

Israel's Lost Clout

The Israeli government and the neocons have long felt they can dictate U.S. policy in the Mideast, including demands for military strikes against "enemies." But President Obama's push for diplomacy on Syria and Iran may be challenging that longstanding reality, writes Lawrence Davidson.

By Lawrence Davidson

The Iran's new and more moderate President Hassan Rouhani came to the United Nations at the end of September. Amidst numerous interviews and diplomatic discussions, his message was clear: no, Iran will not give up its legal right to enrich uranium and no, Iran will not develop nuclear weapons.

According to Rouhani, Iran is willing to prove this second point by "ensuring full transparency [of its nuclear program] under international law." In exchange for doing so, Iran will demand "a total lifting" of international sanctions.

In truth, this has been the position of the Iranian government for years. As far back as 2005 Iran's supreme leader Ali Khamenei declared that nuclear weapons violated Islamic law and Iran would not construct them. It primarily has been due to pressure from the Israelis and their Zionist lobby in Washington that U.S. politicians have refused to believe these Iranian assertions.

To overcome this lobby-induced skepticism, President Rouhani has switched from the in-your-face behavior that characterized his predecessor, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, to a more tactful, forthcoming approach. At least for now this shift has borne fruit.

There was the recent historic 15-minute phone call between him and President Barack Obama, as well as a brief meeting between Secretary of State John Kerry and his Iranian counterpart Mohammad Javad Zarif. According to Kerry, Zarif "put some possibilities on the table," and this has led to a scheduled round of "substantive talks" between Iran and the main Western nations in Geneva on Oct. 15-16.

Favorable White House Response

What has loosened the grip of lobby power and allowed the Obama administration to meet the Iranian initiative favorably? Certainly Rouhani's so-called charm offensive helped, but it can't be the only reason.

More fundamentally, the likelihood that a U.S attack on Syria would end in a debacle and the overwhelming popular opinion against such action set the scene

for this latest turn toward diplomacy with Iran. According to a *Washington Post* opinion poll, 85 percent of Americans want better relations with Iran. That is the type of political ammunition that can do successful battle with selfish special interest pressure.

As politician and president, Obama has been caught between a desire to avoid war with Iran, a war that would almost certainly harm the Western world's economy, and the political pressure of the powerful American Zionist lobby. The Zionists ultimately seek to ensure that U.S. policy falls in line with Israel's desires to see Iran destroyed. This Zionist position reflects the distorted view of Israeli interests held by its ideologically myopic, militaristic elite, but it conflicts with the long-term interests of the United States.

If nothing else, the disastrous foreign policy of the George W. Bush administration demonstrated that American interests cannot possibly be served by starting a war with dangerous and unpredictable consequences against a country that has never been a direct threat to the United States. Obama knows this and, occasional rhetoric aside, has been hesitant and cautious in his approach to Iran.

The fact that he does not have to face reelection has positioned Obama to better separate out Israeli and American interests when it comes to Iran. American public opinion, first in the case of the Syrian episode and now in the case of Iran, has encouraged him to do so.

However, not all U.S. politicians enjoy this position. As M. J. Rosenberg tells us in a piece entitled "Will AIPAC Defeat Obama on Iran?" many in Congress still stand exposed to Zionist pressure. Rosenberg asserts that "the Netanyahu government and the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) are both determined to end the process [toward settlement with Iran] and have the ability to do it."

How so? "They intend to use the United States Congress [to] pass resolutions that will cause Rouhani to walk away by making it clear that Congress will accept nothing short of Iranian surrender on nuclear issues."

And indeed, the usual suspects in Congress, such as Sens. Lindsey Graham, R-South Carolina, and Robert Menendez, D-New Jersey, who in a more rational world would be recognized as part-time agents of a foreign power (Israel), are already formulating resolutions and legislation to promote war.

Rosenberg notes that, ultimately, it is money that suborns the Congress. Why, he asks, would any in Congress pass measures that go against the interests of their own country and risk involvement in yet another Middle Eastern war? "The answer

is simply that the midterm elections are coming up and that means members of Congress need campaign cash. And AIPAC provides it.”

Fortunately, there is a catch to this rather corrupt process. The alliance between the politicians and the Zionist lobby depends on a passive citizenry that does not threaten electoral defeat of politicians who promote special-interest wars when the voters want peace. Right now, the voters do not seem very passive.

Zionist Blindness

The American Zionists take their marching orders from Israel’s leaders and seem oblivious to this development. In his speech to the UN, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu showed no interest in compromise with Iran. He dismissed President Rouhani’s diplomatic efforts as deceitful, interpreted every Iranian defensive military move as an offensive threat, and let it be known that Israel wants sanctions to continue and to be backed with threats of hostile action.

The Prime Minister insists that he takes this stance to protect the interests of Israel. However, Netanyahu seems to have never considered the fact that by having the Zionist lobby pressure Washington to do his military dirty work, he makes the whole affair the interest of every American citizen.

Insofar as the Israelis and their Zionist agents increase the likelihood of yet more wars, they expose their allies in the Congress to a political reaction that risks their defeat the first moment they have an opponent willing to follow the public’s demand for diplomacy and peace.

Political Zionists are ideologues, and therefore if something does not happen to call into question their ideology, they will go on believing they are in the right even up to and through the gates of Hell. This blinkered mindset is sometimes called “motivated reasoning,” or more broadly “confirmation bias.”

As explained by author Michael Shermer, people who think this way refuse to consider or give any credit to data that does not “fit their creed.” That describes Benjamin Netanyahu perfectly.

Members of Congress who consistently support the political Zionist position are usually motivated by something other than ideology. They are motivated by money. That does not necessarily make them bad people, it just makes them slaves to a bad political system.

The ability to call into question their financial allegiance to the Zionists is readily possible when a publicly recognized difference evolves between the desires of the voters who put them in office and the desires of this particular

special interest. That now seems to be happening in the case of U.S. foreign policy toward Iran.

Of course, the Zionists did this to themselves. They pushed and pushed for U.S. hostilities against Iran and assumed that they had no real opposition except a weakling president. They were wrong. Their opposition was nationwide, but they were blinded to it by their "motivated reasoning" and their hubris.

As for President Obama, he seems to have finally found his courage amidst popular demands for peace and diplomacy. Let's hope this all-too-rare condition of sanity lasts.

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