

# Will Obama Resist Push for Iran War?

The last two American presidents who pressured Israel (Jimmy Carter and George H.W. Bush) lost reelection. Though the reasons for their defeats varied, their strained relations with Israel surely didn't help, a dilemma now facing Barack Obama as Israel demands U.S. backing against Iran, as Marjorie Cohn describes.

By Marjorie Cohn

Neocons in Israel and the United States are escalating their rhetoric to prepare us for war with Iran. Even the infamous John Yoo, architect of President George W. Bush's illegal torture and spying programs, is calling on the Republican presidential candidates to "begin preparing the case for a military strike to destroy Iran's nuclear program."

Under the 1968 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), Iran has the legal right to produce nuclear power for peaceful purposes. The United Nations International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) has found no evidence that Iran is developing a nuclear weapons program. Defense Secretary Leon Panetta recently said on CBS that Iran is not currently trying to build a nuclear weapon.

Nevertheless, the United States and Israel are mounting a campaign of aggression against Iran. The United States has imposed punishing sanctions against Iran that are crippling Iran's economy, and pressuring other countries and strong-arming financial institutions to stop buying oil from Iran, the world's third largest exporter.

The Obama administration is also preparing new punitive measures that target the Central Bank of Iran. And the House of Representatives voted overwhelmingly to pass the Iran Threat Reduction Act of 2011 which would outlaw any contact between U.S. government employees and some Iranian officials.

There is also evidence that Israel, with the possible assistance of the United States, has orchestrated the assassinations of at least five Iranian nuclear scientists or engineers since 2007. The *New York Times* reported: "The campaign, which experts believe is being carried out mainly by Israel, apparently claimed its latest victim on [Jan. 11] when a bomb killed a 32-year-old nuclear scientist in Tehran's morning rush hour."

These assassinations constitute acts of terrorism. There have also been cyber-attacks on Iranian centrifuges and an explosion at a missile facility last year that killed a senior general and 16 other people.

These acts of aggression are designed to provoke Iran to retaliate, including

possibly closing the Strait of Hormuz, which will spark a war that could spread to the entire Middle East.

In addition, the United States has shifted combat troops and warships to the Middle East, and supplied Israel with bunker-busting bombs.

Moreover, President Barack Obama had plans to deploy 9,000 U.S. troops to Israel to participate later this year with thousands of Israeli troops in "war games" to test the U.S./Israeli air defense system (although the exercise was postponed reportedly as a signal of Obama's displeasure with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.) The exercise was to be the largest ever joint drill between the two countries. Panetta said the exercise is designed "to back up our unshakable commitment to Israel's security."

Iran is not a threat to Israel's security. Iran has not attacked any country in some 200 years. In 1953, the CIA engineered a coup that replaced a democratic government in Iran with the vicious Shah. He ruled Iran with an iron hand for 25 years, wreaking torture and terror on Iranians while keeping Iran open to Western investment.

When I visited Iran in 1978 as a human rights observer, there were dozens of U.S. corporations in downtown Tehran. One year later, the chickens came home to roost. The Iranian revolution overthrew the Shah, replacing him with a tyrannical theocracy that continues to violate the rights of the Iranian people.

But that does not mean that Iran, if it does obtain nuclear weapons, will attack Israel. The Iranian government knows that Israel and the United States would retaliate with unimaginable military force that would devastate Iran and much of the Middle East.

Article 2 of the United Nations Charter requires the peaceful settlement of international disputes between Iran and the United States. Both the U.S. and Iran are signatories of the Kellogg-Briand Peace Pact of 1928, which states, "The High Contracting Parties agree that the settlement or solution of all disputes or conflicts of whatever nature or of whatever origin they may be, which may arise among them, shall never be sought except by pacific means."

Yet the United States has been illegally threatening war against Iran, dating back to the administration of President George W. Bush.

Security Council Resolution 687, that ended the first Gulf War, requires a weapons-of-mass-destruction-free zone in the Middle East. Israel, which reportedly has an arsenal of 200-300 nuclear weapons, stands in violation of

that resolution. Israel refuses to sign the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, thus avoiding inspections by the IAEA.

As Shibley Telhami and Steven Kull advocate in a recent op-ed in the *Times*, we should work toward a nuclear weapons-free zone in the Middle East, and that includes Israel. They cite a poll in which 65 percent of Israeli Jews think it would be best if neither Israel nor Iran had the bomb, even if that means Israel giving up its nukes.

AIPAC (American Israel Public Affairs Committee), the Israel lobby in the United States, has tremendous support in the U.S. Congress. Even Zionist Thomas Friedman wrote in the *Times* last month that the standing ovation Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu got in Congress “was bought and paid for by the Israel lobby.”

AIPAC also exerts considerable pressure on Obama to be tough on Iran. When the new Chairman of the joint Chiefs of Staff and the new head of CENTCOM told Obama late last year they were disappointed that he was not firmly opposing an Israeli strike on Iran, Obama replied that he “had no say over Israel” because “it is a sovereign country.”

Obama does indeed have a say a strong say over Israel. The United States has pledged \$30 billion to Israel over the next 10 years. Obama should inform his counterparts in Israel that if it launches a military attack on Iran, the U.S. will withhold foreign aid from Israel.

Although pressure from the neocons to support an Israeli attack on Iran will increase as the presidential elections draws near, Obama has a legal duty to refrain from actions that will lead to war with Iran.

Additionally, the U.N. Security Council, which has the duty to prevent threats to international peace and security, should order Israel and the United States to cease their aggressive provocation against Iran.

The same voices who brought us the illegal, tragic and ill-advised war with Iraq will continue to try to dominate the national conversation with battle cries against Iran. It is up to us to prevail upon our elected officials to avoid a tragic conflagration in Iran by pressuring Israel to cease and desist.

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