

US and Israeli Hypocrisy Regarding Iran's Nuclear Program

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It's been almost a decade that the United States, Israel and their European allies have been pressuring Iran to give up its nuclear program. Economic sanctions, threats of military strike, assassinations and cyber attacks were all the options which they have resorted to in order to ruin Iran's nuclear program. At the same time, Israel, which admittedly possesses up to 200 atomic warheads, has been unconditionally supported by the United States and Europe and every effort to investigate Israel's nuclear arsenal by the international organization has been stalled by Washington.

Simultaneously, the ever-increasing animosity between Iran and Israel has embittered the Iran-West relations more than before.

To further investigate the prospect of controversy over Iran's nuclear program, the future of Iran-West relations and the possibility of an Israeli or U.S. military strike, I conducted an interview with American journalist and political analyst, Noah Gimbel.

Noah Gimbel is a freelance journalist based in Washington DC, currently working for the Real News Network. He primarily focuses on geopolitics, particularly relating to the U.S.'s role in the Middle East. His work has been published in Foreign Policy in Focus, Counter Punch, the Epoch Times, Yes Magazine among several other online and print media outlets. Currently, Noah is in Madrid, Spain, covering the financial crisis and the popular movements that have mobilized in response to government austerity.

What follows is the complete text of my in-depth interview with Noah Gimbel.

Kourosh Ziabari: Iranian officials say that the new IAEA chief Yukyia Amano was the United States' choice for the position so that she might further her objectives in isolating Iran through IAEA resolutions and pressuring Iran into giving up its nuclear program. Amano's November 2011 report was completely in line with Washington's large-scale policies vis-à-vis Iran and paved the way for a new round of sanctions by the EU and Washington against Iran's Central Bank and oil sector. Do you agree that former IAEA chief Mohammed ElBaradei had assumed a more independent stance on Iran's nuclear file and that Amano is taking orders from Washington on Iran?

Noah Gimbel: To say that Amano is "taking orders" from Washington on Iran would be speculation. What can be said, however, making reference to leaked diplomatic cables published by Wikileaks, is that the U.S. gave its full support to Amano's candidacy after he had made it clear that he shared Washington's views on the Iranian nuclear program.

ElBaradei, both during and after his tenure at the IAEA, made clear his opinion that the U.S. has long pursued an agenda of seeing to the termination of Iran's nuclear program, and that it attempted to use the IAEA to achieve that goal. ElBaradei repeatedly refused to admit pieces of evidence submitted by the U.S. and Israel to the IAEA into the reports he oversaw because he didn't have faith in their authenticity, and Amano has apparently chosen to admit some of those same pieces. In that sense ElBaradei – a frequent target of U.S. criticism – was more independent than Amano, who as far as I have seen has not once been criticized by the U.S. administration.

KZ: So far, no reliable evidence has been put forward, confirming that Iran has deviated toward military dimensions in its nuclear program. Whatever has been said with regards to the possibility of Iran developing nuclear weapons was based on conjectures and hypothetical assumptions, not hard evidence. Having that said, what's the reason behind the West's enormous pressure on Iran over its nuclear program? Is it only a pretext for confronting Iran or do you see more serious reasons for the hostility?

NG: As you point out in one of your subsequent questions, the Iranian regime has been perceived as inimical to the U.S.'s interests in the region since the revolution of 1979 in which Washington's staunch ally – the Shah – was overthrown, and a number of U.S. embassy personnel were held hostage in the months leading up to the election of Ronald Reagan. Iran's nuclear program has its roots in the Shah's regime, with the blessing and support of the U.S. and Israel, but once the country came under the control of the Islamic Revolution, a nuclear-armed Iran has been turned by U.S. rhetoric into an existential threat to world peace. Of course, no sane person in Washington or Tel Aviv thinks that Iran would launch a nuclear strike even if it did develop one nuclear weapon as Israel and the U.S. possess thousands of them, poised to cause unspeakable damage to Iran and the planet as a whole.

The West's pressure on Iran over its nuclear program is a tool to mobilize public opinion against Iran as escalating sanctions punish the Iranian people. As sanctions scarcely achieve their stated goal of pushing populations into revolt against the targeted regime, in the longer term the public outrage against Iran generated by the inflation of the "threat" its nuclear program poses could potentially be used to bring one or more countries into military conflict against Iran.

KZ: Iranians regularly complain of the double standards exercised by the United States and its allies on the development of nuclear technology. They say that while Israel possesses up to 200 nuclear warheads, Iran is targeted by sanctions and threats of military strike simply because it wants to enrich uranium to be used in its research reactors. What's your take on that? Is it a matter of alliance with the United States that Iran is not allowed to develop nuclear technology?

NG: Not only does Israel have nuclear weapons outside the scope of the NPT, but India has also developed and weaponized its nuclear program with the full support of the United States. The double standard and the hypocrisy of the U.S. and Israel on the issue of the Iranian nuclear program could not be any clearer. But I would go further than to call it a matter of alliance with the United States: What Iran potentially poses is a challenge to the hegemony of the United States. Indeed, Israel does not have a formal treaty of alliance with the U.S., but the national interests of the two states tend almost unanimously to overlap. On the other hand, Iran has resisted U.S. dominance in the region, and is thus literally

surrounded by U.S. military bases. The U.S. affected regime change in Iran once with the overthrow of Dr. Mossadegh in 1953 for the sole reason of avoiding nationalization of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company. Back then they said Iran had gone communist; today they say Iran supports terrorism and seeks nuclear weapons. It's a matter of narrative convenience to isolate and intimidate Iran into changing course either voluntarily or by force.

KZ: Israel and the United States have repeatedly threatened Iran against the possibility of a military strike, should the sanctions and diplomatic efforts fail to convince Tehran to relinquish its nuclear activities. Are these threats realistic and plausible? Should we await a new war in the Middle East?

NG: First let me say that in terms of "diplomatic efforts" we're talking about a few minutes of conversation, with no real sincerity. In the U.S., most of the population is led to equate sanctions with diplomacy simply because the violence inflicted by the sanctions takes a passive form rather than an active one – instead of being shot by helicopters and blown up by drone strikes, people are starved by economic depression and submitted to the increase in crime and repression that always accompanies increasing national poverty.

As long as Iran complies with the IAEA, it will be extremely difficult for the hawkish politicians in the U.S. and Israel to start a new war. As we saw in Libya, the U.S. can exercise a great deal of control on the UN Security Council in order to pave the way for "internationally-sanctioned" military intervention, which under the current framework of international law makes such intervention legal. But without a significant misstep by Iran, Russia and China will have the legitimate support from the rest of the Security Council in blocking the passage of any such resolution.

Meanwhile, there already is a very active war going on in the Middle East – assassinated scientists, computer viruses, and other covert actions that we don't know about yet have been going on for years. I think at this point it's unclear whether or not that will escalate into all-out military conflict, but I think it's hard for even the most hawkish political and military leaders to deny that such an escalation would be utterly disastrous on a global scale.

KZ: What's your analysis of the recent talks between Iran and the P5+1 in Istanbul and Baghdad? It seems that Israel is afraid of a possible agreement between Iran and the six world powers over Tehran's nuclear program. West insists that Iran should suspend its enrichment activities while Tehran remains steadfast in saying that enrichment is its inalienable right under NPT. So, can we foresee a peaceful deal between the two sides while both of them seem to be persistent in their position?

NG: That's very hard to say. I haven't been following the talks extremely closely, but I would expect the US to do everything in its power to delay any resolution, at the very least until after the November elections.

KZ: The United States and its allies have been recurrently directing dangerous, propagandistic claims against Iran in the recent months, including the allegation that Iran has plotted to assassinate Saudi and American diplomats in different countries. Many commentators see these allegations in the context that the U.S. wants to demonize Iran and portray a distorted image of the country in the eyes of global public so as to rationalize its possible plans for launching an attack on Iran. What's your viewpoint?

NG: I think I've addressed some of these issues in my responses to your previous questions, but I would reiterate that the U.S. has made clear its aim to "isolate" Iran as much from sovereign governments as from private companies and individuals. The U.S. has manipulated information in the past in order to justify military aggression, perhaps most blatantly and most disastrously in the lead-up to the invasion of Iraq in 2003. There's a saying "Fool me once, shame on you. Fool me twice, shame on me." The people of the U.S., of NATO countries and the so-called "coalition of the willing" were fooled on a grand scale to acquiesce to the execution of the Iraq war carried out in their names, funded by their taxes. I would like to think that people are now on guard against such lies, and that democratic societies wouldn't permit a few elites to plunge the world into such a disastrous scenario, but then again the same thing was said after Vietnam; before that, after the First World War

KZ Iran's Islamic Revolution in 1979 embittered the relations between Iran and the United States. With the victory of Iranian revolution, the United States lost its key ally in the region and Iran became a major opponent of the U.S. policies in the Middle East. Do you foresee any chances of reconciliation and rapprochement between the two states, or are they destined to remain at odds forever?

NG: I would point out that covertly, there was some cooperation between the U.S. and Iran after the revolution, which also involved Israel. I'm referring to the so-called Iran-contra scandal whereby the U.S. sold weapons to Iran in contradiction of U.S. law during the Iran-Iraq war vis-à-vis Israel, even as the U.S. rhetorically supported Saddam Hussein who had previously been on the payroll of the CIA.

I think that in the short term – under either a second Obama administration or the first Romney administration – there is no hope of reconciliation, at least at the level of elite politics. However, I have seen hopeful signs of collaboration between Iranian and American civil society. Normal people are always losers in any conflict, on all sides, and a lot of people recognize that fact. In the U.S., since the military draft was abolished after Vietnam, the population has been alienated from the military aggression launched in their name. They experience war only virtually, through compliant media outlets that transmit the narrative of the government as though it were unquestionable fact.

As that informational hold on U.S. public opinion is slowly broken, if indeed it is to be broken, so will the hegemonic foreign policy of the United States, and with it the socio-economic order imposed by global capital. None of this is destined to happen, and it will take a great deal of struggle to achieve the necessary shift in priorities, consciousness, etc. before climate change and other real existential threats do away with the world as we know it.

KZ: Some political analysts say that the United States is using the nuclear pretext for realizing a larger goal, which is a regime change in Tehran. Do you agree with this viewpoint? Is the United States still looking for ways to overthrow the current government of Iran?

NG: I think I've answered this question above. The demands of the corporate structure that is really behind the policy of the United States will determine the way that policy is formulated. If the current government can be made to cooperate with those demands, the mere appearance of military rivalry will continue to fuel a very profitable arms race. If the demands for oil, for shipping access, etc. are truly threatened by the Iranian regime, the U.S. and all the other countries acting on behalf of the same corporate power structure will act according to their needs. If that means overthrowing the government, that's what they'll

seek to do.

But I don't think they have refrained from doing so for lack of means, rather for lack of urgency. As profitable as war can be for many key sectors, tension and political conflict – the preparation for war – can also reap in huge profits.

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