

Why the Right Killed Disabled Treaty

Besides rejecting many aspects of science, the American Right despises the idea of international agreements as well, considering them infringements on U.S. "sovereignty." That attitude among GOP senators turned back a global agreement on protecting the disabled, notes ex-CIA analyst Paul R. Pillar.

By Paul R. Pillar

Former Senator Bob Dole, 89 years old, returned this week to the floor of the chamber where he was for many years one of the leading Republicans. He also, of course, had twice represented his party on a national ticket as the nominee for vice president and then for president.

Infirm of late and just recently checked out of Walter Reed hospital, Dole was in a wheelchair pushed by his wife Elizabeth, also a former senator. He came back to the Senate to show his support for ratification of a multilateral treaty banning discrimination against people with disabilities.

Dole demonstrated in his own career what a talented person with a disability can do. He lacked one of the common tools of a politician: a handshake with the right arm, an arm that in Dole's case had been rendered useless by a severe injury sustained in combat in World War II.

Sen. John Kerry, as chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, was the principal advocate of the treaty in the Senate debate. In his speech he appealed to his colleagues, "Don't let Senator Bob Dole down." It wasn't enough.

One of those who lobbied against ratification was another former senator, one whose career has been far less accomplished and distinguished than Dole's. Rick Santorum argued that somehow the treaty would not let American parents home-school their kids. The vote on ratification was 61 in favor and 38 against, falling short of the two-thirds needed for ratification.

The opposition to this treaty reflected a generic opposition on the right that extends as well to other broadly-adopted international conventions, to anything having to do with the United Nations, often to treaties in general, and even to most international cooperation in general.

Those with this mindset often speak about not wanting to compromise U.S. "sovereignty." Suspicions were voiced that the disabilities treaty would mean U.N. bureaucrats making decisions about the needs of American children. One could almost hear the black helicopters hovering overhead.

Some of the treaty's opponents also argued that because countries we don't like, and which we like to assume are insincere and hypocritical regarding their international obligations, such as Iran and Syria have signed the treaty, for the United States to adhere to the treaty might imply that we approve of how those countries treat their disabled citizens.

That's a strange approach, one that would appear to give the disliked countries a veto over which international agreements the United States does and does not sign on to itself. Moreover, if we regard the United States as sincere in what it says and in what it signs up to internationally, then the message being sent by rejecting a treaty is that the United States rejects the principles embodied in the document.

Sovereignty does not mean handcuffing one's own diplomacy or eschewing international commitments. It instead means a nation acting freely and not being told by another country what to do. Signing and ratifying a treaty are themselves acts of sovereignty. And as [John Ikenberry has argued](#), undertaking commitments through international institutions is one of the best ways through which even a superpower can extend and perpetuate its global influence.

Advocates of ratification patiently explained that the convention on disabilities merely applies to other nations what are already legal obligations in the United States under the Americans With Disabilities Act. Rejection therefore has little practical effect on the United States, unlike with, say, the Law of the Sea Convention, which 163 other states have already signed and ratified but the United States has not.

The Senate, however, has missed a chance, which neoconservatives in particular ought to have welcomed, to say something positive about the rest of the world accepting values that Americans have already expressed in their own laws.

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Understanding the 'Crazy' Iranians

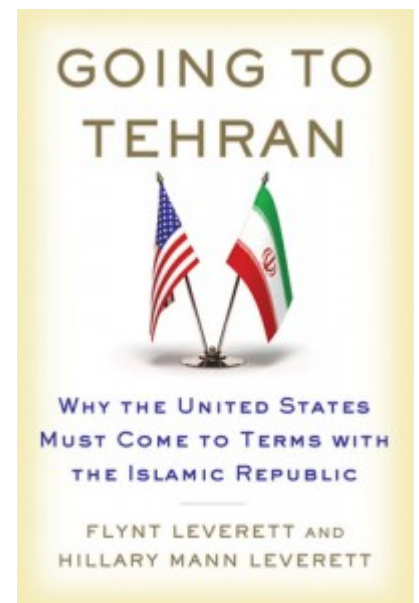
For more than three decades, many Americans have viewed Iran through the lens of the painful hostage crisis of 1979-81, seeing the Islamic Republic as irrational and dismissive of international law. But the fuller story is more complicated

and less frightening, write Flynt and Hillary Mann Leverett.

By Flynt Leverett and Hillary Mann Leverett

One of the main themes in our new book, *Going to Tehran: Why the United States Must Come to Terms with the Islamic Republic of Iran*, is that America's Iran debate is fundamentally distorted by a series of myths, namely, that the Islamic Republic is irrational, illegitimate, and can easily be isolated in its regional environment and, ultimately, undermined by the United States.

An excerpt in *Harper's* (see [here](#)), entitled "The Mad Mullah Myth: The Dangers of Misunderstanding Iran's Strategy," lays out some of the main points in our critique of the irrationality myth. It opens by noting that:



"In the more than thirty years since the Iranian Revolution, Western analysts have routinely depicted the Islamic Republic as an ideologically driven, illegitimate, and deeply unstable state. From their perspective, Iran displayed its fanatical character early on, first in the hostage crisis of 1979-81, and shortly afterward with the deployment of teenage soldiers in 'human wave' attacks against Iraqi forces during the 1980s.

"Supposedly the same Shi'a 'cult of martyrdom' and indifference of casualties persist in a deep attachment to suicide terrorism that would, if Iran acquired nuclear weapons, end in catastrophe. Allegations of the Iranian government's 'irrationality' are inevitably linked to assertions that it is out to export its revolution across the Middle East by force, is hell-bent on the destruction of Israel, and is too dependent for its domestic legitimacy on anti-Americanism to contemplate improving relations with the United States."

Of course, the veteran diplomat Chas Freeman has pointed out that “to dismiss a foreign government, policy, or circumstance as ‘irrational’ is to confess that one does not understand its motivations, causes, or calculus, has no idea how to deal with it short of the use of force, and has no intention of making the effort to discover how to do so.”

And we point out that “if Western political elites were to make an effort to understand Iran and its motivations, they would discover that the Islamic Republic has shown itself to be a highly rational actor in the conduct of its foreign policy. The Iranian government did not launch a holy war against Iraq in the 1980s; rather, it struggled to defend the Iranian people against a brutal Iraqi invasion that was directly supported by many of Iran’s neighbors as well as by Western power, including the United States.

“When in the course of that was Iran was subjected to years of chemical-weapons attacks, Grand Ayatollah Seyed Ruhollah Khomeini, the Islamic Republic’s founding father, and his associates chose not to weaponize Iran’s stockpiles of chemical agents, a move that would have enabled it to respond in kind.

“And for years now the Islamic Republic’s most senior political and religious leaders have rejected the acquisition and use of nuclear weapons, both on strategic grounds and because, in their view, nuclear weapons violate Islamic morality.”

We go on to debunk Western conventional wisdom about Tehran’s “support for terrorism.” We describe how, “if Westerners looked soberly at the record, they would discover that Iran is not aggressively exporting revolution.”

Likewise, we explain that, while Iranian policymakers believe that Israel is an illegitimate state, “Iran is not out to destroy” it, and has never threatened to do so, contrary to Western mythology.

Iranian leaders “take a long view of their standoff with Israel, expecting that the unsustainability in the twenty-first century of apartheid-like arrangements will lead to the fall of Israel’s current political structure, not to the annihilation of the Jewish people. Such an expectation, although disturbing to many Israelis, does not constitute a threat to liquidate Israel’s Jewish inhabitants.”

Furthermore, “The record also shows that Iran has not been stubbornly antagonistic toward the United States. Over the past two decades, Tehran has consistently cooperated on issues when Washington has requested its assistance, and it has frequently explored the possibilities for improved American-Iranian relations.

“It is the United States that has repeatedly terminated these episodes of bilateral cooperation and rebuffed Iranian overtures, reinforcing Iranian leaders’ suspicion that Washington will never accept the Islamic Republic.”

The Islamic Republic continues to frame its foreign policy around principles that reflect its religious and revolutionary roots. But for many years now it has defined its diplomatic and national-security strategies in largely non-ideological terms, on the basis of national interests that are perfectly legitimate: to be free from the threat of attack and from interference in its internal affairs; to have its government accepted by its neighbors and by the world’s most militarily powerful state.

For more than 20 years, the Islamic Republic has shown itself to be capable of acting rationally to defend and advance these interests. Americans may not like Tehran’s strategic and tactical choices, its links to political factions and their associated militias in Afghanistan and Iraq, its support for Hamas and Hezbollah, its pursuit of nuclear-fuel-cycle capabilities. But these choices are far from irrational, particularly in the face of continuing animosity from Washington.

As America enters a period of perhaps decisive choices in its Iran policy during President Obama’s second term, we offer *Going to Tehran* (as we write in the Introduction) as “a challenge to our fellow Americans and others to reconsider what they think they know about the Islamic Republic.”

We hope that it has an impact. (*Going to Tehran* will be published by Henry Holt’s Metropolitan Books imprint on Jan. 8, 2013.)

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<http://www.raceforiran.com/iran-and-the-mad-mullah-myth-leveretts-forthcoming-book-excerpted-in-harpers>

Murdoch Seeks Help from Team Obama

Since the 1980s, Rupert Murdoch has built his U.S. media empire in close

collaboration with the Republican Party, trading the his public influence for favorable regulatory treatment from GOP politicians. But now he is hoping for some help from President Obama's regulators, say Bill Moyers and Michael Winship.

By Bill Moyers and Michael Winship

Until now, this hasn't been the best year for media mogul Rupert Murdoch. For one, none of the Republicans who'd been on the payroll of his Fox News Channel – not Newt Gingrich or Rick Santorum or Mike Huckabee or Sarah Palin – became this year's GOP nominee for president.

Oh sure, when Mitt Romney got the nod instead, Murdoch's TV and newspaper empire backed him big time, but on Election Night, Fox pundits like Dick Morris and Karl Rove – the top GOP strategist and fundraiser – had to eat crow as Barack Obama won a second term in the White House, despite their predictions of a Republican landslide.

(When the network called Ohio and the election for Obama, a desperate Rove tried to keep Fox statisticians from doing their job until the facts couldn't be ignored or denied. New York magazine [reports](#) that Fox News programming chief Bill Shine now “has sent out orders mandating that producers must get permission before booking Rove or Morris.”)

On top of all that, just this week, Murdoch's News Corp announced the shutdown of The Daily, its multimillion dollar attempt at a national iPad newspaper. And last week in London, the thousand-page report of an independent inquiry into the gross misconduct of the British press came out – that big scandal over reporters illegally hacking into people's cell phones and committing other assorted forms of corruption, including bribery.

Murdoch's gossip sheet, The News of the World, was right at the center of it, the worst offender. The fallout cost Murdoch the biggest business deal of his career – the multi-billion buyout of satellite TV giant BSkyB – and the report attacked his now-defunct News of the World for its “failure of management” and “general lack of respect for individual privacy and dignity.”

But Murdoch's luck may be changing. Despite Fox News' moonlighting as the propaganda ministry of the Republican Party, President Obama's team may be making it possible for Sir Rupert to increase his power, perversely rewarding the man who did his best to make sure Barack Obama didn't have a second term. The Federal Communications Commission could be preparing him one big Christmas present, the kind of gift that keeps on giving – unless we all get together and do something about it.

All indications are that Murdoch has his eye on two of the last remaining big newspapers in America – the Chicago Tribune and the Los Angeles Times, each owned by the now bankrupt Tribune Company. He could add one or both to his impressive portfolio, but even though the media mogul is splitting News Corp into two separately traded companies – one for its print entities, the other for TV and film – he would still come under current rules restricting media companies from owning newspapers and TV and radio stations in the same town. However, the FCC may be planning to suspend those rules, paving the way for Murdoch's takeover of either of the two papers.

In prior years, the FCC has granted waivers to the rules, but this latest move on their part would be more permanent, allowing a monolithic corporation like News Corp or Disney, Comcast, Viacom, CBS or Time Warner – in any of the top twenty markets – to own newspapers, two TV stations, eight radio stations and even the local Internet provider.

Once again, massive media conglomerates would be given free rein to gobble up more and more of our communications outlets, increasing their already considerable power, destroying independent voices, diluting or eradicating local news and community affairs coverage, eliminating competition and stomping even further on diversity.

A recent study – from the FCC itself – shows that last year female ownership of commercial TV and radio stations is at 6.8 percent, Latino ownership is 2.8 percent, Asian ownership is half a percent, and African-American ownership of commercial stations actually has decreased to less than one percent.

Suspending the current rules would only make this awful situation worse, which is one of the reasons why Vermont's independent Sen. Bernie Sanders and several of his Senate colleagues sent a letter last week to FCC Chairman Julius Genachowski.

"Congress tasked you with a mandate to promote localism and diversity in America's broadcast system," they wrote. "While the current ownership rules have not completely achieved these goals, they nonetheless remain a bulwark against mass consolidation and stand to preserve local voices."

This is not the first time the Federal Communications Commission has tried to change the rules. In 2003 and again five years ago, while George W. Bush was still in the White House, a Republican-dominated FCC made a similar attempt to sneak them past but the suspension was rejected by both the Senate and a Federal appeals court.

Public comments – three million of them – ran 99 percent against the attempt to

make the media behemoths even bigger and more avaricious than ever. Among the opponents: freshman Sen. Barack Obama and Sens. Joe Biden and Hillary Clinton.

Under Genachowski, the FCC has from time to time upheld its mandate to protect the public interest – the recent decision to increase the number of low-power community FM stations, for example, or the ruling that gave the public online access to who’s buying political ads on TV and radio, and how much they’re spending.

But this time, it seems as if Chairman Genachowski may be trying to rush the rules change through on a technicality without sufficient time for public comments or even an open hearing.

Make your voices heard – write or call Genachowski and the other commissioners – you can find their names, e-mail addresses and phone numbers at the website fcc.gov, or on the “Take Action” page at our website, BillMoyers.com. Write your senators and representatives, too, tell them the FCC must delay this decision and give the public a chance to have its opposition known. We’ve done it before.

Just ask the FCC this basic question: What part of “no” don’t you understand?

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