Israel tries to persuade the U.S. and Europe to revise nuclear agreement with Iran

Not trusting Tehran in its intent to fulfil the agreement concluded in Geneva, Israel has appointed itself as the main fighter for the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons in the Middle East. Substituting the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), Tel Aviv is ready to control Tehran’s fulfilment of the agreement with the “Six”, the members of which agreed to establish a special working group jointly with the Agency to verify Geneva agreements. In particular, this could even involve daily visits to certain Iranian nuclear facilities by international experts.

The IAEA will need additional funding to control compliance with the Geneva agreements between Iran and the “Six”, and talks on this issue are to start very soon. Thus the time for debate on the implementation of, or a failure to comply with the requirements of the initial six-month phase of the agreement has not yet come. According to Iran's permanent representative to the IAEA, Reza Najafi, the implementation of agreements with the “Six” will begin in late December or early January. Nevertheless, the leadership of the Jewish state and its intelligence agencies, without waiting for the results of the diplomatic efforts of the “Six” and the IAEA, still insist that Iran continues enriching uranium intensively and can obtain a nuclear weapon within several months. It is difficult to refute or to confirm such information on the background of continuing mistrust of Tehran on the part of both Israel and Western countries.

The IAEA still cannot verify Iran’s undeclared activities in the nuclear field. This was noted by the General Director of IAEA Yukiya Amano in his speech at the meeting of the Board of Governors of the Agency in Vienna. He acknowledges that the Agency continues to inspect Iran’s potential nuclear capability, but it cannot “say with absolute certainty about the absence of undeclared nuclear material and activities in Iran”. The IAEA cannot reassure the international community and conclude that “all nuclear material is used for peaceful purposes in Iran”. If this is the case, then the opponents of diplomatic closing of the Iranian nuclear dossier have quite logical reasons to refute the global optimism in respect of the further actions of Tehran, if not fully reasoned arguments. Israel is in the foreground of distrust towards the Islamic Republic, and it is the main mouthpiece of Iranian nuclear threat.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu believes that “the pressure exerted by Israel bore fruit and led to a better result than expected, but still it is a bad agreement”. In Tel Aviv, they proceed from the fact that the situation in the region has become more dangerous than ever before, and Iran has not abandoned its intentions to destroy the state of Israel. Israel’s desire to upset provisional agreements with Iran remains unchanged and is not a surprise for anyone. However, now it is the signs of readiness to revise the Geneva agreement by the U.S. and Western European participants of the “Six” that are more alarming. The U.S. President Barack Obama shares the scepticism of Jerusalem, with respect to the peaceful intentions of Iran, and proposes to start consultations on the agreements on Iran’s nuclear programme concluded in Geneva in the near future. There is a decision that the Secretary of State Kerry should discuss the problem of Iran’s nuclear dossier and the Middle East with Netanyahu once again in early December. The counter visit to America of an Israeli team headed by the National Security Adviser Yossi Cohen is planned for the same period, with purpose of the visit being to discuss the final version of the agreement with Iran, which is to be concluded within six months.

Israel is holding intensive consultations with other Western partners. The country was visited by representatives of
France and the UK, who were directly involved in the negotiations in Geneva, and who, as reported by Maariv, took part in meetings in the Foreign Ministry and the Ministry of Intelligence and Strategic Planning of Israel. It is known that Paris favours the Israeli approach to obtain more weighty assurances from Iran in the interim agreement. French Foreign Ministry took a special, though different from the U.S. and the UK, position in the talks with Iran, putting forward a number of requirements that were sacrificed in the compromise, but were not removed from the nuclear agenda and moved to the planned final agreement.

As for the UK, its authorities intend to block Israel and avert the failure of the signed agreement on Iran’s nuclear programme at the very beginning of its implementation. The Foreign Minister of the country, William Hague, promised that his country was ready to “dissuade anyone in the world, including Israel, from taking steps that could derail the agreement with Iran. Recent steps of London, with respect to Tehran, seem to confirm the firmness of such position. After President Hassan Rouhani came to power, Iran-US direct contact removed, to some extent, the risks that European allies would like to avoid, fearing a negative reaction of the White House to resuming their bilateral relations with Tehran. Britain and Iran have already made an important step toward restoring their relations that were broken in 2011 after the attack on the British Embassy in Tehran. In November of this year, the countries announced the restoration of diplomatic relations. A little later, Prime Minister David Cameron had a telephone conversation with the Iranian leadership for the first time in more than a decade, both sides noted progress in the normalization of relations, British media were quick to assign the status of “historical” to the half-hour conversation between the two leaders.

It turns out that after the former Iranian President Ahmadinejad, who was in isolation from Western partners for many years, almost every contact of Rouhani with European counterparts becomes a significant event in international relations. Tehran’s efforts to normalize relations with West European members of the “Six certainly gave a positive impetus to negotiations in Geneva on the Iranian nuclear programme. The question is to what extent the positive progress is irreversible. On arriving in London from Geneva, British Foreign Minister William Hague was invited to the annual dinner of Conservative Friends of Israel (CFI) on the following day, where he was clearly reproved for his tractability on the issue of the Iranian nuclear programme. The most powerful lobbying UK group is opposed to Iran as if “every Jew in the country were a supporter of the Likud”. British Jews are not alone in Europe in their support for Prime Minister Netanyahu. France was the first West European country whose president shook hands with his Iranian counterpart, but a few weeks later it firmly opposed the Iranian nuclear programme. Then there was diplomatic pressure on the part of the White House, for which the Iranian nuclear programme became a kind of the bone of contention not only in its relations with Paris, but also in its relations with allies in the Middle East.

The rapprochement of Iran and the U.S.A. was considered as a threat, by a number of countries in the region, of Washington’s refusal to strive for a change in the Islamic regime in the near future, and the danger of US-Iranian partnership in the foreseeable future. Within the framework of implementation of such a scenario, the withdrawal of controversy over Iran’s nuclear programme is not considered as just a single step of Washington, but is seen as, beyond doubt, a prerequisite for further contacts with Tehran. The situation resembles a deal: Iranian concessions on the nuclear issue, in exchange for the removal of sanctions. Since the sanctions imposed by the UN Security Council resolutions do not have such a negative impact on the economy of Iran as discriminatory unilateral measures taken by the United States and countries of the European Union that joined Washington, Iran is simply forced to negotiate with the Americans. Although it is not yet clear how far their agreements can go, Israel and Saudi Arabia have decided to stand in their path now.

Israeli Prime Minister defiantly threatens President Obama with breaking alliance relations, calls on all the leaders of the “Six”, urging them to abandon the nuclear deal with Iran, tries to play the Russian card at the last minute, going to a meeting with President Putin in the Kremlin just before the Geneva meeting. At the same time, Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman announced the beginning of a search for new allies to replace the Americans “on the basis of new views on the situation”, obviously hoping to scare the White House by a possible rapprochement with Moscow. Meanwhile, there are no grounds to consider anti-American rhetoric of Israeli leadership as a sign of the country’s geopolitical reorientation. We can rather see the usual diplomatic tricks. The offensive tone of statements of Israeli authorities is based on the historical analogies with the Munich Agreement - dangerously sounding, but lacking grounds in this case. However, the U.S. Congress does not think so, and President Obama is compared to Arthur Neville Chamberlain, although the Israeli trail is also obvious here.

The Jewish lobby is preparing a real rebellion against the closure of the “Iranian nuclear dossier” in the Senate. Thus, President Obama praised the agreement as the most “significant and weighty” progress in the diplomatic campaign that was started when he took office. However, just a few days later, the interim agreement on the Iranian
nuclear issue became the object of criticism instead of a foreign triumph, and the agreement with Iran that claimed the highest honour as the “deal of the century” became called the “mistake of the century”. We would like to recall that in July this year, after the election of Iranian President Rouhani, the House of Representatives decided to make their sanctions stricter, and now the bill is being considered in the Senate. There are many indications that we cannot exclude the adoption of new sanctions against Iran. Obama can expect, perhaps, to achieve only one compromise with Congress – the consent to postpone the entry into force of the new sanctions for six months.

The difficult position of the American president is complicated by the unusual joining of efforts against his administration by the Israeli and Arab lobby in America, which is headed by Saudi Arabia. The Arab world is concerned about a potential reversal of the policy of the White House in the Middle East, they are concerned about the changes in their strategic fate – the loss of the U.S. as a reliable patron came to be regarded as the loss of the king on a chessboard. “It is not surprising that the agreement of the “Six” with Iran has become, to Washington’s Arab friends, an event injuring their leaders no less than the Israeli leadership. The alliance of opponents of Obama’s intentions to restore relations with Iran has become an inevitable factor in the political life of the U.S.A., but it can still be overcome, given a strong political will on the part of the presidential administration. U.S. senators are going to give a real battle to their president at the beginning of December, when Congress returns from vacation. Will this be a prelude to Obama’s retreat from his agreements with Iran?

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