

# The Senator Cotton- Iranian Foreign Minister Zarif Twitter Faceoff over the Iran Nuke Agreement



US Sen. Tom Cotton (R-AK)

Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif

Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif led the [Non-aligned Movement \(NAM\)](#) this week at the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty conference at the UN headquarters in Manhattan.

President Rouhani of The Islamic Republic of Iran is the current leader of the NAM comprising 120 members of the UN. In his remarks in two *Charlie Rose Interviews* this week, see Part 1, [here](#), and Part 2, [here](#), Zarif was honored to present the NAM position and he restated his country's demands for lifting of all sanctions upon conclusion of a final agreement by the P5+1 with a target date of June 30. Remarks he made at NYU on Wednesday, April 29<sup>th</sup> had an additional riposte directed at Arkansas US Senator Tom Cotton that led to a faceoff between the two in a series of twitter exchanges.

This kerfuffle was set against the backdrop of US Senate floor amendments introduced by Republican Senators Cruz, Rubio and Johnson to the [Iran Nuclear Agreement Review Act of 2015](#) (INARA) approved by a unanimous Foreign Relations Committee 19 to 0 vote on April 14, 2015. The Cruz [amendment](#) would require a simple majority vote for affirmation of any proposed nuclear deal arising from the P5+1 process before any sanctions are lifted. Rubio has seven amendments poised for floor consideration. His amendment for Iran to recognize Israel was [considered](#) a "poison pill" by Benjamin Cardin (D-MD) ranking chair of Senate Foreign relations who negotiated

the compromise version with Chairman, Bob Corker (R-TN). A compromise that President Obama indicated he might sign.

Both Corker and Cardin worked to [defeat](#) Sen. Johnson's (R-WI) amendment to require two-thirds approval by the Senate of a final P5+1 deal with Iran. The vote tally was 53 to 39.

Senator Rubio at a *National Review* conference on May 1, 2015 in Washington with potential Republican Presidential contenders [said](#):

The criticism of that is that there are a bunch of countries in the Middle East that don't recognize Israel's right to exist, which is true," Mr. Rubio said Friday at an event hosted by the National Review. "But none of them are trying to build a nuclear weapon. And none of them have billions of dollars of sanctions, and if we lift those sanctions, we are handing over billions of dollars to the Iranian regime.

Iranian Foreign Minister Zarif on behalf of the NAM at the UN NPT conference presented the alliance's case to rid the world of arsenals of leading nuclear powers. Especially, a certain non signatory of the UN treaty, Israel. Israel whom Zarif cited in his UN NPT conference as the most dangerous nuclear threat in the Middle East that he [declared](#) had 400 nukes. He said:

*It's laughable that [Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin] Netanyahu has become everybody's nonproliferation guru. He is sitting on 400 nuclear warheads, nuclear warheads that have been acquired in violation of the NPT [Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty].*

David Albright of the Washington, DC-based Institute for Science and International Security and former UN nuclear weapons inspector [estimated](#) based on plutonium production that Israel may have in excess of 169 to 200 nuclear devices. Israel, although not a signatory of the NPT, showed up at the UN conference as an observer.

Israel is not alone as a nuclear power and non signatory to the NPT, Pakistan, India and North Korea have not signed the UN treaty. Israel allegedly has the capability to deliver nuclear weapons by intermediate and intercontinental missiles, aircraft and submarine launched cruise missiles. Israel has had a memorandum of understanding with the US since 1965 that it would not be the first to introduce nuclear weapons in the Middle East. The so-called Begin first strike containment policy was directed at regional nuclear threats to Israel. The exercise of that doctrine is reflected in [Operation Opera](#), the June 1981 attack that took out the Osirak nuclear reactor near Baghdad and the September 2007 [Operation Orchard](#) that destroyed a Syrian nuclear reactor being built with technical assistance from North Korea and Iran.

Disclosures of its nuclear facility at Dimona were made in a 1986 [London Times series](#) by former nuclear technician Mordechai Vanunu in 1986. Israel captured, tried and convicted Vanunu as a traitor for his disclosures of its nuclear facility. In February 2015, a [FOIA request](#) by an anti-Israel NGO surfaced a secret 1987 report on Israel's nuclear weapons program prepared by the Institute for Defense Analysis.

While Zarif was in Manhattan at the NPT conference, Secretary of State Kerry [met](#) with him in furtherance of the negotiations to reach a final P5+1 agreement by a deadline of June 30, 2015. The focus was on concluding an agreement subject to a UN Security Council resolution vote with the proviso that there would be an immediate lifting of all sanctions. The Obama Administration suggested that there may be a possible 'signing bonus' of perhaps \$30 to 50 billion in the offing with more to come in stages based on verification of Iran's compliance by the IAEA. Zarif was not buying that in his Rose interview comments. After all Iran had complied with the interim Joint Plan of Action provisions. Other aspects of Iran's nuclear program, such as complying with IAEA requests for information on prior nuclear developments and its ICBM program have been

swept aside in pronouncements by Supreme Ruler Khamenei as intrusive of the Islamic Regime's national security.

Following an address by Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu on March 3<sup>rd</sup> before a joint meeting of Congress Senator Cotton authored a [letter](#), signed by 46 other Republican colleagues that was tweeted to the Supreme Leader and other Regime official leaders, including Foreign Minister Zarif. The letter sought to explain the US Constitutional prerogatives of the Senate to "advise and consent" on all treaties and major international agreements. That tweet sparked West Wing criticism of Cotton and his Republican colleagues for intruding on the Constitutional prerogatives of the Executive branch to conduct foreign policy. The flashpoint being that Congressional approval wasn't required because this was an international agreement subject to ratification by the UN Security Council Resolution. The compromise version of the INARA reached between Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Bob Corker (R-TN) and Ranking Member Benjamin Cardin (D-MD) was deemed acceptable to President Obama, as it gave wriggle room, for conclusion of the P5+1 deal with Iran over its nuclear program, while limiting the time period for Congressional Review to less than 30 days.

Enter Senator Cotton of Arkansas in another twitter faceoff with Iranian Minister Zarif and a possible procedural battle over Senate Floor Amendments to INARA. *NBC News* [reported](#):

Sen. Tom Cotton called Iran's foreign minister "cowardly" and challenged him Wednesday to a debate on the U.S. constitution.

The junior Republican from Arkansas – one of the main opponents to a nuclear deal being negotiated with Iran – dared Javad Zarif on Twitter to meet him in Washington "to debate Iran's record of tyranny, treachery, & terror" after the foreign minister called Cotton out.

In remarks at New York University on Wednesday, Zarif appeared to imply that the senator had little sway over the outcome of a nuclear deal and if one is reached sanctions would be lifted by United Nations member states “whether Sen. Cotton likes it or not.”

Cotton responded shortly after on Twitter, issuing the challenge but saying he would understand if the foreign minister declined because Zarif’s decision to “hide” in the U.S. during the Iran-Iraq war showed “cowardly character.”

The “cowardly” accusation during the Iran-Iraq War by Senator Cotton was a reference to Foreign Minister Zarif’s receipt of a Master’s Degree in 1984 and PhD in 1988 from the Josef Korbel School of International Studies at the University of Denver (DU). Josef Korbel was a former Czech diplomat who fled Communist repression and founded the program at DU. He was the father of former Clinton era Secretary of State Madeleine Albright. Among other alumna of the Korbel School is former Bush Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice.

Katie Pavlich, writing about the episode in a Townhall.com article that included the exchange of Tweets between Cotton and Zarif, noted the Senator’s [full response](#):

President Obama promised sanctions would only be lifted when Iran’s compliance with restrictions on their nuclear program were verified. But earlier today, Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif once again contradicted the President’s interpretation saying:

“If we have an agreement on the 30th of June, within a few days after that, there will be a resolution before the UN Security Council under Article 41 of Chapter 7 which will be mandatory for all member states whether Senator Cotton likes it or not.”

Sanctions relief isn’t about what I like, but what will keep

America safe from a nuclear-armed Iran. But I suspect Foreign Minister Zarif is saying what President Obama will not because the President knows such terms would be unacceptable to both Congress and the American people. The repeated provocative statements made by members of the Iranian leadership demonstrate why Iran cannot be trusted and why the President's decision to pursue this deal and grant dangerous concessions to Iran was ill-advised from the beginning. These aren't rhetorical tricks aimed at appealing to hard-liners in Iran; after all, Mr. Zarif was speaking in English in New York. Rather, they foreshadow the dangerous posture Iran will take and has taken repeatedly—including as recently as yesterday with the interception of a U.S.-affiliated cargo ship—if this deal moves forward.

More, they reaffirm the need for Congress to approve any final deal and to conduct oversight over the Obama Administration's actions. As we consider the Iran Nuclear Agreement Review Act, I urge my colleagues to ensure we pass legislation strong enough to stop a bad deal in its tracks and protect the American people from a nuclear Iran."

Before week's end, Senator Cotton's position had been translated into action with his introduction of a Senate floor amendment. The *Wall Street Journal* [reported](#), his actions might "upend" the compromise reached by Corker and Cardin:

Foreign Relations Committee Chairman [Bob Corker](#) (R., Tenn.) and the panel's top Democrat, Sen. Ben Cardin of Maryland, had been on the verge of reaching a deal to bring more than a dozen GOP amendments to the Senate floor, lawmakers said, when Mr. Cotton took the unusual step Thursday of seeking to secure a vote on amendments from himself and Sen. [Marco Rubio](#) (R., Fla.) outside the bipartisan negotiations.

"What it did was obviously very much changed the dynamic of cooperative movement forward with a large number of

amendment votes and it took it in a very different direction,” Mr. Corker said of Mr. Cotton’s move. Democrats are now “probably in a place where they’re not open to additional amendments at this time,” Mr. Corker said.

As a result, Republicans may lose their chance to make Democrats face more tough votes on GOP amendments to Mr. Corker’s bill. This past week, Democrats and some Republicans blocked two GOP measures that would have altered the legislation approved unanimously by the foreign-relations panel after Messrs. Corker and Cardin struck a deal.

“We have been making progress,” Mr. Cardin said on the Senate floor Thursday. But he said Mr. Cotton’s move diminished the prospects of reaching an agreement on amendments. “Some of the tactics that are now being deployed are going to make it much more difficult for us.”

Although Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R., Ky.) still has some flexibility, Mr. Corker said he expected Mr. McConnell would take procedural steps Monday moving the Senate closer to a final vote on the bill, which is expected to pass.

[...]

On the Senate floor Thursday, Mr. Cotton defended his amendment preventing President [Barack Obama](#) from easing sanctions on Iran before the country met certain demands, including disclosing the past military dimensions of its nuclear program and accepting a fully verifiable inspections regime.

“These are not poison pills. They are vitamin pills. They are designed to strengthen this legislation and strengthen the U.S. negotiating position,” Mr. Cotton said. “If you’re in the Senate and you don’t want to vote, you

should leave.”

While Cotton’s proposed amendment might void the Israel amendment of Rubio, it will make more complicated Majority Leader senator Mitch McConnell’s management of the INARA legislation as he seeks to assure passage early in the week of May 4<sup>th</sup>. Stay tuned for developments.