

Larding On More Iran Sanctions

Behind the scenes, Iran says it's willing to offer more assurances that it really isn't building a nuclear bomb, but Israel and many of its U.S. congressional allies keep pushing for a nasty showdown. The dynamic is now impeding President Obama's ability to defuse the crisis, says ex-CIA analyst Paul R. Pillar.

By Paul R. Pillar

The latest indication of how sanctions-imposing initiatives in Congress have deteriorated into mindless Iran-bashing is how the Obama administration has had to weigh in on the writing of the defense authorization bill to minimize the damage it does to U.S. diplomacy on Iran.

Bear in mind that the administration and the congressional protagonists are, on the face of it, seeking the same thing: policies in Tehran that assure the rest of the world that Iran is not making and will not make a nuclear weapon. The President, like the protagonists in Congress, has pronounced an Iranian nuclear weapon to be unacceptable.

The President, also like members of Congress, sees the imposition of harsh economic sanctions on Iran as a major tool in trying to achieve the desired result. In fact, in the recent election campaign the Obama camp made a rather big deal out of how the most extensive sanctions ever imposed on Iran had been put in place during the current administration.

In other words, there does not appear to be disagreement on fundamental objectives, unlike with, say, the current main event of political combat along Pennsylvania Avenue, i.e., the one about budgets and taxes where there *is* disagreement on some rather fundamental questions about burden-sharing and the like.

Therefore, again, if we take stated objectives about Iran at face value, any disagreement between the administration and members of Congress concerns tactical judgments about what combination of policies and tools has the best chance of getting closer to the shared objective of foreclosing the possibility of an Iranian nuclear weapon.

The administration sees, with good reason, the additional sanctions that Sens. Robert Menendez, D-New Jersey, and Mark Kirk, R-Illinois, want to include in the defense bill as complicating rather than facilitating movement toward that objective. The sanctions that have already been piled on have passed the point

where they start decreasing rather than increasing the President's negotiating strength and flexibility in trying to cut a deal with Iran.

An administration aide stated that provisions in the bill about sanctions also "would be impossible to enforce and only make our allies really angry. They would have endangered their cooperation with the sanctions we have now."

It should be clear from the history of the past couple of years, as well as a little thought about incentives for Iranian policymakers, that simply piling on still more sanctions without more Western flexibility at the negotiating table will not attain the U.S. objective.

The sanctions are hurting Iran and are a major reason Iran wants to negotiate a deal. But the Iranians have dismissed the only sanctions relief that has been offered so far as peanuts, which it is. They have no reason to make significant concessions if they don't think they will be getting anything significant in return.

If members of Congress were really interested in inducing changes in Iran's policy and behavior, they would be devoting as much time and energy to asking why the powers negotiating with Iran evidently do not intend to depart much from their failed negotiating formulas of the past as they would in trying to find some new sanction to impose.

There are two possible explanations for why members of Congress are making trouble on this issue despite the ostensibly shared objective. One is that some members may actually naively believe that if turning the screws hasn't yet gotten the Iranians to cry uncle, then all we need to do is to turn them some more.

The other explanation is that it is a mistake to take the stated objectives at face value and that for some members getting a negotiated agreement with Iran is less important than their own posturing, which is based on the belief that Iran-bashing and Iran-pressuring is always good politics. Menendez gave some indication of this when he refused Harry Reid's request for a voice vote on his sanctions amendment and insisted on a roll call vote, which slowed the legislative process down but put everyone's hard-line anti-Iran chops on the record.

Menendez's conduct on the Iran issue underscores an additional complication for the President as he considers candidates to replace Secretary of State Clinton. Appointing the otherwise well-qualified John Kerry would mean not only giving up a Senate seat that Massachusetts Republicans may recapture but also having the chair of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee probably pass to Menendez.

This would mean not only losing a constructive force in this key foreign policy position but also having it replaced by a destructive influence.

Paul R. Pillar, in his 28 years at the Central Intelligence Agency, rose to be one of the agency's top analysts. He is now a visiting professor at Georgetown University for security studies. (This article first appeared as a blog post at The National Interest's Web site. Reprinted with author's permission.)

Dubious Graph Feeds Iran Nuke Frenzy

Propaganda aimed at convincing Americans that Iran is pursuing a nuclear bomb continues with more dubious evidence leaked to an ever-gullible U.S. press corps. An AP story highlighted a supposed Iranian computer model of a nuclear explosion but the graph may be forged, says Gareth Porter at Inter Press Service.

By Gareth Porter

The suspect graph of a nuclear explosion reportedly provided to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) as evidence of Iranian computer modeling of nuclear weapons yields appears to have been adapted from a very similar graph in a scholarly journal article published in January 2009 and available on the Internet.

The graph, published in a Nov. 27 Associated Press story but immediately found to have a mathematical error of four orders of magnitude, closely resembles a graph accompanying a scholarly article modeling a nuclear explosion. It provides a plausible explanation for the origins of the graph leaked to AP, according to two nuclear physicists following the issue closely.

The graph in the scholarly journal article was well known to the IAEA at the time of its publication, according to a knowledgeable source.

That means that the IAEA should have been able to make the connection between the set of graphs alleged to have been used by Iran to calculate yields from nuclear explosions that the agency obtained in 2011 and the very similar graph available on the internet.

The IAEA did not identify the member countries that provided the intelligence about the alleged Iran studies. However, Israel provided most of the intelligence cited by the IAEA in its 2011 report, and Israeli intelligence has

been the source of a number of leaks to the AP reporter in Vienna, George Jahn.

The graph accompanying an article in the January 2009 issue of the journal Nuclear Engineering and Design by retired Swiss nuclear engineer Walter Seifritz displayed a curve representing power in a nuclear explosion over fractions of a second that is very close to the one shown in the graph published by AP and attributed by the officials leaking it to an Iranian scientist.

Both graphs depict a nuclear explosion as an asymmetrical bell curve in which the right side of the curve is more elongated than the left side. Although both graphs are too crudely drawn to allow precise measurement, it appears that the difference between the two sides of the curve on the two graphs is very close to the same in both graphs.

The AP graph appears to show a total energy production of 50 kilotons taking place over about 0.3 microseconds, whereas the Seifritz graph shows a total of roughly 18 kilotons produced over about 0.1 microseconds.

The resemblance is so dramatic that two nuclear specialists who compared the graphs at the request of IPS consider it very plausible that the graph leaked to AP as part of an Iranian secret nuclear weapons research program may well have been derived from the one in the journal article.

Scott Kemp, an assistant professor of nuclear science and engineering at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), told IPS he suspects the graph leaked to AP was "adapted from the open literature". He said he believes the authors of that graph "were told they ought to look into the literature and found that paper, copied (the graph) and made their own plot from it."

Yousaf Butt, a nuclear scientist at the Monterey Institute, who had spotted the enormous error in the graph published by AP, along with his colleague Ferenc Dalnoki-Veress, said in an interview with IPS that a relationship between the two graphs is quite plausible, particularly given the fact they both have similar asymmetries in the power curve.

"Someone may just have taken the Seifritz graph and crudely adapted it to a 50-kilotonne yield instead of the 18 kilotons in the paper," Butt said.

He added that "it's not even necessary that an actual computer model was even run in the production of the AP graph."

Apparently anticipating that the Seifritz graph would soon be discovered, the source of the graph given to AP is quoted in a Dec. 1 story as acknowledging that "similar graphs can be found in textbooks, the internet and other public sources."

Butt said that he doesn't know whether the AP graph is genuine or not, but that it could well be a forgery.

"If one wanted to plant a forgery," he wrote, "it would make sense to manufacture something that looked like the output from the many unclassified 'toy-models' available on-line or in academic journals, rather than leak something from an actual high-fidelity classified study."

The Seifritz graph came to the attention of the IAEA secretariat soon after it was published and was referred to the staff specialist on nuclear weapons research, according to a source familiar with the IAEA's handling of such issues.

The source, who refused to be identified, told IPS the reaction of the official was that the graph represented fairly crude work on basic theory and was therefore not of concern to the agency.

The agency was given the alleged Iranian graph in 2011, and a "senior diplomat" from a different country from the source of the graph said IAEA investigators realized the diagram was flawed shortly after they received it, according to the Dec. 1 AP story.

The IAEA's familiarity with the Seifritz graph, two years before it was given graphs that bore a close resemblance to it and which the agency knew contained a huge mathematical error, raise new questions about how the IAEA could have regarded the Israeli intelligence as credible evidence of Iranian work on nuclear weapons.

Yukiya Amano, the director-general of the IAEA, refused to confirm or deny in an appearance at the Council on Foreign Relations in Washington Dec. 6 that the graph published by AP was part of the evidence of Iranian "activities" related to nuclear weapons cited by the agency in its November 2011 report. .

Amano responded to a question on the graph, "I can't discuss this specific information."

In its November 2011 report, the IAEA said it had "information" from two member states that Iran had conducted "modeling studies" aimed at determining the "nuclear explosive yield" associated with components of nuclear weapon. It said the "information" had identified "models said to have been used in those studies and the results of these calculations, which the Agency has seen".

The "senior diplomat" quoted by AP said the IAEA also had a spreadsheet containing the data needed to produce the same yield as shown on the graph 50 kilotons suggesting that the spreadsheet is closely related to the graph.

Butt observed, however, that the existence of the spreadsheet with data showing the yield related to a 50-kiloton explosion does not make the graph any more credible, because the spreadsheet could have been created by simply plugging the data used to produce the graph.

Kemp of MIT agreed with Butt's assessment. "If it's simply data points plotted in the graph, it means nothing," he told IPS.

After Butt and Dalnoki-Veress identified the fundamental error in the graph AP had published as evidence of Iranian work on a 50-kiloton bomb, the Israeli source of the graph and an unidentified "senior diplomat" argued that the error must have been intentionally made by the Iranian scientist who they alleged had produced the graph.

A "senior diplomat" told AP the IAEA believed the scientist had changed the units of energy used by orders of magnitude, because "Nobody would have understood the original."

That explanation was embraced by David Albright, who has served as unofficial IAEA spokesman in Washington on several occasions. But neither Albright nor the unidentified officials quoted by Jahn offered any explanation as to why an accurate graph would have been more difficult for Iranian officials to understand than one with such a huge mathematical error.

Further undermining the credibility of the explanation, Jahn's sources suggested that the Iranian scientist whom they suspected of having devised the graph was Dr. Majid Shahriari, the nuclear scientist assassinated by the Israeli intelligence agency Mossad in 2010.

No evidence has been produced to indicate that Shahriari, who had a long record of publications relating to nuclear power plants and basic nuclear physics, had anything to do with nuclear weapons research.

Gareth Porter, an investigative historian and journalist specializing in U.S. national security policy, received the UK-based Gellhorn Prize for journalism for 2011 for articles on the U.S. war in Afghanistan. [This story originally appeared at Inter Press Service.]

The Revolving Door on Healthcare

Washington is a place where behavior friendly to the rich and powerful is rewarded lavishly and other behavior hostile to those interests can make you a

pariah. That reality is reinforced when public officials make trips through the revolving door, as Bill Moyers and Michael Winship note.

By Bill Moyers and Michael Winship

We've seen how Washington insiders write the rules of politics and the economy to protect powerful special interests, but now as we enter the holiday season, and a month or so after the election, we're getting a refresher course in just how that inside game is played, gifts and all.

In this round, Santa doesn't come down the chimney – he simply squeezes his jolly old self through the revolving door.

It's an old story, the latest chapter of which came to light a few days ago with a small item in *Politico*: "Elizabeth Fowler is leaving the White House for a senior-level position leading 'global health policy' at Johnson & Johnson's government affairs and policy group."

A familiar name. We had talked about Liz Fowler on *Bill Moyers Journal* in 2009, during the early stages of Obama's health care reform. She was at the center of the action, sitting behind Montana Sen. Max Baucus, chairman of the Senate Finance Committee at committee hearings.

Bill noted, "She used to work for WellPoint, the largest health insurer in the country. She was Vice President of Public Policy. And now she's working for the very committee with the most power to give her old company and the entire industry exactly what they want: higher profits, and no competition from alternative non-profit coverage that could lower costs and premiums."

After Obamacare passed, Sen. Baucus himself, one of the biggest recipients in Congress of campaign cash from the health care industry, boasted that the architect of the legislation was none other than Liz Fowler.

"I want to single out one person," he said. "Liz Fowler is my chief health counsel. Liz Fowler has put my health care team together. ... She put together the White Paper last November 2008, [the] 87-page document which became the basis, the foundation, the blueprint from which almost all health care measures in all bills on both sides of the aisle came. She is an amazing person. She is a lawyer; she is a Ph.D. She is just so decent. She is always smiling, she is always working, always available to help any Senator, any staff. I just thank Liz from the bottom of my heart."

The health-care industry was very pleased, too. Early on in the evolution of Obamacare, the Senate and the White House cut deals that protected the interests

of the health-care industry, especially insurers and the pharmaceutical companies. Lobbyists beat back such popular proposals as a public option, an expansion of Medicare, and a requirement that drug companies negotiate the prices they charge.

As the eagle-eyed journalist Glenn Greenwald noted in *The Guardian* last week, “The bill’s mandate that everyone purchase the products of the private health insurance industry, unaccompanied by any public alternative, was a huge gift to that industry.” That sound you hear isn’t jingle bells; it’s cash registers ringing.

And Liz Fowler? The White House brought her over from Congress to oversee the new law’s implementation, first at the Department of Health and Human Services and then as Special Assistant to the President for Healthcare and Economic Policy. And now, it’s through the revolving door once more.

Yes, Christmas has come a little early for the peripatetic Ms. Fowler, as she leaves the White House for the pharmaceutical giant Johnson & Johnson.

As Glenn Greenwald writes, Ms. Fowler “will receive ample rewards from that same industry as she peddles her influence in government and exploits her experience with its inner workings to work on that industry’s behalf, all of which has been made perfectly legal by the same insular, Versailles-like Washington culture that so lavishly benefits from all of this.”

Friends of Liz Fowler will say this is harsh, that she was the talented, intelligent protégée of two liberal Democrats – outgoing California Congressman Pete Stark and the late Sen. Daniel Patrick Moynihan of New York – who believed in public service as a calling. That she was seriously devoted to crafting a health-care reform proposal that would pass.

No doubt, but it’s not the point. She’s emblematic of the revolving door culture that inevitably means, when push comes to shove, corporate interests will have the upper hand in the close calls that determine public policy. It’s how insiders fix the rules of the market, no matter which party is in power.

The last time we looked, 34 former staff members of Sen. Baucus, whose finance committee has life-and-death power over the industry’s wish list, were registered lobbyists, more than a third of them working on health care issues in the private sector. And the revolving door spins ever faster after a big election like the one we had last month, as score of officials, elected representatives and their staffs vacate their offices after the ballots are counted. Many of them head for K Street and the highest bidder.

When his administration began, President Obama swore he would get tough. “If you

are a lobbyist entering my administration," he said, "you will not be able to work on matters you lobbied on, or in the agencies you lobbied during the previous two years. ... When you leave government, you will not be able to lobby my administration for as long as I am president. And there will be a ban on gifts by lobbyists to anyone serving in the administration as well."

Reforms were passed that are supposed to slow down the revolving door, increase transparency and limit the contact ex-officials and officeholders can have with their former colleagues. But those rules and regulations have loopholes big enough for Santa and his sleigh to drive through, reindeer included.

The market keeps growing for insiders poised to make a killing when they leave government to help their new bosses get what they want *from* government. That's the great thing about the revolving door: one good turn deserves another.

Bill Moyers is managing editor and Michael Winship is senior writer of the weekly public affairs program, Moyers & Company, airing on public television. Check local airtimes or comment at www.BillMoyers.com.
