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Wiki weakens Iran war drive

The Saudi endorsement could be the kiss of death for Netanyahu's push for a military strike on Iran.

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Binyamin Netanyahu, the Israeli prime minister, is ecstatic. He has come to the conclusion that a diplomatic cable released by WikiLeaks, revealing that the Saudis privately favour a military strike on Iran, has vindicated Israel's hawkish stance. With Saudi Arabia aboard the war train, how can it possibly be derailed?

Of course, he is totally wrong. The revelation that the Saudi royals agree with the Israeli position adds exactly nothing to the case for war. The House of Saud? Whom exactly do they speak for? Not even the Saudi people, let alone anybody else in the Muslim world. In fact, the Saudi endorsement could be the kiss of death for Netanyahu's plans.

A more significant revelation is that the Obama administration has no intention of resorting to force to prevent Iran from developing nuclear weapons. A host of cables indicate that in private, as in public, only sanctions and diplomacy are on the table.

That is why right-wing Israelis (and their neocon cutouts in the US) hope that the Republicans win in 2012 - preferably former half-term Alaska governor Sarah Palin - and that the nuclear stalemate remains unresolved until she can order "Bombs Away".

Netanyahu's wishful thinking

Nothing in WikiLeaks can be legitimately used to advance the case for war despite Netanyahu's wishful thinking. **This is from *Ha'aretz*:**

"Our region has been hostage to a narrative that is the result of 60 years of propaganda, which paints Israel as the greatest threat," Netanyahu said.

"In reality leaders understand that that view is bankrupt. For the first time in history there is agreement that Iran is the threat," he said.

"If leaders start saying openly what they have long been saying behind closed doors, we can make a real breakthrough on the road to peace."

By that, he means, a real breakthrough on the road to war.

But even if the Saudis agree with the Israelis that a military strike is warranted, it really amounts to little more than nothing. That is because neither Israel nor Saudi Arabia considered US interests when coming to this conclusion, which is the only thing a president of the US should consider.

Saudis and Israelis support policies which they believe are in their interests. That is how foreign governments invariably behave and it is how the US would behave toward Israel but for the unique political considerations that impel our national leadership to march in lockstep with Israeli leaders.

Diplomacy, not war

Nothing in WikiLeaks affects the clear US national interest which dictates, above all, that we resolve our differences with Iran through diplomacy and not through war.

That assertion hardly requires proving. The US is involved in two wars in the Middle East already, in which 5,840 Americans (and countless Iraqis and Afghans) have been killed. And we still have well over 100,000 troops in that part of the world.

A strike on Iran by the US or by Israel would not only put our troops in Iraq and Afghanistan at greater risk, it would destroy the US' standing throughout the Muslim world. It would also vastly increase the threat of terrorism against American civilians at home and abroad. It could even trigger a regional war.

Sure, a few royals and unrepresentative autocrats would privately cheer us on, but those regimes would ultimately either join the opposition to us or be swept away by popular fury.

The Wiki-revealed knowledge that the Israelis and the Saudis are tacitly working in concert against Iran would only make things worse, given that among most Arabs and Muslims, the Saudi regime is only a little more popular than the Netanyahu government. A US/Israeli/Saudi tripartite alliance against Iran could be **the US' Suez**, and could finish us off in the region the way the United Kingdom and France were finished by their anti-Egypt alliance with Israel in 1956.

In addition, of course, no one believes a strike on Iran would eliminate its nuclear facilities.

Nobody wants to see a nuclear-armed Iran. But few are particularly happy with nuclear weapons in the hands of Pakistan, or for that matter, India. And, believe it or not, the Muslim world has never been particularly comfortable with Israel's uninspected nuclear arsenal. And then there is North Korea which, unlike Iran, has demonstrated its crazy recklessness over and over again. (Iranian recklessness has been confined to repulsive rhetoric, not impulsive actions.)

Israelis say that they do not want to live under a nuclear shadow. But that does not make them any different than anyone else, or more vulnerable either. There is a gigantic hole in the middle of Manhattan which provides ample evidence that Americans do not need any lectures from anyone on that score.

The good news is that, unlike al-Qaeda, Iran is a nation that can be engaged in serious negotiations. It is not a nihilist terror group; it is not a suicide cult. Rather, it is a nation that has been a key player in its region for thousands of years.

We have grievances with them and they have grievances with us. That means that we must enter into comprehensive negotiations on all those grievances - starting with their nuclear programme and our attempts at overthrowing their government, along with the whole host of issues that divide us, including the security of Israel.

Remember, back in 2003, the **Iranians sent the Bush administration a two-page document** stating that they were ready for comprehensive negotiations and we refused to even acknowledge the offer. Obama has done better than his predecessor, but not by much.

He offers friendly greetings to the Iranian people, but like Bush, he mainly issues demands and sets time-tables. (**See this column.**) A better model would be Nixon, who treated a dangerous adversary, China, with respect and an outstretched hand, and changed the world. Is Iran really worse than the place we used to call Red China? More fanatical? What is Iran's equivalent of invading Korea in 1950 to install a puppet state? (No, we installed Iran's puppet regime in Iraq for them.)

In short, we can do business with Iran, if we want to - and if we block out the endless war-mongering from the neocons. (AIPAC's **spring conference** will be almost entirely dedicated to hyping the Iran threat, with half of Congress in attendance, dutifully memorising AIPAC talking points.)

There is no alternative to negotiations. Either get serious about them or prepare to live with a nuclear armed Iran. In either case, we will be better off following Nixon's example and not George W. Bush's.