

Slanting the Case on Iran's Nukes

From the Archive: As the International Atomic Energy Agency clashes with Iran over access to a military site, the U.S. government and mainstream news media are denouncing Iran. But no one recalls the WikiLeaks documents that exposed the bias of the new IAEA leaders, as Robert Parry reported in 2011.

By Robert Parry (Originally published November 21, 2011)

As Washington's political/media class rises up in arms over new WMD allegations against Iran, it might be worth recalling how a similar process played out nearly a decade ago when the U.S. public was drawn into a war with Iraq. It wasn't just that George W. Bush told some lies; it was more complicated than that.

In 2002-2003, Official Washington professed a deep faith in the professionalism of the CIA's analytical division, which accepted enough of the bogus intelligence being pushed by neocon war hawks to create a basis for Bush's invasion of Iraq. Only later did it become clear how politicized the CIA's analysis had become.

Today, a similar role is being played by the United Nations' International Atomic Energy Agency, which during the run-up to war with Iraq and under different management was one of the few international bodies with the courage to reject some of Bush's claims about Iraq.

However, in the past two years, the IAEA has become deeply politicized under its new director general, Japanese diplomat Yukiya Amano. Yet, you wouldn't know that from how the U.S. news media is accepting what the IAEA says about Iran, much as the U.S. press corps avoided questioning the CIA's assessments on Iraq.

The evidence of the IAEA's politicization can be found in confidential U.S. diplomatic cables obtained by WikiLeaks and published last year by the Guardian newspaper in the U.K. In those cables, the IAEA's new leadership indicated it was willing to give Washington what it wanted on Iran, just as the CIA's hierarchy bent to Bush's needs on Iraq last decade.

According to the U.S. embassy cables from Vienna, Austria, the IAEA's headquarters, American diplomats in 2009 were cheering the prospect that Amano would advance American interests in ways that outgoing IAEA Director General Mohamed ElBaradei wouldn't.

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 ranks as the world's leading rogue nuclear state with a large and undeclared nuclear arsenal.)

'Constructive Ambiguity'

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.

The U.K. Guardian observed Amano's cozy relationship with the United States, but major U.S. news outlets have avoided any critical examination of Amano.

Instead, they simply trumpeted the new IAEA report on Iran in November 2011, treating it without skepticism. [See Consortiumnews.com's "DÃ©jÃ vu Over Iran Nuke Charges" and "Big Media's Double Standards on Iran."]

Later the same month, the neocon-dominated Washington Post continued to pump out anti-Iranian propaganda, fronting an article entitled "Iran's role probed in Gaddafi stockpile" suggesting with no solid evidence at all that Iran had supplied Muammar Gaddafi's Libya with artillery shells for chemical weapons.

Co-produced with the Center for Public Integrity, the Post article said U.S. intelligence is investigating how the shells got to Libya and that "several sources said early suspicion had fallen on Iran. A U.S. official with access to classified information confirmed that there were 'serious concerns' that Iran had provided the shells, albeit some years ago.

"In recent weeks, U.N. inspectors [at IAEA] have released new information indicating that Iran has the capability to develop a nuclear bomb, a charge Iranian officials have long rejected. Confirmed evidence of Iran's provision of the specialized shells may exacerbate international tensions over the country's alleged pursuit of weapons of mass destruction."

Troubling Parallel

If any of this is creating a sense of dÃ©jÃ vu, with supposedly objective organizations fanning the flames of confrontation based on little hard proof, it's understandable. A nearly identical process paved the way to war with Iraq. (Over the years, for instance, the Center for Public Integrity has received substantial funding from liberal foundations, but it has since tilted right.)

[A recent Google search revealed that the article generated dozens of derivative stories that flashed around the world, but there was no subsequent confirmation of the allegations. A news analysis at the PBS "Frontline" Web site, however, did note obvious holes in the article.]

In 2002-2003, the U.S. political/media process was similarly overwhelmed with supposedly objective evidence of Iraq's pursuit of nuclear bombs and other unconventional weapons, including disclosure from "scientists" defecting from Iraq who were then funneled to U.S. intelligence analysts and journalists by the dissident Iraqi National Congress.

It was not until 2006 when the Senate Intelligence Committee issued a long-awaited *post-mortem* on why the U.S. intelligence community performed so badly that details were revealed about how the INC shaped the pro-war debate by coaching Iraqi "defectors" how to lie. Amid the powerful "group think" that gripped Official Washington then, the lies fed the war fever.

Just like today, it was far easier and safer for politicians and pundits to get all macho against a "designated enemy" in the Middle East than it was to examine the specifics of the WMD claims and risk being called an enemy "apologist."

After all, what if it turned out that Iraq's Saddam Hussein had hid stockpiles of chemical or biological weapons? Anyone who had challenged the WMD "group think" would have been identified as a "Saddam stooge" and might never work again.

By contrast, there was almost no career danger if you ran with the pack, even if it turned out that there were no secret WMD caches. Then, you could simply say that "everyone" was deceived and that no one should be singled out for punishment.

As it turned out with very few exceptions those who pushed disinformation that justified the Iraq War have maintained their esteemed spots in the Washington establishment.

Of course, some people did end up paying a price for the bogus Iraq-WMD "group think" the nearly 4,500 dead U.S. soldiers, the tens of thousands of wounded, and the hundreds of thousands of dead and maimed Iraqis, plus the U.S. taxpayers who got stuck with the bill. But few of those folks attend Georgetown cocktail parties.

Given the self-interest of Washington's WMD-duped insiders, it shouldn't come as much of a surprise that the report detailing how the phony WMD case was built got little notice in 2006 when the Senate Intelligence Committee released its finding on how the Iraqi National Congress worked with American neocons to sell the case for war with Iraq.

The History

The official U.S. relationship with these Iraqi exiles dated back to 1991 after

President George H.W. Bush had routed Hussein's army from Kuwait and wanted to help Saddam Hussein's domestic opponents.

In May 1991, the CIA approached Ahmed Chalabi, a secular Shiite who had not lived in Iraq since 1956. Chalabi was far from a perfect opposition candidate, however. Beyond his long isolation from his homeland, Chalabi was a fugitive from bank fraud charges in Jordan.

Still, in June 1992, the Iraqi exiles held an organizational meeting in Vienna out of which came the Iraqi National Congress with Chalabi as the group's chairman.

But Chalabi soon began rubbing some CIA officers the wrong way. They complained about the quality of his information, the excessive size of his security detail, his lobbying of Congress, and his resistance to working as a team player.

For his part, smooth-talking Chalabi bristled at the idea that he was a U.S. intelligence asset, preferring to see himself as an independent political leader. Nevertheless, he and his organization were not averse to accepting American money.

With U.S. financial backing, the INC waged a propaganda campaign against Hussein and arranged for "a steady stream of low-ranking walk-ins" to provide intelligence about the Iraqi military, the Senate Intelligence Committee report said.

The INC's mix of duties propaganda and intelligence would create concerns within the CIA as would the issue of Chalabi's "coziness" with the Shiite government of Iran. The CIA concluded that Chalabi was double-dealing both sides when he falsely informed Iran that the United States wanted Iran's help in conducting anti-Hussein operations.

"Chalabi passed a fabricated message from the White House to" an Iranian intelligence officer in northern Iraq, the CIA reported. According to one CIA representative, Chalabi used National Security Council stationery for the fabricated letter, a charge that Chalabi denied.

In December 1996, Clinton administration officials decided to terminate the CIA's relationship with the INC and Chalabi. "There was a breakdown in trust," CIA Director George Tenet later told the Senate Intelligence Committee.

However, in 1998, with the congressional passage of the Iraq Liberation Act, the INC was again one of the exile organizations that qualified for U.S. funding. Starting in March 2000, the State Department agreed to grant an INC foundation almost \$33 million for several programs, including more propaganda operations

and collection of information about alleged war crimes committed by Hussein's regime.

By March 2001, with George W. Bush in office and already focusing on Iraq, the INC was given greater leeway to pursue its projects, including an Information Collection Program.

The INC's blurred responsibilities on intelligence gathering and propaganda dissemination raised fresh concerns within the State Department. But Bush's National Security Council intervened against State's attempts to cut off funding.

The NSC shifted the INC operation to the control of the Defense Department, where neoconservatives wielded more influence. To little avail, CIA officials warned their counterparts at the Defense Intelligence Agency about suspicions that "the INC was penetrated by Iranian and possibly other intelligence services, and that the INC had its own agenda," the Senate report said.

"You've got a real bucket full of worms with the INC and we hope you're taking the appropriate steps," the CIA told the DIA.

Media Hype

But the CIA's warnings did little to stanch the flow of INC propaganda into America's politics and media. Besides irrigating the U.S. intelligence community with fresh propaganda, the INC funneled a steady stream of "defectors" to U.S. news outlets eager for anti-Hussein scoops.

The "defectors" also made the rounds of Congress where members saw a political advantage in citing the INC's propaganda as a way to talk tough about the Middle East. In turn, conservative and neoconservative think tanks honed their reputations in Washington by staying at the cutting edge of the negative news about Hussein, with human rights groups ready to pile on, too, against the Iraqi dictator.

The Bush administration found all this anti-Hussein propaganda fitting perfectly with its international agenda. So the INC's information program served the institutional needs and biases of Official Washington. Saddam Hussein was a despised figure anyway, with no influential constituency that would challenge even the most outrageous accusations against him.

A war fever was sweeping the United States and the INC was doing all it could to spread the infection. INC's "defectors" supplied primary or secondary intelligence on two key points in particular, Iraq's supposed rebuilding of its unconventional weapons and its alleged training of non-Iraqi terrorists.

Sometimes, these “defectors” would enter the cloistered world of U.S. intelligence with entrées from former U.S. government officials.

For instance, ex-CIA Director James Woolsey referred at least a couple of these Iraqi sources to the DIA. Woolsey, who was affiliated with the Center for Strategic and International Studies and other neoconservative think tanks, had been one of the Reagan administration’s favorite Democrats in the 1980s because he supported a hawkish foreign policy. After Bill Clinton won the White House, Woolsey parlayed his close ties to the neocons into the job as CIA director.

In early 1993, Clinton’s foreign policy adviser Samuel “Sandy” Berger explained to one well-placed Democratic official that Woolsey was given the CIA job because the Clinton team felt it owed a favor to the neoconservative *New Republic*, which had lent Clinton some cachet with the insider crowd of Washington.

Amid that more relaxed post-Cold War mood, the Clinton team viewed the CIA directorship as a kind of a patronage plum that could be handed out as a favor to campaign supporters. But new international challenges soon emerged and Woolsey proved to be an ineffective leader of the intelligence community. After two years, he was replaced.

As the 1990s wore on, the spurned Woolsey grew closer to Washington’s fast-growing neoconservative movement, which was openly hostile to President Clinton for his perceived softness in asserting U.S. military power, especially against Arab regimes in the Middle East.

On Jan. 26, 1998, the neocon Project for the New American Century sent a letter to Clinton urging the ouster of Saddam Hussein by force if necessary. Woolsey was one of the 18 signers. By early 2001, he also had grown close to the INC, having been hired as co-counsel to represent eight Iraqis, including INC members, who had been detained on immigration charges.

So, Woolsey was well-positioned to serve as a conduit for INC “defectors” trying to get their stories to U.S. officials and to the American public.

The ‘Sources’

DIA officials told the Senate Intelligence Committee that Woolsey introduced them to the first in a long line of INC “defectors” who told the DIA about Hussein’s WMD and his supposed relationship with Islamic terrorists. For his part, Woolsey said he didn’t recall making that referral.

The debriefings of “Source One” as he was called in the Senate Intelligence Committee report generated more than 250 intelligence reports. Two of the

reports described alleged terrorist training sites in Iraq, where Afghan, Pakistani and Palestinian nationals were allegedly taught military skills at the Salman Pak base, 20 miles south of Baghdad.

“Many Iraqis believe that Saddam Hussein had made an agreement with Usama bin Ladin in order to support his terrorist movement against the U.S.,” Source One claimed, according to the Senate report.

After the 9/11 attacks, information from Source One and other INC-connected “defectors” began surfacing in U.S. press accounts, not only in the right-wing news media, but many mainstream publications.

In an Oct. 12, 2001, column entitled “What About Iraq?” *Washington Post* chief foreign correspondent Jim Hoagland cited “accumulating evidence of Iraq’s role in sponsoring the development on its soil of weapons and techniques for international terrorism,” including training at Salman Pak.

Hoagland’s sources included Iraqi army defector Sabah Khalifa Khodada and another unnamed Iraqi ex-intelligence officer in Turkey. Hoagland also criticized the CIA for not taking seriously a possible Iraqi link to 9/11.

Hoagland’s column was followed by a Page One article in *The New York Times*, which was headlined “Defectors Cite Iraqi Training for Terrorism.” It relied on Khodada, the second source in Turkey (who was later identified as Abu Zeinab al-Qurairy, a former senior officer in Iraq’s intelligence agency, the Mukhabarat), and a lower-ranking member of Mukhabarat.

This story described 40 to 50 Islamic militants getting training at Salman Pak at any one time, including lessons on how to hijack an airplane without weapons. There were also claims about a German scientist working on biological weapons.

In a *Columbia Journalism Review* retrospective on press coverage of U.S. intelligence on Iraq, writer Douglas McCollam asked *Times* correspondent Chris Hedges about the *Times* article, which had been written in coordination with a PBS Frontline documentary called “Gunning for Saddam,” with correspondent Lowell Bergman.

Explaining the difficulty of checking out defector accounts when they meshed with the interests of the U.S. government, Hedges said, “We tried to vet the defectors and we didn’t get anything out of Washington that said, ‘these guys are full of shit.’”

For his part, Bergman told *CJR*’s McCollam, “The people involved appeared credible and we had no way of getting into Iraq ourselves.”

The journalistic competition to break anti-Hussein scoops was building. Based in Paris, Hedges said he would get periodic calls from *Times* editors asking that he check out defector stories originating from Chalabi's operation.

"I thought he was unreliable and corrupt, but just because someone is a sleazebag doesn't mean he might not know something or that everything he says is wrong," Hedges said. Hedges described Chalabi as having an "endless stable" of ready sources who could fill in American reporters on any number of Iraq-related topics.

The Salman Pak story would be one of many products from the INC's propaganda mill that would prove influential in the run-up to the Iraq War but would be knocked down later by U.S. intelligence agencies.

According to the Senate Intelligence Committee's *post-mortem*, the DIA stated in June 2006 that it found "no credible reports that non-Iraqis were trained to conduct or support transnational terrorist operations at Salman Pak after 1991."

Explaining the origins for the bogus tales, the DIA concluded that Operation Desert Storm had brought attention to the training base at Salman Pak, so "fabricators and unestablished sources who reported hearsay or third-hand information created a large volume of human intelligence reporting. This type of reporting surged after September 2001."

Going with the Flow

However, in the prelude to the Iraq War, U.S. intelligence agencies found it hard to resist the INC's "defectors" when that would have meant challenging the White House and going against Washington's conventional wisdom. Rather than take those career chances, many intelligence analysts found it easier to go with the flow.

Referring to the INC's Source One, a U.S. intelligence memorandum in July 2002 hailed the information as "highly credible and includes reports on a wide range of subjects including conventional weapons facilities, denial and deception; communications security; suspected terrorist training locations; illicit trade and smuggling; Saddam's palaces; the Iraqi prison system; and Iraqi petrochemical plants."

Only analysts in the State Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research were skeptical because they felt Source One was making unfounded assumptions, especially about possible nuclear research sites.

After the invasion of Iraq, U.S. intelligence finally began to recognize the holes in Source One's stories and spotted examples of analysts extrapolating

faulty conclusions from his limited first-hand knowledge.

“In early February 2004, in order to resolve credibility issues with Source One, Intelligence Community elements brought Source One to Iraq,” the Senate Intelligence Committee report said. “When taken to the location Source One had described as the suspect [nuclear] facility, he was unable to identify it.

“According to one intelligence assessment, the ‘subject appeared stunned upon hearing that he was standing on the spot that he reported as the location of the facility, insisted that he had never been to that spot, and wanted to check a map’

“Intelligence Community officers confirmed that they were standing on the location he was identifying. During questioning, Source One acknowledged contact with the INC’s Washington Director [redacted], but denied that the Washington Director directed Source One to provide any false information.”

The U.S. intelligence community had mixed reactions to other Iraqi “walk-ins” arranged by the INC. Some were caught in outright deceptions, such as “Source Two” who had talked about Iraq supposedly building mobile biological weapons labs.

After catching Source Two in contradictions, the CIA issued a “fabrication notice” in May 2002, deeming him “a fabricator/provocateur” and asserting that he had “been coached by the Iraqi National Congress prior to his meeting with western intelligence services.”

However, the DIA never repudiated the specific reports that had been based on Source Two’s debriefings. So, Source Two continued to be cited in five CIA intelligence assessments and the pivotal National Intelligence Estimate in October 2002, “as corroborating other source reporting about a mobile biological weapons program,” the Senate Intelligence Committee report said.

Source Two was one of four human sources referred to by Secretary of State Colin Powell in his United Nations speech on Feb. 5, 2003. When asked how a “fabricator” could have been used for such an important speech, a CIA analyst who worked on Powell’s speech said, “we lost the thread of concern as time progressed I don’t think we remembered.”

A CIA supervisor added, “Clearly we had it at one point, we understood, we had concerns about the source, but over time it started getting used again and there really was a loss of corporate awareness that we had a problem with the source.”

Flooding Defectors

Part of the challenge facing U.S. intelligence agencies was the sheer volume of “defectors” shepherded into debriefing rooms by the INC and the appeal of their anti-Hussein information to U.S. policymakers.

“Source Five,” for instance, claimed that Osama bin Laden had traveled to Baghdad for direct meetings with Saddam Hussein. “Source Six” claimed that the Iraqi population was “excited” about the prospects of a U.S. invasion to topple Hussein. Plus, the source said Iraqis recognized the need for post-invasion U.S. control.

By early February 2003, as the final invasion plans were underway, U.S. intelligence agencies had progressed up to “Source Eighteen,” who came to epitomize what some analysts still suspected that the INC was coaching the sources.

As the CIA tried to set up a debriefing of Source Eighteen, another Iraqi exile passed on word to the agency that an INC representative had told Source Eighteen to “deliver the act of a lifetime.” CIA analysts weren’t sure what to make of that piece of news since Iraqi exiles frequently badmouthed each other but the value of the warning soon became clear.

U.S. intelligence officers debriefed Source Eighteen the next day and discovered that “Source Eighteen was supposed to have a nuclear engineering background, but was unable to discuss advanced mathematics or physics and described types of ‘nuclear’ reactors that do not exist,” according to the Senate Intelligence Committee report.

“Source Eighteen used the bathroom frequently, particularly when he appeared to be flustered by a line of questioning, suddenly remembering a new piece of information upon his return. During one such incident, Source Eighteen appeared to be reviewing notes,” the report said.

Not surprisingly, the CIA and DIA case officers concluded that Source Eighteen was a fabricator. But the sludge of INC-connected misinformation and disinformation continued to ooze through the U.S. intelligence community and to foul the American intelligence product in part because there was little pressure from above demanding strict quality controls.

Curve Ball

Other Iraqi exile sources not directly connected to the INC also supplied dubious information, including a source for a foreign intelligence agency who earned the code name “Curve Ball.” He contributed important details about Iraq’s alleged mobile facilities for producing agents for biological warfare.

Tyler Drumheller, former chief of the CIA's European Division, said his office had issued repeated warnings about Curve Ball's accounts. "Everyone in the chain of command knew exactly what was happening," Drumheller said. [Los Angeles Times, April 2, 2005]

Despite those objections and the lack of direct U.S. contact with Curve Ball, he earned a rating as "credible" or "very credible," and his information became a core element of the Bush administration's case for invading Iraq.

Drawings of Curve Ball's imaginary bio-weapons labs were a central feature of Secretary of State Powell's presentation to the U.N.

Even after the invasion, U.S. officials continued to promote these claims, portraying the discovery of a couple of trailers used for inflating artillery balloons as "the strongest evidence to date that Iraq was hiding a biological warfare program." [CIA-DIA report, "Iraqi Mobile Biological Warfare Agent Production Plants," May 16, 2003]

Finally, on May 26, 2004, a CIA assessment of Curve Ball said "investigations since the war in Iraq and debriefings of the key source indicate he lied about his access to a mobile BW production product."

The U.S. intelligence community also learned that Curve Ball "had a close relative who had worked for the INC since 1992," but the CIA could never resolve the question of whether the INC was involved in coaching Curve Ball.

One CIA analyst said she doubted a direct INC role because the INC pattern was to "shop their good sources around town, but they weren't known for sneaking people out of countries into some asylum system."

Delayed Report

In September 2006, four years after the Bush administration began fanning the flames for war against Iraq, a majority of Senate Intelligence Committee members overrode the objections of the panel's senior Republicans and issued a report on the INC's contribution to the U.S. intelligence failures.

The report concluded that the INC fed false information to the intelligence community to convince Washington that Iraq was flouting prohibitions on WMD production. The panel also found that the falsehoods had been "widely distributed in intelligence products prior to the war" and did influence some American perceptions of the WMD threat in Iraq.

But INC disinformation was not solely to blame for the bogus intelligence that permeated the pre-war debate. In Washington, there had been a breakdown of the

normal checks and balances that American democracy has traditionally relied on for challenging and eliminating the corrosive effects of false data.

By 2002, that self-correcting mechanism a skeptical press, congressional oversight, and tough-minded analysts had collapsed. With very few exceptions, prominent journalists refused to put their careers at risk; intelligence professionals played along with the powers that be; Democratic leaders succumbed to the political pressure to toe the President's line; and Republicans marched in lockstep with Bush on his way to war.

Because of this systematic failure, the Senate Intelligence Committee concluded four years later that nearly every key assessment of the U.S. intelligence community as expressed in the 2002 National Intelligence Estimate about Iraq's WMD was wrong:

"Postwar findings do not support the [NIE] judgment that Iraq was reconstituting its nuclear weapons program; do not support the [NIE] assessment that Iraq's acquisition of high-strength aluminum tubes was intended for an Iraqi nuclear program; do not support the [NIE] assessment that Iraq was 'vigorously trying to procure uranium ore and yellowcake' from Africa; do not support the [NIE] assessment that 'Iraq has biological weapons' and that 'all key aspects of Iraq's offensive biological weapons program are larger and more advanced than before the Gulf war'; do not support the [NIE] assessment that Iraq possessed, or ever developed, mobile facilities for producing biological warfare agents; do not support the [NIE] assessments that Iraq 'has chemical weapons' or 'is expanding its chemical industry to support chemical weapons production'; do not support the [NIE] assessments that Iraq had a developmental program for an Unmanned Aerial Vehicle 'probably intended to deliver biological agents' or that an effort to procure U.S. mapping software 'strongly suggests that Iraq is investigating the use of these UAVs for missions targeting the United States.'"

Now, five years after the Senate report, one might hope that this cautionary tale of how a dangerous "group think" can lead a nation to war would be remembered by editors, politicians and the public as a similar crescendo of propaganda builds about Iran.

But the opposite seems to be the case. An historical amnesia has taken hold, enabling the same political and career pressures to return. Mainstream journalists fall over themselves to compose scoops about Iran's WMD just as they did regarding Iraq's WMD. Politicians compete to out-macho the other when it comes to threatening Iran.

Skepticism toward politicized organizations like the IAEA is nearly non-existent. The American people are told to be afraid, very afraid. The only

significant difference may be that President Barack Obama is less eager for war with Iran than President George W. Bush was regarding war with Iraq.

But one Republican frontrunner, Mitt Romney, who has surrounded himself with neocoon foreign policy advisers, has made clear that if he's elected in 2012 he will be ready to launch a war against Iran, if that's what it takes to prevent Iran from building a nuclear bomb.

With the quality of intelligence that the neocons are sure to provide a President Romney, that future U.S./Israeli war against Iran may be launched on information as reliable as that which was used to justify invading Iraq.

[For more on related topics, see Robert Parry's *Lost History, Secrecy & Privilege* and *Neck Deep*, now available in a three-book set for the discount price of only \$29. For details, click here.]

Robert Parry broke many of the Iran-Contra stories in the 1980s for the Associated Press and Newsweek. His latest book, *Neck Deep: The Disastrous Presidency of George W. Bush*, was written with two of his sons, Sam and Nat, and can be ordered at neckdeepbook.com. His two previous books, *Secrecy & Privilege: The Rise of the Bush Dynasty from Watergate to Iraq* and *Lost History: Contras, Cocaine, the Press & 'Project Truth'* are also available there.

Tempest over an Iran Military Site

Iran's refusal to grant U.N. inspectors access to the Parchin military facility is churning up new suspicions about a concealed nuclear weapons program, but the impasse can be explained as the frustration by Iran over how previous inspections of the site have been treated, Gareth Porter writes for Inter Press Service.

By Gareth Porter

The failure of a mission by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to get Iranian permission to visit a military testing site mentioned in its latest report has been interpreted in media coverage as a stall to avoid the discovery of confirming evidence of past work on nuclear weapons.

But the history of Iranian cooperation with the IAEA on carrying out inspections at the Parchin military testing center, as well as a previous IAEA-Iran work program agreement, suggests that Iran is keeping permission for such a visit as

bargaining leverage to negotiate a better deal with the agency.

The IAEA statement on Wednesday emphasized the fact that the mission to Tehran had been denied permission to visit the site at Parchin. That prompted Associated Press correspondent in Vienna, George Jahn, to call Iran's refusal to agree to an IAEA visit to Parchin "stonewalling" and evidence of "hard line resistance" to international pressure on its nuclear program.

International Herald Tribune blogger Harvey Morris wrote that Iran's strategy was to "play for time."

But access to Parchin was discussed as part of broader negotiations on what the IAEA statement called a "document facilitating the clarification of unresolved issues" in regard to "possible military dimensions" of Iran's nuclear program. The negotiations were focused on what cooperation the IAEA is demanding and what the agency is ready to offer in return for that cooperation.

Judging from past negotiations between Iran and the IAEA, Iran is ready to offer access to Parchin as well as other sites requested by the agency as part of an agreement under which the IAEA would stop accusing Iran of carrying out covert nuclear weapons experiments.

The IAEA's position in the negotiations was revealed by the AP's Jahn, who reported that the agency mission had hoped to get Iranian agreement to meetings with "scientists suspected of working on the alleged weapons program" and to "inspect documents related to nuclear weapons work."

An IAEA report from September said the agency had "proposed discussions with Iranian experts on the contents of the engineering reports (on the Shahab-3 missile) examining in detail modeling studies." Iran has rejected such demands as threatening its legitimate national security interests, in violation of the IAEA statute.

The scientists that the agency is demanding to see are publicly known officials of Iran's military research institutions. Even before Israel had begun assassinating Iranian scientists, Iran had made it clear it will not give the IAEA physical access to any individual scientists.

The IAEA wants to visit a specific site at Parchin because of information from an unnamed member state, cited in its November 2011 report, that Iran had "constructed a large explosives containment vessel in which to conduct hydrodynamic experiments" tests of nuclear weapons designs without the use of fissile material.

The report said the construction had been carried out at Parchin military

complex in 2000 and that the IAEA had satellite imagery that was “consistent with” that information, meaning only that there were structures that could have housed such a vessel at Parchin in 2000. The previous history of IAEA inspections at Parchin make it clear, however, that Iran knew it had nothing to hide at Parchin after 2000.

In 2004, John Bolton, the point man in the George W. Bush administration on Iran, who coordinated closely with Israel, charged that satellite imagery showed a bunker at Parchin appropriate for large-scale explosives tests such as those needed to detonate a bomb that would use a neutron trigger.

Bolton put heavy pressure on the IAEA to carry out an investigation at Parchin. A few months later, Tehran agreed to allow the agency to select any five buildings and their surroundings to investigate freely. That gave U.S. and Israeli intelligence, as well as IAEA experts, an opportunity for which they would not have dreamed of asking: they could scan satellite imagery of the entire Parchin complex for anything that could possibly suggest work on a nuclear weapon, including a containment vessel for hydrodynamic testing, and demand to inspect that building and the grounds around it at their leisure.

In January 2005, an IAEA team visited Parchin and investigated the five areas they had chosen, taking environmental samples, but found nothing suspicious. In November 2005, Iran allowed the IAEA to do the same thing all over again on five more buildings of its own choice.

The Iranian military and nuclear establishment would never have agreed to such terms for IAEA inspection missions at Parchin – not once but twice – if they had been concealing a hydrodynamic test facility at the base.

Other information suggests that no such vessel ever existed at Parchin. Yet, the November report claimed the IAEA had obtained information on the dimensions of the containment vessel from the publication of a foreign expert identified as someone who worked “in the nuclear weapons program of the country of his origin.”

That was a reference to Vlachyslav Danilenko, a Ukrainian scientist who has acknowledged having lectured in Iran on theoretical physics and having helped the country build a cylinder for production of nano-diamonds, which was his research specialty. However, Danilenko has firmly denied ever having done any work related to nuclear weapons.

The claim that the dimensions of the putative bomb test chamber at Parchin could be gleaned from a publication by Danilenko is implausible. The report said the bomb containment chamber at Parchin was “designed to contain the detonation of

70 kilograms of high explosives.” Danilenko’s patented 1992 design for a cylinder for nano-diamond production, however, was built to contain only 10 kg of explosives.

Former IAEA weapons inspector and nuclear weapons expert Robert Kelley has pointed out, moreover, that a container for only 70 kg of explosives could not possibly have been used for hydrodynamic testing of a nuclear weapon design.

The negotiations on a “framework” for Iran’s cooperation with the IAEA recall the negotiation of a “work program” in August 2007 aimed at resolving a series of issues on which the IAEA Safeguards Department suspected links to nuclear weapons. The issues included experiments involving the extraction of polonium-210, plutonium experiments and possible military control of the Gchine uranium mine.

In previous years, Iran had failed to provide sufficient information to overcome those suspicions. But after the negotiation of the “work program,” Iran began to move with dispatch to provide documentation aimed at clearing up the six remaining issues. The IAEA acknowledged that all six of the issues had been effectively resolved in two reports in late 2007 and early 2008.

The reason for the dramatic change in cooperation was simple: the IAEA had pledged that, in return for Iran’s resolving the six issues, “the implementation of safeguards in Iran will be conducted in a routine manner.” That was seen as a significant step toward finally getting a clean bill of health from the agency.

But the IAEA instead then began focusing its questioning entirely on the purported Iranian documents of unknown origin and doubtful authenticity which the IAEA called the “alleged studies.”

Gareth Porter is an investigative historian and journalist specializing in U.S. national security policy. The paperback edition of his latest book, *Perils of Dominance: Imbalance of Power and the Road to War in Vietnam*, was published in 2006.

Avoiding Another Long War

Exaggerated coverage of [a dubious report](#) by the International Atomic Energy Agency about Iran’s alleged nuclear weapons program has spurred a rush toward a new war in the Middle East, but ex-U.S. intelligence officials urge President Obama to resist the pressures and examine the facts.

MEMORANDUM FOR: The President

FROM: Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS)

SUBJECT: Avoiding Another Long War

As professionals with collectively hundreds of years of experience in intelligence, foreign policy, and counterterrorism, we are concerned about the gross misrepresentation of facts being bruited about to persuade you to start another war.

We have watched the militarists represent one Muslim country after another as major threats to U.S. security. In the past, they supported attacks on Sudan, Somalia, Yemen, Iraq, Pakistan, Libya and Afghanistan, as well as Israel's attacks on Syria and Lebanon, nine Muslim countries and Gaza.

This time, they are using a new IAEA report to assert categorically that Iran is building a nuclear weapon that allegedly poses a major threat to the U.S. Your intelligence and military advisors can certainly clarify what the report really says.

As you know, the IAEA makes regular inspection visits to Iran's nuclear facilities and has TV cameras monitoring those facilities around the clock. While there is reason to question some of Iran's actions, the situation is not as clear-cut as some allege.

Mohamed ElBaradei, a Nobel Peace Prize recipient and former IAEA director-general, said recently, "I don't believe Iran is a clear and present danger. All I see is the hype about the threat posed by Iran." He is not alone: All 16 U.S. intelligence agencies concluded "with high confidence" in a 2007 National Intelligence Estimate that Iran had halted its nuclear-weapons program as of 2003.

We are seeing a replay of the "Iraq WMD threat." As Philip Zelikow, Executive Secretary of the 9/11 Commission said, "The 'real threat' from Iraq was not a threat to the United States. The unstated threat was the threat against Israel."

Your military and intelligence experts can also provide information on unpublicized efforts to derail Iran's nuclear program and on the futility of attempting to eliminate that program which is dispersed and mostly underground through aerial bombing.

Defense Secretary [Leon] Panetta and other experts have stated that an air attack would only delay any weapons program for a year or two at most.

Former Mossad head Meir Dagan said that an air force strike against Iran's

nuclear installations would be “a stupid thing,” a view endorsed in principle by two other past Mossad chiefs, Danny Yatom and Ephraim Halevy. Dagan added that “Any strike against [the civilian program] is an illegal act according to international law.”

Dagan pointed out another reality: bombing Iran would lead it to retaliate against Israel through Hezbollah, which has tens of thousands of Grad-type rockets and hundreds of Scuds and other long-range missiles, and through Hamas.

We are already spending as much as the rest of the world combined on National Security and \$100 billion per year on a Long War in Afghanistan. The Israel lobby has been beating the drums for us to attack Iran for years, led by people with confused loyalties like Joe Lieberman, who once made the claim that it is unpatriotic for Americans not to support Israel.

Another Long War is not in America’s or Israel’s interests, whatever Israel’s apologists claim. Those are the same people who claim that [Iranian President Mahmoud] Ahmadinejad said he would “wipe Israel off the map.” Persian specialists have pointed out that the original statement in Persian actually said that Israel would collapse: “This occupation regime over Jerusalem must vanish from the arena of time.”

What we have is a situation where Israel’s actions, for example in sending 300,000 settlers into the West Bank and 200,000 settlers into East Jerusalem, are compromising U.S. security by putting us at risk for terrorist retaliation.

We have provided Israel with \$100 billion in direct aid since 1975. Since this is fungible, how has funding settlements contributed to our security? You agreed to provide \$3 billion in F-35s to Israel in exchange for a 90-day freeze on settlements. What you got was 90 days of stonewalling on the peace process and then more settlers. What more do we owe Israel?

Certainly not a rush to war. We have time to make diplomacy and sanctions work, to persuade Russia and China to make joint cause with us.

James Madison once wrote that “Of all the enemies of true liberty, war is, perhaps, the most to be dreaded. War is the parent of armies; from these proceed debts and taxes. No nation can preserve its freedom in the midst of continual warfare.”

We are currently winding down what you labeled a “dumb war;” we should not undertake another dumb war against a country almost three times larger than Iraq, that would set off a major regional war and create generations of jihadis. Such a war, contrary to what some argue, would not make Israel or the U.S. safer.

Steering Group, Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS)

Phil Giraldi, Directorate of Operations, CIA, retired

Ray McGovern, US Army Intelligence Officer, Directorate of Intelligence, CIA, retired

Coleen Rowley, former Special Agent and Minneapolis Division Counsel, FBI

Ann Wright, Col., US Army Reserve (ret.), former Foreign Service Officer, Department of State

Tom Maertens, Foreign Service Officer and NSC Director for Non-Proliferation under two presidents

Elizabeth Murray, former Deputy National Intelligence Officer for the Near East in the National Intelligence Council

David MacMichael, former history professor and CIA and National Intelligence Council analyst

America's Debt to Bradley Manning

Exclusive: The cables and videos allegedly leaked by Pvt. Bradley Manning offer the American people gritty “ground truth” about what the U.S. government has done in their names, such as the slaughter in Iraq, but the information also sheds light on a possible future war with Iran, reports Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

One criticism about the value of the information that Pvt. Bradley Manning allegedly 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 last month 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.)

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.”

The 24-year-old Manning now faces the prospect of a court martial that could put him in prison for the rest of his life. 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.

[For more on related topics, see Robert Parry’s *Lost History, Secrecy & Privilege* and *Neck Deep*, now available in a three-book set for the discount price of only \$29. For details, [click here.](#)]

Robert Parry broke many of the Iran-Contra stories in the 1980s for the Associated Press and Newsweek. His latest book, *Neck Deep: The Disastrous Presidency of George W. Bush*, was written with two of his sons, Sam and Nat, and can be ordered at neckdeepbook.com. His two previous books, *Secrecy & Privilege: The Rise of the Bush Dynasty from Watergate to Iraq* and *Lost History: Contras, Cocaine, the Press & ‘Project Truth’* are also available there.

Slanting the Case on Iran’s Nukes

Special Report: The U.S. news media shows no skepticism as it accepts the toughly worded report by the International Atomic Energy Agency on Iran’s alleged nuclear weapons program. Ignored is the fact that the IAEA’s new chief appears to have joined the U.S./Israel camp, reports Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

As Washington's political/media class rises up in arms over new WMD allegations against Iran, it might be worth recalling how a similar process played out nearly a decade ago when the U.S. public was drawn into a war with Iraq. It wasn't just that George W. Bush told some lies; it was more complicated than that.

In 2002-2003, Official Washington professed a deep faith in the professionalism of the CIA's analytical division, which accepted enough of the bogus intelligence being pushed by neocon war hawks to create a basis for Bush's invasion of Iraq. Only later did it become clear how politicized the CIA's analysis had become.

Today, a similar role is being played by the United Nations' International Atomic Energy Agency, which during the run-up to war with Iraq and under different management was one of the few international bodies with the courage to reject some of Bush's claims about Iraq.

However, in the past two years, the IAEA has become deeply politicized under its new director general, Japanese diplomat Yukiya Amano. Yet, you wouldn't know that from how the U.S. news media is accepting what the IAEA says about Iran, much as the U.S. press corps avoided questioning the CIA's assessments on Iraq.

The evidence of the IAEA's politicization can be found in confidential U.S. diplomatic cables obtained by WikiLeaks and published last year by the Guardian newspaper in the U.K. In those cables, the IAEA's new leadership indicated it was willing to give Washington what it wanted on Iran, just as the CIA's hierarchy bent to Bush's needs on Iraq last decade.

According to the U.S. embassy cables from Vienna, Austria, the IAEA's headquarters, American diplomats in 2009 were cheering the prospect that Amano would advance American interests in ways that outgoing IAEA Director General Mohamed ElBaradei wouldn't.

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 ranks as the world's leading rogue nuclear state with a large and undeclared nuclear arsenal.)

'Constructive Ambiguity'

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.

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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.

The U.K. Guardian observed Amano's cozy relationship with the United States, but major U.S. news outlets have avoided any critical examination of Amano.

Instead, they simply trumpeted the new IAEA report on Iran earlier this month, treating it without skepticism. [See Consortiumnews.com's "[Dā'jā vu Over Iran Nuke Charges](#)" and "[Big Media's Double Standards on Iran.](#)"]

This week, the neocon-dominated Washington Post has continued to pump out anti-Iranian propaganda. On Monday, the Post fronted an article entitled "[Iran's role probed in Gaddafi stockpile](#)" suggesting with no solid evidence at all that Iran had supplied Muammar Gaddafi's Libya with artillery shells for chemical weapons.

Co-produced with the Center for Public Integrity, the Post article said U.S. intelligence is investigating how the shells got to Libya and that "several sources said early suspicion had fallen on Iran. A U.S. official with access to classified information confirmed that there were 'serious concerns' that Iran had provided the shells, albeit some years ago.

"In recent weeks, U.N. inspectors [at IAEA] have released new information indicating that Iran has the capability to develop a nuclear bomb, a charge Iranian officials have long rejected. Confirmed evidence of Iran's provision of the specialized shells may exacerbate international tensions over the country's alleged pursuit of weapons of mass destruction."

Troubling Parallel

If any of this is creating a sense of *dā'jā vu* – with supposedly objective organizations fanning the flames of confrontation based on little hard proof – it's understandable. A nearly identical process paved the way to war with Iraq. (Over the years, for instance, the Center for Public Integrity has received substantial funding from liberal foundations, but it has since tilted right.)

In 2002-2003, the U.S. political/media process was similarly overwhelmed with supposedly objective evidence of Iraq's pursuit of nuclear bombs and other unconventional weapons, including disclosure from "scientists" defecting from Iraq who were then funneled to U.S. intelligence analysts and journalists by the dissident Iraqi National Congress.

It was not until 2006 when the Senate Intelligence Committee issued a long-awaited *post-mortem* on why the U.S. intelligence community performed so badly that details were revealed about how the INC shaped the pro-war debate by coaching Iraqi "defectors" how to lie. Amid the powerful "group think" that gripped Official Washington then, the lies fed the war fever.

Just like today, it was far easier and safer for politicians and pundits to get all macho against a "designated enemy" in the Middle East than it was to examine the specifics of the WMD claims and risk being called an enemy "apologist."

After all, what if it turned out that Iraq's Saddam Hussein had hid stockpiles of chemical or biological weapons? Anyone who had challenged the WMD "group think" would have been identified as a "Saddam stooge" and might never work again.

By contrast, there was almost no career danger if you ran with the pack, even if it turned out that there were no secret WMD caches. Then, you could simply say that "everyone" was deceived and that no one should be singled out for punishment.

As it turned out with very few exceptions those who pushed disinformation that justified the Iraq War have maintained their esteemed spots in the Washington establishment.

Of course, some people did end up paying a price for the bogus Iraq-WMD "group think" the nearly 4,500 dead U.S. soldiers, the tens of thousands of wounded, and the hundreds of thousands of dead and maimed Iraqis, plus the U.S. taxpayers who got stuck with the bill. But few of those folks attend Georgetown cocktail parties.

Given the self-interest of Washington's WMD-duped insiders, it shouldn't come as much of a surprise that the report detailing how the phony WMD case was built got little notice in 2006 when the Senate Intelligence Committee released its finding on how the Iraqi National Congress worked with American neocons to sell the case for war with Iraq.

The History

The official U.S. relationship with these Iraqi exiles dated back to 1991 after President George H.W. Bush had routed Hussein's army from Kuwait and wanted to help Saddam Hussein's domestic opponents.

In May 1991, the CIA approached Ahmed Chalabi, a secular Shiite who had not lived in Iraq since 1956. Chalabi was far from a perfect opposition candidate, however. Beyond his long isolation from his homeland, Chalabi was a fugitive from bank fraud charges in Jordan.

Still, in June 1992, the Iraqi exiles held an organizational meeting in Vienna out of which came the Iraqi National Congress with Chalabi as the group's chairman.

But Chalabi soon began rubbing some CIA officers the wrong way. They complained about the quality of his information, the excessive size of his security detail, his lobbying of Congress, and his resistance to working as a team player.

For his part, smooth-talking Chalabi bristled at the idea that he was a U.S. intelligence asset, preferring to see himself as an independent political leader. Nevertheless, he and his organization were not averse to accepting American money.

With U.S. financial backing, the INC waged a propaganda campaign against Hussein and arranged for "a steady stream of low-ranking walk-ins" to provide intelligence about the Iraqi military, the Senate Intelligence Committee report said.

The INC's mix of duties propaganda and intelligence would create concerns within the CIA as would the issue of Chalabi's "coziness" with the Shiite government of Iran. The CIA concluded that Chalabi was double-dealing both sides when he falsely informed Iran that the United States wanted Iran's help in conducting anti-Hussein operations.

"Chalabi passed a fabricated message from the White House to" an Iranian intelligence officer in northern Iraq, the CIA reported. According to one CIA representative, Chalabi used National Security Council stationery for the fabricated letter, a charge that Chalabi denied.

In December 1996, Clinton administration officials decided to terminate the CIA's relationship with the INC and Chalabi. "There was a breakdown in trust," CIA Director George Tenet later told the Senate Intelligence Committee.

However, in 1998, with the congressional passage of the Iraq Liberation Act, the INC was again one of the exile organizations that qualified for U.S. funding. Starting in March 2000, the State Department agreed to grant an INC foundation almost \$33 million for several programs, including more propaganda operations and collection of information about alleged war crimes committed by Hussein's regime.

By March 2001, with George W. Bush in office and already focusing on Iraq, the INC was given greater leeway to pursue its projects, including an Information Collection Program.

The INC's blurred responsibilities on intelligence gathering and propaganda dissemination raised fresh concerns within the State Department. But Bush's National Security Council intervened against State's attempts to cut off funding.

The NSC shifted the INC operation to the control of the Defense Department, where neoconservatives wielded more influence. To little avail, CIA officials warned their counterparts at the Defense Intelligence Agency about suspicions that "the INC was penetrated by Iranian and possibly other intelligence

services, and that the INC had its own agenda," the Senate report said.

"You've got a real bucket full of worms with the INC and we hope you're taking the appropriate steps," the CIA told the DIA.

Media Hype

But the CIA's warnings did little to stanch the flow of INC propaganda into America's politics and media. Besides irrigating the U.S. intelligence community with fresh propaganda, the INC funneled a steady stream of "defectors" to U.S. news outlets eager for anti-Hussein scoops.

The "defectors" also made the rounds of Congress where members saw a political advantage in citing the INC's propaganda as a way to talk tough about the Middle East. In turn, conservative and neoconservative think tanks honed their reputations in Washington by staying at the cutting edge of the negative news about Hussein, with human rights groups ready to pile on, too, against the Iraqi dictator.

The Bush administration found all this anti-Hussein propaganda fitting perfectly with its international agenda. So the INC's information program served the institutional needs and biases of Official Washington. Saddam Hussein was a despised figure anyway, with no influential constituency that would challenge even the most outrageous accusations against him.

A war fever was sweeping the United States and the INC was doing all it could to spread the infection. INC's "defectors" supplied primary or secondary intelligence on two key points in particular, Iraq's supposed rebuilding of its unconventional weapons and its alleged training of non-Iraqi terrorists.

Sometimes, these "defectors" would enter the cloistered world of U.S. intelligence with entrées from former U.S. government officials.

For instance, ex-CIA Director James Woolsey referred at least a couple of these Iraqi sources to the DIA. Woolsey, who was affiliated with the Center for Strategic and International Studies and other neoconservative think tanks, had been one of the Reagan administration's favorite Democrats in the 1980s because he supported a hawkish foreign policy. After Bill Clinton won the White House, Woolsey parlayed his close ties to the neocons into the job as CIA director.

In early 1993, Clinton's foreign policy adviser Samuel "Sandy" Berger explained to one well-placed Democratic official that Woolsey was given the CIA job because the Clinton team felt it owed a favor to the neoconservative *New Republic*, which had lent Clinton some cachet with the insider crowd of Washington.

Amid that more relaxed post-Cold War mood, the Clinton team viewed the CIA directorship as a kind of a patronage plum that could be handed out as a favor to campaign supporters. But new international challenges soon emerged and Woolsey proved to be an ineffective leader of the intelligence community. After two years, he was replaced.

As the 1990s wore on, the spurned Woolsey grew closer to Washington's fast-growing neoconservative movement, which was openly hostile to President Clinton for his perceived softness in asserting U.S. military power, especially against Arab regimes in the Middle East.

On Jan. 26, 1998, the neocon Project for the New American Century sent a letter to Clinton urging the ouster of Saddam Hussein by force if necessary. Woolsey was one of the 18 signers. By early 2001, he also had grown close to the INC, having been hired as co-counsel to represent eight Iraqis, including INC members, who had been detained on immigration charges.

So, Woolsey was well-positioned to serve as a conduit for INC "defectors" trying to get their stories to U.S. officials and to the American public.

The 'Sources'

DIA officials told the Senate Intelligence Committee that Woolsey introduced them to the first in a long line of INC "defectors" who told the DIA about Hussein's WMD and his supposed relationship with Islamic terrorists. For his part, Woolsey said he didn't recall making that referral.

The debriefings of "Source One" as he was called in the Senate Intelligence Committee report generated more than 250 intelligence reports. Two of the reports described alleged terrorist training sites in Iraq, where Afghan, Pakistani and Palestinian nationals were allegedly taught military skills at the Salman Pak base, 20 miles south of Baghdad.

"Many Iraqis believe that Saddam Hussein had made an agreement with Usama bin Ladin in order to support his terrorist movement against the U.S.," Source One claimed, according to the Senate report.

After the 9/11 attacks, information from Source One and other INC-connected "defectors" began surfacing in U.S. press accounts, not only in the right-wing news media, but many mainstream publications.

In an Oct. 12, 2001, column entitled "What About Iraq?" *Washington Post* chief foreign correspondent Jim Hoagland cited "accumulating evidence of Iraq's role in sponsoring the development on its soil of weapons and techniques for international terrorism," including training at Salman Pak.

Hoagland's sources included Iraqi army defector Sabah Khalifa Khodada and another unnamed Iraqi ex-intelligence officer in Turkey. Hoagland also criticized the CIA for not taking seriously a possible Iraqi link to 9/11.

Hoagland's column was followed by a Page One article in *The New York Times*, which was headlined "Defectors Cite Iraqi Training for Terrorism." It relied on Khodada, the second source in Turkey (who was later identified as Abu Zeinab al-Qurairy, a former senior officer in Iraq's intelligence agency, the Mukhabarat), and a lower-ranking member of Mukhabarat.

This story described 40 to 50 Islamic militants getting training at Salman Pak at any one time, including lessons on how to hijack an airplane without weapons. There were also claims about a German scientist working on biological weapons.

In a *Columbia Journalism Review* retrospective on press coverage of U.S. intelligence on Iraq, writer Douglas McCollam asked *Times* correspondent Chris Hedges about the *Times* article, which had been written in coordination with a PBS Frontline documentary called "Gunning for Saddam," with correspondent Lowell Bergman.

Explaining the difficulty of checking out defector accounts when they meshed with the interests of the U.S. government, Hedges said, "We tried to vet the defectors and we didn't get anything out of Washington that said, 'these guys are full of shit.'"

For his part, Bergman told *CJR's* McCollam, "The people involved appeared credible and we had no way of getting into Iraq ourselves."

The journalistic competition to break anti-Hussein scoops was building. Based in Paris, Hedges said he would get periodic calls from *Times* editors asking that he check out defector stories originating from Chalabi's operation.

"I thought he was unreliable and corrupt, but just because someone is a sleazebag doesn't mean he might not know something or that everything he says is wrong," Hedges said. Hedges described Chalabi as having an "endless stable" of ready sources who could fill in American reporters on any number of Iraq-related topics.

The Salman Pak story would be one of many products from the INC's propaganda mill that would prove influential in the run-up to the Iraq War but would be knocked down later by U.S. intelligence agencies.

According to the Senate Intelligence Committee's *post-mortem*, the DIA stated in June 2006 that it found "no credible reports that non-Iraqis were trained to conduct or support transnational terrorist operations at Salman Pak after 1991."

Explaining the origins for the bogus tales, the DIA concluded that Operation Desert Storm had brought attention to the training base at Salman Pak, so “fabricators and unestablished sources who reported hearsay or third-hand information created a large volume of human intelligence reporting. This type of reporting surged after September 2001.”

Going with the Flow

However, in the prelude to the Iraq War, U.S. intelligence agencies found it hard to resist the INC’s “defectors” when that would have meant challenging the White House and going against Washington’s conventional wisdom. Rather than take those career chances, many intelligence analysts found it easier to go with the flow.

Referring to the INC’s Source One, a U.S. intelligence memorandum in July 2002 hailed the information as “highly credible and includes reports on a wide range of subjects including conventional weapons facilities, denial and deception; communications security; suspected terrorist training locations; illicit trade and smuggling; Saddam’s palaces; the Iraqi prison system; and Iraqi petrochemical plants.”

Only analysts in the State Department’s Bureau of Intelligence and Research were skeptical because they felt Source One was making unfounded assumptions, especially about possible nuclear research sites.

After the invasion of Iraq, U.S. intelligence finally began to recognize the holes in Source One’s stories and spotted examples of analysts extrapolating faulty conclusions from his limited first-hand knowledge.

“In early February 2004, in order to resolve credibility issues with Source One, Intelligence Community elements brought Source One to Iraq,” the Senate Intelligence Committee report said. “When taken to the location Source One had described as the suspect [nuclear] facility, he was unable to identify it.

“According to one intelligence assessment, the ‘subject appeared stunned upon hearing that he was standing on the spot that he reported as the location of the facility, insisted that he had never been to that spot, and wanted to check a map’

“Intelligence Community officers confirmed that they were standing on the location he was identifying. During questioning, Source One acknowledged contact with the INC’s Washington Director [redacted], but denied that the Washington Director directed Source One to provide any false information.”

The U.S. intelligence community had mixed reactions to other Iraqi “walk-ins”

arranged by the INC. Some were caught in outright deceptions, such as "Source Two" who had talked about Iraq supposedly building mobile biological weapons labs.

After catching Source Two in contradictions, the CIA issued a "fabrication notice" in May 2002, deeming him "a fabricator/provocateur" and asserting that he had "been coached by the Iraqi National Congress prior to his meeting with western intelligence services."

However, the DIA never repudiated the specific reports that had been based on Source Two's debriefings. So, Source Two continued to be cited in five CIA intelligence assessments and the pivotal National Intelligence Estimate in October 2002, "as corroborating other source reporting about a mobile biological weapons program," the Senate Intelligence Committee report said.

Source Two was one of four human sources referred to by Secretary of State Colin Powell in his United Nations speech on Feb. 5, 2003. When asked how a "fabricator" could have been used for such an important speech, a CIA analyst who worked on Powell's speech said, "we lost the thread of concern as time progressed I don't think we remembered."

A CIA supervisor added, "Clearly we had it at one point, we understood, we had concerns about the source, but over time it started getting used again and there really was a loss of corporate awareness that we had a problem with the source."

Flooding Defectors

Part of the challenge facing U.S. intelligence agencies was the sheer volume of "defectors" shepherded into debriefing rooms by the INC and the appeal of their anti-Hussein information to U.S. policymakers.

"Source Five," for instance, claimed that Osama bin Laden had traveled to Baghdad for direct meetings with Saddam Hussein. "Source Six" claimed that the Iraqi population was "excited" about the prospects of a U.S. invasion to topple Hussein. Plus, the source said Iraqis recognized the need for post-invasion U.S. control.

By early February 2003, as the final invasion plans were underway, U.S. intelligence agencies had progressed up to "Source Eighteen," who came to epitomize what some analysts still suspected that the INC was coaching the sources.

As the CIA tried to set up a debriefing of Source Eighteen, another Iraqi exile passed on word to the agency that an INC representative had told Source Eighteen to "deliver the act of a lifetime." CIA analysts weren't sure what to make of

that piece of news since Iraqi exiles frequently badmouthed each other but the value of the warning soon became clear.

U.S. intelligence officers debriefed Source Eighteen the next day and discovered that "Source Eighteen was supposed to have a nuclear engineering background, but was unable to discuss advanced mathematics or physics and described types of 'nuclear' reactors that do not exist," according to the Senate Intelligence Committee report.

"Source Eighteen used the bathroom frequently, particularly when he appeared to be flustered by a line of questioning, suddenly remembering a new piece of information upon his return. During one such incident, Source Eighteen appeared to be reviewing notes," the report said.

Not surprisingly, the CIA and DIA case officers concluded that Source Eighteen was a fabricator. But the sludge of INC-connected misinformation and disinformation continued to ooze through the U.S. intelligence community and to foul the American intelligence product in part because there was little pressure from above demanding strict quality controls.

Curve Ball

Other Iraqi exile sources not directly connected to the INC also supplied dubious information, including a source for a foreign intelligence agency who earned the code name "Curve Ball." He contributed important details about Iraq's alleged mobile facilities for producing agents for biological warfare.

Tyler Drumheller, former chief of the CIA's European Division, said his office had issued repeated warnings about Curve Ball's accounts. "Everyone in the chain of command knew exactly what was happening," Drumheller said. [Los Angeles Times, April 2, 2005]

Despite those objections and the lack of direct U.S. contact with Curve Ball, he earned a rating as "credible" or "very credible," and his information became a core element of the Bush administration's case for invading Iraq.

Drawings of Curve Ball's imaginary bio-weapons labs were a central feature of Secretary of State Powell's presentation to the U.N.

Even after the invasion, U.S. officials continued to promote these claims, portraying the discovery of a couple of trailers used for inflating artillery balloons as "the strongest evidence to date that Iraq was hiding a biological warfare program." [CIA-DIA report, "Iraqi Mobile Biological Warfare Agent Production Plants," May 16, 2003]

Finally, on May 26, 2004, a CIA assessment of Curve Ball said “investigations since the war in Iraq and debriefings of the key source indicate he lied about his access to a mobile BW production product.”

The U.S. intelligence community also learned that Curve Ball “had a close relative who had worked for the INC since 1992,” but the CIA could never resolve the question of whether the INC was involved in coaching Curve Ball.

One CIA analyst said she doubted a direct INC role because the INC pattern was to “shop their good sources around town, but they weren’t known for sneaking people out of countries into some asylum system.”

Delayed Report

In September 2006, four years after the Bush administration began fanning the flames for war against Iraq, a majority of Senate Intelligence Committee members overrode the objections of the panel’s senior Republicans and issued a report on the INC’s contribution to the U.S. intelligence failures.

The report concluded that the INC fed false information to the intelligence community to convince Washington that Iraq was flouting prohibitions on WMD production. The panel also found that the falsehoods had been “widely distributed in intelligence products prior to the war” and did influence some American perceptions of the WMD threat in Iraq.

But INC disinformation was not solely to blame for the bogus intelligence that permeated the pre-war debate. In Washington, there had been a breakdown of the normal checks and balances that American democracy has traditionally relied on for challenging and eliminating the corrosive effects of false data.

By 2002, that self-correcting mechanism a skeptical press, congressional oversight, and tough-minded analysts had collapsed. With very few exceptions, prominent journalists refused to put their careers at risk; intelligence professionals played along with the powers that be; Democratic leaders succumbed to the political pressure to toe the President’s line; and Republicans marched in lockstep with Bush on his way to war.

Because of this systematic failure, the Senate Intelligence Committee concluded four years later that nearly every key assessment of the U.S. intelligence community as expressed in the 2002 National Intelligence Estimate about Iraq’s WMD was wrong:

“Postwar findings do not support the [NIE] judgment that Iraq was reconstituting its nuclear weapons program; do not support the [NIE] assessment that Iraq’s acquisition of high-strength aluminum tubes was intended for an Iraqi nuclear

program; do not support the [NIE] assessment that Iraq was 'vigorously trying to procure uranium ore and yellowcake' from Africa; do not support the [NIE] assessment that 'Iraq has biological weapons' and that 'all key aspects of Iraq's offensive biological weapons program are larger and more advanced than before the Gulf war'; do not support the [NIE] assessment that Iraq possessed, or ever developed, mobile facilities for producing biological warfare agents; do not support the [NIE] assessments that Iraq 'has chemical weapons' or 'is expanding its chemical industry to support chemical weapons production'; do not support the [NIE] assessments that Iraq had a developmental program for an Unmanned Aerial Vehicle 'probably intended to deliver biological agents' or that an effort to procure U.S. mapping software 'strongly suggests that Iraq is investigating the use of these UAVs for missions targeting the United States.'"

Now, five years after the Senate report, one might hope that this cautionary tale of how a dangerous "group think" can lead a nation to war would be remembered by editors, politicians and the public as a similar crescendo of propaganda builds about Iran.

But the opposite seems to be the case. An historical amnesia has taken hold, enabling the same political and career pressures to return. Mainstream journalists fall over themselves to compose scoops about Iran's WMD just as they did regarding Iraq's WMD. Politicians compete to out-macho the other when it comes to threatening Iran.

Skepticism toward politicized organizations like the IAEA is nearly non-existent. The American people are told to be afraid, very afraid. The only significant difference may be that President Barack Obama is less eager for war with Iran than President George W. Bush was regarding war with Iraq.

But one Republican frontrunner, Mitt Romney, who has surrounded himself with neocon foreign policy advisers, has made clear that if he's elected in 2012 he will be ready to launch a war against Iran, if that's what it takes to prevent Iran from building a nuclear bomb.

With the quality of intelligence that the neocons are sure to provide a President Romney, that future U.S./Israeli war against Iran may be launched on information as reliable as that which was used to justify invading Iraq.

[For more on related topics, see Robert Parry's *Lost History, Secrecy & Privilege* and *Neck Deep*, now available in a three-book set for the discount price of only \$29. For details, [click here.](#)]

Robert Parry broke many of the Iran-Contra stories in the 1980s for the Associated Press and Newsweek. His latest book, *Neck Deep: The Disastrous*

Presidency of George W. Bush, was written with two of his sons, Sam and Nat, and can be ordered at neckdeepbook.com. His two previous books, *Secrecy & Privilege: The Rise of the Bush Dynasty from Watergate to Iraq* and *Lost History: Contras, Cocaine, the Press & 'Project Truth'* are also available there.

Iran Nuke Report: Little New, Big Impact

The much-touted report by U.N. weapons inspectors on Iran's alleged pursuit of a nuclear bomb contained little that was new, much that was dated, and nothing that could be independently confirmed. But, as Paul R. Pillar, a former top CIA analyst, notes, it still had a big impact.

By Paul R. Pillar

The report on Iran that the International Atomic Energy Agency released this week had been awaited with bated breath, with much pre-spinning of the substance. But the breath was at least as much baited as bated.

Despite references in the surge of report commentary about new evidence on this or that aspect of the subject, the report told us nothing of importance to policy on Iran that was not already well known. The voluminous commentary has consisted chiefly of people saying what they had intended to say on the topic all along, with the report being just the latest peg on which to hang such talk.

This week's surge in comments about the Iranian program is another step in a long-running process that seems destined to push U.S. policy toward a disastrous conclusion. It is a process of talking up Iran and specifically the nuclear program as if there were no greater danger to Western civilization as we know it.

When this theme is voiced often enough, loudly enough, by enough people, it becomes a received wisdom that is accepted automatically with no effort to determine whether it is true. That in turn leads to the notion, also widely and automatically accepted, that an Iranian nuclear weapon must be prevented at all costs, with no effort to add up the costs.

Commentary such as that heard this week entrenches the further theme that Iran is on an inexorable march toward building a nuclear weapon, with no consideration to all the influences, many of which are in the control of the United States, that will help to determine whether or not Tehran ever takes that step.

As the discourse about the Iranian nuclear program moves through still more chapters, with the IAEA report being the occasion for the latest chapter, the very length of the discourse fosters the impression that all manner of means have been tried to deal with the perceived problem that the program represents.

The impression lingers even though there are wide diplomatic avenues that have never been explored. So we get patently false remarks such as one from Mark Dubowitz of the Foundation for the Defense of Democracy that “no one can reasonably argue that countries threatened by Iran have not tried all peaceful alternatives.”

This whole process treats a policy question such as “what should be the U.S. posture toward Iran?” as if it is to be equated with an empirical question such as “is Iran working to make a nuclear weapon?” This is not the first time this mistake has been made.

In the selling of the Iraq War, the Bush administration hammered so relentlessly into the public consciousness the theme of Iraqi weapons of mass destruction that many people never stopped to notice that a presumed Iraqi unconventional weapons program, even if entirely real, simply did not equate with a case to launch an offensive war.

American politics, especially amid a presidential-election campaign, exacerbate these unfortunate tendencies. We see it most obviously in Republican presidential candidates falling over each other in an effort to declare their love for Israel and their toughness on Iran.

The latest round in the national discourse about Iran contains several gaping holes, the biggest of which is any serious and careful consideration of what danger an Iranian nuclear weapon actually would pose. The closest things to a serious effort to posit such a danger ultimately come up short.

The direction the discourse has taken has meant that any questioning of this supposedly grave danger is already outside the mainstream. But being in the mainstream does not make something valid.

[For more on the IAEA report, see Consortiumnews.com’s [“Iran’s Soviet Bomb-Maker Who Wasn’t”](#) and [“Dã©jã Vu Over Iran’s A-Bomb Charges.”](#)]

Paul R. Pillar, in his 28 years at the Central Intelligence Agency, rose to be one of the agency’s top analysts. He is now a visiting professor at Georgetown University for security studies. (This article first appeared in The National Interest.)

Déjà Vu Over Iran A-Bomb Charges

Exclusive: The mainstream U.S. news media is again ratcheting up tensions with Iran over its alleged nuclear weapons program by hailing a new report on the topic. But the press is once more falling down on its duty to examine the allegations carefully, writes Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

The New York Times is trotting out some of its favorite words like “meticulous” to praise the new report by United Nations weapons inspectors citing Iran’s supposed work on a nuclear bomb, and the Washington Post says the findings “ought to end serious debate” about Tehran’s nefarious intentions.

So, rather than undertake a careful examination of the report’s claims, America’s preeminent newspapers are once more putting on display their deep-seated biases regarding the Middle East. Any claim against a Muslim adversary must be true.

In the words of New York Yankees great Yogi Berra, “it’s déjà vu all over again.”

It seems every time an allegation is made against a “designated enemy” in the Middle East, the Post and Times editors cast aside professional skepticism, a pattern that has included Iraq’s WMD (oops!); a U.N.-sponsored report on Syria’s guilt in the Hariri assassination (“meticulous,” the Times said, though the report later fell apart); and the flat-fact claim of Libya’s role in the Lockerbie bombing (highly dubious in terms of evidence, but useful in justifying Muammar Gaddafi’s ouster and murder). [For more on these cases, [click here.](#)]

The Times editorial on Thursday was headlined, “[The Truth About Iran](#)” with the subhead: “A new report from weapons inspectors leaves little doubt about Tehran’s ambitions.” The editorial fully embraced the methodology of the International Atomic Energy Agency’s report, declaring:

“The report is chillingly comprehensive. What gives the report particular credibility is its meticulous sourcing. The agency’s director, Yukiya Amano, built a case on more than a thousand pages of documents, the assistance of more than 10 agency member states and interviews with ‘a number of individuals who were involved in relevant activities in Iran.’”

The Washington Post’s neocon editors, in an editorial entitled “[Running out of time,](#)” were similarly enthusiastic about the report, writing: “The IAEA’s

evidence, which includes 1,000 pages of documents, interviews with renegade scientists who helped Iran and material from 10 governments, ought to end serious debate about whether Tehran's program is for peaceful purposes."

It might be noted that on Feb. 6, 2003, the day after Secretary of State Colin Powell gave his infamous speech to the United Nations detailing Iraq's WMD arsenal, the Post editors deemed Powell's case "irrefutable" and added: "it is hard to imagine how anyone could doubt that Iraq possesses weapons of mass destruction." [For details on Powell's speech and its media reception, [click here.](#)]

Yet, instead of having learned any lessons and applying a skeptical eye to the IAEA report, the editors at the Post and the Times returned to their usual role as boosters for anything that puts adversaries of the United States and Israel in a negative light, regardless of how thin the evidence.

'May Still Be Ongoing'

If an objective observer did examine the [IAEA report](#) and particularly its annex entitled "Possible Military Dimensions of Iran's Nuclear Programme" he or she would encounter a curious document that offers very little verifiable proof for its murky conclusion that Iran's weapon project "may still be ongoing."

Indeed, based on what's been released to the public, it's impossible to evaluate any of the allegations because the supporting details are not provided. There is only an assurance from the IAEA that all "information has been carefully and critically examined" and was determined "to be, overall, credible."

But the credibility question persists, especially because the report doesn't spell out where the new accusations are coming from although it's been widely reported that many of the charges emanated from Iran's intense enemy, Israel.

While Israel clearly has an ax to grind with Iran as Israeli leaders call Iran's alleged nuclear ambitions an "existential threat" to Israel the IAEA report says it considered "Member States," which provided most of the evidence about Iran, to be "independent sources."

Plus, to the degree any of the report's details have become known, such as the identity of the supposed ex-Soviet nuclear bomb expert tutoring Iranian scientists on a detonation system, the facts haven't withstood scrutiny.

As reporter Gareth Porter [explained](#), the ex-Soviet scientist, who is not named in the report but has been identified in news reports as Vyacheslav Danilenko, "is not a nuclear weapons scientist but one of the top specialists in the world in the production of nanodiamonds by explosives."

“In fact, Danilenko, a Ukrainian, has worked solely on nanodiamonds from the beginning of his research career and is considered one of the pioneers in the development of nanodiamond technology, as published scientific papers confirm.” (Nanodiamonds have widespread commercial applications in manufacturing and medicine.)

The Danilenko angle was the most dramatic new allegation in the IAEA report because it stirred memories of the spy thriller, “Sum of All Fears,” in which disaffected ex-Soviet nuclear physicists help fashion a nuclear bomb for a terrorist attack. If that key part of the IAEA report can be debunked by a Google search, it doesn’t speak well for the rest of it.

Perhaps even more troubling, the IAEA was aware of Danilenko’s expertise in nanodiamonds, but chose to put a sinister spin on his work in Iran from 1996 to 2002 anyway. The report states:

“The Agency has strong indications that the development by Iran of the high explosives initiation system, and its development of the high speed diagnostic configuration used to monitor related experiments, were assisted by the work of a foreign expert who was not only knowledgeable in these technologies, but who, a Member State has informed the Agency, worked for much of his career with this technology in the nuclear weapon programme of the country of his origin.

“The Agency has reviewed publications by this foreign expert and has met with him. The Agency has been able to verify through three separate routes, including the expert himself, that this person was in Iran from about 1996 to about 2002, ostensibly to assist Iran in the development of a facility and techniques for making ultra-dispersed diamonds (‘UDDs’ or ‘nanodiamonds’), where he also lectured on explosion physics and its applications.”

Since the production of nanodiamonds involves explosions, it would be expected that Danilenko would lecture “on explosion physics and its applications,” but the IAEA report puts that fact in a particularly negative light. It also appears almost certain that the “Member State” pushing the Danilenko angle was Israel.

Pre-2003 Focus

Another surprising part of the IAEA report’s annex is that much of it like the Danilenko section focuses on the time frame before late 2003, when the U.S. intelligence community concluded that Iran stopped work on a nuclear bomb.

The IAEA report acknowledges as much, saying: “the Agency has been able to construct what it believes to be a good understanding of activities undertaken by Iran prior to the end of 2003. The Agency’s ability to construct an equally good understanding of activities in Iran after the end of 2003 is reduced, due

to the more limited information available to the Agency.”

But the IAEA still leans toward accepting nearly every piece of disputed evidence against Iran. Regarding alleged Iranian scientific studies gleaned from a purloined laptop, Iran has denounced that material as a fabrication, but the IAEA chooses to accept the material, which was provided by “a Member State,” as genuine. The report states:

“The quantity of the documentation, and the scope and contents of the work covered in the documentation, are sufficiently comprehensive and complex that, in the Agency’s view, it is not likely to have been the result of forgery or fabrication.”

However, a professional intelligence agency would be expected to produce a convincing fabrication that would withstand at least superficial analysis, especially if the forgery was generated by a “Member State” with its own nuclear weapons expertise.

Clearly, today’s IAEA is not the same organization that stood up to falsehoods used in 2002-2003 by the United States and Great Britain to justify invading Iraq.

As former CIA analyst Ray McGovern wrote on Feb. 21, 2010, the new IAEA chief, Japanese diplomat Yukiya Amano, had “huge shoes to fill when he took over from the widely respected Mohamed ElBaradei, [who] had the courage to call a spade a spade and, when necessary, a forgery a forgery, like the documents alleging that Iraq had sought yellowcake uranium in Niger.”

Citing the contrast between ElBaradei’s expertise and reputation and that of the less known Amano, McGovern added, “lacking gravitas, one bends more easily. It is a fair assumption that Amano will prove more malleable than his predecessor, and surely more naive.”

Now, it appears that Amano’s IAEA has accepted intelligence information from Israel and other enemies of Iran in preparing a report that is adding fuel to the fire for a possible military confrontation with Iran.

Spinning the Details

Major U.S. news outlets, like the Times and the Post, also have shorn off some of the nuances that remained in the IAEA’s report, which distinguished its more authoritative analysis regarding Iran’s pre-2003 nuclear experiments from a sketchier understanding of the post-2003 period when U.S. intelligence agencies concluded that the work had stopped.

The newspapers tended to merge the two periods, relying on interpretations from “experts” like former weapons inspector David Albright, who was the principal source for a front-page Washington Post news article on Monday about the IAEA’s impending report and who was famously wrong about Iraq’s WMD in 2002-2003.

“The [Iranian nuclear bomb] program never really stopped,” Albright, president of the Washington-based Institute for Science and International Security, said, according to the Post. “After 2003, money [in Iran] was made available for research in areas that sure look like nuclear weapons work but were hidden within civilian institutions.”

The IAEA was more circumspect in its conclusions, although it is a truism that academic research on a wide variety of topics can, theoretically at least, be applied to building a nuclear bomb. Which is apparently one of the reasons why assassins have targeted Iranian physicists for murder in recent years.

In its Thursday editorial, the Post raised no objection to that strategy of killing Iranian scientists except to indicate that it didn’t go far enough. The Post’s neocon editors wrote:

“The Obama administration and other Western governments must recognize that the sanctions [on Iran] that have so far been put in place, and covert operations aimed at sabotaging Iranian centrifuges and killing scientists, have not succeeded in changing the regime’s intentions or stopping its work.”

The Post’s editors seem to accept the fact (and the rationalization) for assassinating Iran’s scientists, but the practice, if done against scientists in Western countries or in Israel, would surely be denounced as terrorism.

Similarly, it almost goes without saying that the Post and the Times saw no reason to mention that Israel possesses a sophisticated nuclear arsenal and unlike Iran has refused to subject itself to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty or the scrutiny of the IAEA.

No one in the U.S. mainstream news media seems to find it the least bit hypocritical that Israel would be supplying evidence to the IAEA about the alleged secret nuclear ambitions of Iran when Israel itself is a rogue nuclear state.

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Iran's Soviet Bomb-Maker Who Wasn't

In the new Iranian nuclear-bomb allegations, the most sensational charge was that a former Soviet nuclear weapons expert spent years tutoring Iranian scientists, but it turns out the Ukrainian was a specialist in commercial nanodiamonds, not A-bombs, reports Gareth Porter.

By Gareth Porter

The report of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) published by a Washington think tank Tuesday repeated the sensational claim previously reported by news media all over the world that a former Soviet nuclear weapons scientist had helped Iran construct a detonation system that could be used for a nuclear weapon.

But it turns out that the foreign expert, who is not named in the IAEA report but was identified in news reports as Vyacheslav Danilenko, is not a nuclear weapons scientist but one of the top specialists in the world in the production of nanodiamonds by explosives.

In fact, Danilenko, a Ukrainian, has worked solely on nanodiamonds from the beginning of his research career and is considered one of the pioneers in the development of nanodiamond technology, as published scientific papers confirm. (Nanodiamonds have widespread commercial applications in manufacturing and in medicine.)

It now appears that the IAEA and David Albright, the director of the International Institute for Science and Security in Washington, who was the source of the news reports about Danilenko, never bothered to check the accuracy of the original claim by an unnamed "Member State" on which the IAEA based its assertion about his nuclear weapons background.

Albright gave a "private briefing" for "intelligence professionals" last week, in which he named Danilenko as the foreign expert who had been contracted by Iran's Physics Research Centre in the mid-1990s and identified him as a "former Soviet nuclear scientist," according to a story by

Joby Warrick of the Washington Post on Nov. 5. The Danilenko story then went worldwide. [For more on Albright, see Consortiumnews.com's "[An Iraq-WMD Replay on Iran.](#)"]

The IAEA report says the agency has "strong indications" that Iran's development of a "high explosions initiation system," which it has described as an "implosion system" for a nuclear weapon, was "assisted by the work of a foreign expert who was not only knowledgeable on these technologies, but who, a Member State has informed the Agency, worked for much of his career in the nuclear weapon program of the country of his origin."

The report offers no other evidence of Danilenko's involvement in the development of an initiation system.

The member state obviously learned that Danilenko had worked during the Soviet period at the All-Russian Scientific Research Institute of Technical Physics in Snezhinsk, Russia, which was well known for its work on development of nuclear warheads and simply assumed that he had been involved in that work.

However, further research would have revealed that Danilenko worked from the beginning of his career in a part of the Institute that specialized in the synthesis of diamonds. Danilenko wrote in an account of the early work in the field published in 2006 that he was among the scientists in the "gas dynamics group" at the Institute who were "the first to start studies on diamond synthesis in 1960."

Danilenko's recollections of the early period of his career are in a chapter of the book, *Ultrananocrystalline Diamond: Synthesis, Properties and Applications* edited by Olga A. Shenderova and Dieter M. Gruen, published in 2006.

Another chapter in the book covering the history of Russian patents related to nanodiamonds documents the fact that Danilenko's center at the Institute developed key processes as early as 1963-66 that were later used at major "detonation nanodiamond" production centers.

Danilenko left the Institute in 1989 and joined the Institute of Materials Science Problems in Ukraine, according to the authors of that chapter.

Danilenko's major accomplishment, according to the authors, has been the development of a large-scale technology for producing ultradispersed diamonds, a particular application of nanodiamonds. The technology, which was later implemented by the "ALIT" company in Zhitomir, Ukraine, is based on an explosion chamber 100 square meters in volume, which Danilenko designed.

Beginning in 1993, Danilenko was a principal in a company called "Nanogroup"

which was established initially in the Ukraine but is now based in Prague. The company's website boasts that it has "the strongest team of scientists" which had been involved in the "introduction of nanodiamonds in 1960 and the first commercial applications of nanodiamonds in 2000."

The declared aim of the company is to supply worldwide demand for nanodiamonds.

Iran has an aggressive program to develop its nanotechnology sector, and it includes as one major focus nanodiamonds, as blogger Moon of Alabama has pointed out. That blog was the first source to call attention to Danilenko's nanodiamond background.

Danilenko clearly explained that the purpose of his work in Iran was to help the development of a nanodiamond industry in the country.

The IAEA report states that the "foreign expert" was in Iran from 1996 to about 2002, "ostensibly to assist in the development of a facility and techniques for making ultra dispersed diamonds (UDDs) or nanodiamonds" That wording suggests that nanodiamonds were merely a cover for his real purpose in Iran.

The report says the expert "also lectured on explosive physics and its applications", without providing any further detail about what applications were involved.

The fact that the IAEA and Albright were made aware of Danilenko's nanodiamond work in Iran before embracing the "former Soviet nuclear weapons specialist" story makes their failure to make any independent inquiry into his background even more revealing.

The tale of a Russian nuclear weapons scientist helping construct an "implosion system" for a nuclear weapon is the most recent iteration of a theme that the IAEA introduced in its May 2008 report, which mentioned a five-page document describing experimentation with a "complex multipoint initiation system to detonate a substantial amount of high explosives in hemispherical geometry" and to monitor the detonation.

Iran acknowledged using "exploding bridge wire" detonators such as those mentioned in that document for conventional military and civilian applications. But it denounced the document, along with the others in the "alleged studies" collection purporting to be from an Iranian nuclear weapons research program, as fakes.

Careful examination of the "alleged studies" documents has revealed inconsistencies and other anomalies that give evidence of fraud. But the IAEA,

the United States and its allies in the IAEA continue to treat the documents as though there were no question about their authenticity.

The unnamed member state that informed the agency about Danilenko's alleged experience as a Soviet nuclear weapons scientist is almost certainly Israel, which has been the source of virtually all the purported intelligence on Iranian work on nuclear weapons over the past decade.

(Israel is a United Nations "member" state, although it has refused to sign the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty and thus does not subject its secret nuclear weapons arsenal to IAEA supervision. Iran did sign the treaty and does grant IAEA inspectors some access to its nuclear-related facilities, which Iran insists are for peaceful purposes only.)

Israel has made no secret of its determination to influence world opinion on the Iranian nuclear program by disseminating information to governments and news media, including purported Iran government documents. Israeli foreign ministry and intelligence officials told journalists Douglas Frantz and Catherine Collins about the special unit of Mossad dedicated to that task at the very time the allegedly fraudulent documents were being produced.

In an interview in September 2008, Albright said Olli Heinonen, then deputy director for safeguards at the IAEA, had told him that a document from a member state had convinced him that the "alleged studies" documents were genuine. Albright said the state was "probably Israel."

The Jerusalem Post's Yaakov Katz reported Wednesday that Israeli intelligence agencies had "provided critical information used in the report," the purpose of which was to "push through a new regime of sanctions against Tehran."

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