

Omnipotence

I read an interesting article in *The Atlantic* recently about the Iran nuclear deal and why so many hate it.

The premise of the article is that the real motivation behind the contempt is not that it's a bad deal. The author, Peter Beinart, interviewed experts from national security agencies here and abroad (including the former head of Israel's Mossad spy agency). One thing they agreed on was that the deal was better than any available alternatives which consist of doing nothing, increasing sanctions until Iran gives us everything we want, or military action.

I don't really want to focus on the nuclear deal and its critics so much as to consider Beinart's assertion about why it is so galling. However, to do so, we have to look at what his experts agree are the outcomes of the various options. First, to do nothing would mean that most sanctions stay in place, but Iran will feel no compunction to refrain from nuclear development. It's a green light to go ahead and build nuclear bombs.

This is especially true since our allies in sanctioning Iran are sick and tired of the sanctions. Since they actually have much more trade with Iran than the US (which has practically none), they are affected by the sanctions. They have said they will start dismantling sanctions with or without the US. These allies, also, like the deal.

The second option is like the first - increasing sanctions only works if the people who have the most clout will go along. And they won't.

The third option is military action, and Israel's former head of Mossad feels that this would be exactly what Iran would prefer because it's the perfect excuse to develop nukes as fast as possible.

Which brings us to the heart of what Beinart says is our problem. We do not have the clout to make everyone - Iran or our allies - do what we want. And this is infuriating. For much of our history, the US has been in the position of feeling just about omnipotent. We defeated the world's greatest superpower, Great Britain, when we were just beginning. We conquered the West (savagely, true, but we made it ours). We were the difference in World War I. We defeated Germany and Japan in World War II. We held the Soviet Union in check and oversaw its implosion.

We were number 1. We were the world's policeman and the world's savior. The term "American exceptionalism" meant that we were the special ones. We were always the good guys. What we wanted, we got.

Now, so the argument goes, we are no longer the only one who matters. We are no longer omnipotent. We can't tell our allies, "strengthen those sanctions because we know what's best." We can't tell Iran, "I don't care who's with me. I will crush you if you don't change."

Now, we have to compromise with people we don't necessarily like. True, we've done that many times in the past, but Beinart's article is suggesting that we have less choice about it nowadays because our allies have strong economies (relative to ours) and they don't need us as much.

They don't need us? That hurts. Is it like the parent whose children leave home and start their own lives while the parent diminishes? Or is it like the bully whose

victims finally say, "We won't be pushed around by you anymore"? Or is it a little of both.

Whichever way it is, one thing is clear. If Beinart's thesis is correct, then we are facing that very human emotion of loss of influence, possibly accompanied by denial. How do we deal with these new realities?

I'm trying to imagine if I had undue influence over others and they one day said, "We want to be equal partners and we won't just do whatever you say anymore." How would I deal with it? Aside from kicking and screaming, then locking myself in my room to sulk for awhile, I think I would embrace that new reality.

Why not? They don't want me leading, but they don't want to dump me, either. Why not change the dynamics? Relationships are all about change, and that means changing the power balance.

Let's face it, in human relations, it's never good for one party to be the most powerful anyway. You want a balance - an equally agreed upon, mutually beneficial balance. We haven't had that in a long time. We've been the big guy, number 1. And to lose that status kind of hurts.

But to release it willingly, without a fight or a fuss, to let go of the idea that we are fundamentally different from everyone else (we aren't), to invite our partners to share the decision-making - and not just in a superficial manner - that is real power. It's real relationship. And I tend to think that's a good thing.