

US and Iranian Hardliners Continue the Suffering

Ann Wright reports on a citizen peace delegation's recent trip to Iran, which included a meeting with the country's foreign minister.

By **Ann Wright**

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We knew that a CODEPINK: Women for Peace delegation to Iran would wind up in the crosshairs of the Trump administration. While he was campaigning, Donald Trump made his animosity toward Iran very clear by referring to the Obama administration's nuclear agreement with Iran as the "worst deal ever."

Despite the International Atomic Energy Agency's evidence that Tehran was complying with the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, one of Trump's first actions upon becoming president was pulling the U.S. out of the treaty and imposing brutal sanctions on the people of Iran.

These sanctions have resulted in the slashing of purchasing power of the national currency by two-thirds. We knew that U.S citizens going to Iran to talk with Iranians about the impact of the sanctions would not be popular with the Trump administration.

Despite the visas that Tehran issued to our delegation, we knew our delegation would also be under Iranian scrutiny while we were there. American journalists, IT professionals, retired UN officials and retired and former

U.S. government officials have been imprisoned.

Despite such considerations, our group still takes these trips. We endure the suspicions of governments to travel as citizen diplomats to areas of the world where our government does not want us to see the effects of U.S. policies on the lives of people in targeted countries.

As citizen diplomats, we have been labeled as “naïve tools of repressive governments” when we visited Iran, North Korea, Gaza, Egypt, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iraq and Yemen, countries where U.S. interference, invasion, occupation or support for other countries’ wars, have made life miserable and dangerous for their citizens. We encounter ordinary citizens who are concerned about the future of their children, their health and education because of military conflict or sanctions touted as a humane substitute for military conflict. We return with their stories, determined to resolve whatever political disagreement is occurring between the U.S. and the particular country.

The Knives Were Out

The knives of journalists and pundits were out for [Women Cross the DMZ in 2015](#) when we – 30 women from 15 countries, including two Nobel Peace Laureates – returned from North Korea after holding a peace conference with 250 North Korean women and peace marches with 5,000 women in Pyongyang and 2,000 women in Kaesong.

The anti-Semitism label was thrown at us when we visited Israeli-blockaded Gaza and witnessed the illegal Israeli settlements on Palestinian land in the West Bank and dared to speak and write about them. We were called the tool of

the Pakistani Taliban when we talked with families of civilians assassinated by U.S. drones in the border area of Pakistan-Afghanistan.

Our delegation's meeting with the foreign minister of Iran has already provoked harsh words from U.S. and Israeli media of collaborating with the Iranian government and FBI warning us about being agents of a foreign government.

In the nine days we were in Iran, from Feb. 26 to March 6, we talked with Iranians in schools, bazaars and markets, on squares and in mosques. Many people in Iran speak English. English is taught from elementary school. Young students ran up to us to practice their English. The Trump administration's travel ban on Iranians means that students who have been accepted to U.S. universities cannot get student visas to study in the U.S. Families with members in the U.S. cannot visit them. Iranians are turning to Europe and Asia. The U.S. travel ban on Iran and the six other countries may have been intended to isolate Iran, but instead America is isolating itself.

A surprising number of people, particularly outside of Tehran, the capital, spoke openly about their disagreements with their own government.

'We Like You, Not Your Government'

At a museum in Isfahan we talked with other visitors who were Iranian. Spotting small banners pinned to our backs that read "Peace with Iran" in English and Farsi, people came up to us, invariably beginning with, "We like Americans, but we don't like your government." Many of them added, "and we don't like our government either." The

reasons that we heard for disliking their own government included graft, corruption, those in power living the high life, too much money spent on other countries which should be used at home, mistakenly trusting the United States to lessen or end the sanctions after signing the nuclear agreement.

Iranians we met were open about the effect of the latest stringent U.S. sanctions on their daily life. The U.S.-sponsored closure of Iran's access to the international financial system means that ordinary businesses have less access to funds to purchase goods. Apps on mobile phones for paying bills or arranging for car-share rides no longer function. Marriages are postponed as families lack money for the obligatory dowries and wedding celebrations. Purchases of big-ticket items of everything from refrigerators to cars are delayed due to the hyper-inflation of the rial, Iranian currency.

From the foreign minister to the ordinary Iranians we met, all reminded us with great pride of the 2,500-year history of their country. Many spoke of the pressures from neighboring countries and destructive wars waged by neighbors and by countries from afar: the United States, Britain and Russia.

Seven countries are direct neighbors: Turkey, Iraq, Syria, Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Armenia. Seven more are within 100 miles: Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, United Arab Emirates, Oman and Yemen. Three more are within 300 miles: Georgia, Russia and Uzbekistan.

By contrast, only Canada and Mexico directly border the U.S.

and its possessions and only a few countries are within 100 miles: the Bahamas, Cuba and Russia across the Bering Sea, as Alaska geography expert Sarah Palin famously reminded us with her "I can see Russia from here" comment.

In the past 25 years, from the 1991 Gulf War onwards, the U.S. has been involved in military conflict in six of the countries surrounding Iran: Kuwait, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq, Syria and Yemen. Hundreds of thousands have died from U.S. military wars in the region. Two million Iraqis and 3 million Syrians have fled U.S.-sponsored violence and are now refugees in other countries in the region.

From 1980 to 1988, the U.S. supported Iraq with intelligence and chemical weapons in its horrific eight-year war on Iran, which began one year after the Iranian revolution overthrew the U.S. backed government of the Shah of Iran. The Shah had come to power as a result of the American-Anglo orchestrated overthrow of the elected president of Iran in 1953.

Massive Cemetery

On the way from Tehran to Isfahan, we were asked to visit the massive cemetery outside of Tehran with the graves of tens of thousands of Iranians killed during the Iraqi war on Iran. It is estimated that one million Iranians died defending their country from the Iraqi attacks and that between 250,000-500,000 Iraqis died. The road leading to the cemetery has flower stands along the route for visitors to arrive with flowers to place on the graves. Thousands of Iranians visit the cemetery each day. We spoke with one older woman who said she comes to the cemetery each day as

all of her sons are buried here. The entire country including very young kids were mobilized to stop the Iraqi invasion of Iran.

The cemetery is the equivalent of Arlington National cemetery outside of Washington, D.C., where many international guests visit to see the history of the United States through the graves of those who were killed in many U.S. wars.

The U.S. military bases surrounding Iran are a constant reminder of the U.S. military threat. U.S. combat aircraft and drones fly daily from U.S. air bases in the region. Not shown on the map are the fleet of U.S. Navy and Coast Guard ships that since the 1970s have had a permanent presence in the waters off the coast of Iran in the Persian Gulf.

One incident weighs on the minds of Iranians, much as the events of 9/11 do on Americans. On July 3, 1988, the USS Vincennes, a U.S. guided-missile cruiser, used two radar-guided missiles to shoot down an Iranian civilian passenger aircraft, Iran Air flight 655, that had taken off from the coastal city of Bandar Abbas, Iran. The flight was still climbing on its regularly scheduled flight to Dubai when it was blown to pieces. Iran Air flight 655 was still in Iranian airspace, on its prescribed routine daily flight route on established air lanes, emitting by radio the standard commercial identifying data when the missiles struck. Two hundred and ninety passengers and crew, including 66 children, were killed.

Earlier in the day on July 3, 1988, the captain of the USS Vincennes, Will Rogers III, had sunk in Iranian waters, two

Iranian gunboats and damaged a third. Captain David Carlson of the U.S. Navy frigate "*Sides*" that was also on patrol in the Persian Gulf, later told investigators that the destruction of the airliner by the missiles of the USS Vincennes "marked the horrifying climax to Rogers' aggressiveness." Incredibly, in 1990, Rogers was awarded the Legion of Merit decoration "for exceptionally meritorious conduct in the performance of outstanding service as commanding officer ... from April 1987 to May 1989." The citation made no mention of the shoot-down of Iran Air 655.

'Never Apologize'

As vice president, George H.W. Bush argued at the United Nations that the U.S. attack on Iranian Airbus flight 655 had been a wartime incident and that the crew had acted appropriately to the situation at the time. He famously and tragically said: "I'll never apologize for the United States of America, ever. I don't care what the facts are." It was not until 1996 that the U.S. agreed to a \$132 million out-of-court settlement in a case brought by Iran in 1989 against the U.S. in the International Court of Justice. The U.S. paid additional compensation for the 38 non-Iranian deaths.

While the vice president of the United States would not make an apology to the people of Iran, our delegation did.

Barbara Briggs-Letson, a member of our delegation, created a beautiful book expressing our heartfelt remorse. It contains several poems and the name of each person on the flight written in Farsi. We showed the book to Foreign Minister Zarif during our meeting with him and he was very moved by

our gesture. A few days later, we gave the book to the Tehran Peace Museum where it will be on permanent display.

The effect of U.S. sanctions on Iran, particularly in the medical field, were brought home to us vividly by people who told us of family members who have died because they were unable to get proper treatment with the most efficient drugs due to sanctions.

Sanctions Block Medical Equipment

Dialysis patients who could be helped by state-of-the-art equipment from Europe or the U.S. are denied that equipment by the sanctions. The financial sanctions block purchase of medicines and medical equipment. Insurance companies in the U.S. and Europe are blocked from paying directly to hospitals medical bills of citizens who need emergency medical care.

While in Iran, a member of our own delegation had chest pains and was taken to hospital where he was diagnosed with heart artery blockage. His family in the U.S., the medical doctor in Iran and a medical doctor on our delegation recommended that he not try to return to the U.S. without determining the extent of blockage and that he have an angioplasty procedure in Iran. The angioplasty showed dangerous blockage of three arteries. Stents made in the United States were placed in his arteries during the angioplasty procedure to open up the arteries. He would not have been able to travel safely back to the U.S. without the stents.

When the family and the U.S. Interests Section at the Swiss Embassy contacted the patient's insurance carrier, Kaiser

Permanente, they were told that due to the sanctions, the insurance company could not pay the Iranian hospital directly, but the patient could be reimbursed after his return to the United States. The U.S. Embassy in Switzerland made a loan through the U.S. Interests section at the Swiss Embassy in Tehran to pay for the medical procedure, which the patient will repay.

Sanctions were a topic of discussion when we had the opportunity to meet with Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif. In a 90-minute talk on our first morning in Tehran, Zarif reminded us that that Iran's 80 million people have lived for the past 40 years under some level of U.S. sanctions. U.S. sanctions on Iran began soon after the 1979 revolution and the student seizure of the U.S. Embassy and holding of 52 U.S. diplomats for 444 days.

Zarif told our delegation: "...the U.S. difficulty with Iran is not because of the region, not because of human rights, not because of weapons, not because of the nuclear issue – it's just because we decided to be independent – that's it – that's our biggest crime. Iranians are resilient people who will resist the arbitrary actions of the Trump administration in dumping the nuclear agreement and intimidating European partners from honoring the commitments of the agreement to loosening sanctions."

Zarif said that Iran had worked with the United States in the days after 9/11 to provide information on the Taliban, al Qaeda and other groups in Afghanistan. Iranian cooperation was "rewarded" three months later by the Bush administration, no doubt led by National Security Advisor John Bolton, with placement on Bush's Axis of Evil list:

Iran, Iraq and North Korea.

In an overview of military budgets and spending, he said Saudi Arabia spends \$67 billion buying weapons from the U.S. “Last year, the West sold \$100 billion of weaponry to GCC countries – these small emirates in the Persian Gulf. The entire population of these countries, I don’t think would reach 40 million. A hundred billion dollars in weapons. I don’t, I don’t believe with all due respect they know how to use them. Because they have not been able to defeat basically defenseless people in Yemen. For four years. The war in Yemen, this April, will be 4-years-old.”

Yemen Ceasefire Efforts

Zarif also spoke of his efforts with the U.S. in 2015 to broker a ceasefire to stop the brutal Saudi bombing and blockade on Yemen. The Saudis, after first agreeing to a ceasefire, backed out of the agreement and then the United States, he said, blamed Iran, not Saudi Arabia.

“When the war started, I was involved in the most difficult stage of the negotiations on the nuclear case. Because if you remember in 2015, Congress set a deadline that unless we had a framework agreement on the nuclear issue by April first, Congress would impose sanctions that the U.S. administration would not be able to waive. We were running against a deadline in Lausanne (Switzerland) when we had that stage of negotiations. And yet, John Kerry and I spent two days from that precious time talking about how to end the war in Yemen although that was not my mandate, but I thought the war in Yemen was so disastrous that we should bring it to an end.”

Zarif continued, "John Kerry and I reached an understanding that we need to end this war. At that time the current minister of state of Saudi Arabia, Adel al-Jubeir, was U.S. ambassador–Saudi ambassador to the U.S. After we reached an agreement on April second or third, John Kerry went back to Washington and talked to Adel al-Jubeir. He went back to Saudi Arabia and got an OK for a ceasefire in Yemen. And he informed me that we can have a ceasefire. I immediately contacted the Houthis and got them to agree to a ceasefire. This is April 2015. In a few days it will be four years."

He added, "Then I was boarding a plane to Indonesia...I told my deputy – wait for a call from Secretary Kerry, he'll tell you that the final agreement has arrived. We arrived in Indonesia eight hours later, I called Secretary Kerry and said what happened? He said, 'Saudis reneged, because they believed they could have a military victory in three weeks.' I told him they won't be able to have a military victory, not in three weeks, not in three months, not in three years. But he said, 'what can I do? I'm fed up with them, they won't budge.'" I said, 'Fine, we tried.' "

Zarif shook his head and said, "The next day, the very next day, President Obama, of all people, made a public statement accusing Iran of interfering in Yemen. The very next day. I told them, OK – you couldn't get it (the ceasefire) from your allies, why are you blaming us? You don't want to blame your allies, fine – but, why are you blaming us?"

Much to our surprise, Zarif resigned as foreign minister only a few hours after speaking to our delegation. Reportedly, he resigned after his exclusion from a meeting held with Syrian dictator Bashar al-Assad the

previous day. Other senior regime officials, including President Rouhani, Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, and Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps-Quds Force commander Gen. Qassem Soleimani had met with the Syrian dictator Assad in Tehran without Zarif being present.

Less than 24 hours later, Rouhani rejected Zarif's resignation, saying that it would be "against national interests" to accept it.

In an Instagram posting announcing his resignation to the public, Zarif wrote that the Iranian people were displeased with the results of his work on the nuclear framework, giving up thousands of centrifuges and allowing inspections of its nuclear facilities in exchange for lifting of sanctions and a return to normal business around the world. But the U.S. had broken the agreement and had placed heavier sanctions on Iran and extreme pressure and sanctions on any government or financial entity doing business with Iran. Zarif felt he had let the Iranian people down.

Hardliners in both the Iranian and the U.S. governments make the opportunity for dialogue and negotiations very difficult resulting in the people of Iran continuing to suffer the burden of both Iranian and American ideologies and politicians that have returned international relations to a standstill.

In a move by the hardliners of Iran, on March 12, 2019, Iranian human rights lawyer [Nasrin Sotoudeh was sentenced](#) to at least seven years' imprisonment and perhaps up to 33 years and 148 lashes.

Sotoudeh won the Sakharov Prize in 2012 and was convicted

following a trial held in absentia. Her husband Reza Khandan was sentenced to six years' imprisonment in January 2019. The European Union has stated that the right to protest peacefully, as well as the right to express opinion in a non-violent manner, are cornerstones of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Iran is a party.

Ann Wright was in the U.S.Army/Army Reserves for 29 years and retired as a colonel. She was a U.S. diplomat for 16 years and served in U.S. embassies in Nicaragua, Grenada, Somalia, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Micronesia, Afghanistan and Mongolia. She resigned from the U.S. government in March 2003 in opposition to Bush's war on Iraq.

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How Syrian-Nuke Evidence Was Faked

Exclusive: In joining Israel and the White House selling military intervention in Syria, the CIA and international inspectors hid key evidence that would undermine the case, says Gareth Porter in a second part of [a two-part series](#).

By Gareth Porter

When Yousry Abushady studied the highly unusual May 2008 CIA video on a Syrian

nuclear reactor that was allegedly under construction when Israeli jet destroyed it seven months earlier, the senior specialist on North Korean nuclear reactors on the International Atomic Energy Agency's staff knew that something was very wrong.



Abushady quickly determined that the CIA had been seriously misled by Israeli intelligence and immediately informed the two highest officials of the Vienna-based IAEA, Director General Mohamed ElBaradei and Deputy Director for Safeguards, Olli Heinonen, that the CIA's conclusions were not consistent with the most basic technical requirements for such a reactor.

But it did not take long for Abushady to realize that the top IAEA officials were not interested in drawing on his expertise in regard to the alleged Syrian reactor. In fact, the IAEA cited nonexistent evidence linking the site to a Syrian nuclear program while covering up real evidence that would have clearly refuted such a claim, according to Abushady and other former senior IAEA officials.

When Abudhsady met with Heinonen to discuss his analysis of the CIA's case in May 2008, Abushady asked to be included on the team for the anticipated inspection of the al-Kibar site because of his unique knowledge of that type reactor.

But Heinonen refused his request, citing an unwritten IAEA rule that inspectors are not allowed to carry out inspections in their countries of origin. Abushady objected, pointing out that he is Egyptian, not Syrian, to which Heinonen responded, "But you are an Arab and a Muslim!" according to Abushady. Heinonen declined a request for his comment on Abushady's account of the conversation.

A Curious Inspection

In June 2008, an IAEA team consisting of Heinonen and two other inspectors took environmental samples at the al-Kibar site. In November 2008, the IAEA issued a report saying that laboratory analysis of a number of natural uranium particles collected at the site "indicates that the uranium is anthropogenic," meaning that it had been processed by humans.

The implication was clearly that this was a reason to believe that the site had been connected with a nuclear program. But former IAEA officials have raised serious questions about Heinonen's handling of the physical evidence gathered from the Syrian site as well as his characterization of the evidence in that and other IAEA reports.

Tariq Rauf who headed the IAEA's Verification and Security Policy Coordination Office until 2011, has pointed out that one of the IAEA protocols applicable to these environmental samples is that "the results from all three or four labs to have analyzed the sample must match to give a positive or negative finding on the presence and isotopics of uranium and/or plutonium."

However, in the Syrian case the laboratories to which the samples had been sent had found no evidence of such man-made uranium in the samples they had tested. ElBaradei himself had announced in late September, three months after the samples had originally been taken but weeks before the report was issued, "So far, we have found no indication of any nuclear material." So the November 2008 IAEA report claiming a positive finding was not consistent with its protocols.

But the samples had been sent to yet another laboratory, which had come up with a positive test result for a sample, which had then touted as evidence that the site had held a nuclear reactor. That in itself is an indication that a fundamental IAEA protocol had been violated in the handling of the samples from Syria.

One of the inspectors involved in the IAEA inspection at al-Kibar later revealed to a fellow IAEA inspector what actually happened in the sample collection there. Former senior IAEA inspector Robert Kelley recalled in an interview that, after the last results of the samples from the al-Kibar inspection had come back from all the laboratories, the inspector, Mongolian national Orlokh Dorjkhaidav, came to see him because he was troubled by the results and wanted to tell someone he trusted.

Negative Results

Dorjkhaidav told Kelley that all the samples taken from the ground in the vicinity of the bombed building had tested negative for man-made uranium and that the only sample that had tested positive had been taken in the toilet of

the support building.

Dorjkhaidav later left the IAEA and returned to Mongolia, where he died in December 2015. A [video obituary for Dorjkhaidav](#) confirmed his participation in the inspection in Syria. Kelley revealed the former inspector's account to this writer only after Dorjkhaidav's death.

In an e-mail response to a request for his comment on Kelley's account of the Syrian environmental samples, Heinonen would neither confirm nor deny that the swipe sample described by Dorjkhaidav had been taken inside the support building. But in January 2013, [David Albright](#), Director of the Institute for Science and International Security in Washington, D.C., who has co-authored several articles with Heinonen, acknowledged in a commentary on his think tank's website that the al-Kibar uranium particles had been "found in a changing room in a building associated with the reactor."

Given the dispersal of any nuclear material around the site by the Israeli bombing, if man-made uranium was present at the site, it should not have shown up only inside the support facility but should have been present in the samples taken from the ground outside.

Former IAEA senior inspector Kelley said in an e-mail that a "very likely explanation" for this anomaly is that it was a case of "cross contamination" from the inspector's own clothing. Such cross contamination had occurred in IAEA inspections on a number of occasions, according to both Kelley and Rauf.

Kelley, who had been in charge of inspections in Iraq in the early 1990s, recalled that a set of environmental swipes taken from nuclear facilities that the United States had bombed in Iraq had appeared to show that that Iraq had enriched uranium to 90 percent. But it turned out that they had been taken with swipe paper that had been contaminated accidentally by particles from the IAEA laboratory.

But what bothered Abushady the most was that the IAEA report on Syria had remained silent on the crucial fact that none of the sample results had shown any trace of nuclear-grade graphite.

Abushady recalled that when he challenged Heinonen on the absence of any mention of the nuclear graphite issue in the draft report in a Nov. 13, 2008 meeting, Heinonen said the inspectors had found evidence of graphite but added, "We haven't confirmed that it was nuclear-grade."

Abushady retorted, "Do you know what nuclear-grade graphite is? If you found it you would know it immediately."

Heinonen was invited to comment on Abushady's account of that meeting for this article but declined to do so.

After learning that the report scheduled to be released in November would be silent on the absence of nuclear graphite, Abushady sent a letter to ElBaradei asking him not to release the report on Syria as it was currently written. Abushady protested the report's presentation of the environmental sampling results, especially in regard to nuclear-grade graphite.

"In my technical view," Abushady wrote, "these results are the basis to confirm the contrary, that the site cannot [have been] actually a nuclear reactor."

But the report was published anyway, and a few days later, ElBaradei's Special Assistant Graham Andrew responded to Abushady's message by ordering him to "stop sending e-mails on this subject" and to "respect established lines of responsibility, management and communication."

A Clear Message

The message was clear: the agency was not interested in his information despite the fact that he knew more about the issue than anyone else in the organization.

At a briefing for Member States on the Syria reactor issue on Feb. 26, 2009, the Egyptian representative to the IAEA confronted Heinonen on the absence of nuclear-grade graphite in the environmental samples. This time, Heinonen had a different explanation for the failure to find any such graphite. He responded that it was "not known whether the graphite was in the building at the time of the destruction," according to the diplomatic cable reporting on the briefing that was later released by WikiLeaks.

But that response, too, was disingenuous, according to Abushady. "Graphite is a structural part of the reactor core in the gas-cooled reactor," he explained. "It is not something you add at the end."

The IAEA remained silent on the question of graphite in nine more reports issued over more than two years. When the IAEA finally mentioned the issue for the first time officially in a May 2011 report, it claimed that the graphite particles were "too small to permit an analysis of the purity compared to that normally required for use in a reactor."

But American nuclear engineer Behrad Nakhai, who worked at Oak National Laboratories for many years, said an interview that the laboratories definitely have the ability to determine whether the particles were nuclear grade or not, so the claim "doesn't make sense."

News outlets have never reported on the IAEA's role in helping to cover up the false CIA claim of a North-Korean-style nuclear reactor in the desert by a misleading portrayal of the physical evidence collected in Syria and suppressing the evidence that would have made that role clear.

Heinonen, who was directly responsible for the IAEA's role in the Syria cover-up, left the IAEA in August 2010 and within a month was given a position at Harvard University's Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs. He has continued to take positions on the Iran nuclear negotiations that were indistinguishable from those of the Netanyahu government. And he is now senior adviser on science and non-proliferation at the Foundation for the Defense of Democracies, a think tank whose positions on the Iran nuclear issues have closely followed those of the Likud governments in Israel.

Gareth Porter is an independent investigative journalist and historian on U.S. national security policy and the recipient of the 2012 Gellhorn Prize for journalism. His most recent book is *Manufactured Crisis: the Untold Story of the Iran Nuclear Scare*, published in 2014. [For a previous segment of this two-part series, see

<https://consortiumnews.com/2017/11/18/israels-ploy-selling-a-syrian-nuke-strike/>]

Israel's Ploy Selling a Syrian Nuke Strike

Exclusive: The Iraq WMD fiasco wasn't the only time political pressure twisted U.S. intelligence judgments. In 2007, Israel sold the CIA on a dubious claim about a North Korean nuclear reactor in the Syrian desert, reports Gareth Porter.

By Gareth Porter

In September 2007, Israeli warplanes bombed a building in eastern Syria that the Israelis claimed held a covert nuclear reactor that had been built with North Korean assistance. Seven months later, the CIA released an extraordinary 11-minute video and mounted press and Congressional briefings that supported that claim.

But nothing about that alleged reactor in the Syrian desert turns out to be what it appeared at the time. The evidence now available shows that there was no such

nuclear reactor, and that the Israelis had misled George W. Bush's administration into believing that it was in order to draw the United States into bombing missile storage sites in Syria. Other evidence now suggests, moreover, that the Syrian government had led the Israelis to believe wrongly that it was a key storage site for Hezbollah missiles and rockets.

The International Atomic Agency's top specialist on North Korean reactors, Egyptian national Yousry Abushady, warned top IAEA officials in 2008 that the published CIA claims about the alleged reactor in the Syrian desert could not possibly have been true. In a series of interviews in Vienna and by phone and e-mail exchanges over several months Abushady detailed the technical evidence that led him to issue that warning and to be even more confident about that judgment later on. And a retired nuclear engineer and research scientist with many years of experience at Oak Ridge National Laboratory has confirmed a crucial element of that technical evidence.

Published revelations by senior Bush administration officials show, moreover, that principal U.S. figures in the story all had their own political motives for supporting the Israeli claim of a Syrian reactor being built with North Korean help.

Vice President Dick Cheney hoped to use the alleged reactor to get President George W. Bush to initiate U.S. airstrikes in Syria in the hope of shaking the Syrian-Iranian alliance. And both Cheney and then CIA Director Michael Hayden also hoped to use the story of a North Korean-built nuclear reactor in Syria to kill a deal that Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice was negotiating with North Korea on its nuclear weapons program in 2007-08.

Mossad Chief's Dramatic Evidence

In April 2007 the chief of Israel's Mossad foreign intelligence agency, Meir Dagan, presented Cheney, Hayden and National Security Adviser Steven Hadley with evidence of what he said was a nuclear reactor being constructed in eastern Syria with the help of the North Koreans. Dagan showed them nearly a hundred hand-held photographs of the site revealing what he described as the preparation for the installation of a North Korean reactor and claimed that it was only a few months from being operational.

The Israelis made no secret of their desire to have a U.S. airstrike destroy the alleged nuclear facility. Prime Minister Ehud Olmert called President Bush immediately after that briefing and said, "George, I'm asking you to bomb the compound," according to the account in Bush's memoirs.

Cheney, who was known to be a personal friend of Olmert, wanted to go further. At White House meetings in subsequent weeks, Cheney argued forcefully for a U.S.

attack not only on the purported reactor building but on Hezbollah weapons storage depots in Syria. Then-Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, who participated in those meetings, recalled in his own memoirs that Cheney, who was also looking for an opportunity to provoke a war with Iran, hoped to “rattle Assad sufficiently so as to end his close relationship with Iran” and “send a powerful warning to the Iranians to abandon their nuclear ambitions.”

CIA Director Hayden aligned the agency clearly with Cheney on the issue, not because of Syria or Iran but because of North Korea. In his book, *Playing to the Edge*, published last year, Hayden recalls that, at a White House meeting to brief President Bush the day after Dagan’s visit, he whispered in Cheney’s ear, “You were right, Mr. Vice-President.”

Hayden was referring to the fierce political struggle within the Bush administration over North Korea policy that had been underway ever since Condoleezza Rice had become Secretary of State in early 2005. Rice had argued that diplomacy was the only realistic way to get Pyongyang to retreat from its nuclear weapons program. But Cheney and his administration allies John Bolton and Robert Joseph (who succeeded Bolton as the key State Department policymaker on North Korea after Bolton became U.N. Ambassador in 2005) were determined to end the diplomatic engagement with Pyongyang.

Cheney was still maneuvering to find a way to prevent the successful completion of the negotiations, and he saw the story of a Syrian nuclear reactor built secretly in the desert with help from the North Koreans as bolstering his case. Cheney reveals in his own memoirs that in January 2008, he sought to sandbag Rice’s North Korea nuclear deal by getting her to agree that a failure by North Korea to “admit they’ve proliferating to the Syrians would be a deal killer.”

Three months later, the CIA released its unprecedented 11-minute video supporting the entire Israeli case for a North-Korean-style nuclear reactor that was nearly completed. Hayden recalls that his decision to release the video on the alleged Syrian nuclear reactor in April 2008 was “to avoid a North Korean nuclear deal being sold to a Congress and a public ignorant of this very pertinent and very recent episode.”

The video, complete with computer reconstructions of the building and photographs from the Israelis made a big splash in the news media. But one specialist on nuclear reactors who examined the video closely found abundant reason to conclude that the CIA’s case was not based on real evidence.

Technical Evidence against a Reactor

Egyptian national Yousry Abushady was a PhD in nuclear engineering and 23-year

veteran of the IAEA who had been promoted to section head for Western Europe in the operations division of agency's Safeguards Department, meaning that he was in charge of all inspections of nuclear facilities in the region. He had been a trusted adviser to Bruno Pellaud, IAEA Deputy Director General for Safeguards from 1993 to 1999, who told this writer in an interview that he had "relied on Abushady frequently."

Abushady recalled in an interview that, after spending many hours reviewing the video released by the CIA in April 2008 frame by frame, he was certain that the CIA case for a nuclear reactor at al-Kibar in the desert in eastern Syria was not plausible for multiple technical reasons. The Israelis and the CIA had claimed the alleged reactor was modeled on the type of reactor the North Koreans had installed at Yongbyon called a gas-cooled graphite-moderated (GCGM) reactor.

But Abushady knew that kind of reactor better than anyone else at the IAEA. He had designed a GCGM reactor for his doctoral student in nuclear engineering, had begun evaluating the Yongbyon reactor in 1993, and from 1999 to 2003 had headed the Safeguards Department unit responsible for North Korea.

Abushady had traveled to North Korea 15 times and conducted extensive technical discussions with the North Korean nuclear engineers who had designed and operated the Yongbyon reactor. And the evidence he saw in the video convinced him that no such reactor could have been under construction at al-Kibar.

On April 26, 2008, Abushady sent a "preliminary technical assessment" of the video to IAEA Deputy Director General for Safeguards Olli Heinonen, with a copy to Director General Mohamed ElBaradei. Abushady observed in his memorandum that the person responsible for assembling the CIA video was obviously unfamiliar with either the North Korean reactor or with GCGM reactors in general.

The first thing that struck Abushady about the CIA's claims was that the building was too short to hold a reactor like the one in Yongbyon, North Korea.

"It is obvious," he wrote in his "technical assessment" memo to Heinonen, "that the Syrian building with no UG [underground] construction, can not hold a [reactor] similar [to] NK GCR [North Korean gas-cooled reactor]."

Abushady estimated the height of the North Korean reactor building in Yongbyon at a 50 meters (165 feet) and estimated that the building at al-Kibar at a little more than a third as tall.

Abushady also found the observable characteristics of the al-Kibar site inconsistent with the most basic technical requirements for a GCGM reactor. He pointed out that the Yongbyon reactor had no less than 20 supporting buildings on the site, whereas the satellite imagery shows that the Syrian site did not

have a single significant supporting structure.

The most telling indication of all for Abushady that the building could not have been a GCGM reactor was the absence of a cooling tower to reduce the temperature of the carbon dioxide gas coolant in such a reactor.

“How can you work a gas-cooled reactor in a desert without a cooling tower?” Abushady asked in an interview.

IAEA Deputy Director Heinonen claimed in an IAEA report that the site had sufficient pumping power to get river water from a pump house on the nearby Euphrates River to the site. But Abushady recalls asking Heinonen, “How could this water be transferred for about 1,000 meters and continue to the heat exchangers for cooling with the same power?”

Robert Kelley, a former head of the U.S. Department of Energy’s Remote Sensing Laboratory and former senior IAEA inspector in Iraq, noticed another fundamental problem with Heinonen’s claim: the site had no facility for treating the river water before it reached the alleged reactor building.

“That river water would have been carrying debris and silt into the reactor heat exchangers,” Kelley said in an interview, making it highly questionable that a reactor could have operated there.

Yet another critical piece that Abushady found missing from the site was a cooling pond facility for spent fuel. The CIA had theorized that the reactor building itself contained a “spent fuel pond,” based on nothing more than an ambiguous shape in an aerial photograph of the bombed building.

But the North Korean reactor at Yongbyon and all 28 other GCGM reactors that had been built in the world all have the spent fuel pond in a separate building, Abushady said. The reason, he explained, was that the magnox cladding surrounding the fuel rods would react to any contact with moisture to produce hydrogen that could explode.

But the definitive and irrefutable proof that no GCGM reactor had been present at al-Kibar came from the environmental samples taken by the IAEA at the site in June 2008. Such a reactor would have contained nuclear-grade graphite, Abushady explained, and if the Israelis had actually bombed a GCGM reactor, it would have spread particles of nuclear-grade graphite all over the site.

Behrad Nakhai, a nuclear engineer at Oak Ridge National Laboratory for many years, confirmed Abshuady’s observation in an interview. “You would have had hundreds of tons of nuclear-grade graphite scattered around the site,” he said, “and it would have been impossible to clean it up.”

IAEA reports remained silent for more than two years about what the samples showed about nuclear-grade graphite, then claimed in a May 2011 report that the graphite particles were “too small to permit an analysis of the purity compared to that normally required for use in a reactor.” But given the tools available to laboratories, the IAEA claim that they couldn’t determine whether the particles were nuclear grade or not “doesn’t make sense,” Nakhai said.

Hayden acknowledged in his 2016 account that “key components” of a nuclear reactor site for nuclear weapons were “still missing.” The CIA had tried to find evidence of a reprocessing facility in Syria that could be used to obtain the plutonium for a nuclear bomb but had been unable to find any trace of one.

The CIA also had found no evidence of a fuel fabrication facility, without which a reactor could not have gotten the fuel rods to be reprocessed. Syria could not have gotten them from North Korea, because the fuel fabrication plant at Yongbyon had produced no fuel rods since 1994 and was known to have fallen into serious disrepair after the regime had agreed to scrap its own plutonium reactor program.

Manipulated and Misleading Photographs

Hayden’s account shows that he was ready to give the CIA’s stamp of approval to the Israeli photographs even before the agency’s analysts had even begun analyzing them. He admits that when he met Dagan face-to-face he didn’t ask how and when Mossad had obtained the photographs, citing “espionage protocol” among cooperating intelligence partners. Such a protocol would hardly apply, however, to a government sharing intelligence in order to get the United States to carry out an act of war on its behalf.

The CIA video relied heavily on the photographs that Mossad had given to Bush administration in making its case. Hayden writes that it was “pretty convincing stuff, if we could be confident that the pictures hadn’t been altered.” But by his own account Hayden knew Mossad had engaged in at least one deception. He writes that when CIA experts reviewed the photographs from Mossad, they found that one of them had been photo-shopped to remove the writing on the side of a truck.

Hayden professes to have had no concern about that photo-shopped picture. But after this writer asked how CIA analysts interpreted Mossad’s photo shopping of the picture as one of the questions his staff requested in advance of a possible interview with Hayden, he declined the interview.

Abushady points out that the main issues with the photographs the CIA released publicly are whether they were actually taken at the al-Kibar site and whether

they were consistent with a GCGM reactor. One of the photographs showed what the CIA video called “the steel liner for the reinforced-concrete reactor vessel before it was installed.” Abushady noticed immediately, however, that nothing in the picture links the steel liner to the al-Kibar site.

Both the video and CIA’s press briefing explained that the network of small pipes on the outside of the structure was for “cooling water to protect the concrete against the reactor’s intense heat and radiation.”

But Abushady, who specializes in such technology, pointed out that the structure in the picture bore no resemblance to a Gas-Cooled Reactor vessel. “This vessel cannot be for a Gas-Cooled Reactor,” Abushady explained, “based on its dimensions, its thickness and the pipes shown on the side of the vessel.”

The CIA video’s explanation that the network of pipes was necessary for “cooling water” made no sense, Abushady said, because gas-cooled reactors use only carbon dioxide gas – not water – as a coolant. Any contact between water and the Magnox-cladding used in that type of reactor, Abushady explained, could cause an explosion.

A second Mossad photograph showed what the CIA said were the “exit points” for the reactor’s control rods and fuel rods. The CIA juxtaposed that photograph with a photograph of the tops of the control rods and fuel rods of the North Korean reactor at Yongbyon and claimed a “very close resemblance” between the two.

Abushady found major differences between the two pictures, however. The North Korean reactor had a total of 97 ports, but the picture allegedly taken at al-Kibar shows only 52 ports. Abushady was certain that the reactor shown in the photograph could not have been based on the Yongbyon reactor. He also noted that the picture had a pronounced sepia tone, suggesting that it was taken quite a few years earlier.

Abushady warned Heinonen and ElBaradei in his initial assessment that the photo presented as taken from inside the reactor building appeared to an old photo of a small gas-cooled reactor, most likely an early such reactor built in the U.K.

A Double Deception

Many observers have suggested that Syria’s failure to protest the strike in the desert loudly suggests that it was indeed a reactor. Information provided by a former Syrian air force major who defected to an anti-Assad military command in Aleppo and by the head of Syria’s atomic energy program helps unlock the mystery of what was really in the building at al-Kibar.

The Syrian major, “Abu Mohammed,” told The Guardian in February 2013 that he was

serving in the air defense station at Deir Azzor, the city nearest to al-Kibar, when he got a phone call from a Brigadier General at the Strategic Air Command in Damascus just after midnight on Sept. 6, 2007. Enemy planes were approaching his area, the general said, but "you are to do nothing."

The major was confused. He wondered why the Syrian command would want to let Israeli fighter planes approach Deir Azzor unhindered. The only logical reason for such an otherwise inexplicable order would be that, instead of wanting to keep the Israelis away from the building at al-Kibar, the Syrian government actually wanted the Israelis to attack it. In the aftermath of the strike, the Damascus issued only an opaque statement claiming that the Israeli jets had been driven away and remaining silent on the airstrike at al-Kibar.

Abushady told this writer he learned from meetings with Syrian officials during his final year at the IAEA that the Syrian government had indeed originally built the structure at al-Kibar for the storage of missiles as well as for a fixed firing position for them. And he said Ibrahim Othman, the head of Syria's Atomic Energy Commission, had confirmed that point in a private meeting with him in Vienna in September 2015.

Othman also confirmed Abushady's suspicion from viewing satellite photographs that the roof over the central room in the building had been made with two movable light plates that could be opened to allow the firing of a missile. And he told Abushady that he had been correct in believing that what had appeared in a satellite image immediately after the bombing to be two semi-circular shapes was what had remained of the original concrete launching silo for missiles.

In the wake of the Israel's 2006 invasion of Southern Lebanon, the Israelis were searching intensively for Hezbollah missiles and rockets that could reach Israel and they believed many of those Hezbollah weapons were being stored in Syria. If they wished to draw the attention of the Israelis away from actual missile storage sites, the Syrians would have had good reason to want to convince the Israelis that this was one of their major storage sites.

Othman told Abushady that the building had been abandoned in 2002, after the construction had been completed. The Israelis had acquired ground-level pictures from 2001-02 showing the construction of outer walls that would hide the central hall of the building. The Israelis and the CIA both insisted in 2007-08 that this new construction indicated that it had to be a reactor building, but it is equally consistent with a building designed to hide missile storage and a missile-firing position.

Although Mossad went to great lengths to convince the Bush administration that the site was a nuclear reactor, what the Israelis really wanted was for the Bush

administration to launch U.S. airstrikes against Hezbollah and Syrian missile storage sites. Senior officials of the Bush administration didn't buy the Israeli bid to get the United States do the bombing, but none of them ever raised questions about the Israeli ruse.

So both the Assad regime and the Israeli government appear to have succeeded in carrying out their own parts in a double deception in the Syrian desert.

[A second part of this two part-series can be [read here.](#)]

Gareth Porter is an independent investigative journalist and historian on U.S. national security policy and the recipient of the 2012 Gellhorn Prize for journalism. His most recent book is *Manufactured Crisis: the Untold Story of the Iran Nuclear Scare*, published in 2014.

Did Manning Help Avert War in Iran?

From the Archive: Though President Obama commuted Chelsea Manning's prison sentence, he showed no appreciation for her brave disclosures, including one that undercut war plans with Iran, Robert Parry reported in 2013.

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

From U.S. embassy cables leaked by Pvt. Bradley 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.

Neocon 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 Bradley 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. Bradley Manning had armed them with the facts.

And this scenario, while admittedly 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 out his hand 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 a subsequent 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.

Update: It also is significant that Geoffrey Pyatt was rewarded for his work lining up the IAEA behind the anti-Iranian propaganda campaign by being made U.S. ambassador to Ukraine where he helped engineer the Feb. 22, 2014 coup that overthrew elected President Viktor Yanukovich. Pyatt was on the infamous "fuck the E.U." call with Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs Victoria Nuland weeks before the coup as Nuland handpicked Ukraine's new leaders and Pyatt pondered how "to midwife this thing."

Salvaging Some Hype

Though Manning's release of the U.S. embassy cables from Vienna 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 given 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 his ISIS [not to be confused with the head-chopping terrorist outfit] 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.

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.

[**Update:** In August 2013, Bradley (now Chelsea) Manning was sentenced to 35 years in prison for leaking classified documents. Although President Obama supported her prosecution, he did – in one of his final acts in office – commute Manning’s sentence to her nearly seven years already served in prison. She is scheduled for release on March 17.]

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](#)).

Twisting the Facts on Iran Nukes

Part of the credibility crisis afflicting the world’s officialdom is the tendency to issue reports that start with the politically desired conclusion and then twist words and facts accordingly, a problem apparent in a U.N. report on Iran’s alleged nuclear program, as Gareth Porter explains.

By Gareth Porter

Many government reports The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) assessment has cleared the way for the board of governors to end the Agency’s extraordinary investigation into accusations of Iran’s past nuclear weapons work. But a closer examination of the document reveals much more about the political role that the Agency has played in managing the Iran file.

Contrary to the supposed neutral and technical role that Director General Yukiya

Amano has constantly invoked and the news media has long accepted without question, the Agency has actually been serving as prosecutor for the United States in making a case that Iran has had a nuclear weapons program.

The first signs of such an IAEA role appeared in 2008 after the George W. Bush administration insisted that the Agency make a mysterious collection of intelligence documents on a purported Iranian nuclear weapons research program the centerpiece of its Iran inquiry.

The Agency's partisan role was fully developed, however, only after Amano took charge in late 2009. Amano got U.S. political support for the top position in 2009 because he had enthusiastically supported the Bush administration's pressure on Mohammed ElBaradei on those documents when Amano was Japan's permanent representative to the IAEA in 2008.

Amano delivered the Agency's November 2011 report just when the Obama administration needed additional impetus for its campaign to line up international support for "crippling sanctions" on Iran. He continued to defend that hardline position and accuse Iran of failing to cooperate as the Obama administration sought to maximize the pressure on Iran from 2012 to 2015.

When the Obama administration's interests shifted from pressuring Iran to ensuring that the nuclear agreement with Iran would be completed and fully implemented, Amano's role suddenly shifted as well. In late June, according to Iranian officials involved in the Vienna negotiations, Secretary of State John Kerry reached agreement with both the Iranians and Amano that the "possible military dimensions" (PMD) issue would be resolved through a report by Amano before the end of the year.

Based on that agreement, Amano would write a report that would reach no definitive conclusion about the accusations of nuclear weapons work but nevertheless bring the PMD inquiry to an end. The report was still far from even-handed. It could not be, because Amano had embraced the intelligence documents that the United States and Israel had provided to the IAEA, around which the entire investigation had been organized.

Dodgy Intelligence Documents

Iran had insisted from the beginning that the intelligence documents given to the IAEA were fraudulent, and ElBaradei had repeatedly stated publicly from late 2005 through 2009 that the documents had not been authenticated. ElBaradei observes in his 2011 memoirs that he could never get a straight answer from the Bush administration about how the documents had been acquired.

Different cover stories had been leaked to the media over the years suggesting

that either an Iranian scientist involved in the alleged weapons program or a German spy had managed to get the documents out of Iran.

But in 2013, former senior German foreign office official Karsten Voigt revealed to me in an interview that German intelligence had obtained the documents in 2004 from a sometime source whom they knew to be a member of the Mujahideen E-Khalq (MEK). A cult-like Iranian exile terrorist group, MEK had once carried out terror operations for the Saddam Hussein regime but later developed a patron-client relationship with Israeli intelligence.

Quite apart from the unsavory truth about the origins of the documents, the burden of proof in the IAEA inquiry should have been on the United States to make the case for their authenticity. There is a good reason why U.S. judicial rules of evidence require that “the proponent must produce evidence sufficient to support a finding that the item is what the proponent claims it is.”

But instead Amano has required Iran, in effect, to prove the negative. Since it is logically impossible for Iran to do so, that *de facto* demand has systematically skewed the entire IAEA investigation toward the conclusion that Iran is guilty of the covert activities charged in the intelligence documents.

And the Agency has reinforced that distorted frame in its final assessment by constantly making the point that Iran possesses technology that could have been used for the development of a nuclear weapon. Every time Iran produced evidence that a technology that the IAEA had suggested was being used for the development of nuclear weapons was actually for non-nuclear applications, the Agency cast that evidence in a suspicious light by arguing that it bore some characteristics that are “consistent with” or “relevant to” work on nuclear weapons.

The “final assessment” uses that same tactic to frame not only Iranian development of various technologies but its organizations, facilities and research activities as inherently suspicious regardless of evidence provided by Iran that they were for other purposes.

Another tactic the IAEA had used in the past to attack Iran’s credibility is the suggestion that the government actually made a partial confession. In May 2008, the IAEA had claimed in a quarterly report that Iran “did not dispute that some of the information contained in the documents was factually accurate but said the events and activities concerned involved civil or conventional military applications.”

That statement had clearly conveyed the impression that Iran has admitted to details about activities shown in the documents. But in fact Iran had only confirmed information that was already publicly known, such as certain names,

organizations and official addresses, as the IAEA itself acknowledged in 2011. Furthermore, Iran had also submitted a 117-page paper in which it had pointed out that “some of the organizations and individuals named in those documents were nonexistent.”

The IAEA resorted to the same kind of deceptive tactic in the final assessment’s discussion of “organizational structure.” It stated, “A significant proportion of the information available to the Agency on the existence of organizational structures was confirmed by Iran during implementation of the Road-map.”

That sentence implied that Iran had acknowledged facts about the organizations that supported the purported intelligence claims of a nuclear weapons research program. But it actually meant only that Iran confirmed the same kind of publicly available information as it had in 2008.

On the issue of whether an Iranian organization to carry out nuclear-weapons research and development had existed, the final assessment again uses suggestive but ultimately meaningless language: “[B]efore the end of 2003, an organizational structure was in place in Iran suitable for the coordination of a range of activities relevant to the development of a nuclear explosive device.”

Similar language implying accusation without actually stating it directly can be found in most of the assessments in the document. In the section on “procurement activities,” the report refers to “indications of procurements and attempted procurements of items with relevance, inter alia, to the development of a nuclear device.”

That language actually means nothing more than that Iranians had sought to purchase dual-use items, but it preserves the illusion that the procurement is inherently suspicious.

EBW and MIP

The use of “relevance” language was, in fact, the IAEA’s favorite tactic for obscuring the fact that it had no real evidence of nuclear weapons work. On the issue of the purported intelligence documents showing that Iran had developed and experimented with Exploding Bridge-Wire (EBW) technology for the detonation of a nuclear weapon, Iran had gone to great lengths to prove that its work on EBW technology was clearly focused on non-nuclear applications.

It provided detailed information about its development of the technology, including videos of activities it had carried out, to show that for the objective of the work was to develop safer conventional explosives.

The IAEA responded by saying “that the EBW detonators developed by Iran have

characteristics relevant to a nuclear device.” By that same logic, of course, a prosecutor could name an individual as a suspect in a crime simply because his behavior showed “characteristics relevant” to that crime.

A similar tactic appears in the assessment of the “initiation of high explosives” issue. The 2011 IAEA report had recorded the intelligence passed on by the Israelis that Iran had done an experiment with a high explosives detonation technology called multipoint initiation (MIP) that the Agency said was “consistent with” a publication by a “foreign expert” who had worked in Iran.

That was a reference to the Ukrainian scientist Vyacheslav Danilenko, but he was an expert on producing nanodiamonds through explosives, not on nuclear weapons development. And the open-source publication by Danilenko was not about experiments related to nuclear weapons but only about measuring shock waves from explosions using fiber optic cables.

The 2011 report also had referred to “information” from an unnamed member state that Iran had carried out the “large scale high explosives experiments” in question in the “region of Marivan.” In its final assessment, the Agency says it now believes that those experiments were carried out in a “location called ‘Marivan’,” rather than in the “region of Marivan.”

But although Iran has offered repeatedly to allow the IAEA to visit Marivan to determine whether such experiments were carried out, the IAEA has refused to carry out such an inspection and has offered no explanation for its refusal.

The Agency relies on its standard evasive language to cover its climb-down from the 2011 assessment. “The Agency assesses that the MPI technology developed by Iran has characteristics relevant to a nuclear device,” it said, “as well as to a small number of alternative applications.”

That wording, combined with its refusal to make any effort to check on the one specific claim of Iranian experiments at Marivan, makes it clear that the Agency knows very well that it has no real evidence of the alleged experiments but is unwilling to say so straightforwardly.

The Agency did the same thing in regard to the alleged “integration into a missile delivery system.” A key set of purported intelligence documents had shown a series of efforts to integrate a “new spherical payload” into the existing payload chamber of the Shahab-3 missile.

The final assessment avoids mention of the technical errors in those studies, which were so significant that Sandia National Laboratories found through computer simulations that not a single one of the proposed redesign efforts

would have worked. And it later became apparent that Iran had begun redesigning the entire missile system, including an entirely different reentry vehicle shape from the one shown in the drawings, well before the start date of the purported nuclear weapons work.

But the IAEA was only interested in whether the workshops portrayed in the purported intelligence were in fact workshops used by the Iranian government. Iran allowed the Agency to visit two of the workshops, and the final assessment declares that it has “verified that the workshops are those described in the alleged studies documentation” and that “the workshop’s features and capabilities are consistent with those described in the alleged studies documentation.”

Flawed Computer Modeling

One of the most egregious cover-ups in the assessment is its treatment of the alleged computer modeling of nuclear explosions. The agency recalled that it had “received information from Member States” that Iran had done modeling of “nuclear explosive configurations based on implosion technology.”

Unfortunately for the credibility of that “information,” soon after that 2011 report was published someone leaked a graph of one of the alleged computer modeling efforts attributed to Iran to Associated Press reporter George Jahn. The graph was so similar to one published in a scholarly journal in January 2009 that Scott Kemp, an assistant professor of nuclear science and engineering at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), said he suspected the graph had been “adapted from the open literature.”

Furthermore the information in the graph turned out to be inaccurate by four orders of magnitude. In response to that revelation, a senior IAEA official told Jahn that the Agency knew that the graph was “flawed” as soon as it had obtained it but that IAEA officials “believe it remains important as a clue to Iranian intentions.”

In fact, the official revealed to Jahn that the Agency had come up with a bizarre theory that Iranian scientists deliberately falsified the diagram to sell the idea to government officials of a nuclear explosion far larger than any by the United States or Russia.

That episode surely marks the apogee of the IAEA’s contorted rationalizations of the highly suspect “information” the Agency had been fed by the Israelis. In the final report, the Agency ignores that embarrassing episode and “assesses that Iran conducted computer modeling of a nuclear explosive device prior to 2004 and between 2005 and 2009,” even though it describes the modeling, enigmatically, as

“incomplete and fragmentary.”

The assessment further “notes some similarity between the Iranian open source publications and the studies featured in the information from Member States, in terms of textual matches, and certain dimensional and other parameters used.”

Unless the Agency received the “information” from the unidentified states before the dates of the open-source publications, which one would expect to be noted if true, such similarities could be evidence of fraudulent intelligence rather than of Iranian wrongdoing. But the assessment provides no clarification of the issue.

Nuclear Material

On the issue it calls “nuclear material acquisition,” however, the Agency makes a startling retreat from its previous position that has far-reaching implications for the entire collection of intelligence documents. In its 2011 report, the IAEA had presented a one-page flow sheet showing a process for converting “yellow cake” into “green salt” (i.e., uranium that can be enriched) as a scheme to “secure a source of uranium suitable for use in an undisclosed enrichment program.”

But the final assessment explicitly rejects that conclusion, pronouncing the process design in question “technically flawed” and “of low quality in comparison with what was available to Iran as part of its declared nuclear fuel cycle.”

In other words, Iran would have had no rational reason to try to seek an entirely new conversion process and then turn the project over to incompetent engineers. Those were precisely the arguments that Iran had made in 2008 to buttress its case that the documents were fabricated.

The assessment carefully avoids the obvious implication of these new findings, that the anomalies surrounding the “green salt” documents make it very likely that they have were fabricated. To acknowledge that fact would cast doubt on the entire collection. But the surprising backtracking on the “green salt” evidence underlines just how far the IAEA has gone in the past to cover up awkward questions about the intelligence at the center of the case.

Now that the Obama administration has settled on a nuclear agreement with Iran, the IAEA will no longer have to find contorted language to discuss Iran’s past and present nuclear program.

Nevertheless, the Agency remains a highly political actor, and its role in monitoring and reporting on the implementation of the agreement may bring more

occasions for official assessments that reflect the political interest of the U.S.-led dominant coalition in the IAEA board of governors rather than the objective reality of the issue under review.

Gareth Porter, an investigative journalist and historian specializing in U.S. “national security” policy and was the recipient of the Gellhorn Prize for journalism in 2012. His latest book, *Manufactured Crisis: The Untold Story of the Iran Nuclear Scare*, was published by Just World Books in 2014. [This story first appeared at LobeLog.]

America's Debt to Bradley Manning

From the Archive: The U.S. mainstream media is again embracing a U.N. report critical of Iran's alleged past work on a nuclear bomb, but leaks from Pvt. Bradley (now Chelsea) Manning exposed Yukiya Amano, the key U.N. official, as a front for U.S. and Israeli interests, as Robert Parry reported in 2011.

By Robert Parry (Originally published Dec. 24, 2011)

One criticism about the value of the information that Pvt. Bradley Manning gave to WikiLeaks is that most of it was known in some form and thus didn't justify the risks to sources who might be identified from the diplomatic and military cables. However, that complaint misses the importance of detailed “ground truth” in assessing issues of war and peace.

For instance, the prospects of war with Iran escalated in November 2011 because of a toughly worded report by the United Nations' International Atomic Energy Agency, which compiled some old and new evidence to argue that Iran continues to make progress toward a nuclear bomb. Immediately, the U.S. news media accepted the IAEA's report as the unquestioned truth and as further repudiation of the 2007 U.S. intelligence estimate that Iran had ceased work on a nuclear weapon in 2003.

One might note the irony in this flip on Iran. In the run-up to war with Iraq, the U.S. media embraced CIA reports of secret Iraqi WMD programs while mocking the IAEA's doubts. Regarding Iran, the CIA and IAEA have traded places, with U.S. intelligence analysts chagrined over swallowing the bogus Iraq-WMD evidence being more skeptical of the Iran-nuke allegations, while the IAEA has taken the role as chief WMD exaggerator.

So, it was useful to examine the WikiLeaks documents regarding the election of

the new IAEA leader in 2009 to understand why this flip may have occurred. What those classified State Department cables show is that the IAEA's new director general, Japanese diplomat Yukiya Amano, credited his victory largely to U.S. government support and promptly stuck his hand out for U.S. money.

Further, Amano left little doubt that he would side with the United States in its confrontation with Iran and that he would even meet secretly with Israeli officials regarding their purported evidence on Iran's nuclear program, despite the fact that Israel is arguably the world's preeminent rogue nuclear state and rejects IAEA inspections of its own nuclear sites.

According to 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.

Cable Revelations

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. (Yes, it is the same Geoffrey Pyatt who was later promoted to Ambassador to Ukraine where he helped orchestrate the putsch that ousted elected President Viktor Yanukovich.)

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

Today, with some Republican presidential contenders falling over themselves to bond with Israel over its desire to attack Iran, this sort of detail puts the IAEA report into a fuller context that can help American voters judge whether another war is necessary or whether they’re being misled again by hyped allegations.

These cables, which Manning allegedly gave to WikiLeaks, were first spotlighted by the Guardian newspaper in the U.K. in 2010. However, because the full cables were posted on the Internet, I could dig through them to find additional details, such as Amano asking for more U.S. money.

Without this level of “ground truth,” Americans would be at the mercy of the major U.S. news media, which seems as much on board for a war with Iran as it was for war with Iraq. [For more on this topic, see Consortiumnews.com’s “DÃ©jÃ
vu Over Iran Nuke Charges” and “Big Media’s Double Standards on Iran.”]

Slaughtering Iraqis

Another example of how the material allegedly leaked by Manning helped educate the American people was the infamous gun-barrel video of U.S. attack helicopters mowing down seemingly defenseless Iraqi men, including two Reuters journalists, as they walked down a Baghdad street.

Not only did a U.S. military helicopter gunship slaughter the men amid macho jokes and chuckling apparently after mistaking a couple of cameras for weapons but the American attackers then blew away several Iraqis who arrived in a van and tried to take one of the wounded newsmen to a hospital. Two children in the van were badly wounded.

“Well, it’s their fault for bringing their kids into a battle,” one American remarked.

The videotaped incident entitled “Collateral Murder” by Wikileaks occurred on July 12, 2007, in the midst of President George W. Bush’s much-heralded troop “surge,” which the U.S. news media has widely credited for reducing violence in Iraq and bringing something close to victory for the United States.

But the U.S. press corps rarely mentions that the “surge” represented one of the bloodiest periods of the war. Beyond the horrific and untallied death toll of Iraqis, about 1,000 U.S. soldiers died during Bush’s “surge” of an additional 30,000 troops into Iraq.

It’s also unclear that the “surge” deserves much if any credit for the gradual decline in Iraqi violence, which had already reached turning points in 2006 before the “surge” with the death of al-Qaeda leader Musab al-Zarqawi, the U.S.-funded Sunni Awakening against al-Qaeda in Iraq, and the de facto ethnic cleansing of Iraqi cities with Sunnis and Shiites moving into separate neighborhoods.

Further putting the sectarian killing on a downward path was the Iran-brokered agreement with militant Shiite leader Moktada al-Sadr to have his militia stand down in exchange for an Iraqi government commitment to insist on a firm timetable for total U.S. military withdrawal, a process that has just been completed.

However, the U.S. news media continues to repeat the conventional wisdom about how U.S. troops protected Iraqis from violence through the “successful surge.” The “Collateral Murder” video puts the lie to that smug consensus, showing the “ground truth” of how the “surge” and indeed the entire Iraq War truly operated.

Many Americans may want to put the unpleasant memories of the Iraq War behind

them from “shock and awe” and the illegal invasion, to the leveling of Fallujah and the Abu Ghraib atrocities, to the incompetent U.S. occupation, the Haditha murders and the sectarian slaughters but a failure to face the reality honestly will only encourage future war crimes of similar or even greater magnitude.

Already, Republicans such as Newt Gingrich, Rick Perry, Michele Bachmann and Mitt Romney are speaking as casually about going to war with Iran as George W. Bush and Dick Cheney did about war with Iraq.

As Bradley Manning wrote as he struggled over his decision to leak evidence of war crimes and other machinations by the U.S. government, “God knows what happens now. Hopefully worldwide discussion, debates, and reforms. I want people to see the truth because without information, you cannot make informed decisions as a public.”

(In 2013, Manning was court-martialed and sentenced to 35 years in prison for disclosing this classified information to the public.) But his gift to America may be that he provided the nation the “ground truth” that could give meaning to debates about past and possibly future wars.

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](#)).

A Prized Iran-Nuke Myth Unraveling

Once an Official Washington “group think” gets going it’s very hard to stop because the mainstream U.S. media will adjust the narrative so as not to debunk what all the Important People “know” to be true, such as shoring up a beloved Iran nuclear myth that is starting to fall apart, as Gareth Porter notes.

By Gareth Porter

For well over three years, heavy doses of propaganda have created a myth about a purported steel cylinder for testing explosives located on a site at Iran’s Parchin military testing reservation. According to that storyline, Iran was refusing to allow the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to inspect the site while it sought to hide its past nuclear weapons-related work.

Now Iran has agreed to allow the IAEA to visit the site at Parchin and environmental samples have already been collected at the site. However, the

politically charged tale of the bomb test chamber of Parchin is beginning to unravel. IAEA director general Yukiya Amano entered the building in which the explosives chamber had supposedly been located on Monday and announced afterward that he found “no equipment” in the building.

That is surely a major story, in light of how much has been made of the alleged presence of the chamber at that location. But you may have missed that news, unless you happened to read the story by Jonathan Tirone of Bloomberg Business News, who was the only journalist for a significant news outlet who chose to lead with the story in his coverage of Amano’s Monday visit.

The rest of the news media buried that fact far down in their stories, focusing almost entirely on the fact that the Iranians have been allowed to physically gather environmental samples at the site under the gaze of IAEA technicians rather than IAEA inspectors carrying out that function.

The main storyline associated with the purported bomb cylinder since early 2012 has been that Iran has been removing evidence from the site for years in anticipation of an eventual IAEA inspection in order to hide the evidence of past experiments using the purported chamber. But the full story of that mysterious chamber makes it clear that it was highly dubious from the start.

The first description of an explosive chamber at Parchin appeared in an IAEA report published in early November 2011. But less than two weeks after the story of the cylinder was reported in the media, Associated Press reporter George Jahn published a report that an official of an unidentified state had “cited intelligence from his home country, saying it appears that Iran is trying to cover its tracks by sanitizing the site and removing any evidence of nuclear research and development.”

The official provided an “intelligence summary” from which Jahn quoted: “Freight trucks, special haulage vehicles and cranes were seen entering and leaving” the site on Nov. 4-5, 2011, it said, and “some equipment and dangerous materials were removed from the site.”

Disputed intelligence

The purpose of that language was clearly to suggest that Iran had actually removed the cylinder and the nuclear materials that it had been testing. If true, it would have been very incriminating evidence of Iran’s nuclear deception. But there was a problem with that claim. Officials of two other IAEA member states that were obviously following the aerial photography of the Parchin site closely denied that the story being peddled to Jahn by the unnamed state was true.

It was true that there was more activity than normal at the site on those days, they told Jahn, but nothing resembling the activities claimed by the unidentified state's "intelligence summary." One of those two countries denying the story was clearly the United States. Pentagon spokesman Captain John Kirby told Jahn he had "seen nothing to indicate that those concerns are warranted."

The episode of the AP story begs the obvious question: Why was the state that could not be named so intent on planting a false story of Iranian removal of the purported cylinder? The obvious purpose of such a story would be to prepare government and public opinion for a possible IAEA visit to the site in the future, and the subsequent discovery that there was nothing incriminating at the site.

That, in turn, indicates that the state in question was the same one that had provided the original story of the explosive cylinder to the IAEA and that it already knew that no cylinder would be found there because the original story had been a fabrication.

Israeli-supplied Documents

The IAEA member state that had provided the information about a purported bomb cylinder was never identified by the IAEA. But IAEA director-general Mohamed El Baradei asserts in his memoirs that in the summer of 2009 Israel turned over to the IAEA a number of intelligence documents purporting to show that Iran had carried out nuclear weapons work "until at least 2007," most of which consisted of purported Iranian official documents whose authenticity had been questioned by some of the agency's technical experts.

El Baradei refused to bow to diplomatic pressures from Israel's allies, coordinated by the head of Israel's Atomic Energy Commission, to publish a compendium of those documents, including the claim in an intelligence report of the Parchin explosives cylinder. The Israelis and the Obama administration had to wait until Amano succeeded El Baradei and agreed to do exactly that.

The episode of the AP story isn't the only evidence that the unidentified state had concocted an intelligence document on Parchin that was a complete falsehood. In August 2012, an IAEA report stated that the agency had acquired the satellite imagery available on the Parchin site for the entire period from February 2005 to January 2012.

The report revealed that the imagery showed "virtually no activity at or near the building housing the containment vessel" during that entire period. The imagery clearly suggested that Iran had not been using the site for any sensitive activities, much less the activities suggested by the IAEA in its

report, during the seven years, nor had they engaged in any cleanup of the site.

And an earlier episode sheds further light on the issue. In 2004, John Bolton, then President George W. Bush's Iran policymaker, leaked satellite imagery of sites at Parchin that had features someone believed might be high explosives testing facilities.

After a few months of bullying by Bolton, the IAEA asked to visit Parchin. Iran not only agreed to an inspection in February 2005 but allowed the IAEA to choose any five sites in any one of the four Parchin quadrants after the inspection team's arrival – and take environmental samples anywhere at the sites. And in November 2005, after El Baradei requested a second inspection, Iran again gave the IAEA the choice of five more sites at which to take samples.

The significance of those two 2005 IAEA inspections is not merely that the environmental samples all came back negative. More important, Iran would never have allowed the IAEA to choose to take environmental samples anywhere it chose at Parchin if it had carried out nuclear-weapons related experiments as claimed later by the unidentified state.

Beginning in spring 2012 and continuing right up to the Vienna round of Iran nuclear negotiations last summer, the IAEA, Western diplomats and David Albright of the Institute for Science and International Security generated many dozens of stories about Iran's "stonewalling" the IAEA on Parchin while it sought to remove evidence of its purported nuclear-related testing at the site. Those stories invariably used the term "sanitizing" the same word the Israeli official used in passing on the false story to AP.

Those stories were just as dishonest as the original Israeli story because the IAEA and Western diplomats assigned to it know very well that there is no way to remove all traces of nuclear material from a site. In 2013, Stephan Vogt, the head of the IAEA's environmental sample laboratory, declared in a 2013 interview: "You cannot get rid of them by cleaning, you cannot dilute them to the extent that we will not be able to pick them up."

Strangely, however, even after that interview was published, the Parchin stories continued as if Vogt had not revealed the impossibility of "sanitizing" a site that had held nuclear material.

We are now only a few weeks away from the release of the environmental sampling results at Parchin. It will be amusing to this writer to see how the governments and news media who pushed the Parchin myth manage that story.

Gareth Porter is an independent investigative journalist and winner of the 2012 Gellhorn Prize for journalism. He is the author of the newly published

Manufactured Crisis: The Untold Story of the Iran Nuclear Scare. [This article first appeared at Middle East Eye, <http://www.middleeasteye.net/columns/parchin-myth-begins-unravel-1441311523#sthash.D1zWNM80.dpuf>]

Doubts Remain on Iran Sanction Relief

While Iran expresses confidence that it can fulfill the restrictions on its nuclear program to ensure that it remains peaceful there is less certainty about the lifting of U.S. and international sanctions against Iran, creating some possible trouble for the April 2 deal, writes Gareth Porter for Middle East Eye.

By Gareth Porter

The framework agreement reached on Thursday night clearly gives the P5+1 a combination of constraints on Iran's nuclear program that should reassure all but the most bellicose opponents of diplomacy. It also provides the basis for at least a minimum of sanctions relief in the early phase of its implementation that Iran required, but some of the conditions on that relief are likely create new issue between Iran and the Western powers over the process.

The agreement's dependence on decisions by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and the penchant of Israeli intelligence for discovering new evidence of illicit Iranian activities will encourage moves to delay or obstruct relief of sanctions.

U.S. and European officials had been telling reporters that they would phase out their sanctions on oil and banking in return for Iranian actions to modify its program only gradually over several years, and made it clear that the purpose of this strategy was to maintain "leverage" on Iran.

Iran, however, was demanding that those sanctions be lifted immediately upon delivering on their commitments under agreement. And a source close to Iranian negotiators told Middle East Eye that Iran was confident it could deliver on all of the actions related to its enrichment program and Arak within a matter of months.

The same diplomatic conflict was being fought over UN Security Council sanctions: Iran wanted them to end as soon as they have fulfilled its commitments; the U.S. and its allies were insisting that those sanctions could only be suspended gradually on a schedule that would extend through most or all of the initial ten-year period.

And the P5+1 was also demanding that, in order to get those sanctions lifted, Iran would have to fully satisfy the IAEA that it had cooperated completely in regard to the “possible military dimensions” (PMD) of its program, and wait for the IAEA to give Iran a clean bill of health that its nuclear program is for peaceful purposes only.

Figuring out how those pivotal issues were finally resolved requires sifting through evidence that is not entirely clear-cut. The two sides apparently agreed that they would not release any official text of the agreement. The joint statement by EU foreign policy chief Frederica Mogherini and Iranian foreign minister Zarif, which is the closest thing to an official statement, was very brief and general and failed to clarify the provisions on sanctions removal.

And the only available text of their statement, a transcript of the English language translation of Zarif’s Farsi language version of the statement, which was published in the Washington Post, unfortunately fails to complete the one sentence on how the issue of sanctions removal was removed, because it was partially inaudible.

The fact that no official text was released has meant that press coverage of the content of the agreement has relied primarily on the much more detailed summary of the agreement by the U.S. State Department and on remarks by Secretary of State John Kerry. The U.S. interpretation of the agreement, however, is ambiguous on some aspects of the sanctions removal issue, raising serious questions about what was precisely agreed on.

On U.S. and European unilateral sanctions on oil and banking, which are of greatest short-term importance to the Iranian economy, the documents says those sanctions “will be suspended after the IAEA has verified that Iran has taken all of its key nuclear-related steps.” That wording appears to suggest that the sanctions would be suspended immediately upon the verification of the last step taken by Iran.

The U.S. text thus seems to indicate that the Iranians won their demand that the Western powers give up their scheme for a “gradual” or “phased” withdrawal of sanctions. But the Iranians had wanted some of the sanctions removed each time they completed the implementation of a commitment, and instead the payoff comes only after the final step taken.

The U.S. document also makes it clear that the “architecture of sanctions” regarding U.S. unilateral sanctions meaning the legal and bureaucratic systems underlying the sanctions “will be retained for much of the duration of the deal and allow for snap-back of sanctions in the event of significant non-performance.”

The Iranians have complained that suspending sanctions while leaving the threat of future sanctions in place has an intimidating effect on banks and businesses regarding resumption of relations with Iranian entities. But they didn't have much leverage over that question.

The UN sanctions issue was resolved in a distinctly different way. According to the U.S. text, all the UN Security Council resolutions on Iran, which impose various sanctions on Iran, "will be lifted with the completion by Iran of nuclear-related actions addressing all key issues (enrichment, Fordow, Arak, PMD and transparency)."

The implication of the U.S. summary is that Iran would get some sanctions relief from the UN Security Council each time it has completed the implementation of one of its key "irreversible" commitments, as Iran had been demanding – not only at the end of all of its performance on all of the commitments.

The inclusion of the PMD ("possible military dimensions") of the Iranian nuclear program as an issue on which Iran would have to satisfy the IAEA introduces a potential obstacle to early sanctions relief, because IAEA Director General Yukiya Amano has said it could take several years to complete its assessment of the issue. But at least a delay by the IAEA would not prevent Iran from obtaining relief upon completing the other actions it would take.

Further confusing the interpretation of the agreement, Secretary of State John Kerry referred to the United States and its "international partners" providing sanctions relief "in phases" – a statement that appears inconsistent with the State Department text. In a tweet on Thursday, Zarif cited the Iran/P5+1 joint statement as saying the U.S. would "cease all application of ALL nuclear-related secondary economic and financial sanctions," and asked rhetorically, "Is this gradual?"

Judging from the U.S. interpretative statements, Iran could get the bulk of the sanctions relief in the initial period of implementation much of it within the first year or so. But that prospect would depend on the good will of the Obama administration and the IAEA. The Obama administration may well be inclined to facilitate the provision of early sanctions relief. But the political dynamics swirling around U.S. and IAEA policies toward Iran suggest that the processes of IAEA assessment and delivery of sanctions may not go as smoothly as Iran would hope.

Looking even further ahead, Iran is certainly concerned about how a future U.S. administration could and would implement the agreement. Iran was insisting that the UN Security Council resolution repealing previous resolutions with a new one reflecting the comprehensive agreement be passed before the change in

administration in Washington in 2017, according to the source in contact with the negotiators. It remains unclear whether the P5+1 agreed to that demand.

One thing the U.S. text makes clear is that the issue of Iranian research and development on advanced centrifuges research and development (R&D) remains unresolved.

The U.S. statement says that for the first ten years of the agreement, enrichment R&D will have to be consistent with maintaining breakout timeline of at least one year – obviously based on further understandings that have not been revealed or are yet to be negotiated. And beyond that period, the Iranian R&D plan will be “pursuant to the JCPOA”, meaning the final Joint Comprehensive Program of Action” is still to be negotiated.

Gareth Porter is an independent investigative journalist and winner of the 2012 Gellhorn Prize for journalism. He is the author of the newly published *Manufactured Crisis: The Untold Story of the Iran Nuclear Scare*. [This story first appeared at Middle East Eye.]

Why Iran Distrusts the US in Nuke Talks

Exclusive: The mainstream U.S. media portrays the Iran nuclear talks as “our good guys” imposing some sanity on “their bad guys.” But the real history of the West’s dealings on Iran’s nuclear program shows bad faith by the U.S. government, as ex-CIA analyst Ray McGovern describes.

By Ray McGovern

The Iranians may be a bit paranoid but, as the saying goes, this does not mean some folks are not out to get them. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his knee-jerk followers in Washington clearly **are** out to get them and they know it.

Nowhere is this clearer than in the surreal set of negotiations in Switzerland premised not on evidence, but rather on an assumption of Iran’s putative “ambition” to become a nuclear weapons state like Israel, which maintains a secret and sophisticated nuclear weapons arsenal estimated at about 200 weapons. The supposed threat is that Iran might build one.

Israel and the U.S. know from their intelligence services that Iran has no active nuclear weapons program, but they are not about to let truth get in the way of their concerted effort to marginalize Iran. And so they fantasize before

the world about an Iranian nuclear weapons program that must be stopped at all costs including war.

Among the most surprising aspects of this is the fact that most U.S. allies are so willing to go along with the charade and Washington's catch-all solution sanctions as some U.S. and Israeli hardliners open call for a sustained bombing campaign of Iranian nuclear sites that could inflict a massive loss of human life and result in an environmental catastrophe.

On March 26, arch-neocon John Bolton, George W. Bush's Ambassador to the United Nations, graced the pages of the New York Times with his most recent appeal for an attack on Iran. Bolton went a bit too far, though, in citing the National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) of November 2007, agreed to unanimously by all 16 U.S. intelligence agencies. Perhaps he reasoned that, since the "mainstream media" rarely mentions that NIE, "Iran: Nuclear Intentions and Capabilities," he could get away with distorting its key findings, which were:

"We judge with high confidence that in fall 2003, Tehran halted its nuclear weapons program; we also assess with moderate-to-high confidence that Tehran at a minimum is keeping open the option to develop nuclear weapons. ... We assess with moderate confidence Tehran had not restarted its nuclear weapons program as of mid-2007, but we do not know whether it currently intends to develop nuclear weapons. ...

"Our assessment that Iran halted the program in 2003 primarily in response to international pressure indicates Tehran's decisions are guided by a cost-benefit approach rather than a rush to a weapon irrespective of the political, economic and military costs."

An equally important fact ignored by the mainstream media is that the key judgments of that NIE have been revalidated by the intelligence community every year since. But reality is hardly a problem for Bolton. As the Undersecretary of State for Arms Control, Bolton made quite a name for himself by insisting that it was the proper function of a policy maker like him not intelligence analysts to interpret the evidence from intelligence.

An 'Embarrassment'

So those of us familiar with Bolton's checkered credibility were not shocked by his New York Times op-ed, entitled "To Stop Iran's Bomb, Bomb Iran." Still less were we shocked to see him dismiss "the rosy 2007 National Intelligence Estimate" as an "embarrassment."

Actually, an embarrassment it was, but not in the way Bolton suggests. Highly embarrassing, rather, was the fact that Bolton was among those inclined to push

President Bush hard to bomb Iran. Then, quite suddenly, an honest NIE appeared, exposing the reality that Iran's nuclear weapons program had been stopped in 2003, giving the lie not only to neocon propaganda, but also to Bush's assertion that Tehran's leaders had admitted they were developing nuclear weapons (when they had actually asserted the opposite).

Bush lets it all hang out in his memoir, *Decision Points*. Most revealingly, he complains bitterly that the NIE "tied my hands on the military side" and called its findings "eye-popping."

A disgruntled Bush writes, "The backlash was immediate. [Iranian President Mahmoud] Ahmadinejad hailed the NIE as a 'great victory.'" Bush's apparent "logic" here is to use the widespread disdain for Ahmadinejad to discredit the NIE through association, i.e. whatever Ahmadinejad praises must be false.

But can you blame Bush for his chagrin? Alas, the NIE had knocked out the props from under the anti-Iran propaganda machine, imported duty-free from Israel and tuned up by neoconservatives here at home.

In his memoir, Bush laments: "I don't know why the NIE was written the way it was. Whatever the explanation, the NIE had a big impact, and not a good one."

Spelling out how the Estimate had tied his hands "on the military side," Bush included this (apparently unedited) kicker: "But after the NIE, how could I possibly explain using the military to destroy the nuclear facilities of a country the intelligence community said had no active nuclear weapons program?"

It seems worth repeating that the key judgments of the 2007 NIE have been reaffirmed every year since. As for the supposedly urgent need to impose sanctions to prevent Iran from doing what we are fairly certain it is not doing well, perhaps we could take some lessons from the White Queen, who bragged that in her youth she could believe "six impossible things before breakfast" and counseled Alice to practice the same skill.

Sanctions, Anyway, to the Rescue

Despite the conclusions of the U.S. intelligence community, the United States and other countries have imposed unprecedented sanctions ostensibly to censure Iran for "illicit" nuclear activities while demanding the Iran prove the negative in addressing allegations, including "intelligence" provided via Israel and its surrogates, that prompt international community concerns about Iran's nuclear program.

And there's the rub. Most informed observers share historian/journalist Gareth Porter's conclusion that the main sticking point at this week's negotiations in

Lausanne is the issue of how and when sanctions on Iran will be lifted. And, specifically, whether they will be lifted as soon as Iran has taken “irreversible” actions to implement core parts of the agreement.

In Lausanne, the six-nation group (permanent members of the UN Security Council plus Germany) reportedly want the legal system behind the sanctions left in place, even after the sanctions have been suspended, until the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) officially concludes that Iran’s nuclear activities are exclusively peaceful a process that could take many years.

Iran’s experience with an IAEA highly influenced by the U.S. and Israel has been, well, not the best particularly since December 2009 under the tenure of Director-General Yukiya Amano, a Japanese diplomat whom State Department cables reveal to be in Washington’s pocket.

Classified cables released by Pvt. Bradley (now Chelsea) Manning and WikiLeaks show that Amano credited his success in becoming director-general largely to U.S. government support and promptly stuck his hand out for U.S. money.

Further, Amano left little doubt that he would side with the United States in the confrontation with Iran and that he would even meet secretly with Israeli officials regarding their purported evidence on Iran’s hypothetical nuclear weapons program, while staying mum about Israel’s actual nuclear weapons arsenal.

According to 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 never did.

In [a July 9, 2009, cable](#), American chargé Geoffrey Pyatt yes, the same diplomat who helped Assistant Secretary Victoria Nuland choose “Yats” (Arseniy Yatsenyuk) to be the post-coup prime minister of Ukraine said Amano was thankful for U.S. support for his election,” noting that “U.S. intervention with Argentina was particularly decisive.”

A grateful Amano told Pyatt that as IAEA director-general, he would take a different “approach on Iran from that of ElBaradei” and that he “saw his primary role as implementing” U.S.-driven sanctions and demands against Iran.

Pyatt also reported 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.” Pyatt added that Amano privately agreed to “consultations” with the head of the Israeli Atomic Energy Commission.

In other words, Amano has shown himself eager to bend in directions favored by the United States and Israel, especially regarding Iran's nuclear program. His behavior contrasts with that of the more independent-minded ElBaradei, who resisted some of Bush's key claims about Iraq's supposed nuclear weapons program, and even openly denounced forged documents about "yellowcake uranium" as "not authentic." [For more on Amano, see Consortiumnews.com's "[America's Debt to Bradley Manning](#)."]]

It is a given that Iran misses ElBaradei; and it is equally clear that it knows precisely what to expect from Amano. If you were representing Iran at the negotiating table, would you want the IAEA to be the final word on whether or not the entire legal system authorizing sanctions should be left in place?

Torpedoing Better Deals in 2009 and 2010

Little has been written to help put some context around the current negotiation in Lausanne and show how very promising efforts in 2009 and 2010 were sabotaged the first by Jundullah, a terrorist group in Iran, and the second by Secretary of State Hillary Clinton. If you wish to understand why Iran lacks the trust one might wish for in negotiations with the West, a short review may be helpful.

During President Barack Obama's first year in office, the first meeting of senior level American and Iranian negotiators, then-Under Secretary of State William Burns and Iran's chief nuclear negotiator Saeed Jalili, on Oct. 1, 2009, seemed to yield surprisingly favorable results.

Many Washington insiders were shocked when Jalili gave Tehran's agreement in principle to send abroad 2,640 pounds (then as much as 75 percent of Iran's total) of low-enriched uranium to be turned into fuel for a small reactor that does medical research.

Jalili approved the agreement "in principle," at a meeting in Geneva of representatives of members of the U.N. Security Council plus Germany. Even the New York Times acknowledged that this, "if it happens, would represent a major accomplishment for the West, reducing Iran's ability to make a nuclear weapon quickly, and buying more time for negotiations to bear fruit."

The conventional wisdom in Western media is that Tehran backed away from the deal. That is true, but less than half the story a tale that highlights how, in Israel's (and the neocons') set of priorities, regime change in Iran comes first. The uranium transfer had the initial support of Iran's President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. And a follow-up meeting was scheduled for Oct. 19, 2009, at the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in Vienna.

The accord soon came under criticism, however, from Iran's opposition groups,

including the “Green Movement” led by defeated presidential candidate Mir Hossein Mousavi, who has had ties to the American neocons and to Israel since the Iran-Contra days of the 1980s when he was the prime minister who collaborated on secret arms deals.

At first blush, it seemed odd that it was Mousavi’s U.S.-favored political opposition that led the assault on the nuclear agreement, calling it an affront to Iran’s sovereignty and suggesting that Ahmadinejad wasn’t being tough enough.

Then, on Oct. 18, a terrorist group called Jundullah, acting on amazingly accurate intelligence, detonated a car bomb at a meeting of top Iranian Revolutionary Guards commanders and tribal leaders in the province of Sistan-Baluchistan in southeastern Iran. A car full of Guards was also attacked.

A brigadier general who was deputy commander of the Revolutionary Guards ground forces, the Revolutionary Guards brigadier commanding the border area of Sistan-Baluchistan, and three other brigade commanders were killed in the attack; dozens of other military officers and civilians were left dead or wounded.

Jundullah took credit for the bombings, which followed years of lethal attacks on Revolutionary Guards and Iranian policemen, including an attempted ambush of President Ahmadinejad’s motorcade in 2005.

Tehran claims Jundullah is supported by the U.S., Great Britain and Israel, and former CIA Middle East operations officer Robert Baer has fingered Jundullah as one of the “good terrorist” groups benefiting from American help.

I believe it no coincidence that the Oct. 18 attack the bloodiest in Iran since the 1980-88 war with Iraq came one day before nuclear talks were to resume at the IAEA in Vienna to follow up on the Oct. 1 breakthrough. The killings were sure to raise Iran’s suspicions about U.S. sincerity.

It’s a safe bet that after the Jundullah attack, the Revolutionary Guards went directly to their patron, Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, arguing that the bombing and roadside attack proved that the West couldn’t be trusted. Khamenei issued a statement on Oct. 19 condemning the terrorists, whom he charged “are supported by certain arrogant powers’ spy agencies.”

The commander of the Guards’ ground forces, who lost his deputy in the attack, charged that the terrorists were “trained by America and Britain in some of the neighboring countries,” and the commander-in-chief of the Revolutionary Guards threatened retaliation.

The attack was front-page news in Iran, but not in the United States, where the mainstream media quickly consigned the incident to the memory hole. The American

media also began treating Iran's resulting anger over what it considered an act of terrorism and its heightened sensitivity to outsiders crossing its borders as efforts to intimidate "pro-democracy" groups supported by the West.

Despite the Jundullah attack and the criticism from the opposition groups, a lower-level Iranian technical delegation did go to Vienna for the meeting on Oct. 19, but Jalili stayed away. The Iranians questioned the trustworthiness of the Western powers and raised objections to some details, such as where the transfer should occur. The Iranians broached alternative proposals that seemed worth exploring, such as making the transfer of the uranium on Iranian territory or some other neutral location.

But the Obama administration, under mounting domestic pressure to be tougher with Iran, dismissed Iran's counter-proposals out of hand, reportedly at the instigation of White House Chief of Staff Rahm Emanuel and neocon regional emissary Dennis Ross.

If at First You Don't Succeed

Watching all this, Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva and Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan saw parallels between Washington's eagerness for an escalating confrontation with Iran and the way the United States had marched the world, step by step, into the invasion of Iraq.

In spring 2010, hoping to head off another such catastrophe, the two leaders dusted off the Oct. 1 uranium transfer initiative and got Tehran to agree to similar terms on May 17, 2010. Both called for sending 2,640 pounds of Iran's low-enriched uranium abroad in exchange for nuclear rods that would have no applicability for a weapon. In May 2010, that meant roughly 50 percent of Iran's low-enriched uranium would be sent to Turkey in exchange for higher-enriched uranium for medical use.

Yet, rather than embrace this Iranian concession as at least one significant step in the right direction, U.S. officials sought to scuttle it by pressing instead for more sanctions. The U.S. media did its part by insisting that the deal was just another Iranian trick that would leave Iran with enough uranium to theoretically create one nuclear bomb.

An editorial in the Washington Post on May 18, 2010, entitled "[Bad Bargain](#)," concluded wistfully/wishfully: "It's possible that Tehran will retreat even from the terms it offered Brazil and Turkey, in which case those countries should be obliged to support U.N. sanctions."

On May 19, a New York Times' [editorial](#) rhetorically patted the leaders of Brazil and Turkey on the head as if they were rubes lost in the big-city world of

hardheaded diplomacy. The Times wrote: "Brazil and Turkey are eager to play larger international roles. And they are eager to avoid a conflict with Iran. We respect those desires. But like pretty much everyone else, they got played by Tehran."

The disdain for this latest Iranian concession was shared by Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, who was busy polishing her reputation for "toughness" by doing all she could to undermine the Brazil-Turkey initiative. She pressed instead for harsh sanctions.

"We have reached agreement on a strong draft [sanctions resolution] with the cooperation of both Russia and China," Clinton told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on May 18, making clear that she viewed the timing of the sanctions as a riposte to the Iran-Brazil-Turkey agreement.

"This announcement is as convincing an answer to the efforts undertaken in Tehran over the last few days as any we could provide," she declared. Her spokesman, Philip J. Crowley, was left with the challenging task of explaining the obvious implication that Washington was using the new sanctions to scuttle the plan for transferring half of Iran's enriched uranium out of the country.

Obama Overruled?

Secretary Clinton got her UN resolution and put the kibosh on the arrangement that Brazil and Turkey had worked out with Iran. The Obama administration celebrated its victory in getting the UN Security Council on June 9, 2010, to approve a fourth round of economic sanctions against Iran. Obama also signed on to even more draconian penalties sailing through Congress.

It turned out, though, that Obama had earlier encouraged both Brazil and Turkey to work out a deal to get Iran to transfer about half its low-enriched uranium to Turkey in exchange for more highly enriched uranium that could only be used for peaceful medical purposes. But wait. Isn't that precisely what the Brazilians and Turks succeeded in doing?

Da Silva and Erdogan, understandably, were nonplussed, and da Silva actually released a copy of an earlier letter of encouragement from Obama.

No matter. The tripartite agreement was denounced by Secretary Clinton and ridiculed by the U.S. mainstream media. And that was kibosh enough. Even after Brazil released Obama's supportive letter, the President would not publicly defend the position he had taken earlier.

So, once again. Assume you're in the position of an Iranian negotiator. Trust, but verify, was Ronald Reagan's approach. We are likely to find out soon whether

there exists the level of trust necessary to start dealing successfully with the issue of most concern to Iran lifting the sanctions.

Ray McGovern works with Tell the Word, a publishing arm of the ecumenical Church of the Saviour in inner-city Washington. He was a CIA analyst for 27 years and now serves on the Steering Group of Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS).

How the Iran-Nuke Crisis Was Hyped

A prized weapon in the U.S. geopolitical arsenal is “information warfare,” the ability to promote false or misleading information to heighten the pressure on an adversary, often using supposedly neutral UN agencies as a front, as may have happened on Iran’s nuclear program, reports Gareth Porter.

By Gareth Porter

In a critique of the handling of the Iran file by the International Atomic Energy Agency, former IAEA Director General Han Blix has called for greater skepticism about the intelligence documents and reports alleging Iranian nuclear weapons work and warned that they may be used to put diplomatic pressure on Tehran.

In an interview with this writer in his Stockholm apartment late last month, Blix, who headed the IAEA from 1981 to 1997, also criticized the language repeated by the IAEA under its current director general, Yukiya Amano, suggesting that Iran is still under suspicion of undeclared nuclear activity.

Blix, who clashed with U.S. officials when he was head of the United Nations Monitoring, Verification and Inspection Commission (UNMOVIC) on weapons of mass destruction in Iraq from 2000 to 2003, said he has long been skeptical of intelligence that has been used to accuse Iraq and Iran of having active nuclear-weapons programs.

“I’ve often said you have as much disinformation as information” on alleged weaponization efforts in those countries, Blix said.

Referring to the allegations of past Iranian nuclear weapons research that have been published in IAEA reports, Blix said, “Something that worries me is that these accusations that come from foreign intelligence agencies can be utilized by states to keep Iran under suspicion.”

Such allegations, according to Blix, “can be employed as a tactic to keep the state in a suspect light, to keep Iran on the run.” The IAEA, he said, “should be cautious and not allow itself to be drawn into such a tactic.”

Blix warned that compromising the independence of the IAEA by pushing it to embrace unverified intelligence was not in the true interests of those providing the intelligence.

The IAEA Member States providing the intelligence papers to the IAEA “have a long-term interest in an international service that seeks to be independent,” said Blix. “In the Security Council they can pursue their own interest, but the [IAEA] dossier has to be as objective as possible.”

In 2005, the George W. Bush administration gave the IAEA a large cache of documents purporting to derive from a covert Iranian nuclear weapons research and development program from 2001 to 2003. Israel provided a series of documents and intelligence reports on alleged Iranian nuclear weapons work in 2008 and 2009.

Blix’s successor as IAEA director general, Mohamed ElBaradei, recalled in his 2011 memoirs having doubts about the authenticity of both sets of intelligence documents. ElBaradei resisted pressure from the United States and its European allies in 2009 to publish an “annex” to a regular IAEA report based on those unverified documents.

But Amano agreed to do so, and the annex on “possible military dimensions” of the Iranian nuclear program was published in November 2011. During the current negotiations with Iran, the P5+1 (U.S., UK, Russia, China, France plus Germany) has taken the position that Iran must explain the intelligence documents and reports described in the annex.

The provenance of the largest part of the intelligence documents, the so-called “laptop documents”, was an unresolved question for years after they were first reported in 2004 and 2005. But former senior German foreign office official Karsten Voigt confirmed in 2013 that the Iranian exile opposition group, the *Mujahedeen E-Khalq* (MEK), gave the original set of documents to the German intelligence service (BND) in 2004.

The MEK has been reported by Seymour Hersh, Connie Bruck, and a popular history of the Mossad’s covert operations to have been a client of Israel’s foreign intelligence agency, the Mossad, serving to “launder” intelligence that Mossad did not want to have attributed to Israel.

Blix has been joined by two other former senior IAEA officials in criticizing the agency for its uncritical presentation of the intelligence documents cited

in the November 2011 annex. Robert Kelley, the head of the Iraq team under both Blix and ElBaradei, and Tariq Rauf, the former head of the Agency's Verification and Security Policy Coordination Office, have written that the annex employed "exaggeration, innuendo and careful choice of words" in presenting intelligence information from an unidentified Member State of the IAEA on the alleged cylinder at the Parchin military facility.

Blix said he is "critical" of the IAEA for the boilerplate language used in its reports on Iran that the Agency is "not in a position to provide credible assurances about the absence of undeclared nuclear material and activities."

Blix added that it is "erroneous" to suggest that the IAEA would be able to provide such assurances if Iran or any other state were more cooperative. As head of UNMOVIC, Blix recalled, "I was always clear that there could always be small things in a big geographical area that can be hidden, and you can never guarantee completely that there are no undeclared activities."

"In Iraq we didn't maintain there was nothing," he said. "We said we had made 700 inspections at 500 sites and we had not seen anything."

Blix emphasized that he was not questioning the importance of maximizing inspections, or of Iran's ratification of the Additional Protocol. "I think the more inspections you can perform the smaller the residue of uncertainty," he said.

Gareth Porter, an investigative journalist and historian specializing in U.S. "national security" policy and was the recipient of the Gellhorn Prize for journalism in 2012. His latest book is *Manufactured Crisis: The Untold Story of the Iran Nuclear Scare*. [This article first appeared at LobeLog.]
