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Opinion

SEYED HOSSEIN MOUSAVIAN

Red line on Iran: No, here are Netanyahu's real objectives

By Seyed Hossein Mousavian | OCTOBER 09, 2012

Although US officials do not believe Iran has decided to build a nuclear bomb, Israel has gone into overdrive to convince the world that Iran is on the verge of acquiring a nuclear weapon and must have all its uranium enrichment activities stopped by all means possible, including the military option. Under Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's leadership, these efforts thus far have not garnered much support.

Israel's rhetoric and threats aim to convince the United States to stop Iran's uranium enrichment activities and place unrelenting economic, political, and, if necessary, military pressure on Iran. Yet, this is an unrealistic demand since Iran, as a signatory to the Non-Proliferation Treaty, has the legitimate right to enrichment. Moreover, the International Atomic Energy Agency has maintained that there is no evidence that Iran has diverted material for a nuclear weapon. That is why US State Department spokeswoman Victoria Nuland said last month that "it is not useful" to set deadlines or outline "red lines." In response, Netanyahu blasted Washington's position by saying, "The world tells Israel, 'Wait. There's still time,' and I say: 'Wait for what? Wait until when?' Those in the international community who refuse to put red lines before Iran don't have a moral right to place a red light before Israel."

His statement humiliates the United States, and gives the impression to the international community that it is Tel Aviv who calls the shots in Washington. In addition, such immature loose talk of war could encourage Iran and the Islamic world to take military action against Israel in order to persuade the international community to pressure Israel to give up on *its* nuclear arsenal.

The United States and the majority of its allies generally agree on three things about Iran's nuclear program: Tehran does not have a bomb, has not decided to build one, and is not on the verge of achieving a nuclear weapon. Nevertheless, there is a deep belief that Iran intends to at least acquire the capacity to build nuclear weapons in a relatively short time should it

deem them necessary and, as a result, they do not trust that Iran will confine its nuclear activities to nonmilitary purposes.

But for Israel, the Iranian nuclear issue has broad strategic advantages. Netanyahu aims to achieve the following 10 objectives by pressing the Iranian nuclear issue:

1. drag the United States into a devastating war with Iran;
2. if not, commit President Obama to publicly escalate US military pressure on Tehran;
3. paint Iran as the number one threat to peace and security of the Middle East;
4. prevent a realistic and peaceful resolution toward Iran's nuclear program;
5. push the United States and EU to implement further sanctions;
6. weaken Iran's regional role and influence;
7. receive increased US and EU military assistance for Israel;
8. sideline major domestic socioeconomic and political woes facing Israel;
9. resolve the Israeli defense budget deficit from the pockets of the American taxpayer;
10. distract the world from the Middle East peace process and the plight of the Palestinians.

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Regrettably, due to unrelenting pressure from Netanyahu, the Americans backed out of a possible breakthrough on the Iranian nuclear dossier in 2010. At that time, Washington was ready to make a relatively fair negotiated deal with Tehran by accepting the legitimate right of Iran to enrichment; in return, Iran would accept limits on its level and capacity of its enrichment and allow intrusive inspections. This was the primary reason why Secretary of State Hillary Clinton announced that “Iran can enrich uranium for civilian purposes at some future date once it has demonstrated it can do so in a responsible manner and in accordance with Iran's international obligations.”

This opportunity still exists, but as long as the Israeli prime minister aims to realize the 10 objectives, he will not give up on demonizing Iran and presenting it as the existential threat to Israel. The cost of his folly will be paid by the United States, the West, and his own people.

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Woodrow Wilson School and a former spokesman for Iran's nuclear negotiators. His latest book is "The Iranian Nuclear Crisis: A Memoir."

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