

FINAL PUSH FOR P5+1 DEAL BEGINS AGAINST BACKDROP OF US WORKING WITH ANTI- IRAN GROUPS

Very high level US diplomats, including William Burns and Wendy Sherman, are in Geneva for talks today and tomorrow (for the second time in a month) with an Iranian delegation headed by Abbas Araghchi, whose position in Iran's Foreign Ministry is similar to theirs. This meeting follows one on Monday between the EU's chief negotiator Catherine Ashton and Iran's Foreign Minister Mohammad Zarif. Reuters has more on today's meetings, informing us that they are a prelude to the resumption of P5+1 negotiations (which now have a November 24 deadline when the interim deal expires):

Iran and the United States met in Geneva for bilateral talks on Thursday as international diplomacy intensifies to end a decade-old dispute over Tehran's atomic activities by a new deadline in late November.

The office of European Union foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton confirmed Iran and six world powers would hold their first negotiating round since they failed to meet a July 20 target date for an agreement in New York on Sept. 18.

It is a wonder that Iran continues negotiations, as the US blacklisted a new group of companies last week that it accused of trying to help Iran work around sanctions. More from the Reuters article:

State news agency IRNA and a U.S. official confirmed the discussions were underway. "If there is good will and a

constructive approach, we can reach a desired result before Nov. 24," IRNA quoted Iran's deputy foreign minister Majid Takht-Ravanchi as saying late on Wednesday. The United States last week penalized a number of Iranian and other foreign companies, banks and airlines for violating sanctions against Tehran, saying it was sending a signal that there should be no evasion of sanctions while talks continue. Rouhani said on Saturday the sanctions were against the spirit of negotiations, but added he was not pessimistic about the viability of the talks.

There is a very interesting backstory on parts of the blacklisting process. A seemingly "independent" group, United Against Nuclear Iran, has been very active in the process of "naming and shaming" individuals, companies and organizations that it accuses of violating the spirit of the sanctions against Iran. Despite the fact that they are supposed to be independent, the US has stepped into a lawsuit brought against UANI by a businessman claiming he was defamed (I owe Marcy a big thank you for alerting me to this part of the story). The government is specifically intervening to keep the funding of UANI secret:

The Obama administration has gone to court to protect the files of an influential anti-Iran advocacy group, saying they likely contain information the government does not want disclosed.

The highly unusual move by the Justice Department raises questions about the connections between the American government and the group, [United Against Nuclear Iran](#), a hard-line voice seeking to prevent Iran from obtaining [nuclear weapons](#). The group has a roster of prominent former government officials and a reputation for uncovering information about companies that

sometimes do business with Iran, in violation of international sanctions.

The Justice Department has temporarily blocked the group from having to reveal its donor list and other internal documents in a defamation lawsuit filed by a Greek shipping magnate the group accused of doing business with Iran. Government lawyers said they had a “good faith basis to believe that certain information” would jeopardize law enforcement investigations, reveal investigative techniques or identify confidential sources if released.

Wow. So this “independent” group seems to be getting intelligence directly from the government, if we are to believe what the US said in its filing. So just who are the “former government officials” in UANI? A look at their “Leadership” page is nauseating. The first entry in the section for “Advisory Board” is none other than war hawk Joe Lieberman. Next to him is Fran Townsend and directly below him is a former director of the Mossad. The Advisory Board photos go on and on, a virtual “Who’s Who” of pro-war, pro-Israel media darlings. There also is a former Deputy Director of the IAEA even though it is supposed to be apolitical. Intellectual luminaries Mike Gerson and Mark Salter appear much lower on the list, perhaps out of a semblance of embarrassment. So, regarding those “investigative techniques” and “confidential sources” that the government doesn’t want to reveal in how UANI gets its information, consider this tidbit we got recently from David Albright, another player in the Iran-smearing business, this time branching out to comment on the recent tensions over US spying on Germany (also brought to my attention by Marcy):

At the end of the day, many observers still think Germany and the United States will be able to salvage at least elements of their intelligence

relationship. After all, the BND and the CIA share information on Iran's nuclear program, cooperate on counter-terrorism investigations, and even share the take of foreign agents—although not always with great results. The BND first provided the CIA in 2001 with information from the infamous Iraqi defector the CIA code-named “Curve Ball,” who falsely claimed Saddam possessed mobile biological weapons labs.

German companies in the 1980s and 1990s were fleeced of sensitive nuclear technology and equipment by rogue proliferators like A.Q. Khan, the father of Pakistan's A-Bomb. The Americans and the Israelis have worked to sabotage German gear that Iran has tried to purchase on the black market.

The BND, however, has more restrictions on engaging in these kinds of dirty tricks. “They operate under more constraints than the US intelligence agencies in terms of what they can do,” said David Albright, the president of the Institute for Science and International Security, a think tank that focuses on Iranian proliferation. He has worked with the German government on Iran's nuclear issues. “This [latest] scandal could cause the political establishment to establish rules of cooperation that could lead to even less cooperation on Iran.”

Albright said that despite these restrictions, the Germans have been anxious to cooperate more with the CIA. “On Iran and North Korea, their position is that they wanted to work more together. They have been disappointed the United States has not been willing to cooperate more.”

“But,” he added, “what can happen is

that these scandals could lead to a backlash in the German political decision making apparatus that will make it harder to cooperate with American intelligence.”

So here we have the director of an “independent” think tank admitting that he works directly with both US and foreign intelligence agencies. I’m betting that if somehow Albright’s Institute for Science and International Security (he needs to change the name away from making the ISIS acronym...) were involved in a lawsuit that threatened to reveal details of its relationship with intelligence agencies that we would see an intervention very similar to the one on behalf of UANI.

But UANI and Albright’s ISIS are only two players on this scene of the how anti-Iran propaganda gets generated in the US. Besides these groups that seem to work directly with the government, there is a large array of groups that get their funding from conservative sources and operate as the anti-Iran lobby. See this great description of them by Eli Clifton and Ali Gharib.

With such a huge array of forces working against a deal, it would be a huge accomplishment if a final agreement is made between the P5+1 and Iran.