

A Poison Pill for Iran Nuke Talks

Israel and its hardline U.S. backers have tried to manipulate the UN's IAEA to ensure failure of negotiations aimed at constraining but not eliminating Iran's nuclear program. The new ploy is to sink the talks with a demand for an Iranian "confession," as Gareth Porter wrote for Inter Press Service.

By Gareth Porter

President Barack Obama's administration appears to have rejected a deal-breaking demand by Israel for an Iranian confession to having had a covert nuclear weapons program as a condition for completing the comprehensive nuclear agreement.

Pro-Israeli commentators have openly criticized the Obama administration for failing to explicitly demand that Iran confess to charges by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) of a covert nuclear weapons program.

Demanding such a confession would be an obvious deal-breaker, because Iran has consistently denied those past charges and denounced the documents and intelligence reports on which they were based as fraudulent. In fact, the failure of the talks appears to be precisely the Israeli intention in pressing Washington to make that demand.

All the intelligence in question can be traced back to Israel, and investigation of the material has shown that the documents and reports that have been most widely publicized betray multiple indications of having been fabricated, as reported by IPS.

A "senior administration official" told reporters after the Nov. 24 Joint Plan of Action was announced that the United States had "made clear" in the negotiations that "the Security Council resolutions must still be addressed and that Iran must come into compliance with its obligations under the NPT and its obligations to the IAEA."

The U.N. Security Council Resolution 1929 of Jun. 9, 2010 says Iran "shall cooperate with the IAEA on all outstanding issues, particularly those which give rise to concerns about the possible military dimensions of the Iranian nuclear program."

The term "possible military dimensions" had been used by the IAEA in referring to the claims publicized by the agency over the past six years of covert Iranian nuclear weapons development projects, including an alleged facility at Parchin for testing nuclear weapons designs.

The Obama administration thus seemed to suggest that some kind of Iranian admission to past nuclear weapons work is a condition for a final agreement. But the administration's rhetoric on resolving IAEA claims of a nuclear weapons program appears to be less about forcing Iran to confess than responding to pressures from Israel and its supporters in the United States.

The first explicit indication of Israeli pressure on Obama to demand an Iranian confession as part of any diplomatic settlement came in a September 2012 article by Patrick Clawson and David Makovsky, then both senior staff members of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy (WINEP), whose analysis and recommendations reflect Israeli government policy.

"Given Iran's past undeclared activities," Clawson and Makovsky wrote, "a particular concern is that Iran will develop clandestine nuclear facilities. Tehran's coming clean about the past will therefore be an important determinant of whether it has any hidden capabilities."

The demand that Iran "come clean" on its alleged nuclear weapons program entered into the Obama administration's public posture for the first time after consultations with Israel in advance of the October 2013 round of negotiations with Iran.

Secretary of State John Kerry declared in Tokyo on Oct. 3 that Iran would "have to prove it's willing to come clean about the nuclear program." That same day, Ambassador James Jeffrey, a senior fellow at WINEP, in testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, said Iran "must come clean on its nuclear-related military research".

By the time the negotiations on the joint Plan of Action were completed in November, however, the State Department adopted language on the issue that harkened back to Kerry's testimony at his Senate confirmation hearings in January 2013. Kerry had said then that "questions surrounding Iran's nuclear weapons program" had to be "resolved".

It quickly became apparent that Israel had wanted the United States to demand not only a pro forma confession by Iran but the details of its alleged work on nuclear weapons. On the very day the agreement was announced, however, Robert Satloff, the executive director of WINEP, expressed his unhappiness that the deal did not include "getting Iran to come clean on all its past clandestine programs."

Also on Nov. 24, in the Wall Street Journal, Mark Dubowitz and Orde Kittrie of the Foundation for the Defense of Democracies, which is well known for expressing Israeli policy on Iran, criticized the Joint Plan of Action for

failing to “make clear reference to Iran revealing its past nuclear weapons research.”

The following day, again in the Wall Street Journal, WINEP managing director Michael Singh objected to the same U.S. failure to demand all the details of Iranian work on nuclear weapons. “Without insight into the full extent of Iran’s clandestine nuclear activities,” Singh wrote, “no amount of monitoring and inspection can provide confidence that Iran lacks a parallel program beyond the inspectors’ view.”

Along with Kerry’s initial adoption of the “come clean” rhetoric, these sharp criticisms of the U.S. refusal to call explicitly for a confession indicate that the Obama administration had initially gone along with Israel in calling for Iran to “come clean” but concluded that such a demand risked a premature breakdown in the talks.

Since the interim agreement, moreover, the State Department has avoided language that would commit it to requiring anything resembling an Iranian confession. In Israel on Feb. 22, Undersecretary of State Wendy Sherman, who is the primary negotiator with Iran, said, “What we have said to Iran is that [the ‘possible military dimensions’ issue] will have to be addressed in some way.”

Sherman suggested for the first time the possibility of a less than complete and clear-cut outcome of the process. The IAEA was “very much focused on working through PMD with Iran,” said Sherman. “And the more Iran can do with the IAEA, which is where this belongs, the more likely we will have successful comprehensive agreement.”

A former U.S. official who had worked on Iran suggested in a recent off-the-record meeting that the “possible military dimensions” issue could not be resolved completely, but that one or more parts could be clarified satisfactorily. The rest could be left for resolution by the IAEA after the comprehensive agreement is signed, the ex-official said.

That possibility arises because Iran and the IAEA agreed in February to work on the “Exploding Bridgewire” (EBW) issue the claim published by the IAEA that Iran had carried out experiments on high explosives developed for the purpose of detonating a nuclear weapon. That claim was based on a document that was part of the large collection originally said by anonymous intelligence sources to have come from the laptop computer of a participant in a purported Iranian nuclear weapons research project.

The documents were actually turned over to German intelligence by the Iranian terrorist organization Mujahedin-E-Khalq, which had close links to Israel’s

intelligence agency, Mossad.

Iran provided the IAEA with an account of its actual EBW development program in 2008. The Iranian account, cited by the agency in its May 2008 report, indicated the rate of explosions in its experiments, which was just one-eighth the rate mentioned by then IAEA deputy director Olli Heinonen in a briefing for member states in 2008.

But instead of acknowledging that fact in its report, the IAEA suggested repeatedly that Iran had acknowledged carrying out the EBW experiments described in the purported document from the secret weapons program while claiming it was for non-nuclear applications.

The new Iran-IAEA agreement on the EBW issue raises the question of whether IAEA Director General Yukiya Amano is now ready to reach a deal with Iran, despite having staked his own reputation on the November 2011 report on intelligence claims of covert Iranian nuclear weapons research coming from Israel.

Such an agreement might be based on the IAEA's stating accurately the Iranian explanation for the EBW and thus implicitly admitting that the agency had distorted the issue in the past. Other issues might be left to be resolved quietly after the negotiations on a comprehensive agreement are completed.

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Did Manning Help Avert War in Iran?

From the Archive: Many of the world's crises, like those in Syria and Ukraine, can be better understood by factoring in Israel's maneuvers to involve the U.S. in bombing Iran. Documents leaked by Pvt. Manning exposed how one such scheme might have played out, as Robert Parry wrote in 2013.

By Robert Parry (Originally published on Aug. 19, 2013)

From U.S. embassy cables leaked by Pvt. Bradley (now Chelsea) Manning, you can easily imagine how the propaganda game might have played out, how Americans could have been panicked into supporting another unnecessary war in the Middle East, this time against Iran. Except that Manning's release of the documents

spoiled the trick.

The gambit might have gone this way: One morning, a story would have led the front page of, say, the Washington Post citing how the widely respected International Atomic Energy Agency and its honest-broker Director-General Yukiya Amano had found startling "evidence" that Iran was nearing a nuclear bomb despite a longstanding U.S. intelligence estimate to the contrary and despite Iranian denials.

Next, the neocon-dominated opinion pages would ridicule anyone who still doubted these "facts." After all, these articles would say, "even" the IAEA, which had challenged President George W. Bush's claims about Iraq in 2002, and "even" Amano, who had initially believed Iran's denials, were now convinced.

Neo-con think tanks would rush to join the chorus of alarm, dispatching WMD "experts" to TV talk shows bracing the American people on the need for military action. From Fox News to CNN to MSNBC, there would be a drumbeat about Iran's perfidy. Then, as hawkish Republicans and Democrats ratcheted up their rhetoric and as Israeli leaders chortled "we told you so" the war-with-Iran bandwagon might have begun rolling with such velocity that it would be unstoppable.

Perhaps, only years later after grave human costs and severe economic repercussions would the American people learn the truth: that the IAEA under Amano wasn't the objective source that they had been led to believe, that Amano was something of a U.S.-Israeli puppet who had feigned a pro-Iranian position early on to burnish his credentials for pushing an anti-Iranian line subsequently; that after he was installed, he had even solicited U.S. officials for money and had held secret meetings with Israelis (to coordinate opposition to Iran's nuclear program while maintaining a polite silence about Israel's rogue nuclear arsenal).

However, because of the actions of Pvt. Manning, the rug was pulled out from under this possible ruse. The U.S. embassy cables revealing the truth about Amano were published by the U.K. Guardian in 2011 (although ignored by the New York Times, the Washington Post and other mainstream U.S. news outlets). The cables also drew attention from Web sites, such as Consortiumnews.com.

So, the gambit could not work. If it had been tried, enough people would have known the truth. They wouldn't be fooled again and they would have alerted their fellow citizens. Pvt. Manning had armed them with the facts.

And this scenario, while hypothetical, is not at all far-fetched. When the cables were leaked about a year after Amano's appointment, his IAEA was busy feeding the hysteria over Iran's nuclear program with reports trumpeted by think

tanks, such as the Institute for Science and International Security, and by the Washington Post and other U.S. news media.

Revealing Cables

According to those leaked U.S. embassy cables from Vienna, Austria, the site of IAEA's headquarters, American diplomats in 2009 were cheering the prospect that Amano would advance U.S. interests in ways that outgoing IAEA Director General Mohamed ElBaradei wouldn't; Amano credited his election to U.S. government support; Amano signaled he would side with the United States in its confrontation with Iran; and he stuck his hand out for more U.S. money.

In a July 9, 2009, cable, American chargé Geoffrey Pyatt said Amano was thankful for U.S. support of his election. "Amano attributed his election to support from the U.S., Australia and France, and cited U.S. intervention with Argentina as particularly decisive," the cable said.

The appreciative Amano informed Pyatt that as IAEA director general, he would take a different "approach on Iran from that of ElBaradei" and he "saw his primary role as implementing safeguards and UNSC [United Nations Security Council]/Board resolutions," i.e. U.S.-driven sanctions and demands against Iran.

Amano also discussed how to restructure the senior ranks of the IAEA, including elimination of one top official and the retention of another. "We wholly agree with Amano's assessment of these two advisors and see these decisions as positive first signs," Pyatt commented.

In return, Pyatt made clear that Amano could expect strong U.S. financial support, stating that "the United States would do everything possible to support his successful tenure as Director General and, to that end, anticipated that continued U.S. voluntary contributions to the IAEA would be forthcoming. Amano offered that a 'reasonable increase' in the regular budget would be helpful."

Pyatt learned, too, that Amano had consulted with Israeli Ambassador Israel Michaeli "immediately after his appointment" and that Michaeli "was fully confident of the priority Amano accords verification issues." Michaeli added that he discounted some of Amano's public remarks about there being "no evidence of Iran pursuing a nuclear weapons capability" as just words that Amano felt he had to say "to persuade those who did not support him about his 'impartiality.'"

In private, Amano agreed to "consultations" with the head of the Israeli Atomic Energy Commission, Pyatt reported. (It is ironic indeed that Amano would have secret contacts with Israeli officials about Iran's alleged nuclear weapons program, which has yet to yield a single bomb, when Israel possesses a large and

undeclared nuclear arsenal.)

In another leaked cable dated Oct. 16, 2009, the U.S. mission in Vienna said Amano “took pains to emphasize his support for U.S. strategic objectives for the Agency. Amano reminded ambassador [Glyn Davies] on several occasions that he was solidly in the U.S. court on every key strategic decision, from high-level personnel appointments to the handling of Iran’s alleged nuclear weapons program.

“More candidly, Amano noted the importance of maintaining a certain ‘constructive ambiguity’ about his plans, at least until he took over for DG ElBaradei in December” 2009.

In other words, Amano was a bureaucrat eager to bend in directions favored by the United States and Israel regarding Iran’s nuclear program. Amano’s behavior surely contrasted with how the more independent-minded ElBaradei resisted some of Bush’s key claims about Iraq’s supposed nuclear weapons program, correctly denouncing some documents as forgeries.

[Pyatt, who was the chief contact with Amano, is now U.S. ambassador to Ukraine and was a key figure, working with neocon Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs Victoria Nuland, in orchestrating the violent coup that overthrew the democratically elected President Viktor Yanukovich in February and touched off a confrontation between Russian President Vladimir Putin and U.S. President Barack Obama, a clash that disrupted their cooperation in trying arrange a peaceful resolution to the Iran-nuclear issue. For details, see Consortiumnews.com’s “What Neocons Want from Ukraine Crisis.”]

Salvaging Some Hype

Though Manning’s release of the embassy cables apparently scotched any large-scale deployment of the Amano ploy, some elements of the gambit did go forward nonetheless, albeit with less oomph than they might have had.

In February 2013, the front page of the Washington Post offered a taste of what the propaganda campaign might have looked like when investigative reporter Joby Warrick hyped an account about Iran’s nuclear program pushed by David Albright, director of the Institute for Science and International Security who had lent support to Bush’s invasion of Iraq a decade ago.

The Albright/Warrick alarm cited Iran’s alleged effort to place an Internet order for 100,000 ring-shaped magnets that would work in some of the country’s older centrifuges.

“Iran recently sought to acquire tens of thousands of highly specialized magnets

used in centrifuge machines, according to experts and diplomats, a sign that the country may be planning a major expansion of its nuclear program that could shorten the path to an atomic weapons capability," Warrick wrote in his lede paragraph.

You had to read to the end of the long story to hear a less strident voice, saying that Iran had previously informed IAEA inspectors that it planned to build more of its old and clunkier centrifuges, which use this sort of magnet, and that the enrichment was for civilian energy, not a nuclear bomb.

"Olli Heinonen, who led IAEA nuclear inspections inside Iran before his retirement in 2010, said the type of magnet sought by Iran was highly specific to the IR-1 centrifuge and could not, for example, be used in the advanced IR-2M centrifuges that Iran has recently tested," according to the final paragraphs of Warrick's article.

"The numbers in the order make sense, because Iran originally told us it wanted to build more than 50,000 of the IR-1s,' Heinonen said. 'The failure rate on these machines is 10 percent a year, so you need a surplus.'"

At the bottom of Warrick's story, you'd also learn that "Iran has avoided what many experts consider Israel's new 'red line': a stockpile of medium-enriched uranium greater than 530 pounds, roughly the amount needed to build a weapon if further purified."

So there was nothing urgent or particularly provocative about this alleged purchase, though the structure and placement of the Post story suggested otherwise. Many readers likely were expected to simply jump to the conclusion that Iran was on the verge of building an atomic bomb and that it was time for President Barack Obama to join Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in another Middle East war.

The pressure from the Post and other neocon-leaning news outlets on the Obama administration to fall in line with Netanyahu's belligerence toward Iran has been building for years, often with Warrick channeling anti-Iranian propaganda from Albright and his ISIS, which, in turn, seems to be a pipeline for hardliners at the IAEA.

A decade ago, Albright and the ISIS were key figures in stoking the hysteria for invading Iraq around the false allegations of its WMD program. In recent years, Albright and his institute have adopted a similar role regarding Iran and its purported pursuit of a nuclear weapon, even though U.S. intelligence agencies say Iran terminated that weapons project in 2003.

Nevertheless, Albright has transformed his organization into a sparkplug for a

new confrontation with Iran. Though Albright insists that he is an objective professional, ISIS has published hundreds of articles about Iran, which has not produced a single nuclear bomb, while barely mentioning Israel's rogue nuclear arsenal.

An examination of the ISIS Web site reveals only a few technical articles relating to Israel's nukes while ISIS has expanded its coverage of Iran's nuclear program so much that it's been moved onto a separate Web site. The articles not only hype developments in Iran but also attack U.S. media critics who question the fear-mongering about Iran.

More than a year ago when a non-mainstream journalist confronted Albright about the disparity between ISIS's concentration on Iran and *de minimis* coverage of Israel, he angrily responded that he was working on a report about Israel's nuclear program. But there is still no substantive assessment of Israel's large nuclear arsenal on the ISIS Web site, which goes back to 1993.

Despite this evidence of bias, the Post and other mainstream U.S. news outlets typically present Albright as a neutral analyst. They also ignore his checkered past, for instance, his prominent role in promoting President Bush's pre-invasion case that Iraq possessed stockpiles of WMD.

Stoking a War

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 error. But the Post's Warrick didn't, even though Albright and his ISIS were at the core of the February story, receiving credit for obtaining copies of the magnet purchase order.

So, while we'll never know if the Amano ploy would have been tried since Manning's disclosures made it unfeasible it surely would not have been unprecedented. The American people experienced similar deceptions during the run-up to war with Iraq when the Bush-43 administration assembled every scrap of suspicion about Iraq's alleged WMD and fashioned a bogus case for war.

Eventually, Manning was pulled into that war as a young intelligence analyst. He confronted so much evidence of brutality and dishonesty that he felt compelled to do something about it. What he did in leaking hundreds of thousands of documents to WikiLeaks and, thus, to other news outlets was to supply "ground truth" about war crimes committed in Iraq and Afghanistan.

His disclosure of diplomatic cables also gave the American people and the world a glimpse behind the curtain of secrecy that often conceals the dirty dealings of statecraft. Perhaps most significantly, those revelations helped sparked the Arab Spring, giving people of the Middle East a chance to finally take some political control over their own lives.

And, by letting Americans in on the truth about Amano's IAEA, Bradley Manning may have helped prevent a war with Iran.

[Pvt. Manning is now serving a 35-year prison sentence for unauthorized release of classified material.]

Investigative reporter Robert Parry broke many of the Iran-Contra stories for The Associated Press and Newsweek in the 1980s. You can buy his new book, *America's Stolen Narrative*, either in [print here](#) or as an e-book (from [Amazon](#) and [barnesandnoble.com](#)). For a limited time, you also can order Robert Parry's trilogy on the Bush Family and its connections to various right-wing operatives for only \$34. The trilogy includes *America's Stolen Narrative*. For details on

this offer, [click here.](#)
