

# War Clouds Gather Around Iran

With Israel and Iran exchanging direct fire, Trump pulling out of the Iran nuclear deal and John Bolton promoting regime change in Tehran, Inder Comar offers four reasons why the US may be close to attacking the Islamic Republic.

By Inder Comar



In 1953, the United States' Central Intelligence Agency, with the help of the British government, orchestrated a coup against Iran's democratically elected prime minister, Mohammad Mossadeq.

Mossadeq had nationalized the Iranian oil industry, including the British Anglo-Iranian Oil Company. This was unacceptable to the United Kingdom. A request to the United States for assistance led to "Operation Ajax," and the overthrow of Mossadeq.

Mossadeq's political successor was the Shah of Iran, who ruled with the support of the U.S. and the U.K. until 1979, when he was himself overthrown by a popular revolution led by Ayatollah Khomeini.

None of this is secret. The CIA openly admitted that it was behind the coup in 2013.

While the coup is not a secret, it remains ancient history in the United States. Maybe even forgotten history.

But while the U.S. has forgotten, the rest of the world remembers. Iran certainly remembers.

And this history adds a weighty and grim perspective to the U.S. decision to walk away from the multi-party agreement with Iran related to nuclear development.

The fact of the matter is that the United States has already successfully sponsored regime change in Iran. And even more recently, the United States invaded Iran's neighbor, Iraq, under false pretenses to overthrow its government. The United States promised democracy, but instead, Iraqis were subjected to years of death and destruction, torture and ISIS.

The past is prologue. In the wake of the invasion of Iraq, the bombing of Libya, the support of rebel groups against Bashar al-Assad in Syria, and the support of a Saudi-led war of aggression in Yemen, the question on everyone's mind at this

time is a terrible one: has the United States now committed itself to violent regime change in Iran?

Here are four reasons that point towards a potential attack against Iran in the near future.

**(1) President Trump is now openly committed to regime change.** This, according to the President's personal lawyer, former New York City mayor Rudolph Giuliani.

Trump thus joins in the opinion of his Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo, who has been openly advocating for regime change since 2016.

Trump additionally joins his national security advisor, John Bolton, who also supports regime change. Bolton gave a speech in 2017 in which he promised members of an Iranian exile group, known as the Mujahedeen Khalq (MEK) that the Iranian regime would be toppled by 2019 – next year. Bolton was an early member and supporter of the Project for the New American Century, a now infamous non-profit that provided the intellectual framework for the invasion of Iraq.

**(2) The United States does not care about its international law obligations.** In any other nation, a political party that openly advocated for war and regime change in another country would be a scandal.

But in the United States, it is common place, an every-day affair.

In the Middle East (and elsewhere), the United States has blatantly disregarded its international legal obligations to maintain collective peace and security. The United States committed the crime of aggression against Iraq, and illegally sponsored armed militias in Syria as a means of overthrowing the Syrian government.

There are very clear international norms regarding the use of violence internationally—norms that are designed to keep global peace.

But time and time again, the United States has ignored them, and violated them.

These international rules might stop another country. But they will not pose any barrier to a U.S.-led invasion of or attack against Iran.

**(3) There is already a brewing conflict in Syria between Iran and Israel.** One of the biggest proponents of a U.S. walkaway from the

Iran deal was Benjamin Netanyahu, who gave a televised address in English on April 30, claiming that Iran could not be trusted.

In hindsight, the speech was nakedly aimed at convincing Trump to walk away from

the deal. It worked. And just an hour after Trump's decision to tear up the deal, Israel was already bombing targets in Syria, trying it seems to provoke an Iranian response. Iran did respond with an ineffective rocket attack on the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights, which on Thursday unleashed a full Israeli response on Iranian targets in Syria.

There is a real potential for a grave flashpoint in the coming weeks that could lead to a major war.

**(4) Imperialism and militarism, now dominant as cultural values in the United States, will make another war seem attractive to many Americans.** It is a sad, awful truth, but it is one that honest people have to confront: militarism is an accepted and glorified value in the United States.

The U.S. is a country where nearly two-thirds of the population support torture against suspect terrorists, and where more than forty percent of Americans think it was the "right decision" to invade Iraq in 2003—a war that has claimed the lives of hundreds of thousands, produced millions of refugees, led to the rise of ISIS, and was done in blatant violation of international law.

The painful reality is that imperial values are ascendant in the United States.

A lonely, alienated mass of consumers, too spiritless to question the dominant narrative, will simply look the other way as their government targets another society for annihilation.

Democratic norms are lost even as a vast surveillance and killing machine is deployed abroad. Precious and inalienable freedoms are swiftly traded for the false glory of foreign wars and domination.

Spiritual decay sets in, violence ever more glorified, hierarchy and dictatorship seen as positive forces.

America is desperately in need of a cultural and spiritual change. But the good that America and Americans could do will never flower so long as war and aggression are accepted and celebrated.

*This article was originally published on Inder Comar's blog.*

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## The Meaning of Verification in Iran, Syria and North Korea

Ronald Reagan said the US must trust & verify with Moscow. Both Iran & Syria complied with verified accords, yet Trump bombed Syria & pulled out of the Iran deal. What message does this send the DPRK, asks Ted Snider.

By Ted Snider



Donald Trump bombed Syria for allegedly using chemical weapons last month and he has now officially pulled out of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) nuclear agreement with Iran.

But Syria officially has no chemical weapons and Iran has no nuclear ones. The Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) verified Syria to be chemical free, and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) has verified Iran's consistent and continued compliance with the JCPOA. To the best of anyone's knowledge, Syria has no chemicals and Iran has no nukes: that's what verification means.

### Iran

In 2015, Iran, the United States, Germany and all the permanent members of the Security Council (P5+1) signed the JCPOA. Every ninety days, the president of the United States has the opportunity to certify that Iran is implementing the agreement. If Iran is in compliance, the U.S. has to continue to honor the agreement; if Iran is not in compliance, the U.S. can pull out of the agreement. Iran is in compliance. The IAEA has repeatedly verified – in eleven consecutive reports since January 2016 – that Iran is fully complying with their obligations under the agreement.

In the absence of evidence, America has turned to deception and digging up dirt. Not able to discredit the deal, Trump tried to discredit the deal makers. Trump aides hired the private Israeli intelligence agency Black Cube to "get dirt" on key people in the Obama administration who played a role in negotiating the deal. The agency tried to find anything damaging on personal relationships, involvement with Iran-friendly lobbyists or political or personal benefit to the negotiators.

When dirt presumably wasn't found, the deal killers turned to deceit. Just two weeks before Trump's most recent opportunity to decertify the deal, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu revealed to the world "proof" that "Iran lied, big time, after signing the nuclear deal in 2015." Netanyahu displayed binders with over 50,000 paper files and a wall of CDs that he said were packed with the proof.

But Netanyahu was more Wizard of Oz than statesman. There was nothing behind the curtain. Netanyahu's "significant new revelations" were a greatest hits tour of old songs that didn't sell. The binders and discs contained nothing that the IAEA hadn't seen and dismissed the first time around. Those old attempts to discredit Iran have been carefully discredited by many experts, including Gareth Porter in his book, *Manufactured Crisis*.

That Israel tried so hard to find evidence that Iran has worked on a nuclear weapons program in any way since the signing of the JCPOA and found nothing new is perhaps the best proof that Trump needed to certify that Iran is in compliance with all of its obligations under the agreement, rather than pull out of it.

Olli Heinonen, the chief inspector of the IAEA at the time of the JCPOA negotiations – and not someone who was in

any way soft on Iran – said that the IAEA first saw the "significant new" evidence that Netanyahu revealed in 2005. Watching Netanyahu's revelation, Heinonen could only say, "I just saw a lot of pictures I had seen before." Federica Mogherini, the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, said that, based on first reports of Netanyahu's presentation, it "has not put into question Iran's compliance with the JCPOA." Mogherini said that the final word had to go to the IAEA. The final word was given. The day after Netanyahu's presentation, the IAEA said that there was "no credible indications" of Iran working on a nuclear weapons program for several years before the JCPOA.

But, as in Syria, Trump accepted the word of a biased source with a significant interest in claiming that Iran has an active clandestine nuclear weapons program over the IAEA's verification team. Dismissing the IAEA, Trump boasted that Netanyahu's revelation "showed that I've been 100 percent right." And now, citing only Netanyahu's presentation as evidence, he dismissed the IAEA's weapons inspectors and verifications and betrayed an international agreement with a partner who was verified to be in full compliance with its agreements.

**Syria**

On September 14, 2013 the United States and Russia finalized a Russian brokered agreement on the removal and destruction of Syria's chemical weapons. On January 4, 2016, the OPCW declared the completion of the destruction of all chemical weapons in Syria.

Nonetheless, on April 14, Trump ordered the bombing of Syria because of a claimed chemical attack in Duma, near Damascus. Only days before the missile strikes, Defense Secretary James Mattis said that the U.S lacked the intelligence that Assad was responsible for the alleged chemical weapons attack. Mattis admitted that the U.S. was "still assessing the intelligence... We're still working on it."

Days after, however, the U.S. bombed three particular buildings that they claimed housed specific chemicals and chemical production equipment. That's very precise, specific intelligence. Armed with that proof, why would the U.S. rush to bomb Syria? Why not take that intelligence to U.N. inspectors? Why not hand it over to the OPCW? Why not reveal the illegal Syrian clandestine chemical weapons program to the world?

Russian chemical weapons specialists who were on site found no trace of chemical weapon use. Neither did Red Crescent doctors who treated people. The OPCW inspectors might quickly have answered the question, but their access to the site was delayed by the United Nations department of Safety and Security.

The evidence for Assad's chemical weapons attack on his own people came from rebel-affiliated and Western-financed groups like the White Helmets. The Trump administration has publicly offered nothing further as evidence despite the precise nature of their bombing.

But investigative journalist Robert Fisk has offered something further. Fisk was the first western journalist to make it to Duma. Fisk heard from no local who knew of a chemical weapons attack. He heard a different version of the story in Duma than the one put out by the White Helmets and accepted by Trump.

The video of victims of chemical attack is real, but the interpretation is false. The suffering is real, but they are not suffering from chemical exposure. They are suffering from oxygen starvation. There was heavy shelling by government forces that night. But on this particular night, there were also strong winds and huge clouds of dust choked the tunnels and basements people were hiding in. The suffering people in the video were struggling from hypoxia, or oxygen starvation. Then a White Helmet "shouted 'Gas!'" The panic, and the propaganda begun.

When Russia brought seventeen witnesses from Duma to The Hague to testify before

the OPCW, the U.S., U.K., and France not only did not listen to the evidence, they boycotted the event. The witnesses from Duma supported the story that Fisk had heard. Each witness was either a victim of that night's events or a doctor who treated them. Some of the victim witnesses even show up in the White Helmet videos. They all said that there had been no chemical attack: they were sucking in dust, not gas.

The OPCW has verified that Syria has no chemical weapons. The United States and its allies accepted the word of a biased and unreliable source over the OPCW verification team with no additional evidence. They then bombed Syria before they gave the OPCW inspectors a chance to return to Syria. Trump invested in the word of the White Helmets – a group with a significant interest in pinning a chemical weapon attack – over the word of the OPCW, wanting the U.S. to intervene militarily on their side.

### **North Korea**

So what does North Korea understand from this? The North Koreans could learn two things. The first is to be wary of signing deals with America. Both Syria and Iran gave up their programs only to have Trump and America ignore verification of their compliance in favor of biased sources and turn on them: in Syria with bombs and in Iran with pulling out of the JCPOA. How can North Korea confidently agree to give up its only deterrence against American aggression with no assurance that the U.S. will honor a agreement?

The second lesson North Korea could draw from Iran is that, though you may not be able to trust that you can profit from signing an agreement, you can profit by holding off on signing it. In the book, *Losing an Enemy*, Trita Parsi argued that the difference between sanctions and nuclear escalation is that the former is finite and the latter is not. North Korea knows, as Iran did before, that America will eventually run out of things to sanction. But North Korea will not run out of uranium to enrich or missiles to test. North Korea can outlast the United States unless the United States is really prepared to go to war.

Trump's bombing of Syria and pulling out of the JCPOA with Iran can only reinforce North Korean anxiety that they can't trust Trump and the U.S. to honor any nuclear disarmament agreement, much as the world needs it.

*A version of this article was first published at [AntiWar.com](http://AntiWar.com).*

**Ted Snider has a graduate degree in philosophy and writes on analyzing patterns in U.S. foreign policy and history.**

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# Trump Vindicates Iranian Hardliners and Victimizes Ordinary Citizens

Donald Trump's decision to pull the U.S. out of the Iranian nuclear deal only strengthens Iranian hardliners, hurts average people and drives up the potential for a devastating war, argue Trita Parsi and Ryan Costello.

**By Trita Parsi and Ryan Costello**



When the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action was announced in 2015, the Iranian people poured into the streets to celebrate what they thought was the beginning of a new era.

Long squeezed by both U.S. pressure and their own government, they had just cause for optimism. The threat of war was receding, and the sanctions that had stifled Iran's economy were soon to be lifted. Many hoped that Iranian President Hassan Rouhani, vindicated by his success at the negotiating table, would leverage his political capital and ease Iran's harsh security environment at home.

Today, as President Donald Trump tears up the agreement, the Iranian people are once again those who will suffer most. Iranian hardliners, empowered by the deal's failure, are sharpening their knives for Rouhani and Foreign Minister Javad Zarif, and the chances of catastrophic war are undoubtedly greater.

Iran did everything it needed to comply with the accord's terms, destroying the core of its reactor at Arak, empowering International Atomic Energy Agency inspectors and dramatically limiting its uranium enrichment program. Sanctions were initially lifted under President Barack Obama, and Iran saw some limited relief. But that long-overdue optimism was quickly halted by the election of Trump, who vowed to terminate the agreement struck under his predecessor. Iran's hopes for a brighter future had been turned over to a reality TV star turned demagogue.

## **A More Imminent Threat of War**

Doubts about whether Trump actually meant what he said during his volatile campaign were put to rest in the first



week of his presidency, when he banned Iranians and many others from entering the United States on the basis of little more than bigotry.

Shortly after the ban, Trump began subjecting the nuclear deal to a death by a thousand cuts. Major deals with international companies like Boeing never came to fruition. European banks, fearful of U.S. sanctions that remained on the books, refused to re-enter the Iranian market. Moreover, Trump and his top officials repeatedly violated the accord, warning foreign companies against doing business with Iran while leaving the implementation of U.S. commitments in doubt.

And in March, Trump began elevating the most caustic voices on Iran to key national security positions. John Bolton, who has never stopped calling for bombing Iran and took money from a despised Iranian terrorist cult that seeks regime change, became national security adviser. Mike Pompeo, one of the foremost opponents of the nuclear deal, is now secretary of state. The threat of war has returned, this time more imminent than ever before.

Many Iranians are again feeling hopeless, due to a variety of factors, not the least of which is an economy stifled by sanctions, a fact that manifested in December and January when Iran was rocked by the largest protests since the 2009 Green Movement. Yet, many stayed home, not out of support for the regime but out of fear for what might come next.

Now the hardline narrative, that the United States cannot be trusted and will never lift the sanctions, has been vindicated by Trump's shortsighted and self-serving decision to abrogate the nuclear accord. The hardliners seek to seize back all levers of power from moderates like Rouhani and Zarif, to destroy hopes for reform and to ensure the elevation of a hardline successor to Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei. If they succeed in doing so, it will mean greater repression at home and escalation abroad.

Yet, much like hardliners in Washington, Iranian hardliners have no good "plan B" for what comes after the deal. And, given the suddenness of Trump's decision to rip up the deal without an Iranian violation, Rouhani and Zarif have been given one last chance to salvage nuclear compromise and to prevent Trump's war cabinet from finding a justification to put their war and regime change plans into place.

European Union foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini has vowed that Europe will stick with its commitments under the deal, acting within its security interests and protecting its economic investments. French President Emmanuel Macron has warned that Trump's decision threatens the very fabric of the nonproliferation regime. Critically, Rouhani as well has indicated that Iran can

achieve benefits under the JCPOA without the United States. This sets the stage for a last-ditch effort for Europe, Russia, China and Iran to negotiate a follow-on deal, with Europe taking steps to mitigate the effects of U.S. sanctions re-imposition and protecting companies doing business with Iran.

But the chances for such a follow-on agreement, even absent Trump, are slim.

Europe, in particular, is extremely vulnerable to U.S. sanctions, and Europe has been slow to recognize that its best hope for keeping the nuclear deal rests not with cultivating Trump but in blocking Trump. Israel and Saudi Arabia also hold many cards that could short-circuit diplomacy and drag the United States into direct military confrontation.

The majority of the Iranian people, though, have little choice but to hope that Rouhani and Zarif can navigate these treacherous waters, lest Iran be torn apart by outside powers, just like Iraq and Syria before them.

*This article originally appeared on [HuffPost](#).*

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## VIPS Call on Trump Not to Pull Out of Iran Nuclear Deal

As Donald Trump announces his decision at 2 pm Tuesday on staying in the Iran nuclear deal, the Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity urge him in this memo exclusive to Consortium News not to base his decision on fabricated evidence.

**MEMORANDUM FOR:** The President

**FROM:** Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS)

**SUBJECT:** Being "Played" By Bogus Evidence on Iran

**NOTE:** *The evidence presented by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on April 30 alleging a covert Iranian nuclear weapons program shows blatant signs of fabrication. That evidence is linked to documents presented by the Bush Administration more a decade earlier as proof of a covert Iran nuclear weapons program. Those documents were clearly fabricated as well.*

*We sent President Bush a similar warning about bogus intelligence – much of it fabricated by Israel –six weeks before the U.S./UK attack on Iraq, but Bush paid us no heed. This time, we hope you will take note before things spin even further out of control in the Middle East. In short, Israel’s “new” damaging documents on Iran were fabricated by the Israelis themselves.*

## **Executive Summary**

The Bush administration account of how the documents on Iran got into the hands of the CIA is not true. We can prove that the actual documents originally came not from Iran but from Israel. And the documents were never authenticated by the CIA or the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

Two former Directors-General of the IAEA, Hans Blix and Mohamed ElBaradei, have publicly expressed suspicion that the documents were fabricated. And forensic examination of the documents yielded multiple signs that they are fraudulent.

We urge you to insist on an independent inquiry into the actual origins of these documents. We believe that the renewed attention being given to claims that Iran is secretly working to develop nuclear weapons betokens a transparent attempt to stoke hostility toward Iran, with an eye toward helping “justify” pulling out of the 2015 nuclear deal with Iran.

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Mr. President,

We write you in the hope that you will be informed of our views before you decide whether to continue to adhere to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) regarding Iran. We fear that upcoming decisions may be based, in part, on unreliable documents alleging secret nuclear weapons activity in Iran.

On April 30, Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu displayed some of those documents in his slide show on what he called the Iranian “atomic archive.” But those are precisely the same fraudulent documents that were acquired by the CIA in 2004.

The official accounts offered by the senior officials of the CIA about the provenance of these documents turned out be complete fabrication. Journalists were told variously that the documents (1) were taken from the laptop computer of an Iranian working in a secret research program; (2) were provided by a German spy; or (3) simply came from a “longtime contact in Iran.”

However, Karsten Voigt, the former German Foreign Office official in charge of German-North American cooperation, revealed in an on the record interview with historian/journalist Gareth Porter in 2013 that senior officials of the German

foreign intelligence service, the BND, told Voigt in November 2004 that the documents had been passed to the CIA by a BND source. That source, the senior BND official said, was not considered trustworthy, because he belonged to the Mujahideen-E-Khalq (MEK), the armed Iranian opposition group that was known to have served as a conduit for information that Israeli intelligence (Mossad) wanted to provide to the IAEA without having it attributed to Israel. (In 2012 Secretary of State Hillary Clinton removed MEK from the list of terrorist organizations.)

Voigt recalled that the senior BND officials told him of their worry that the Bush administration was going to repeat the error of using fraudulent intelligence, as was the case with the notorious "Curveball", the Iraqi living in Germany, whom the BND had identified as unreliable. Nonetheless, Curveball's fictions about mobile biological weapons laboratories in Iraq –with "artists renderings" by the CIA of those phantom labs – had been used by Colin Powell in his error-ridden presentation to the UN on February 5, 2003, leading to war on Iraq.

As for the purported Iranian documents, the CIA never ruled out the possibility that they were fabricated, and the IAEA made no effort to verify their authenticity. IAEA Director General Mohamed ElBaradei recalled in his memoirs that he had believed the documents were not really from the Iranian government and that, as he put it, "it made more sense that this information originated in another country." ElBaradei stated publicly from 2005 through 2009 that the documents had not been authenticated, and he refused to use them as "evidence" of a covert Iranian weapons research program. And ElBaradei's predecessor as Director-General, Hans Blix, has said he is "somewhat more worried" about the intelligence on the alleged Iranian nuclear weapons program than about the dubious intelligence he saw on Iraq, because "there is as much disinformation as there is information."

Each of the documents mentioned by both Netanyahu and the IAEA reports bears tell-tale signs of fraud. The most widely reported document in the collection is a set of schematic drawings showing efforts to redesign the re-entry vehicle of Iran's Shahab-3 missile to accommodate a nuclear weapon. But the slide that Netanyahu displayed on the screen in his slide show provides visual confirmation of fraud. The drawing shows clearly the "dunce cap" design of the Shahab-3 reentry vehicle. But Iran's Defense Ministry had already discarded that "dunce cap" reentry vehicle when it began to develop a new improved missile. That redesign began in 2000, according to the Congressional testimony in September 2000 of CIA national intelligence officer for strategic and nuclear programs Robert D. Walpole. But the earliest dates of any of the alleged Iranian nuclear weapon program documents on the project for redesign of the reentry vehicle in

the May 2008 IAEA report on the entire collection are from summer 2002 after the “dunce cap” was replaced. The “baby-bottle” shaped reentry vehicle on the redesigned missile was not known to the outside world until the first test of the new missile in mid-2004. So those drawings could not have been done by someone who was actually involved in the redesign of the original Shahab-3 reentry vehicle; it was clearly the work of a foreign intelligence agency seeking to incriminate Iran, but slipping up on one important detail and thus betraying its fraudulent character.

The second document from that same collection turned over to the IAEA that has been widely reported is the so-called “green salt project” – a plan for a bench-scale system of uranium conversion for enrichment given the code name “Project 5.13” and part of a larger “Project 5”. Other documents that had been provided by the MEK showed that “Project 5” also included a sub-project involving ore processing at a mine designated “Project 5.15,” according to a briefing by IAEA Deputy Director Olli Heinonen in February 2008.

But when Iran turned over detailed documents to the IAEA in response to its questions about Project 5.15 in 2008, the IAEA learned the truth: there had been a real ore processing project called Project 5.15, but it was a civilian project of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran – not part of a covert nuclear weapons program—and the decision to create Project 5.15 had been made on August 25, 1999—more than two years before the initial date of the project found in the collection of supposedly secret nuclear weapons research documents. That fact gives away the ruse surrounding the numbering system of “Project 5” adopted by intelligence specialists who had fabricated the document.

A third document that purportedly shows Iranian nuclear weapons research is about what Netanyahu called “Multi-Point Initiation in hemispheric geometry” and the IAEA called “experimentation in connection with symmetrical initiation of a hemispherical high explosive charge suitable for an implosion type nuclear device.” Significantly, that document was not part of the original collection that the CIA had passed to the IAEA, but had been given to the IAEA years later, and officials from the IAEA, Europe and the United States refused to reveal which member country had provided the document. Former Director-General ElBaradei revealed in his memoirs, however, that Israel had passed a series of documents to the IAEA in 2008-09, in an effort to make the case that Iran had continued its nuclear weapons experiments until “at least 2007.”

The summary picture we offer above includes unusually clear evidence of the fraudulent nature of the documents that are advertised as hard evidence of Iran’s determination to obtain nuclear weapons. One remaining question is *cui bono?* – who stands to benefit from this kind of “evidence.” The state that had

the most to gain from the fabrication of such documents was obviously Israel.

Completely absent from the usual discussion of this general problem is the reality that Israel already has a secret nuclear arsenal of more than a hundred nuclear weapons. To the extent Israel's formidable deterrent is more widely understood, arguments that Israel genuinely fears an Iranian nuclear threat any time soon lose much of their power. Only an extreme few suggest that Iran's leaders are bent on risking national suicide. What the Israelis are after is regime change in Tehran. And they have powerful allies with similar aims.

We therefore urge you, Mr. President, not to go along with these plans or to decide to pull the U.S. out of the six-nation nuclear deal with Iran based on fraudulent evidence.

For the Steering Group, Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS)

**Richard H. Black**, Senator of Virginia, 13th District; Colonel US Army (ret.); Former Chief, Criminal Law Division, Office of the Judge Advocate General, the Pentagon (associate VIPS)

**Marshall Carter-Tripp**, Foreign Service Officer (ret.) and Division Director, State Department Bureau of Intelligence and Research

**Kathleen Christison**, Senior Analyst on Middle East, CIA (ret.)

**Philip Giraldi**, CIA, Operations Officer (ret.)

**Matthew Hoh**, former Capt., USMC, Iraq & Foreign Service Officer, Afghanistan (associate VIPS)

**Michael S. Kearns**, Captain, Wing Commander, RAAF (ret.); Intelligence Officer & ex-Master SERE Instructor

**John Kiriakou**, former CIA Counterterrorism Officer and former senior investigator, Senate Foreign Relations Committee

**Edward Loomis**, NSA Cryptologic Computer Scientist (ret.)

**David MacMichael**, Ph.D., former senior estimates officer, National Intelligence Council (ret.)

**Ray McGovern**, former US Army infantry/intelligence officer & CIA analyst; CIA Presidential briefer (ret.)

**Elizabeth Murray**, former Deputy National Intelligence Officer for the Near East, National Intelligence Council & CIA political analyst (ret.)

**Todd E. Pierce**, MAJ, US Army Judge Advocate (ret.)

**Gareth Porter**, author/journalist (associate VIPS)

**Scott Ritter**, former MAJ., USMC, former UN Weapon Inspector, Iraq

**Coleen Rowley**, FBI Special Agent and former Minneapolis Division Legal Counsel (ret.)

**Robert Wing**, former Foreign Service Officer (associate VIPS)

**Ann Wright**, Colonel, US Army (ret.); also Foreign Service Officer who resigned in opposition to the US war on Iraq

*This Memorandum was drafted by VIPS Associate Gareth Porter, author of "Manufactured Crisis: The Untold Story of the Iran Nuclear Scare," 2014*

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## The Latest Act in Israel's Iran Nuclear Disinformation Campaign

Benjamin Netanyahu's stage performance about Iran seeking a nuclear weapon not only was based on old material, but evidence shows it was fabricated too, says Gareth Porter in this Consortium News exclusive report.

**By Gareth Porter** *Special to Consortium News*



Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's claim in his theatrical 20-minute presentation of an Israeli physical seizure of Iran's "atomic archive" in Tehran would certainly have been the "great intelligence achievement" he boasted if it had actually happened.

But the claim does not hold up under careful scrutiny, and his assertion that Israel now possesses a vast documentary record of a covert Iranian nuclear weapons program is certainly fraudulent.

Netanyahu's tale of an Israeli intelligence raid right in Tehran that carted off 55,000 paper files and another 55,000 CDs from a "highly secret location" requires that we accept a proposition that is absurd on its face: that Iranian policymakers decided to store their most sensitive military secrets in a small tin-roofed hut with nothing to protect it from heat (thus almost certainly ensuring loss of data on CDs within a few years) and no sign of any security, based on the satellite image shown in the slide show. (As Steve Simon observed in *The New York Times* the door did not even appear to have a lock on it.)

The laughable explanation suggested by Israeli officials to *The Daily Telegraph*—that the Iranian government was afraid the files might be found by international inspectors if they remained at “major bases” – merely reveals the utter contempt that Netanyahu has for Western governments and news media. Even if Iran were pursuing nuclear weapons secretly, their files on the subject would be kept at the Ministry of Defense, not at military bases. And of course the alleged but wholly implausible move to an implausible new location came just as Netanyahu needed a dramatic new story to galvanize Trump to resist the European allies’ strong insistence on preserving the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Act (JCPOA) nuclear deal with Iran.

In fact, there is no massive treasure trove of secret files about an Iran “Manhattan Project.” The shelves of black binders and CDs that Netanyahu revealed with such a dramatic flourish date back to 2003 (after which a U.S. National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) said Iran had abandoned any nuclear weapons program) and became nothing more than stage props like the cartoon bomb that Netanyahu used at the United Nations in 2012.

### **Disinformation Campaign**

Netanyahu’s claim about how Israel acquired this “atomic archive” is only the latest manifestation of a long-term

disinformation campaign that the Israeli government began to work on in 2002-03. The documents to which Netanyahu referred in the presentation were introduced to the news media and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) beginning in 2005 as coming originally from a secret Iranian nuclear weapons research program. For many years U.S. news media have accepted those documents as authentic. But despite the solid media united front behind that narrative, we now know with certainty that those earlier documents were fabrications and that they were created by Israel’s Mossad.

That evidence of fraud begins with the alleged origins of the entire collection of documents. Senior intelligence officials in the George W. Bush administration had told reporters that the documents came from “a stolen Iranian laptop computer”, as *The New York Times* reported in November 2005. The *Times* quoted unnamed intelligence officials as insisting that the documents had not come from an Iranian resistance group, which would cast serious doubt on their reliability.

But it turned that the assurances from those intelligence officials were part of an official dissimulation. The first reliable account of the documents’ path to the United States came only in 2013, when former senior German foreign office official Karsten Voigt, who retired from his long-time position as coordinator



of German-North American cooperation, spoke with this writer on the record.

Voigt recalled how senior officials of the German foreign intelligence agency, the *Bundesnachrichtendienst* or BND, had explained to him in November 2004 that they were familiar with the documents on the alleged Iran nuclear weapons program, because a sometime source—but not an actual intelligence agent—had provided them earlier that year. Furthermore, the BND officials explained that they had viewed the source as “doubtful,” he recalled, because the source had belonged to the Mujahideen-E Khalq, the armed Iranian opposition group that had fought Iran on behalf of Iraq during the eight year war.

BND officials were concerned that the Bush administration had begun citing those documents as evidence against Iran, because of their experience with “Curveball” – the Iraqi engineer in Germany who had told stories of Iraqi mobile bioweapons labs that had turned to be false. As a result of that meeting with BND officials, Voigt had given an interview to *The Wall Street Journal* in which he had contradicted the assurance of the unnamed U.S. intelligence officials to the *Times* and warned that the Bush administration should not base its policy on the documents it was beginning to cite as evidence of an Iranian nuclear weapons program, because they had indeed come from “an Iranian dissident group.”

### **Using the MEK**

The Bush administration’s desire to steer press coverage of the supposedly internal Iranian documents away from the MEK is understandable: the truth about the MEK role would immediately lead to Israel, because it was well known, that Israel’s intelligence agency Mossad had used the MEK to make public information that the Israelis did not want attributed to itself – including the precise location of Iran’s Natanz enrichment facility. As Israeli journalists Yossi Melman and Meir Javadanfar observed in their 2007 book on the Iran nuclear program, based on U.S., British and Israeli officials, “Information is ‘filtered’ to the IAEA via Iranian opposition groups, especially the National Resistance Council of Iran.”

Mossad used the MEK repeatedly in the 1990s and the early 2000’s to get the IAEA to inspect any site the Israelis suspected might possibly be nuclear-related, earning their Iranian clients a very poor reputation at the IAEA. No one familiar with the record of the MEK could have believed that it was capable of creating the detailed documents that were passed to the German government. That required an organization with the expertise in nuclear weapons and experience in fabricating documents – both of which Israel’s Mossad had in abundance.

Bush administration officials had highlighted a set of 18 schematic drawings of the Shahab-3 missile’s reentry vehicle or nosecone of the missile in each of

which there was a round shape representing a nuclear weapon. Those drawings were described to foreign governments and the International Atomic Energy Agency as 18 different attempts to integrate a nuclear weapon into the Shahab-3.

Netanyahu gave the public its first glimpse of one of those drawings Monday when he pointed to it triumphantly as visually striking evidence of Iranian nuclear perfidy. But that schematic drawing had a fundamental flaw that proved that it and others in the set could not have been genuine: it showed the “dunce cap” shaped reentry vehicle design of the original Shahab-3 missile that had been tested from 1998 to 2000. That was the shape that intelligence analysts outside Iran had assumed in 2002 and 2003 Iran would continue to use in its ballistic missile.

### **New Nose Cone**

It is now well established, however, that Iran had begun redesigning the Shahab-3 missile with a conical reentry vehicle or nosecone as early as 2000 and replaced it with a completely different design that had a “triconic” or “baby bottle” shape. It made it a missile with very different flight capabilities and was ultimately called the Ghadr-1. Michael Elleman, the world’s leading expert on Iranian ballistic missiles, documented the redesign of the missile in his [path-breaking 2010 study of Iran’s missile program](#).

Iran kept its newly-designed missile with the baby bottle reentry vehicle secret from the outside world until its first test in mid-2004. Elleman concluded that Iran was deliberately misleading the rest of the world – and especially the Israelis, who represented the most immediate threat of attack on Iran – to believe that the old model was the missile of the future while already shifting its planning to the new design, which would bring all of Israel within reach for the first time.

The authors of the drawings that Netanyahu displayed on the screen were thus in the dark about the change in the Iranian design. The earliest date of a document on the redesign of the reentry vehicle in the collection obtained by U.S. intelligence was August 28, 2002 – about two years after the actual redesign had begun. That major error indicates unmistakably that the schematic drawings showing a nuclear weapon in a Shahab-3 reentry vehicle – what Netanyahu called “integrated warhead design” were fabrications.

Netanyahu’s slide show highlighted a series of alleged revelations that he said came from the newly acquired “atomic archive” concerning the so-called “Amad Plan” and the continuation of the activities of the Iranian who was said to have led that covert nuclear weapons project. But the single pages of Farsi language documents he flashed on the screen were also clearly from the same cache of

documents that we now know came from the MEK-Israeli combination. Those documents were never authenticated, and IAEA Director-General Mohamed ElBaradei, who was skeptical of their authenticity, had insisted that without such authentication, he could not accuse Iran of having a nuclear weapons program.

### **More Fraud**

There are other indications of fraud in that collection of documents as well. A second element of the supposed covert arms program given the name "Amad Plan" was a "process flow chart" of a bench-scale system for converting uranium ore for enrichment. It had the code name "Project 5.13", according to a briefing by the IAEA Deputy Director Olli Heinonen, and was part of a larger so-called "Project 5", according to an official IAEA report. Another sub-project under that rubric was "Project 5.15", which involved ore processing at the Gchine Mine." Both sub-projects were said to be carried out by a consulting firm named Kimia Maadan.

But documents that Iran later provided to the IAEA proved that, in fact, "Project 5.15" did exist, but was a civilian project of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran, not part of a covert nuclear weapons program, and that the decision had been made in August 1999 – two years before the beginning of the alleged "Amad Plan" was said to have begun.

The role of Kimia Maadan in both sub-projects explains why an ore processing project would be included in the supposed secret nuclear weapons program. One of the very few documents included in the cache that could actually be verified as authentic was a letter from Kimia Maadan on another subject, which suggests that the authors of the documents were building the collection around a few documents that could be authenticated.

Netanyahu also lingered over Iran's denial that it had done any work on "MPI" or ("Multi-Point Initiation") technology "in hemispheric geometry". He asserted that "the files" showed Iran had done "extensive work" or "MPI" experiments. He did not elaborate on the point. But Israel did not discover the alleged evidence of such experiments in a tin-roofed shack in Tehran. The issue of whether Iran had done such experiments was a central issue in the IAEA's inquiry after 2008. The agency described it in a September 2008 report, which purported to be about Iran's "experimentation in connection with symmetrical initiation of a hemispherical high explosive charge suitable for an implosion type nuclear device."

### **No Official Seals**

The IAEA refused to reveal which member country had provided the document to the

IAEA. But former Director-General ElBaradei revealed in his memoirs that Israel had passed a series of documents to the Agency in order to establish the case that Iran had continued its nuclear weapons experiments until “at least 2007.” ElBaradei was referring to convenient timing of the report’s appearance within a few months of the U.S. NIE of November 2007 concluding that Iran had ended its nuclear weapons-related research in 2003. And the “MPI” document fulfilled precisely that political function.

Netanyahu pointed to a series of documents on the screen as well a number of drawings, photographs and technical figures, and even a grainy old black and white film, as evidence of Iran’s nuclear weapons work. But absolutely nothing about them provides an evidentiary link to the Iranian government. As Tariq Rauf, who was head of the IAEA’s Verification and Security Policy Coordination Office from 2002 to 2012, noted in an e-mail, none of the pages of text on the screen show official seals or marks that would identify them as actual Iranian government documents. The purported Iranian documents given to the IAEA in 2005 similarly lacked such official markings, as an IAEA official conceded to me in 2008.

Netanyahu’s slide show revealed more than just his over-the-top style of persuasion on the subject of Iran. It provided further evidence that the claims that had successfully swayed the U.S. and Israeli allies to join in punishing Iran for having had a nuclear weapons program were based on fabricated documents that originated in the state that had the strongest motive to make that case – Israel.

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

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## Beware of Bolton Undermining Korean Peace

With peace breaking out on the Korean peninsula, beware of National Security Adviser John Bolton’s efforts to sabotage any deal, warns Gareth Porter.

**By Gareth Porter**



The still-unscheduled Donald Trump-Kim Jong Un summit offers the opportunity for a denuclearization deal that would avoid a possible nuclear war, but that potential deal remains vulnerable to a hostile corporate media sector and political elites in the United States. At the center of this hostility is national security adviser John Bolton, who's not just uninterested in selling a denuclearization deal to the public. He's working actively to undermine it.

Strong circumstantial evidence indicates that he leaked intelligence to a Washington think tank sympathetic to his views in order to generate media questioning about the president's announced plan to reach an agreement with North Korea's leader.

Bolton made no secret of his visceral opposition to such a deal before Trump announced that Bolton would become national security adviser, arguing that Kim Jong Un would never let go of his nuclear weapons, especially since he is so close to having a real nuclear deterrent capability vis-a-vis the United States.

Even after meeting Trump on March 6 to discuss joining the administration,

Bolton was not expecting the announcement of a Trump-Kim summit. Trump tweeted about progress in talks with North Korea that day, but when asked about such talks in an [interview with Fox News](#) later that same day, Bolton dismissed the whole idea. He portrayed Kim's willingness to have discussions as aimed at diverting Washington's attention from Pyongyang nearing its goal of having a "deliverable nuclear weapon."mp-Kim summit was announced on March 9, Bolton made a tactical adjustment in his public stance toward talks with Kim to avoid an open conflict with Trump. He started suggesting in interviews that Trump had cleverly "foiled" Kim's plan for long, drawn-out talks by accepting the proposal for a summit meeting. But he also urged Trump to assume a stance that would guarantee the meeting would fail.

### **Bolton's Alarming Libya Model**

In an [interview with Fox News](#) on the day of the summit announcement, Bolton suggested a peremptory demand by Trump to Kim: "Tell us what ports should American ships sail in, what airports American planes can land to load your nuclear weapons." And in a [second interview with Fox](#) that day, Bolton suggested that Trump demand that Kim identify the ports and airfields to be used to "dismantle your nuclear program and put it at Oak Ridge, Tennessee, where Libya's nuclear program lives." Bolton's invocation of the Libyan example of giving up a nuclear weapons program was an ostentatious way of conveying his intention to keep open the option of using force to overthrow Kim's regime.

Bolton was staking his opposition to negotiations with Kim primarily on the argument that North Korea would simply exploit such negotiations to complete its testing of a nuclear-tipped intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM). But former CIA Director Mike Pompeo got a concrete commitment from Kim to end all tests during their meetings in Pyongyang on April 7-8, which Kim then announced officially on April 20.

Pompeo's report on Kim's commitment, coming just before Bolton's first day in the White House on April 9, immediately vitiated Bolton's chief argument against a denuclearization agreement. But Bolton had another argument to fall back on. When a Fox News interviewer asked him on March 6 about a possible nuclear testing freeze, Bolton replied, "A freeze won't work. The only inspections system that you could have with any prospect of finding out what they're up to would have to be so intrusive it would threaten the stability of the regime."

As an argument that a testing halt wouldn't work, that comment was nonsensical: The United States has no intrusive inspections to detect a test of a long-range North Korean missile or of a nuclear weapon. But Bolton could use the need for an intrusive inspection system that North Korea would resist as an argument against a denuclearization agreement. He was well aware that in 2008, Vice President Dick Cheney forced Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice to change the agreement she had reached with North Korea in October 2007 to require an intrusive verification system at a different stage of implementation—*before* the United States had taken North Korea off the terrorism list and ended the application of the Trading with the Enemy Act rather than after that, as had been originally agreed. North Korea refused to accept the new verification demand and then denounced the agreement in late 2008.

## **The Leak**

Within a few days of Bolton taking over as national security adviser, someone leaked intelligence to a Washington think tank on a North Korean facility allegedly intended to produce nuclear-grade graphite, a key component of nuclear reactors. The leak resulted in a post by David Albright, the executive director of the Institute for Science and International Security (ISIS), on April 20 with satellite images of what he identified as a North Korean nuclear-grade graphite plant. Albright wrote that a "knowledgeable government official" had identified the site of the factory on the Yalu River, which divides North Korea from China.

Albright suggested that the factory "violates the spirit of the upcoming summit processes with the United States and South Korea." And he concluded that any agreement with North Korea "must contain its verifiable commitments not to proliferate nuclear goods and abide by internationally recognized strategic export control regimes."

But Albright presented no evidence that the building under U.S. intelligence surveillance had any bearing on negotiations on denuclearization. His report made it clear that analysts had only suspicions rather than hard evidence that it was for nuclear-grade graphite, referring to “the suspect site” and to “the suspect facility.” Albright also admitted that nuclear-grade graphite is a “dual use” material, and that an existing North Korean facility produces it for components of domestic and foreign ballistic missiles, not for nuclear plants.

Albright nevertheless implied that nuclear-grade graphite is produced and traded covertly. In fact, it is sold online by trading companies such as Alibabalike any other industrial item.

On April 21, despite the absence of any real link between the “suspect facility” and a prospective denuclearization agreement, The Washington Post published an article by intelligence reporter Joby Warrick, based on Albright’s post, that suggested such a link. Warrick referred to a “suspected graphite production facility” that could allow North Korea’s “weapons program” to “quietly advance while creating an additional source of badly needed export revenue.”

Adopting Bolton’s key argument against a denuclearization agreement, Warrick wrote, “It is unclear how the United States and its allies would reliably verify a suspension of key facets of North Korea’s nuclear program or confirm that it has stopped selling weapons components to partners overseas.” North Korea has “a long history of concealing illicit weapons activity from foreign eyes,” Warrick argued, adding that, unlike Iran, it “does not allow inspectors to visit its nuclear facilities.”

But Warrick failed to inform readers that North Korea had allowed 24-hour, 7-day-a-week inspections of their nuclear facilities from the time the agreed framework was adopted in 1994 until December 2002, after Bolton had

successfully engineered the George W. Bush administration’s open renunciation of that Clinton administration agreement. And in the negotiations in 2007-08, Pyongyang only had objected to the U.S. demand for intrusive inspection—including military sites—before the United States had ended its suite of hostile policies toward North Korea.

### **Sabotaging a Deal with Iran**

The graphite factory episode would not be the first time Bolton had used alleged intelligence to try to block a negotiated agreement. In early 2004, Bolton, as undersecretary of state for arms control and international security, was determined to prevent the British, French and German governments from reaching an accord with Iran that would frustrate Cheney’s plan for an eventual U.S.

military option against Iran. Bolton gave satellite images of Iran's Parchin military complex to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) claiming that they were appropriate for certain kinds of nuclear weapons testing, as Seymour Hersh later reported. Bolton demanded that the IAEA inspect the sites, evidently hoping that Iran would refuse such an intrusive inspection and allow the Bush administration to accuse Iran of hiding covert weapons activities.

But the IAEA failed to refer to the satellite images of Parchin in two 2004 reports on Iran. Then the State Department provided them to ABC News, which reported that a State Department official "confirmed the United States suspects nuclear activity at some of [Parchin's] facilities." But the ABC report also quoted a former senior Department of Defense official who specialized in nuclear weapons as saying the images did not constitute evidence of any nuclear weapons-related activities. Iran let the IAEA inspect 10 Parchin sites in two separate visits in 2005. Taking environment samples in each case, the inspectors found no evidence of nuclear-related activity.

Bolton's hopes of keeping the option of U.S. war on Iran flopped in 2004, but he still believes in a first strike against North Korea, as he urged in an op-ed in late February. And he can be expected to continue to use his position in the White House to try to keep that option open as he did with Iran in 2004, in part by covert leaks of information to allies outside the government.

*This article was originally published on TruthDig.*

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

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## The Tragedy of Benjamin Netanyahu

In presenting no new information about Iran's alleged nuclear weapons program, the Israeli prime minister is actually undermining his own country's security, argues Trita Parsi.

**By Trita Parsi**





There is something tragic about Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. The harder he tries, the more he fails. That has been the case with many of his attempts to sabotage diplomacy with Iran and push the US to take military action against the country. And that was certainly the case with his underwhelming powerpoint presentation Monday. What was supposed to be a smoking gun to once and for all nix the Iran nuclear deal, inadvertently made [a powerful case](#) as to [why the the deal must remain in place](#).

The Israeli government had promised “significant new revelations” about the nuclear program. Yet Netanyahu offered nothing new. The bulk of his presentation focused on what the world already knew: That between 1999 and 2003, Iran had engaged in activities with possible military dimensions.

As I describe in [Losing an Enemy: Obama, Iran and the Triumph of Diplomacy](#), these past Iranian activities constituted a tricky dilemma during the nuclear talks. If it was revealed that the Iranians had indeed engaged in illegal military research, that could jeopardize the entire agreement, as voices would be raised to have it punished for its past violations. Completely disregarding it without allowing the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to complete its investigation—which the Iranians had not been cooperating with—was also not an option. What it came down to was a choice between punishment for Iran’s past violations and guarantees that those violations would never be repeated in the future.

### **Obama’s Choice**

The obvious choice for Obama was the latter: punishing Iran for its past errors was of little value if punishment came at the expense of a deal that would prevent Iran from building a bomb. Politically, however, this choice was feasible only if the IAEA could complete its investigation—with the cooperation of the Iranians—to make a final judgment on the issue and close the file. The P5+1 needed neither an admission of guilt nor a guilty verdict; they just needed Iran’s cooperation to complete the investigation.

The Iranians feared that giving the IAEA more access would only lead to more demands and investigations. To Iran, it was critical that any investigation would be time-limited, so it couldn’t drag on indefinitely, and delinked from the sanctions relief process, so that the decision to lift sanctions couldn’t be held hostage to the Possible Military Dimensions (*PMD*) investigation.

Eventually, a compromise was reached in which the Iranians would make their documents accessible and their scientists available for interviews for the

purposes of producing a time-limited report that would contain both the IAEA's assessments and Iran's responses and contributions. The report would essentially include two narratives, which meant that there wouldn't be an authoritative judgment. More importantly, the sanctions relief process would be linked to the completion of the IAEA investigation and not its conclusion. That is, the IAEA would have to report only that Iran had cooperated with the investigation and that the IAEA's questions were answered in order for the green light for sanctions reform to be lit.

In July 2015, the head of the IAEA flew to Tehran and concluded a final agreement that established a timeline for resolving the question of Iran's past activities whereby Iran would turn over all information requested by the IAEA, and the IAEA would provide its final assessment by December 15 of that year.

The IAEA [issued its report](#) on December 2, 2015 concluding that Iran had pursued a nuclear weapons program prior to 2003, but that this organized program ended that year and that there was no evidence that any undeclared activities had taken place since 2009.

### **Case Closed**

Following the report, the 35-member IAEA Board of Governors voted unanimously to conclude the investigation into Iran's past weaponization work. The case was officially closed.

Now, without presenting *any new* information – and without even attempting to claim that Iran's undeclared activities had continued beyond 2009 or 2015 – Bibi wants to convince the world that he has discovered something new.

He hasn't.

As one former IAEA official [publicly commented](#): "I just saw a lot of pictures I had seen before."



Iran's past military activities are precisely why the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) is needed: The deal significantly limited Iran's program and closed off all of Tehran's pathways to a bomb. And thanks to the inspections regime, Iran cannot engage in any such clandestine activities without getting caught.

All of these restrictions, limitations and inspections will be lost if Donald Trump follows Netanyahu's advice and kills the deal on May 12.

And therein lies the tragedy of Netanyahu.

By helping to kill the Iran deal, Netanyahu may advance his own political interest, but only by undermining that of Israel's. Bibi may consider himself the biggest political winner of the Iran deal's collapse. Yet, Israel will count among some of the biggest losers of this diplomatic travesty.

*This article originally appeared at The American Conservative.*

**Trita Parsi is the author of [Losing an Enemy: Obama, Iran and the Triumph of Diplomacy](#) and president of the [National Iranian American Council](#).**

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## Scarier than Bolton? Think Nikki for President

Nikki Haley is America's face to the international community. She is the Ugly American personified, thinking that American Exceptionalism gives her license to say and do whatever she wants at the United Nations, argues Phil Giraldi in this commentary.

**By Phil Giraldi**



The musical chairs playing out among the senior officials that make up the President Donald Trump White House team would be amusing to watch but for the genuine damage that it is doing to the United States. The lack of any coherence in policy means that the State Department now has diplomats that do not believe in diplomacy and environment agency heads that do not believe in protecting the environment. It also means that well-funded and disciplined lobbies and pressure groups are having a field day, befuddling ignorant administrators with their “fact sheets” and successfully promoting policies that benefit no one but themselves.

In the Trumpean world of all-the-time-stupid, there is, however, one individual who stands out for her complete inability to perceive anything beyond threats of unrelenting violence combined with adherence to policies that have already proven to be catastrophic. That person is our own Ambassador to the United Nations Nikki Haley, who surfaced in the news lately after she unilaterally and evidently prematurely announced sanctions on Russia. When the White House suggested that she might have been “confused” she responded that “With all due respect, I don’t get confused.” This ignited a firestorm among the Trump haters, lauding Haley as a strong and self-confident woman for standing up to the White House male bullies while also suggesting that the hapless Administration had not bothered to inform one of its senior diplomats of a policy change. It also produced a flurry of Haley for higher office tweets based on what was described as her “brilliant *riposte*” to the president.

One over-the-top bit of effusion from a former Haley aide even suggested that her “deft rebuttal” emphasizes her qualities, enthusing that “What distinguishes her from the star-struck sycophants in the White House is that she understands the intersection of strong leadership and public service, where great things happen” and placing her on what is being promoted as the short list of future presidential candidates.

For sure, neocon barking dog Bill Kristol has for years been promoting Haley for president, a sign that something is up as he was previously the one who “discovered” Sarah Palin. Indeed, the similarities between the two women are readily observable. Neither is very cerebral or much given to make any attempt to understand an adversary’s point of view; both are reflexively aggressive and dismissive when dealing with foreigners and domestic critics; both are passionately anti-Russian and pro-Israeli. And Kristol is not alone in his advocacy. Haley regularly receives praise from Senators like South Carolina’s Lindsey Graham and from the Murdoch media as well as in the opinion pages of *National Review* and *The Weekly Standard*.

## **She's Locked and Loaded**

The greater problem right now is that Nikki Haley is America's face to the international community, even more than the Secretary of State. She has used her bully pulpit to do just that, i.e. bully, and she is ugly America personified, having apparently decided that something called American Exceptionalism gives her license to say and do whatever she wants at the United Nations. In her mind, the United States can do what it wants globally because it has a God-given right to do so, a viewpoint that doesn't go down well with many countries that believe that they have a legal and moral right to be left alone and remain exempt from America's all too frequent military interventions.

Nikki Haley sees things differently, however. During her 15 months at the United Nations she has been instrumental in cutting funding for programs that she disapproves of and has repeatedly threatened military action against countries that disagree with U.S. policies. Most recently, in the wake of the U.S. cruise missile attack against Syria, she announced that the action was potentially only the first step. She declared that Washington was "locked and loaded," prepared to exercise more lethal military options if Syria and its Russian and Iranian supporters did not cease and desist from the use of chemical weapons.

Ironically, the cruise missile attack was carried out even though the White House had no clue as to what had actually happened and it now turns out that the entire story, spread by the terrorist groups in Syria and their mouthpieces, has begun to unravel. Will Nikki Haley apologize? I would suspect that if she doesn't do confusion she doesn't do apologies either.

Haley, who had no foreign policy experience of any kind prior to assuming office, relies on a gaggle of neoconservative foreign-policy "experts" to help shape her public utterances, which are often not cleared with the State Department, where she is at least nominally employed. Her speechwriter is Jessica Gavora, who is the wife of the leading neoconservative journalist Jonah Goldberg. Unfortunately, being a neocon mouthpiece makes her particularly dangerous as she is holding a position where she can do bad things. She has been shooting from the lip since she assumed office with only minimal vetting by the Trump Administration, and, as in the recent imbroglio over her "confusion," it is never quite clear whether she is speaking for herself or for the White House.

## **She Has Her Own Foreign Policy**

Haley has her own foreign policy. She has declared that Russia "is not, will not be our friend" and has lately described the Russians as having their hands covered with the blood of Syrian children. From the start of her time at the U.N., Haley has made it clear that she is neoconservatism personified and she has done nothing since to change that impression. In December 2017 she warned

the U.N. that she was “taking names” and threatened retaliation against any country that was so “disrespectful” as to dare to vote against Washington’s disastrous recognition of Jerusalem as Israel’s capital, which she also helped to bring about.

As governor of South Carolina, Haley first became identified as an unquestioning supporter of Israel through her signing of a bill punishing supporters of the nonviolent pro-Palestinian Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement, the first legislation of its kind on a state level. Immediately upon taking office at the United Nations she complained that “nowhere has the U.N.’s failure been more consistent and more outrageous than in its bias against our close ally Israel” and vowed that the “days of Israel bashing are over.” On a recent visit to Israel, she was feted and honored by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. She was also greeted by rounds of applause and cheering when she spoke at the annual meeting of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) in March, saying “When I come to AIPAC I am with friends.”

Nikki Haley’s embrace of Israeli points of view is unrelenting and serves no American interest. If she were a recruited agent of influence for the Israeli Mossad she could not be more cooperative than she apparently is voluntarily. In February 2017, she blocked the appointment of former Palestinian Prime Minister Salam Fayyad to a diplomatic position at the United Nations because he is a Palestinian. In a congressional hearing she was asked about the decision: “Is it this administration’s position that support for Israel and support for the appointment of a well-qualified individual of Palestinian nationality to an appointment at the U.N. are mutually exclusive?” Haley responded yes, that the administration is “supporting Israel” by blocking every Palestinian.

### **She’s Decided She Wants Regime Change**

Haley is particularly highly critical of both Syria and Iran, reflecting the Israeli bias. She has repeatedly said that regime change in Damascus is a Trump administration priority, even when the White House was saying something different. She has elaborated on an Administration warning that it had “identified potential preparations for another chemical weapons attack by the Assad regime” by tweeting “...further attacks will be blamed on Assad but also on Russia and Iran who support him killing his own people.” At one point, Haley warned “We need to see Russia choose to side with the civilized world over an Assad government that brutally terrorizes its own people.”

At various U.N. meetings, though Haley has repeatedly and uncritically complained of institutional bias towards Israel, she has never addressed the issue that Israel’s treatment of the Palestinians might in part be responsible for the criticism leveled against it. Her description of Israel as a “close

ally” is hyperbolic and she tends to be oblivious to actual American interests in the region when Israel is involved. She has never challenged the Israeli occupation of the West Bank as well as the recent large expansion of settlements, which are at least nominally opposed by the State Department and White House. Nor has she spoken up about the more recent shooting of three thousand unarmed Gazan demonstrators by Israeli Army sharpshooters, which is a war crime.

Haley’s hardline on Syria reflects the Israeli bias, and her consistent hostility to Russia is a neoconservative position. A White House warning that it had “identified potential preparations for another chemical weapons attack by the Assad regime led to a Haley elaboration in a tweet that “...further attacks will be blamed on Assad but also on Russia and Iran who support him killing his own people.” Earlier, on April 12, 2017 after Russia blocked a draft U.N. resolution intended to condemn the alleged Khan Shaykhun chemical attack, which subsequently turned out to be a false flag, Haley said, “We need to see Russia choose to side with the civilized world over an Assad government that brutally terrorizes its own people.”

Haley is particularly critical of Iran, which she sees as the instigator of much of the unrest in the Middle East, again reflecting the Israeli and neocon viewpoints. She claimed on April 20, 2017 during her first session as president of the U.N. Security Council, that Iran and Hezbollah had “conducted terrorist acts” for decades within the Middle East, ignoring the more serious terrorism support engaged in by U.S. regional allies Saudi Arabia and Qatar. She stated in June 2017 that the Security Council’s praise of the Iran Nuclear Agreement honored a state that has engaged in “illicit missile launches,” “support for terrorist groups,” and “arms smuggling,” while “stok[ing] regional conflicts and mak[ing] them harder to solve.” All are perspectives that might easily be challenged.

So, Nikki Haley very much comes across as the neoconservatives’ dream ambassador to the United Nations—full of aggression, a staunch supporter of Israel, and assertive of Washington’s preemptive right to set standards for the rest of the world. And there is every reason to believe that she would nurture the same views if she were to become the neocon dream president. Bearing the flag for American Exceptionalism does not necessarily make her very good for the rest of us, who will have to bear the burdens and risks implicit in her imperial hubris, but, as the neoconservatives never feel compelled to admit that they were wrong, one suspects that Haley’s assertion that she does not do confusion is only the beginning if she succeeds in her apparent quest for the highest office in the land. Worse than John Bolton? Absolutely.

**Philip Giraldi, a former CIA officer, is executive director of the Council for the National Interest. [This article originally appeared at [The Unz Review](#), reprinted with permission.]**

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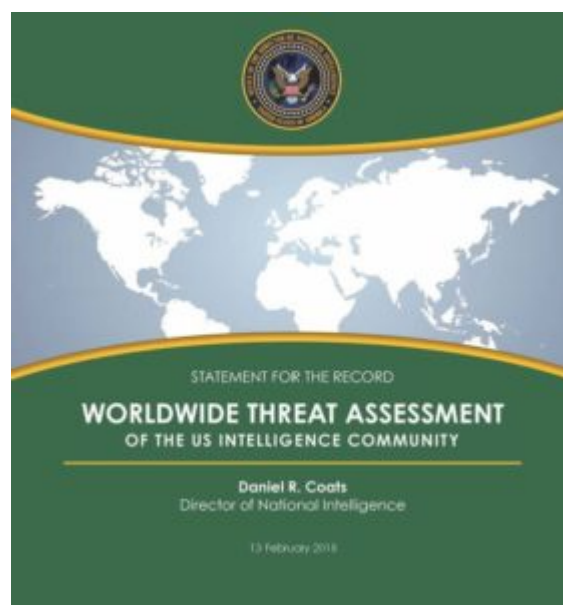
## North Korea, Iran and U.S. Intelligence that Neither Hears Nor Sees

A recent Worldwide Threat Assessment issued by the U.S. intelligence community exaggerates threats posed by North Korea and Iran, ignoring well-known realities and downplaying the U.S.'s own previous intelligence assessments, notes Ted Snider.

By Ted Snider

On February 13, the American intelligence community issued its Worldwide Threat Assessment for 2018. It is a frightening document to read, but perhaps not for the reasons you would expect. It is not frightening for the threat to America or the world that it reveals, but rather for its failure to hear or see what U.S. adversaries say or do.

On North Korea, for example, the agencies that hear everything cannot seem to hear anything North Korea has said; on Iran, the agencies that see everything cannot seem to see what they have long known.



The Worldwide Threat Assessment is a regular ritual of the intelligence community in which it shares a declassified summary of threats to U.S. national security with Congress. The current assessment is published under the name of Daniel R. Coats, Director of National Intelligence. In theory, the assessment is



the result of input from all of America's sixteen intelligence agencies.

Worldwide Threat Assessments, according to Ray McGovern, are not as important as National Intelligence Estimates, but they are not unimportant. McGovern, a former CIA analyst who prepared and briefed the President's Daily Brief for Nixon, Ford, and Reagan, explained to me that, though they are less important for shaping policy, they are no less important for shaping public perception.

When it comes to North Korea and Iran, Congress exaggerates the truth, and, according to McGovern, Worldwide Threat Assessments serves the interests of those who benefit from exaggerating the truth. When Congress misleads the public on North Korea and Iran, it can claim support from the intelligence community by referencing the Threat Assessment. Neocons and irresponsible journalists can all quote its exaggerated and unsupported claims.

### **North Korea**

North Korea receives a scant three paragraphs. North Korea is identified as "a complex and increasing threat to U.S. national security and interests." That threat cannot be removed by negotiations, it is always said, because North Korea is not willing to negotiate away their nuclear weapons program. That is the Trump administration's justification for bypassing diplomacy or even talking with North Korea. That premise is asserted when the Worldwide Threat Analysis insists that "repeatedly stating that nuclear weapons are the basis for its survival, suggests that the regime does not intend to negotiate them away."

But the intelligence community that can hear everything you say apparently cannot hear anything North Korea is saying. The North Koreans do say that their nuclear weapons program is the basis of its survival—a deterrent—but they have repeated many versions of the formulation that if the threat to its survival were removed, the deterrent to the threat would be removed.

North Korea's position is not a refusal, it's a conditional: North Korea is not saying it will not negotiate over its nuclear program; it is saying it will not negotiate away the deterrent until there are guarantees that they no longer need the deterrent. To change North Korea's undesirable behaviour, America has to change its undesirable behaviour.

It is well known – or would be well known if the essential role assigned to historians and journalists in a democratic society had not been appropriated by propagandists – that both times the United States seriously engaged in diplomatic discussions with North Korea – in 1994 and in 2005 – when the U.S. promised to stop threatening to attack North Korea, North Korea promised to stop its nuclear weapons program.

But, it is not necessary to appeal to distant history or to previous North Korean leaders. The same conditional formulation of abandoning the deterrent when the need for the deterrent is abandoned has been articulated repeatedly in very recent history.

North Korea's Deputy Ambassador Kim In-ryong put it this way to UN Secretary-General António Guterres in August of 2017: "As long as the U.S. hostile policy and nuclear threat continue, the DPRK, no matter who may say what, will never place its self-defensive nuclear deterrence on the negotiating table." Ju Yong Chol, a North Korean diplomat, expressed the formulation exactly the same way.

The same conditional North Korean formulation was expressed by Foreign Minister Ri Yong-ho in August of 2017. Ri said "We will, under no circumstances, put the nukes and ballistic rockets on the negotiating table. . . . unless the hostile policy and nuclear threat of the U.S. against the DPRK are fundamentally eliminated." The next month, RI Yong-ho explained to the U.N. that its nuclear program is "to all intents and purposes, a war deterrent for putting an end to nuclear threat of the U.S. and for preventing its military invasion, and our ultimate goal is to establish the balance of power with the U.S.."

Most importantly, Kim Jong Un, himself, has also expressed this conditional formulation. Kim has stated that "Our final goal is to establish the equilibrium of real force with the U.S. and make the U.S. rulers dare not talk about military options."

And despite the Worldwide Threat Assessment's assurance that "the regime does not intend to negotiate [its nuclear weapons] away," North Korea has not ceased to assure the world that it would. Investigative journalist Gareth Porter has recently reported on the possibility of an "intra-Korean" agreement between North and South Korea.

Porter says that in a South Korean proposal that has never been reported by the U.S. media, the U.S. and South Korea would "discuss reducing the South Korea-U.S. joint military exercises if North Korea suspends its nuclear weapons and missile activities." South Korean President Moon Jae-in has further suggested that the U.S. and South Korea could refrain from including aircraft carriers and nuclear submarines during their joint military exercises."

Kim Jong Un has responded in a way that suggests that this proposal satisfies the conditional formulation of North Korea's terms. He called for a détente with South Korea and requested that South Korea "discontinue all the nuclear drills they have staged with outside forces," meaning the U.S., and "refrain from bringing in nuclear armaments and aggressive forces of the United States." Separating nuclear cooperation with the U.S. during the drills from the mere

existence of drills, suggests, as Porter points out, “that Kim was signaling [his] interest in negotiating an agreement along the lines that [South Korea] had raised.”

The Worldwide Threat Assessment’s position on North Korea is not based on real world intelligence. An intelligence community that can hear everything cannot seem to hear anything that North Korea is saying. Or it can but is using its Worldwide Threat Assessment to shape public perception in a way that serves the way the U.S. government wants the public to perceive North Korea.

## **Iran**

Iran receives a lot more space in the Worldwide Threat Assessment than North Korea. And, although there are a number of incredible claims made in the Iran section, the most incredible claims about Iran are made in the section on terrorism. In that section, two unsupportable claims are stated as accepted fact. The first reverberates out of the Washington echo chamber: “Iran remains the most prominent state sponsor of terrorism.” The second is that “Lebanese Hizballah” – which is lumped together with Iran – “has demonstrated its intent to foment regional instability by deploying thousands of fighters to Syria”

The American intelligence agencies that can see everything apparently cannot see what they have long known. They know Iran is not “the most prominent state sponsor of terrorism” for two reasons: they know it’s not Iran, and they know who it really is.

This is not only because all of the recent attempts to link Iran to terrorism have failed, but because their own reports on terrorism don’t list Iran as the leading state sponsor of terrorism. The State Department’s Patterns of Global Terrorisms rarely identifies terrorist incidents as carried out on behalf of Iran. And, the most recent Global Terrorism Index from the Department of Homeland Security clearly states that, not Iran, but “ISIL, Boko Haram, the Taliban and al-Qa’ida” are the biggest terrorist threats. None of these four groups is Shiite and none is aligned with Iran, but combined they are “responsible for 74 per cent of all deaths from terrorism.” The Index also clearly identifies “ISIL,” not Iran “as the deadliest terrorist group.”

The intelligence community also knows that Iran is not the leading state sponsor of terrorism because it knows that Iran’s enemy, Saudi Arabia, is. As early as December of 2009, the State Department already knew that “Saudi Arabia remains a critical financial support base for al-Qaeda, the Taliban . . . and other terrorist groups.” A 2012 classified Defense Intelligence Agency Information Intelligence Report that made the rounds through the US intelligence community identified the “supporting powers” of ISIS to be “Western countries, the Gulf

States and Turkey.”

In 2014, Vice President Biden admitted that “[O]ur allies in the region were our largest problem in Syria. . . . They poured hundreds of millions of dollars and tens, thousands of tons of weapons into anyone who would fight against Assad except that the people who were being supplied were Al Nusra and al-Qaeda and the extremist elements of jihadis.”

Point 4 of a memo written by Hillary Clinton on September 17, of the same year confesses that based on “western intelligence, US intelligence and sources in the region,” the U.S. knew that “the governments of Qatar and Saudi Arabia . . . [were] providing clandestine financial and logistic support to Isis and other radical groups in the region.” And, in 2015, President “Obama and other US officials urged Gulf leaders who are funding the opposition to keep control of their clients, so that a post-Assad regime isn’t controlled by extremists from the Islamic State or al-Qaeda.”

In other words, the Worldwide Threat Assessment of the American intelligence community does not reflect what the American intelligence community has known for at least eight years: Iran is not the leading state sponsor of terrorism, Saudi Arabia is.

As the intelligence community cannot see what it has long been shown about terrorism, so it cannot see what it has long known about Iran’s role in the region. Iran and Hezbollah are not “foment[ing] regional instability by deploying thousands of fighters to Syria.” Iran is in Syria to fight the Islamic State and al-Qa’ida. According to the very same Worldwide Threat Assessment, “Sunni violent extremists – most notably ISIS and al-Qa’ida – pose continuing terrorist threats to US interests and partners worldwide.”

So, Iran is fomenting, not regional instability, but regional stability by playing a leading role in the fight against the most destabilizing terrorist organizations in the region. The Worldwide Threat Assessment identifies al-Qa’ida and the Islamic State as destabilizing forces in the region but simultaneously identifies Iran—whose role in the region is to combat those destabilizing forces—as destabilizing.

Ever since Iran tried and failed to mediate the dispute in Syria in an attempt to avoid the conflict, Iran and Hezbollah have backed Assad against the Islamic State, al-Qa’ida and the other rebel forces. Iran’s role against destabilizing forces in the region has not been a trivial one. Iran and Hezbollah have played a crucial role in defeating the rebels. For many people who are being threatened by al-Qa’ida and the Islamic State, Iran has surpassed the United States as their most important ally.

And it is not like the authors of the Worldwide Threat Assessment don't know this. Ayatollah Khamenei has authorized his top commander to coordinate military operations with the U.S., and the Israeli media reported in 2014 that Iranian F-4 Phantoms that have bombed Islamic State targets were "most likely" working in "coordination with the U.S. military." Patrick Cockburn has suggested that advances by Iranian-controlled Shia militias against the Islamic State on the ground have been made possible by coordination with U.S. airstrikes on Islamic State positions.

On both Iran and North Korea, the Worldwide Threat Assessment is a terrifying document to read – terrifying for the incompetence it reveals. The best briefing that the U.S. intelligence community can offer Congress is an assessment based on incomplete information and logical inconsistency. The ears of America cannot hear what North Korea is saying; the eyes of America cannot see what Iran is doing.

**Ted Snider writes on analyzing patterns in U.S. foreign policy and history. This article originally appeared at Antiwar.com. Reprinted with permission.**

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## Growing Risk of U.S.-Iran Hostilities Based on False Pretexts, Intel Vets Warn

As President Donald Trump prepares to host Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu next week, a group of U.S. intelligence veterans offers corrections to a number of false accusations that have been levelled against Iran.

February 26, 2018

**MEMORANDUM FOR:** The President

**FROM:** Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS)

**SUBJECT:** War With Iran

### INTRODUCTION

In our December 21st Memorandum to you, we cautioned that the claim that Iran is currently the world's top sponsor of terrorism is unsupported by hard evidence. Meanwhile, other false accusations against Iran have intensified. Thus, we feel obliged to alert you to the virtually inevitable consequences of war with Iran, just as we warned President George W. Bush six weeks before the U.S. attack on

Iraq 15 years ago.

In our first Memorandum in this genre we told then-President Bush that we saw “no compelling reason” to attack Iraq, and warned “the unintended consequences are likely to be catastrophic.” The consequences will be far worse, should the U.S. become drawn into war with Iran. We fear that you are not getting the straight story on this from your intelligence and national security officials.

After choosing “War With Iran” for the subject-line of this Memo, we were reminded that we had used it before, namely, for a Memorandum to President Obama on August 3, 2010 in similar circumstances. You may wish to ask your staff to give you that one to read and ponder. It included a startling quote from then-Chairman of President Bush Jr.’s Intelligence Advisory Board (and former national security adviser to Bush Sr.) Gen. Brent Scowcroft, who told the *Financial Times* on October 14, 2004 that Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon had George W. Bush “mesmerized;” that “Sharon just has him wrapped around his little finger.” We wanted to remind you of that history, as you prepare to host Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu next week.

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### **Rhetoric vs. Reality**

We believe that the recent reporting regarding possible conflict with nuclear-armed North Korea has somewhat obscured consideration of the significantly higher probability that Israel or even Saudi Arabia will take steps that will lead to a war with Iran that will inevitably draw the United States in. Israel is particularly inclined to move aggressively, with potentially serious consequences for the U.S., in the wake of the recent incident involving an alleged Iranian drone and the shooting down of an Israeli aircraft.

There is also considerable anti-Iran rhetoric in U.S. media, which might well facilitate a transition from a cold war-type situation to a hot war involving U.S. forces. We have for some time been observing with some concern the growing hostility towards Iran coming out of Washington and from the governments of Israel and Saudi Arabia. National Security Adviser H.R. McMaster is warning that the “time to act is now” to thwart Iran’s aggressive regional ambitions while U.S. United Nations Ambassador Nikki Haley sees a “wake-up” call in the recent shooting incident involving Syria and Israel. Particular concern has been expressed by the White House that Iran is exploiting Shi’a minorities in neighboring Sunni dominated states to create unrest and is also expanding its role in neighboring Iraq and Syria.

While we share concerns over the Iranian government’s intentions vis-à-vis its

neighbors, we do not believe that the developments in the region, many of which came about through American missteps, have a major impact on vital U.S. national interests. Nor is Iran, which often sees itself as acting defensively against surrounding Sunni states, anything like an existential threat to the United States that would mandate the sustained military action that would inevitably result if Iran is attacked.

Iran's alleged desire to stitch together a sphere of influence consisting of an arc of allied nations and proxy forces running from its western borders to the Mediterranean Sea has been frequently cited as justification for a more assertive policy against Tehran, but we believe this concern to be greatly exaggerated. Iran, with a population of more than 80 million, is, to be sure, a major regional power but militarily, economically and politically it is highly vulnerable.

### **Limited Military Capability**

Tehran's Revolutionary Guard is well armed and trained, but much of its "boots on the ground" army consists of militiamen of variable quality. Its Air Force is a "shadow" of what existed under the Shah and is significantly outgunned by its rivals in the Persian Gulf, not to mention Israel. Its navy is only "green water" capable in that it consists largely of smaller vessels responsible for coastal defense supplemented by the swarming of Revolutionary Guard small speedboats.

When Napoleon had conquered much of continental Europe and was contemplating invading Britain it was widely believed that England was helpless before him. British Admiral Earl St Vincent was unperturbed: "I do not say the French can't come, I only say they can't come by sea." We likewise believe that Iran's apparent threat is in reality decisively limited by its inability to project power across the water or through the air against neighboring states that have marked superiority in both respects.

The concern over a possibly developing "Shi'ite land bridge," also referred to as an "arc" or "crescent," is likewise overstated. It ignores the reality that Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon all have strong national identities and religiously mixed populations. They are influenced – some of them strongly – by Iran but they are not puppet states. And there is also an ethnic division that the neighboring states' populations are very conscious of– they are Arabs and Iran is Persian, which is also true of the Shi'a populations in Saudi Arabia and the Emirates.

Majority Shi'a Iraq, for example, is now very friendly to Iran but it has to deal with considerable Kurdish and Sunni minorities in its governance and in the

direction of its foreign policy. It will not do Iran's bidding on a number of key issues, including Baghdad's relationship with Washington, and would be unwilling to become a proxy in Tehran's conflicts with Israel and Saudi Arabia. Iraqi Vice President Osama al-Nujaifi, the highest-ranking Sunni in the Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi government, has, for example, recently called for the demobilization of the Shi'ite Popular Mobilization Forces or militias that have been fighting ISIS because they "have their own political aspirations, their own [political] agendas. ... They are very dangerous to the future of Iraq."

### **Nuclear Weapons Thwarted**

A major concern that has undergirded much of the perception of an Iranian threat is the possibility that Tehran will develop a nuclear weapon somewhere down the road. We believe that the current Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, even if imperfect, provides the best response to that Iranian proliferation problem. The U.N. inspections regime is strict and, if the agreement stands, there is every reason to believe that Iran will be unable to take the necessary precursor steps leading to a nuclear weapons program. Iran will be further limited in its options after the agreement expires in nine years. Experts believe that, at that point, Iran is not likely to choose to accumulate the necessary highly enriched uranium stocks to proceed.

The recent incident involving the shoot-down of a drone alleged to be Iranian, followed by the downing of an Israeli fighter by a Syrian air defense missile, resulted in a sharp response from Tel Aviv, though reportedly mitigated by a warning from Russian President Vladimir Putin that anything more provocative might inadvertently involve Russia in the conflict. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is said to have moderated his response but his government is clearly contemplating a more robust intervention to counter what he describes as a developing Iranian presence in Syria.

In addition, Netanyahu may be indicted on corruption charges, and it is conceivable that he might welcome a "small war" to deflect attention from mounting political problems at home.

### **Getting Snookered Into War**

We believe that the mounting Iran hysteria evident in the U.S. media and reflected in Beltway groupthink has largely been generated by Saudi Arabia and Israel, who nurture their own aspirations for regional political and military supremacy. There are no actual American vital interests at stake and it is past time to pause and take a step backwards to consider what those interests actually are in a region that has seen nothing but disaster since 2003. Countering an assumed Iranian threat that is minimal and triggering a war would



exacerbate instability, likely leading to a breakdown in the current political alignment of the entire Middle East. It would be costly for the United States.

Iran is not militarily formidable, but its ability to fight on the defensive against U.S. naval and air forces is considerable and can cause high casualties. There appears to be a perception in the Defense Department that Iran could be defeated in a matter of days, but we would warn that such predictions tend to be based on overly optimistic projections, witness the outcomes in Afghanistan and Iraq. In addition, Tehran would be able again to unleash terrorist resources throughout the region, endangering U.S. military and diplomats based there as well as American travelers and businesses. The terrorist threat might easily extend beyond the Middle East into Europe and also the United States, while the dollar costs of a major new conflict and its aftermath could break the bank, literally.

Another major consideration before ratcheting up hostilities should be that a war with Iran might not be containable. As the warning from President Vladimir Putin to Netanyahu made clear, other major powers have interests in what goes on in the Persian Gulf, and there is a real danger that a regional war could have global consequences.

In sum, we see a growing risk that the U.S. will become drawn into hostilities on pretexts fabricated by Israel and Saudi Arabia for their actual common objective ("regime change" in Iran). A confluence of factors and misconceptions about what is at stake and how such a conflict is likely to develop, coming from both inside and outside the Administration, has, unfortunately, made such an outcome increasingly likely.

We have seen this picture before, just 15 years ago in Iraq, which should serve as a warning. The prevailing perception of threat that the Mullahs of Iran allegedly pose directly against the security of the U.S. is largely contrived. Even if all the allegations were true, they would not justify an Iraq-style "preventive war" violating national as well as international law. An ill-considered U.S. intervention in Iran is surely not worth the horrific humanitarian, military, economic, and political cost to be paid if Washington allows itself to become part of an armed attack.

**FOR THE STEERING GROUP, VETERAN INTELLIGENCE PROFESSIONALS FOR SANITY**

William Binney, former NSA Technical Director for World Geopolitical & Military Analysis; Co-founder of NSA's Signals Intelligence Automation Research Center (ret.)

Richard Black, Virginia State Senator; former Marine officer in Vietnam, later

Army Judge Advocate General officer, retiring as Colonel after 31 years

Kathleen Christison, CIA, Senior Analyst on Middle East (ret.)

Graham E. Fuller, Vice-Chair, National Intelligence Council (ret.)

Philip Giraldi, CIA, Operations Officer (ret.)

Matthew Hoh, former Capt., USMC Iraq; Foreign Service Officer, Afghanistan (associate VIPS)

Larry C. Johnson, former CIA and State Department Counter Terrorism officer

Michael S. Kearns, Captain, USAF; ex-Master SERE Instructor for Strategic Reconnaissance Operations (NSA/DIA) and Special Mission Units (JSOC) (ret.)

John Brady Kiesling, Foreign Service Officer; resigned Feb. 27, 2003 as Political Counselor, U.S. Embassy, Athens, in protest against the U.S. attack on Iraq (ret.)

John Kiriakou, Former CIA Counterterrorism Officer and former senior investigator, Senate Foreign Relations Committee

Edward Loomis, Jr., former NSA Technical Director for the Office of Signals Processing (ret.)

David MacMichael, National Intelligence Council, National Intelligence Estimates Officer (ret.)

Ray McGovern, former US Army infantry/intelligence officer & CIA analyst; CIA Presidential briefer (ret.)

Elizabeth Murray, Deputy National Intelligence Officer for Near East (ret.)

Todd E. Pierce, MAJ, US Army Judge Advocate (ret.)

Coleen Rowley, FBI Special Agent and former Minneapolis Division Legal Counsel (ret.)

Greg Thielmann, former Director of the Strategic, Proliferation, and Military Affairs Office, State Department Bureau of Intelligence & Research (INR), and former senior staffer on Senate Intelligence Committee (ret.)

Kirk Wiebe, former Senior Analyst, SIGINT Automation Research Center, NSA (ret.)

Lawrence Wilkerson, Colonel (USA, ret.), former Chief of Staff for Secretary of State; Distinguished Visiting Professor, College of William and Mary (associate VIPS)

Sarah G. Wilton, CDR, USNR, (ret.); Defense Intelligence Agency (ret.)

Robert Wing, former Foreign Service Officer (associate VIPS)

Ann Wright, Colonel, US Army (ret.); also Foreign Service Officer who, like Political Counselor John Brady Kiesling, resigned in opposition to the war on Iraq

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