NUCLEAR DEAL COULD START HISTORIC FRIENDSHIP

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Tony Burman, Special to the Star, 3 April 2015

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It was quite the spectacle. Like heavyweight boxers at the end of a gruelling championship bout, exhausted but still standing, representatives of the world's six major powers and Iran finally did the deal.

After eight days of intensive negotiations in Lausanne, Switzerland, which followed more than 18

months of talks, they announced an interim framework intended to limit Iran's nuclear program to peaceful and not military purposes. They have given themselves until the end of June to conclude a detailed and final agreement.

Given all the uncertainty during the negotiations, it is easy to lose sight of how potentially breathtaking this Iranian development is. After 35 years of bitter relations with the U.S. and isolation by the West, the home of one of the world's great civilizations appears ready once again to become a credible and accepted member of the international community.

If this deal ultimately leads to a constructive new partnership with the West, which existed before the Islamic revolution of 1979, it will dramatically change the strategic balance in the Middle East. And this will be for the good.

Inevitably, as the final deadline in June approaches, the voices against this deal with Iran will be loud and alarmist. They will exploit the media's often uncritical echo chamber to terrify. Working for peace is hard work and complicated, but sounding bold and bellicose is easy.

We only have the past century to remind us. We can still hear the voices that bellowed "treason" in response to any nuclear deal with the Soviet Union's "evil empire" or to any accommodation with "Red China." But those courageous acts changed the direction of the world for the good

The battle for American public opinion has only begun. A Washington Post/ABC News poll released on Tuesday showed that Americans by nearly a 2-to-1 margin support a deal with Iran but are skeptical that Iran will keep to the bargain. This week's drama has only emboldened critics of the deal. Already, there are calls from American conservatives for Israel, the U.S. or both to bomb Iran. In the U.S. Congress, the Republicans have vowed to do what they can to block the interim accord and to try to impose added sanctions on Iran.

Like other critics, they will voice at least three major objections to this interim agreement, and they will be wrong on all three counts:

"Additional sanctions would produce a better deal."

Not true. Decades of sanctions against Iran didn't force Iran to give up its nuclear program or convince Iranians to revolt. Additional sanctions will simply persuade Iran that negotiations are a waste of time and to conclude that the real western motive is "regime change." This will provide it with a compelling enough motive to develop nuclear weapons as a deterrent.

"Iran will be allowed to cheat."

Why should this be so? Yes, Iran has cheated in the past but that was because the monitoring was weak. This isn't a deal being made in the dead of night with casual drifters. This is an agreement that is being signed by six of the world's great powers — the U.S., Russia, China, Germany, Britain and France — because they feel this is in the world's interest. Do we assume they are idiots or what?

"A strengthened Iran will destabilize the Middle East."

Again, why should this be so? Iran is a cultured, civilized country with a vibrant young population that wants to come in from the cold — in fact, they are insisting on it. If this process unfolds as outlined, why wouldn't Iran become a positive force in the evolution of a region that we all know is clearly broken.

History is replete with self-serving politicians eager to show off their manhood by sending other people's children to die in their name. They are all around us now, including here in Canada. Yet somehow, we miraculously survived the 20th century because enough people, eventually, said 'no' to them.

That challenge is no less urgent now, and this week's historic breakthrough with Iran — because of its promise and in spite of its risks — can be a big step along that journey.

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