Obama shouldn't be fooled by the Iranian president's charm offensive

One negotiating tactic for prying desired results from important yet reluctant people is the time-tested principle of "killing them with kindness." Charming others to your side is generally well received, and can produce win-win scenarios. Though what if one side only wants to trick the other into lowering its guard so it can achieve goals at the other's expense? In the business world, it happens often. Like buying a lemon from a used car salesman – the guy who was so incredibly nice! But nations also play this game. Japanese diplomats infamously delivered a memo to the State Department in Washington on the afternoon of Dec. 7, 1941 stating that Tokyo was breaking off negotiations. Too bad it came an hour after Pacific Fleet battleships were being sunk at Pearl Harbor. Fast forward to 2013. Iran has suddenly taken a kinder, gentler approach to the West. Newly elected President Hasan Rouhani is communicating directly with President Barack Obama. He's signaled compromise over Tehran's nuclear program, freed political prisoners and replaced the military with the foreign ministry to lead nuclear negotiations. His boss, Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, even saluted Jews worldwide by tweeting Rosh Hashanah well wishes. But is it all for show? Perhaps Iran, the place where chess was invented, is lulling the U.S. and Europe into a false sense of security so tough sanctions can be eased, thus repairing its crippled economy – and then it will continue a nuclear weapons program under the radar, literally buried into mountainsides around the country. Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu seems to think so, calling Rouhani a "wolf in sheep's clothing." Netanyahu's concerns are not unfounded. Rouhani was a firebrand young cleric and protégé of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, the man who launched Iran's Islamic Revolution in 1979. Rouhani rose up the ranks, eventually becoming Secretary, Supreme National Security Council and Iran's top nuclear negotiator. In reflecting about Iran's regime and its raison d'etre, let's not forget that as the Soviet Union was crumbling in 1989, Khomeini sent a letter to Mikhail Gorbachev lecturing that communism was dead, and that he "should study and research Islam." It appears that today's struggle with the international left, now spearheaded by radical Islam – waged by both Shia-led Iran, its proxies Syria and Hezbollah, plus ,more recently, Sunni-led al-Qaida and its affiliates – is the new Cold War. Yet some still downplay the threat from our most dangerous adversary, citing Rouhani's olive branches and labeling him a "moderate." The same people also typically downplay the fact that Iran's elections were something of a sham, with only six ayatollah-approved, hardline, conservative candidates on the ballot. The true "moderates" and "reformers" were either all arrested or simply not allowed to compete. Though Rouhani speaks in softer tones than his predecessor Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, who said Israel should be "wiped off the map," let's recall that the stealthier ayatollah calls the shots, which helps explain why the Supreme Leader had a falling out with the former president, and was

reportedly close to arresting him. One source of tension was Ahmadinejad's brutal honesty regarding Iran's true intentions, a major faux pas for any chess player – or Iranian leader. If Iran's new intentions are as benevolent as some suggest, why was Hossein Deghan, a former Revolutionary Guard commander with direct ties to Islamic Jihad's 1983 marine barracks bombing in Beirut that killed 241 American and 58 French troops, selected as Rouhani's Minister of Defense? Should Iran's charm offensive be a ruse, enabling Tehran to acquire nuclear weapons, it would pose a mortal threat to Israel's existence, allow for potential proliferation into the anti-U.S. Venezuela-led bloc in Latin America and spark a Middle Eastern arms race. In a region where rival tribes and factions have been at each other's throats since Biblical times, does anyone think it's a good idea to have a nuclear armed Iran, Saudi Arabia and Israel? President Obama doesn't, and in fact, Iranian nukes constitute one of his "red lines." But since Obama badly mishandled Syria, including stinging rebukes from both the American people and international community on his unrealistic plan for "limited military action" without anticipating any consequences, Iran knows that time is on its side. Obama's "red lines" just don't carry much weight. The fact that both he and Secretary of State John Kerry have based their careers on anti-war activism helps explain the mixed messages and shaky leadership on using military force in Syria – war is simply not their expertise. So while it may be appealing to welcome Iran's recent overtures and all sing kumbaya, the U.S. and Europe must not let their guard down. Iran just may "kill us with kindness." Literally. Read original article in U.S. News & World Report.