

Déjà Vu Over Iran A-Bomb Charges

Exclusive: The mainstream U.S. news media is again ratcheting up tensions with Iran over its alleged nuclear weapons program by hailing a new report on the topic. But the press is once more falling down on its duty to examine the allegations carefully, writes Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

The New York Times is trotting out some of its favorite words like “meticulous” to praise the new report by United Nations weapons inspectors citing Iran’s supposed work on a nuclear bomb, and the Washington Post says the findings “ought to end serious debate” about Tehran’s nefarious intentions.

So, rather than undertake a careful examination of the report’s claims, America’s preeminent newspapers are once more putting on display their deep-seated biases regarding the Middle East. Any claim against a Muslim adversary must be true.

In the words of New York Yankees great Yogi Berra, “it’s déjà vu all over again.”

It seems every time an allegation is made against a “designated enemy” in the Middle East, the Post and Times editors cast aside professional skepticism, a pattern that has included Iraq’s WMD (oops!); a U.N.-sponsored report on Syria’s guilt in the Hariri assassination (“meticulous,” the Times said, though the report later fell apart); and the flat-fact claim of Libya’s role in the Lockerbie bombing (highly dubious in terms of evidence, but useful in justifying Muammar Gaddafi’s ouster and murder). [For more on these cases, [click here.](#)]

The Times editorial on Thursday was headlined, “[The Truth About Iran](#)” with the subhead: “A new report from weapons inspectors leaves little doubt about Tehran’s ambitions.” The editorial fully embraced the methodology of the International Atomic Energy Agency’s report, declaring:

“The report is chillingly comprehensive. What gives the report particular credibility is its meticulous sourcing. The agency’s director, Yukiya Amano, built a case on more than a thousand pages of documents, the assistance of more than 10 agency member states and interviews with ‘a number of individuals who were involved in relevant activities in Iran.’”

The Washington Post’s neocon editors, in an editorial entitled “[Running out of time,](#)” were similarly enthusiastic about the report, writing: “The IAEA’s evidence, which includes 1,000 pages of documents, interviews with renegade

scientists who helped Iran and material from 10 governments, ought to end serious debate about whether Tehran's program is for peaceful purposes."

It might be noted that on Feb. 6, 2003, the day after Secretary of State Colin Powell gave his infamous speech to the United Nations detailing Iraq's WMD arsenal, the Post editors deemed Powell's case "irrefutable" and added: "it is hard to imagine how anyone could doubt that Iraq possesses weapons of mass destruction." [For details on Powell's speech and its media reception, [click here.](#)]

Yet, instead of having learned any lessons and applying a skeptical eye to the IAEA report, the editors at the Post and the Times returned to their usual role as boosters for anything that puts adversaries of the United States and Israel in a negative light, regardless of how thin the evidence.

'May Still Be Ongoing'

If an objective observer did examine the [IAEA report](#) and particularly its annex entitled "Possible Military Dimensions of Iran's Nuclear Programme" he or she would encounter a curious document that offers very little verifiable proof for its murky conclusion that Iran's weapon project "may still be ongoing."

Indeed, based on what's been released to the public, it's impossible to evaluate any of the allegations because the supporting details are not provided. There is only an assurance from the IAEA that all "information has been carefully and critically examined" and was determined "to be, overall, credible."

But the credibility question persists, especially because the report doesn't spell out where the new accusations are coming from although it's been widely reported that many of the charges emanated from Iran's intense enemy, Israel.

While Israel clearly has an ax to grind with Iran as Israeli leaders call Iran's alleged nuclear ambitions an "existential threat" to Israel the IAEA report says it considered "Member States," which provided most of the evidence about Iran, to be "independent sources."

Plus, to the degree any of the report's details have become known, such as the identity of the supposed ex-Soviet nuclear bomb expert tutoring Iranian scientists on a detonation system, the facts haven't withstood scrutiny.

As reporter Gareth Porter [explained](#), the ex-Soviet scientist, who is not named in the report but has been identified in news reports as Vyacheslav Danilenko, "is not a nuclear weapons scientist but one of the top specialists in the world in the production of nanodiamonds by explosives."

“In fact, Danilenko, a Ukrainian, has worked solely on nanodiamonds from the beginning of his research career and is considered one of the pioneers in the development of nanodiamond technology, as published scientific papers confirm.” (Nanodiamonds have widespread commercial applications in manufacturing and medicine.)

The Danilenko angle was the most dramatic new allegation in the IAEA report because it stirred memories of the spy thriller, “Sum of All Fears,” in which disaffected ex-Soviet nuclear physicists help fashion a nuclear bomb for a terrorist attack. If that key part of the IAEA report can be debunked by a Google search, it doesn’t speak well for the rest of it.

Perhaps even more troubling, the IAEA was aware of Danilenko’s expertise in nanodiamonds, but chose to put a sinister spin on his work in Iran from 1996 to 2002 anyway. The report states:

“The Agency has strong indications that the development by Iran of the high explosives initiation system, and its development of the high speed diagnostic configuration used to monitor related experiments, were assisted by the work of a foreign expert who was not only knowledgeable in these technologies, but who, a Member State has informed the Agency, worked for much of his career with this technology in the nuclear weapon programme of the country of his origin.

“The Agency has reviewed publications by this foreign expert and has met with him. The Agency has been able to verify through three separate routes, including the expert himself, that this person was in Iran from about 1996 to about 2002, ostensibly to assist Iran in the development of a facility and techniques for making ultra-dispersed diamonds (‘UDDs’ or ‘nanodiamonds’), where he also lectured on explosion physics and its applications.”

Since the production of nanodiamonds involves explosions, it would be expected that Danilenko would lecture “on explosion physics and its applications,” but the IAEA report puts that fact in a particularly negative light. It also appears almost certain that the “Member State” pushing the Danilenko angle was Israel.

Pre-2003 Focus

Another surprising part of the IAEA report’s annex is that much of it like the Danilenko section focuses on the time frame before late 2003, when the U.S. intelligence community concluded that Iran stopped work on a nuclear bomb.

The IAEA report acknowledges as much, saying: “the Agency has been able to construct what it believes to be a good understanding of activities undertaken by Iran prior to the end of 2003. The Agency’s ability to construct an equally good understanding of activities in Iran after the end of 2003 is reduced, due

to the more limited information available to the Agency.”

But the IAEA still leans toward accepting nearly every piece of disputed evidence against Iran. Regarding alleged Iranian scientific studies gleaned from a purloined laptop, Iran has denounced that material as a fabrication, but the IAEA chooses to accept the material, which was provided by “a Member State,” as genuine. The report states:

“The quantity of the documentation, and the scope and contents of the work covered in the documentation, are sufficiently comprehensive and complex that, in the Agency’s view, it is not likely to have been the result of forgery or fabrication.”

However, a professional intelligence agency would be expected to produce a convincing fabrication that would withstand at least superficial analysis, especially if the forgery was generated by a “Member State” with its own nuclear weapons expertise.

Clearly, today’s IAEA is not the same organization that stood up to falsehoods used in 2002-2003 by the United States and Great Britain to justify invading Iraq.

As former CIA analyst Ray McGovern wrote on Feb. 21, 2010, the new IAEA chief, Japanese diplomat Yukiya Amano, had “huge shoes to fill when he took over from the widely respected Mohamed ElBaradei, [who] had the courage to call a spade a spade and, when necessary, a forgery a forgery, like the documents alleging that Iraq had sought yellowcake uranium in Niger.”

Citing the contrast between ElBaradei’s expertise and reputation and that of the less known Amano, McGovern added, “lacking gravitas, one bends more easily. It is a fair assumption that Amano will prove more malleable than his predecessor, and surely more naive.”

Now, it appears that Amano’s IAEA has accepted intelligence information from Israel and other enemies of Iran in preparing a report that is adding fuel to the fire for a possible military confrontation with Iran.

Spinning the Details

Major U.S. news outlets, like the Times and the Post, also have shorn off some of the nuances that remained in the IAEA’s report, which distinguished its more authoritative analysis regarding Iran’s pre-2003 nuclear experiments from a sketchier understanding of the post-2003 period when U.S. intelligence agencies concluded that the work had stopped.

The newspapers tended to merge the two periods, relying on interpretations from “experts” like former weapons inspector David Albright, who was the principal source for a front-page Washington Post news article on Monday about the IAEA’s impending report and who was famously wrong about Iraq’s WMD in 2002-2003.

“The [Iranian nuclear bomb] program never really stopped,” Albright, president of the Washington-based Institute for Science and International Security, said, according to the Post. “After 2003, money [in Iran] was made available for research in areas that sure look like nuclear weapons work but were hidden within civilian institutions.”

The IAEA was more circumspect in its conclusions, although it is a truism that academic research on a wide variety of topics can, theoretically at least, be applied to building a nuclear bomb. Which is apparently one of the reasons why assassins have targeted Iranian physicists for murder in recent years.

In its Thursday editorial, the Post raised no objection to that strategy of killing Iranian scientists except to indicate that it didn’t go far enough. The Post’s neocon editors wrote:

“The Obama administration and other Western governments must recognize that the sanctions [on Iran] that have so far been put in place, and covert operations aimed at sabotaging Iranian centrifuges and killing scientists, have not succeeded in changing the regime’s intentions or stopping its work.”

The Post’s editors seem to accept the fact (and the rationalization) for assassinating Iran’s scientists, but the practice, if done against scientists in Western countries or in Israel, would surely be denounced as terrorism.

Similarly, it almost goes without saying that the Post and the Times saw no reason to mention that Israel possesses a sophisticated nuclear arsenal and unlike Iran has refused to subject itself to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty or the scrutiny of the IAEA.

No one in the U.S. mainstream news media seems to find it the least bit hypocritical that Israel would be supplying evidence to the IAEA about the alleged secret nuclear ambitions of Iran when Israel itself is a rogue nuclear state.

[For more on related topics, see Robert Parry’s *Lost History, Secrecy & Privilege* and *Neck Deep*, now available in a three-book set for the discount price of only \$29. For details, [click here](#).]

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Presidency of George W. Bush, was written with two of his sons, Sam and Nat, and can be ordered at neckdeepbook.com. His two previous books, *Secrecy & Privilege: The Rise of the Bush Dynasty from Watergate to Iraq* and *Lost History: Contras, Cocaine, the Press & 'Project Truth'* are also available there.
