

Punishing Poland for US Crimes

While former U.S. officials continue to deny torturing “war on terror” detainees and President Obama fails to enforce any meaningful accountability countries from the old Soviet bloc are confronting their complicity in the CIA’s crimes, writes Nat Parry.

By Nat Parry

It is one of the great ironies of the U.S.-led “war on terror” and post-Cold War transatlantic relations that democratic accountability and human rights protections at times seem stronger in the former Soviet bloc than they do in the United States. This lesson was driven home again last week when Poland paid a quarter of a million dollars to two terror suspects tortured by the CIA in a secret prison on Polish territory between 2002 and 2003.

Imposed by the European Court of Human Rights, the penalty issued against Poland prompted outrage among many Poles who felt they were being unfairly punished for American wrongdoing.

“We might have to pay compensation even though our personnel did nothing wrong,” said Radoslaw Sikorski, Poland’s former foreign minister. Sikorski noted that Poland is the only country that has sought to hold accountable its own senior officials whose decisions allowed the CIA to commit human rights violations on its territory.

This lack of accountability also goes for the United States, which has failed to investigate or prosecute any of the senior officials who authorized the human rights violations at secret CIA prisons in Poland or anywhere else.

Of the 119 known detainees held in CIA black sites between 2001 and 2006, at least 39 were subjected to torture by CIA personnel, according to the U.S. Senate Intelligence Committee report on torture released last December. The two individuals tortured in Poland, Abu Zubaydah and Abd al-Rahim al-Nashiri, were eventually sent to Guantanamo Bay, where they have remained since 2006.

While al-Nashiri is currently on trial for allegedly orchestrating the bombing of the USS Cole in 2000, Abu Zubaydah is considered one of Guantanamo’s “forever prisoners,” with no charges or trial foreseen. Not even a preliminary ruling has been made on his case in nearly seven years. In a May 12, 2015 article, ProPublica noted that his case has been stalled “for 2,477 days and counting.”

As one of his lawyers, Helen Duffy, wrote in the *Guardian* last December following the long-delayed release of the Senate report’s executive summary,

“Abu Zubaydah might now be described as exhibit A” in the CIA’s rendition and torture regime.

“He has the regrettable distinction of being the first victim of the CIA detention programme for whom, as the report makes clear, many of the torture (or ‘enhanced interrogation’) techniques were developed, and the only prisoner known to have been subject to all of them,” Duffy wrote.

The Senate report contains about 1,000 references to Abu Zubaydah specifically, and confirms the ECHR’s findings regarding the interrogation techniques that he endured. Among these were “wallings” (being slammed repeatedly against a wall), sleep deprivation for up to 180 hours (usually nude and in stress positions), and waterboarding. The waterboarding of Abu Zubaydah, to which he was subjected 83 times in one month alone, was authorized at the highest levels of the U.S. government.

He was also subjected to extreme confinement. “Over the course of the entire 20 day ‘aggressive phase of interrogation,’ Abu Zubaydah spent a total of 266 hours (11 days, 2 hours) in the large (coffin size) confinement box and 29 hours in a small confinement box, which had a width of 21 inches, a depth of 2.5 feet, and a height of 2.5 feet,” according to the Senate report. “The CIA interrogators told Abu Zubaydah that the only way he would leave the facility was in the coffin-shaped confinement box.”

Duffy notes that beyond Abu Zubaydah’s torture, the Senate report revealed how much misinformation was generated to justify his indefinite detention. Several of the CIA’s claims, in some cases reiterated long after they were known to be false, were repudiated point by point in the report.

For example, despite repeated assertions that Abu Zubaydah was “the third or fourth man in al-Qaida,” the report noted that the “CIA later concluded that Abu Zubaydah was not a member of al-Qaida.” It also refuted the government’s claims regarding his involvement in 9/11, that the interrogating team was “certain he was withholding information” and claims that his torture led to valuable actionable intelligence.

The case of Abu Zubaydah also led to the only prosecution to date in the United States associated with the CIA’s torture program although not for anyone who was involved with his ill-treatment, but for the CIA whistleblower who first exposed it.

Selective Prosecution

In a 2007 interview with ABC News, former CIA officer John Kiriakou described the waterboarding of Abu Zubaydah and later allegedly provided to a journalist

the name of a covert officer with the CIA's Counterterrorism Center who worked on the operation to capture and interrogate Abu Zubaydah. For this offense, Kiriakou was charged under the 1917 Espionage Act and accepted a plea bargain for which he spent two years in prison.

The prosecution of Kiriakou was criticized at the time by some segments of the international community. The Parliamentary Assembly of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, for example, in a resolution adopted in 2012 "condemned the prosecution that U.S. authorities have initiated against former CIA agent John Kiriakou, who is accused of providing journalists details regarding the capture of Abu Zubaydah, an al-Qaeda suspect who is said to have been tortured in a secret CIA prison in Poland and is one of two individuals granted 'victim status' by prosecutors in Warsaw."

Former U.S. Rep. Jim Moran, D-Virginia, said on the House floor on Nov. 17, 2012, that the government's targeting of Kirakou represented a "selective prosecution." He asked President Barack Obama to pardon Kiriakou and called the 15-year CIA veteran "an American hero."

With Kiriakou out of prison after serving his term but the CIA's torture victims still languishing in Gitmo with no end in sight, Poland has faced not only the political fallout for these policies but also the practical challenges of complying with the ECHR's rulings considering the logistics of compensating individuals who are incarcerated one a Palestinian and one a Saudi.

Nevertheless, "Poland is applying the ECHR's decisions," foreign ministry spokesman Marcin Wojciechowski said. "In the case of one person, the money was paid into a bank account indicated by his lawyers, in the case of the other, hit by international sanctions, we requested the creation of a judicial deposit," he added.

In accordance with the ECHR ruling, Poland has also asked the United States to rule out the death penalty for the two men in line with an EU-wide ban on capital punishment, Wojciechowski told AFP.

Plausible Deniability

It irks many in Poland that their country is facing legal repercussions for the secret rendition and detention program which the CIA operated under then-President George W. Bush in several countries across the world after the 9/11 attacks. In Poland, the notion that the former Communist country would tolerate a secret CIA prison in which torture was being used was for years derided by the country's politicians, journalists and the public as a crackpot conspiracy theory. Polish officials consistently denied the existence of any such prison.

But a string of revelations and political statements by Polish leaders acknowledged for the first time that the United States did indeed run a secret interrogation facility for terror suspects in 2002 and 2003 in a remote region of the country. In December 2014, Poland's former President Aleksander KwaÅniewski officially admitted that a secret CIA prison had existed at an airbase where terror suspects were brought for interrogation, but he insisted that Warsaw had no knowledge of abuse happening at the site.

It appears now though that the denials of knowledge regarding torture may have been a case of willful ignorance or plausible deniability enforced by millions of dollars in cash payoffs. The Senate torture report revealed that despite initial threats by Poland to halt the transfer of terror suspects to the black site 11 years ago, the government became more "flexible" after the CIA started giving it large amounts of money. Reportedly, the CIA paid Polish officials as much as \$50 million in cash to look the other way.

But, according to Radoslaw Sikorski, Poland's former foreign minister and now marshal of the lower house of the Parliament, the prison was set up out of friendship with the United States. He now concedes however that the covert relationship has proved detrimental to Poland.

"We have been embarrassed by it, but even so we do not apologize for having the closest possible security and intelligence relationship with the United States," he said. "We might have to pay compensation even though our personnel did nothing wrong. You can imagine how Polish people feel about it."

"This left bad feelings on our side," said Tadeusz Chabiera, founder of the Euro-Atlantic Association think tank in Warsaw. "We are a small country that was badly treated by a great power."

The regrets and feelings of betrayal being expressed in Poland follow a long-established pattern that goes back at least a decade. Signs of this frustration first emerged in 2004 during the U.S.-led occupation of Iraq, to which Poland committed 2,400 troops.

At the height of the Iraqi insurgency, David Ost reported in *The Nation* magazine on Sept. 16, 2004, "George W. Bush has managed to do what forty-five years of Communist rule could not: puncture the image of essential American goodness that has always been the United States' key selling point."

America's Eroding Image

In Poland, as in many countries around the world, much of that positive image was restored following the election in 2008 of Barack Obama and the promise of change that he seemed to represent. But as the Pew Research Center reported in

2013, “pro-America sentiment is slipping.”

“The decline is in no way comparable to the collapse of U.S. standing in the first decade of this century,” according to Pew, which noted that at the time of the 2013 global survey, more than six-in-ten in Poland, France, Italy and Spain had a favorable opinion of the U.S. “But the ‘Obama bounce’ in the global stature of the United States experienced in 2009 is clearly a thing of the past.”

It remains to be seen whether the recent developments on CIA torture will play any significant role in further eroding the image of the United States, but the incongruity of a small country like Poland bearing the brunt of liability for these illegal policies while no one in the United States answers for them should not be lost on any of the U.S.’s other allies.

In some of the countries that cooperated with the U.S. rendition program, the wheels of justice are still spinning, albeit slowly. A criminal investigation is ongoing in Lithuania, where prosecutors are focusing on a possible illegal border crossing involving CIA prisoner Mustafa al-Hawsawi who was allegedly tortured at a Lithuanian black site code-named Violet.

Meanwhile, calls are growing for authorities to conduct a comprehensive investigation into the existence of a CIA black site in Romania, with former Romanian President Ion Iliescu revealing last month that he had approved CIA requests to set up at least one secret prison where prisoners were subject to torture. Iliescu said he deeply regrets that decision.

Calls also continue for the United States to launch credible investigations into its own role, and to offer reparations to the victims of the rendition and torture program.

Coincidentally, the ECHR’s penalty against Poland was imposed the same week that the U.S. was urged by the United Nations to financially compensate victims of the U.S. torture regime and to prosecute the perpetrators of this abuse.

According to a report by the UN Human Rights Council’s Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review, issued on May 15, the U.S. should “ensure that all victims of torture and ill-treatment whether still in U.S. custody or not obtain redress and have an enforceable right to fair and adequate compensation and as full rehabilitation as possible, including medical and psychological assistance.”

Further, the U.S. should “ensure proper and transparent investigation and prosecution of individuals responsible for all allegations of torture and ill treatment, including those documented in the unclassified Senate summary on CIA

activities published in 2014 and provide redress to victims.”

With a September deadline to respond to the UN’s recommendations, the Obama administration will have to make a stated commitment to the world by deciding which of the recommendations will be accepted, and which will be rejected.

When it comes to torture prosecutions and compensation, it is safe to say that the world will be watching.

Nat Parry is the co-author of *Neck Deep: The Disastrous Presidency of George W. Bush*. Follow Nat Parry on Twitter @natparry.

On Iraq/Torture, Still in Denial

Ex-senior CIA official Michael Morell is making the rounds promoting a new book and recycling old excuses about the Bush administration’s innocence in invading Iraq (just bad intel, you know) and torturing prisoners (the lawyers said it was okay) and dodging pointed questions, as Sam Hussein discovered.

By Sam Hussein

On Monday, I questioned former acting CIA director Michael Morell about the lies leading up to the Iraq War and their relation to torture. He’s been making the rounds on talk shows and started the talk by speaking about the alleged “failures” of the “pre-war Iraq intelligence,” echoing a frequent mantra. The claim is that somehow the Bush administration and others didn’t engage in propaganda and deceit to sell the Iraq War, but rather, were themselves victims of bad intelligence.

So I cited a claim by the Bush administration made during the run-up to the Iraq War that was provably false. On Sept. 7, 2002, President George W. Bush held a news conference with then-British Prime Minister Tony Blair. Bush claimed there was an International Atomic Energy Agency report that claimed Iraq was “six months away from developing a weapon. I don’t know what more evidence we need.”

John R. MacArthur, author of *Second Front: Censorship and Propaganda in the Gulf War*, highlighted – at the time that, when questioned, “the IAEA responded that not only was there no new report, ‘there’s never been a report’ asserting that Iraq was six months away from constructing a nuclear weapon.”

When I confronted Morell – who was Bush’s briefer – about Bush’s statement he took no responsibility at all. “So, you know you have to ask him. You have to

ask him," Morell said.

I found it so laughable that he would say this instead of directly responding to the false statement that my initial reaction was not to bother following up on this. If he's not going to take any responsibility for Bush's false public claims, what's the point?

I'd rather expect that if I were able to corner Bush and ask him enough follow-up questions, he'd probably excuse his false statements by saying that's what his briefers told him; so they'd hide behind each other. But Morell also said, "The only thing I can tell you is what we were telling them at the time." It would certainly be worthwhile to ask him what he was telling Bush about this – or claims he was.

I then asked Morell about the Shaykh al-Libi case. Contrary to the depiction in movies like "Zero Dark Thirty" – which Morell had a hand in – that torture helped get the bad guys, the al-Libi case shows that torture was used to get false but useful information. That is, al-Libi was tortured into "confessing" that Iraq was working with al-Qaeda.

Morell gave a lengthy objection to my use of the word "torture," citing approval for "enhanced interrogation procedures" from Bush's Justice Department lawyers. Morell said: "When the Central Intelligence Agency used enhanced interrogation techniques to get information from Al Qaeda detainees, the Justice Department of United States of America on multiple occasions said it was legal, said it wasn't torture. Okay, so for you to call it torture is you calling my officers torturers. And the Justice Department of United States of America said they were not."

Morell also disputed that Egypt's torture of al-Libi was done at the U.S. government's behest, questioning what evidence I had for that. The moderator cut off the discussion at this point.

Journalist Marcy Wheeler succinctly notes about Morell's response here: "1) He doesn't deal with torture that exceeded and/or preceded DOJ guidelines. 2) Which al-Libi's torture did 3) that he doesn't actually deny al-Libi was tortured 4) which is interesting because he got the same treatment as Abu Zubaydah."

Al-Libi was captured by the U.S. in Afghanistan and turned over to the Egyptians by the CIA and then tortured into saying what the U.S. government wanted him to say – that Iraq was tied to al-Qaeda – his "confession" was featured in Secretary of State Colin Powell's speech to the UN just before the Iraq invasion. [See my ["'Both Sides' Are Wrong: Torture Did Work – to Produce Lies for War."](#)]

But, according to Morell, it's totally out of bounds for me to suggest that his torture was at the U.S. government's behest. The U.S. government merely provided him to the Egyptians and benefited from his "confession" to start a gigantic war based on "evidence" that the Bush administration is merely the victim of – or so Morell would have us believe.

There's been a fair amount said about "if we knew now what we knew then" about Iraq. I've tried to debunk the notion that we didn't know that the Bush administration was falsifying, propagandizing and lying to start the Iraq war *at the time*. And many, including myself, did real time debunking. [See: "[White House Claims: A Pattern of Deceit](#)" "[U.S. Credibility Problems](#)" "[Tough Questions for Bush on Iraq Tonight](#)."]

But we should consider this question in one respect: Given what we know now, why are people like Mr. Morell being taken the least bit seriously and why are they not being prosecuted?

One other line of defense by Morell bares comment – and one that few take exception to. When I questioned him about the Bush falsifications for war, part of his response was to say that such statements were made during the Clinton administration, too. Which is true. The Clinton administration [did lie about Iraq](#), including WMDs and [many politicians](#) – not just Jeb Bush – continue to fabricate the record.

That in no way defends what the Bush administration did. It merely highlights that establishment Democrats like those in the Clinton administration and others who voted to "authorize" the Iraq invasion are also culpable. Just because both Bushes and Clintons say something doesn't mean it's not a lie, merely that it's a particularly destructive one.

Former CIA analyst and presidential briefer Ray McGovern wrote a pair of relevant pieces, one recently ("[The Phony 'Bad Intel' Defense on Iraq](#)") and another, from 2011 ("[Rise of Another CIA Yes Man](#)") on Morell when he was acting CIA director.

[Video of full event with Morell at National Press Club.](#)

[Video of Morell questioned by Sam Hussein.](#)

Transcript at 41:00 of the video:

SAM HUSSEINI: Sam Hussein with IPA. Just to sort of get a baseline here. You were a briefer for George Bush for 9/11 and after 9/11.

MICHAEL MORELL: I was President Bush's first intelligence briefer, so I briefed

him kind of the entire calendar year of 2001. Yes.

SAM HUSSEINI: You're not acknowledging that the Bush administration falsified information on Iraqi WMDs and other aspects in the build up to the Iraq war.

MICHAEL MORELL: I'm not acknowledging it because it's not true. It is a great myth. It is a great myth that the Bush White House or hard-liners in the Bush administration pushed the Central Intelligence Agency, pushed the U.S. intelligence community and every other intelligence service in the world that looked at this issue to believe that Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass destruction. All they have to do is tell you this, that the CIA believed that Saddam had weapons of mass destruction programs long before George Bush ever came to office. We were telling Bill Clinton that.

SAM HUSSEINI: One would not be following Iraq to say the Clinton administration never falsified information on Iraq as well. So for example when Bush –

MICHAEL MORELL: I'm just not with you on the falsification, but go ahead.

SAM HUSSEINI: Yeah, well I'm putting evidence if I could.

MICHAEL MORELL: Okay.

SAM HUSSEINI: So in September 2002, when he was at a news conference with Tony Blair, and this is just one example. That there was an IAEA report saying that Iraq was "six months away from developing a weapon. I don't know how much more evidence we need." And then IAEA says there is no such report – that was just an honest mistake?

MICHAEL MORELL: So, you know you have to ask him. You have to ask him. The only thing I can tell you –

SAM HUSSEINI: – You were the briefer. –

MICHAEL MORELL: The only thing I can tell you is what we were telling them at the time. Okay? That's the only thing I can tell you.

SAM HUSSEINI: So you, among other things, in your time of the CIA had a role in "Zero Dark Thirty," which in effect glorifies the use of torture to gain "intelligence." I want to ask you about a different case and that's the case of Shaykh al-Libi, who all evidence indicates, was tortured by the Egyptian authorities at our behest.

MICHAEL MORELL: So, so –

SAM HUSSEINI: If I might – you can say whatever you want. You can say whatever

you want. You're interrupting me, I'm not interrupting you. –

MICHAEL MORELL: – But your premise is wrong.

SAM HUSSEINI: And you can say that if you like. Who was tortured in order to say that Iraq and Al Qaeda were related. This is actually in the latest Senate report on torture, among other places. Contrary to the mythology that torture breeds good intelligence – or that it's immoral – it actually breeds intentionally useful but false information. Why not?

MICHAEL MORELL: Okay, so I'm going to go back to your first comment about CIA's enhanced interrogation techniques, which you call torture. Which I want to challenge that premise right off the bat. When the Central Intelligence Agency used enhanced interrogation techniques to get information from Al Qaeda detainees, the Justice Department of United States of America on multiple occasions said it was legal, said it wasn't torture. Okay, so for you to call it torture is you calling my officers torturers. And the Justice Department of United States of America said they were not. So I'm going to defend my officers to my last breath in people calling them torturers. Number two, I'm going to challenge your premise that the Egyptians tortured al-Libi at our behest, at our behest. Not true. We never asked the Egyptians to torture al-Libi. What is your evidence for that?

SAM HUSSEINI: Well – HOST: Let him give you that evidence off-line. We have other people who want to ask questions.

Sam Hussein is communications director for the Institute for Public Accuracy. Follow him on twitter: [@samhusseini](https://twitter.com/samhusseini). [This story first appeared at [Husseini's blog](#).]

Saudi Arabia's Nuclear Bluster

Saudi Arabia and Israel keep ratcheting up the pressure to kill the deal for constraining Iran's nuclear program with the latest gambit a renewed Saudi threat to obtain its own nuclear capability if the Iran deal isn't scrapped, a warning that may be more bluster than believable, writes Jonathan Marshall.

By Jonathan Marshall

As if the Mideast weren't troubled enough, we now [learn](#) from Rupert Murdoch's *Sunday Times* that Saudi Arabia has apparently "taken the 'strategic decision' to acquire 'off-the-shelf' atomic weapons from Pakistan."

This and many recent similar stories blame the emergence of Saudi Arabia's alleged nuclear ambitions on President Barack Obama's perceived failure to check Iran. "Saudi Arabia is so angry at the emerging nuclear agreement between Iran and the major powers that it is threatening to develop its own nuclear capability, one more indication of the deep differences between the United States and the Persian Gulf Arab states over the deal," commented *The New York Times* in an editorial on May 15.

Saudi Arabia has been playing the nuclear card for years, however. In 2003, the Saudis leaked a "strategic review" that included the option of acquiring a "nuclear capability" as a deterrent. The *Guardian*, which broke the story, called it a "worrying development" that reflected "Riyadh's estrangement from Washington" and "worries about an Iranian nuclear programme."

In 2006, Saudi Arabia announced its interest in developing a nuclear energy program with other members of the Gulf Cooperation Council. As journalists reported at the time, "Few observers doubt that promoting the idea of a joint atomic energy program between the predominantly Sunni Arab states is a way for Saudi Arabia to send a message to the United States that the Arab state will match Tehran's nuclear power if it needs to."

Years have passed without the Saudis making good on these threats. And, there are strong reasons to question the veracity of leaks about Riyadh's nuclear intentions now. Many experts seriously doubt whether the Saudis really intend to break their treaty obligations and risk international sanctions by trying to acquire nuclear weapons, particularly when they have lived with a nuclear-armed Israel for years.

Saudi Arabia would require many years to build nuclear weapons from scratch; the country has only a very modest atomic energy research program, not a single nuclear power reactor, and no known enrichment facilities. Thus Riyadh's nuclear ambitions only make sense if Saudi Arabia has, as often claimed, arranged with Islamabad to obtain fully armed nuclear weapons in exchange for financing Pakistan's nuclear program.

Such claims, while not totally implausible, remain "speculation," according to the Nuclear Threat Initiative, a leading NGO devoted to proliferation issues. Stories about the Pakistan connection originated with a former Saudi diplomat who defected to the United States in the 1990s. He also claimed that Saudi Arabia provided almost \$5 billion to Saddam Hussein to finance an Iraqi nuclear weapons program.

"Riyadh has denied the veracity of Khilewi's statements, and most experts dismiss their credibility," according to NTI. "Most analysts believe it highly

unlikely Pakistan would ever follow through with such an agreement, were it to even exist, given a host of disincentives.”

The story has been kept alive over the years by Israeli intelligence leaks. As BBC news reported in 2013, “it is Israeli information – that Saudi Arabia is now ready to take delivery of finished warheads for its long-range missiles – that informs some recent US and NATO intelligence reporting. Israel of course shares Saudi Arabia’s motive in wanting to worry the US into containing Iran.”

Pakistan called the claim of a nuclear deal with Saudi Arabia “speculative, mischievous and baseless.” Of course, Islamabad would say that even if the deal were real. But Pakistan would face “huge disincentives” against transferring nuclear weapons, including the threat of international sanctions and the loss of military aid from Washington, notes Philipp Bleek, a proliferation expert at the Monterey Institute of International Studies.

“Moreover,” Bleek writes, “Pakistan is locked in an arms race with archrival India, and New Delhi’s long-term nuclear weapon production capabilities significantly exceed those of Islamabad, so the latter can ill-afford to spare a meaningful number of nuclear weapons.” Pakistan’s recent refusal to send troops to support Saudi Arabia’s attacks on Yemen is further evidence that it is no puppet of Riyadh.

Bleek observes that the very frequency of leaks about Saudi Arabia’s nuclear intentions weighs against the seriousness of that threat:

“History suggests that while some states have trumpeted their potential desire for nuclear weapons, think Germany in the early years of the Cold War, or Japan more recently, they tend not to be those that later went on to actually acquire them. And for good reason: calling attention to proliferation intentions is counterproductive if one is intent on actually proliferating. Instead, states tend to draw attention to their potential proliferation in the service of another goal: rallying others to address the security concerns that are motivating potential proliferation, and especially securing protection from powerful allies.”

Saudi Arabia’s latest nuclear leaks may be having their intended effect of bolstering the Arab monarchy’s bargaining leverage with Washington. Although President Obama stopped short of promising a formal military alliance at the recent summit with members of the Gulf Cooperation Council, he reaffirmed America’s “ironclad commitment to the security of our gulf partners,” and promised more wide-ranging military aid, including creation of “an early-warning capability for a regional missile defense system.”

The Obama administration should stop making such concessions in the face of dubious Saudi proliferation warnings. It should simply stick to its course of seeking a comprehensive nuclear agreement with Iran. Such an agreement remains the best guarantee of Saudi Arabia's long-term security. And in the short term, the Saudis have no legitimate reason to fear Iran's nuclear program, which is one of the most closely inspected on Earth.

Iran has no known nuclear weapons capability and has enriched uranium only to levels useful for medical or peaceful atomic energy applications. The International Atomic Energy Agency has uncovered no substantiated evidence of Iran attempting to break out of the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), to which Saudi Arabia is also a signatory.

If the Saudis ignore such evidence and really do seek nuclear weapons from Pakistan, the White House should take a hard line and follow the example set by the Ford administration in 1976, which warned South Korea that it would "review the entire spectrum of its relations" if Seoul moved to develop nuclear weapons.

Ideally, the United States should also begin exploring a more productive strategy for reassuring both Saudi Arabia and Iran without making concessions to either one. Instead of selling more arms, reaching new defense pacts, or cracking down further on Iran, why not get behind Saudi Arabia's longstanding support for a nuclear weapon free zone in the Middle East?

That goal was endorsed by the UN General Assembly in 2012. It may be a political non-starter for now in Washington, but the surest way to reduce the risk of proliferation in the Middle East would be to inspect, control, and eventually eliminate the region's one existing nuclear arsenal, in Israel.

Jonathan Marshall is an independent researcher living in San Anselmo, California. Some of his previous articles for Consortiumnews were "Risky Blowback from Russian Sanctions"; "Neocons Want Regime Change in Iran"; "Saudi Cash Wins France's Favor"; and "The Saudis' Hurt Feelings."
