

Who is the real threat: Iran or Israel?

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During his eight-year presidency Mahmoud Ahmadinejad repeatedly used inhumane, absurd and adventurous language to speak about the existence of Israel and deny or cast doubt on the historic and catastrophic events of Holocaust, and by doing so he served well extremists such as Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, to the extent [that he was favored](#) by many Israeli officials in the presidential elections of 2009. In turn, Netanyahu, who is the biggest loser of Iran's recent presidential elections, called President Hassan Rouhani a "[wolf in sheep's clothing](#)" who would "smiles and build the [nuclear] bomb." In my recent article, [Iran's Olive Branch](#), I demonstrated the fallacy of Netanyahu's arguments, using the statements by the United States officials. The fact is Netanyahu and his government has tried to bring the Iran "nuclear threat" to the foreground in order to sideline other major issues, including the continued occupation of Palestinian lands and denying citizenship rights to its inhabitants. The truth that has been neglected as a result of this overemphasis on the "Iran threat" is that it is Israel that has been building hundreds of nuclear warheads and threatening Iran with military attacks.

Iran's nuclear weapon is a product of Israel's propaganda. Since 1992 both Netanyahu and current Israeli President Shimon Peres have repeatedly claimed that Iran will build a nuclear weapon over the next few years. As two out of many examples, consider the [following two](#):

1992: Israeli parliamentarian Benjamin Netanyahu tells his colleagues that Iran is 3 to 5 years from being able to produce a nuclear weapon – and that the threat had to be "uprooted by an international front headed by the US."

1992: Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres tells French TV that Iran was set to have nuclear warheads by 1999. "Iran is the greatest threat and greatest problem in the Middle East," Peres warned, "because it seeks the nuclear option while holding a highly dangerous stance of extreme religious militancy."

After 21 years, Netanyahu has downgraded his claim to declaring that if Iran possesses 250 kg of uranium, enriched at 20 percent, Israel will bomb its nuclear

sites. This is while [Israel possesses](#) up to 200 nuclear warheads [and is not](#) a signatory of the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT). In fact, Peres is the father of Israel's nuclear program who, [with France's cooperation](#), transformed his country into a nuclear state. According to the newly-released documents, 50 years ago [Israel secretly received](#) thousands of kilograms of "yellow cake," the feedstock for nuclear weapons, from Argentina. Israel continues to build nuclear weapons without any monitoring or inspection by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

On the other hand, Iran is a signatory of the NPT, and is under close monitoring and inspection by the IAEA. At the same time, according to the NPT, the member states are entitled to peaceful use of nuclear technology, including uranium enrichment.

Since 2003, when the extent of Iran's nuclear program was revealed, Israel has repeatedly tried to provoke the U.S. into attacking Iran. In a controversial interview with the *Times of London* on 5 November 2002, former Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon [tried to persuade](#) the U.S. to attack Iran. Calling Iran a "center of world terror" that is pursuing nuclear weapon, Sharon declared that the U.S. must attack Iran the "day after" its aggression against Iraq and its occupation.

In April 2003, Daniel Ayalon, then Israel's ambassador to the U.S., [called for regime change](#) in Iran and Syria, claiming in a conference that "it [the U.S.] has to follow through. We still have great threats of that magnitude coming from Syria, coming from Iran." In the same year other Israeli officials spoke repeatedly about the possibility of Israel's unilateral attacks on Iran's nuclear sites. For example, then Israel's Defense Minister [Shaul Mofaz warned](#) that "under no circumstances would Israel be able to tolerate nuclear weapons in Iranian possession."

In January 2005 [Seymour Hersh reported](#), "The Defense Department civilians, under the leadership of [Under-secretary of Defense for Policy] Douglas Feith, have been working with Israeli planners and consultants to develop and refine potential nuclear, chemical-weapons, and missile targets inside Iran." Then, in April 2005, [Sharon said](#), "Israel — and not only Israel — cannot accept a nuclear Iran. We have the ability to deal with this and we're making all the necessary preparations to be ready for such a situation." Sharon had reportedly ordered the

IDF to develop plans for attacking Iran by March 2006. In the same month, when the IDF chief Dan Halutz was asked, how far Israel was willing to stop Iran's nuclear program, [he responded](#), "two thousand kilometers," meaning Tehran. Halutz [also said](#) Iran's nuclear facilities can be destroyed. And, in response to Ahmadinejad's infamous [and incorrectly translated](#) statement that "Israel must be wiped off the map," [Peres said](#), "Iran can also be wiped off the map," which implied that Israel or the U.S. can attack Iran with nuclear weapons.

Then, in July 2008, Israel carried out a large military exercise that [U.S. officials interpreted](#) as that country's warning to the world that Israel is prepared to go it alone and attack Iran. In January 2009 the [New York Times reported](#) that the year before Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert had pushed the outgoing George W. Bush administration for help in destroying Iran's underground nuclear facilities, asking for bunker-busting bombs.

After a meeting in July 2009 with then U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, Ehud Barak, Israel's Defense Minister, said that attacking Iran's nuclear facilities is an option, [adding](#), "We clearly believe that no option should be removed from the table. This is our policy; we mean it. We recommend to others to take the same position...." Barak and Netanyahu were determined to attack Iran in 2010, but [were thwarted](#) by the military and intelligence establishments within Israel. Then, in November 2012 Netanyahu [again threatened Iran](#) with military attacks, even if the U.S. does not go along.

On June 19 Moshe Ya'alon, Netanyahu's new Defense Minister [called for](#) "significant increase in pressure by Western countries to lead Iran to the dilemma of either having a bomb or surviving." And, in the latest of such provocations, in an interview with CNN's Farid Zakaria on August 10, [Barak emphasized again](#) that attacking Iran is a serious option for Israel. He claimed that the fact that, as Iran's chief nuclear negotiator President Rouhani had suspended Iran's uranium enrichment program from 2003-2005 was due to fears of U.S. military attacks on Iran, adding that the Iranian must be made to understand, either behind closed doors or publicly, that the military option is serious, and that if they cross the red line [set by Netanyahu], military attacks will prevent them from building nuclear weapons, and that "When we say that we are determined to prevent Iran from going nuclear, we know what we mean."

But, the fact is, Iran is no threat to Israel. Why?

According to a [bilateral agreement](#) between the U.S. and Israel (see also [here](#)), the U.S. is committed to preserving Israel's qualitative military edge. So far, the U.S. has lived up to its commitment.

Even if Iran wanted to, it lacks the capability to attack Israel. The *Jerusalem Post* reported on April 28 that in a meeting in New York Olmert talked about Netanyahu's claims about Iran's nuclear capability [and said](#), "I think that we have exaggerated, for a long time, the potential threat of Iran possessing nuclear power," adding, "They don't have it not only because of their failures. Perhaps someone helped them to fail."

In a research paper released by Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington, military analyst Anthony Cordesman [stated that](#) it is Iran, not Israel, that faces an existential threat and, "Israel now poses a more serious existential threat to Iran than Iran can pose to Israel in the near term." Cordesman also wrote, Israel long ago extended the range of its nuclear-armed land-based missiles, probably now targets Iran with thermonuclear weapons, and is examining options for sea launched cruise missiles," he wrote, "A mix of several air and ground bursts in an Israeli thermonuclear or high fission yield attack on five key cities – Tehran (capital) 7.19 million; Mashhad 2.592 million; Esfahan 1.704 million; Karaj 1.531 million; Tabriz 1.459 million – would probably destroy Iran as a nation in anything like its current form."

Through its powerful lobby, Israel succeeded in convincing the U.S. Senate [to pass a resolution](#) 99-0 that stated that if Israel attacked Iran, the U.S. must help that country. Senate Resolution 65 declared that,

If the Government of Israel is compelled to take military action in legitimate self defense against Iran's nuclear weapons program, the United States Government should stand with Israel and provide, in accordance with United States law and the constitutional responsibility of Congress to authorize the use of military force, diplomatic, military, and economic support to the Government of Israel in its defense of its territory, people, and existence.

Thus, Iran, a nation that, unlike Israel, has not started a war with any country for more than two centuries, cannot pose any significant military threat to Israel. Despite this, Israel's military establishment spokesmen talk about a "softening" of

the U.S. positions regarding attacks on Iran. In an op-ed [published by the New York Times](#) on August 10 by Avner Golov and AmusYadlin, former chief of Israeli military intelligence, it was demanded that not only must Iran stop its uranium enrichment activities, but also stop constructing its heavy-water nuclear reactor, a 40 MW research reactor in Arak, southwest of Tehran because, according to the authors, Iran could use the plutonium that the reactor will produce for bomb making.

Ten days before the publication of the op-ed, Yadlin told Radio Israel that President Obama's policy regarding Israel's unilateral military attacks on Iran has changed in Israel's favor. According to Yadlin, whereas in 2012 attacking Iran was the U.S. red line, there is now a new tone of voice in Washington, in that "the U.S. is saying, if you [Israel] wish to attack Iran, we trust your intelligence data." The U.S., according to Yadlin, has still not given the green light for the attacks, [but a yellow light](#).

Before the recent diplomatic opening at the United Nations General Assembly meetings, there was even speculation about a secret agreement between the U.S. and Israel whereby, in return for returning to the negotiation table with the Palestinians, the U.S. will not oppose Israel's attacks on Iran as strongly as in the past. John Bolton, former U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, [told Fox Business Network](#) on 29 July that Netanyahu agreed to release 104 Palestinian prisoners because he wants to be able to tell Obama, "I have done everything you asked me on the Israel-Palestinian question, despite the political cost, now I want you to stand with me against Iran."

Summarizing, here are the facts as I see them:

Israel has hundreds of nuclear warheads, but Netanyahu does not recognize Iran's right to enrich uranium within the NPT framework and under monitoring and inspection of the IAEA. In fact, the IDF chief, Lieutenant General Benny Gantz, has said that he does not believe Iran will build a nuclear weapon. He [was quoted saying](#), "I don't think [Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei] will want to go the extra mile. I think the Iranian leadership is composed of very rational people."

Although some Iranian officials have in the past spoken of destroying Israel, Ayatollah Khamenei's suggestion for resolving the problem between Israel and the Palestinians is holding a referendum on the future of all of the Palestinian territories in which Israelis and Palestinians, including those that are refugees, can vote. Regardless of how one thinks about the plausibility of such a proposal, he believes that because Palestinians will be in the majority, they will liberate their nation akin to what happened in South Africa, in which Jewish people, like the Whites in South Africa, can also live in peace. On the other hand, Israel has been constantly threatening to bomb Iran, or at the very least its nuclear facilities.

Using fear mongering and threatening to attack Iran, the Israeli government has succeeded in convincing the U.S. and its allies to impose harsh sanctions on Iran. Israel's former Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman [said in November 2011](#) that only "crippling sanctions" against Iran's central bank and gas industries would halt Tehran's nuclear program." Ya'alon [has also said](#) that Iran's economy can be paralyzed. In his opinion, if the Iranian regime finds itself in such a shaky state, it will be forced to choose between survival and its nuclear program.

Netanyahu staged the last episode of this two decade old campaign of constructing an image of Iran as the most imminent global threat on October 1, during his [UN General Assembly speech](#). He devoted 214 words (less than seven percent of the total word count) in his speech to the main issue, the Israel-Palestinian conflict, and in those words he set two conditions for the Palestinians: recognize Israel as a 'Jewish state', and thus formally accept second-class citizenship for those 25 percent of the population of Israel who are not Jews, and accept a 'demilitarized' Palestinian state. He did not mention anything about the illegal settlements in the occupied territories, status of the borders or the refugees. That is the kind of 'painful compromise' he intends to make on the Palestinian issue.

The entire speech was meant to portray the conflict as a four thousand-year story dating back to wars among prophets, kings, ancient empires and catastrophic events. Elevating a conflict over land and water and other resources to the realm of God and prophets is the best way of mystifying the political reality of a 46-year old occupation of land and collective punishment of its people, and, in the same act, making the resolution of the conflict impossible. That is the rationale behind the magnification of the 'Iranian menace'.

In the same speech Netanyahu threatened Iran again with military attacks. In his numerous speeches and interview while in New York Netanyahu claimed that [Iran is after destruction of Israel](#) by creating [another Holocaust](#). To justify military aggression against Iran, a nation that has not attacked another country for at least 275 years Netanyahu likens Iran to Nazi Germany (see, for example, [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#)). Shedding crocodile tears for the Iranian youths, [Netanyahu even said](#), “I believe that if the Iranian people are free, they would wear jeans and listen to Western music,” which [generated a huge backlash](#) among the Iranians, because they already do wear jeans and listen to any type of music that they like. Netanyahu is trying to present Iran as an evil nation in order to prepare the public for attacking Iran.

When the people of Iran are constantly worried about Israel’s military attacks on Iran, how do they feel about Israel and its allies? Even if such military attacks are restricted to Iran’s nuclear facilities, the resulting radiation and contamination will kill a very large number of people. In an extensive [study by Abdullah Toukan and Anthony Cordesman](#) of Center for Strategic and International Studies attacking Iran’s nuclear sites, including the reactor in Bushehr by the Persian Gulf, will kill and injure hundreds of thousands of people. Attacking Iran’s uranium enrichment sites will release radioactive nuclear materials in the air, farms, and groundwater resources. Another [study by Dan Plesch and Martin Butcher](#) of Center for International Studies and Diplomacy at the University of London concluded that attacking Iran’s nuclear and chemical sites will kill over 2 million people. At the same time, it is clear that Iran will respond to any Israeli attack, and thus the war will quickly spread.

Going back to Netanyahu’s main theme in the UNGA speech, I ask myself, why do extremists in both Iran and Israel need each other? My answer to this question is: clearly because they want to hide the real problems of that region and their own societies behind the “enemy.” The Middle East needs peace, democracy and respect for human rights, not instability, war, enmity, inequality, and double standards. Without security and peace, democracy and respect for human rights will be marginalized.

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