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Behind Israel's Hysterical Opposition to the Iran Nuclear Deal

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In light of the fact that Israel is in possession of at least 200 (surreptitiously-built) nuclear warheads, and considering the reality that, according to both US and Israeli intelligence sources, Iran neither possesses nor pursues nuclear weapons, the relentless hysterical campaign by Israel and its lobby against the Iran nuclear deal can safely be characterized as the mother of all ironies—a clear case of chutzpah.

As I pointed out in a recent essay on the nuclear agreement, the deal effectively establishes US control (through IAEA) over the entire production chain of Iran's nuclear and related industries. Or, as President Obama put it (on the day of the conclusion of the agreement), "Inspectors will have access to Iran's entire nuclear supply chain—its uranium mines and mills, its conversion facility and its centrifuge manufacturing and storage facilities. . . . Some of these transparency measures will be in place for 25 years. Because of this deal inspectors will also be able to access any suspicious location."

Even a cursory reading of the text of the agreement shows that, if ratified by the US congress, the deal would essentially freeze Iran's nuclear program at a negligible, ineffectual level of value—

at only 3.67% uranium enrichment. Israel and its lobby must certainly be aware of this, of the fact that Iran poses no “existential threat to Israel,” as frequently claimed by Benjamin Netanyahu and his co-thinkers.

So, the question is: why all the screaming and breast beating?

There is a widespread perception that because the nuclear agreement was reached despite the lobby’s vehement opposition, it must therefore signify a win for Iran, or a loss for Israel and its allies. This is a sheer misjudgment of what the deal represents: it signifies a win not for Iran but for Israel and its allies. And here is why: under the deal Iran is obligated to (a) downgrade its uranium enrichment capabilities from 20% of purity to 3.67%, (b) freeze this minimal level of 3.67% enrichment for 15 years, (c) reduce its current capacity of 19000 centrifuges to 6104 (a reduction of 68%), (d) reduce its stockpile of low grade enriched uranium from the current level of 7500 kg to 300kg (a reduction of 96%), and (e) accept strict limits on its research and development activities. While some restrictions on research and development are promised to be relaxed after 10 years, others will remain for up to 25 years.

In addition, Iran would have to accept an extensive monitoring and inspection regime not only of declared nuclear sites but also of military and other non-declared sites where the monitors may presume or imagine incidences of “suspicious” activity. The elaborate system of monitoring and inspection was succinctly described by President Obama on the day of the conclusion of the agreement in Vienna (July 14, 2015): “Put simply, the organization responsible for the inspections, the IAEA, will have access where necessary, when necessary. That arrangement is permanent.”

These are obviously major concessions that not only render Iran’s hard-one (but peaceful) nuclear technology ineffectual, but also weaken its defense capabilities and undermine its national sovereignty.

So, the lobby’s frantic objection to the nuclear agreement cannot be because the deal represents a win for Iran, or a loss for Israel. Quite to the contrary the agreement signifies a historic success for Israel as it tends to remove, or drastically undermine, a major challenge to its expansionist schemes in the Middle East—the challenge of independent, revolutionary Iran that consistently opposed such colonial schemes of expansion and occupation.

Thus, the reasons for the lobby's panicky, or more likely feigned, protestations must be sought elsewhere. Two major reasons can be identified for the lobby's vehement opposition to the nuclear deal.

The first is to keep pressure on negotiators in pursuit of further concessions from Iran. Indeed, the lobby has been very successful in quest of this objective. A look back at the process of negotiations indicates that, under pressure, Iran's negotiators have continuously made additional concessions over the course of the 20-month long negotiations. For example, when negotiations began in Geneva in November 2013, discussion of Iran's defense industries or inspection of its military sites were considered off the limits of negotiations. Whereas in the final agreement, reached 20 months later in Vienna, Iran's negotiators have regrettably agreed to such highly intrusive, once-taboo measures of national sovereignty.

The lobby is of course aware of the fact that the 159-page long nuclear deal is fraught with ambiguities and loopholes, which leaves plenty of room for haggling and maneuvering over the many contestable aspects of the deal during its 25-year long implementation period. This means that, even if ratified by the US congress, the deal does not mean the end of negotiations but their continuation for a long time to come.

The shrill, obstructionist voices of the lobby's operatives are, therefore, designed to continue the pressure on Iran during the long period of implementation in order to extract additional concessions beyond the agreement.

The second reason for the lobby's relentless campaign to sabotage the nuclear agreement is that, while the agreement obviously represents a fantastic victory for Israel, it nonetheless falls short of what the lobby projected and fought for, that is, devastating regime change by military means, similar to what was done to Iraq and Libya.

This is no conspiracy theory or idle speculation. There is well-documented, undeniable evidence that the lobby, as a major pillar of the neoconservative forces in the US and elsewhere, set out as early as the late 1980s and early as 1990s to "deconstruct" and reshape the Middle East in the image of radical Zionist champions of building "greater Israel" in the region, extending from Jordan River to Mediterranean coasts.

Indeed, radical Zionists' plans to balkanize and re-mold the Middle East are as old as the state of Israel itself. Those plans were actually among the essential designs of Israel's *founding fathers* to build a Jewish state in Palestine. David Ben Gurion, one of the Key founders of the state of

Israel, for example, stated unabashedly that land grabbing, expulsion of non-Jewish natives from their land/homes and territorial expansion is best achieved through launching wars of choice and creating social chaos, which he called “revolutionary” times or circumstances. “What is inconceivable in normal times is possible in revolutionary times; and if at this time the opportunity is missed and what is possible in such great hours is not carried out—a whole world is lost” [1].

While the plans to foment war and create social convulsion in pursuit of “greater Israel” thus began with the very creation of the state of Israel, systematic implementation of such plans, and the concomitant agenda of changing “unfriendly” regimes in the region, began in earnest in the early 1990s—that is, in the immediate aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet Union.

As long as the Soviet Union existed as a balancing superpower vis-à-vis the United States, US policy makers in the Middle East were somewhat constrained in their accommodations of territorial ambitions of hardline Zionism. That restraint was largely due to the fact that at the time the regimes that ruled Iraq, Syria and Libya were allies of the Soviet Union. That alliance, and indeed the broader counter-balancing power of Soviet bloc countries, served as a leash on the expansionist designs of Israel and the US accommodations of those designs. The demise of the Soviet Union removed that countervailing force.

The demise of the Soviet Union also served as a boon for Israel for yet another reason: it created an opportunity for a closer alliance between Israel and the militaristic faction of the US ruling elites—elites whose interests are vested largely in the military-industrial-security-intelligence complex, that is, in military capital, or war dividends.

Since the rationale for the large and growing military apparatus during the Cold War years was the “threat of communism,” US citizens celebrated the collapse of the Berlin Wall as the end of militarism and the dawn of “peace dividends.”

But while the majority of the US citizens celebrated the prospects of what appeared to be imminent “peace dividends,” the powerful interests vested in the expansion of military-industrial-security-intelligence spending felt threatened. Not surprisingly, these influential forces moved swiftly to safeguard their interests in the face of the “threat of peace.”

To stifle the voices that demanded peace dividends, beneficiaries of war and militarism began to methodically redefine the post-Cold War “sources of threat” in the broader framework of the new multi-polar world, which purportedly goes way beyond the traditional “Soviet threat” of the

bipolar world of the Cold War era. Instead of the “communist threat” of the Soviet era, the “menace” of “rogue states,” of radical Islam and of “global terrorism” would have to do as new enemies.

Just as the beneficiaries of war dividends view international peace and stability inimical to their interests, so too the militant Zionist proponents of “greater Israel” perceive peace between Israel and its Palestinian/Arab neighbors perilous to their goal of gaining control over the “promised land.” The reason for this fear of peace is that, according to a number of the United Nations’ resolutions, peace would mean Israel’s return to its pre-1967 borders. But because proponents of “greater Israel” are unwilling to withdraw from the occupied territories, they are therefore afraid of peace—hence, their continued attempts at sabotaging peace efforts and/or negotiations.

Because the interests of the beneficiaries of war dividends and those of radical Zionism tend to converge over fomenting war and political convulsion in the Middle East, an ominously potent alliance has been forged between them—ominous, because the mighty US war machine is now supplemented by the almost unrivaled public relations capabilities of the hardline pro-Israel lobby in the United States.

The alliance between these two militaristic forces is largely unofficial and de facto; it is subtly forged through an elaborate network of powerful neoconservative think tanks such as The American Enterprise Institute, Project for the New American Century, America Israel Public Affairs Committee, Middle East Media Research Institute, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Middle East Forum, National Institute for Public Policy, Jewish Institute for National Security Affairs, and Center for Security Policy.

In the immediate aftermath of the Cold War, these militaristic think tanks and their hawkish neoconservative operatives published a number of policy papers that clearly and forcefully advocated plans for border change, demographic change and regime change in the Middle East. Although the plan to change “unfriendly” regimes and balkanize the region was to begin with the removal of Saddam Hussein’s regime, as the “weakest link,” the ultimate goal was (and still is) regime change in Iran.

For example, in 1996 an influential Israeli think tank, the Institute for Advanced Strategic and Political Studies, sponsored and published a policy document, titled “A Clean Break: A New Strategy for Securing the Realm,” which argued that the government of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu should “make a clean break” with the Oslo peace process and reassert Israel’s claim to the West Bank and Gaza. It presented a plan whereby Israel would “shape its strategic

environment,” beginning with the removal of Saddam Hussein and the installation of a Hashemite monarchy in Baghdad, to serve as a first step toward eliminating the anti-Israeli governments of Syria and Iran.

The influential Jewish Institute for the National Security Affairs (JINSA) also occasionally issued statements and policy papers that strongly advocated “regime changes” in the Middle East. One of its hardline advisors Michael Ladeen, who also unofficially advised the George W. Bush administration on Middle Eastern issues, openly talked about the coming era of “total war,” indicating that the United States should expand its policy of “regime change” in Iraq to other countries in the region such as Iran and Syria. “In its fervent support for the hardline, pro-settlement, anti-Palestinian Likud-style policies in Israel, JINSA has essentially recommended that ‘regime change’ in Iraq should be just the beginning of a cascade of toppling dominoes in the Middle East [2].

It follows from this brief sketch of the lobby’s long-standing plans of regime change in Iran that, as mentioned earlier, its opposition to the nuclear deal is not because the deal does not represent a win for Israel, or a loss for Iran, but because Iran’s loss is not as big as the lobby would have liked it to be, that is, a devastating regime change through bombing and military aggression, as was done in Iraq or Libya.

What the lobby seems to overlook, or more likely, unwilling to acknowledge or accept, is that regime change in Iran is currently taking place from within, and the nuclear deal is playing a major role in that change. The lobby also seems to overlook or deny the fact that the Obama administration opted for regime change from within—first through the so-called “green revolution” and now through nuclear deal—because various US-Israeli led attempts at regime change from without failed. Indeed, such futile attempts at regime change prompted Iran to methodically build robust defense capabilities and geopolitical alliances, thereby establishing a military and geopolitical counterweight to US-Israeli plans in the region.

Furthermore, The Obama administration’s plan of “peaceful” regime change seems to be more like an experimental or tactical change of approach to Iran than a genuine commitment to peace, as it does not rule out the military option in the future. If Iran carries out all its 25-year long obligations under the deal, regime change from within would be complete and military option unnecessary—in essence, it would be a gradual, systematic retrogression to the days of the Shah. But if at any time in the long course of the implementation of the deal Iran resists or fails to carry out some of the highly draconian of those obligations, the US and its allies would again resort to

military muscle, and more confidently too because success chances of military operations at that time would be much higher, since Iran would have by then greatly downgraded its military/defense capabilities.

References

[1] Quoted in Norman Finkelstein, *Image and Reality of the Israel-Palestine Conflict*, Introduction to German edition (10 July 2002).

[2] William D. Hartung, *How Much Are You Making on the War, Daddy?* New York: Nation Book