

Behind the Diplomatic Conflict over Iran Nuclear Negotiations. Israel Campaigns against Agreement

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What is really behind the fierce diplomatic conflict that has erupted over the Iran nuclear negotiations? What are the motivations of the Israeli and French governments in opposing an interim agreement that would require significant concessions by Iran in exchange for some easing of harsh economic sanctions?

Several rounds of sanctions imposed by the U.S., the European Union and the UN Security Council have inflicted severe damage on Iran's economy and widespread hardship on the Iranian people. The U.S. and its allies have tried to justify the sanctions by claiming that they are aimed at preventing Iran from developing nuclear weapons. The Iranian government has repeatedly asserted that its nuclear program is for civilian use only and that it has no intention of building nuclear bombs.



Netanyahu went on an all-out campaign against the agreement.

On Nov. 9, it appeared that an interim agreement was about to be signed in Geneva, Switzerland between the "P5+1" and Iran. The "P5+1" are the Security Council permanent members—U.S., Britain, France, Russia and China—plus Germany. While the details of the agreement have not been made public, it reportedly called for Iran to limit or halt its uranium enrichment for six months in exchange for a "very limited" and "reversible" easing of sanctions. The plan called for negotiations over the following six months to reach a permanent agreement that would, among other conditions, subject Iran's nuclear program to intensified international inspections. Such an agreement would make military uses of nuclear technology virtually impossible.

That an agreement was indeed close was indicated by the presence in Geneva of the foreign ministers of the countries involved, including U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry. At the last minute, however, French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius unexpectedly blocked the deal, on the grounds that it supposedly didn't contain enough concessions from Iran. Fabius's veto is part of a concerted drive by France, a former colonizing power in the Middle East, to reassert its influence in the region at a time of widening divisions between the U.S. on the one hand and Israel and Saudi Arabia on the other.

Negotiations are set to resume on Nov. 20.

Israel campaigns against agreement

Israel's prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu had already launched an all-out campaign against any agreement. "This is a very bad deal and Israel utterly rejects it," Netanyahu told a press conference on Nov. 8. "Israel will do everything it needs to defend itself and the security of its people." This was one more repetition of a thinly veiled threat of war by the leader of the only state in the region that actually possesses nuclear bombs—hundreds of them.

Israel, despite its relatively small size and thanks to unparalleled aid from the U.S., is rated as having one of the most powerful militaries in the world. It is hardly in danger of being attacked by Iran, which has never launched a war against another country.

Why then such a vehement response from Netanyahu, who even took his anti-agreement campaign to the halls of Congress and the Sunday morning talk shows in the U.S.?

Comments by Giora Eiland, a former Israeli national security adviser, are instructive: "I can understand why Netanyahu is so furious. A unilateral military option would have no real chance now. Not because we can't do it, but because it would be seen as moving against the whole international community. That is something Israel cannot afford."

While it is highly unlikely that Israel was about to launch a unilateral war against Iran, Eiland's comments provide insight into what could be called the "perpetual war" doctrine of Israel's leadership—past and present.

Israeli leaders and their supporters here never tire of proclaiming that, "Israel wants peace, but it cannot find a partner for peace," but the reality is very different.

State of Israel serves imperialist interests

Since its foundation in 1948 as a European colonial implantation in the heart of the Arab world, Israel has been in a state of conflict with neighboring states and the Palestinian people who it dispossessed. This is the basis of an irreconcilable contradiction, one which the Israeli leadership embraces.

As a highly militarized garrison state, Israel has served the interests of imperialism, especially U.S. imperialism. Israel's wars of aggression have not only expanded its conquered territory, they have also served to disrupt and derail development in the entire resource-rich and strategic region. In exchange for services rendered, the U.S. has sent hundreds of billions in economic and military aid, including much high tech weaponry.

Peace, not war, is what is viewed as the grave threat by Israel's leaders. They have long feared that their U.S. patron would one day realign its Middle East strategy away from its traditional allies/clients toward an understanding with other capitalist governments in the region, including Iran. Such an agreement would make armed conflicts less likely in the short term, hence reducing the critical importance of Israel as the U.S. watchdog in the region. To be sure, such a change in U.S. policy would not be motivated by a more benevolent outlook. As long as imperialism exists, such a shift would be employing different tactics to achieve the same objective: domination and exploitation.

The great fear in Tel Aviv is that a reorientation of U.S. Middle East policy would reduce Israel's importance to Washington. From its beginnings a little over a century ago, the leaders of the Zionist movement that eventually created the Israeli state were highly conscious of the fact that their colonial project could only succeed with the sponsorship of a

major imperialist power. From 1917-47, it was Britain. In the 1950s and 60s, France was the main source of arms, while aid poured in from the U.S. and Germany to sustain an economically unviable state. After the 1967 war, when Israel conquered Syria's Golan Heights, Egypt's Sinai and the West Bank and Gaza, the U.S. became the main supplier of vast quantities of economic and military assistance, along with diplomatic protection.

Any possibility of a diminution of U.S. support—military, economic or diplomatic—is viewed as the real existential threat by Israel's rulers.

U.S. 'peace plan' latest attempt to liquidate Palestinian struggle

And, Iran is not the only point of recent contention. Secretary of State John Kerry has made restarting negotiations between Israel and the Palestinian Authority, which governs some parts of the West Bank, a priority. This effort is not motivated by good will on the part of Kerry or the Obama administration, but is instead the latest U.S. attempt to liquidate the Palestinian liberation struggle which remains a key to the entire region.

Kerry's plan calls for creating a weak Palestinian mini-state on broken up pieces of West Bank territory and Gaza—less than 20 percent of historic Palestine. This "state", according to the U.S. plan, would be unlike any other state in the world in that it would not have control over its own borders, water, air space or subsoil rights. It would be disarmed. In reality, it would be a neo-colony of Israel. Moreover, the six-plus million Palestinian refugees would be denied the right of return.

But even this plan is too much for the Israeli government. While Netanyahu mouths the words "two states" on occasion to please Washington, his government is engaged in a massive buildup of illegal Israeli settlements on stolen Palestinian land, in effect annexing large parts of the West Bank.

On Nov. 14, the entire Palestinian negotiating team—made up of PA representative who would be glad to agree to the Kerry plan—announced their resignation in protest over the stepped up settlement expansion plan announced by Netanyahu.

In unusually direct comments to Israeli TV on Nov. 7, Kerry said: "How can you say 'We [the Israeli government] are planning to build in the same place that will eventually be Palestine?' It sends a message that somehow you're not really serious."

The Netanyahu government, of course, is only participating in the latest round of "peace talks" in order to mollify the U.S. Their priority is to take as much Palestinian land as possible hoping that a by-product of this policy combined with other vicious apartheid practices will "encourage" large numbers of Palestinians to leave. This in reality has been the Israeli plan since the 1967 war.

Kerry and other U.S. leaders would have no problem with such a plan except that it hasn't worked. They are worried that if the Palestinians continue to be offered nothing but more repression and deprivation, there could be a new intifada or uprising that could further destabilize the region. The Obama administration's priority is protecting the interests of Empire.

Another recent point of conflict was the confirmation by a White House source that it was, in fact, Israel that carried out the bombing attack on a Syrian military base on Oct. 30. Israel has staged several raids on Syrian government forces in the midst of the war raging in that

country. The Israeli government has never admitted the obvious, that it was responsible.

Israeli military officials responded angrily to the U.S. confirmation, calling it “scandalous” and “unthinkable.” Like their U.S. counterparts, Israeli leaders consider it their “right” to carry out unprovoked attacks on other countries, while maintaining a “window of deniability.” The White House confirmation was a rebuke to the Israeli leaders for interfering with U.S. strategy against Syria.

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