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## The War Party and the Israel Lobby Wish for War with Iran in 2013

By Muhammad Sahimi

December 30, 2012

As we begin 2013, the War Party and its ally, the Israel lobby, are pushing hard to make sure that they get their wish for the New Year, namely, a devastating war with Iran. To them, it is not enough that the illegal unilateral sanctions that the United States and its allies have imposed on Iran are ruining the lives of tens of millions of ordinary Iranians. It is not enough that the lives of hundreds of thousands of Iranians are being threatened with life-threatening illnesses, who cannot get the medicine they need, partly because of economic sanctions. It is not enough that the arts and culture of Iran, particularly a renowned movie industry, are seriously threatened by a lack of funds brought about by the sanctions. The War Party and Israel lobby will be satisfied only if Iran is attacked and destroyed, which will inevitably lead to a much wider war in the entire Middle East.

The push is coming from several fronts. The Party and the Lobby have staged an all-out attack to sabotage the possible nomination of former senator Chuck Hagel as defense secretary. His “sin”? Among other things, Hagel has stated in the past that “I am a United States senator, I am not an Israeli senator,” and that when the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) comes knocking with a pro-Israel letter, “you’ll get 80 or 90 senators on it. I don’t think I’ve ever signed one of the letters” because they were “stupid.” But, most importantly, the unforgivable “sin” of Hagel has been opposing sanctions on Iran and advocating diplomacy and negotiations, which Likud-led Israel rejects. A top Senate Republican aide has threatened, “Send us Hagel [as the nominee for defense secretary], and we will make sure every American knows he is an anti-Semite.” Even gay Republicans got into the act. In a full-page ad in *The New York Times*, Log

Cabin Republicans proclaimed that Hagel “is wrong on gays’ rights, wrong on Iran, wrong on Israel.”

In another front, retiring Sen. Joe “bomb-Iran-for-Israel’s-sake” Lieberman is using his last days in the Senate to push President Obama to attack Iran. Led by him and Sens. Kelly Ayotte (R-N.H.) and Robert Menendez (D-N.J.), a letter was sent to the president, signed by 57 senators, urging him to be prepared for war with Iran and asking him “to reiterate your readiness to take military action against Iran if it continues its efforts to acquire a nuclear weapon.” Never mind that there is no evidence of weaponization of Iran’s nuclear program. Even the totally politicized International Atomic Energy Agency reports time and again that it has found no evidence of diversion of nuclear materials from peaceful to non-peaceful purposes, nor has it found any evidence for a secret parallel military program in Iran.

While pushing the president to attack Iran, the letter also stated, “We urge you to expand America’s outreach and support to the Iranian people and support of the cause of human rights and democracy in Iran.... The current government of the Islamic Republic of Iran will eventually end up in the ash heap of history, not because of the efforts of the United States, but because of the desire of the Iranian people to enjoy the basic freedoms that are their universal right, and that many of their neighbors increasingly are demanding.”

Iranians living in Iran have not asked the Party and the Lobby to speak on their behalf. But on the one hand, the Party and the Lobby advocate war and sanctions that will destroy Iran and kill hundreds of thousands of its citizens, if not more, and on the other hand, they support “democracy” and “human rights” for Iran amid the destruction that they are advocating. This “support” for the Iranian people, in addition to the unilateral sanctions and the misery that they have brought, is offered while it has become increasingly difficult, for example, for Iranian students to receive visas to come here to study. In the latest round of imposing even more restrictions on Iranian students, those who wish to study in the energy field, such as oil and natural gas, are refused visas. This restriction is in addition to those already imposed on those who wish to study nuclear engineering, nuclear physics, biology, etc.

In the universe of the Party and the Lobby, the meanings of democracy and human rights are totally different from ours. In theirs, the prerequisites to democracy in a nation such as Iran are destroying the country and its historical and cultural heritage (as happened in Iraq), killing its people, taking control of its resources, and only then giving them “democracy” and “human rights.” The most fundamental human rights of every human being are living in peace and having the minimum for a decent life. The sanctions are denying such fundamental rights of the Iranian people, and war will destroy their nation and the rest of the Middle East, yet the Party and the Lobby want to bring misery in the name of human rights and democracy.

The Party and the Lobby are also hard at work to convince the public that war with Iran is inevitable. In a gala at the “research” arm of the AIPAC, the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Dennis Ross and Elliott Abrams, two of the most trusted Lobby men, and the outgoing U.S. ambassador to Iraq, James Jeffrey, insisted that the president will attack Iran in 2013 if diplomacy does not succeed. Ross, the Middle East envoy during the Clinton administration and until November 2011 President Obama’s adviser on Iran in the National Security Council, said,

“I think there’s the stomach in this administration, and this president, that if diplomacy fails to use force [against Iran].”

Jeffrey said, “I think [Obama’s] first choice will be a negotiated settlement. Failing that, I think that we’re going to strike. One way or the other, these guys [the Iranians] are either going to stop their program or, before we’re halfway through 2013, they’re going to have enough [enriched nuclear materiel] to go critical in a few weeks,” adding, “I think if we don’t get a negotiated settlement, and these guys are actually on the threshold [of weaponization capability], as Obama said during the campaign, then the president is going to take military action.” This is while the Iranians have been converting — as they had said they would — their enriched uranium at 19.75% to fuel plates for use in the Tehran Research Reactor, which provides medical isotopes for 850,000 patients every year, hence making it practically impossible to use that uranium for bombs, even if they wanted to.

Then, during discussion with Ross and Abrams halfway through the gala, WINEP director Robert Satloff asked the two, “Will either America or Israel employ preventive military action against Iran’s nuclear program — yes or no?” The two replied, “Yes.” Satloff then asked, “Will this happen in 2013?” Ross said, “Yes,” and Abrams added, “Yes, I agree.”

In another piece of sheer nonsense propaganda, former senator Charles Robb, Ross, and Michael Makovsky of the Bipartisan Policy Center cooked up another absurd scenario in order to encourage war on Iran. In a piece published by the *Wall Street Journal*, the trio considered the possibility of a “Saudi-Iran nuclear exchange” and the effect that it would have on the supply and price of oil and concluded that, “As American and other policy makers contemplate what it will take to thwart Iran’s nuclear ambitions, they must not dwell exclusively on the potential short-term impacts of economic pressure or military action. Over the medium and long term, the economic costs of a nuclear Iran may be no less real and far more enduring.”

The idea that an Islamic country may attack Saudi Arabia, which houses Islam’s two holiest sites, with nuclear weapons is beyond absurd, but it goes to show that the Party and the Lobby are willing to say anything to provoke a war. The authors did not, of course, ask the crucial question: If Saudi Arabia is going to have a nuclear exchange with Iran, who will supply it with nuclear technology? The West, of course, and in particular France and the U.S. So, why should the Saudis be given nuclear technology, if there are true concerns about a “Saudi-Iran nuclear exchange” and nuclear proliferation? Is it enough that the Kingdom is already buying close to \$100 billion worth of weapons from the West, weapons that in all likelihood it will never need or use?

Will John Kerry, as the new secretary of state, make a difference in U.S. policy toward Iran? It remains to be seen, but he is certainly more moderate than Hillary Rodham Clinton, who threatened to obliterate Iran. Documents released by WikiLeaks indicate that Kerry wants to resolve the dispute with Iran through negotiations. Many Iranian-Americans supported his bid for the presidency in 2004. He has said in that past that, “his own intention, had he been elected president [in 2004], was to pursue front channel and back channel contacts with the Iranian regime.” He also told Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani, Qatar’s king, that “the United States

recognizes Iran's ambitions to be a regional player, and wants a dialogue about what sort of power it will be.”

War with Iran will benefit no one but the Party, the Lobby, and the far right in Israel. It will not only destroy the Middle East and kill hundreds of thousands, if not more, it will also lead to a decades-long war of attrition between Muslims and the West that will also destroy the West's economy. The only solution to the standoff over Iran's nuclear program is patient and sincere diplomacy, in which every step that Iran takes to address the concerns over its nuclear program is reciprocated by the U.S. and its allies, who could at least suspend some of their illegal sanctions, which would provide relief for tens of millions of Iranians. Then, and only then, can we talk sincerely about democracy and human rights for the Iranian people.