

False Comparison of N. Korea to Iran

Opponents of a nuclear-limitation deal with Iran often cite the failed effort to constrain North Korea's nuclear weapons program. But the two cases are dramatically different from the levels of inspection involved to the nature of the political systems as ex-CIA analyst Paul R. Pillar explains.

By Paul R. Pillar

One of the lines of attack against the agreement to limit Iran's nuclear program is to liken it to the case of North Korea, with which the United States and other powers reached a deal in 1994, the so-called "Agreed Framework", that did not stop North Korea from building and testing nuclear weapons.

The most prominent opponent of any agreement with Iran, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, has been among those who have tried to make this comparison. The comparison ignores many large and important differences between the two cases.

Even just a few of those differences are sufficient to show how misplaced the comparison is. Start with the nature of the regimes involved. Iran, despite its complicated institutional arrangements that constitute departures from full democracy, has a political system in which responsiveness to public demands and expectations matters.

The political futures not only of President Hassan Rouhani but also of the Supreme Leader depend in large part on satisfying expectations for economic improvement that could come only from adherence to an agreement with the West that would bring some relief from economic sanctions. In Pyongyang, in contrast, there is a family-led band of thugs posing as a government that has had no compunction about pursuing policies that have caused mass starvation among the North Korean population.

The agreement being negotiated by Iran and the P5+1 is nothing at all like the North Korean Agreed Framework, apart from each having to do with nuclear matters. The Agreed Framework was a sketchy four-page document that provided for little in the way of monitoring and enforcement.

In contrast, the leading feature of the agreement being negotiated with Iran is its unprecedented degree of monitoring and inspections. The final agreement will have an enforcement and dispute resolution mechanism consistent with the Additional Protocol pertaining to work of the International Atomic Energy Agency.

The agreement with Iran addresses, comprehensively and in detail, all possible routes to a nuclear weapon, from the mining of uranium to the internal design of nuclear reactors. In contrast, the Agreed Framework was a deal about reactors that did not address the uranium enrichment route at all.

As sketchy as the Agreed Framework was, it was broader than the Iran agreement in that part of the bargain was that in return for the restrictions North Korea was accepting on its nuclear program the United States was expected not only to provide help in building proliferation-resistant reactors but also to provide fuel oil and to move toward normal political and economic relations.

In contrast, the Iran agreement is sharply focused on nuclear matters. Although successful implementation of the agreement might lead to worthwhile dialogue on other topics, the agreement will stand or fall on compliance by both sides regarding nuclear-related obligations.

This broader though vaguer aspect of the Agreed Framework was a large reason for the breakdown of the deal. However questionable North Korea's own behavior was, the North Koreans had good reason to be disappointed with what they regarded as Washington's failure to live up to its obligations.

In addition to the aid in building new reactors never fully materializing, the Clinton administration was slow in moving toward more normal relations. The George W. Bush administration had even less interest in moving in that direction; it consigned North Korea to the Axis of Evil and was talking publicly about militarily attacking North Korea before Pyongyang withdrew from the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty and proceeded with its bomb-building program.

The compliance issues stemming from the Agreed Framework point to one worthwhile lesson to be applied to the Iranian case, and this has to do with the care and attention required in implementing an agreement. There will need to be more care and attention, and there is no reason there cannot be, in scrupulously living up to obligations in the agreement between Iran and the P5+1 than there was with North Korea if the Iranian agreement is to succeed.

The experience of North Korea is one of the reasons for well-founded Iranian suspicion and doubt about the willingness of the United States to live up to its side of the deal. (Other reasons include some actions by the U.S. Treasury Department since the reaching of the preliminary agreement with Iran in 2013, and the majority party in the U.S. Congress saying it might destroy the deal once it has the ability to do so).

The suspicion and doubt about U.S. compliance explain Iranian determination to retain certain capabilities, such as the underground facility at Fordo, that

could function as an insurance policy should the agreement break down.

There is one other valid parallel between North Korea and what's going on now regarding the Iran negotiations. One of the most distinctive aspects of the North Korean regime's international behavior is to make trouble, and to threaten to make even more trouble, as a way of getting attention and getting its way on something else.

The troublesome act that functions as a signal might be some bellicose action against South Korea, the firing of a ballistic missile over Japan, or something else. The nuclear weapons program also serves this purpose: North Korea threatens to be a troublesome proliferator and actually *is* troublesome along this line, as a way of trying to get material aid and recognition.

The chief trouble-maker during the nuclear negotiations with Iran, the actor that has been endeavoring to sabotage the negotiations at every turn, is Netanyahu's Israeli government. Motivated less by the nuclear issue itself than by a desire to keep Iran ostracized and isolated, the Israeli government is not about to end its sabotage efforts.

But it is now thinking of how it can use the threat of more troublemaking on the issue to get some other benefits for itself. This means telling the Obama administration to pay up or else face continued vigorous efforts by Israel to use its influence in Congress to derail the deal even after it is signed and has entered into force.

Israel doesn't have the material needs that North Korea does, but it always will welcome more advanced armaments to make its regional military superiority even more overwhelmingly superior, in addition, of course, to the United States providing unstinting political cover in international organizations for Israeli policies.

The opportunities for Israel to exert this kind of pressure are enhanced by its tag-team effort with the Gulf Arabs, who have been making their own demands for more advanced arms. Then, invoking the article of faith that Israel always must be militarily superior to the Arab states, the Israeli demands go even higher.

Some of the Israeli government's followers in the U.S. Congress are going even farther and urging that Israel be given bunker-buster bombs. This would facilitate Israel being able to threaten a even greater degree of trouble: not just political shenanigans in Congress, but starting a new war in the Middle East, which would not only kill the nuclear agreement for sure but also cause all manner of other untoward consequences.

The Obama administration probably is going to have to allow itself, lest the

benefits of the nuclear agreement be lost, to be bullied into playing to some degree this extortionate game. But playing it is still distasteful, and still damaging to sound and credible U.S. foreign policy, whether those imposing the game do so with a Korean accent or an Israeli one.

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.)

Israel's Plan to Kill Lebanese Civilians

Israel has preannounced its intent to inflict heavy civilian casualties the next time it bombs southern Lebanon, already claiming that Hezbollah will be at fault because its forces are enmeshed with the population, a remarkable public admission, says Jonathan Marshall.

By Jonathan Marshall

It's a rare and remarkable event when a government broadcasts ahead of time its intent to commit war crimes. Yet that's just what senior Israeli military officials recently did in the [pages](#) of *The New York Times*.

Israeli military officials gave friendly *Times* correspondent [Isabel Kershner](#) a provocative briefing, warning (in her words) that in the "almost inevitable next battle with Hezbollah . . . many Lebanese civilians will probably be killed, and that it should not be considered Israel's fault."

Claiming that the militant Lebanese Shiite organization has stationed arms and fortified positions in various southern villages, the anonymous Israeli military briefers accused their foe of using civilians as a shield. The officers were "blunt" that those villages "will most likely be the scene of widespread destruction" and heavy civilian casualties in the wake of an Israeli response to rocket attacks.

The reporter made little attempt to check the officers' claims about Hezbollah, but that really wasn't the point. Her story was an apparent trial balloon to test international reaction should Israel undertake an all-out military campaign against the local population, as it did in Lebanon in 1978, 1982 and 1996, and in Gaza in 2008-09 and 2014. Aside from critical notice by a few [watchdog](#)

bloggers, there has been almost no reaction. The collective silence may lead Tel Aviv to believe the world is willing to give Israel the green light for mass killing of civilians.

A week before the Times story ran, Israel's defense minister was even blunter. Speaking at a conference in Jerusalem, Moshe Yaalon said Israel would not shrink from targeting civilian neighborhoods in the event of a future conflict in Lebanon or Gaza: "We are going to hurt Lebanese civilians to include kids of the family . . . We did it in [the] Gaza Strip, we are going to do it in any round of hostilities in the future."

Chilling as those words were, they simply expressed longstanding Israeli military practice and doctrine. During Israel's most recent invasion of Lebanon in 2006, for example, the Israeli Defense Forces killed hundreds of Lebanese civilians and several unarmed United Nations observers. Reports by Human Right Watch documented serious war crimes by Hezbollah, which engaged in indiscriminate rocket fire against Israel, but also by the IDF for systematically failing to distinguish between combatants and civilians:

"Since the start of the conflict, Israeli forces have consistently launched artillery and air attacks with limited or dubious military gain but excessive civilian cost. In dozens of attacks, Israeli forces struck an area with no apparent military target. In some cases, the timing and intensity of the attack, the absence of a military target, as well as return strikes on rescuers, suggest that Israeli forces deliberately targeted civilians.

"The Israeli government claims that it targets only Hezbollah, and that fighters from the group are using civilians as human shields, thereby placing them at risk. Human Rights Watch found no cases in which Hezbollah deliberately used civilians as shields to protect them from retaliatory IDF attack. . . . In none of the cases of civilian deaths documented in this report is there evidence to suggest that Hezbollah forces or weapons were in or near the area that the IDF targeted during or just prior to the attack.

"By consistently failing to distinguish between combatants and civilians, Israel has violated one of the most fundamental tenets of the laws of war: the duty to carry out attacks on only military targets."

Investigating similar crimes against civilians during the Gaza conflict of 2008-09, a UN fact-finding mission led by the eminent South African jurist Richard Goldstone drew attention to an Israeli military strategy known as the "Dahiya doctrine" after a suburb of Beirut that was heavily damaged by Israel in the 2006 war.

The Goldstone Report quoted the head of Israel's Northern Command as warning, "What happened in the Dahiya quarter of Beirut in 2006 will happen in every village from which Israel is fired on. . . We will apply disproportionate force on it and cause great damage and destruction there. From our standpoint, these are not civilian villages, they are military bases. . . This is not a recommendation. This is a plan. And it has been approved."

The Goldstone mission declared firmly that "reprisals against civilians in armed hostilities are contrary to international humanitarian law. . . . One party's targeting of civilians or civilian areas can never justify the opposing party's targeting of civilians and civilian objects, such as homes, public and religious buildings, or schools."

The Goldstone mission's damning conclusions did not stop Israel from savaging Gaza again in 2014. The United Nations estimates that at least two-thirds of the more than 2,000 victims were civilians. The Israeli group Breaking the Silence recently issued a report—"This is How We Fought in Gaza 2014"—with testimonials from Israeli soldiers about the IDF's mass destruction of civilian infrastructure and casual indifference to civilian casualties.

Israeli civilians of course deserve to live free from fear of rocket attacks, whether fired from southern Lebanon or Gaza. But Israel's chances of reaching a peaceful modus vivendi with its neighbors will remain nil if it continues responding to terror with greater terror; indeed, its collective punishment of civilians in the past contributed greatly to the rise of Hezbollah and Hamas.

Other governments, particularly Israel's friends in the United States and Europe, have an obligation to tell Tel Aviv clearly that crimes against civilians will be prosecuted and punished, not tolerated by silence or indifference.

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"; "The Saudis' Hurt Feelings"; and "Saudi Arabia's Nuclear Bluster."

You Be the Judge

Exclusive: An Australian news show bristled at being caught broadcasting misleading images designed to prove Russian President Putin was responsible for

shooting down Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 last July. The program says it simply opted for “a wide shot” to give its audience the fuller “layout,” reports Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

The Australian news show “60 Minutes” has angrily responded to my noting discrepancies between the footage that it used to claim it found the spot in eastern Ukraine where a BUK missile launcher passed after the Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 shoot-down last July and the video taken that day.

Earlier in the “60 Minutes” broadcast, the show made a point of overlaying other video from last July 17 with its own footage to demonstrate that it had found the precise locations passed by a truck suspected of hauling the missile battery eastward before the shoot-down. But the program deviated from that pattern regarding the most important video, which the program claimed proved that Russia had provided the missile that shot down MH-17 and that missile battery was making its getaway through Luhansk.

On that crucial point, the program separated the original video of a BUK anti-aircraft missile battery, apparently taken the night after the shoot-down, from the scene in which correspondent Michael Usher claims to have located the same site in Luhansk.

The separation of the two scenes made it difficult for viewers to note the many discrepancies. Indeed, almost nothing in the two scenes matched. In my article about these differences, I posted the two images from the TV show side by side so readers could decide for themselves.

In the “60 Minutes” program, Usher offered no explanation for why the pattern of using overlays was broken in this one instance. Nor did the program make any effort to explain the multiple discrepancies in the two images.

In reacting to my article, however, the show issued a statement saying that in deciding where locations were it relied on calculations by blogger Eliot Higgins “done from his house in Leicester,” England. The show then explained the discrepancies between the earlier video, as posted on social media, and the show’s footage in Luhansk, Ukraine, this way:

“We opted to do our piece to camera as a wide shot showing the whole road system so the audience could get the layout and see which way the Buk was heading. The background in our piece to camera looks different to the original Buk video simply because it was shot from a different angle. The original video was obviously shot from one of the apartments behind, through the trees – which in summer were in full leaf.”

So, the show is acknowledging that it intentionally deviated from the previous pattern of using overlays to demonstrate how precisely its team had located earlier scenes in question. But it's simply not true that by offering this "wide shot showing the whole road system" that the audience would "get the layout and see which way the Buk was heading."

All you see is Usher standing on open ground gesturing to a billboard. How any Australian viewer would get a deeper understanding of the geography of Luhansk from this "wide shot" is a mystery. And you don't get much sense of "the whole road system" either. In other words, the explanation sounds more like an excuse or a cover-up.

Given the pattern of the rest of the show, wouldn't it have made more sense to try to recreate the angle of the original video to prove the actual location as best you could rather than opting for a different angle and simply relying on Usher to make an assertion? There's an old saying in journalism, "show, don't tell," but this was a classic case of telling, not showing.

And this was not some minor point. This was proof cited by the program to say Russian officials were lying when they placed the scene of the "getaway" BUK launcher in the town of Krasnoarmiisk, northwest of Donetsk and then under Ukrainian government control. Usher dismissed that Russian claim as a lie and cited the billboard scene in Luhansk as the final proof that Russian President Vladimir Putin was responsible for killing 298 people aboard MH-17.

If the show wanted to truly nail down this significant point and was really interested in giving its viewers "the layout" of the scene in Luhansk, wouldn't it also have made sense to have footage of the apartments where the original video was supposedly shot? That would have provided some explanation for the obvious discrepancies in the two images. Instead, the show simply broke the two video scenes up in a way so a casual viewer wouldn't be able to detect the discrepancies.

The Australian show also takes issue with me writing that Usher appeared to be standing in "an open field." The show protests that "he is on a patch of grass by the road" although it sure looks like an open field in the "wide shot" giving us "the layout."

The show further protests my characterization of the scene in the original video as "overgrown," saying "it was simply shot through trees in the foreground." But note the trees and bushes along the right of the image and in the background. Beyond the positioning of this overgrowth, there appears to be almost nothing comparable between the two images, including the positioning and shapes of the billboards.

Yet, instead of grappling with these differences or trying to recreate the angle of the original video as closely as possible, the show opts for some meaningless “wide shot,” makes it difficult for anyone watching the show to compare the two scenes that flash by fairly quickly, and simply asserts as flat fact something that is still dubious that Usher and his team had located the right spot.

That strikes me as journalistically negligent if not willfully misleading. But look at the images. You be the judge.

Investigative reporter Robert Parry broke many of the Iran-Contra stories for The Associated Press and Newsweek in the 1980s. You can buy his latest book, *America’s Stolen Narrative*, either in [print here](#) or as an e-book (from [Amazon](#) and [barnesandnoble.com](#)). 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](#).
