

IRAN: PARALLEL TO 2003 RHETORIC, SENATE WAR LOBBY OBJECTS TO NEGOTIATIONS, IAEA VISIT CONTROVERSIAL

Writing on the front page of today's New York Times, Scott Shane finally states what should have been obvious to anyone paying attention to the steady drumbeat from the war mongers over the last couple of years:

Echoes of the period leading up to the Iraq war in 2003 are unmistakable, igniting a familiar debate over whether journalists are overstating Iran's progress toward a bomb.

Shane notes that this time, as opposed to 2003, the Obama administration is trying to calm the war rhetoric instead of inflaming it as the Bush administration did in 2003.

However, the the bellicose Israel war lobby in the US Senate is more than willing to take up the cause of war as the only answer. A "bipartisan" group consisting of Joe Lieberman (I-CT), Pat Toomey (R-PA), Kelly Ayotte (R-N.H.), Richard Blumenthal (D-CT), Ben Cardin (D-MD), Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY), John McCain (R-AZ), Bob Menendez (D-NJ), James Risch (R-ID), Marco Rubio (R-FL) and Charles Schumer (D-NY) has penned a letter to President Obama, trying to take away the major negotiated settlement which could avert war. In the letter, they state:

Second, we believe it is absolutely essential that the United States and its partners make clear to the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran that we intend to continue ratcheting up this pressure-through comprehensive

implementation of existing sanctions as well as imposition of new measures-until there is a full and complete resolution of all components of illicit Iranian nuclear activities. This must include, at a minimum, the full, verifiable, and sustained suspension of all enrichment-related and reprocessing activities and heavy water-related activities, as required by multiple UN Security Council resolutions.

This is a pre-emptive strike by the ~~Israel~~ war lobby in the Senate to prevent a negotiated settlement in which Iran suspends its work enriching uranium to the 20% level. From an editorial in today's Washington Post:

In fact, it appears likely that Tehran perceives talks as an opportunity to undermine sanctions. Mr. Jalili's letter referred to negotiations "based on step-by-step principles and reciprocity," language that could describe a proposal originally put forward by Russia last year. Moscow outlined a sequence of steps in which Iran would receive relief from sanctions in exchange for incremental actions to satisfy the IAEA. Iran rejected the idea, but now the P5+1, urged on by the Obama administration, is discussing a modified version. Reportedly, it could grant some sanctions relief if Iran suspended only its higher-level enrichment of uranium, and surrendered material enriched to that 20 percent level.

Clearly, the war mongers in the Senate are demanding that sanctions be ratcheted up substantially, with complete capitulation by Iran being the only way to remove any sanctions. In other words, the Senate group is demanding that negotiations be structured in a way that they are doomed.

Yesterday's second visit by an IAEA delegation to Iran is being reported widely in the press as a failure. For example, Reuters says:

The failure of the two-day visit by the International Atomic Energy Agency could now hamper any resumption of wider nuclear negotiations between Iran and six world powers.

A team from the IAEA had hoped to inspect a site at Parchin, southeast of Tehran, where the agency believes there is a facility to test explosives.

"During both the first and second round of discussions, the agency team requested access to the military site at Parchin. Iran did not grant permission for this visit to take place," the Vienna-based IAEA said in a statement.

"It is disappointing that Iran did not accept our request to visit Parchin. We engaged in a constructive spirit, but no agreement was reached," said IAEA Director General Yukiya Amano.

But Iran's reporting on the visit is different. Although the IAEA says no further visits are planned, Iran says that they intend to continue talking:

The Iranian ambassador to the International Atomic Energy Agency has said that Iran and the IAEA will continue talks about the country's cooperation with the UN nuclear watchdog.

"The second round of talks about cooperation between Iran and the agency and interaction with each other was held, and the talks will continue in the future," Ambassador Ali Asghar Soltanieh told ISNA on Tuesday at the end of the two-day talks in Tehran between Iran and an IAEA delegation, headed by Herman

Nackaerts, the IAEA deputy director and the head of the IAEA Department of Safeguards.

It appears that Iran's stance regarding the request to visit Parchin is that the IAEA team in both of the recent visits is as the IAEA described them, a "senior IAEA expert team" whose mission was negotiation, rather than a team of inspectors:

Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Ramin Mehmanparast has said that the delegation of the International Atomic Energy Agency that visited Tehran from February 21 to 22 was not a delegation of inspectors.

"The delegation that has travelled to Iran is not a delegation of inspectors, but rather it is an expert delegation headed by the agency's deputy director general (Herman Nackaerts), and its purpose is not to carry out inspections but to hold negotiations about cooperation between Iran and the agency so that a framework could be set for the continuation of negotiations," Mehmanparast stated during his regular press briefing on Tuesday.

It should also be kept in mind that not only is Iran not opposed to the general concept of IAEA inspectors, it actually has been working with them, as demonstrated in their recent installation of domestically produced nuclear fuel plates produced from 20% enriched uranium:

On February 15, Iran placed the first indigenous fuel rods into the heart of the Tehran Research Reactor. The fuel rods were produced at the Isfahan nuclear facility and transferred to the Tehran Research Reactor under the supervision of IAEA inspectors.

By placing nuclear plates into the

Tehran reactor, Iran has taken the final step in completing the nuclear fuel cycle.

Since Iran already has worked with IAEA inspectors on the fuel plate issue, it would seem only natural that the P5+1 talks could settle on ending 20% enrichment as the way out of the current crisis. And that is why the war mongers in the Senate felt that they had to derail this potential route to peace before it got started.