Vienna Talks and the Future of the Middle East

The negotiations now opening in Vienna under the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) between Iran on the one hand and, on the other, a number of countries including the E3 (France, Great Britain, and Germany), Russia, China, and the US, are not generally thought likely to make any major positive change to the stability of the Middle East. The positions taken by the parties are too divergent, and each of them seeks to achieve maximum success for themselves without regard for the views and interests of the others.

Tehran’s position was set out by Abbas Moqtadaye, Deputy Chairman of the Iranian legislature’s committee for national security and foreign affairs, who stated clearly and unambiguously that if the Western countries recognize that the success of the Vienna talks depends on safeguarding the interests of the Iranian people, there is hope for success. At the same time, he noted that should the West miss this chance, Iran may make use of the opportunity, under the Strategic Action Plan to Protect the Iranian Nation’s Interests approved by its legislature, to order the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) to accelerate its nuclear program. Moqtadaye added that the US must first correct its mistakes of recent years, and only then and after verification will the Islamic Republic allow the Americans to act in accordance with agreements recognized by Iran.
Both before and after the seventh round of the Vienna talks began, Iranian officials clearly and unambiguously stated the three conditions which must be met by the US, given that the text of the JCPOA was approved by UN Security Council Resolution 2231, but the US withdrew from it. Firstly, Washington must immediately lift all inhumane sanctions against the Islamic Republic. The situation is such that, in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, the United States as well as the German government forbade all other countries from supplying Iran with the COVID vaccine or even its ingredients under penalty of sanctions. Secondly, Washington must guarantee that no future American administration will withdraw from the deal, given that the party of the right wing may soon assume power and could promptly renounce this important agreement, as happened under Donald Trump. Moreover, Washington must “admit its wrongdoing in withdrawing from the JCPOA,” which caused great harm to the entire Middle East and, most especially, the Iranian people. It is well understood that Joe Biden lacks any legal means to force his successors to abide by his decisions. This can only be achieved by concluding an agreement that enjoys bipartisan support in the US, and that is what the current administration should be attempting to bring about. This is the only means by which the development of Iran’s military arsenal can be halted and the program directed into peaceful channels.

Referring to the Vienna talks, Iran’s Minister of Foreign Affairs Hossein Amir-Abdollahian said that: “Iran is serious, acts in good faith, and considers the practical and tangible result to be the removal of sanctions.” He remarked that the other parties need to make a practical demonstration of political will. In an important declaration, the Minister of Foreign Affairs said that: “I would like to emphasize once again that this opportunity is not a window that could remain open forever and the US and the three European countries must well understand this. The Islamic Republic of Iran, while making its determined, strong and active diplomatic efforts to remove the oppressive US sanctions, has devised an effective program to neutralize the sanctions in line with its sustainable economic development program.” He added that, even as US officials call for negotiations and say they want to return to the JCPOA nuclear deal, they are simultaneously imposing new sanctions on Iranian companies and individuals.

If the Iranian delegation is sincerely aiming at a positive outcome for the negotiations, then Western diplomats and media organizations, Reuters in particular, have begun a psychological operation to undermine the Vienna talks in order to then lay the full blame for the breakdown of negotiations on Tehran. Reuters, allegedly citing European diplomats, claims that within the last two days of the Vienna talks, a draft agreement was between 70 and 80% complete. But sources closer to the Iranian negotiating team reject this claim, saying that such an assessment is not supported by the facts and that there is a long way to go before the outstanding issues are resolved. Even Enrique Mora, the chief of staff to the EU’s High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, “weighed in,” stating that the current negotiations in Vienna are a continuation of the 6 previous rounds of talks. But his comments were immediately rejected by Iran’s chief negotiator Ali Bagheri Kani.

There is nothing new or remarkable about this. It is a favorite and well-honed tactic of Western politicians, who will accuse the whole world of guilt for some crime while never looking for it in their own conduct. Even when Europeans were exterminating American Indians and the indigenous peoples of Africa and Australia, enslaving the native population of Asia, imposing their domination by force, and plundering the world’s wealthiest countries, has anyone ever heard of them apologizing for their crimes or offering any kind of compensation for their under-development of the colonized nations? Never, but they have often spoken of the benefits they ostensibly brought to Asia, Africa, and America, and still do so to this day. It is enough to review such Asian countries as Afghanistan, Iran, and Syria, or in Africa, Libya, to fully appreciate the “blessings” delivered by the West under American leadership.

Current reporting and statements from the White House suggest that if the talks should fail, the result will be pervasive political confusion. Non-military options are likely to prove ineffective, especially considering that Trump has already imposed every conceivable form of sanctions on Iran. Biden and his European colleagues are desperate not to resign themselves to a worst-case scenario. This patently obvious reality is precisely what leads the ayatollahs to believe they have a window of opportunity for a nuclear breakthrough. As Sir John Jenkins, a former British ambassador, said in an article: “The issue is not troop numbers. It is political will. The idea that an administration that has made clear its desire to leave Middle Eastern conflicts behind will seek to put Iran back in its box is fantasy. And Tehran knows this.”

Despite Israel’s impressive acts of sabotage, Iranian scientists have gone to remarkable lengths to repair their nuclear facilities and keep their development on schedule. According to Western intelligence officials, Tehran has replaced damaged equipment with new technology that works faster and in larger volumes. It follows that a strategy dependent on cyber-attacks and pin-prick acts of sabotage has only caused Iran to double down on its efforts. Conversely, Western officials report that the Israelis are “100% certain” that they will launch a decisive strike against Iran’s nuclear and ballistic capabilities, and that if matters reach such a pass, they can also seriously weaken Hezbollah’s arsenal. US officials grimly acknowledge that in such a case, they would be drawn into the
conflict. Prime Minister Naftali Bennett said that nuclear deal of 2015 has had a “sleeping pill” effect on Israel. He promised not to repeat his predecessor’s mistakes and stated that “even if there is a return to an agreement, Israel is of course not a party to it, and is not bound by it.” In other words, having at its disposal more than a hundred nuclear warheads and the means to deliver them, the Israeli leadership simply spits on international law and behaves like a tavern brawler.

Iran’s attainment of nuclear capability has immediate consequences for global security. As in the case of North Korea, the world will be compelled to respond to Israeli and Iranian actions with great caution, given that their disputes may escalate to the use of ballistic and nuclear weapons. However, Tehran’s access to nuclear weapons will have a positive effect on the containment of Tel-Aviv’s adventurism in the region. This is why the Israelis, fearful of losing their military superiority, are taking all possible measures and several impossible ones to disrupt the signing of the JCPOA, maintain their dominant military position within the region, and continue their aggressive actions with impunity. But unlike North Korea or Israel, Iran has proxy forces at its disposal throughout the region, which could act with impunity under an Iranian nuclear umbrella. At the same time, several regional states are preparing to establish their own nuclear arsenals should Iran achieve a breakthrough: a recipe for Armageddon in the world’s most chronically unstable region. In such a case, it will be interesting to see how the West will respond: will these allies of the US and Europe be placed under the same crippling sanctions as Iran?

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