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Israel Accepting Iran Deal As Fait Accompli – OpEd

By Richard Silverstein

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There is increasing evidence to suggest that Israel's far-right leaders have tacitly accepted the eventuality of an Iran-P5+1 nuclear deal. Until now, Israel has conceded no Iranian right to enrich uranium. It has always demanded any nuclear deal include an Iranian concession to stop enrichment, which in effect stops any nuclear program.

"Our policy is simple," Dermer said. "Let Iran have only a peaceful nuclear program and nothing more."

I'm not sure Dermer realizes what he's said, though doubtless he's smart enough to understand it and presumably meant it. He's an extremely close Bibi confidant and would not wander off the reservation in making such an important statement and concession. Of course, any agreement will offer Iran much more than this since it will cover other issues as well including the fate of the Arak reactor and other subjects. It may be that Dermer is conceding this point because he wants to preserve some leverage over other thorny matters that may come up. But at any rate, Israel here has made a major concession.

It's also possible that Israel is only conceding Iran's right to have a nuclear program essentially imported from foreign nations and facilities (enriched uranium, etc.). Though this would be far-fetched on Israel's part, if true.

Yossi Melman, a bellwether among Israeli national security journalists, has written a very strong piece for The Post (Jerusalem Post's Hebrew edition), *Netanyahu, Take Heart: Agreement between Iran and P5+1 is No Tragedy*, which urges Netanyahu to accept the likelihood of a deal. The Israeli reporter argues that Bibi has articulated Israel's relationship with Iran as a "zero sum game" in which the outcome (for Israel) is all or nothing. But in actuality, as long as Iran never crosses the nuclear threshold and creates a bomb, the security situation isn't bad at all.

Melman points out that after meeting in several world capitals (and one location far less so, Kazakhstan), the coming round of nuclear talks will be on U.S. soil. This would indicate extensive progress being made in the talks. If this were not so, Obama would not allow the talks to come to our shores for fear of embarrassment over a possible failure or stalemate. Not to mention that he recognizes that bringing the talks here will focus a huge amount of international and domestic attention on the subject. He wouldn't be willing to brook such exposure unless he felt confident of a positive outcome.

The Israeli correspondent further points out that the May 5th date for the talks falls precisely on Israeli Independence Day. He surmises that this may be a deliberate statement by the U.S. that it is willing to tell the world that this agreement will further secure, rather than endanger Israel's continued independence and existence. Not to mention it's a possible poke in the ribs of PM Netanyahu by a U.S. president who has no love lost for him. Melman adds that this may be a further sign that Israel's maximalist policy toward Iran has failed.

The fatal flaw in Israel's strategic approach to Iran has been to misunderstand its goal. It was not to have an actual physical WMD arsenal, but merely to *have the capacity for one*, that was Iran's goal. This is the same strategy pursued by Japan. You never hear anyone talking about Japan's nuclear capability though it has the capacity to build such a weapon in fairly short order. Iran seeks the same sort of ambiguity. Though ambiguity, especially in parsing the interests of other nations, has never been Israel's strong suit.

Israel's fundamental misunderstanding of Iran's intent has led it to severe errors in projecting the timeline according to which Iran will achieve nuclear breakout potential. As I've reported here (as have Scott Peterson and Nima Shirazi), Israel has been predicting an Iranian bomb going all the way back to 1984. Yet it's never happened. Israel has never explained why. But the simple answer is and has always been, that Iran's goal has not been the same as Israel's in pursuing WMD. It does not want a nuclear arsenal as Israel has. It was the capacity to produce one if it feels the need to. In other words, if it faced an existential threat (a real one, as opposed to the sort that Bibi predicts virtually every time he speaks about Iran) like the sort of attack it faced during its eight year war with Iraq, it would have the ability to put together such a weapon on fairly short notice.

Melman further argues in support of this thesis that if North Korea could produce a nuclear weapon in a matter of years, surely if it wanted to Iran could, after 30-plus years of research and effort, have produced its own by now. The fact that it hasn't means a deliberate decision not to do so.

John Kerry, according to Melman, told Congress that the U.S. aim is to move Iran from its current status of being able to produce a nuclear weapon within three months—to being able to produce one in 12-15 months. According to Bibi's parameters, such an outcome might be seen as a victory for Iran and defeat for Israel. But this is far too simplistic. Iran, Melman says, is not an existential threat to Israel, and a significant delay in its production schedule for producing WMD should not be considered a failure or defeat.