



Iran Deal Lies: Should Americans Trust Presidents on Foreign Policy?

“Trust but verify,” was the famous formulation used by President Ronald Reagan in his dealings with the Soviet Union, particularly its then-ruler Mikhail Gorbachev.

The latest scandal involving lying by the Obama White House in order to secure passage of its controversial Iranian nuclear deal demonstrates that Reagan’s formula should be applied not only to Communist dictators, but also to this American president, and indeed, any U.S. president. It has long been a part of the American political culture, no doubt dating back to our secession from the British Empire, to have a healthy mistrust of the government on domestic matters.



Unfortunately, Americans have been far too trusting of their government when it comes to foreign affairs, as though political leaders who regularly spin and twist the truth in domestic political battles become paragons of truth when their policies concern international issues.

Such is the case with the Iran nuclear deal. As unpopular as the Iranian regime is with the American public (the Gallup Poll found that only eight percent of Americans held a “favorable view” of Iran), President Barack Obama benefitted from Americans’ trust in their government in matters of foreign affairs when he secured approval by Congress of the deal.

We now know that Ben Rhodes, national security advisor for Obama, admitted in an interview with the *New York Times* that he took advantage of media ignorance when promoting the deal. The article was entitled, “Aspiring Novelist Who Became Obama’s Foreign-Policy Guru,” and in it Rhodes explained how easy it was to feed the media false talking points.

“All these newspapers used to have foreign bureaus. Now they don’t. They call us to explain to them what’s happening in Moscow and Cairo. Most of the outlets are reporting on world events from Washington. The average reporter we talk to is 27 years old, and their only reporting experience consists of being around political campaigns. That’s a sea change. They literally know nothing.”

Rhodes added, “We created an echo chamber. They were saying things that validated what we had given them to say.” Because of this, the uninformed reporters relied heavily on what they were told by the administration. As the *Federalist* commented, “It was first necessary to lie to a corrupted and inexperienced American media about all sorts of things, beginning with the nature and intentions of the enemy Iranian regime. Subsequent lies were caked on, as the White House took advantage of a dangerous mix of journalists’ ignorance, their ideological and partisan commitment to the administration, and, finally, their career aspirations.”



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Press Secretary Josh Ernest attempted earlier this week to downplay the story, telling reporters that the White House had never lied about the Iranian nuclear deal. “I think the facts of this agreement make clear that the national security of the United States of America has been enhanced.”

What were some of the alleged lies?

The Obama State Department denied in February 2013 that they were involved in “direct, secret bilateral talks with Iran.” Later, it was admitted that the talks had begun in 2011. If that is not enough of a contradiction, the argument for the talks was that a “thaw” in relations between the two countries had occurred since the election of Iranian “moderates.” The “moderates” referred to were elected in the summer of 2013!

This so-called “moderate” regime, led by Hassan Rouhani, has actually increased executions of Iranian dissidents. But the talks actually began when Mahmoud Ahmadinejad was the president of Iran, yet another clear contradiction of the facts.

Regardless of what one thinks of the merits of a deal with Iran, it should be emphasized that there are larger issues at stake that should concern Americans.

First of all, it is a circumvention of the Constitution. While Obama refused to call the agreement a treaty, Representative Justin Amash (R-Mich.), who sports a 94-percent score on the Freedom Index of *The New American* (which measures a congressman’s voting record in regard to fidelity to the Constitution), argued otherwise: “First, President Barack Obama refuses to recognize the agreement as a treaty, subject to approval under the Constitution’s Treaty Clause (Art. II, Sec. 2, Cl. 2). Under the Treaty Clause the president ‘shall have power, by and with the advice and consent of the Senate, to make treaties, provided two thirds of the senators present concur.’ To avoid this higher threshold for approval, the Obama Administration asserts that the nuclear deal is merely an ‘executive agreement’ that binds only this president.”

Sadly, this is yet another case where the Congress has unilaterally surrendered its constitutional power to the executive branch. Although the Constitution clearly states that any treaty negotiated by the president must have the approval of two thirds of the U.S. Senate, Senator Bob Corker (R-Tenn., 66 percent on the Freedom Index) paved the way for yet another Obama victory over Congress and the Republicans when he won passage of the Corker-Menendez bill back in April. This legislation flipped the necessity of a president obtaining the vote of two thirds of the Senate to gain treaty approval, creating a situation wherein he, in effect, must have the support of only one third of each house of Congress.

This is because, thanks to Senator Corker and all those members of Congress who voted for the legislation, the president would submit the measure to Congress, which could then vote a resolution of disapproval. If the measure failed to win two thirds of both houses of Congress, then President Obama could simply veto the act of disapproval.

Yet, Congress and the American people regularly defer to the president’s judgment in international affairs, because he is considered our “commander-in-chief.” Of course, he is not the commander-in-chief of the American people, but only of the armed forces of the U.S. government. Still, presidents would not just lie to the American people, would they, when it comes to serious questions of peace and war?

History provides many examples of situations in which U.S. presidents have clearly not told the American people the truth — situations involving war and peace. One such example is the lies told by the Lyndon Johnson administration to win passage of the Gulf of Tonkin resolution in Congress, used as



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authorization for the Vietnam War. In that case, the Johnson White House claimed that American ships had been attacked — twice — by North Vietnamese vessels in the Gulf of Tonkin. The most charitable thing that can be said about this assertion is that the second attack clearly did not take place.

President Woodrow Wilson ran for reelection in 1916 on the slogan, “He kept us out of war,” while he was simultaneously plotting to ask for a declaration of war from Congress — after the election. Then there is the infamous promise by President Franklin D. Roosevelt, in the fall of 1940, that he would never send Americans to fight in a foreign war. President Johnson said a similar thing when running for reelection in 1964, proclaiming that American boys should not be sent thousands of miles away to fight in a war that was the business of Asian boys.

In more recent times, the reason given for going to war in Iraq was that Saddam Hussein possessed weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) and that he was going to give some of them to terrorists to use against America. This was, of course, a real concern to Americans so soon after the attacks of September 11, 2001, and Congress signed off on the invasion of Iraq — at President George W. Bush’s discretion, of course. (Yet another example of Congress surrendering its powers under the Constitution to a president). When no great stockpiles of such WMDs were found, it did severe damage to Bush’s legacy, with political opponents even making it into a bumpersticker: “Bush Lied. People Died.”

Even Reagan’s administration, in the Iran-Contra scandal, made statements that turned out not to be accurate.

Ultimately, the principle outlined by Reagan of “trust but verify” should be applied to U.S. presidents not only on domestic matters, but especially in matters that could place Americans in wars under false pretenses.

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