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THE IRAN DEAL: IRRATIONALITY IN FOREIGN POLICY DISCOURSE

イラン核交渉：国際政治にみる言説の不合理性

Yakov M. Rabkin*

本稿は2年間の交渉の末昨年7月に漸く合意に至ったイラン核交渉について、その背景にあって強かに交渉の帰趨を支配してきた国際政治の構造的な要因に着目し、それがイラン問題に留まらず広く現在の国際関係を歴史的に規定してきたことに注意を喚起しようとするものである。

2013年以降のイラン核開発疑惑をめぐる交渉の実質的な主役である米国は、この交渉について国家安全保障上の「深刻な懸念」を表明するイスラエルの説得に腐心してきた。だがここでイスラエルの懸念の主な根拠がアフマディネジャード大統領(当時)の「イスラエルを地図上から消す」発言であること、この発言の真意についてあいまいな部分が残るにもかかわらず、イスラエル側がネタニエフ首相を中心にこれに固執し続けてきたことはきわめて特異なことであると言わなければならない。

その背景にはオスロ合意の空洞化と軌を一にするイスラエルの国内政治の極端な右傾化、1979年の革命以後のイランを全否定して「反近代化(De-modernization)」のサイクルに落とし込もうとする一部の根強い潮流(それは皮肉にも隣国のイラクにおいて実現した)、さらに旧来からの「西欧 VS アジア」の差別的構造を維持しようとする強力な力が否定しようもなく働いていると見るべきであろう。

この最後の点について筆者は第二次大戦中のマンハッタン計画に言及し、当時のルーズベルト米大統領がいずれにしても西欧側にあったナチス・ドイツへの原爆の投下を躊躇する一方で、これを引継いだトルーマン大統領はその外部にあった日本に対して2度の原爆投下をためらわなかったという事実を指摘する。こうした事例に象徴される不平等な関係が現在でも絶えず繰り返されている事実は、イラン核合意の性格を公平に理解し今後の展開を見通すうえで不可欠な前提である。

(文責・鈴木 均)

*Yakov M. Rabkin is professor of history at the University of Montreal; his most recent book is *What is Modern Israel?* (Pluto/University of Chicago Press, 2016), and its Japanese version 『イスラエルとは何か』(平凡社新書、2012年).

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It took two years of intense negotiations, travel by diplomats equal to 16 around-the-world trips and thousands of pages of position papers to solve a problem ... that never existed:

“It is not hard to argue that, had there been no diplomatic rupture between Teheran and Washington for so long, many of the upheavals in the region would have been avoided. It is also not hard to argue that there would have been no ‘manufactured crisis’ about Iran’s nuclear programme, had the two countries remained friendly after the Iranian revolution in 1979. And, finally, there would have been no occasion for an historical breakthrough.”¹

Intelligence services of major powers, such as the U.S. National Intelligence Estimate, repeatedly concluded that Iran was not developing a nuclear weapon.² Crude attempts to plant intelligence and raise the spectre of the bomb were no more credible than earlier claims that Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction. As we know, that false intelligence led Western powers to attack and devastate Iraq. The emergence of the terrorist Islamic State, or Daesh, is one of the consequences of that attack. Hundreds of thousands of casualties and millions of refugees from the war is another.

Partly because of the lamentable U.S. experience in Afghanistan and Iraq, an attack on Iran has so far been prevented but threats of an attack continue to be voiced in Israel and in the United States. This is why it is instructive to look at the origins of “the Iranian threat”, the effects of Western and Israeli punitive actions on Iran, the process that led to the signing of the Vienna agreement (Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, or JCPOA) and the resulting state of international relations.

Background

Iran signed the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) in 1968, soon after receiving a nuclear research reactor and highly enriched uranium to use in it from the United States. This development was halted after the Islamic Revolution of 1979 and a military attack on Iran by the then U.S.-supported and armed Iraq in 1980. The war lasted eight years and dramatically drained Iran’s resources. It was only in the 1990s that Iran concluded agreements with China, Russia and Pakistan with the purpose of resuming a peaceful nuclear programme. However, intense pressure from the United States slowed down cooperation with these countries. The U.S., notably the only country to have actually used atomic bombs, officially called Iran, which had not attacked another country for centuries, “a rogue state.” President Clinton’s National

¹ Adam Tarock, “The Iran Nuclear Deal: Winning a Little, Losing a Lot”, *Third World Quarterly* (37) 8, 2016, pp. 1408-1424, http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01436597.2016.1166049#.V5om_KLjasI (this and all the other URLs in this article were last accessed on July 28, 2016).

² See illustration: http://www.blackcommentator.com/256/256_images/256_cartoon_iran_not_nuclear_threat_large.gif

Security Advisor elaborated this concept under the appellation of “backlash states” and argued that “the United States has a special responsibility for developing a strategy to neutralize, contain and, through selective pressure, perhaps eventually transform these backlash states into constructive members of the international community”.³ President Bush Jr. included Iran in “the axis of evil”, another innovation in the vocabulary of international relations. Consequently, Washington deemed Tehran too irresponsible to deal with nuclear technology, let alone nuclear weapons.

In the post-Cold War unipolar world this approach, promoted by the United States as the sole superpower, became known as an international consensus. Iran was not allowed to develop technologies that many other countries were developing without hindrance. To this effect, Iran was forced to sign an agreement with the EU-3 (France, Germany and the UK) in Paris in 2004 which suspended both enrichment and conversion activities, including the manufacture and operation of centrifuges. It was a modern version of the “unequal treaties” that China, Tokugawa Japan, Egypt and others had been forced to sign in the 19th century. Arguing that the EU-3 had succumbed to U.S. pressure and had failed to uphold its part of the agreement, in June 2005 the outgoing President Khatami announced the resumption of uranium enrichment and conversion.⁴ The new president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, elected a year later, attended the restart of an enrichment facility under the surveillance of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). This brought about international sanctions and the freezing of Iranian assets abroad. “Iran has been punished for a ‘crime’ that it might commit, in some unspecified future, of making a bomb in violation of the Nuclear NPT.”⁵

However, neither Israeli intelligence services nor the IAEA has ever produced proof that Iran was actually engaged in weaponization.⁶ Iran’s leaders reiterated their country’s principled opposition to nuclear arms while pointing out at double standards: the United States not only continued to develop nuclear weapons but so did its main regional protégé Israel, which never even signed the NPT. Israel is suspected of being behind mysterious assassinations of several nuclear scientists in Iran and cyber attacks on Iran’s nuclear facilities; it has played an overtly crucial role in stirring anti-Iran sentiment and leading opposition to the Vienna agreement (JCPOA) within the United States.

³ Anthony Lake, “Confronting Backlash States”, *Foreign Affairs* 73 (2) March - April 1994, pp. 45-55.

⁴ Peter Osborne and David Morrison, *A Dangerous Delusion: Why the West Is Wrong About Nuclear Iran*, London: Elliott and Thompson, 2013, <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/f3922552-fee6-11d9-94b4-00000e2511c8.html?siteedition=intl#axzz4IxSQaZNY>

⁵ *ibid.*

⁶ Ames Risen & Mark Mazzetti, “U.S. Agencies See No Move by Iran to Build a Bomb”, *New York Times*, February 24, 2012, http://www.nytimes.com/2012/02/25/world/middleeast/us-agencies-see-no-move-by-iran-to-build-a-bomb.html?_r=0

Claims and Allegations

The defiant tone of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, Iran's president from 2005 to 2013, offered Israel and its allies in the United States an opportunity to portray Iran as an inveterate enemy of the Jews that officially denied the Holocaust and was plotting wholesale physical destruction of the Israeli population. Both accusations turned out to be false but U.S. diplomats at the United Nations would walk out of the General Assembly invoking these two reasons for their refusal to hear the Iranian president speak: Holocaust denial and plans to "wipe Israel off the map." Even though Western media did report some of his quotes correctly, and even though his speeches are available in translation online⁷, the image of the Iranian president as a Holocaust denier was firmly embedded in Western media. By extension, Iran was portrayed as a country run by homicidal irrational anti-Semites.

These two claims were meant to lead to a new war. Iranian leaders' principled opposition to Zionism⁸ and their firm condemnations of Israel's treatment of the Palestinians had long placed Iran in the category of "existential threats" invoked by successive Israeli governments. Prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu brandished crude schemes of the bomb at the United Nations⁹ and, in the course of several years, repeatedly claimed that Iran was just a few months away from developing nuclear weapons. The non-existent weapon of mass destruction was used as a weapon of mass distraction, diverting world attention away from the wretched fate of the Palestinians and focusing it on Israel's threats to bomb Iran. In the meantime, Israel was free to wage war on Gaza and other Palestinians with total impunity. The new "existential threat" also served to consolidate political support for the ruling party and move Israeli society further right.

Yet, the Iranian president was clearly making a distinction between Israel and the Jews: "vigilant and just human beings will not blame the Jews for the crimes committed by the fake Zionist regime and its supporters in the occupied territories."¹⁰ The Jews of Iran continue to practice Judaism without much interference from the Iranian authorities and stay put in the country they have inhabited for thousands of

⁷ http://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=ahmadinejad+on+holocaust&search=Search

⁸ Among the many tendencies within Zionism, the one that has triumphed set out to transfer the Jews from their countries of origin to Palestine and to establish political and economic control over the "new-old land," as the founder of political Zionism Theodor Herzl called it, if need be by force. The Zionist project in Palestine, based on the principles of *hafrada* (separate development) and *geulat haarets* (redemption and acquisition of the land), has led to discrimination, dispossession and exile of native Arab Palestinians. (For more details see: Ilan Pappé, *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine*, London: Oneworld, 2007 and Yakov M. Rabkin, *What is Modern Israel?*, London: Pluto, 2016.)

⁹ See illustration: http://www.vosizneias.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/UN-General-Assembly-I_sham.jpg

¹⁰ Quoted from "Why we went to Iran", <http://www.nkusa.org/activities/Statements/20070402IranWhycfm.cfm>

years. Had anti-Jewish fanatics run Iran, they would have harassed the helpless local Jews rather than challenge a nuclear-armed regional power and its superpower ally.

Moreover, in using the memory of the Holocaust for his own political purposes, the Iranian president was hardly alone. According to Moshe Zimmermann, professor of German history and public intellectual in Israel, “the Shoah [Holocaust] is an oft-used instrument. Speaking cynically, it can be said that the Shoah is among the most useful objects for manipulating the public, and particularly the Jewish people, in and outside of Israel. In Israeli politics, the Shoah is held to demonstrate that an unarmed Jew is as good as a dead Jew”.¹¹

There are political reasons why the accusation of Holocaust denial is brought up. A denier of the massacre of hundreds of thousands of Jews in Ukraine in the 17th century or of the expulsion of Jews from Spain in the 15th would attract no more attention than a member of the Flat Earth Society. Nor would denial of the vastly greater massacres suffered by the original inhabitants of the Americas be viewed with such opprobrium. Yet, many Zionists today interpret any doubt expressed about the Nazi genocide or even about its scope as a present threat to destroy the Jews. It is not only the historical recency and the magnitude of the industrialized massacre of Jews across Europe, but the political uses of its memory, decried by Zimmermann and many other Jewish intellectuals, that make it unique.

Norman Finkelstein’s *Holocaust Industry* amply documents how the memory of the Nazi genocide has been harnessed for political purposes by Israel and pro-Israel advocates to justify its *raison d’être* and claim impunity for its military actions. For decades, references to the Nazi genocide in Europe have functioned as an instrument of persuasion in the hands of Israeli foreign policy to mute criticism and to generate sympathy for the state, which styles itself as the collective heir of the six million victims. The Nazi genocide has been invoked to present Israel as the ultimate saviour not only of Israeli Jews but as the potential redeemer of Jews around the world. The message was to be one of rebirth, of pride in belonging to Israel, and against the indignity of dying in Europe. The deliberate conflation between Israel and the Jews has dangerously muddled political debate about the Middle East, mixing in emotional and even theological arguments.

Iran was thus portrayed as intent on “wiping Israel off the map.” This was done by mistranslating one of Ayatollah Khomeini’s decades-old anti-Zionist diatribes: *Esrâ’îl bâyard az sahneyeh roozégâr mahv shavad*, which means “Israel must vanish from the page of time,” and does not mention any map, let alone killing. This phrase is so common as to be seen on many walls in Tehran and other Iranian cities. Yet just as the end of Soviet communism and the end of the Shah’s regime in Iran never meant wiping out population of these countries from the face of the earth, the call for an end to Zionism did not mean the destruction of the country and its population. In fact,

¹¹ Yeshayahu Leibowitz, *Peuple, Terre, État*, Paris: Plon, 1995, p. 61.

President Ahmadinejad was expressing no more than “a vague wish for the future,”¹² a wish for a regime change, not a genocide. Indeed, after the phrase “wiping Israel off the map” was exposed as a canard, some Israeli instigators of the anti-Iran campaign, namely the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs (JCPA), quietly dropped it from further use.¹³

However, anti-Iran fear mongering quickly shaped a new Zionist consensus. The right-wing politician Nathan Sharansky, the doyen of the New Historians Benny Morris and the otherwise liberal scholar Shlomo Avineri, in spite of their political differences, called on the Jews of the world to rally against Iran.¹⁴ They repeated the assertion that Iran was determined “to wipe Israel off the map.” Sharansky saw in this opposition to Iran a messianic-sounding opportunity “to save the world.”¹⁵ Morris publicly warned against another Holocaust at the hands of Iran.¹⁶ The hysteria was palpable.

The role of the Israel Lobby in Washington was seminal in stirring the anti-Iran hysteria. The America-Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) meeting in Spring 2006 made Iran its special target and reportedly featured giant screens alternating clips of Adolf Hitler denouncing the Jews and Mahmoud Ahmadinejad whose words were interpreted as a threat “to wipe Israel off the map.” The show ended with a fade-out to the post-Holocaust vow “Never Again.”¹⁷ Within months, these images became commonplace and the Iranian president came to be referred to as Hitler by U.S. officials.¹⁸

JCPA actively promoted the anti-Iran campaign from both Israel and the United States. In December 2006 it organized a press conference proposing to indict President

¹² Jonathan Steele, “Lost in translation”, *The Guardian*, June 14, 2006, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2006/jun/14/post155>

¹³ On the controversy about this phrase see:
http://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/theeditors/2007/03/wiped_off_the_map.html;
https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/fact-checker/post/did-ahmadinejad-really-say-israel-should-be-wiped-off-the-map/2011/10/04/gIQABJIKML_blog.html;
<http://www.globalresearch.ca/israel-wiped-off-the-map-the-rumor-of-the-century-fabricated-by-the-us-media-to-justify-an-all-out-war-on-iran/21188>.

¹⁴ “Shlomo Avineri responds,” *Dissent*, Winter 2007, <https://www.dissentmagazine.org/article/shlomo-avineri-responds>

¹⁵ Nathan Sharansky, “Mobilize now, save the world”, *Jerusalem Post*, February 11, 2007, <http://www.jpost.com/Opinion/Op-Ed-Contributors/Mobilize-now-save-the-world>

¹⁶ Benny Morris, “Using Bombs to Stave off War”, *New York Times*, July 18, 2008, http://www.nytimes.com/2008/07/18/opinion/18morris.html?_r=1&scp=1&sq=Benny%20Morris&st=cse&oref=slogin

¹⁷ <http://int.icej.org/news/headlines/aipac-head-compares-iranian-leader-hitler>; Alice Ollstein, “Wandering Jew - Propaganda for the Insipid”, *Jewish Journal* (Los Angeles) March 30, 2006, http://www.jewishjournal.com/wandering_jew/article/wandering_jew_propaganda_for_the_insidip_20060331

¹⁸ Peter Hutchison, “WikiLeaks: US referred to Mahmoud Ahmadinejad as 'Hitler'”, *The Telegraph* November 28, 2010, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/8166248/WikiLeaks-US-referred-to-Mahmoud-Ahmadinejad-as-Hitler.html>

Ahmadinejad for threatening to commit mass murder. Nobel Prize laureate Elie Wiesel and two prominent lawyers, the American Alan Dershowitz and the Canadian Irwin Cotler, known for their staunch support of Israel's right wing circles, were there to call for expelling Iran from the United Nations.¹⁹ Cotler, a Liberal member of Canada's parliament, later called on Canadian and other governments to prosecute Iran for an alleged violation of the U.N. Genocide Convention. The JCPA initiative was at the root of similar public anti-Iran activities in Australia and other countries.²⁰

The most impressive contribution to stirring the anti-Iran sentiment was made by the Israel Project, a Washington-based constituent of the Israel Lobby. In March 2007 it distributed an "Iran Press Kit" to over 17,000 media professionals and 40,000 pro-Israel activists in the United States. The Jerusalem office of the Israel Project distributed the kit to more than 400 foreign journalists accredited in Israel. The Iran Press Kit claimed that the Iranian president "denies the Holocaust and says he wants to wipe Israel off the map." It also added that Iranian leaders supported attacks that killed thousands of Americans. Since many Americans continue to believe that Saddam Hussein was behind September 11, it would not be difficult to make this new accusation stick. The Israel Project also played on the fear of a nuclear attack: one of the documents in the press kit warns that "The Nuclear Clock is TICKING ... and time is running out." The documents distributed by the Israel Project promoted the image of Iran as a threat not only to Israeli security but also to that of Europe and the United States.

The two emotionally charged accusations hurled at Iran — Holocaust denial and intention to wipe Israel off the map — certainly helped prepare the public opinion for a military strike against the oil-rich Iran, a disquieting remake of the scare of Iraq's illusory weapons of mass destruction.²¹ Prior to this propaganda barrage public opinion surveys had shown that Israel was perceived as constituting a greater danger to world peace than Iran.²² Ten years later, Israel tied with Iran in terms of being viewed as a threat to world peace.²³ This shows the democratic deficit of the apparently solid international support for Israel: the population of major Western countries is consistently and significantly more critical of Israel than their governments.

The demonization of the Iranian president as a Holocaust denier bent on wiping Israel off the map in an act of genocide became commonplace. He appeared to be the

¹⁹ Hillary Leila Krieger, "Jewish Heavy-Hitters swing at Iran", *Jerusalem Post*, September 12, 2006, <http://www.jpost.com/Iranian-Threat/News/Jewish-heavy-hitters-swing-at-Iran>

²⁰ <http://jcpa.org/iran/>

²¹ Mark Mackinnon and Alicja Siekierska, "Iraq Confidential", *Globe and Mail*, July 7, 2016, <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/world/i-will-be-with-you-whatever-how-blair-and-bush-set-course-for-war-behind-thescenes/article30765161/>

²² By Ambrose Evans-Pritchard, "Israel is No 1 threat to peace, says EU poll", *The Telegraph*, November 4, 2003.

²³ Eric Brown, "In Gallup Poll, The Biggest Threat To World Peace Is ... America?", *International Business Times*, January 2, 2014, <http://www.ibtimes.com/gallup-poll-biggest-threat-world-peace-america-1525008>: The United States was named as the greatest danger by 24% of the 60 000 respondents around the globe, including 13% of Americans.

only world leader that Western media characterized as “genocidal.” Even at the height of the Cold War, when tens of thousands of Soviet nuclear warheads were aimed at the United States, no Kremlin leader deserved the appellation “genocidal.” It followed that Iran must be stopped at any cost. This became a mantra of politicians in Israel and the United States alike. The mantra reflected not only demonization of the head of state but, at the same time, personification of an entire country, implying that its president possessed unlimited dictatorial powers. The same approach is currently used with respect to Russia, to which Western media and certain Western governments refer simply as “Putin.” As we shall see, analogies between Western attitudes to Iran and to Russia do not end with demonization of the head of state.

Punitive actions and their effect

Soon after his inauguration, President Barak Obama appeared to improve relations with Iran. While his predecessor called Iran “evil and pariah,” the new chief executive sent two letters to Iran’s supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, calling for a relaxation of tensions between the two countries. On the occasion of the Iranian New Year, Obama addressed the Iranian people emphasizing common humanity and wishing to build a better future for both nations.²⁴

These moves by the U.S. president seriously alarmed Israeli leaders and their allies in Washington, many of whom, such as Dennis Ross, were then part of Obama’s inner circle. A new cycle of hostility ensued. Without any new evidence, Washington accused Tehran of plotting to acquire nuclear weapons. Moreover, the appointment of a new director general of IAEA in 2009 compromised the agency’s neutrality by placing it at the service of U.S. strategic interests.²⁵ Beginning in 2010, IAEA issued a series of critical reports based on intelligence from unidentified sources previously deemed untrustworthy.²⁶ Consequently, the United States mobilized its European allies, including Iran’s major trading partners Germany, France and Italy, for an imposition of severe economic sanctions on Iran.

Conversely, Israel, which refuses to sign the NPT and has attacked its neighbours several times in its short history, and reportedly possesses over 200 nuclear weapons, advanced missiles and six submarines (a gift from Germany), remains beyond criticism, let alone international sanctions. Western powers, aka the “international community,” appeared to take at face value Israeli allegations that Iran was on the verge of nuclear weaponization. Western media portrayed the Islamic republic in Western Asia as a country run by irrational and irresponsible “mullahs” in contradistinction to Western

²⁴ <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2012/01/02/12-01-02-remarks-president-celebration-nowruz>

²⁵ Julian Borger, “Nuclear watchdog chief accused of pro-western bias over Iran”, *The Guardian* March 12, 2012, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/mar/22/nuclear-watchdog-iran-iaea>

²⁶ Michele Gaietta, *The Trajectory of Iran's Nuclear Program*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015, p. 164.

powers assumed to be rational and responsible in spite of their record of two world wars and innumerable colonial wars, including recent unprovoked attacks on countries of West and Central Asia as well as Libya. Racism and colonial mentality are likely to have played a part. Iranians are seen as “Orientals” who cannot be trusted to play with matches.

This was not the first time racism affected decisions concerning nuclear weapons. It was in 1943, when German armies were deep in Soviet territory and the outcome of the war in Europe was far from certain, that President Roosevelt, in a conversation with General Groves, the head of the Manhattan Project, refused to consider dropping the atomic bomb on Germany. The Jewish émigré scientists, including Einstein, who had prompted the U.S. government to produce nuclear weapons, wanted to prevent Germany from acquiring a nuclear monopoly. Many of them were horrified when Washington ordered to bomb Hiroshima and Nagasaki, causing massive civilian casualties.²⁷ The racial explanation of the choice of Japan as the first nuclear test ground continues to divide historians to this day. In any case, racism was at the time institutionalized in the United States, and its troops fighting the Nazis were racially segregated. More importantly, during the war Japanese Americans were summarily uprooted and interned while this measure was applied only selectively to certain American citizens of German and Italian descent.

This racial thinking dovetails with the realities of a unipolar world. During the Cold War nobody in the West suggested that the Soviet Union did not have the right to develop nuclear weapons. Americans may have been displeased, upset, frightened or distressed that “the Russkies” broke the American nuclear monopoly but they never claimed they did not have the mental wherewithal needed to handle nuclear weapons. Now that the balance of power no longer exists Western powers routinely declare entire countries “rogue states” if their governments fail to acknowledge Washington’s leadership. Needless to say, Iran has been placed into that category for several decades.

“The issue for the West was not so much to prevent Iran joining the nuclear club as it was to prevent the country from developing the scientific and technological capability needed for its industrialization and economic development.”²⁸ Indeed, policies of demodernization have long been employed in international relations. Some were cruder than others. For example, Britain used military means to halt modernization efforts under Mohammed Ali in Egypt in the 19th century. During the Cold War, the United States put in place a mechanism of export control that prevented acquisition of dual technologies by the Soviet Union and its allies. Moreover, American intelligence services successfully subverted Soviet civilian industries as well.²⁹ Israel and the United States also succeeded in thwarting modernization pursued by secular

²⁷ See the explicitly racist cartoon right after the Hiroshima bombing on *The Pittsburgh Press*, 7 Aug. 1945: http://4.bp.blogspot.com/-Xmpq1KjpDDE/UB24_BsgOnI/AAAAAAAAAU8/ojTjsK5dmyk/s1600/Pittsburgh%2BPress%2BJapan%2Bcartoon.png

²⁸ Tarock, *op. cit.*

²⁹ Gus W. Weiss, « Dumping the Soviets. The Farewell Dossier », *CIA Studies in Intelligence*, vol. 39, n° 5, 1996.

nationalists in a number of countries in West Asia and North Africa. Iraq and Libya were “bombed back into Middle Ages” by U.S. and Western-led coalitions, Afghanistan was destroyed first by terrorism directed at the socialist regime in Kabul and later through Western armed intervention.³⁰ At the time of this writing, Syria, led by a secular modernizing government, is fighting a life-and-death struggle under massive pressure from Western-armed terrorists. The United States has repeatedly used non-military means of demodernization, including sanctions against a numbers of countries, and this approach is gaining momentum.³¹

Surrounded by U.S. military bases, Iran was reeling from the economic sanctions for several years. They had profound effect on the economy, education, science, technology and public health. Similar U.S.-inspired sanctions against Iraq under Saddam Hussein had resulted in over half a million of child deaths and practically reversed all modernization in the country.³² It had already been badly weakened when the U.S.-led coalition administered a final *coup de grâce* to modern Iraq in 2003.

U.S. and Israeli military threats against Iran were routine during the presidency of Ahmadinejad, and they have not ended since.³³ They were credible in view of an earlier air strike by Israeli planes on the Iraqi nuclear reactor in 1981. The Israeli air force has operated freely in the air space of neighbouring countries and occasionally conducted long-range operations such as a raid on the Entebbe airport in Uganda in 1976. The U.S.-led attack on Iraq, which had not been approved by the United Nations, set a frightening precedent in the region that Iranian leaders had to take into account. The election of a less outspoken president Hassan Rouhani of Iran in 2013 finally led the Iranian government to negotiate a new agreement and make unprecedented concessions, duly mentioned in President Obama’s speech about the agreement.³⁴

Conclusion: The Vienna agreement and its aftermath

The hype around the negotiations in Vienna was immense. The media maintained tension for several weeks as the diplomats were working out the details of the accord. Compared to agreements with other countries concerning non-proliferation, the final document was unprecedented in terms of minutiae and attention to detail. It drastically curbed the scientific potential of Iran, authorized the IAEA to conduct inspections of present and past activities, and in case of “cheating”, trigger “snapback” sanctions on Iran without prior approval of the U.N. Security Council. Military threats

³⁰ Alberto Rabillota, *et al.*, “La démodernisation en marche”, *Revue internationale et stratégique*, 92, décembre 2013, pp. 40-50, http://histoire.umontreal.ca/fileadmin/Documents/FAS/histoire/Documents/2-Recherche/RIS92_Demodernisation.pdf

³¹ Robert D. Blackwell and Jennifer M. Harris, *War by Other Means : Geoeconomics and Statecraft*, Cambridge, MA : Harvard University Press/Council on Foreign Relations, 2016.

³² John Pilger, “Squeezed to Death”, *The Guardian*, March 4, 2000, <https://www.theguardian.com/theguardian/2000/mar/04/weekend7.weekend9>

³³ See illustration: <http://theantimedia.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/iran-wants-war-2.png>

³⁴ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-politics/wp/2015/08/05/text-obama-gives-a-speech-about-the-iran-nuclear-deal/>

against Iran remained “on the table” and the agreement was literally reached under the gun. Moreover, according to the U.S. secretary of state, “the unprecedented inspections and verification mechanisms in the deal allow for a better understanding of Iran’s infrastructure, thereby making its bombing campaign against Iran easier if necessary”.³⁵ Policies aimed at the demodernization of Iran continue under the Vienna agreement, and are to be in place for another quarter of a century.

The fate of the accord signed in Vienna and its approval by the U.S. Congress is highly instructive. It showed the limits of Zionist influence on American politics. In an unprecedented manner, the prime minister of Israel addressed the U.S. Congress and warned it against approving the accord. The entire Zionist machinery of political influence was put into gear and reportedly spent over \$40 million to defeat it.³⁶

Predictably, Israel, which had done so much to fabricate this issue to begin with, denounced the agreement and reserved the right to attack Iran. Israel’s allies and agents in the United States are doing their best to derail it. One of them, Senator Lindsay Graham called it “a death sentence for the State of Israel”.³⁷ The Republican presidential hopeful Donald Trump called it “one of the worst deals ever negotiated”³⁸ but stopped short of promising to repeal it. The drama may continue for months and years, with American neo-cons in the forefront of categorical opposition to improving relations with Iran. Israeli officials continue to denounce Iran, using, as late as March 2016, the long discredited allegation that Iran wants to “wipe Israel off the map”.³⁹ This is done not only for internal consumption to beef up national unity but also at respected international forums such as the United Nations where Ambassador Danny Danon, known as an unabashed nationalist extremist,⁴⁰ called for “concrete punitive actions” against Iran.⁴¹

The “Iranian nuclear threat” embodies the Orwellian principle that some countries are apparently more equal than others. The United States suspects both Iran and Russia of nefarious actions against its neighbours, which justifies their military encirclement. It makes no difference that NATO countries’ military budget is 20 times greater than Russia’s or that the United States’ military budget is 20 times greater than Iran’s (which constitutes only 40% of Israel’s).⁴² When asked about the actual nature of “the Russian threat” NATO officials do not suggest that Baltic countries face

³⁵ Trita Parsi and Reza Marashi, “Obama’s Real Achievement with the Iran Deal.” *Huffington Post (U.S.)*, September 1, 2015.

³⁶ Elizabeth Drew, “How they failed to block the Iran Deal.” September 22, 2015, <http://www.nybooks.org>.

³⁷ McGeough, Paul. “A Done Deal.” *The Age* (Melbourne), July 18, 2015.

³⁸ <http://www.vox.com/2016/7/21/12253426/donald-trump-acceptance-speech-transcript-republican-nomination-transcript>

³⁹ <http://mfa.gov.il/MFA/ForeignPolicy/Iran/Nuclear/Pages/Amb-Danon-calls-for-punitive-measures-against-Iran-14-Mar-2016.aspx>

⁴⁰ Allison Kaplan Sommer, “Six Reasons to Worry about Israel’s New UN Ambassador Danny Danon”, *Haaretz* August 11, 2015, <http://www.haaretz.com/blogs/routine-emergencies/.premium-1.671558>

⁴¹ See illustration: <http://mfa.gov.il/MFA/InternatlOrgs/Photos/danon-UNSCstakeout.jpg>

⁴² <http://www.politifact.com/truth-o-meter/statements/2015/apr/09/barack-obama/obama-iran-spends-30-billion-defense-us-about-600/>

an invasion from the east. Similarly, “the Iranian threat” seems to have worried American and Israeli politicians more than their military experts.

While the agreement signed in Vienna may defuse this burning non-issue, it is instructive to appreciate the irrationality of American and Israeli rhetoric with respect to Iran. It reflects the growing trend to frame international relations in Manichean rather than political terms, with Western nations (including Israel) invariably assumed to incarnate Good versus the ever threatening - and often personalized - Evil: not only Iran but, for example, “Saddam’s Iraq”, “Qaddafi’s Libya” and “Putin’s Russia”. This, of course, has its own rationale, namely to intimidate, demonize and delegitimize adversaries and, at the same time, make military intervention against them appear moral and honourable.

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