

Neutralizing Iran comes before normalization with Riyadh

written by Meir Ben Shabbat | 13.09.2023

The Mossad chief's recent speech was not really aimed against Iran; the words were actually intended to clarify to the Biden administration precisely where Jerusalem's priority currently lies.

Biden buys calm from Iran until 2025

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This past May, Defense Minister Yoav Gallant revealed that Iran had accumulated enough uranium enriched to 60% and 20% purity for five nuclear bombs. He further said that "the Iranian nuclear program has reached its most advanced stage ever." When policymakers speak about the emerging understandings between Iran and the US, they have to take into account those two facts above everything else. These include Israeli officials as well as the members of the Biden administration, congress members and senators, and US public opinion influencers.

According to various media reports, US and Iranian officials have recently struck an unofficial deal that has three components: First, a mutual release of prisoners; the second, unfreezing Iranian funds at a sum of some \$6 billion from South Korean and Iraqi banks (Iran's access to those accounts had been blocked due to the US sanctions, but now Iran would be able to use the money for humanitarian purposes); and third, Iran halting its enrichment progress: It has apparently committed not to go beyond 60% purity and not to accumulate more uranium of that grade.

By having these steps framed as "unofficial understandings," the administration

can theoretically avoid having to get congressional approval, which would have been far from certain under the current circumstances. Submitting a deal for approval might have made Iran front and center in the public discourse, so this path allows the White House to kick the Iranian can down the road to 2025 and buy some calm until his reelection campaign is over.

As far as Iran is concerned, it won't have to take any drastic measure as part of this deal, especially compared to what it would have had to do if it were to return to the original deal from 2015. Although it might not get all of what it could have gotten under that framework, nevertheless the new arrangement marks the first time it gets a de facto permission to reach 60% purity grade. Moreover, true to its conduct in the past, it would be able to renege on its pledge not to accumulate more such material and not to exceed this level.

The new understandings could cement Iran's stature as a nuclear threshold state with an American stamp of approval. Iran will maintain a breakout capacity that would allow it to easily shift gears to a military nuclear program. This reinforces the fear that the president – despite vowing to stick to a strategy of pre-emption – is actually now pursuing a policy of containment.

Even as Israel continues to bolster its operational capabilities, it should maintain its steadfast rejection of the concessions made to Iran as part of the unofficial deal. It should also insist that the US take concrete steps against Iran. Having Israel be a tacit participant in this effort to buy time on behalf of the Biden administration. Israel must formulate its position on this matter based on the outcome of the discreet talks with the White House.

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Iran's pincer war on Israel

written by David M. Weinberg | 13.09.2023

Operation "Bayit VeGan" was more than a two-day anti-terrorist raid meant to capture enemy operatives and weapons in the Palestinian city of Jenin. It was

another stage in Israel's ongoing and escalating war with Iran.

The mullahs of Teheran largely are behind the sophisticated and well-equipped military infrastructure exposed and destroyed by the IDF this week. Iran is funding the efforts of two radical Islamic militias, Hamas and Islamic Jihad, to penetrate Judea and Samaria, expanding their bases of attack against Israel from Gaza to the West Bank.

As far back as 2014, Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei began to openly advocate for "exporting the Islamic revolution" to hills of Samaria. He called for "serious planning to add the West Bank to the confrontation with Israel." "Gaza is the center of resistance, but resistance groups in the West Bank are the key that can bring the Zionist enemy to its knees," Khamenei said.

The notorious commander of the Iranian revolutionary Guards Corps Quds Force, Qassem Soleimani (assassinated by the US in 2020), took-up the charge, making the arming of West Bank militias an Iranian priority.

Soleimani brought Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh and his deputy Saleh al-Arouri to meet Khamenei and President Ebrahim Raisi in Teheran. Hamas official Osama Hamdan then bragged about a "new stage of resistance" in which Iran would back the creation of "20 to 30 new battalions of 2,000 militants in Samaria."

Last month, Khamenei hosted Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) leaders in Teheran. Islamic Jihad's Secretary-General Ziyad al-Nakhleh, who participated in the terrorist summit, plainly told Iranian newspaper *Al-Wefaq* that anti-Israeli operations actions in the West Bank reflect directives coming from Iran.

"The arming of the West Bank, a directive issued by Iran's Leader Ayatollah Khamenei, significantly impacts the region," he said. "Efforts were made to implement this directive, including weapon smuggling and purchasing from Israelis. The aim was to bring about a qualitative shift in the Palestinian situation and enhance resistance actions in the West Bank."

Al-Nakhleh continued: "In terms of practical support, it is important to clarify that the aid provided by the Islamic Republic to the Palestinian people is significant. The assistance includes security and military help, training, economic support, and humanitarian aid for the families of martyrs and prisoners... No other country in the world takes such a stance so explicitly, a testament to

Tehran's support for the Palestinian resistance factions, with strong ties between PIJ, Hamas and the Islamic Republic."

Al-Nakhleh also saluted the significant economic assistance provided by Iran, "in addition to contributing to creating a resistance infrastructure in Palestine."

And where is all the money coming from? Well, Iran is getting tens of billions of dollars in sanctions relief from President Biden's administration. On behalf of Iran, Hezbollah and the Qods Force are invested heavily in drug production and distribution (Captagon pills and more) across the Middle East and Europe, and in money-laundering cryptocurrency schemes - as revealed two weeks ago by the Israeli defense and foreign affairs ministries.

IT IS PRECISELY the "resistance infrastructure" bragged about by Al-Nakhleh that the IDF targeted this week. This was an Israeli effort to kill the terrorist cancer in early stages to prevent the "Lebanonization" of Jenin; before Palestinian terrorist cells in Samaria metastasize into a menace that surgical strikes can't overcome.

Israel cannot sit by and watch the West Bank (in Israel's center, adjacent to Israel's three key cities, Jerusalem, Tel Aviv, and Haifa) become another full-fledged base of Iranian military operations against Israel, like Gaza (on Israel's southern border) and Lebanon (on Israel's northern border).

Israeli analyst Dan Diker (president of the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs) points out that Iran now outflanks Israel on three sides. He calls this an "Iranian pincer movement" against Israel. From Gaza, Hamas and PIJ have targeted Israel with tens of thousands of rockets. From Lebanon and Syria, IRGC Quds forces and Hezbollah's proxy terror army have about 180,000 rockets and laser-guided missiles directed at Israeli cities. From both directions, these Iranian-backed forces have dug and sought to use terror attack tunnels into Israel.

Khamenei now uses the phrase "the unity of fronts" against Israel, meant to include Gaza, Lebanon, Jerusalem, the West Bank - and next, Jordan.

Destabilization of the generally pro-Western (and purportedly Israel-ally) Hashemite Kingdom long has been an Iranian goal. From Jordan, which straddles Israel's longest border, Iranian proxies could penetrate and further destabilize the West Bank.

And it may not be all that hard to do. Jordan is a perpetual economic basket-case, a rickety country with a disgruntled populace that also hosts millions of refugees including Syrians and Palestinians who still dream of destroying Israel.

Writing in *Foreign Affairs* magazine, Michael Knight notes that Iraq can be considered a model for what Iran wants to do to Jordan. Iraq is quietly falling apart, he says, with Iranian-controlled Popular Mobilization Units fully incorporated into the Iraqi army, and most Iraqi politicians too fearful to resist. Iraq has become an Iranian hegemonic success story, and Khamenei intends Jordan to be next.

In Gaza, Lebanon, Syria, the West Bank, Iraq (and Yemen), Western powers have been feckless and proved powerless in impeding Iranian advances. Remember UN Resolution 1701 ending the 2006 Second Lebanon War which mandated the disarmament of Hezbollah and the prevention of any armed forces south of the Litani River, except for the Lebanese army and UNIFIL? What a joke that resolution and that UN force has proven to be!

Remember the Palestinian Authority, established under the internationally backed and massively funded Oslo Accords, which was supposed to bring peace to Palestinians and Israelis alike; or at least good governance and basic security in the West Bank and Gaza? What a disappointment that corrupt, weak, and hostile “Authority” has become!

The only real power standing in the way of Palestinian terrorism and Iranian hegemonism is Israel.

Alas, no understanding of this reality could be found in media reporting on, or the reactions in most Western capitals to, the IDF operation in Jenin this week.

Instead, reporters and diplomats fluttered with namby-pamby statements about the need of “all sides” to reduce tensions, and then they plained about terrible loss of life or the difficult (indeed!) humanitarian situation in Jenin – as if all this were occurring in a complete vacuum.

The average Westerner could have gotten the impression (from supposedly seasoned reporters and evidently expert diplomats) that Zionist stormtroopers landed from Mars and for no good reason raided the pastoral farmlands of Palestine. As if the IDF did not confiscate in Jenin thousands of illegal weapons

and discover dozens of underground military command posts with sophisticated technology that were directing murderous attacks on Israelis and making a mockery of vestigial Palestinian Authority control of a major Palestinian city.

As if Iranian-backed Palestinian terrorism was not the core problem, and Israel had no business defending its citizenry accordingly.

No wonder that Israelis have grown quite unreceptive to criticism of their defense policies by friends and foes alike.

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Beware another US sellout to Tehran

written by David M. Weinberg | 13.09.2023

Believe it or not, the Biden administration apparently is once again offering the mullahs of Tehran a sweetheart deal: the release of \$10 billion or more in frozen Iranian assets and clemency for Iran's near-breakout nuclear advances of recent years, in exchange for Iranian release of American hostages and warmed-over pious Iranian pledges to freeze the Shiite atomic bomb program.

This, even though Washington would be freezing the Iranian nuclear program with 16 cascades spinning to enrich uranium to 60% purity, which is just shy of weapons-grade. In February, Iran was caught with some uranium enriched to 84% purity and was called-out for manufacturing uranium metal, a material used in nuclear weapon cores.

This month, intelligence photos showed Iran again digging tunnels at its Natanz nuclear site – supposedly deep enough to withstand an American or Israeli military strike. This tells us that Iran has what to hide, a clear sign that it has not given up on its quest for a nuclear bomb.

Nevertheless, US President Joe Biden may grant Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi

an end to all past and current International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) investigations into Iran's nuclear violations alongside the suck-up deal above.

Biden also seems happy to ignore Iran's other regional muckraking and hegemonic advances, including its harassment of internationally flagged merchant ships in the Straits of Hormuz, and its placement of "floating terror bases" (civilian ships converted into mini-aircraft and commando carriers) in the strategic waterway. The situation there is so bad that in protest the UAE last month pulled-out of a US naval alliance group meant to protect shipping in the Arabian Gulf.

John Hannah and Richard Goldberg of the Washington-based Foundation for the Defense of Democracies warned this week in a special alert publication that the above contours would be "a bad, even a desperate, deal made from a position of American weakness."

"It looks like the administration is reviving an idea out of the old Obama playbook because it's not willing to do what's necessary to stop Iran's program by restoring deterrence through coercive diplomacy. Biden is scared to death that if Iran keeps advancing its nuclear program, either the United States or Israel will be forced to make good on their promise to stop Iran militarily."

"From the administration's perspective, paying Iran off is the easiest way to hold at bay the worst-case outcomes of a nuclear Iran, on the one hand, or another major military conflict, on the other. And suspending sanctions to get there is a lot easier and less risky in their minds than doing the hard work and committing the resources needed to establish a credible US military option to destroy the Iranian program."

"But the price for America will be stabilizing and strengthening a terror-supporting Iranian regime now under pressure not only from sanctions but from profound domestic discontent and turmoil among its own population," they added.

Equally distressing, they warned, is that "Biden risks undermining American support for the war in Ukraine by asking Congress to approve billions of taxpayer dollars to support Kyiv while offering Iran billions of dollars to help resupply Moscow." (It has been well documented that Iran is supplying Russia with military attack drones and other critical technologies with which to clobber Ukraine.)

Given that Washington appears unwilling, even now, to place hard limits on the crucial elements of Iran's illicit nuclear weapons program (fissile material production, weaponization, and means of delivery/missile development), and is unwilling to apply maximum economic pressure (as President Trump did) or to present a credible military threat to Iran – it is no surprise that Israel is ramping-up its preparations for confrontation.

At the Herzliya Conference last week, IDF Chief-of-Staff Lt. Gen. Herzl Halevi said plainly, in a rare speech focused directly on Iran, that Israel may “take action” against Iran's nuclear facilities because of “possible negative developments on the horizon. We have the ability to hit Iran, and we are not indifferent to what Iran is trying to build around us.” National Security Advisor Tzachi Hanegbi added that “there is no place that can't be reached” (referring to the new Natanz tunnels).

THIS IS WHERE broader regional diplomacy comes into the picture and complicates Israel's calculations.

Washington expects Israeli acquiescence in the emerging US surrender to Iran in exchange for a series of other things important to Israel. These include US backing for Israel against escalated Palestinian assaults expected this fall in UN forums, toning down US criticism regarding settlement and security matters (at a time when the IDF is going to have to intensify its anti-terrorist operations in Judea and Samaria), an easing of US pressures on Israel in connection with domestic matters (like judicial reform), a warm Washington visit for Prime Minister Netanyahu (which is not just a political concession but rather is critical to Israel's overall deterrent posture), and most of all, significant American moves towards reconciliation with Saudi Arabia (which is critical to driving a breakthrough in Israeli-Saudi ties).

It is worth dwelling on the latter point because renewed close cooperation between Washington and Riyadh is central to the stability of the region and is the cornerstone of what should and can be Saudi entry to the Abraham Accords. In other words, the road to Israel-Saudi normalization runs through Washington.

It will take serious intent and deft maneuvering from America to get there, and there is good reason to doubt that Biden is prepared or capable of paying the mostly justified Saudi price for renewed close Saudi-US partnership. (This may

include a defense treaty, high-quality arms supply, a comprehensive economic agreement, and most controversially, US agreement to a Saudi civilian nuclear program. Israel may have a problem with parts of this package too.)

The further problem is that even an expensive package of US “concessions” to Saudi Arabia will not truly compensate for US capitulation to Iran (something we know from experience will only embolden the hegemonic ambitions of the mullahs). And this capitulation will make it more difficult for the Saudis to publicly embrace Israel (although the quiet security coordination between the two countries assuredly will continue to grow).

In the end, Israel must prioritize its most naked, existential security interests – which clearly are stopping Iran’s nuclear bomb effort and scuttling Iran’s attempts to encircle Israel with well-armed proxy armies. Accepting another ruinous US nuclear deal with Iran is not in accordance with these interests.

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