

# Big Media's Double Standards on Iran

**Exclusive:** The mainstream U.S. press corps is again pounding the propaganda war drums, this time over dubious accusations of Iran's secret work on a nuclear bomb. It is a pattern of bias that Robert Parry calls the U.S. media's worst – and most dangerous – ethical violation.

By Robert Parry

Arguably, the most serious ethical crisis in U.S. journalism is the deep-seated bias about the Middle East that is displayed by major American news outlets, particularly the Washington Post and the New York Times.

When it comes to reporting on “designated enemies” in the Muslim world, the Post and the Times routinely jettison all sense of objectivity even when the stakes are as serious as war and peace, life and death. Propaganda wins out over balanced journalism.



We have seen this pattern with Iraq and its non-existent stockpiles of WMD; with the rush to judgment about Syria's supposed guilt in the killing of Lebanese leader Rafik Hariri; with the false certainty about Libya's role in the Lockerbie bombing; and many other examples of what everyone just “knows to be true” but often turns out isn't. [For more on these cases, [click here.](#)]

The latest example of this ethical failing relates to reporting about Iran on such topics as [the buffoonish plot](#) to assassinate the Saudi ambassador in Washington and [a new set of dubious allegations](#) about Iran's nuclear weapons program.

In these cases, U.S. mainstream news media happily marshals sources with histories of credibility problems; treats implausible scenarios with utmost

respect; jettisons crucial context; and transforms the grays of ambiguity into black-and-white morality tales of good versus evil.

Then, behind these war drums of the U.S. press corps, the American people are marched toward confrontation and violence, while anyone who dares question the perceived wisdom of the Post, the Times and many other esteemed outlets is fair game for marginalization and ridicule.

An example of this propaganda passing as journalism has been the recent writings of Joby Warrick of the Washington Post about a vague but alarmist report produced by the new leadership of the International Atomic Energy Agency.

On Monday, the Post put on its front page a story about Russian scientist Vyacheslav Danilenko, a leading expert in the formation of nanodiamonds who spent several years assisting Iranians develop a domestic industry in these micro-diamonds that have many commercial uses.

But Warrick's story is fraught with spooky shadows and scary music that suggest Danilenko is really part of an ongoing drive by Iranian authorities to overcome technological obstacles for a nuclear bomb. Just like in that spy thriller "Sum of All Fears," a greedy ex-Soviet nuclear scientist is helping to build a rogue nuclear bomb.

Warrick wrote: "When the Cold War abruptly ended in 1991, Vyacheslav Danilenko was a Soviet weapons scientist in need of a new line of work. At 57, he struggled to become a businessman, traveling through Europe and even to the United States to promote an idea for using explosives to create synthetic diamonds. Finally, he turned to Iran, a country that could fully appreciate the bombmaker's special mix of experience and talents."

Now, Warrick continued, Danilenko has been identified by Western diplomats as the unnamed scientist cited in the IAEA report as advising Iran on the explosive techniques to detonate a nuclear bomb. Warrick's story continues:

"No bomb was built, the diplomats say. But help from foreign scientists such as Danilenko enabled Iran to leapfrog over technical hurdles that otherwise could have taken years to overcome, according to former and current U.N. officials, Western diplomats and weapons experts."

### **Slanted Tale**

However, Warrick crafts the story in a very misleading way, leaving out key facts that would create a less ominous picture. For instance, the article fails to mention that the U.S. intelligence community issued a National Intelligence Estimate in 2007 that Iran had stopped its work on a nuclear bomb in late 2003.

Danilenko, who has insisted that his work was limited to advising Iranians on the explosions used to manufacture nanodiamonds, last worked in Iran in 2002 and the explosive test that the IAEA associates with Danilenko and which supposedly might have nuclear implications was conducted in 2003.

In other words even if one accepts that Danilenko is lying about his work in Iran nothing in the Danilenko story undercuts the U.S. intelligence community's NIE. To leave out this crucial context in the Post's article suggests an intention to frighten rather than to inform.

Indeed, what is notable about the curious IAEA report is how much of it predates late 2003. [For a contrasting view of the Danilenko evidence, see Consortiumnews.com's "[Iran's Soviet Bomb-Maker Who Wasn't.](#)"]

Warrick also relies heavily on the expertise of discredited arms control analyst David Albright, the founder and president of the Institute for Science and International Security. Albright was a prominent voice in promoting President George W. Bush's pre-invasion case that Iraq possessed stockpiles of WMD.

Yet, from reading Warrick's article, you would have no idea of Albright's checkered history. You would simply assume that Albright is an unbiased expert who is bringing his analytical skills to bear to help us untangle difficult questions about Iran's nuclear research.

But Albright and his ISIS actually have a pattern of imbalanced work on nuclear proliferation and the spread of other dangerous weapons. For instance, ISIS has essentially ignored Israel's real nuclear arsenal with only [a few brief items](#) over the past decade while obsessing over a non-existent nuclear arsenal in Iran with [scores and scores of reports](#).

Albright has continued this disproportional emphasis despite the fact that Israel is arguably the world's most notorious rogue nuclear state. It has built up its undeclared nuclear arsenal after refusing to sign the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) and keeping IAEA inspectors away from its nuclear facilities.

By contrast, Iran signed the NPT, has renounced nuclear weapons, and has allowed IAEA inspectors to monitor its nuclear energy program. Granted, Iran's cooperation has been less than stellar but its record is far superior to Israel's. Yet, Albright and his ISIS have largely turned a blind eye to Israel's nukes and focused instead on Iran's theoretical bomb-making.

(On Sunday, when non-mainstream journalists confronted Albright about the disparity between ISIS's concentration on Iran and neglect of Israel, he angrily responded that he was currently working on a report about Israel. If so, it

would be Albright's first substantive study solely on Israel's nuclear program since ISIS was founded in 1993, according to an examination of its Web site.)

### **Conned on Iraq**

Albright also has not been above harnessing his selective outrage over Middle East weapons in the cause of U.S. war propaganda.

At the end of summer 2002, as Bush was beginning his advertising roll-out for the Iraq invasion and dispatching his top aides to the Sunday talk shows to warn about "smoking guns" and "mushroom clouds," Albright co-authored a Sept. 10, 2002, article entitled "Is the Activity at Al Qaim Related to Nuclear Efforts?" which declared:

"High-resolution commercial satellite imagery shows an apparently operational facility at the site of Iraq's al Qaim phosphate plant and uranium extraction facility. This site was where Iraq extracted uranium for its nuclear weapons program in the 1980s. This image raises questions about whether Iraq has rebuilt a uranium extraction facility at the site, possibly even underground. The uranium could be used in a clandestine nuclear weapons effort."

Albright's alarming allegations fit neatly with Bush's propaganda barrage, although as the months wore on with Bush's warnings about aluminum tubes and yellowcake from Africa growing more outlandish Albright did display more skepticism about the existence of a revived Iraqi nuclear program.

Still, he remained a "go-to" expert on other Iraqi purported WMD, such as chemical and biological weapons. In a typical quote on Oct. 5, 2002, Albright told CNN: "In terms of the chemical and biological weapons, Iraq has those now."

After Bush launched the Iraq invasion in March 2003 and Iraq's secret WMD caches didn't materialize, Albright admitted that he had been conned, explaining to the Los Angeles Times: "If there are no weapons of mass destruction, I'll be mad as hell."

"I certainly accepted the administration claims on chemical and biological weapons. I figured they were telling the truth. If there is no [unconventional weapons program], I will feel taken, because they asserted these things with such assurance." [See FAIR's "The Great WMD Hunt,"]

Given the horrendous costs in blood and treasure resulting from the Iraq fiasco, an objective journalist might feel compelled to mention Albright's track record of bias and errors. But the Post's Warrick doesn't.

### **A Troubling Trend**

While Albright may stand out as a troubling example of how biased analysis works, he surely is not alone. Nor is Warrick's selective journalism atypical of what regularly appears in the U.S. mainstream news media.

For instance, also on Monday, the New York Times published a lengthy article, entitled "Israel Lobbies Discreetly for More Sanctions After U.N. Report on Iran," that discussed how Israeli leaders are working behind the scenes with threats and sabotage to stop Iran from advancing toward a nuclear bomb.

While a journalist perhaps doesn't need to mention Israel's nuclear arsenal each time allegations are lodged against Iran, it would seem quite appropriate for this article by Isabel Kershner from Jerusalem to take note of the hypocrisy of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and other senior officials complaining about Iran's hypothetical bomb when they have many real ones.

Yet Kershner's article ignores the Israeli nuclear arsenal even as it raises concerns about how an Iranian bomb could touch off a regional nuclear arms race.

Netanyahu is quoted as saying: "The international community must stop Iran's race to arm itself with nuclear weapons, a race that endangers the peace of the entire world." The article then adds:

"While Israel regards nuclear-armed Iran as potentially an existential threat, it also threatens moderate Arab states and could set off a destabilizing regional arms race. The [IAEA] report did not speculate on the time it would take Iran to produce a nuclear weapon, but Israelis say it shows Iran is moving ever closer to the nuclear threshold while Western powers have been dragging their feet on action to stop it."

Given these observations, one might think the New York Times would have inserted somewhere that Israel is itself a rogue nuclear state, possessing an undeclared nuclear arsenal that is regarded by experts as one of the world's largest and most sophisticated.

Also, if Iran does move ahead toward building a nuclear bomb, one of the obvious factors would be that nuclear-armed Israel is constantly threatening to attack and Iran suspects that Israel might be joined by the United States, the world's preeminent nuclear and military power.

After witnessing the outcomes in Iraq and Libya where leaders dismantled their nuclear programs compared with North Korea, which pressed ahead to build a nuclear bomb, Iranian leaders might regard possession of a nuclear bomb as an existential necessity.

Forgoing a nuclear bomb didn't save Iraq's Saddam Hussein from dangling at the

end of a rope or Libya's Muammar Gaddafi from having a bullet shot into his brain. However, North Korea's Kim Jong-Il is still alive and holding power.

But the harsh necessities of geopolitics aside, journalistic ethics require presenting relevant details and nuances to the reader. To leave them out especially to do so repeatedly with a predictable bias is where the Post, the Times and much of the U.S. mainstream news media fall down.

For many years, one set of rules has applied to "designated enemies" in the Muslim world and another to Israel and various Arab "friends." There is an unspoken bias or "group think" and it is as undeniable as it is unacknowledged.

This hypocrisy has become so deeply engrained in the U.S. news media that the double standards are regarded as the natural order of things. Since Iran is perceived as unpopular in the United States and Israel is generally popular, Iran gets pummeled while Israel gets pampered.

But just because all the important U.S. media outlets violate the ethical rules of journalism on this front doesn't make the behavior good journalism. America's double standard on Middle East reporting is a fundamental violation of journalistic ethics and it has contributed over the past decade to getting many innocent people killed.

[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.](#)]

Robert Parry broke many of the Iran-Contra stories in the 1980s for the Associated Press and Newsweek. His latest book, *Neck Deep: The Disastrous Presidency of George W. Bush*, was written with two of his sons, Sam and Nat, and can be ordered at [neckdeepbook.com](http://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.

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## The Assault on Occupy Wall Street

New York City police mounted a surprise nighttime raid on Occupy Wall Street at Zuccotti Park, forcing out protesters, removing tents and arresting about 150. The assault was the latest move by forces of a corrupt status quo against Americans opposing a dehumanized economic system, Phil Rockstroh writes.

By Phil Rockstroh

For days now surrounding Veterans Day, we have endured demonstrably false propaganda that the fallen soldiers of U.S. wars sacrificed their lives for “our freedoms.”

Yet, as that noxious nonsense still lingers in the air, militarized police have invaded OWS sites in numerous cities, including Zuccotti Park in Lower Manhattan, and, in the boilerplate description of the witless courtesans of the corporate media, with the mission to “evict the occupiers.”

U.S. soldiers died protecting what and who again? These actions should make this much clear: The U.S. military and the police exist to protect the 1 percent. At this point, the ideal of freedom will be carried by those willing to resist cops and soldiers.

There have been many who have struggled and often died for freedom but scant few were clad in uniforms issued by governments.

Freedom rises despite cops and soldiers not because of them. And that is exactly why those who despise freedom propagate military hagiography and fetishize those wearing uniforms so they can give the idea of liberty lip service as all the while they order it crushed.

When anyone tells you that dead soldiers died for your freedom, it is your duty to occupy reality and inform them of just how mistaken they are. And if you truly cherish the concepts of freedom and liberty, you just might be called on to face mindless arrays of fascist cops and lose your freedom, for a time, going to jail, so others might, at some point, gain their freedom.

I was born in Birmingham Alabama, at slightly past the mid-point of the decade of the 1950s. Many of my earliest memories involve the struggle for civil rights that was transpiring on the streets of my hometown.

My father was employed at a scrap metal yard but also worked as a freelance photojournalist who hawked his work to media photo syndicates such as Black Star which then sold his wares to the major newsmagazines of the day.

A number of the iconic photographs of the era were captured by his Nikon camera e.g., of vicious police dogs unleashed on peaceful demonstrators; of demonstrators cart-wheeled down city streets by the force of fire hoses; of Dr. King and other civil rights marchers kneeled in prayer before arrays of Police Chief Bull Connor’s thuggish ranks of racist cops.

In Birmingham, racist laws and racial and economic inequality were the

progenitors of acts of official viciousness. The social structure in place was indefensible. Reason and common decency held no dominion in the justifications for the established order that was posited by the system's apologists and enforcers; therefore, brutality filled the void created by the absence of their humanity.

And the same situation is extant in the growing suppression of the OWS movement in various cities, nationwide, including Liberty Park in Lower Manhattan. The 1 percent and their paid operatives local city officials are striving to protect an unjust, inherently dishonest status quo. Lacking a moral mandate, they are prone to the use of police state forms of repression.

Dr. King et al faced their oppressors on the streets of my hometown. Civil Rights activists knew that they had to hold their ground to retain their dignity that it was imperative to sit down in those Jim Crow-tyrannized streets when necessary in order to stand up against the forces of oppression.

At present, we have arrived at a similar moment. If justice is to prevail, it seems, the air of U.S. cities will hold the acrid sting of tear gas, the jails will again be filled, the brave will endure brutality yet the corrupt system will crumble. Because the system's protectors themselves will bring it down by revealing its empty nature, and the corrupt structure will collapse from within.

Yet, when riot police attack unarmed, peacefully resisting protesters, the mainstream media often describes the events with standard boilerplate such as "police clash with demonstrators."

This is inaccurate (at best) reportage. It suggests that both parties are equal aggressors in the situation, and the motive of the police is to restore order and maintain the peace, as opposed to, inflicting pain and creating an aura of intimidation. This is analogous to describing a mugging as simply: two parties engaging in a financial transaction.

Although mainstream media demurred from limning the upwelling of mob violence at Penn. State as involving any criteria deeper than the mindless rage of a few football-besotted students unloosed by the dismissal of a beloved sport figure. Yet there exists an element that the Penn. State belligerents and OWS activists have in common: a sense of alienation.

Penn. State students rioted because life in the corporate state is so devoid of meaning ... that identification with a sports team gives an empty existence said meaning. These are young people, coming of age in a time of debt-slavery and diminished job prospects, who were born and raised in, and know of no existence other than, life as lived in U.S. nothing-villes i.e., a public realm devoid of



just that a public realm an atomizing center-bereft culture of strip malls, office parks, fast food eateries and the electronic ghosts wafting the air of social media.

Contrived sport spectacles provisionally give an empty life meaning. Take that away, and a mindless rampage might ensue. Anything but face the emptiness and acknowledge one's complicity therein, and then direct one's fury at the creators of the stultified conditions of this culture.

It is a given, the cameras of corporate media swivel towards reckless actions not mindful commitment are attuned to verbal contretemps not thoughtful conviction and then move on. And we will click our TV remotes and scan the Internet restless, hollowed out eating empty memes skimming the surface of the electronic sheen.

These are the areas we are induced to direct our attention as the oceans of the earth are dying these massive life-sustaining bodies of water have less than 50 years before they will be dead. This fact alone should knock us to our knees in lamentation should sent us reeling into the streets in displays of public grief.

Accordingly, we should not only occupy but inhabit our rage. No more tittering at celebrity/political class contretemps it is time for focused fury. The machinery of the corporate/police state must be dismantled.

If the corporate boardrooms have to be emptied for the oceans to be replenished with abundant life then so be it. If one must go to jail for committing acts of civil disobedience to free one's heart then it must be done.

Yet why does the act of challenging the degraded status quo provoke such a high degree of misapprehension, anxiety and outright hostility from many, both in positions of authority and among so many of the exploited and dispossessed of the corporate/consumer state.

For example, why did the fatal shooting incident in Oakland, California, on Nov. 1, that occurred near the Occupy Oakland Encampment but, apparently, was wholly unrelated to OWS activity cause a firestorm of reckless speculation and false associations.

Because any exercise in freedom makes people in our habitually authoritarian nation damn uneasy a sense of uncertainty brings on dread the feeling that something terrible is to come from challenging a prevailing order, even as degraded as it is.

Tyrants always promise safety; their apologists warn of chaos if and when the soul-numbing order is challenged.

Granted, it is a given that there exists a sense of certainty in a prison routine: high walls and guards and gun mounts ensure continuity; an uncertainty-banishing schedule is enforced. Moreover, solitary confinement offers an even more orderly situation uncertainty is circumscribed as freedom is banished.

The corporate/national security state, by its very nature is anti-liberty and anti-freedom. Of course, its defenders give lip service to the concept of freedom ... much in the manner a pick-pocket working a subway train is very much in favor of the virtues of public transportation.

A heavy police presence has ringed Zuccotti Park from the get-go, and whose ranks have now staged a military style raid upon it, a de facto search and destroy mission because the ruling elite wants to suppress the very impulse of freedom.

These authoritarian bullies don't want the concept to escape the collective prison of the mind erected and maintained by the corrupt jailers comprising the 1 percent who claim they offer us protection as, all the while, they hold our chains all for our own good, they insist for our safety and the safety of others.

Although, from studying on these prison walls, the thought occurs to me that what we might need is protection from all this safety.

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