to some major policy differences, including Hamas' support for Islamist rebels fighting the Iranian-backed regime in Syria. (In yet another irony for the Democratic platform, the Persian Gulf country of Qatar is currently the major foreign supporter for Hamas.)

There are also some other dubious charges, such as claiming the regime denies the Nazi genocide of the Jews, which -- while alleged by a former Iranian president -- has never been government policy, and insisting that Iran "has its fingerprints on almost every conflict in the Middle East." (The platform fails to note that in the two regional conflicts of most critical importance to the United States -- Iraq and Afghanistan -- the Iranians have been on the same side as the United States.)

It is striking how such threats and hyperbolic language were largely absent from the 2012 Democratic platform, which emphasized the need for diplomacy, while the Republican platform was somewhat less belligerent.

Historically, successful arms control agreements have resulted in lessening rather than escalating such hostile rhetoric. That does not seem to be the case, however, during this election year.

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