

## Be happy

by Oliver\_North

WASHINGTON — The Obama administration's remarkable inability to say or do the right things to aid our sinking economy, stay the collapse of our equities markets, or even build a competent Cabinet is now the stuff of cartoons, talk show fodder and late-night comedy. Who hasn't heard the one about how "this year's IRS 1040 allows every taxpayer to claim one Geithner or a Daschle, depending on how much tax you don't want to pay"? Humor may help us deal with our current financial travail, but national security is no laughing matter.

Unfortunately, this week has proved that the new administration may be no better at protecting us from incoming Iranian nuclear warheads than it is at creating jobs. It started last Sunday, when Defense Secretary Robert Gates said on NBC that Iran isn't "close to a stockpile. They're not close to a weapon at this point, and so there is some time." That same morning, on CNN, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Adm. Mike Mullen, was asked whether Iran has enough fissile material to make a nuclear bomb. "We think they do, quite frankly," he replied. The admiral added, "Iran having a nuclear weapon is a very, very bad outcome for the region and for the world." Somehow, it doesn't seem that both Pentagon leaders can be correct.

By Tuesday, it was worse. That morning, The New York Times reported that three weeks ago, Mr. Obama wrote a confidential letter to Russian President Dmitry Medvedev suggesting that European-based ballistic missile defenses in Poland and the Czech Republic will not be deployed as planned if Moscow helps keep Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons. This revelation generated an international media feeding frenzy.

Hours later, during a White House press availability with visiting British Prime Minister Gordon Brown, Mr. Obama claimed that his missive had been "mischaracterized" and denied that it was "some sort of quid pro quo." He insisted that it was merely "a very lengthy letter talking about a whole range of issues, from nuclear proliferation to how are we going to deal with a set of common security concerns along the Afghan border and terrorism." He also noted, "The missile defense program, to the extent that it is deployed, is designed to deal with not a Russian threat, but an Iranian threat."

During a visit to Madrid, Medvedev maintained, "No trade-offs have been discussed; I assure you." It didn't help.

The furor over Mr. Obama's "to the extent that it is deployed" language about the missile shield was exacerbated Wednesday by the release of a new presidential task force report on Iran by The Washington Institute for Near East Policy. The bipartisan authors of the document, entitled "Preventing a Cascade of Instability: U.S. Engagement to Check Iranian Nuclear Progress," conclude that Iran has the means and materiel to develop a nuclear weapon within a year and sufficient fissile material on hand to produce 50 more.

The nine-page report also warns that Iranian plans to acquire Russian-made advanced anti-aircraft

missiles could accelerate Israeli military plans for dealing with Tehran's threat to "wipe the Zionist entity off the earth." According to the authors, "Israeli leaders seem convinced that at least for now, they have a military option." However, the report states, "Israelis see the option fading over the next one to two years, not only because of Iran's nuclear progress and dispersion of its program but also because of improved Iranian air defenses, especially the expected delivery of the S-300."

All of this prompted more than 40 Republican members of the U.S. House of Representatives to send their own letter to the White House Wednesday night. In it, the congressmen expressed their concern that Mr. Obama's "policy does not adequately recognize the threat posed by Iran" and that the administration "may be undertaking a surprisingly unilateral action" by offering concessions to Russia.

Noting that last month, the Iranians "launched a satellite into orbit using dual-use, long-range ballistic missile technology," the House Republicans cautioned that the Obama-Medvedev correspondence "undermines NATO's endorsement" of European missile defenses and "undercuts our allies." The signatories observed, "Russia used financial incentives to persuade Kyrgyzstan to deny the U.S. access to its Manas military base in order to support coalition operations in Afghanistan."

In response, Mr. Obama said, "We've had a good exchange between ourselves and the Russians," and "we're rebooting" our relationship. Administration officials are putting out the word that Moscow is playing nice, noting that this week, they allowed a NATO supply convoy to pass through Russia to Afghanistan. Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton described her meeting Friday in Geneva with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov as a "tremendous opportunity." Meanwhile, the "transparent" administration refuses to release the Obama-Medvedev letter.

In the pictures and on the tube, everyone but the House Republicans is smiling. Our president, our secretary of state and the Russians are happy. You should be, too. Now you have something to think about besides the economy. Don't worry. Be happy.

Oliver North is the host of "War Stories" on Fox News Channel, the founder and honorary chairman of Freedom Alliance, and the author of "American Heroes."

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