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European Languages

زبانهای اروپایی

By Moshe Machover  
19.01.2022

## Israel and the Iranian Nuclear Deal: A Factory of Lies



Sources: Weekly Worker

At the time of writing, the outcome of the Vienna talks on restoring the Iran nuclear deal, the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), which aims to prevent Iran from reaching the capability to develop nuclear weapons,[1] is at stake.

Should we believe the persistent media reports about the existence of an 'insurmountable chasm' between the positions of the US (which withdrew from the agreement during the Trump presidency) and Iran? Maybe. But they could simply reflect negotiating tactics, as

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often happens in difficult negotiations, that seem to be on the verge of collapse before reaching a last-minute deal.

One thing is for sure: Israel, the *kibitzer* in this political poker game, is doing everything it can to avoid any real rapprochement between its American patron and the Iranian *bête noire*.

## **Preserving**

What are Israel's real concerns? Israeli propaganda continually claims that Iran aims to achieve the capability to produce nuclear weapons, because it intends to annihilate Israel. Here's a typical example, from a speech by Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu at Yad Vashem on Holocaust Remembrance Day, April 15, 2015:

"Just as the Nazis aspired to crush civilization and establish a 'master race' to control the world, while annihilating the Jewish people, Iran is also striving to gain control of the region, from where it would extend further, with the explicit intention of destroying the Jewish state. Iran is moving in two directions: first, by developing the ability to arm itself with nuclear weapons and accumulate an arsenal of ballistic missiles; and the second, exporting the Khomeinist revolution to many countries by massively using terrorism to take over much of the Middle East." [2]

This is, of course, pure nonsense. Iran has neither the intention nor the ability to 'erase' Israel. Allegations to the contrary are inventions of *hasbarah* (propaganda), Israel's efficient factory of falsehoods. It is true that Iranian leaders have occasionally expressed hope that the Zionist regime will collapse and disappear. But this is an illusion rather than a threat that Iran intends to initiate military action to bring about Israel's demise, as Israel's friendly media claim.

The most notorious case of this deliberate falsification used a statement made on 26 October 2005 by Iran's President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. He was quoting the expectation of the first leader of the Islamic Republic that "that regime occupying Jerusalem must disappear from the pages of time." This was widely misrepresented as a threat to "wipe Israel off the map." [3]

Moreover, even if Iran achieves "the ability to arm itself with nuclear weapons," it would not pose an existential danger to Israel. This was emphatically pointed out by Ephraim Halevy, former head of Mossad (the Israeli counterpart of the CIA and MI6). Addressing a conference held in February 2008 at the Israel Institute for National Security Studies,

"Ephraim Halevy criticized Israeli political leaders for calling Iran's nuclear threat "an existential threat." It is a mistake to let our enemy know that they can cause our demise," Halevy said. He added: "It is also a mistake for us to inform the world that the moment the Iranians have nuclear capability, they will begin to count back the time for the destruction of the State of Israel. We are the superpower in the Middle East and it's time for us to start behaving like [a] superpower." [4]

Of course, Israel is not indifferent to the prospect of Iran achieving the capability to develop nuclear weapons. But their concern is not the fear of being 'erased'; rather, it is concerned about any erosion, however slight, of its position as a hegemonic regional superpower. This position depends, among other factors, on whether it is the only state in the Middle East to possess a nuclear arsenal,[5] as well as the only one that has refused to sign the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT). It is by far the most aggressive expansionist state in the region, pursuing a prolific policy of assassinations; [6] frequent, widely reported bombings in Syria and Lebanon; and attacks at sea on ships carrying Iranian oil. [7]

These practices of state terrorism depend on their enemies and rivals not having effective means of deterrence, as that would tip the military balance and diminish Israel's overwhelming advantage. Iran's nuclear capability could be such a deterrent, though not very serious. Indeed, a more credible deterrent is Iran's development of conventional missiles, which would place an unacceptably high price of retaliation for an Israeli strike [8], which is why Israel is pushing for a ban on such weapons to be included in any new nuclear deal with Iran.

By the way, the same logic applies to Israel's obvious concern about the rather advanced state of missile buildup by Iran's Lebanese ally, Hezbollah. There is no real danger that Hezbollah will initiate aggressive military action against Israel; but its missiles are now a

credible deterrent against a repeat of Israel's broad aggressive incursions into Lebanon, or a massive attack on Hezbollah's patron, the Islamic Republic of Iran.

### **Political concern**

However, from the perspective of preserving Israel's absolute regional hegemony, the biggest concern is not purely military: it is political. In his lecture, quoted above, Ephraim Halevy went on to say, "Iran's real goal [is] to become a regional superpower and achieve a 'state of equality' with the United States in its diplomatic relations." This is a rather inept way of posing a real problem. Of course, Iran will never be able to achieve a state of equality with the US at the diplomatic level; but a certain détente between global hegemony and the Iranian Islamic Republic would certainly improve the latter's regional position. This would imply some erosion of Israel's regional hegemony, because it is unlikely that, as part of the US-Iran deal, the latter will accept Israel's regional dominance (as Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states have done).

I have repeatedly pointed out that, in this regard, the Israeli interest may differ from the American interest. For example, a year ago I wrote:

"I have my own opinion on the possibility of some kind of settlement between the United States and Iran. Of course, it would depend on many contingencies, but, as the nuclear deal reached by Barack Obama demonstrated, there are circumstances in which it is possible for these two states to reach an agreement. In my opinion, Israeli hostility to Iran has a greater reach than that of the United States. It would be acceptable for the Americans, under certain circumstances, to reach such an agreement, provided that Iran behaved as an obedient client state. That would involve giving Iran some sort of recognition as a major power in the Middle East. But Israel would oppose such a settlement, because it considers Iran to be an obstacle to its own regional hegemony." [9]

This explains Netanyahu's vehement efforts to dissuade the US Congress under the Obama administration from signing the 2015 nuclear deal, and his pressure on Trump to withdraw from the deal (not that Trump needed much pressure). As several Israeli military commentators noted, the U.S. withdrawal left Iran free to enrich uranium to a higher concentration, thus moving closer to the ability to develop nuclear weapons than while

maintaining the deal. The position against Netanyahu's deal would have been irrational if his main concern was Iran's nuclear capability. But he was quite rational, given that his priority was to exacerbate tension in U.S.-Iran relations.

The same logic applies to the Vienna talks. As the well-informed Iranian-American academic Trita Parsi has recently pointed out,

"It is not the nuclear deal that is the Problem of Tel Aviv, but the very idea that Washington and Tehran will reach some détente...

The details of the deal are not the real issue. It is rather the very idea of Washington and Tehran reaching *an* agreement that not only prevents Iran from developing a bomb, but also reduces tensions between the United States and Iran and lifts sanctions that have prevented Iran from enhancing its regional power...

There is a curious passage in the *New York Times* article [published on December 10]: "U.S. officials believe that as long as Iran has not moved to develop a bomb, it does not have a military nuclear program, since it suspended the one it had after 2003. Israeli officials, on the other hand, believe that Iran has clandestinely continued its efforts to build a bomb after 2003." If true, has Israel shared that information with Washington? If so, it has failed to persuade the CIA or the International Atomic Energy Agency. If you haven't shared it, why haven't you? And why did the *NYT* choose to publish this rather incendiary indictment without investigating these very basic, if not elementary, questions?

The moral of the story is this: the diplomatic interests of the United States and Israel in relation to Iran are irreconcilable. Unsurprisingly, Biden's efforts to square the circle have failed. Biden must choose whether he will pursue U.S. interests or those of Israel. It shouldn't be a difficult choice." [10]

Regardless of the political differences we may have with Parsi, his diagnosis of Israel's main concerns is correct. Israel is doing everything it can to prevent any agreement in Vienna. It resorts to various provocations, including thinly veiled threats to take major unilateral military action.

In my opinion, the probability of such an action, a massive Israeli attack on Iran, is fortunately not high. There are no signs in Israel of serious military preparations for this scenario, or of fortifying civilian population centers against expected Iranian and Hezbollah retaliation. However, raids and relatively low-level killings that have become routine are likely to increase; and these can get out of control and lead to a large unwanted conflagration.

### **Nuclear-weapon-free Middle East**

Meanwhile, as Akiva Eldar, a prominent Israeli political commentator, has recently pointed out, what could deflate Israel's conceited bullying stance is a serious proposal for the nuclear demilitarization of the Middle East. In an article titled 'The Iranian Threat: No to Nuclear Weapons for Us, or for Israel', [11] he writes:

"Over the years we have learned that when a politician or a general declares that 'all options are on the table' he is actually referring to a single option: the military option. That is supposedly the only option left to Israel if negotiations with Iran do not produce a nuclear deal that satisfies the political leadership in Jerusalem.

Has anyone read or heard anything about the preparations for the possibility of Iran announcing that it accepts all the restrictions that the United States wants to impose on it; that it will also allow inspectors from the International Atomic Energy Agency to visit its nuclear facilities without warning, and even agree to extend the treaty for another 15 years – all that, on one condition: that Israel sign exactly the same document?

... As far as is known, those who make the decisions in Jerusalem, those who proclaim that "all options are on the table," have not considered the possibility of Iran putting on the table the weapon of the final day: a comprehensive agreement for the nuclear demilitarization of the Middle East – including Israel – and the acceptance of all demands. It's much sexier to show pilots in helmets on TV talking about war preparations.

Akiva Eldar does not exaggerate when he warns against this "weapon of the final day". What he is saying is something very serious. We should demand a nuclear-weapon-free Middle East. Israel, of course, will reject the idea itself, as it has done in the past, but it

will serve to expose its hypocritical position of aggressor demanding sympathy as a victim.

#### Notes:

1. Keep in mind that what is at issue is Iran's alleged intention to become a 'nuclear threshold state', capable of producing nuclear warheads at short notice. As the CIA recently confirmed, there is no credible evidence that Iran has *any real plans* to produce such a weapon (see [www.timesofisrael.com/no-evidence-iran-has-decided-to-weaponize-nuclear-program-cia-boss-says](http://www.timesofisrael.com/no-evidence-iran-has-decided-to-weaponize-nuclear-program-cia-boss-says)). ↩
2. From Netanyahu's official website, April 16, 2015: [www.netanyahu.org.il/en/news/944-holocaust-remembrance-day-address-by-prime-minister-benjamin-netanyahu-at-yad-vashem](http://www.netanyahu.org.il/en/news/944-holocaust-remembrance-day-address-by-prime-minister-benjamin-netanyahu-at-yad-vashem). ↩
3. See J Steele, 'If Iran is willing to talk, the US must do so unconditionally' *The Guardian*, June 2, 2006; 'Lost in translation' *The Guardian* 14 June 2006. ↩
4. 'Iranian nuclear weapons signify the end of Zionism' *Jerusalem Post* September 9, 2008. The title of *JP's* article is a quote from Ephraim Sneh, a politician who expressed the kind of alarmist view Halevy was dismissing; see my article 'Zionism: Propaganda and Sordid Reality', *Weekly Worker* September 17, 2008: [weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/737/zionism-propaganda-and-sordid-reality](http://weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/737/zionism-propaganda-and-sordid-reality). ↩
5. Estimated between 80 and 400 nuclear warheads:  
see [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nuclear\\_weapons\\_and\\_Israel](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nuclear_weapons_and_Israel). ↩
6. See my article. 'Champion assassinator' *Weekly Worker* January 16, 2020: [weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1282/champion-assassinator](http://weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1282/champion-assassinator) . ↩
7. [www.haaretz.com/opinion/.premium-how-to-start-a-war-1.10079341](http://www.haaretz.com/opinion/.premium-how-to-start-a-war-1.10079341) . ↩
8. An Iranian press report on a recent missile exercise highlights its "deterrent power to enemies." See [www.presstv.ir/Detail/2021/12/24/673295/Iran-fires-ballistic-missiles-stark-warning-Israel-drills-end](http://www.presstv.ir/Detail/2021/12/24/673295/Iran-fires-ballistic-missiles-stark-warning-Israel-drills-end) . ↩
9. 'Champion assassinator' *Weekly Worker* January 16, 2020: [weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1282/champion-assassinator](http://weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1282/champion-assassinator) . ↩
10. [responsablestatecraft.org/2021/12/12/bidens-efforts-to-appease-israel-on-iran-have-failed-on-all-fronts](http://responsablestatecraft.org/2021/12/12/bidens-efforts-to-appease-israel-on-iran-have-failed-on-all-fronts) . ↩

11. [www.haaretz.com/opinion/.premium-the-iranian-threat-no-nukes-for-us-or-israel-1.10499558](http://www.haaretz.com/opinion/.premium-the-iranian-threat-no-nukes-for-us-or-israel-1.10499558) . ↵□

**Moshe Machover. Veteran Israeli anti-Zionist socialist militant who co-founded the defunct Socialist Organization of Israel (Matzpen). He currently lives in London. He is Professor Emeritus of Philosophy at King's College, University of London. His most recent book is *Israelis and Palestinians: conflict and resolution*, London 2012.**

Source: <https://weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1377/factory-of-falsehoods/> Translation for  
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Rebellion 18.01.2022