Weapons Delimitation in Modern Iran and Ancient Israel

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Abstract

Iran's development of its nuclear program has been regarded with suspicion over time by the international community. Even though guaranteed by the nuclear non-proliferation Treaty (NPT) to develop nuclear technology for non-military use, it is feared that Iran may be developing a clandestine program that could lead to nuclear weapons production. This work examines the provisions of the NPT and situates Iran's right to nuclear development. It discusses the basis on which the world powers place their suspicions of Iran's true intentions. The paper also does a biblical exegesis of a similar scenario in the book of I Samuel 13:19-23 when ancient Israel, under suspicion of weapons development, was not allowed to develop its metal and agricultural tools industry by the Philistines. The paper concludes that in both cases, the quest for balance of power led to the efforts on weapons delimitation on Israel and Iran.

Keywords: Iran, Israel, Nuclear Weapons, Delimitation, Nonproliferation.

1.Introduction

Iran's nuclear program development has been a major source of concern to the international community, especially the Western powers comprising the United States and her allies in Europe. It is a situation described as "one of the most vexing foreign policy challenges confronting the Obama administration" (Edelman, Krepinevich, and Mongomery, 2011). This concern stems from the suspicion that Iran may be developing a clandestine nuclear weapons program, an attempt seen as a violation of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). Even though the Treaty makes provision for the development of nuclear technology for civilian and non-military purposes, the major powers feel there is no guarantee that developing the technology would not be abused. This is in view of the potential that countries aspiring to have nuclear weapons think such may give them an equal bargaining platform with the more powerful states. There is also the fear that aggrieved states that are able to develop the weapons would hold the rest of the world to ransom. This may be the major reason why the world powers are working hard on persuading a nation like Iran to abandon any effort it is making at developing nuclear capability. A scenario like this finds a parallel in the Biblical encounter between Israel and her more powerful neighbors, the Philistines in I Samuel 13:19-23. Israel was not allowed to develop any form of metal technology with the fear that it will enable the development of their weaponry, a situation which will jeopardize the then prevailing balance of power against the Philistines.

This paper is a critical assessment of one such prevailing scenario, with discussions in four parts. The first part surveys the development of the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and its provisions. The second part discusses fears of the possibility of some 'untrusted' states developing nuclear weapons. The third part carries a biblical exposition of the scenario between Israel and her more powerful neighbors, the Philistines in I Samuel 13:19-23. The last part forms the conclusion by drawing some similarities between the two cases.

2.The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT)

The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) was made to limit the proliferation of nuclear weapons in the world. The treaty was crafted in 1968 and came into force on 5 March 1970. The initiative was put in place by the then American President John F. Kennedy in 1962 after the near fatal Cuban nuclear crisis. He warned of the possibility that there could be twenty (20) nuclear weapons States by the end of the 1970s. The initiative and subsequent ones was to help in reducing the number of States that will develop the nuclear bomb.

The Treaty has three major elements sometimes interpreted as a 'three pillar' system, with an implicit balance among them:

2.1 Non-Proliferation

The Treaty makes it obligatory for all signatories to be committed to not spreading the technology that will lead to the development and production of nuclear weapons. This implies that no more nuclear weapons will be produced as soon as the Treaty comes into effect.

2.2 Disarmament

It became obligatory for those countries that already have the nuclear weapons to be committed, in the long run to the destruction of the weapons in their arsenals in a stage-by-stage level, leading to complete nuclear disarmament.

2.3The Right to Peacefully Use Nuclear Technology.

The Treaty however, guarantees the right to nuclear technology and its development, production and utilization. This right is guaranteed as long as the countries involved can demonstrate that the nuclear program is for peaceful purposes (peaceful civilian energy uses) only, and would not be used for the development of nuclear weapons.

When the NPT came into effect, it was generally expected that states that signed the treaty as Non-Nuclear Weapons States would honor the terms and maintain that status. However, the actions of certain countries over time have been perceived to threaten the non-proliferation regime. Currently there are 189 states party to the NPT, seven of which are confirmed as having nuclear weapons: the United States, Russia, the United Kingdom, France, China, India, and Pakistan. Israel is also alleged to have the bomb, a claim she has neither confirmed nor denied. North Korea withdrew her signature and tested her first nuclear weapon in 2006. Other signatories have voluntarily rejected nuclear weapons. Among them are key countries like Japan, Germany, Sweden, South Africa, Argentina, Brazil, Taiwan, South Korea, and Singapore. These all have the technical infrastructure to develop nuclear weapons if they chose to do so.

3.Non-Nuclear Sates Like Iran and their Aspirations to Join the 'Nuclear Club'

The possession of nuclear weapons today presents tremendous dangers. During the Cold War, they were essential to maintaining international security because there was the assumption that the weapons were the most effective deterrent to War Between the bi-polar States of the East and the West led by America and Russia. The end of the Cold War however, has made deterrence obsolete, especially the reliance on nuclear weapons to achieve it. A unique feature of the Soviet-American nuclear arms race of the Cold War was that they had safeguards put in effect to prevent nuclear accidents and unauthorized launches. Both powers made deliberate efforts to ensure that no nuclear weapon was used at that period either by design or by accident (Shultz, Perry, Kissinger, and Nunn, 2007). There is the fear now that when some untrusted States like Iran possess the weapon, they may not be as careful as nuclear power nations were during the Cold War. It is therefore important to stop any of such States from developing the bomb.

Perry (1997) observed that the era of relative nuclear security under the bi-polar blanket is over. According to him:

> The Cold War, despite mutually assured destruction, provided both the United States and former Soviet Union a common strategic framework to play the nuclear game. Both played the game very well, and understood the rules. The nuclear rules as promulgated… in a series of bilateral agreements and treaties were tested by nearly 50 years of peaceful coexistence. Today…with the dissolution of bi-polarism and the corresponding proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD), the game has dramatically changed. The nuclear game was manageable because only two teams really played. As the nature of the game shifts from one of global strategic giants playing to series of regional players, proliferation of nuclear weapons adds a new element to politics in places like the Middle East.

This is a situation that is regarded as hypocritical and of double standards by Blix (2008). He argues that in stemming the threat of nuclear attack from rogue States and terrorists, a recipe for success is for nuclear States to live by example. It will be difficult to convince rogue states to halt the pursuit of nuclear weapons programs while the same nuclear States claim that the weapons are indispensable. In his opinion, the right standards will be set when those countries reject any new proliferation and armament activities.

4.The Spotlight on Iran

It was within this background that the information about Iran's uranium enrichment program has attracted so much angst. Over time, Iran has been suspected by Western powers of seeking to develop nuclear weapons, a claim that it denies, asserting that its pursuit of nuclear technology is for peaceful purposes only. This claim

however, is regarded with uneasiness and suspicion by the international community for some two major reasons as highlighted by Azaran (2005). Firstly, since the Islamic Revolution of 1979 that deposed the Shah, then ruler of Iran and friend of the US, Iran's ideology has been less political and more religious. Secondly, the country has been fingered with involvement in terrorist activities and groups linked with nuclear materials smuggling.

4.1 Interpreting Iran's Motives

According to Bolton (2003) the United States believes that Iran is trying to legitimize as "peaceful and transparent" its pursuit of nuclear fuel cycle capabilities that would give it the ability to produce missile material for nuclear weapons. In the opinion of the major world powers, even though Iran has the right to nuclear technology under the terms of the NPT, it does not have the right to enrich uranium under international law. This was buttressed in the initial UN Security Council Resolution 1696 passed in 2006 against Iran. The Resolution "demanded that Iran suspend all uranium enrichment-related and reprocessing activities, including research and development, and gave it one month to do so or face the possibility of economic and diplomatic sanctions to give effect to its decision."

Since Resolution 1696 in 2006, there have been five other resolutions, namely: Resolution 1737 (2006), Resolution 1747 (2007), Resolution 1803 (2008), Resolution 1835 (2008), and Resolution 1929 (2010). Resolution 1737 imposed economic sanctions on "Iranian companies and individuals involved in Iran's nuclear weapons program," and ordered Iran to give up enrichment within a period of two months.

In dissuading Iran from developing her nuclear weapons capabilities, the World powers have resorted to coercive diplomacy but without much success. This approach, according to Tocha (2009) is flawed for some reasons. First, the objectivity and the legitimacy of their specific demands have been challenged by both Iran and countries of the Non-Aligned Movement and the New Agenda Coalition. Second, a "carrots and sticks" policy as pursued by the Powers is unlikely to work out in the Iranian case, taking into account that the demands touch "on Iran's vital interests and on questions of prestige, regional supremacy and nationalism" (p. 2).

4.2 Efforts at Negotiations

Negotiations brokered by Brazil and Turkey and agreements reached on May 17, 2010 were regarded as constructive and an important milestone towards achieving a "real new world order." At the negotiations, Iran agreed to a ten-point deal on its uranium enrichment facilities. In a report by Falk (2010:1)

> The essence of the deal was that Iran would ship 1200 kilograms of low enriched uranium (LEU) to Turkey for deposit, and receive in return 120 kilograms of uranium enriched to 20% for use in an Iranian nuclear reactor devoted to medical research. The agreement reaffirmed support for the Non-Proliferation Treaty, as well as acknowledged Iran's right under the treaty to develop nuclear energy for peaceful purposes, which meant the entire fuel cycle, including the enrichment phase.

Despite this acclamation, the United States still regarded the initiative with suspicion. This may not be unconnected with the fact that previous similar arrangements were breached by Iran. The US saw that the resolution to impose more sanctions on Iran would be jeopardized by the Brazil/Turkey initiative. The then USA Secretary of State, Hilary Clinton, insisted that the concerns about Iranian nuclear enrichment be left exclusively in the hands of the "major powers." According to Falk (2010:1), America "immediately rallied China and Russia (in addition to France and the United Kingdom) to support a fourth round of punitive sanctions that were to be presented to the UN Security Council in the near future." The sanctions would include "an arms embargo on heavy weapons, travel restrictions on Iranian officials, a boycott of banks and companies listed as linked to Iran's nuclear and missile programs, and authority to search ships to and from Iran suspected of carrying prohibited items."

4.3 Should Iran Be Deterred

Among the measures considered to deter Iran from actualizing its nuclear program is the use of military force. O'Connell and El Molla (2013) observed that "in many discussions of Iran's nuclear program, there seems to be an implicit assumption that states have a right to use military force to end the program" (p. 315). They however point out that "international law does not permit the use of military force without United Nations Security Council authorization for arms control of any kind. This submission is consistent with Article 2(4) of the United Nations Charter which generally prohibits the use of military force in international relations. There are however two exceptions: States may use force under the terms of Article 51 in self-defense if an armed attack occurs. Also, States may use force if the United Nations Security Council authorizes it. This may be why Kemp (2013) argues

that past attempts at diplomacy have been plagued by poor messaging, bad timing, and organizational problems associated with domestic and international institutions. He however insists that there may not be better alternatives to regular diplomacy as it still remains the best way to end the crisis on peaceful terms.

Sagan (1996/1997:54) thinks that there is something that is not considered on how states think when it comes to weapons development. He explains that in international public opinion: "States will seek to develop weapons when they face a significant military threat to their security that cannot be met through alternative means; if they do not face such threats, they will willingly remain non-nuclear states." In other words, if Iran tries to develop nuclear weapons, it may likely be that it feels threatened by other States. Waltz (2012:2) on the other hand posits that a nuclear-armed Iran "would probably be the best possible result: the one most likely to restore stability to the Middle East." He sees the danger that if harsh sanctions continue to be mounted on Iran, it would lead the country into the desperate need to seek the protection of the "ultimate deterrent." He cited the example of North Korea to support his assertion. In a swift response however, Kahl (2012:157) disagrees that a nuclear-armed Iran will have positive effects. This is based on the fact that Iranian leaders may not be trusted to become responsible international rational actors. He opines that the possession of the bomb will make Iran to support militants and terrorists. They will also pressure and intimidate other States and indirectly expand their interests in pursuit of their revisionist agenda of making them a power broker in the Middle East.

Hymans (2012:44) thinks that rather than being agitated over Iran's nuclear pursuits, the international community should look at history. He argues that the length of time needed to develop a nuclear bomb and the fact that global trends in proliferation have shown more failures than success; a fate that may befall Iran's endeavor. He dismisses the emphasis placed on the progress of Iran's development of the bomb, a situation he refers to as "crying wolf" over Iran's capabilities. He concludes that "Iran's nuclear ambitions are surely a cause for concern. But the current climate of hysteria is unjustified and counter-productive, a major impediment to the sober pursuit of a diplomatic solution."

Meanwhile, there seems to be a positive development in the talks with Iran. A deal has been reached for Iran to stop any form the development of its nuclear capabilities. Sebenius (2014) comments on the deal thus:

> The November 2013 "interim" nuclear deal between Iran and the "P5+1"—the United States, Russia, China, Britain, France, and Germany—raises challenging questions. Will the initial deal function as a stepping stone toward a more comprehensive deal? Or will it drift into becoming a stopping point that leaves Iran dangerously close to nuclear weapons capability with the sanctions regime in decline? Or will it devolve to a slippery slope that would end up requiring a painful choice for key players between either acquiescing in a nuclear-capable Iran or attacking Iran's nuclear facilities? (Sebenius, 2014).

5. Weapon Delimitation in 1 Samuel 13:19-22

Biblical analogy to arms control is first recorded in 1 Samuel 13:19-22. The Philistines, who held a territorial monopoly on the manufacture of iron implements, prevented the Israelites from having access to swords or spears: "Not a blacksmith could be found in the whole land of Israel, because the Philistines had said, 'Otherwise the Hebrews will make swords or spears!' So all Israel went down to the Philistines to have their plow points, mattocks, axes and sickles sharpened. The price was two-thirds of a shekel for sharpening plow points and mattocks, and a third of a shekel for sharpening forks and axes and for repointing goads. So on the day of the battle not a soldier with Saul and Jonathan had a sword or spear in his hand; only Saul and his son Jonathan had them" (NIV).

The Book of First Samuel seems to be a polemic against "swords and spears." God did not want Israel to depend on them. Philistines did not want Israel to own or work them. The subsection, 1 Samuel 13-15 is to be treated as a single unified literary unit with common themes (Jobling, 1976; Klein, 1983; Eslinger, 1985; Long, 1987; Edelman, 1991). The word translated "smith" or "blacksmith" in 1 Samuel 13:19 is actually *hārāš* in Hebrew and it means "craftsman of any sort," "stoneworker" (Exod 28:11), "carpenter" (2 Kings 12:12), and "metalworker, armorer" (Holladay & Köhler, 2000, p. 118). It the key text, the word *hārāš* is best translated in line with the implement to be made: "swords and spears;" hence "metalworker" or "blacksmith."

Plow points, mattocks, axes and sickles mentioned in I Samuel 13: 20 were all agricultural implements which could also be converted to weapons of war when the necessity arose (Joel 3:10). They were used for cutting, hoeing, seeding, grubbing or breaking up the soil, digging, ploughing, and harvesting (Elwell & Beitzel, 1988). In times of peace, swords were also turned into plowshares (Isa 2:4; Micah 4:3).

5.1 The Philistines as Israel's Powerful Neighbors

The Hebrew term for "Philistine" (*pelishti*) occurs 288 times in the Old Testament. The original etymology of the

word is unknown (Barry et al, 2012). Their origin is also various attributed to the original Sea Peoples who left their coastal homes in Greece, Asia Minor, and the Aegean Islands (including Crete) and invaded along the eastern Mediterranean coast and those who attempted to settle on the Egyptian coast, but Rameses III of the Twentieth Dynasty repelled them around 1190 BC (Mitchell, 1967; Kitchen, 1973; Vaux, 1978; Dothan, 1982; Mazar, 1985; Dothan & Dothan, 1992; Drews, 1998; Sinclair, 2000; Finkelstein, 2002).

The Philistines are called Pulsata or Pulista on the Egyptian monuments. The land of the Philistines (Philistia) were termed Palastu and Pilista in the Assyrian inscriptions. They are called Allophyli, "foreigners," in the Septuagint, and in the Books of Samuel referred to them as "uncircumcised" (Ehrlich, 1996; Oren, 2000). Biblical records allocated to the Philistines, a league of five major cities (Pentapolis): Ashdod, Ashkelon, Ekron (Tel Miqne; Khirbet el-Muqannaʿ), Gaza, and Gath; each governed by a seren, or "lord." Archaeological sites in the Philistine plain include Tell Qasile, Tel Gerisa, Tel Ẓafit/Tell eṣ-Ṣafi, Tell Jemmeh, Tell el-Farʿah, Megiddo, Beth-shean, and Deir ʾAlla (Brug, 1985; Singer, 1988; Singer, 1994; Sinclair, 2000).

5.2 The Use of Iron as a Raw Material for Agricultural and Military Tools

The Hittites were among the earliest people to use iron on a large scale, trading iron tools and weapons to Egypt. Later on, merchants of Tyre bought iron from Hittites and sold to Syria and Palestine. "For the most part, however, the Hittites protected iron as a monopoly. According to Maltsberger (2003:1133), Iron became more widely used only after the fall of the Hittite kingdom about 1200 BC. The Egyptians used iron as early as about 3000 BC to produce weapons (Deut. 4:20; 1 Kgs. 8:51; Jer. 11:4). The Hittites were the first to discover how to separate iron from its oxides and much later, the Egyptians by the 13th century BC. The Philistines learnt this technology from the Hittites and brought it with them to Palestine about 1200BC. Very little iron deposit was found in Palestine, merchants from Tyre and Phoenicia imported much of it.

Iron is the malleable, strong metal associated with the archaeological period, the Iron Age. The word "iron" in cognate languages are: Hebrew, *barzel*; Aramaic, *parzel*; Akkadian, *parzillu*; Ugaritic, *brḏl*; and Sumerian *bar-gal*. In Palestine, the Iron Age I occurred from 1200-300 B.C. The Bronze Age preceded this period in the Ancient Near East (ca. 3200-1200 B.C.). Information is now available on the geological strata of the Ancient Near East. Palestine had some copper around Sinai, Punon, and Arabah but generally, several metals were imported from places like Tyre in bars and later processed locally (Ezek. 27:12; 1 Kings 7:46). Precious metals were worked by beating, soldering and engraving, and in the filigree technique (Negev, 1990). Iron I Bronze workshops were concentrated along, but not limited to, the coast where the Philistines lived. Metal-encrusted crucibles or fragments and tuyere/claypipes for bellows evidence these workshops. Some of the archaeological sites located in this regard include: Tel Dan Str. VI-IVB, Tel Harashim, Acco Area A/B, Megiddo K-5, Tell el-Oreme V, Beth Shan Str. VI, Tell Deir cAlla Phase B, Khirbet Raddana, Tell Qasile, Tel Mor Level VI, perhaps Ashdod XI, Tel Miqne/Ekron, Beth Shemesh III, Tell es-Zuweyid/Anthe-don levels N and M, Tel Masos, Yotvata, Timna. (Waldbaum, 1978; Finkelstein, 1988; Dothan, 1997; Bloch-Smith, 2003; Mazar, 2009).

"The 'archetypal' Iron I 'Israelite' village of Khirbet Raddana had a bronze smelting or casting workshop. Bronze slag-encrusted crucibles, tuyeres of various sizes, plus an iron blade and bronze daggers, armor scale, needles, javelin points, plow points, a small arrowhead, and spearheads dispel the image of the highland fighter lacking metal weapons dependent on the Philistine enemy to sharpen his plow point." (Bloch-Smith, 2003:419: Callaway & Cooley, 1971; Cooley, 1975; Callaway, 1993). This may be a unique Israelite site of that period with metallurgical capabilities and armaments assemblage. There were also Iron I courtyard/outdoor ash deposits which could have been from sacrifices and kilns for baking or pottery production or the recycling of copper or bronze into new implements. These casting and smelting sites likely benefited the Philistines and lowland residents more than the highland Israelites.

5.3 Sanctions on Israel

Block-Smith (2003) asserts: "the biblical contention that 'no smith was to be found in all the land of Israel' (1 Sam 13:19) appears to be an exaggeration" (pp. 417-418). The above shows that metalworkers labored throughout the country during the period of Iron I being referred to in the biblical text. However, there was obvious Philistine metallurgical monopoly and superiority in armaments over Israel during that period enough to corroborate the biblical assertion. This would not mean total absence but late arrival or strategic delay forced upon Israel by their Philistine overlords who definitely possessed iron weapons before the Israelites. By the 11th century B.C.E., "the Israelites gained the advantage in numbers of weapons in iron as well as bronze. In general, Israelites utilized and probably produced weapons requiring less metal and technological sophistication" (Bloch-Smith, 2003:419).

6. Conclusion

There is a similarity between the experience of Israel and her more powerful neighbors, the Philistines and the experience of Iran and the world powers today. The weapons limitation imposed on them, in any form, is all in the bid to maintain the balance of power. A very interesting point both nations have is that they have a "right" to the pursuit of what they are barred from. For Israel, all it needed was to forge agricultural implements for peaceful non-military use. The Philistines, however, suspected Israel's intention as the production of weapons of war.

Iran claims, and rightly so under the terms of the NPT, that its nuclear activities were for peaceful purposes only, the world powers suspect that the main goal is the production of nuclear weapons. In both cases, the ancient Philistines and the 21st century world powers possess the very weapons they found unsuitable for Israel and Iran respectively. In both cases, the more superior powers offered to do for the lesser powers what they could for themselves. In the case of Israel, they were to go to the Philistines to forge their agricultural implements only. For Iran, they are to get their nuclear reactors fuel from the world powers and stop any enrichment of their spent fuel.

On assessment of the whole scenario, one may observe that rather than the case of genuine threats in both cases, it is a case of the balance of power. Israel has been a long-standing enemy of the Philistines and as such should not be allowed to develop her weaponry. Iran has not been the best of friends with America especially, and it is feared that a nuclear-capable Iran will tilt the balance of power in the Middle East and constitute a threat to the present nation of Israel, America's ally in the Middle East.

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