

Republican Mega-Donor Sheldon Adelson's Threat to Nuke Tehran

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Casino mogul Sheldon Adelson.

Republican mega-donor Sheldon Adelson urged the United States to coerce Iran by dropping a demonstration nuke in the desert followed by a blackmail threat that the next one would obliterate Tehran. But this idea of genocide-extortion has drawn no official U.S. condemnation, says Robert Parry.

When the largest donor to Republican political organizations urges the U.S. military to detonate a nuclear bomb in an Iranian desert with the explicit warning that “the next one is in the middle of Tehran,” you might expect that major American political figures and large U.S. media outlets would strongly denounce such genocidal blackmail.

After all, Tehran has a population of more than eight million people with millions more living in the suburbs. So, this threat to exterminate Tehran's inhabitants from casino mogul Sheldon Adelson would be comparable to someone nuking an empty space in the United States as a warning that if Americans didn't capitulate to some demand, a nuclear bomb would be dropped on New York City, the site of Adelson's ugly threat.

The fact that the scattered outrage over Adelson's [remarks](#) on Oct. 22 was mostly limited to the Internet and included no denunciations from prominent U.S. politicians, including leading Republicans who have benefited from Adelson's largesse, suggests that many Muslims and especially Iranians are right to suspect that they are the object of obscene prejudice in some American power circles.

Indeed, HuffingtonPost published a vociferous [defense](#) of Adelson's comments by Rabbi Shmuley Boteach, who organized the event at Yeshiva University where Adelson spoke. Boteach, who has been hailed as the “most famous Rabbi in America,” treated Adelson's nuke threat as innocent hyperbole only underscoring how aggressively the world should treat Iran.

Instead of apologizing for letting Adelson go unchallenged as he mused about murdering millions of Iranians, Boteach expressed outrage over the few expressions of outrage about Adelson's plan.

“I found the reaction to his statement illuminating as to the double standards that are often employed on matters relating to Israel,” wrote Boteach, who then reprised the infamous false translation of former Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad supposedly saying “that Israel must be wiped off the map.”

Boteach then added to the false quote the assumption that if Israel ceased to exist as a Jewish state, that would require “the murder of the six million Jews who live there [as] the precondition of such erasure.” However, there is the other possibility that Israel/Palestine could become like the United States, a country that has no official religion but that respects all religions.

To lay out only the two extremes – that Israel must be officially a Jewish state (with non-Jews made second-class citizens or stateless people) as one option and the other that all the Jews must be murdered – invites either apartheid or genocide.

Boteach also misrepresented recent comments by Iran’s Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei about destroying Tel Aviv and Haifa. The rabbi left out the context of Khamenei’s remark: the threat was predicated on Israel having first militarily attacked Iran. In other words, Khamenei was saying that if Israel destroyed Iranian cities, Iran had the right to retaliate against Israeli cities.

Israel’s Rogue Nuke Arsenal

But one thing that Iran has never threatened to do is to drop a nuclear bomb on Israel. First, Iran doesn’t have a nuclear bomb; has foresworn any interest in building one; has signed the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty allowing in inspectors; and has offered to accept even more intrusive inspections in exchange for removal of economic sanctions.

By contrast, Israel possesses one of the world’s most sophisticated nuclear arsenals, albeit one that is undeclared and existing outside international inspections since Israel has refused to sign the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. I’ve also been told that Israel’s military contingency plan for possibly attacking Iran’s hardened nuclear sites includes use of low-yield nuclear weapons.

So, loose talk from a prominent American Zionist about the value of the United States launching a ballistic nuclear strike from Nebraska targeting an Iranian desert with the explicit follow-up threat that the next nuke would obliterate Iran’s capital could be read by the Iranians as a real possibility, especially considering Adelson’s close ties to prominent Republicans.

The fact that such a discussion was held in New York City with no meaningful repercussions for Adelson could be read further as a message to Iran that it might well need a nuclear deterrence to protect itself from such terroristic blackmail.

Boteach’s HuffingtonPost commentary also focused only on the part of Adelson’s remark about dropping a nuclear bomb in an unpopulated area of Iran, where only “a couple of rattlesnakes, and scorpions, or whatever” would be killed.

Treating the idea like some kind of humanitarian gesture, not a genocidal extortion threat, Boteach wrote, “Sheldon’s glib comments about nuking rattle snakes seemed to rattle many of the bloggers who were at our event even more than Ahmadinejad’s threats.”

But what made Adelson’s remark even more stunning than his idea of a demonstration nuclear attack in the desert was the follow-up warning: “Then you say, ‘See! The next one is in the middle of Tehran. So, we mean business. You want to be wiped out? Go ahead and take a tough position and continue with your nuclear development.’”

At that point, the audience at Yeshiva University interrupted Adelson with applause.

The obvious problem with this kind of blackmail threat, of course, is that it requires the extortionist to follow through if the other side doesn't capitulate. To be credible, you have to back up the warning – "you want to be wiped out?" – by actually wiping the other side out.

Republican Influence

If Adelson were simply an eccentric old billionaire spouting threats of genocide at some university forum in New York City, that would be bad enough. But Adelson is an important behind-the-scenes figure in the Republican Party.

Nearly singlehandedly, Adelson kept afloat the 2012 presidential campaign of former House Speaker Newt Gingrich and then threw his vast financial resources behind the Republican presidential nominee Mitt Romney, who accompanied Adelson on a high-profile trip to Israel that was designed to highlight tensions between President Barack Obama and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

Romney's warm reception in Israel was seen as effectively an endorsement of his candidacy by Netanyahu, who has rattled many of his own military sabers at Iran. While in Israel, Romney delivered a belligerent speech suggesting that he, as U.S. president, would happily support an Israeli war against Iran.

Romney told an audience of Israelis and some wealthy pro-Israel Americans that he is prepared to employ "any and all measures" to stop Iran from gaining a nuclear weapons "capability," a vague concept that arguably already exists.

Romney's speech in Jerusalem was accompanied by a comment from his top foreign policy adviser Dan Senor seeming to endorse an Israeli unilateral strike against Iran. "If Israel has to take action on its own," Senor said, "the governor would respect that decision."

Romney said, "today, the regime in Iran is five years closer to developing nuclear weapons capability. Preventing that outcome must be our highest national security priority. ... We must not delude ourselves into thinking that containment is an option. We must [lead](#) the effort to prevent Iran from building and possessing nuclear weapons capability.

"We should employ any and all measures to dissuade the Iranian regime from its nuclear course, and it is our fervent hope that diplomatic and economic measures will do so. In the final analysis, of course, no option should be excluded."

By elevating Iran's achievement of a nuclear weapons "capability" to America's "highest national security priority" and vowing to "employ any and all measures" to prevent that eventuality, Romney was essentially threatening war against Iran under the current circumstances. In that, he went beyond the vague language used by President Obama, who himself has sounded belligerent with his phrasing about "all options on the table" to stop Iran if it moves to build a nuclear weapon.

However, the nuance was significant, since U.S. intelligence agencies – and even their Israeli counterparts – have concluded that Iran has not decided to build a nuclear weapon even as it makes progress in a nuclear program that Iranian leaders say is for peaceful purposes only. Still, those lessons from a peaceful nuclear program arguably can give a country a nuclear weapons "capability." [See Consortiumnews.com's "[US/Israel: Iran NOT Building](#)

[Nukes.”\]](#)

Though Romney lost the 2012 election, his point of view is common among pro-Israel hawks in Congress and throughout Official Washington’s think-tank and media communities. Adelson also wields real influence because he, along with his wife Miriam, has poured a fortune into the U.S. political process, calculated at \$92.8 million to outside political groups during the 2012 election cycle, according to the Center for Responsive Politics.

And, it is his kind of crazy talk, not uncommon among extreme Zionists, that makes any political settlement of the Middle East disputes next to impossible.

*Investigative reporter **Robert Parry** broke many of the Iran-Contra stories for The Associated Press and Newsweek in the 1980s. You can buy his new book, America’s Stolen Narrative, either in [print here](#) or as an e-book (from [Amazon](#) and [barnesandnoble.com](#)). For a limited time, you also can order Robert Parry’s trilogy on the Bush Family and its connections to various right-wing operatives for only \$34. The trilogy includes America’s Stolen Narrative. For details on this offer, [click here](#).*

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