

The Bizarre US-Iranian Negotiations

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The negotiations between the US government and the Iranian government is essentially bizarre. The US state (and the states of France, Britain, China, Germany, and Russia) are negotiating with the Iranian state over whether the Iranians can develop a nuclear power industry which might, perhaps, be used for building nuclear bombs. The Iranians deny they are interested in building such bombs. The US state, armed to the eyebrows with nuclear weaponry, plus the largest military forces on the face of the earth (larger than all others combined), and allied, in the region, with nuclear-armed Israel, is making unilateral demands on Iran. In return, the US offers only to end its “sanctions” and embargo of the Iranian economy. We see the massive hypocrisy of the U.S. state which turns to smaller, weaker, nations and tells them, “YOU must not have nuclear bombs! If you do, it will threaten the peace of the world!”

Of the other negotiators, they too all have nuclear bombs, except for Germany, which is part of nuclear-armed NATO. They are all imperial great powers, except for China, which is working to become an imperial power. For all its regional influence, Iran is a weaker (“Third World”) nation which has historically been dominated by great powers. Iranians recollect how the US and Britain overthrew the democratically-elected Mossedagh regime, for trying to nationalize the oil companies, and replaced it with the dictatorship of the Shah.

By what right does the US state (and the other imperial states) make demands on the Iranians? Suppose the Iranians demanded that the US dismantle its nuclear power plants, disarm its nuclear missiles, withdraw its 150 or so overseas military bases, pull out of Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria, and stop subsidizing Israel? Suppose the Iranian state backed up these demands by organizing a world-wide embargo of the US economy, including oil and all other trade? Surely all US politicians, business leaders, and media pundits would unite in screaming about “terrorism” and the need to protect US “sovereignty”!

The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty was supposed to stop non-nuclear powers from getting atomic armaments. But also, the nuclear-armed powers were supposed to negotiate away their terrible bombs, toward a worldwide condition of nuclear (at least) disarmament. Of course, this has never happened. Following the implosion of the Soviet Union, a number of liberals argued that now was the golden moment for the U.S. to lead a global movement for nuclear disarmament. After all, the U.S. no longer needed to defend itself from a nuclear-armed superpower. This antinuclear crusade did not happen either.

Led by President Obama (who grotesquely received the Nobel Peace Prize), the US justifies its bullying by claiming that the Iranian regime “promotes terrorism.” This means that the Iranians intervene in other countries in their region, supporting forces which are favorable to their interests and opposing those which are unfavorable. So does the US state, except that the US treats the whole world as its “region.” Meanwhile the US, which complains of “terrorism,” flies drones to countries all around the region, without permission of local governments, to kill people.

The US also justifies itself by claiming that Iranian leaders have threatened Israel. Some have, including using vile anti-Semitic propaganda, and others have rejected this approach (such as the current president). What is certain is that the nuclear-armed state of Israel has not merely made verbal threats but has actually driven Palestinian Arabs into the desert, seized their lands, denied them the right to return to their homes, attacked other Arab states, and prevented the creation of a Palestinian state even on the little land which was left to them.

The alternative approach would have been for the US government to push for a nuclear-free Middle East, including Iran and Israel. Even better would be for the US to campaign for a nuclear-

free world, with complete nuclear disarmament by all nations. Of course, none of this is discussed among “serious” political thinkers!

US Politics

US politics is divided on this issue. On one side are most Democrats, who support the president’s negotiation efforts. Recently the US negotiators have claimed to have reached a workable overall agreement, to be finalized in detail in June or thereabouts. Liberals and peaceniks are all delighted. They ignore that this would mean a victory for imperial great power politics, in which the US has succeeded in bullying a smaller nation.

However, the Republicans have persistently opposed the negotiations and any possible deal. While some of them claim that they want a “better” deal, their demands are so extreme that in practice they are simply against any agreement at all. It seems that they would only accept a deal if Supreme Leader Khameni were to convert to orthodox Judaism or fundamentalist Christianity. Some have been explicit: they want the US to attack Iran, to drop bombs (perhaps nuclear bombs) on possible nuclear sites. They are undeterred by estimations that this would only set back a nuclear program for five to ten years, meanwhile uniting all Iranians—even the opponents of the regime—in hostility to the US.

Partially Republicans are motivated by hatred of President Obama, and partially they suffer from rightwing ignorance. Another factor is Israel. A hawkish support for Israel was once the mainstay of the Democrats, who got money and votes from Jewish Americans. The US Zionists built up a network of support across the political spectrum, channelling money to members of both parties. But the US right has increasingly become the most fanatical in its endorsement of the Israelis, however awful their oppression of the Palestinians. Their base includes politically-active “born-again” Christian fundamentalists who are all-out supporters of Israel. They have decided that it is central to the coming Apocalypse. (This is not really pro-Jewish, since they expect that most Jews will die in the Final Days, but a minority will convert to Christianity and be saved.)

Meanwhile most US Jews remain moderately liberal (Democratic) in their politics, especially since both past Israeli leaders and Palestinian leaders have endorsed a “two-state” solution. However, actual politics in Israel itself has swung to the right, abandoning the “two-state” concept in action, and now in words. The Israeli president, Benjamin Netanyahu, has openly become a supporter of—and supported by—the US Republicans. Under their sponsorship, he addressed the US Congress, to denounce Obama’s negotiations with Iran. So the right wing of US imperialism uses Israel as a weapon for its interests. And the range of political opinion within US politics remains destructively narrow, both sides accepting the right of the US to dominate the world.

Should Iran Have a Nuclear Bomb?

As an oppressed nation (compared to the great imperial powers) Iran has the right to defend itself as well as decide how to develop its energy resources. Certainly the hypocritical US state, the agent of the US giant corporations, has no business in determining what Iran does. But for internationalists who oppose nationalist states, capitalist economies, and ecological catastrophe, this does not settle all questions. In my opinion it would be wrong for the Iranian state to develop

nuclear bombs, and even to build up nuclear power. The Iranian people would be better served if they opposed their state's measures in these directions. (The following is taken from Price, 2006.)

Nuclear bombs are not like other armaments, and should not be regarded as "weapons" at all. By their very nature, they are anti-civilian, society-destroying, instruments of human extermination. The destructive force of the original, black, gunpowder was approximately doubled by TNT. By the time World War II was over, they had created explosives 60 % as powerful as TNT. But the nuclear bombs used on Japan were 12,000 times as powerful as the best improvement on TNT. (Macdonald, 1970, p. 169) And hydrogen (fusion) bombs are many times more destructive than the first atomic (fission) bombs. "A more or less typical strategic warhead has a yield of two megatons, the explosive equivalent of two million tons of TNT. But two million tons of TNT is about the same as all the bombs exploded in World War II—a single bomb with the explosive power of the entire Second World War but compressed into a few seconds of time and an area 30 or 40 miles across." (Carl Sagan, 1983, p. 4)

The immense power of their blast, as well as the radioactivity they spew out, makes them devices for destroying populations, cities, industries, and food-growing areas. Unlike all previous weapons, there is no defense against nuclear bombs. They are pure devices of mass annihilation.

Besides its blast, nuclear bombs are spreaders of radioactivity. Each bomb would launch into the air tons of radioactive substances, to spread throughout the globe. We know from atomic bomb tests that they spread radioactive poison throughout the international food chain, into fish far out to sea, and, closer to home, in mothers' breast milk. So even if one nation used such "weapons" against another, the attacker's people would still feel the effects.

A nuclear war between two or more national states would be mutual suicide, as each "defended" itself by exterminating the other. Nuclear missiles have been compared to a pistol with two barrels, one pointed at the enemy and one pointed at the holder of the gun. To shoot it is to simultaneously commit murder and suicide. Even a one-sided nuclear attack against a non-nuclear nation would result in suicide.

The effect of a nuclear war would be to throw up so much debris and smoke from fires as to blot out the sun throughout the world. This would cause the dying out of plants, and of the animals which depend on them (including homo sapiens). The effect would be similar to that of the asteroid which once hit the earth and wiped out the dinosaurs or to the volcano eruptions which may have caused other natural extinctions. How such a "nuclear winter" would interact with global warming has not been studied, as far as I know, but the effect on the balance of nature could not be good.

With the end of the Cold War, we are faced with the possibility of "small" nuclear wars. Even these could be disastrous. Carl Sagan concluded, "Perhaps the greatest surprise in our work was that even small nuclear wars can have devastating climatic effects. We considered a war in which a mere 100 megatons were exploded, [a few hundred strategic weapons] less than one percent of the world arsenals, and only in low-yield airbursts over cities. This scenario, we found, would ignite thousands of fires, and the smoke from these fires alone would be enough to generate an epoch of cold and dark almost as severe as in the 5000-megaton case. The threshold for...The Nuclear Winter is very low." (1983, p. 7) As for "peaceful" development of nuclear energy, Greenpeace was right to declare in a public statement, "Nuclear power is inextricably linked with nuclear proliferation. None of the schemes being promoted will solve this problem. In fact, they will make it worse." (quoted in Broad & Sanger 2006, p. 12)

The major defense of a free society would not be in bombs or in military organization but in politics, in its appeal to the populations of other lands. Were a revolutionary society to dismantle its nuclear weapons, this would be a powerful political message, as we say to the people of the world, "We are destroying the hell bombs that were built by the capitalist state. We are abandoning our ability to exterminate you. We are creating a new society. Do not let your rulers use you to attack us! Disarm them! Overthrow their states! Join us in a free world !" A revolution—especially in the U.S., the center of world imperialism—would have a tremendous political impact throughout the world. Foreign soldiers sent to destroy U.S. workers would become "infected" by the revolution. Foreign governments would fear to send their forces against a free North America, lest they be destroyed by guerrilla war, defense-in-depth, sabotage, nonviolent resistance, and by revolutionary propaganda. This would be our "deterrence." Freedom would be our best defense.

The threat of nuclear self-extinction is not a problem of Iran nor even of the United States. It is a problem of the capitalist system of war-making national states. It is a problem of the international capitalist economic system. It is a problem of way capitalist industrialism and the state have developed technology, including their disastrous energy technologies. All these are bound together. The nuclear bombs exist. Sooner or later they will be used. We cannot rely on the national governments to disarm. They must be disarmed. The workers and oppressed people of the world must take them apart, including their nuclear arsenals.

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