

HOW ABOUT “ANY TIME, ANYWHERE” INSPECTIONS FOR ISRAEL’S NUCLEAR WEAPONS?

While Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu continues his whinging campaign that the West capitulated on a non-existent earlier demand for “any time, anywhere” snap inspections in Iran under the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action negotiated by the P5+1 group of nations with Iran on its nuclear activities, Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif has come forward with a proposal that brilliantly turns the tables on Israel. Writing in the Guardian, Zarif calls on Israel to join in a plan to remove all weapons of mass destruction from the Middle East. Such a plan, of course, would require Israel to give up its poorly-held secret of an arsenal of their own nuclear weapons:

We – Iran and its interlocutors in the group of nations known as the P5+1 – have finally achieved the shared objective of turning the Iranian nuclear programme from an unnecessary crisis into a platform for cooperation on nuclear non-proliferation and beyond. The nuclear deal reached in Vienna this month is not a ceiling but a solid foundation on which we must build. The joint comprehensive plan of action, as the accord is officially known, cements Iran’s status as a zone free of nuclear weapons. Now it is high time that we expand that zone to encompass the entire Middle East.

Also in the Guardian, Julian Borger provides some perspective on Zarif’s proposal:

Israel does not officially confirm its nuclear arsenal, but it is believed to have about 80 warheads. Zarif's remarks also represent a rebuke to the five permanent members of the UN security council, all armed with nuclear weapons – the US, Russia, France, the UK and China – as well as the three other nuclear-armed states which, like Israel, are not NPT signatories: India, Pakistan, and North Korea.

/snip/

Since a cold war high in 1986, when global stockpiles of nuclear warheads topped 65,000, the main weapons states have reduced their arsenals considerably. There are now thought to be fewer than 16,000 warheads worldwide, of which 14,700 are held – roughly equally – by the US and Russia. But the disarmament is now approaching a standstill. The Obama administration wanted to follow the 2010 New Start agreement with another, more ambitious, arms control treaty, but the dramatic worsening in relations halted progress. Russia and the US are modernising their nuclear arsenals.

That last bit about the US and Russia modernizing weapons rather than removing them is especially upsetting, but for now I'd like to concentrate on Zarif's Middle East proposal. Interestingly, Zarif points to Iran's history of restraint on weapons of mass destruction when it came to the Iran-Iraq war. While widespread use of chemical weapons by Iraq in that war is indisputable, Zarif claims that Iran "never reciprocated in kind". The record seems to bear that out. While Iran did develop their own chemical weapons program late in the war, the evidence that they ever used it is murky at best.

Zarif correctly depicts Israel as openly

flaunting the nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty while at the same time noting how ironic that position is considering Israel's rabid attitude towards Iran's nuclear program:

One of the many ironies of history is that non-nuclear-weapon states, like Iran, have actually done far more for the cause of non-proliferation in practice than nuclear-weapon states have done on paper. Iran and other nuclear have-nots have genuinely "walked the walk" in seeking to consolidate the non-proliferation regime. Meanwhile, states actually possessing these destructive weapons have hardly even "talked the talk", while completely brushing off their disarmament obligations under the non-proliferation treaty (NPT) and customary international law.

That is to say nothing of countries outside the NPT, or Israel, with an undeclared nuclear arsenal and a declared disdain towards non-proliferation, notwithstanding its absurd and alarmist campaign against the Iranian nuclear deal.

Borger gives us a concise summary of Zarif's proposal:

Zarif makes three proposals: for negotiations to begin on a nuclear weapons elimination treaty; that this should lead initially to nuclear arsenals being taken off high alert readiness (for example, by removing warheads from missiles); and for the creation of a zone in the Middle East free of weapons of mass destruction.

Again, the irony of Israel's actions are brought into full light here. Another front on which Israel has been vocal regarding the JCPOA relates to restrictions on Iran's missile

program. At the same time Israel wants to severely restrict any further development of missiles in Iran, Israel has an arsenal of missiles already fitted with nuclear warheads and ready for launch.

But there is one more point that Zarif puts into his piece that I can't stop marveling at. In his description of how negotiations on his plan could start, we have this:

One step in the right direction would be to start negotiations for a weapons elimination treaty, backed by a robust monitoring and compliance-verification mechanism.

What better spokesman could the world have for a "robust monitoring and compliance-verification mechanism" than the man who just agreed to submit his own country to history's most intrusive inspections program for a country that hasn't just been defeated in a war. He is definitely "walking the walk" when it comes to inspections and compliance. But I can't help wondering if, should such negotiations actually get underway (note: yes, I realize that the chances are much less than zero), Zarif would allow himself, at least once, to call for Israel to submit to "any time, anywhere" inspections of its nuclear program.