

Iran War on the Ballot

Exclusive: War or peace with Iran will be on the U.S. presidential ballot, with Barack Obama's reelection likely to clear the way for direct talks on resolving the dispute over Iran's nuclear program but with a victory by Mitt Romney putting neocons in a position to seek "regime change," reports Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

A deal to resolve the Iranian nuclear dispute, based on face-to-face negotiations between Iranian and U.S. officials, could follow quickly upon President Barack Obama's reelection on Nov. 6, but those bilateral relations would likely veer toward confrontation if Mitt Romney wins and his neocon advisers retake control of U.S. foreign policy.

Sources familiar with the status of the talks say the potential settlement is much closer than is publicly understood, with a reelected President Obama prepared to relax the harsh economic sanctions on Iran in exchange for tight constraints on any Iranian nuclear program, assuring that it is for peaceful purposes only.

One person familiar with the status of talks said the post-election discussions also could lead to a broader rapprochement between Iran and the United States, two countries that have been at odds since 1979 when Iranian radicals overran the U.S. Embassy and took American diplomatic personnel hostage.

However, the prospects for peace could head off in a very different direction if Romney wins. His neocon advisers are considered likely to hijack the Iran sanctions and use them to force "regime change" in Tehran, rather than for their current narrow purpose of compelling Iran to negotiate seriously on limiting its nuclear program.

By effectively shifting the application of the sanctions from nuclear negotiations to regime change, the neocons could put Iran and the United States on course for another war in the Middle East, much as the neocons did in steadily ratcheting up tensions with Iraq in 2002-2003 until a peaceful resolution became impossible.

Despite the disastrous Iraq War, Washington's influential neocons have never given up on their dream of violently remaking the Middle East through U.S.-imposed "regime change" in countries considered hostile to America and Israel.

If the new Romney administration did redeploy the sanctions for the purpose of "regime change" in Iran, the Islamic government might press ahead toward

development of a nuclear weapon for self-defense. That, in turn, could precipitate a U.S.-Israeli attack on Iran, since Romney has declared that he would not accept Iran even having the “capability” to build an A-bomb, let alone an actual bomb.

Contradictory Remarks

Though Iran’s current readiness to make major concessions on its nuclear program marks a success for the Obama administration’s diplomacy, President Obama has been reluctant to tout the pending resolution of the crisis in the final days of the campaign out of fear that it would open him to attacks as soft on Iran.

That concern left the President making contradictory remarks at last Monday’s debate. He initially disparaged [a New York Times report](#) on a tentative agreement for bilateral talks between the United States and Iran, but later in the debate seemed to confirm that such an arrangement was in the offing.

In response to a question from moderator Bob Schieffer about the shape of a possible deal with Iran, Obama [responded](#), “Well, first of all, those were reports in the newspaper. They are not true. But our goal is to get Iran to recognize it needs to give up its nuclear program and abide by the U.N. resolutions that have been in place, because they have the opportunity to re-enter the community of nations, and we would welcome that.”

However, several questions later, Obama briefly returned to the topic, telling Republican presidential nominee Mitt Romney: “I’m pleased that you now are endorsing our policy of applying diplomatic pressure and potentially having bilateral discussions with the Iranians to end their nuclear program.”

A day earlier, on Oct. 21, the Times cited Obama administration officials as saying that the United States and Iran “have agreed in principle for the first time to one-on-one negotiations over Iran’s nuclear program.” But the Times added that “Iranian officials have insisted that the talks wait until after the presidential election telling their American counterparts that they want to know with whom they would be negotiating.”

The Times reported that the agreement was “a result of intense, secret exchanges between American and Iranian officials that date almost to the beginning of President Obama’s term.”

One intelligence source familiar with the talks told me that the framework for a deal was largely hammered out by Defense Secretary Leon Panetta during his time as CIA director before he took the Pentagon job in mid-2011. But the source said the tough international sanctions, which the Obama administration engineered over the past year, have convinced Iranian leaders that it is time to get

serious and to reach a settlement.

The source added that the scope of the bilateral talks could be much broader than just Iran's nuclear program, which is expected to be suspended although with allowances for civilian nuclear energy. Under the plan, Iran also would tone down its rhetoric against Israel, ease bellicose President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad off the political stage and clear the way for the election of a more moderate president next year, the source said.

Regionally, Iran would be pressed to use its influence with Hezbollah to halt any hostilities toward Israel and to assist in tamping down the civil conflict in Syria. In exchange, the United States would gradually lift the sanctions, allow Iran's international oil sales to recover, and take steps toward establishing diplomatic relations.

"It's going to be a whole sea change," the source said, although adding that the framework is likely to collapse if Romney wins the election. "If Mitt becomes president," the source said, "you'll have chaos in the Middle East."

Romney's Hard Line

The Times's article also noted that plans for face-to-face talks might collapse if Romney wins: "It is also far from clear that Mr. Obama's opponent, Mitt Romney, would go through with the negotiation should he win election. Mr. Romney has repeatedly criticized the president as showing weakness on Iran and failing to stand firmly with Israel against the Iranian nuclear threat. ...

"The prospect of one-on-one negotiations could put Mr. Romney in an awkward spot, since he has opposed allowing Iran to enrich uranium to any level, a concession that experts say will probably figure in any deal on the nuclear program."

During the Oct. 22 debate, Romney displayed ignorance about basic facts regarding Iran and he indicated that he shared the view of his neocon advisers that the civil war in Syria amounted to "an opportunity."

In the third presidential debate, Romney said, "Syria's an opportunity for us because Syria plays an important role in the Middle East, particularly right now. Syria is Iran's only ally in the Arab world. It's their route to the sea. It's the route for them to arm Hezbollah in Lebanon, which threatens, of course, our ally Israel. And so seeing Syria remove [President Bashar al] Assad is a very high priority for us. Number two, seeing a, a replacement government being responsible people is critical for us."

The "route to the sea" gaffe mistaking Iran for some landlocked country exposed

Romney's weak sense of world geography, since Iran sits on the Persian Gulf. Iran also has no common border with Syria. Iraq rests between the two countries.

But Romney's clumsy geopolitical statement resurrected the neocons' longstanding goal of forcing "regime change" in Syria and Iran as well as Iraq under Saddam Hussein and thus starving Israel's close-in enemies, Lebanon's Hezbollah and the Palestinian Hamas, of outside support. [For details, see Consortiumnews.com's "[Moderate Mitt: Neocon Trojan Horse.](#)"]

For Romney's neocon advisers, who dominate his campaign's inner foreign policy circle, torpedoing a potential settlement on Iran's nuclear program would be their first challenge in establishing their preeminence in a Romney administration next year.

Even if bilateral talks are held after a Romney victory, the neocons could guide them toward deliberate failure and then use the collapse as a demonstration of Iranian intransigence, thus justifying an eventual U.S.-Israeli military strike.

So, in a very practical way, a possible war with Iran – and the fate of millions of civilians who could be caught up in the carnage – will be on the ballot in the U.S. presidential election on Nov. 6.

Investigative reporter Robert Parry broke many of the Iran-Contra stories for The Associated Press and Newsweek in the 1980s. You can buy his new book, *America's Stolen Narrative*, either in [print here](#) or as an e-book (from [Amazon](#) and [barnesandnoble.com](#)).

Telling Truths about Israel/Palestine

False national narratives play key roles in controlling human behavior, especially when enforced by an aggressive propaganda system that demonizes factual counter-narratives. That has long been the case as Israel minimized its harsh treatment of Palestinians, but the truth has begun to break through, says Lawrence Davidson.

By Lawrence Davidson

On Oct. 16, the Israeli organization [Yazkern hosted](#) dozens of veterans of Israel's 1948 "War of Independence" for a look at what that struggle really entailed. The veterans testified to what can only be called a conscious effort at ethnic cleansing the systematic destruction of entire Palestinian villages

and numerous massacres.

The aim of Yazkern's effort at truth-telling was to break through the sanitized "mainstream nationalistic narrative" of 1948 and the accompanying denial of any legitimate Palestinian counter-narrative.

A documentary film by Israeli-Russian journalist Lia Tarachansky, dealing with this same subject, the Palestinian "Nakba" or catastrophe, is nearing completion. It too has the testimony of Israeli soldiers of the 1948 war.

These latest revelations lend credence to the claims of Israel's "new historians," such as Ilan Pappé, who have written books based on evidence gleaned from government archives showing that, even before the outbreak of hostilities leading to the creation of the State of Israel, the Zionist authorities planned to ethnically cleanse as much of Palestine as possible of non-Jews.

OK, you might say, the Israelis behaved savagely in 1948 and only a small minority will admit it but what about after "the War of Independence"? As it turns out, the ethnic cleansing never stopped. Conveniently, the longstanding denial that it ever started has helped to hide the fact that it's ongoing.

Just this week, we received the news that Defense Minister Ehud Barak has given the order to demolish eight Palestinian villages with some 1,500 residents in the south Hebron hills. The excuse offered by Barak is that the land is needed for military training exercises.

According to the "new historians," this is a standard Israeli government cover for ethnic cleansing. Sure, for a couple of years the Israeli army will use the land that held the demolished villages. Then, almost inevitably, the area becomes the site of a new Israeli Jewish settlement.

On Oct. 20, Al-Jazeera reported on Israeli documents showing that between 2008 and 2010 the Israeli army allowed food supplies into the Gaza Strip based on a daily calorie count that held the basic diet of a 1.5 million people to a point just short of malnutrition.

According to the Israeli human rights organization Gisha Legal Center for Freedom of Movement, "the official goal of the policy was to wage economic warfare which would paralyze Gaza's economy and, according to the Defense Ministry, create pressure on the Hamas government." Actually, this bit of savagery predates 2008.

Back in 2006, Dov Weissglass, then an adviser to Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, stated that "the idea is to put the Palestinians on a diet, but not to make them

die of hunger." Of course, precedents for this can be found in the treatment of European Jews in the 1930s and 1940s. One assumes that Mr. Weissglass was aware of this.

However, just as with the barbarism practiced in the "War of Independence," in this case too there is a well-practiced capacity for national denial. According to Gideon Levy writing in Haaretz, "the country has plenty of ways of burying skeletons deep in the closet so that Israelis shouldn't be overly disturbed."

The military authors of the document that turned Weissglass's hideous "idea" into savage practice, operated in a country afflicted with blindness. Just so the present Israeli government does not worry about public unease over the fact that it is slowly but surely destroying the Gaza sewage system and rendering its water supply undrinkable.

Then there are the petty acts of cruelty that can be considered telltale signs of an underlying savagery. For instance, the fact that Israeli customs officials held back the the exam sheets for the October 2012 College Board tests bound for the West Bank graduating high school seniors.

AMIDEAST, the organization that serves as the testing agency for the Palestinian territories, had made sure the Israeli authorities had the tests in their hands weeks in advance. Nonetheless, in an apparent act of vindictiveness, the customs officials held on to them until AMIDEAST had to cancel the exam.

One observer has asked the question, "what has the SAT [tests] have to do with Israeli security?" Well it might be that, in the mind of a cruel customs official, the more college-bound Palestinians from the Occupied Territories, the more articulate witnesses to Israeli oppression.

On the Gaza side of the equation, the U.S. was forced to cancel a small scholarship program for Gaza college students because the Israelis refused to let the students leave their open-air prison, even if only to go to a West Bank school. (For anyone who might want to follow the grim procession of Israeli oppressive acts on a day-to-day basis, I recommend the web site Today In Palestine.)

Challenge and Denial

In the face of this behavior on the part of Israel, that country's public support in the United States has finally begun to slip.

Most recently, 15 prominent church leaders, representing major Christian denominations, wrote an open letter to Congress calling for "an immediate investigation into possible violations by Israel of the U.S. Foreign Assistance

Act and the U.S. Arms Export Control Act which respectively prohibit assistance to any country which engages in a consistent pattern of human rights violations. We urge Congress to hold hearings to examine Israel's compliance, and we request regular reporting on compliance and the withholding of military aid for non-compliance."

So far, Congress has turned a deaf-ear to this request, but the Zionist reaction was loud and clear. Leading the way in this effort was the head of the misnamed Anti-Defamation League (ADL), Abraham Foxman. Charging the Christian leaders with a "blatant lack of sensitivity" (one might ask just how sensitive one is suppose to be to an oppressor?) Foxman decided to punish the offending clergy by refusing to engage in ongoing "interfaith dialogue."

Having "big brains" is a two-edge sword for human beings. It means we can think all manner of creative thoughts and even exercise some self-control over our own inappropriate impulses if we care to try. However, it also means that we can be manipulated into thinking that we need not try that we are the victims even as we are oppressing others and that any criticism of our actions is just another example of our victimization.

Israeli culture and indeed the culture of Zionism generally is one ongoing project of self-manipulation to achieve just such a state of mind. And, to a great extent, it has succeeded. A recent poll taken in Israel shows that "a majority of the [Israeli Jewish] public *wants* the state to discriminate against Palestinians revealing a deeply rooted racism in Israeli society."

The Zionists are not the only experts in denial. The United States, Israel's chief ally, has always been good at this gambit as well. After the 9/11 attacks, any consideration of the possibility that United States foreign policy in the Middle East might have helped motivate the terrorism was anathema and it still is over a decade later.

Instead of taking a hard look at our own behavior, we are simply expanding our capacity to kill outright anyone who would challenge our policies in a violent fashion. Our answer is targeted killings by drone or otherwise, a bit of savagery we copied from the Israelis.

Machiavelli, who can always be relied upon to see the darker side of things, once said, "Whoever wishes to foresee the future must consult the past; for human events resemble those of preceding times. This arises from the fact that they are produced by men who ever have been, and ever shall be, animated by the same passions, and thus they necessarily have the same results."

But is it really inevitable?

Lawrence Davidson is a history professor at West Chester University in Pennsylvania. He is the author of *Foreign Policy Inc.: Privatizing America's National Interest*; *America's Palestine: Popular and Official Perceptions from Balfour to Israeli Statehood*; and *Islamic Fundamentalism*.
