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US complicit in Israel war plans for Iran

By Kaveh L Afrasiabi
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After supplying Israel with the massive bunker-buster bombs that would be critical in any Israeli military strike on Iran, the US government now wants to have it both ways, trying to shield itself from any backlash by insisting it would not be "complicit" in such an Israeli gambit.

General Martin Dempsey, chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, raised some eyebrows last week, especially in the Israeli media, by stating publicly: "I don't want to be complicit if they [Israel] choose to do it." As if intent on convincing Iran of US's determination to stay out of a Tehran-Tel Aviv duel, over the weekend there were unconfirmed reports of secret talks between Tehran and Washington, although this has been adamantly denied by the White House.

Regardless, according to various sources, including Hezbollah leader Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah, Iran could strike at US bases in the region if attacked by Israel. This echoes the sentiment of several Iranian military officials including commanders of the revolutionary guards who have warned in the past of making no distinctions between US and Israel if the latter dared to attack Iran.

From Iran's vantage point, Iran's threat against the US forces stationed in Iran's vicinity acts as a deterrent against any Israeli strike and, therefore, the US's attempt to jettison itself out of the equation is actually an inducement to the military scenario, much as it is interpreted in Israel and the West as a sign of US's disapproval of an Israeli strike.

According to a Tehran political science professor who spoke with the author on the condition of anonymity, the US's "neutrality posture" rings hollow because Washington has supplied the

"30,000 pounds deep-earth penetrators" that will likely be used against Iran. "During the Iran-Iraq war Iran made the mistake of not holding the Western suppliers of chemical weapons to Saddam Hussain accountable and Iran will not make that mistake again," says the Tehran professor.

Regarding those bunker-buster bombs, last September the US admitted that it had delivered 55 of those monster bombs (sure to inflict major "collateral damage") to Israel, after being approved by the Obama administration in 2009. In effect, this means that by making the fateful decision to arm Israel with the necessary military muscle to initiate a unilateral attack on Iran, the US has sealed its image as "complicit" irrespective of how its top generals want to create a safe buffer for their forces in the region; this is not to mention the likely US intelligence sharing with Israel that would go into preparation for any attack on Iran.

Henceforth, the only scenario whereby Iran would not retaliate against the US would be a US guarantee that the US-made bombs would not be used by Israel, ie, a virtual impossibility. This is partly because although the US arms sales to Israel are rationalized as purely defensive and, yet, Israel's rationalization of "preemptive strike" on Iran as an act of "self-defense" brings it into line with the terms of those arms sales.

Regardless of such pseudo-rationalizations that would certainly not wash with the rest of the international community, in light of the Tehran summit of the Non-Aligned Movement last week that resulted in a unanimous statement in support of Iran's nuclear program, not to mention Germany's and France's warning to Israel not to attack Iran, it is amply clear now that US would inevitably be dragged into any Iran-Israel conflict. This could well take the form of naval confrontations in the Persian Gulf in case Iran retaliates by closing the Strait of Hormuz.

Meanwhile, as if realizing that Israel has a great deal of work to do to convince the Western governments and publics regarding the imminent Iran "nuclear threat," Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's new tactic is to exhort the West to draw a "clear red line" on Iran. Yet, chances are that Netanyahu's call will go unanswered, due principally to the absence of a legal justification for the western opposition to Iran's possession of dual nature nuclear technology that gives it latent nuclear weapons capability.

In other words, neither the US nor any of its Western allies can possibly declare a "red line" on Iran's nuclear weapons capability by virtue of its potential to cross the threshold of "weaponization" above all by producing weapons-grade enriched uranium. But, as long as all of Iran's enrichment activities are monitored by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and there is no evidence of either military diversion or weapons-grade enrichment, Iran theoretically remains immune from the impositions of any "red line".

"In essence what Israel is requesting from Americans is to draw an arbitrary line," says the Tehran professor, adding that the US "would only isolate itself in the world if it appeased Israel."

Tehran's counter-strategy has been to give further assurance of its peaceful nuclear activities, in part by showcasing the enrichment facilities to the visiting Mongolian president over the weekend. Such efforts are meant to alleviate the international concerns over the latest IAEA

report that cites a doubling of Iran's centrifuges in the underground facility known as Fordo.

Yet, Iran's position is that it has not breached its obligations by increasing its enrichment activities that are "fully monitored by the IAEA inspections as well as cameras," to paraphrase Iran's envoy to the IAEA, Ali Asghar Soltanieh in a recent conversation with the author. In fact, the US media often give the misleading impression that Fordo is outside the IAEA inspection regime and that the atomic agency would fail to detect any weapons grade enrichment and or military diversion.

Conclusion: Need for new US-Iran dialogue

In conclusion, there are compelling reasons for a bilateral US-Iran dialogue that would cover both the nuclear standoff as well as a host of regional issues, including Iraq, Afghanistan, and Syria. Indeed there is more than sufficient reason for a superpower and a regional power to set aside their hesitations and engage in face-to-face communication on a broad range of issues of mutual concern.

With respect to Syria, Iran has endorsed Egypt's proposal for a four-country contact group consisting of Egypt, Turkey, Iran, and Saudi Arabia, which is a timely regional initiative to address the deadly Syrian quagmire. Lakhdar Brahimi, the UN special envoy on Syria, has explicitly opposed the idea of foreign intervention in Syria, and the economically hard-pressed Europeans simply lack the resources to embark on a Libyan-style "no-fly" operation. These, together with the huge influx of radical Jihadists into the Syrian civil war, raise the chances for the regional effort mentioned above. The Israelis and their lobbyists in Washington may dread the mere thought of a behind-the-scene US-Iran talks, yet few in the US nowadays fail to recognize the importance of such an initiative.