Tel Aviv Insists on a Radical Solution to Iran’s Nuclear Program

On December 10, at the annual Israeli-American Council (IAC) National Summit in Miami, Israeli Defense Minister Benny Gantz met with senior US functionaries about a radical solution to Iran’s nuclear program. He warned his American counterpart Lloyd Austin, and US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken that he had ordered the Israel Defense Forces or the Army of Defense for Israel to prepare for war with Iran, should negotiations between the USA and Iran fail to resume the JCPOA (Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action), the Iranian nuclear deal.

Israel sent Defense Minister Benny Gantz and a new Mossad chief David Barnea to the IAC conference to convince the Administration of President Joe Biden to seek an alternative to the Iranian atom problem. That being against the background of another round of talks in Vienna on restoring the nuclear deal that recently ended with no results. Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett stressed the importance and seriousness of these consultations between Israel and the USA the previous day in Tel Aviv: “Our goal is to utilize the window of opportunity that has opened between the rounds to tell our friends in the US: This is precisely the time to use a different toolkit against Iran’s galloping forward in the enrichment sphere.” Bennett stressed that Israel is in an intensive dialogue with the USA, Great Britain, France, Russia, and other countries.

MOSSAD chief D. Barney shared new intelligence on Iran with US officials. However, the Israeli emissaries were disappointed that their additional intelligence did not impress the American side. Unlike Israel, which has expressed
confidence that the Iranians are developing their nuclear program more covertly, the USA believes Iran has not begun developing a nuclear bomb since it suspended its military program in 2003.

However, the New York Times clarified that despite good relations between the USA and Israel, the Iranian issue had overshadowed the communication, which has become increasingly tense: Washington and Tel Aviv disagree on the methods needed to contain Iran and the urgency of using them. Washington realizes that supporting Israeli strikes against the Iranian nuclear infrastructure or a joint US-Israeli military operation carries significant risks for both the USA and Israel. After all, Iran has an impressive missile arsenal; its ballistic and cruise missiles range up to 2500 km, warheads of up to 1000 kg, and sufficient accuracy to inflict colossal damage on US military facilities in the Middle East as well as Israel within that radius. In addition, Lebanon’s Hezbollah movement has an arsenal of at least 100,000 unguided rockets and missiles. Pro-Iranian forces are in Iraq and Syria, so all US military bases in those countries could come under attack.

For all its fixation and determination to prevent Iran from possessing nuclear weapons at all costs, Israel acknowledges that today’s Iranian nuclear program is far more robust than the Iranian nuclear facilities previously destroyed by Tel Aviv. Iran’s nuclear infrastructure includes dozens of facilities equipped at great depths in mountainous areas, so there is no guarantee that a military strike on them will destroy the nuclear program. Most likely, on the contrary, after such a strike, nothing will be able to make Tehran give up creating nuclear weapons, and it will undoubtedly make every effort to do so. A relative guarantee for Israel in this situation could be provided, according to Israeli estimates, by the use of low-yield nuclear weapons, which, among other things, Donald Trump was willing to do during his presidency. And even on June 25, 2019, he threatened Iran with a nuclear strike on his Twitter. However, Joe Biden will not take such a step, continuing to use diplomatic or sanctions tools. Joe Biden is a more cautious politician and more pro-American than pro-Israel. Biden is also aware that a new post-Hiroshima and Nagasaki use of nuclear weapons by Washington or, with its consent, by Israel against Iran would significantly change the threshold for the benefit of nuclear weapons in the world and would undoubtedly bring international criticism against the USA.

Nevertheless, Benny Gantz and David Barnea in the USA actively sought to strengthen the sanctions regime against Iran and endorse a scenario involving the use of force. In particular, this was reported by Israeli media, naming peripheral targets among the possible attacks, including alleged Iranian positions in Yemen. Suppose the Biden administration fails to tighten its approach. In that case, Israel does not rule out that it will be ready to act against Iranian targets on its own, including the use of sabotage attacks already tested by the MOSSAD. That is particularly hinted at in a recent Jewish Chronicle article, which reveals details of the 11-month preparations and execution of the sabotage at the Natanz nuclear facility in April this year. According to the Jewish Chronicle, MOSSAD operations destroyed 90 centrifuges and froze the activity of a key Iranian nuclear facility for nine months.

Although the USA did not support Israel’s proposals for military action against Iran’s nuclear facilities, the Israeli media nevertheless point out that US President Joe Biden allegedly did recently order a review of the Pentagon’s plan for military action against Iran in case diplomatic efforts failed. Meanwhile, Israeli observers conclude that the move is allegedly intended to signal to Tehran that Washington is running out of patience due to delays in the negotiations on the nuclear deal in Vienna. However, one cannot rule out that this “leak” allowed by the media is intended to appease the Israeli side, which believes that the Americans are doing little to stop the Iranians’ ambitions.

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