

Iran: Turning the Tables On the War Party

by Muriel Mirak-Weissbach

Those neo-cons in Washington who are itching to let the bombs fly on Iran, have been hit with two important documents, which effectively expose the campaign of lies and manipulation mounted to justify belligerent action against the Persian Gulf nation. The two documents are the reply, by the Iranian government, to the incentives offer, made by the so-called 5+1 group—the five permanent members of the UN Security Council, plus Germany—and a letter by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to Congressman Peter Hoekstra, refuting claims made by a report of the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, about Iran's nuclear program. The two documents provide powerful ammunition for those seeking to prevent a new war in the region, and to settle the conflict over Iran's nuclear program, through rational negotiations.

Iran issued its formal reply to the 5+1 incentives package on Aug. 22, but it was made public only on Sept. 12, on the *isis* website. It appeared on the Internet just days after Ali Larijani, head of Iran's Supreme National Security Council and chief negotiator on the issue, had held meetings over two days with European Union (EU) foreign policy chief Javier Solana, representing the 5+1. The talks, in Vienna, focussed on the offer and the Iranians' reply; although no details were released, both sides expressed their satisfaction with the talks, which clarified the "ambiguities" (Solana) and "misunderstandings" (Larijani) related to the issue.

At the same time, an unnamed EU diplomat was quoted saying that Larijani had offered a two-month suspension of uranium enrichment. The report was promptly denied in Tehran. Then the document appeared on the Internet, indeed showing that Iran would be ready to suspend uranium enrich-

ment, in the course of negotiations, but not as a precondition to the same.

The message coming out of the talks, was clear: The matter *can* and *should* be solved diplomatically, without recourse to violence. IAEA head Mohamed ElBaradei, who was briefed by Larijani on the talks, presented a report to the IAEA governors board on Sept. 11, in which he stressed that "negotiation is the best option to find a durable solution." He expressed his hope that Larijani and Solana, in their next round of talks, would reach an "agreement to go back to the negotiation table." The Iranian representative at the IAEA also reported to the board of governors meeting, stressing Iran's willingness to open full negotiations, a position repeated by President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

Predictably, U.S. Ambassador to the IAEA Gregory Schulte pushed for referring the affair to the UN Security Council, where U.S. Ambassador John Bolton is ready to present a resolution for sanctions. But Solana put on the brakes, stating that as long as talks took place with Larijani, there was no perspective for sanctions. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov declared, "It is irrational to talk to Iran in the language of ultimatums." Days later, Lavrov said sanctions should be seen as a last resort—as should the use of the veto at the Security Council, hinting that Moscow might have recourse to its veto power. Lavrov emphasized that he hoped contacts between Solana and Larijani would "produce a result that will make it possible to resume negotiations."

Tehran Replies

The document issued by Iran is sound, and undercuts the propaganda line that Iran is merely trying to "buy time," or



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Ali Larijani, Iran's chief negotiator on the nuclear issue, met with European Union foreign policy chief Javier Solana Sept. 9-10, and both sides reported progress in negotiations. Shortly thereafter, Iran made public its formal reply to the proposals of the UN Permanent Five plus Germany.

hoodwink the West, etc. Given that the press coverage has reduced the document to a few points, deliberately excluding other crucial points, it is important to review the text in some detail. The main points made in the document are the following:

Iran has to be dealt with as an equal. Its membership in the IAEA and the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) have to be taken seriously; "To deny rights and privileges is to defy reasons for membership. No government can assume rights to herself while depriving others of the same. And no government can presume responsibilities for others while relieving herself from the same." I.e., no double standards.

The document states that Iran opposes all weapons of mass destruction and has no intention to develop them. If funds allocated for these systems were allocated differently, the "causes of insecurity, instability and injustice" could be removed and replaced by "peace and security, justice, peaceful coexistence and welfare. . . ."

When presented the 5+1 offer, Iran took an "engagement approach," and deployed expert teams to work on it. Iran-EU contacts proceeded, and "No precondition or ultimatum was raised by either side during this period." Then, as things were moving ahead, the Security Council resolution was pushed through, which meant a resumption of the "confrontational and threatening approach . . . just as the region faced a crisis." This undermined confidence, and placed the entire NPT regime in jeopardy. "To resolve the issue at hand in a sustainable manner, there would be no alternative except to recognize and remove the underlying roots and causes that have led the two sides to the current complicated position. When right versus trust forms the basic approach in considering the nu-

clear program of a State, and this serves as pretext for denial, discreetness in the program would naturally ensue; as the other side may never be willing to concede its confidence and trust. Conversely, a legal and fair approach, entailing unimpeded access to peaceful nuclear technology, would prompt transparency and full monitoring."

Iran states that it has no intention of hindering inspections. It developed its program in "independence and self-reliance," at times discreetly, because of the hostile attitude of others.

The document reiterates the point that Iran has a right to develop the full nuclear fuel cycle. "Nuclear fuel is destined as a strategic commodity in the future of world energy. As major European countries continue production of this commodity through heavy investments and large subsidies, Iran too expects that its substantial investments will lead to production so that it would not have to depend on exclusive suppliers. . . . Self-reliance, however, does not exclude cooperation and partnership. Iran's nuclear program is entirely open to joint investment, operation, development, and production. As the President has declared, the Islamic Republic [I.R.] of Iran is prepared to implement its nuclear program through consortium with other countries."

Iran has a nuclear program for the next 20 years, of which details are given. Due to sanctions in the past, Iran demands the right to have the full cycle.

Regarding the June proposal of the 5+1, Iran reiterates its rights according to the NPT, and declares its readiness for "negotiations as a new beginning to reach a 'comprehensive agreement' with Iran." It sees the 5+1 proposals as having constructive ideas but also ambiguities. Iran is "prepared for removing concerns of the two sides through negotiations and receiving clarifications on the nature, extent, approach, level, duration, and depth of issues in the offer such as real and practical cooperation in development of Iran's peaceful nuclear program, including light and heavy water reactors, and exercise of Iran's right to achieve nuclear energy inclusive of the fuel cycle and continuation of research and development in uranium enrichment."

Offer of Regional Cooperation

The most important aspect of the document relates to what Iran could contribute to stabilizing the explosive Southwest Asia region, in the event that a reasonable agreement were found regarding its nuclear program. It states: Iran "is ready for long-term cooperation in security, economic and political and energy areas in order to achieve 'sustainable security in the region' and 'long-term energy security.'" The "region" referred to here includes Iraq, Afghanistan, Lebanon, Palestine, and Israel. The document reiterates the idea, saying, for example, that Iran sees in the proposal the possibility for solving everything through negotiations, and also "to promote peace and security in the region and scientific, technological and economic progress in Iran."

Iran “accepts the core idea of the proposal,” believing all problems can be solved through negotiations and mutual confidence. However, “Clear evidence and experience gives reason to Iran to remain seriously skeptical towards sincerity of at least some members of the 5+1 in their declared intention to establish comprehensive relations and cooperative exchanges. Iran believes, therefore, that these governments should come forward with assurances, commitments, and indications that demonstrate revision in past behavior and absence of intentions to contain Iran or seek a pretext for hostile actions in advance of the negotiations.” This means Iran wants security guarantees that it won’t be nuked or otherwise attacked.

For the negotiations to be fruitful, Iran says the “extent and limitations on the authority of each negotiator should be defined and declared formally” to be clear on what is being negotiated. Iran criticized the 5+1 proposal for the following: It “lacks any reference to irreversible and irrevocable guarantees which should be attached to the undertakings. Such guarantees are particularly essential on access to advanced nuclear technology and equipment, erection and commissioning of nuclear power reactors, nuclear fuel supply, and transfer of know-how and technology. For Iran, it should become clear that the undertakings of our counterparts would become permanent, with no right or possibility to their termination or limitation, in the context of export controls, NSG [Nuclear Suppliers Group], domestic laws and regulations, and the procedures of the IAEA and the United Nations.”

The two main processes involved are “Iran’s interaction and collaboration with the IAEA,” and “The process of negotiations between Iran and its counterparts.” Here, ambiguities have to be clarified.

Iran posits three fundamental principles for the talks: “First The Islamic Republic of Iran has the right to pursue its intended peaceful nuclear Program, including all its activities on the fuel cycle with peaceful purposes, within the framework of NPT and under Agency safeguards. Second: The Islamic Republic of Iran, as an NPT party and an IAEA member, is obligated to comply with all its commitments under its bilateral agreement with the Agency and to prepare conducive conditions for the IAEA to perform its responsibilities vis-à-vis Iran’s activities. Third: As an IAEA member, Iran has the right to receive active support in areas of science, technology, investment, and trade from developed countries in the nuclear field, in accordance with the NPT provisions and its regulations. Conversely, all interlocutors with capabilities in nuclear technology are obligated to remove all impediments in peaceful nuclear cooperation with Iran in implementation of their commitments.”

Regarding the issue of enrichment, Iran says: “The proposers of the package, having considered some commitments and measures to be undertaken by both sides before the

start of negotiations, ‘to create the right conditions for the negotiations.’ . . . The remaining issue is suspension of Iran’s dossier in the Security Council during the negotiation period by the other party, and suspension of enrichment activities by Iran through negotiations. I.R. Iran essentially agrees with consideration of some principles and conditions for further assurances of productive negotiations and considers that as a correct step.”

Iran says the issue must not be sent to the Security Council. “I.R. Iran fundamentally rejects the use of the Security Council resolution as a pressure tool to push forward the P5+1 proposal, and considers this practice as distortion and negation of the initial intent, and would not concede to it. Any progress in this course, would only be possible by separation of these two issues, namely disengagement of any negotiations from unjustified resolution of the Security Council.” Iran states it is ready to discuss the issue.

Iran wants the guarantees that are in the NPT, and in turn would consider implementing the additional protocol. Furthermore, “Iran is ready to illustrate its goodwill if it received responsible and logical behavior from the other party, to guarantee in an appropriate manner, that it would not abandon its membership in IAEA and NPT, and through this way, commits itself even to the future aspect of confidence building.”

Security is a key issue: confidence building for Iran means considering the following: “A) The other party’s commitment to seriously follow up the fulfillment of the nuclear free zone in the Middle East, particularly the commitment to disarm the Zionist regime from weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and in particular nuclear arms. B) The other party’s commitment to convince the countries of the region (Middle East) who are not yet signatories to NPT, or are not yet implementing the Additional Protocol, to accept NPT membership, and to implement the Additional Protocol. C) The commitment and guarantee of the negotiating partners to prevent and protest all hostile and restrictive acts against I.R. Iran including any scientific, technical, political, economic, and commercial embargo and any kind of military aggression or threat.”

A change in policies is required vis-à-vis Iran—i.e., embargoes and sanctions must be lifted. “Fortunately, Iran has active and extensive relations with China and Russia. There are also trade and diplomatic relations with major European countries which have experienced some restrictions in some cases. The available data indicates that the majority of the P5+1 do not have inclinations for political use of trade and economic means, and in their general policies, there is no priority set for deprivation or restriction policies against Iran. Although some states, not only unacceptably exploit restrictive policies against Iran, but also abuse their technical and trade leverage to force other governments and third country companies to participate in these

anti-trade practices despite their own national policies. Therefore at least the main part of the proposed issue in this section is not essentially a case between Iran and the other party, but it is a case for the other party to settle amongst themselves.”

Regional security is discussed in more detail: “The I.R. Iran is ready for a comprehensive and long-term cooperation agreement to achieve ‘sustainable development and security in the region,’ based on fair terms and conditions, attending to the rights of all countries, and *would contribute to the highest extent possible to participate in effective security arrangements in an all-inclusive model, with all its potential as a responsible state, an active member of the international community, having an effective regional role*” (emphasis added). “On this basis, I.R. Iran is ready to have an active role in a cooperation arrangement for ‘sustainable energy security’ to have extensive cooperation and partnership with the European countries and other countries of the region.”

IAEA Strikes Back

As the neo-con warmongers’ camp continued to harp on the need to rapidly refer the matter to the UN Security Council—i.e. to move for sanctions immediately, wise words of caution came from UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, who, following a tour of the turbulent region, reported that government leaders he had met, feared that the Iran crisis could escalate from sanctions to war, as the case of Iraq showed. Annan warned against this.

The case for imposing sanctions on Iran could only be made if Iran were violating the NPT and other IAEA regulations. Thus, putting the truth on the table is crucial. Herein lies the significance of the second document to be considered, which is the IAEA’s response to the Staff Report of the Subcommittee on Intelligence Policy, of the U.S. House Committee on Intelligence, dated Aug. 23, 2006. That the international agency issued a public response to a staff report of a Congressional subcommittee is unusual in itself. The IAEA letter, dated Sept. 12 (right after the Solana-Larijani talks, and the same day the Iranian reply was published), says that the Staff Report “contains some erroneous, misleading and unsubstantiated information.” And the specific cases of such lies are listed and systematically refuted.

First, the Staff Report states, in a caption under a picture of the Natanz nuclear site in Iran, “Iran is currently enriching uranium to weapons grade using a 164-machine centrifuge cascade.” The IAEA states that the work conducted there, “including the 3.6% enrichment level that had been achieved,” had been communicated to the IAEA in April. Furthermore, “The description of this enrichment level as ‘weapons grade’ is incorrect, since the term ‘weapons-grade’ is commonly used to refer to uranium enriched to the order of 90% or more in the isotope of uranium-235.”

Secondly, the Staff Report says that “Iran had covertly produced the short-lived radioactive element polonium-210 (Po-210), a substance with two known uses: a neutron source for a nuclear weapon and satellite batteries.” The IAEA retorts that the use of the word “covertly” is “misleading because the productions of Po-210 is not required to be reported by Iran to the IAEA.”

Thirdly, there is the outright lie, and vicious insinuation that the IAEA is complicit in covering up illegal nuclear work! The “IAEA Secretariat takes strong exception to the incorrect and misleading assertion in the Staff Report’s second full paragraph of page 13 that the Director General of the IAEA decided to ‘remove’ Mr. Charlier, a senior safeguards inspector of the IAEA, ‘for allegedly raising concerns about Iranian deception regarding its nuclear program and concluding that the purpose of Iran’s nuclear programme is to construct weapons.’ In addition, the report contains an outrageous and dishonest suggestion that such removal might have been for ‘not having adhered to an unstated IAEA policy barring IAEA officials from telling the whole truth about the Iranian nuclear program.’ ”

In point of fact, the IAEA explains, according to the safeguards agreement between states and the IAEA, member-states have “the right to object to the designation of any safeguards inspector, and to request the withdrawal of the designation of an inspector, at any time.” This is what happened. The IAEA goes on to note that Iran has accepted over 200 such inspectors, which is what most states also have done.

The last point made by the IAEA, is that it regrets that the Staff Report ignored a statement in a UN Security Council resolution (1696), which “commends and encourages the Director General of the IAEA and its secretariat for their ongoing professional and impartial efforts to resolve all remaining outstanding issues in Iran within the framework of the Agency.” The letter concludes that the IAEA remains “ready to assist your Committee in correcting the erroneous and misleading information contained in the report.”

No Iraq Replay

Clearly, forces in the UN, especially Russia and China, are fully aware of the danger that the attempt to produce fabricated “intelligence” or, more bluntly, lies, regarding Iran’s alleged nuclear weapons ambitions, could be used, as in the case of Iraq, to hoodwink political bodies to accept war. Other forces in the UN—to wit, the IAEA and its Director General ElBaradei—have learned the lessons of the Iraq War, and are committed to preventing a repeat of that crime. Thus the unusually strong response to the staff report.

It should come as no surprise that the person who drafted that report was Fredrick Fleitz, identified by the *Washington Post* on Sept. 14, as a former CIA officer who was a special assistant to John Bolton.