

The Iran Nuclear Threat and “The Second Hostage Crisis”

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Global Research, March 20, 2013

Region: [Middle East & North Africa](#)

Theme: [US NATO War Agenda](#)

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From talk of “red lines” and cartoon bombs to having “all options on the table”, an undeniably delusional logic emanates from leadership in Washington and Tel Aviv regarding the alleged threat posted by Iran’s nuclear program. When Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu famously took to the stage of the UN General Assembly with his doodled explosive, he claimed that Iran would soon have the capability to enrich uranium to 90 percent, allowing them to construct a nuclear weapon by early-mid 2013. In his second administration, Obama, who recently said a nuclear-Iran would represent a danger to Israel and the world, appears to be seeing eye-to-eye with Netanyahu, despite previous reports of the two not being on the same page. For whatever its worth, these two world leaders have taken the conscious decision to entirely ignore evidence brought forward by the US intelligence community, as well as appeals from nuclear scientists, policy-advisers, and IAEA personnel who claim that the “threat” posed by Iran is exaggerated and politicized.

It is common knowledge that Washington’s own National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) on Iran, which reflects the intelligence assessments of America’s 16 spy agencies, confirmed that whatever nuclear weapons program Iran once had was dismantled in 2003. Mr. Netanyahu has not corrected his statements insinuating that Iran was nearing the red line of 90 percent enrichment, even when recent UN reports that show Tehran has in fact decreased its stockpiles of 20 percent fissile material, far below the enrichment level required to weaponize uranium. Hans Blix, former chief of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), has challenged previous IAEA reports on Iran’s nuclear activities, accusing the agency of relying on unverified intelligence from the US and Israel. Flynt Leverett and Hillary Mann Leverett, former Washington insiders and analysts in the Clinton and Bush administrations, recently authored a book titled “*Going to Tehran*”, arguing that Iran is a coherent actor and that evidence for the bomb is simply not there.

Clinton Bastin, former director of US nuclear weapons production programs, [has commented](#) on the status of Iran’s capacity to produce nuclear weapons, stating,

“The ultimate product of Iran’s gas centrifuge facilities would be highly enriched uranium hexafluoride, a gas that cannot be used to make a weapon. Converting the gas to metal, fabricating components and assembling them with high explosives using dangerous and difficult technology that has never been used in Iran would take many years after a diversion of three tons of low enriched uranium gas from fully safeguarded inventories. The resulting weapon, if intended for delivery by missile, would have a yield equivalent to that of a kiloton of conventional high explosives”. Bastin’s assessments corroborate reports that show Iran’s nuclear program is for civilian purposes;

he further emphasizes the impracticality of weaponizing the hexafluoride product of Tehran's gas-centrifuges, as the resulting deterrent would yield a highly inefficient nuclear weapon.

The fact that Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei issued several *fatwas* (a religious prohibition) against the production of nuclear weapons doesn't seem to have helped much either. An unceasing combination of Islamophobia-propaganda, a repetitive insistence that Tehran is edging closer to the threshold, and devastatingly negligent misreporting of Iran and its pursuit of domestic nuclear power has created a situation where the country is viewed as an irrational actor. In the court of Western mainstream opinion, Iran is grouped in the same category as bellicose North Korea, despite the fact that it is a law-abiding signatory to the Nuclear non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) that has consistently cooperated with the IAEA while publically renouncing the use of nuclear weapons. This leads to the current scenario, where Iran and its people are punished under an unethical barrage of economic sanctions for possessing a weapon that they do not possess.

The severity of economic sanctions against Iran and the fabricated allegations of it possessing nuclear weapons serve as a disturbing parallel to the invasion and destruction of Iraq during the Bush administration. From the perspective of this observer, the US does not actually want to go to war with Iran - such an ordeal would bring about an array of overwhelmingly negative ramifications that Obama would probably want to avoid. What the US does want to do however, is to dismantle the foundations of the Islamic Republic by completely destroying its economy through sanctions, prompting the population to rise up and overthrow the regime - so basically, Obama is happy to conduct war by other means. Ayatollah Khamenei's recent proclamations of the US holding a gun to the head of the Iranian nation can only be perceived as entirely accurate.

Its easy to see why the Supreme Leader has doubts over the prospect of negotiations with the US; the deal put forward at the most recent meeting of the P5+1 essentially argued that the US would roll back sanctions that prevent Iran from trading gold and precious metals in exchange for Iran completely shutting down its uranium enrichment plant at Fordo. The substance of this offer appears like it was deliberately drafted to be rejected by the Iranian side, given the fact that it would mandate Iran to shutdown one of its main facilities while keeping in place the most punishing sanctions that have destroyed the Iranian currency and made life-saving medications unaffordable for most - its more of an insult than an offer. For the average Iranian business owner and worker, US-led sanctions and currency devaluation have affected everyday transactions that provide paychecks and economic viability for millions of people.

From urban shopkeepers to rural restaurant owners, many have been forced to close their businesses because they are unable to profit from reselling imported goods purchased with dollars. Isolation from the global banking system has made it increasingly more difficult for Iranian students studying abroad to receive money from their families.

Sanctions targeting Iran's central bank aim to devastate the Iranian export economy, affecting everyone from oil exporters to carpet weavers and pistachio cultivators. By crippling Iranian people's livelihoods and hindering their ability to pursue education and afford necessities, the Obama administration believes such measures will erode public confidence in the government and challenge its legitimacy. It is important to recognize that these sanctions are not only aimed against Iran's government, but at its entire population, especially to the poor and merchant population. An unnamed US intelligence source cited by

the Washington Post elaborates,

“In addition to the direct pressure sanctions exert on the regime’s ability to finance its priorities, another option here is that they will create hate and discontent at the street level so that the Iranian leaders realize that they need to change their ways.”

These sanctions, which are Obama’s throwback to ham-fisted Bush-Cheney era policies, must be seen as part of a series of measures taken to coax widespread social discontent and unrest. US sanctions have broadened their focus, targeting large swaths of the country’s industrial infrastructure, causing the domestic automobile production to plummet by 40 percent, while many essential medical treatments have more than doubled in price. Patients suffering from hemophilia, thalassemia, and cancer have been adversely affected, as the foreign-made medicines they depend on are increasingly more difficult to get ahold of. Over the past two years, general supermarket goods have seen a price hike between 100 to 300 percent. For the first time in the world, a media ban has been imposed, on PressTV, Iran’s state-funded English language international news service. Ofcom, a UK-based communications regulator linked to the British government, spearheaded the prohibition. The European Union has also imposed a travel ban on Press TV CEO Mohammad Sarafraz and eight other officials.

While editorials and commentators in the New York Times and Washington Post regularly accuse Iran of violating international law, the editors of these papers have shown no willingness to scrutinize the US and Israel by holding them accountable when they violate international law, namely, a prohibition of “the threat or use of force” in international relations unless a nation is attacked or such force is authorized by the UNSC, as embodied in the United Nations Charter. It is undeniable that by failing to question the brutal tactics meted out by Washington and Tel Aviv, these papers and the commentators affiliated with them endorse policies that intimidate and coerce civilian populations, in addition to employing terrorist tactics such as targeted cyber-strikes and extrajudicial assassinations – all of which the Iranian nation has been subjected to in utter defiance of the standards and rules of international law and their fundamental bedrock of protecting civilians.

The facts have been proven time and time again, Iran seeks economic development, technological advancement, and energy independence – it wants domestic nuclear power and the freedom to enrich uranium to 20 percent for the medical development of radio-pharmaceuticals and industrial isotopes, as it is entitled to as an NPT signatory. Washington’s threats to impose “secondary” sanctions against third-country entities doing business with the Islamic Republic represents a mafia-mentality so characteristic of the unipolar reality in which the US sees itself. Washington has recently threatened energy-hungry Pakistan with sanctions over its partnership with Tehran in a \$7.5-billion gas pipeline between the two nations, a project that would do infinite good by promoting regional stability and delivering energy to poverty stricken regions in Pakistan. Washington’s sanctions regime will collapse if the US Congress insists that China sharply cut its energy trade and relations with Iran. China will not adhere to such stringent foreign interference into its trade relationships, and Washington is in no position to sanction China because it buys oil from Iran.

If Beijing calls Washington’s bluff, other growth-focused non-Western economies like India, Malaysia, and South Korea will be less fearful of conducting business and buying oil from

Tehran. Obama has taken some cues from the revolutionary students of 1979 and his administration has come up with a hostage crisis of its own, involving holding captive the civilian population of Iran – and Washington looks keen to let the sanctions bite until either the regime bows down, or the people rise up. One of the best examples of the perverted logic behind the US position on Iran comes from Vice President Joe Biden, who recently stated, “*We have also made clear that Iran’s leaders need not sentence their people to economic deprivation*”. Such a statement embodies the upside-down logic of Washington policy-makers who claim the moral high ground while enabling terrorism and engaging in unethical campaigns of economic and military warfare – the present state of affairs simply cannot continue.

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