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War or Agreement: No Third Option for Iran's Nuclear Program

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One may easily claim that the rightist Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has been so far the most adamant critic of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) between Iran and the P5+1 group. Both during intense nuclear talks between Iran and the world powers aimed at reaching an interim agreement, and later on, throughout nuclear talks in the Swiss city of Lausanne, he voiced his strong opposition to the contents of the agreement with Iran, describing it a “very bad deal,” which not



only fails to prevent nuclearization of Iran, but will also facilitate it. As an extension of his opposition, Netanyahu took part in an [interview with the CNN](#) cable news network a few days after the agreement between Iran and the P5+1. During that interview, he described the agreement as a threat, on the one hand, while on the other hand, maintaining that war with Iran would not be a good option either. Consequently, he proposed a third option in the form of “mounting pressure” on Iran until the Islamic Republic would give in to what he called a “good deal.”

Evidently, such a proposal is based on the presumption that escalation and extension of economic sanctions against Iran will increase the risk of domestic unrest in the country and, finally, force Iran to give more nuclear concessions to the Western side through a “good deal” in order to prevent the unrest. This solution is apparently nothing more than a fallacy because it actually puts forth the military option under a diplomatic and peaceful guise. However, at the end of the day, this proposal leads to the same result, which is war. In other words, except for war and what Netanyahu and his allies in Israel and the United States call “bad deal,” there is no third option available in the case of Iran's nuclear program.

Exploring Netanyahu's approach

To better understand the position of Netanyahu on Iran's nuclear talks, especially the third option proposed by him, one must go back a little and review his general opposition to diplomatic interaction with the Islamic Republic of Iran, and peaceful resolution of Iran's nuclear dispute. On the whole, the rightwing Israeli government's approach to Iran's nuclear dispute can be studied within framework of two distinct periods. Before the election of Iranian President Hassan Rouhani's moderate administration and even for a long time after the beginning of negotiations between Iran's new administration and world powers, the institutionalized approach adopted by the Israeli government to thwarting Iran's nuclear “threat,” was mostly aggressive and based on brute force. The proponents of that approach, including Netanyahu and his neo-conservative allies in US Congress, gave priority to using military hardware against Iran. In the meantime, by putting emphasis on the growing threat of Iran for regional security, especially for the existence of Israel, they tried to gain legitimacy for their recourse to war before the world's public opinion. A large part of speeches made by the Israel prime minister in that period reflected a viewpoint that supported the necessity of “weakening and attacking,” Iran. The peak of that viewpoint was reached during a [speech to the UN General Assembly](#) in October 2013, when he called Iran's moderate president a “wolf in sheep's clothing,” warning world leaders against any interaction with the Islamic Republic.

However, this approach gradually changed as Rouhani administration went on with its moderate foreign policy – which finally led to an [interim deal with the P5+1 group in the Swiss city of Geneva](#) in November 2013 – and, more importantly, due to surprising advances by the ISIS terrorist group in Iraq in June 2014. As a result, it

gradually gave way to a milder discourse, which mostly emphasized on the need to “contain and weaken” Iran. Naturally, as war and conflicts intensified in the Middle East as a result of the growing power of the militant groups in Syria and Iraq, the military option on Iran gradually lost ground among Western politicians and public opinion alike. Therefore, an increasing need was felt for a different approach, which would not beat the war drums and would attach more significance to peaceful solutions. In fact, a third option, namely “mounting pressure,” gradually emerged as an intermediate and alternative solution. Instead of directly hailing a military option, this solution put the highest emphasis on “nonmilitary” pressure levers and more specifically, the economic sanctions. This viewpoint was put forth for the first time during Netanyahu’s controversial address to US Congress in March 2015, as a pivotal strategy to confront Iran’s nuclear program and prevent a “bad deal,” with the Islamic Republic.

Fallacious interpretation

The normative or publicity advantage of such an approach for the rightwing Israeli statesmen, who are frequently accused of militarism and warmongering by the public opinion in the West, is that it pursues the final solution that can be relied upon to counter Iran threat, that is, resort to force, without openly emphasizing a military option. In fact, it opens the door to “war” through outward emphasis on “peace.”

However, it should be noted that this strategy, knowingly or unknowingly, is based on an incorrect understanding of political psychology of the Iranian leaders, on the one hand, and a distorted interpretation of the history of nonproliferation of nuclear weapons, on the other hand. A psychological approach to the political behavior of key decision-makers in Iran, including Ayatollah Khamenei, will clearly prove that for him, honorable, even though costly, resistance against “bullying,” and “injustice” takes priority over a profitable, but humiliating, reconciliation with the “bullies,” and “arrogant powers.” This is so important that the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran is ready to pay a very high price in order to protect its pride and prove its “rightfulness.” As a result, more pressure on Iran on the account of its nuclear program will only make Iran more adamant and will not be ensued with that kind of compromise that Netanyahu and his allies consider “good deal.” Such state of affairs will only mean escalation of tensions and the rising possibility of war.

Key Words: War, Agreement, Third Option, Iran Nuclear Program, Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), P5+1, Benjamin Netanyahu, Military Option, United States, Bad Deal, Good Deal, Interim Deal, Fallacious Interpretation, Militarism and Warmongering, Behravesht

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