



Israeli nuclear expert urges deal with Iran

But Netanyahu insists bad deal could threaten ‘us and all of humanity’



Retired Brigadier General Uzi Eilam said an agreement with Iran “could be the beginning of changing the whole atmosphere in the region.”

by Robert Wiener, NJJN Staff Writer

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A retired Israeli brigadier general who headed the Israeli Atomic Energy Commission urged acceptance of what he predicted will be a strong agreement to prevent Iran from developing nuclear weapons.

As talks between the West and Iran over its nuclear program approached a Nov. 24 deadline and Israel worried that they would leave Iran a “nuclear threshold state,” **Uzi Eilam** suggested that the current deal is better than no deal at all.

“It can influence the whole region and could be the beginning of changing the whole atmosphere in the region, and this is a good thing to do and this is why I am for it,”

Eilam, who directed Israel's AEC from 1976 to 1985, told a Manhattan audience that included left-leaning Jewish activists from New Jersey.

On Monday, both sides agreed to extend nuclear talks into 2015, after failing to reach a deal by the Nov. 24 deadline.

Eilam, who is currently a senior research fellow at the **Institute for National Security Studies** in Tel Aviv, addressed the Century Foundation, which describes itself as “a progressive nonpartisan think tank,” on Nov. 20.

Although he acknowledged that Iran has a policy to “annihilate Israel,” **Eilam** noted that Iran has been abiding by rules for inspections laid down by the International Atomic Energy Agency.

“If an agreement is reached with Iran and if as time passes by it proves itself as good, this is very good encouragement to go on and broaden this process, and Israel, if not threatened, could be involved,” he said. “But this will take a lot of time and a lot of patience and a lot of energy to get to this.

“I am positively optimistic and I think it can be done.”

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, however, objects that the current outlines of a deal would ease sanctions on Iran while allowing the country to retain thousands of centrifuges that would allow it to enrich uranium for a nuclear bomb in a short amount of time.

“We are holding discussions with the representatives of other major powers and are presenting them with a vigorous position to the effect that Iran must not be allowed to be determined as a nuclear threshold state,” Netanyahu told his Cabinet Nov. 23 at its regular weekly meeting.

Netanyahu said that a “bad agreement” could “endanger Israel, the Middle East and all of humanity.”

In his talk **Eilam** countered such a view. “We are strong enough to allow them to lessen the sanctions — not totally and not immediately, but part by part,” he said. “And if the unanswered questions are not dealt with, it will show they are not cooperating.... I believe this is the right thing to do.”

Following the meeting, *NJ Jewish News* asked **Eilam** what he would tell American Jews who distrust Iran and believe it wishes to destroy Israel.

“I don't believe that is true,” he responded. “The Iranians are realistic. Just look what they did when they felt the pressure of the sanctions. They got to the negotiations. They are much closer to our way of thinking than we think, and to get into a panic is not the

right approach. I think the agreement, if it will materialize and create a different atmosphere, is a better way to deal with them than to bomb.”

If Israel or the West were to carry out military action, he said, Iranian hardliners “would go by hook or by crook to build nuclear arms.”

Attending the meeting was Marty Levine of Maplewood, a member of the executive committee of Northern New Jersey’s J Street chapter. Levine said he “had some concern” that Iran might build a nuclear weapon, “but I think it can be dealt with through verification.”

Also in attendance was Doni Remba of Westfield, executive director of the Jewish Alliance for Change, who said “it would be a disastrous scenario” if Congress negates a possible treaty and approves tougher sanctions on Iran.

A bipartisan bill championed by Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chair Sen. Robert Menendez (D-NJ) and others would impose additional sanctions against Iran if the country fails to make good on its promises regarding its nuclear program.

The bill, said Remba, “would completely undermine the credibility of the United States as a great power and would deprive the president from carrying through an agreement the United States has reached.”

“Dealing with the problem of Iranian nuclear development through an agreement,” he said, “is a much more effective method than dealing with it through an attack on Iran by the United States or Israel or multiple countries.”

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