

Is Arms Control with Iran Dead?

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Amid the wider sense of a global crisis in security and non state threats, there is a deeper long-term threat. That is the risk to arms control. As now as then from Cold War leaders who used arsenals of weapons of mass destruction for international and domestic political leverage, defense and deterrence. Nuclear weapons and missile delivery systems and the proliferation of these persist. While Israel and the United States call for Iran to stop its missile and nuclear programs, President Putin of Russia has been displaying his new missile systems on the eve of the Russian presidential election. Few if any attempts, as now as then from the Cold War have leaders entered negotiations with the true intention to disarm, reduce or control the arms race and disassemble the deadly arsenals.

We knew then as we do now that we can fight the spread of nuclear weapons, but we cannot wish them away with unwise treaties. It was understood then and now that a country would only disarm if it was in its interests; a feature of unilateralism. Today Bibi and Donald need to accept that the structures and strictures of international conventions and agreements will not bring about security from an Iranian threat or attack. They must quest a more “realist” foreign policy; practical actions to disarm Iran.

These and other leaders world-wide need to accept that key national security will not happen as expected if arms control policies or programs are pursued based upon negotiations. Lessons learned from history show this. The military know this. There are other options as seen from the current Israel America joint exercise underway. The deployment of missile and rocket air-defense systems provides a certain level of defense against the adversaries’ ability. However it is limited.

If the warhead on the enemy’s missile is conventional and if it can be destroyed before it reaches Israel then all good and well. This acts as a defense and as a deterrence to even try attack Israel. However if it is not conventional that is to say nuclear, biological or chemical and if the missile is destroyed over Israel’s skies then it will still result in catastrophic damage.

The enemy knows that at the moment there is no such thing as a 100% effective air-defense system. Shooting down missiles with missiles is like shooting a bullet with a bullet. Some will reach their targets. So Iran et al may try attack Israel out of madness and Israel will suffer. However in the future more robust and more effective defense systems are likely to be

developed and deployed. But there is the danger that an adversary will react and change their tactics to other means of attack.

This brings forth the questions “Is Arms Control Dead?” Are the international arms control and non-proliferation regime established during the past four decades worth anything for Israel’s security? Without directly answering these solutions can be proposed. Israel and the United States should address security challenges interdependently and adopt a more unilateral approach to suit their own best interests. This could fundamentally alter the nature of Israel’s security relations with potential adversaries as well as with traditional friends and allies.

In addition to a robust missile and rocket defense system there is a need to intervene preventing and preempting using force. Israel’s security can be sustained for many decades to come, not only by arms control agreements, but by augmenting its power based on “realism”, or the use of force and, therefore, its ability to lead. Israel and America need to have the capability to adjust forces as necessary to fit a changing strategic environment.

Calling for this is one thing, but making it happen is quite another. Bibi and Donald may be faced with a paradoxical set of options. To act unilaterally in one’s own best interests will collapse any and all arms control agreements worldwide. This mustn’t happen because there needs to be a practical, normative mechanism for crisis stability. If the arms-control mechanisms collapse, then the world loses its ability to properly interpret and recognize nuclear intentions. It faces the prospect of losing access and channels of communication in times of crisis, leaving decision makers to rely on guesswork, crystal-ball gazing and espionage.

Policies evolve, in most cases through a process of creative tension among competing bureaucratic interests and in the context of real-world political constraints. In today’s world, it’s not so easy to be an unfettered unilateralist. The same goes for Iran. In politics, the past is not always prologue. What is said is often not what is done. Iran may find that it may not be able to or that it is not wise to follow the lines adumbrated in its rhetoric. This is the best line for Israel and America to follow; to make the Ayatollahs so fearful of the consequences of rhetoric that they accepts arms control measures.