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Iran's Nuclear Deal With the P5+1: Winners and Losers

by Sasan Fayazmanesh

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The dust has settled and the long-awaited agreement between Iran and the P5+1 (five permanent members of the Security Council and Germany) called “Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action” (JCPOA) is now a reality. The JCPOA curtails Iran’s nuclear program in exchange for some sanctions relief. Also real is the UN Resolution 2231, which terminates all the previous sanctions resolutions against Iran passed by the United Nations Security Council. We can now announce the winners and losers in the 36-year battle between Iran and its adversaries.

Let us start with the biggest loser in this battle, the colonial regime in Palestine called Israel. Since the 1990s Israeli leaders, particularly Benjamin Netanyahu, had been trying to wage a war against both Iraq and Iran, the twin pillars standing in the way of Eretz Yisrael. But they tried to do this on the cheap, sending American boys and girls to kill and get killed. They were successful in the case of Iraq, but had a difficult time getting the US to wage a war against Iran. They could not even convince George W. Bush to go along with bombing Iran, even though they had planted their “neoconservative” allies around a president who was not known for his immense intelligence and had visions of talking to God before invading Iraq. The work became harder when Barack Obama became president. Once again, Israel planted some of its best lobbyists, such as Dennis Ross, in the highest positions in the White House and charged them with the task of formulating and implementing the policy of “tough diplomacy,” a policy designed to wage a military attack on Iran after a series of steps beginning with imposing the most severe sanctions on the country. Yet, however hard Israeli leaders tried, they could not get

President Obama to take the last step and start a war with Iran. The job became even tougher when some of the Israeli lobbyists left the Obama Administration and Secretary of State John Kerry replaced Hillary Clinton, a sycophant who often mimicked Netanyahu when it came to Iran. In the end Israel not only could not get the US to attack Iran, it had to witness the entire policy of “tough diplomacy” wither away.

The failure to make the US wage a war on Iran is, indeed, one of the greatest losses that Israel has ever suffered. Ironically, the dim-witted Prime Minister of Israel played a role in this loss. Netanyahu’s bizarre behavior was, indeed, instrumental in making the P5+1 take Israel’s demands and threats not too seriously. His insane and incessant comparison of Iran to another Nazi Germany intent to commit Holocaust, his silly and continuous warnings that an Iranian nuclear bomb awaits not only Israel but Europe and the US, his ridiculous spectacle at the UN holding a cartoon of an Iranian bomb—mocked by some as “Bibi’s Wile E. Coyote UN speech”—his behind the scene maneuvers with some like mined looney-tunes in the US to defy Obama and speak before a joint session of the US Congress, all helped to isolate Israel and prevent it from playing a major role in the final P5+1 negotiations with Iran. We should all be grateful to Bibi for helping to prevent another war in the Middle East on behalf of Israel!

Israel’s loss is, of course, also the loss of its surrogates in the US. The gambling and “investor” tycoons allied with Israel, the congressmen and women who owe their seats and survival in the US Congress to these moguls, the lobbyists who are nourished by these magnates, the “neoconservatives” whose existence depends on the benevolence of these tycoons, all and all have suffered a colossal loss. The Adelson and Sabans of this world, the Cottons, Kirks and Menendezs, the AIPACs, WINEPs and UANIs, the Kristols, Boltens and Dubowitzs, have all lost big with the conclusion of the JCPOA and Resolution 2231. We should give them an “A” for effort and an “F” for the final outcome.

All this, of course, does not mean that the colonial regime of Israel and its allies are finished with trying to do to Iran what was done to Iraq. They still have a few weeks left to try to kill the US part of the bargain. But even if they muster all the needed votes against the JCPOA in the Congress, the agreement between Iran and the rest of the P5+1 will not go away. Neither will the UN Resolution 2231. That ship has already sailed!

Other big losers in the decades-old battle between Iran and the West are the medieval regimes in the Middle East, particularly in the Persian Gulf, that are nurtured and nourished by the West, especially by the United States. A common argument, originally manufactured in Israel, is that if Iran is allowed to enrich uranium, Arab regimes, such as Saudi Arabia, will try to develop nuclear weapons of their own. But this argument only shows how backward and reactionary these regimes are. Why didn’t these sheikhdoms try to acquire nuclear weapons when a colonial power in their midst acquired hundreds of nuclear warheads? Is it because the existence of these regimes is interwoven with colonialism? Is it because they fear resistance to colonialism? Is it because they see Iran as assisting the anti-colonial forces? Is it because they, too, had been working for decades to maintain sanctions against Iran and were hoping that one day the US or Israel or both would attack Iran? Well, the medieval regimes did not get what they wished for.

Who was the main winner in the 36-year old battle? It is tempting to say Iran. But, for reasons explained below, that would not be my first choice. My answer is actually the international corporations! As I once explained, the battle in the US over sanctioning Iran, particularly during the Clinton's presidency, was fought between two forces, Israel and its lobby groups that were the underwriters of the sanctions, and the corporate lobby that fought to remove the sanctions. Needless to say that the corporate concern was with profit and not with the ethics of trying to starve a nation.

Over the years the corporate lobby, led particularly by the aerospace, energy and agricultural industries, lost all hopes of ever defeating its much stronger foe. Starting in the second half of the Clinton Administration foreign corporations, too, became increasingly fearful of dealing with Iran. Eventually most ties between Iran and the capitalist world economy were severed. Now, after the JCPOA, both the American and foreign corporations are salivating over the prospect of returning to Iran. Like vultures that see a fresh carcass, the capitalists of the world see a large "market" ahead of them, a country with nearly 80 million people who are mostly young and thirsty to possess commodities. Even before the final agreement was reached between Iran and the P5+1, delegation after delegation of corporate leaders started to visit Iran to reserve their seats at the forthcoming auction. But they might be jumping the gun. The sanctions that would eventually be removed are only related to the nuclear dispute. All the other sanctions, related to such things as Iran's putative "support for terrorism" and "violations of human rights," will remain in place.

But did Iran have a victory? I was asked this question after a talk I gave following the April Lausanne agreement. My answer was that the battle between Iran and the P5+1 is analogous to the fight between a lightweight and a heavyweight. Even before the fight begins you know who will get clobbered. The question, however, is if the lightweight will still be standing after the fight. If so, that might be construed as a victory for the lightweight. Using that analogy one can say that President Rouhani's negotiators were victorious. They entered the talks from a position of weakness and yet they were standing at the end. In the process they crossed many of their own "redlines," to use a favored expression of both sides of the negotiation. The redlines that were crossed by Iran included, among others, the demand that the agreement be reached in one stage rather than different stages, that military sites not be inspected at all and that sanctions be removed on the day of the agreement and not gradually. The UN Resolution 2231 also includes many concessions by Iran, such as a "snap-back" mechanism, a mechanism that would effectively trigger sanctions on Iran if one of the parties to the nuclear deal, such as the US, contends that Iran is not fulfilling its commitments. In addition, the resolution keeps in place an arms embargo and a ban on ballistic missile technology for many years to come. When examined closely, the concessions made by Iran in the JCPOA and Resolution 2231 appear shocking to those who have followed these negotiations from the very beginning.

Some "principalist" opponents of Rouhani in Iran have compared the concessions made by his team of negotiators to those made in the past by Iran in its struggle against imperialist forces—for example, the 1828 Turkmanchai Treaty with tsarist Russia, or the 1890 Tobacco Concession and, subsequently, the 1919 "Anglo-Persian Agreement" signed with the British, or the 1988 "poison chalice," which forced Iran to accept a cease-fire demanded by the United Nations Security Council to end the war imposed by Iraq's Saddam Hussein and his supporters,

particularly the U.S. But what the “principalists” ignore is that making concessions did not begin with Rouhani and his team. It started a long time ago, in 2003, during the presidency of the “reformist” President Khatami, when Iran entered negotiations over its enrichment of uranium with E3 (France, Britain, and Germany), while contending at the same time that it has an “inalienable right” under Article IV of the Non-Proliferation Treaty to enrich uranium. Only a country in a weak position negotiates with others over its “inalienable right.” But this weakness was not associated solely with Iranian reformists. President Ahmadinejad, who was considered to be an ally of the principalists, also negotiated with the P5+1 over Iran’s enrichment of uranium. Thus, both the reformists and principalists negotiated with the biggest powers in the world from a position of weakness. This, however, was unavoidable, given the circumstances. When your whole existence is threatened, you might make a Faustian bargain, and, if you are still standing, you might call it a victory.

The biggest victim of 36 years of sanctions and threats against Iran was the Iranian working class who had to live not only under conditions of deprivation and austerity but under continuous fear of being bombed by the US, Israel or both. Let us hope that Iran’s “victory” brings about some relief for these workingmen and women, rather than merely translating into a bonanza for the Western corporate elites and their counterparts in Iran. Let us also hope that with lessening of daily threats of war, the fear of the “enemy”—a common phrase in the parlance of Iranian leaders—lessens and a greater freedom descends upon the people of Iran.