

# Hyping More Fears about Iran

Official Washington's neocon/liberal-hawk establishment is working itself into another lather over Iran, this time by hyping fears about a ballistic missile program as another backdoor way to sabotage the Iran-nuclear agreement, as ex-CIA analyst Paul R. Pillar explains.

By Paul R. Pillar

There are several important things to understand about ballistic missiles and Iran, beyond the fact that this topic has become one of the latest on which those who want Iran to be an ostracized and feared pariah forever, and who still want to kill the agreement to restrict Iran's nuclear program, have seized.

Ballistic missiles are any projectiles that follow, after an initial powered and guided phase, a ballistic trajectory. Devices with this name include an enormously wide variety of sizes, ranges and capabilities. They run from short-range battlefield weapons to missiles with intercontinental range.

Ballistic missiles are in the armed forces of many states. They have become important and accepted parts of the defense posture of many states. Most of those states do not have what are commonly called weapons of mass destruction, and the missiles in their arsenals are not intended or designed to be used with such weapons. Instead they are part of a standard conventional defense strategy. If there is a genie involved with ballistic missiles, it has long been way, way out of the bottle.

Scary rhetoric about Iran has repeatedly referred to the supposed prospect of an Iranian intercontinental ballistic missile, evidently to try to get Americans to believe that Iranian missile programs pose a threat to the United States. Such rhetoric bears little or no resemblance to what the Iranians have been doing in the way of development and testing of ballistic missiles.

As missile expert Greg Thielmann, who studies the Iranian program closely, has concluded, an Iranian ICBM "is nowhere in sight." Iranian work on missiles has focused on shorter-range systems that are more relevant to Iran's defense needs within its own neighborhood.

Those needs, and how Iranian leaders perceive them, are shaped by a painful history of neighbors using ballistic missiles against Iran and by the prospect that missile-armed neighbors might use such weapons again. The Iran-Iraq war, begun by Saddam Hussein's aggression against Iran in 1980, included several rounds of the "war of the cities" in which civilian populations were subject to bombardment from the air.

Iraq used manned aircraft as well as ballistic missiles to attack Iranian cities, but during the later phases of the war the destruction of cities came mainly from Iraq's missiles. It is impossible to come up with an accurate figure of losses sustained by these missile strikes amid what was a very bloody war overall, but probably in even just the first round of the war of the cities in 1984, civilian casualties numbered in the tens of thousands.

In the Persian Gulf region it was Saudi Arabia that made the single biggest move in the proliferation of ballistic missiles: its then-secret purchase in the 1980s from China of intermediate-range CSS-2 missiles. Today, Iranian leaders look across the Gulf at their regional rivals in Saudi Arabia and see a substantial missile force incorporating technology from China and Pakistan. It would be a non-starter for any Iranian leader, regardless of his politics or ideology, to disavow continued efforts to try to improve and develop Iran's own force.

Additional confusion from the sort of rhetoric one hears today concerns exactly how missiles do and do not relate to the recently concluded nuclear agreement. That agreement, one of the signal achievements on behalf of nuclear nonproliferation, was achieved only by the parties agreeing to focus on the nuclear issue itself rather than wading into other grievances that the parties have against each other.

Those include not only Western grievances against Iran but also Iranian grievances against the West and the United States, some of which have to do with U.S. military activities in Iran's immediate neighborhood. Missiles, like a lot of other issues that each side may have otherwise been anxious to raise, were not the target of the nuclear agreement.

Despite frequent references today to Iranian missile tests as a "violation," they do not constitute any violation of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (i.e., the nuclear agreement) or of the two-year-old preliminary agreement. In fact they do not involve a violation of *anything* that Iran has agreed to. Iran has never been under any obligation to help sanction itself.

And it is only as sanctions that the issue of missiles legitimately comes up at all in connection with the nuclear agreement. An embargo on export to Iran of missile-related materiel and a variety of other types of conventional armaments was part of a host of nuclear-related sanctions specified in a series of resolutions of the United Nations Security Council enacted prior to the beginning of the negotiations that led to the JCPOA.

So was a call in a resolution in 2010 for Iran itself not to engage in missile development activity. All of these sanctions, like the other nuclear-related

sanctions, were intended to induce Tehran to negotiate restrictions on its nuclear program. In that respect they were no different from sanctions involving banking access or pistachio exports.

The missile-related sanctions had the added purpose of freezing or retarding any possible development of Iranian missiles that could be used to deliver nuclear weapons, as long as there was not yet an agreement precluding Iran from producing the fissile material that would be needed for such a weapon.

Now there is such an agreement. The reason for the nuclear-related sanctions no longer exists. If the principle of ending nuclear-related sanctions in return for Iran accepting the tight restrictions and intrusive monitoring provided for in the JCPOA were to be completely observed, then all of those sanctions, including the ones involving missiles, would end once Iran completes, which it might as early as the next couple of months, the measures it is obliged to complete before the accord is implemented.

But somewhere along the line the subject of missiles and conventional armaments acquired a life of its own, with political pressure especially on the U.S. side not to give up those sanctions any time soon no matter what Iran does to dismantle key parts of its nuclear program. Thus there ensued some of the toughest negotiations before the JCPOA could be completed.

In what has to be considered a major concession by Iran, it finally was agreed to let the embargo related to missiles run for another eight years, and the one covering other conventional arms five years. These are still all nuclear-related sanctions, even if their removal is being delayed despite Iranian compliance with the nuclear agreement.

International efforts, and not just those aimed at Iran, to restrict development of ballistic missiles always have been motivated by concerns about missiles that could be used to deliver weapons of mass destruction and especially nuclear weapons. That concern has been the focus and rationale of the Missile Technology Control Regime, the principal international effort to check the proliferation of advanced ballistic missiles.

Iranian ballistic missiles pose no threat to U.S. interests as long as Iran does not have the fissile material to build nuclear weapons that could be put atop any of those missiles. Preventing such a nuclear capability is, of course, what the JCPOA is all about. It thus would be a stupidly counterproductive approach to let issues about missiles endanger the implementation and longevity of the JCPOA.

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## Twisting the Facts on Iran Nukes

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

By Gareth Porter

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

Contrary to the supposed neutral and technical role that Director General Yukiya Amano has constantly invoked and the news media has long accepted without question, the Agency has actually been serving as prosecutor for the United States in making a case that Iran has had a nuclear weapons program.

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

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

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

When the Obama administration's interests shifted from pressuring Iran to

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

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

### **Dodgy Intelligence Documents**

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

Different cover stories had been leaked to the media over the years suggesting that either an Iranian scientist involved in the alleged weapons program or a German spy had managed to get the documents out of Iran.

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

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

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

And the Agency has reinforced that distorted frame in its final assessment by

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

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

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

That statement had clearly conveyed the impression that Iran has admitted to details about activities shown in the documents. But in fact Iran had only confirmed information that was already publicly known, such as certain names, organizations and official addresses, as the IAEA itself acknowledged in 2011. Furthermore, Iran had also submitted a 117-page paper in which it had pointed out that “some of the organizations and individuals named in those documents were nonexistent.”

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

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

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

Similar language implying accusation without actually stating it directly can be

found in most of the assessments in the document. In the section on “procurement activities,” the report refers to “indications of procurements and attempted procurements of items with relevance, inter alia, to the development of a nuclear device.”

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

### **EBW and MIP**

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

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

The IAEA responded by saying “that the EBW detonators developed by Iran have characteristics relevant to a nuclear device.” By that same logic, of course, a prosecutor could name an individual as a suspect in a crime simply because his behavior showed “characteristics relevant” to that crime.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The final assessment avoids mention of the technical errors in those studies, which were so significant that Sandia National Laboratories found through computer simulations that not a single one of the proposed redesign efforts would have worked. And it later became apparent that Iran had begun redesigning the entire missile system, including an entirely different reentry vehicle shape from the one shown in the drawings, well before the start date of the purported nuclear weapons work.

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

### **Flawed Computer Modeling**

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

Unfortunately for the credibility of that "information," soon after that 2011 report was published someone leaked a graph of one of the alleged computer modeling efforts attributed to Iran to Associated Press reporter George Jahn.



The graph was so similar to one published in a scholarly journal in January 2009 that Scott Kemp, an assistant professor of nuclear science and engineering at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), said he suspected the graph had been “adapted from the open literature.”

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

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

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

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

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

## **Nuclear Material**

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

But the final assessment explicitly rejects that conclusion, pronouncing the process design in question “technically flawed” and “of low quality in

comparison with what was available to Iran as part of its declared nuclear fuel cycle.”

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

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

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

Nevertheless, the Agency remains a highly political actor, and its role in monitoring and reporting on the implementation of the agreement may bring more occasions for official assessments that reflect the political interest of the U.S.-led dominant coalition in the IAEA board of governors rather than the objective reality of the issue under review.

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## America’s Debt to Bradley Manning

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

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

One criticism about the value of the information that Pvt. Bradley Manning gave

to WikiLeaks is that most of it was known in some form and thus didn't justify the risks to sources who might be identified from the diplomatic and military cables. However, that complaint misses the importance of detailed "ground truth" in assessing issues of war and peace.

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

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

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

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

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

### **Cable Revelations**

In a July 9, 2009, cable, American chargé Geoffrey Pyatt said Amano was thankful for U.S. support of his election. "Amano attributed his election to support from the U.S., Australia and France, and cited U.S. intervention with Argentina as particularly decisive," the cable said.

The appreciative Amano informed Pyatt that as IAEA director general, he would

take a different “approach on Iran from that of ElBaradei” and he “saw his primary role as implementing safeguards and UNSC [United Nations Security Council]/Board resolutions,” i.e. U.S.-driven sanctions and demands against Iran.

Amano also discussed how to restructure the senior ranks of the IAEA, including elimination of one top official and the retention of another. “We wholly agree with Amano’s assessment of these two advisors and see these decisions as positive first signs,” Pyatt commented.

In return, Pyatt made clear that Amano could expect strong U.S. financial support, stating that “the United States would do everything possible to support his successful tenure as Director General and, to that end, anticipated that continued U.S. voluntary contributions to the IAEA would be forthcoming. Amano offered that a ‘reasonable increase’ in the regular budget would be helpful.”

Pyatt learned, too, that Amano had consulted with Israeli Ambassador Israel Michaeli “immediately after his appointment” and that Michaeli “was fully confident of the priority Amano accords verification issues.”

Michaeli added that he discounted some of Amano’s public remarks about there being “no evidence of Iran pursuing a nuclear weapons capability” as just words that Amano felt he had to say “to persuade those who did not support him about his ‘impartiality.’”

In private, Amano agreed to “consultations” with the head of the Israeli Atomic Energy Commission, Pyatt reported. It is ironic indeed that Amano would have secret contacts with Israeli officials about Iran’s alleged nuclear weapons program, which has yet to yield a single bomb, when Israel possesses a large and undeclared nuclear arsenal. (Yes, it is the same Geoffrey Pyatt who was later promoted to Ambassador to Ukraine where he helped orchestrate the putsch that ousted elected President Viktor Yanukovich.)

In a subsequent cable dated Oct. 16, 2009, the U.S. mission in Vienna said Amano “took pains to emphasize his support for U.S. strategic objectives for the Agency. Amano reminded ambassador [Glyn Davies] on several occasions that he was solidly in the U.S. court on every key strategic decision, from high-level personnel appointments to the handling of Iran’s alleged nuclear weapons program.

“More candidly, Amano noted the importance of maintaining a certain ‘constructive ambiguity’ about his plans, at least until he took over for DG ElBaradei in December” 2009.

In other words, the emerging picture of Amano is of a bureaucrat eager to bend

in directions favored by the United States and Israel, especially regarding Iran's nuclear program. Amano's behavior surely contrasts with how the more independent-minded ElBaradei resisted some of Bush's key claims about Iraq's supposed nuclear weapons program, denouncing some documents as forgeries.

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

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

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

## **Slaughtering Iraqis**

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

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

"Well, it's their fault for bringing their kids into a battle," one American remarked.

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

But the U.S. press corps rarely mentions that the "surge" represented one of the bloodiest periods of the war. Beyond the horrific and untallied death toll of Iraqis, about 1,000 U.S. soldiers died during Bush's "surge" of an additional

30,000 troops into Iraq.

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

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

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

Many Americans may want to put the unpleasant memories of the Iraq War behind them from "shock and awe" and the illegal invasion, to the leveling of Fallujah and the Abu Ghraib atrocities, to the incompetent U.S. occupation, the Haditha murders and the sectarian slaughters but a failure to face the reality honestly will only encourage future war crimes of similar or even greater magnitude.

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

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

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

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

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# Cornering Russia, Risking World War III

Official Washington is awash with tough talk about Russia and the need to punish President Putin for his role in Ukraine and Syria. But this bravado ignores Russia's genuine national interests, its "red lines," and the risk that "tough-guy-ism" can lead to nuclear war, as Alastair Crooke explains.

By Alastair Crooke

We all know the narrative in which we (the West) are seized. It is the narrative of the Cold War: America versus the "Evil Empire." And, as Professor Ira Chernus has written, since we are "human" and somehow they (the USSR or, now, ISIS) plainly are not, we must be their polar opposite in every way.

"If they are absolute evil, we must be the absolute opposite. It's the old apocalyptic tale: God's people versus Satan's. It ensures that we never have to admit to any meaningful connection with the enemy." It is the basis to America's and Europe's claim to exceptionalism and leadership.

And "buried in the assumption that the enemy is not in any sense human like us, is [an] *absolution* for whatever hand we may have had in sparking or contributing to evil's rise and spread. How could we have fertilized the soil of absolute evil or bear any responsibility for its successes? It's a basic postulate of wars against evil: God's people must be innocent," (and that the evil cannot be mediated, for how can one mediate with evil).

Westerners may generally think ourselves to be rationalist and (mostly) secular, but Christian modes of conceptualizing the world still permeate contemporary foreign policy.

It is this Cold War narrative of the Reagan era, with its correlates that America simply stared down the Soviet Empire through military and as importantly – financial "pressures," whilst making no concessions to the enemy.

What is sometimes forgotten, is how the Bush neo-cons gave their "spin" to this narrative for the Middle East by casting Arab national secularists and Ba'athists as the offspring of "Satan": David Wurmser was advocating in 1996, "expediting the chaotic collapse" of secular-Arab nationalism in general, and Baathism in particular. He concurred with King Hussein of Jordan that "the phenomenon of Baathism" was, from the very beginning, "an agent of foreign, namely Soviet policy."

Moreover, apart from being agents of socialism, these states opposed Israel, too. So, on the principle that if these were the enemy, then my enemy's enemy (the kings, Emirs and monarchs of the Middle East) became the Bush neo-cons friends. And they remain such today however much their interests now diverge from those of the U.S.

The problem, as Professor Steve Cohen, the foremost Russia scholar in the U.S., laments, is that it is this narrative which has precluded America from ever concluding any real ability to find a mutually acceptable *modus vivendi* with Russia which it sorely needs, if it is ever seriously to tackle the phenomenon of Wahhabist jihadism (or resolve the Syrian conflict).

What is more, the "Cold War narrative" simply does not reflect history, but rather the narrative *effaces history*: It loses for us the ability to really understand the demonized "calous tyrant" be it (Russian) President Vladimir Putin or (Ba'athist) President Bashar al-Assad – because we simply ignore the actual history of how that state came to be what it is, and, our part in it becoming what it is.

Indeed the state, or its leaders, often are not what we think they are – at all. Cohen explains: "The chance for a durable Washington-Moscow strategic partnership was lost in the 1990 after the Soviet Union ended. Actually it began to be lost earlier, because it was [President Ronald] Reagan and [Soviet leader Mikhail] Gorbachev who gave us the opportunity for a strategic partnership between 1985-89.

"And it certainly ended under the Clinton Administration, and it didn't end in Moscow. It ended in Washington, it was squandered and lost in Washington. And it was lost so badly that today, and for at least the last several years (and I would argue since the Georgian war in 2008), we have literally been in a new Cold War with Russia.

"Many people in politics and in the media don't want to call it this, because if they admit, 'Yes, we are in a Cold War,' they would have to explain what they were doing during the past 20 years. So they instead say, 'No, it is not a Cold War.'

"Here is my next point. This new Cold War has all of the potential to be even more dangerous than the preceding 40-year Cold War, for several reasons. First of all, think about it. The epicentre of the earlier Cold War was in Berlin, not close to Russia. There was a vast buffer zone between Russia and the West in Eastern Europe.

"Today, the epicentre is in Ukraine, literally on Russia's borders. It was the



Ukrainian conflict that set this off, and politically Ukraine remains a ticking time bomb. Today's confrontation is not only on Russia's borders, but it's in the heart of Russian-Ukrainian 'Slavic civilization.' This is a civil war as profound in some ways as was America's Civil War."

Cohen continued: "My next point: and still worse – You will remember that after the Cuban Missile Crisis, Washington and Moscow developed certain rules-of-mutual conduct. They saw how dangerously close they had come to a nuclear war, so they adopted "No-Nos," whether they were encoded in treaties or in unofficial understandings. Each side knew where the other's red line was. Both sides tripped over them on occasion but immediately pulled back because there was a mutual understanding that there were red lines.

"TODAY THERE ARE NO RED LINES. One of the things that Putin and his predecessor President Medvedev keep saying to Washington is: You are crossing our Red Lines! And Washington said, and continues to say, 'You don't have any red lines. We have red lines and we can have all the bases we want around your borders, but you can't have bases in Canada or Mexico. Your red lines don't exist.' This clearly illustrates that today there are no mutual rules of conduct.

"Another important point: Today there is absolutely no organized anti-Cold War or Pro-Detente political force or movement in the United States at all not in our political parties, not in the White House, not in the State Department, not in the mainstream media, not in the universities or the think tanks. None of this exists today.

"My next point is a question: Who is responsible for this new Cold War? I don't ask this question because I want to point a finger at anyone. The position of the current American political media establishment is that this new Cold War is all Putin's fault all of it, everything. We in America didn't do anything wrong. At every stage, we were virtuous and wise and Putin was aggressive and a bad man. And therefore, what's to rethink? Putin has to do all of the rethinking, not us."

These two narratives, the Cold War narrative, and the neocons' subsequent "spin" on it: i.e. Bill Kristol's formulation (in 2002) that precisely because of its Cold War "victory," America could, and must, become the "benevolent global hegemon," guaranteeing and sustaining the new American-authored global order an "omelette that cannot be made without breaking eggs" – converge and conflate in Syria, in the persons of President Assad and President Putin.

President Obama is no neocon, but he is constrained by the global hegemon legacy, which he must either sustain, or be labeled as the arch

facilitator of America's decline. And the President is also surrounded by R2P ("responsibility-to-protect") proselytizers, such as Samantha Power, who seem to have convinced the President that "the tyrant" Assad's ouster would puncture and collapse the Wahhabist jihadist balloon, allowing "moderate" jihadists such as Ahrar al-Sham to finish off the deflated fragments of the punctured ISIS balloon.

In practice, President Assad's imposed ouster precisely will empower ISIS, rather than implode it, and the consequences will ripple across the Middle East and beyond. President Obama privately may understand the nature and dangers of the Wahhabist cultural revolution, but seems to adhere to the conviction that everything will change if only President Assad steps down. The Gulf States said the same about Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki in Iraq. He has gone (for now), but what changed? ISIS got stronger.

Of course if we think of ISIS as evil, for evil's sake, bent on mindless, whimsical slaughter, "what a foolish task it obviously [would be] to think about the enemy's actual motives. After all, to do so would be to treat them as humans, with human purposes arising out of history. It would smack of sympathy for the devil. Of course," Professor Chernus continues, "this means that, whatever we might think of their actions, we generally ignore a wealth of evidence that the Islamic State's fighters couldn't be more human or have more comprehensible motivations."

Indeed, ISIS and the other Caliphate forces have very clear human motivations and clearly articulated political objectives, and none of these is in any way consistent with the type of Syrian State that America says it wants for Syria. This precisely reflects the danger of becoming hostage to a certain narrative, rather than being willing to examine the prevailing conceptual framework more critically.

America lies far away from Syria and the Middle East, and as Professor Stephen Cohen notes, "unfortunately, today's reports seem to indicate that the White House and State Department are thinking primarily how to counter Russia's actions in Syria. They are worried, it was reported, that Russia is diminishing America's leadership in the world."

It is a meme of perpetual national *insecurity*, of perpetual fears about America's standing and of challenges to its standing, Professor Chernus suggests.

But Europe is not "far away"; it lies on Syria's doorstep. It is also neighbor to Russia. And in this connection, it is worth pondering Professor Cohen's last point: Washington's disinclination to permit Russia any enhancement to its

standing in Europe, or in the non-West, through its initiative strategically to defeat Wahhabist jihadism in Syria, is not only to play with fire in the Middle East. It is playing with a fire of even greater danger: to do both at the same time seems extraordinarily reckless.

Cohen again: “The false idea [has taken root] that the nuclear threat ended with the Soviet Union: In fact, the threat became more diverse and difficult. This is something the political elite forgot. It was another disservice of the Clinton Administration (and to a certain extent the first President Bush in his re-election campaign) saying that the nuclear dangers of the preceding Cold War era no longer existed after 1991. The reality is that the threat grew, whether by inattention or accident, and is now more dangerous than ever.”

As Europe becomes accomplice in raising the various pressures on Russia in Syria – economically through sanctions and other financial measures, in Ukraine and Crimea, and in beckoning Montenegro, Georgia and the Baltic towards NATO – we should perhaps contemplate the paradox that Russia’s determination to try to avoid war is leading to war.

Russia’s call to co-operate with Western states against the scourge of ISIS; its low-key and carefully crafted responses to such provocations as the ambush of its SU-24 bomber in Syria; and President Putin’s calm rhetoric, are all being used by Washington and London to paint Russia as a “paper tiger,” whom no one needs fear.

In short, Russia is being offered only the binary choice: to acquiesce to the “benevolent” hegemon, or to prepare for war.

**Alastair Crooke is a British diplomat who was a senior figure in British intelligence and in European Union diplomacy. He is the founder and director of the Conflicts Forum, which advocates for engagement between political Islam and the West. [This article also appeared at the Conflicts Forum’s Web site and is republished with permission.]**

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## Who Wants to Weaponize Outer Space?

U.S. military hardliners are pushing for military dominance of outer space and U.S. diplomats are blocking international efforts to ban its weaponization but the Obama administration pretends that Russia and China are the problem, as Sam Hussein explains.

By Sam Hussein

The recent box-office hit “The Martian” directed by Ridley Scott and starring Matt Damon depicts crucial coordination between the U.S. and Chinese space programs, but that’s not the way it’s playing out in the real world.

Secretary of the Air Force Deborah Lee James on Wednesday at the National Press Club responded to a question about the U.S. blocking efforts by Russia, China and over 100 other countries to ensure the disarmament of outer space by alleging that China and Russia are engaging in activities in space that are “worrisome.”

Secretary James stated “we don’t have weapons in space in the United States.” She then added: “Now what has been very worrisome in recent years is that some other countries around the world, notably China and Russia, are investing and they’re testing in different types of capabilities which could shoot satellites out of orbit, and do other things to our capabilities and the capabilities of allies in space, which is worrisome.” [Question at 54:00, [video of event](#).]

James’s comments were in response to a question that I submitted citing a United Nations vote last month which was [122 in favor to 4 against disarmament of outer space](#). The U.S. was one of the nations voting against the resolution.

John Hughes, the president of the National Press Club and moderator of the event, in his introduction of James, noted that she was recently made “the principal space adviser with expanded responsibilities of all Pentagon space activities.” Yet, Secretary James stated that she was “not familiar” with the UN vote.

Alice Slater, who is with Nuclear Age Peace Foundation and the Abolition 2000 coordinating committee and is a leading activist on disarmament, said: “It’s hard to believe that the U.S. Secretary of the Air Force is unaware of the U.S. military program to ‘dominate and control the military use of space’ as set forth in Pentagon documents such as Vision 2020 [[PDF](#)] or that the U.S. also has tested [anti-satellite weapons in space](#).”

Summarizing UN votes on the military use of outer space, the UN’s website [states](#): “The text, entitled ‘No first placement of weapons in outer space,’ reaffirmed the importance and urgency of the objective to prevent an outer space arms race and the willingness of States to contribute to that common goal.” The UN summary references a “draft treaty, introduced by China and the Russian Federation. ... The draft was approved by a recorded vote of 122 in favour to 4 against (Israel, Ukraine, United States, Georgia), with 47 abstentions.” Yet, James, in her National Press Club remarks, painted Russia and China as the aggressors.

But consider Secretary James's exact words. While she says "we don't have weapons in space," she sets a different standard when talking about Russia and China, which "are investing and they're testing in different types of capabilities which could shoot satellites out of orbit," which the U.S. obviously is doing as well.

There is a race to weaponize space though it would seem Russia, China and most other nations are making moves through the UN to stop it while the U.S. government appears to be hindering that effort.

In addition to Vision 2020, the influential neoconservative Project for a New American Century also called for U.S. control of space as one of its goals: "CONTROL THE NEW 'INTERNATIONAL COMMONS' OF SPACE AND 'CYBERSPACE,' and pave the way for the creation of a new military service – U.S. Space Forces – with the mission of space control." [[archived PDF](#)]

Slater added: "It is common knowledge that when [the Cold War was nearing its end, Soviet President Mikhail] Gorbachev and [U.S. President Ronald] Reagan met in Reykjavik and were prepared to negotiate the total elimination of nuclear weapons, except the negotiations were aborted because Reagan refused to give up his dream of a U.S. military shield in space, commonly referred to at the time as Star Wars.

"Less well known, but nevertheless true, is that [Russian President Vladimir] Putin offered [U.S. President Bill] Clinton a deal to cut our arsenals of 16,000 nuclear weapons to 1,000 weapons each and call all the parties to the table to negotiate for nuclear abolition if the U.S. would cease its plans to put missile bases in Eastern Europe. Clinton refused and Putin backed out of his offer. Shortly thereafter, [President George W.] Bush actually walked out of the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty and put U.S. missiles and bases in Turkey, Romania and Poland. ...

"In 2008, Russia and China proposed a draft treaty to ban space weapons which the U.S. blocked from going forward in the consensus-bound committee on disarmament in Geneva. This year, the U.S. voted to abstain from a Russian proposal to ban weapons in space at the UN First Committee of the General Assembly, joining only Israel and Palau, in not going forward to support the ban."

Here is background material relating to the questions posed to Secretary James:

I submitted in writing a couple of other questions about air wars and killer drones which were not posed to James, though several questions were asked about drones, including one about killing of civilians. Here were the questions I

submitted in writing before the event:

Q: [airwars.org](http://airwars.org) estimates that the current bombing campaign in Iraq and Syria over the last 482 days has leveled about 8,600 strikes and killed 682 to 2,104 civilians. Do you have an estimate for the number of civilians killed by U.S. airstrikes?

Q: The [Guardian reports](#) on four former drone pilots who recently wrote an impassioned plea to the Obama administration, calling for a rethink of a military tactic that they say has “fueled the feelings of hatred that ignited terrorism and groups like Isis, while also serving as a fundamental recruitment tool similar to Guantánamo Bay ... We cannot sit silently by and witness tragedies like the attacks in Paris, knowing the devastating effects the drone program has overseas and at home.” Do you have any information on the long term consequences of the US government’s killer drone program? Can you tell us what countries US drones operate in? How do you respond to their letter from the former drone pilot whistleblowers – these are people who left lucrative careers operating drones because they concluded it was morally contemptible to continue.

Neither was asked, though the moderator, Hughes, did ask a number of questions about drones and raised the issue of civilian deaths in this question:

Q: “You talked about the effort to minimize collateral damage, or civilian deaths, in this effort how satisfied are you that you’ve been able to minimize civilian deaths in this campaign? And as you step up this effort now, will the risk of more civilian deaths rise?”

Deborah Lee James: “I am satisfied that our combined efforts and the way we are approaching this campaign is unprecedented in the history of warfare in terms of the care that we take to do everything possible to try to avoid civilian casualties. Is it 100 percent? No, because there are, from time to time, terrible tragedies. But with the thousands of sorties [a deployment or dispatch of one military unit, be it an aircraft, ship, or troops, from a strongpoint] that have been flown, the fact that there have only been a handful of these incidents, I think, is almost a miracle. So I am convinced we’re doing a good job, I saw some of it in action myself when I was in the CAOC [Combined Air and Space Operations Center] and the CGOC [Company Grade Officer’s Council], and enormous care is taken.”

Here’s the full question about weaponization of space:

Q: “This questioner says, ‘One month ago at the UN there was a vote for disarmament in space. The vote was 122 for and 4 against, the U.S. was one of the four against. Why is the U.S. against disarmament in space?’”

Deborah Lee James: “Well, I’m not familiar with that vote, but what I will tell you about space and the proposition of space is this – number one, we don’t have weapons in space in the United States. Number two, we’re very focused on not creating debris in space. So to back up for just a minute, if you go back 20, 30 years there were relatively few countries, and few companies for that matter, who even could get themselves to space, but flash forward to the present day and there are many more countries and many more companies. Plus there is debris in space, there is space junk. So you’ve got thousands of these pieces of material whirling around at 40 or 50 thousand miles per hour and even a small piece of debris can do some serious damage to a billion dollar satellite. So debris is bad and we want to make sure that we minimize that at all costs. Now what has been very worrisome in recent years is that some other countries around the world, notably China and Russia are investing and they’re testing in different types of capabilities which could shoot satellites out of orbit, and do other things to our capabilities and the capabilities of allies in space- which is worrisome. And so what we have said is we need to focus more attention on space, we need to invest more in space, the resiliency of space, and we need to at all times get this point across- –particularly to some of these other countries that are investing and testing in these ways – that debris is bad, that debris hurts all of us.”

**Sam Hussein** is communications director for the Institute for Public Accuracy. Follow him on twitter: [@samhusseini](https://twitter.com/samhusseini).

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## Israel’s ‘Successful’ Defeat on Iran

Israel’s defeat in its bid to get Congress to block President Obama’s nuclear deal with Iran may have represented a loss of face, but the fight generated lots of money and set a marker for Obama and his successors on the price to pay for crossing Israel’s lobby, writes Trita Parsi.

By Trita Parsi

A senior German official told me in 2010, quite proudly, that under the leadership of Angela Merkel, Germany’s Iran policy had become a function of its relations with Israel. Whether Germany would sanction Iran or engage in diplomacy very much depended on Israel’s reaction. In its simplest form, the German official was explaining to me the process of “Israelizing” Iran, that is, turning one’s policy towards Iran broadly into a function one’s relationship with Israel.

No U.S. official has ever described U.S. policy on Iran in those terms to me. And if they did, most likely, it would not be accurate. But in the course of the last two years, particularly this past summer, we have also seen that Israel has played a far greater role in America's Iran policy than many previously would have admitted. And for many on Capitol Hill, the reality is that Iran is primarily viewed through an Israeli lens.

This will be a major problem for President Obama, and for subsequent administrations seeking to sustain the nuclear deal with Iran. Not because Washington would not like to see significant changes in Iran's posture towards Israel, or that it doesn't believe that continued Iranian hostility towards Israel wouldn't be a threat to the nuclear deal, but because the de-Israelization of Iran requires much more than just a change in Iran's policy on Israel.

To understand why, we must first recognize why and how Iran came to be viewed from an Israeli lens by so many in Washington in the first place.

Iran was not an Israeli issue in Washington back in the 1980s, despite the hostile rhetoric of Iran's then-ruler Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini. On the contrary, Israel spent significant diplomatic capital in Washington at the time trying to convince the Reagan administration to reach out to Tehran and come to terms with Iran's theocratic regime.

What later turned into the Iran-Contra scandal is just one of the many initiatives Israel took at the time to get Washington and Tehran back on talking terms. Back then, Israel was primarily concerned with the conventional military capabilities of hostile Arab states and viewed Iran as a potential ally and a balancer against the Arab powers.

Similarly, Washington's pro-Israel organizations, led by AIPAC, were focused on countering the Palestinians and hostile Arab states. Iran wasn't anywhere near their radar.

As the Oslo process transformed Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat from a terrorist enemy to a peace partner, Israel's attitude towards Iran began to shift dramatically. To sell the deal domestically, then-Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin felt that another threat needed to be looming in the horizon. Rabin asked rhetorically what the real threat to Israel was: the weak Palestinians or the rising Iranians?

Moreover, in the new geopolitical reality of the region after the fall of the Soviet Union and the defeat of Iraq in the Persian Gulf War, the common threats that had provided the basis for Israel's alliance with Iran in the era of the



Shah, and Israel's support for U.S.-Iran dialogue in the 1980s, were now gone. A U.S.-Iran rapprochement under these circumstances would come at the expense of Israel's interest rather than enhancing Israel's regional position.

"There was a feeling in Israel that because of the end of the Cold War, relations with the U.S. were cooling and we needed some new glue for the alliance. And the new glue was radical Islam. And Iran was radical Islam," Israeli analyst Efraim Inbar told me in October 2004.

A massive campaign was launched to depict Iran as "the greatest threat [to peace] and greatest problem in the Middle East." Iran and its Shia ideology were the source of Islamic fundamentalism and an irredeemable threat, Israel argued.

This focus on Iran was a complete 180-degree turn by Israel, which only a few years earlier had pressed Washington to talk to Iran, to sell arms to Iran and to ignore Iran's anti-Israel rhetoric.

At first, Israel's new line on Iran was met with skepticism. That Iran suddenly was the new threat to the region was, "a controversial idea" with little credibility, according to *The Washington Post*.

"Why the Israelis waited until fairly recently to sound a strong alarm about Iran is a perplexity," argued the *New York Times*. [See *Treacherous Alliance The Secret Dealings of Israel, Iran and the US* for details.]

This sentiment was shared by the Clinton administration, which felt that Israel was exaggerating the Iranian threat for political gain, mindful of the fact that the campaign came at a time when Tehran was lowering its profile on the Palestinian issue.

"At that time, there were Iranian attempts to rhetorically soften the radical language of Khomeini," Keith Weissman, the point person at AIPAC explained to me in an interview in 2004. "No doubt about it, there was a famous Rafsanjani interview where he said that if it's okay with the Palestinians, it's okay with us."

For AIPAC, however, the Israeli shift against Iran was heaven-sent. The loss of the Palestinians as an enemy had cost the powerful lobby dearly, and the peace process, if successful, could deprive AIPAC of its very raison d'être. AIPAC could now reinvent itself at a moment where merely countering Arab influence in Washington had become obsolete.

"AIPAC made Iran a major issue since they didn't have any other issue to champion," said Israeli academic Shai Feldman during a visit I made to his office in Tel Aviv in 2004. "The U.S. was in favor of the peace process, so what

would they push for?"

AIPAC needed a new issue, and Israel needed help in turning Washington against Iran. It was a win-win situation.

Iran was initially a gift that never stopped giving. Depicting Iran as a major threat was not particularly difficult mindful of Tehran's anti-American and anti-Israeli rhetoric, even though in practice it was pursuing more moderate policies in the 1990s compared to the previous decade. And once Ahmadinejad took power in Iran and began questioning the Holocaust, few people in Washington needed any convincing from Israel or AIPAC.

"Ahmadinejad was literally writing AIPAC's fundraising letters," a former AIPAC insider told me. "All AIPAC needed to do was to quote Ahmadinejad's latest statements and the money would be pouring in."

Even the fight over the nuclear deal that AIPAC lost was good for business according to former AIPAC official Steven Rosen. "This fight has been good for AIPAC in that it brought in a lot of money," he told Foreign Policy in September.

Letting go of Ahmadinejad after he left office was not easy for AIPAC. Letting go of the nuclear issue will be even more difficult. The losing battle it fought this past summer to kill the deal in Congress is telling. Much of the organization's air of invincibility stems from its ability to pick battles it knew it would win and prevent conflicts it likely would lose from emerging in the first place. The showdown over the Iran deal was the opposite.

AIPAC had failed to prevent negotiations, it had failed to push the Obama administration to adopt red lines that would have forced Iran to walk away from the table, and once a final deal was concluded it felt it had no choice but to go up against the President of the United States, even though its chances of success were limited.

After all, Iran had topped AIPAC's agenda since 1995. Sitting out a fight it had, in Rosen's words, "spent 10 years preparing for," could bring about the worst of all nightmares for AIPAC: irrelevance.

At a moment when AIPAC was being challenged from the right from a new group of pro-Israel organizations (some funded by casino magnate Sheldon Adelson, who reportedly views AIPAC as too moderate), and from the left by J Street, neutrality was the worst of all options.

All was not lost for AIPAC over the nuclear deal, however. The mere fact that President Obama had to spend so much political capital defending the deal and

securing support for it on Capitol Hill likely sent a strong signal to future presidents: Even if you ultimately can defeat AIPAC in a head to head confrontation, it will cost you so much political capital that you'll likely have precious little left for your other priorities. Thus, even in defeat, AIPAC may have strengthened its deterrence.

Moreover, hard-fought defeats are good for fundraising. Clear-cut causes, even when losing, are preferable to lack of clarity. In other words, the Israelization of Iran will likely remain good for business, despite the passing of the nuclear deal.

"This last battle," Rosen said of AIPAC's effort on the Iran deal, "may be remembered as the start of another growth spurt."

Thus, even the reduction of a nuclear threat from Iran as well as a continuation of Iran disentangling itself from Israel (for instance, compare Ahmadinejad's rhetoric on Israel to Rouhani's silence on Israel, beyond his tweets wishing the Jewish people a happy Rosh Hashanah ), is obviously helpful, but ultimately insufficient to de-Israelize Iran.

Just like in 1993, when AIPAC abandoned Arafat and embraced Iran as its main threat, the abandonment of Iran today may only take place if a new threat emerges that takes its place. Perhaps the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement will be that threat. But unless something emerges to replace Iran, there is little to suggest that Israel, AIPAC and Netanyahu are ready to let Iran be de-Israelized.

**Trita Parsi is the author of *A Single Roll of the Dice – Obama's Diplomacy with Iran* (Yale University Press, 2012). He tweets at @tparsi. [This article originally appeared at The National Interest.]**

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## A Close Call on Doomsday

The risk of nuclear extermination is real, especially at times of revved-up tensions between the U.S. and Russia, when a political miscalculation or a technical mistake could prove disastrous, a danger that pushed the two sides to the brink of war in 1983, as ex-CIA analyst Melvin A. Goodman recalls.

By Melvin A. Goodman

The *Washington Post* on Oct. 25 published an important story based on a recently-published U.S. intelligence review from 1990 that confirmed Soviet leaders in

1983 believed the Reagan administration was using a mobilization exercise to prepare a nuclear surprise attack. In response, the KGB instituted a sensitive collection effort, Operation RYAN, to determine if the United States was indeed planning such an attack.

I was a CIA analyst at the time, and the incident was known to me and several colleagues as the "war scare" in the Kremlin. There are lessons from the "war scare" that can be applied to the unnecessary escalation of tension between Washington and Moscow now taking place.

The year 1983 was the most dangerous year in the Soviet-American Cold War confrontation since the 1962 Cuban missile crisis. President Ronald Reagan declared a political and military campaign against the "evil empire," although Soviet leaders were looking to break the Gordian knot that was hurting the Kremlin. The intelligence indicated that the Soviet Union was in a downward spiral marked by the quagmire in Afghanistan; the drain of funds in the Third World, particularly in Cuba; the political and military setbacks in Angola and Nicaragua; and the increased cost of competing with the largest peacetime increases in the U.S. defense budget since the end of World War II.

Soviet leaders believed that the "correlation of world forces," Soviet terminology for weighing the international balance, was working against the interests of Moscow and that the U.S. government was in the hands of a dangerous anti-Soviet crowd.

In response to Reagan's references to the Soviet Union as the "focus of evil in the world" and as an "evil empire," the new Soviet general secretary, Yuri Andropov, the former KGB chief, suggested that Reagan was insane and a liar. U.S. media paid close attention to Reagan's sensational charges, and Soviet media launched a verbal offensive that matched Reagan's rhetoric. Reagan was compared to Hitler and accused of "fanning the flames of war." Andropov was portrayed in the U.S. press as a Red Darth Vader. Reagan's demonization of Soviet leaders was counter-productive just as Barack Obama's demonization of Vladimir Putin has been counter-productive.

In addition to the Able Archer mobilization exercise that alarmed the Kremlin, the Reagan administration authorized unusually aggressive military exercises near the Soviet border that, in some cases, violated Soviet territorial sovereignty. The Pentagon's risky measures included sending U.S. strategic bombers over the North Pole to test Soviet radar, and naval exercises in wartime approaches to the USSR where U.S. warships had previously not entered. Additional secret operations simulated surprise naval attacks on Soviet targets.

One of the great similarities between Russia and the United States was that both sides feared surprise attack. The United States suffered psychologically from the Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor; it has still not recovered from 9/11. Yet, the United States has never appreciated that Moscow has similar fears due to Operation Barbarossa, the German invasion in the same year as Pearl Harbor, a far greater nightmare.

Russia's fear of surprise attack was accentuated in 1983, when the United States deployed the Army's Pershing-II missile and land-based cruise missiles in West Europe as a counter to the Soviet Union's SS-20 missiles.

The SS-20 was not a "strategic" weapon because of a limited range (3,000 miles) well short of the United States. The P-II, however, could not only reach the Soviet Union, but it could destroy Moscow's command and control systems with incredible accuracy. Since the Soviets would have limited warning time less than five minutes the P-II was viewed as a first-strike weapon that could destroy the Soviet early warning system.

In addition to the huge strategic advantage from the deployment of P-II and numerous cruise missiles, the U.S. deployment of the MX missile and the D-5 Trident submarine placed the Soviets in an inferior position with regard to strategic modernization. Overall, the United States held a huge strategic advantage in political, economic, and military policy.

The Pentagon's psychological warfare program to intimidate the Kremlin, including dangerous probes of Soviet borders by the Navy and Air Force, was unknown to CIA analysts. Thus, the CIA was at a disadvantage in trying to analyze the war scare because the Pentagon refused to share information on military maneuvers and weapons deployments.

In 1983, the CIA had no idea that the annual Able Archer exercise would be conducted in a provocative fashion with high-level participation. The exercise was a test of U.S. command-and-communications procedures, including procedures for the release and use of nuclear weapons in case of war.

Nevertheless, CIA deputy director for intelligence Robert Gates and National Intelligence Officer for Soviet strategic weapons Larry Gershwin turned out several national intelligence estimates that dismissed "Soviet fear of conflict with the United States." They believed that any notion of a Soviet fear of an American attack was risible, and it wasn't until 1990 that the President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board concluded that there had been a "serious concern" in the Kremlin over a possible U.S. attack. Gershwin, who politicized intelligence on strategic matters throughout the 1980s, is still at the CIA as a national intelligence officer.

I believed that Soviet fears were genuine at the time, and Reagan's national security advisor Robert McFarlane was even known to remark, "We got their attention" but "maybe we overdid it."

For the only time during William Casey's stewardship as CIA director, he believed his intelligence analysts who argued the "war scare" was genuine, and ignored the views of Gates and Gershwin. Casey took our analysis to the White House, and Reagan made sure that the exercises were toned down.

For the first time, the Able Archer exercise was going to include President Reagan, Vice President George H.W. Bush, and Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger, but when the White House understood the extent of Soviet anxiety regarding U.S. intentions, the major principals bowed out.

In his memoirs, Reagan recorded his surprise that Soviet leaders were afraid of an American first strike. One of the reasons why Secretary of State George Shultz was able to convince Reagan of the need for summitry with later Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev was Reagan's belief that it was necessary to convince Moscow that the United States had no plans for an attack.

Ironically, Soviet military doctrine had long held that a possible U.S. *modus operandi* for launching an attack would be to convert an exercise into the real thing.

Nevertheless, one year after President Reagan conceded that the "war scare" was genuine, he issued a radio warning into an open mike: "I've signed legislation that will outlaw Russia forever. We begin bombing in five minutes." Those of us who worked on the war scare were stunned.

Three decades later, history seems to be repeating itself. Washington and Moscow are once again exchanging ugly broadsides over the confrontations in Ukraine and Syria. The Russian-American arms control and disarmament dialogue has been pushed to the background, and the possibilities of superpower conflict into the foreground.

Pentagon briefers are using the language of the Cold War in their congressional briefings, referring to Putin's regime as an "existential threat." Presidential candidates in the United States are using confrontational language, and promising to go on the offensive to knock Putin on his heels. President Obama seems to recognize the false security of military power, but he needs to act on his suppositions.

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CIA, National Insecurity: The Cost of American Militarism, and the forthcoming The Path to Dissent: A Whistleblower at CIA (City Lights Publishers, 2015). Goodman is the national security columnist for counterpunch.org, where this article first appeared. [Republished with permission of the author.]

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## Obama Closes Opening to Iran

Despite prevailing on the Iran nuclear deal, President Obama isn't following up that victory with a more realistic policy to incorporate Iran into resolving Mideast conflicts. Instead, Obama feels he must placate U.S. hardliners with more tough talk, as ex-CIA analyst Paul R. Pillar describes.

By Paul R. Pillar

The Obama administration had to expend considerable political capital in fending off attempts, during the recent Congressional review period, to kill the agreement to restrict Iran's nuclear program. As a matter of policy toward that program, such expenditure should never have been necessary; the strict limitations and scrutiny of the program that are embodied in the agreement are clearly better for U.S. interests than the absence of such limitations and scrutiny if the agreement had been killed.

But the expenditure was required to beat back opposition to the agreement that was rooted not in any consideration of the merits of the agreement itself but instead in other reasons that opponents had to oppose the administration and to keep Iran isolated. It is not surprising, given how domestic politics tends to work, that since the agreement survived last month's Congressional gauntlet we have been seeing a sort of rebalancing of political accounts in which the forces opposing the agreement are being propitiated in other respects.

Although the propitiation is understandable in terms of domestic politics, it is damaging U.S. foreign policy interests. It undermines the prospects for constructively building on the agreement to advance other U.S. interests in the Middle East, and it may even imperil the nuclear agreement itself.

The political rebalancing is manifested in an amplification of hostility toward, and threats against, Iran. All the negative things that were said about Iran in the course of earlier debate on the nuclear agreement are being said, across the political spectrum and across the different branches of government as well as in public discourse, with as much loudness as they were before.

All the required mantras about the need to oppose the “nefarious” things that Iran supposedly is doing in its region are being recited as automatically as they were before. Every opportunity is taken to kick Iran in the shins verbally and to disavow any possibility of American friendship with it.

These themes are apparent not only in the general rhetoric in Washington but also in draft legislation. This includes Sen. Ben Cardin’s bill for an “Iran Policy Oversight Act,” which includes almost nothing about building positively on the agreement but instead is mostly about expressing hostility and making threats, including the threat of reimposing sanctions on Iran.

None of this makes any sense if one goes beyond domestic American politics and considers what the agreement has or has not changed. It makes no sense as a response to a diplomatic accord in which Iran has committed itself to keep its nuclear program peaceful and has backed up that commitment by subjecting itself to unprecedented monitoring of, and limitations on, the program.

The negativity would make much more sense if the Iranian behavior had been the opposite of what it really was, that is, if Tehran had walked away from the negotiations and, amid more threat-making of its own, had resumed expansion of an unrestricted nuclear program.

The negativity-infused political rebalancing jeopardizes the prospects for the United States advancing its interests in the Middle East through a more complete and unfettered diplomacy on several important issues in which Iran also has an interest. The security situations in, and political futures of, Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan top the list of those issues, but there are other important topics as well, including broader questions of security in the Persian Gulf region.

Building on the nuclear agreement means taking advantage of the ice-breaking effect of the nuclear negotiations, which moved away from a situation in which U.S. and Iranian officials were not even talking to each other, to conduct effective and mutually beneficial business on these other matters.

Notwithstanding earlier anti-agreement rhetoric to the effect that we should not expect Iran to become nice because of the nuclear accord, what is involved is not niceness. What is involved is Iran acting on behalf of its own interests, some of which parallel U.S. interests and some of which diverge from U.S. interests on each of the issues just mentioned.

That is the sort of non-zero-sum situation that is the stuff of the normal give-and-take in normal diplomacy. And for the United States, building on the diplomatic breakthrough of the nuclear accord is less a matter of unshackling Iranian diplomacy than of unshackling *its own* diplomacy, and of availing itself



of a full box of tools for pursuing its interests in the Middle East.

The amplified negativity and animosity toward Iran that emanate from the U.S. domestic political pot not only threaten to get in the way of a broader and more effective U.S. diplomacy in the region but also takes no account of the fact that the Iranians have domestic politics as well. The hostile vibes from Washington weaken the position of President Hassan Rouhani and those who are inclined to be part of a more constructive regional diplomacy, and play into the hands of unreconstructed hardliners who would be more content with Iran remaining an isolated rogue.

The political dynamics involved, of hostility begetting more hostility and of hardliners in each capital helping the other's cause, are a threat not only to effective diplomacy on other topics but also to the nuclear agreement itself. Iranian hardliners who never liked the agreement will be eager to seize on anything that enables them to argue that all of Iran's concessions bought it nothing but endless enmity from the United States.

A major part of the U.S. political rebalancing act is a push to provide yet more U.S. assistance to regional rivals of Iran, which mainly means the Gulf Arab states and Israel. Again, there is no logic to this in terms of what the nuclear agreement did and did not change.

Iran's placing of its nuclear program under additional restrictions and scrutiny does not make Iran more of a threat to anyone than it was before. Iran's becoming less of an isolated rogue and more of a normal actor in regional politics does not make Iran any more of a threat to anyone than it was before.

And notwithstanding how heavily opponents of the nuclear agreement tried to rely on the argument that sanctions relief will give Iran a financial windfall that it will use to fund more "nefarious" activity in the region, that argument still is no more valid than it ever was, given how most of the funds in question are already committed to purposes where they have been frozen outside the region, how the needed uses for the funds include domestic economic development and strengthening Iran's international finances, and how there is no evidence that Iran makes its regional policy according to the balance in its bank account, no evidence that "nefarious" activity went down when severe sanctions were imposed, and thus no reason to expect that it will go up when the same sanctions are loosened.

The Gulf Arabs and Israel have their own reasons to try to hinder and isolate their Iranian rival, but these are not interests the United States shares and they do not involve genuine security threats to the countries concerned. The Arab states of the Gulf Cooperation Council already have clear military

superiority over the Iranian armed forces. In the case of Israel, it has overwhelming military superiority over *everybody* else in the region, both at the conventional level and at the level the agreement with Iran was designed to address.

That superiority will continue even if the United States were not to lift a finger on Israel's behalf in the years ahead. A pattern nonetheless prevails in which the United States has given Israel \$124 billion in no-strings-attached aid and continues giving it at a clip of about \$3.1 billion a year, not counting hundreds of millions of additional assistance in the form of joint defense projects. The aid is being given to a state that is among the richest one-fifth of the countries of the world, as ranked by GDP per capita.

That pattern ought to make every American taxpayer cringe, especially when reminded of budget-constrained cuts to programs for the benefit of Americans themselves. The pattern is cringe-worthy even without getting into questions of what sort of Israeli policies and practices the United States is in effect subsidizing. And yet there is talk today of increasing aid to Israel even further.

If policy could trump politics rather than the other way around, policy would take advantage of the political achievement of being able to get the nuclear agreement through Congress despite the huge effort to defeat it by the lobby that works on behalf of the right-wing Israeli government. The episode demonstrates that it is possible to defy the lobby on a matter on which it has pulled out all the stops, and still survive to tell the tale.

A far-sighted and courageous response to this episode would seize the occasion to make several policy adjustments. One would be long-overdue rectification of the aid pattern just described. Related to that would be construction of policy toward Israel that would make the important point that no foreign government will be rewarded for behaving toward the United States the way that particular government behaved regarding the nuclear agreement, which was to do everything it could to subvert U.S. diplomacy and foreign policy, including through blatant interference in domestic U.S. politics.

And another response would be to address, seriously and effectively and not just with wrist-slaps, the unresolved Israel-Palestinian conflict, including changing the practice of automatically providing political cover to Israel at the United Nations no matter what the resolution on the table may say.

Unfortunately, none of this appears likely to happen. President Obama, in his speech at the United Nations General Assembly, gave no hint that he was about to move in a new direction regarding the Palestinian question. The one potentially

justifiable reason for going with the current flow regarding the post-nuclear-accord political rebalancing is that the agreement itself is important enough, and the continued efforts to sabotage it will be persistent enough, that the Congressional Democrats who supported the agreement need enough political cover and need to make enough anti-Iranian noise to keep them away from any clearly agreement-killing measures.

Maybe so, but this approach is hardly far-sighted and courageous. It looks like nearsightedness and folding to fear will again prevail. Politics probably will trump sound policy on these matters, as usual. And that means missing major opportunities to advance U.S. interests.

**Paul R. Pillar, in his 28 years at the Central Intelligence Agency, rose to be one of the agency's top analysts. He is now a visiting professor at Georgetown University for security studies. (This article first appeared as [a blog post at The National Interest's Web site](#). Reprinted with author's permission.)**

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## Rupert Murdoch: Propaganda Recruit

**Special Report:** Journalistic objectivity was never high on Rupert Murdoch's ethics list, but "secret" records from the 1980s show how far the media magnate went to ingratiate himself with President Reagan by collaborating with U.S. propaganda operations, reports Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

In February 1983, global media magnate Rupert Murdoch volunteered to help the Reagan administration's propaganda strategy for deploying U.S. mid-range nuclear missiles in Europe by using his newspapers to exacerbate public fears about the Soviet Union, according to a recently declassified "secret" letter.

Murdoch, then an Australian citizen with major newspaper holdings in Great Britain and some in the United States, had already established close political ties with British Conservative Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and was developing them with President Ronald Reagan, partly through one of Murdoch's lawyers, the infamous Red-baiter Roy Cohn, who had served as counsel to Sen. Joe McCarthy's investigations in the 1950s.

By February 1983, Cohn had already arranged a face-to-face meeting between Reagan and Murdoch (on Jan. 18, 1983) and had brokered a collaborative relationship between Murdoch and Charles Z. Wick, director of the U.S. Information Agency who oversaw U.S. propaganda operations worldwide.

On Feb. 14, 1983, in a "secret" letter to Reagan's National Security Advisor William P. Clark, USIA Director Wick described a phone call from Murdoch in which they discussed ways to heighten European and American fears about Soviet SS-20 intermediate-range missiles and thus undermine activists pushing for nuclear disarmament. Murdoch said his comments reflected the views of high-ranking British officials with whom Murdoch had talked.

In the letter, Wick told Clark that CIA Director William J. Casey was eager to help Murdoch's efforts by releasing classified satellite photos of the Soviet missiles in eastern Europe but was confronting resistance from the spy agency's professional analysts.

"Rupert Murdoch ... called me on February 9 [1983]," Wick told Clark. "Senior British officials have been telling him of their increasing concern with the rapid progress being made by the unilateralists," a reference to the anti-nuclear activists who were rallying millions of Europeans to the cause of nuclear disarmament.

"According to Murdoch, the majority of the people just do not understand the SS-20 threat. He asked if we could release satellite photographs of Soviet SS-20s to dramatically stem the rising opposition to GLCM [U.S. ground-launched cruise missiles] and Pershing II deployment. He felt that the delineation of the SS-20 threat graphically could be very persuasive. It would give the press the friendly press in particular an opportunity to counter the growing wave of unilateralism.

"I pointed out to Murdoch that I had seen these photographs and they are not comprehensible to the lay person. Murdoch responded that he would commission credible analysts to be briefed here. They could make the photographs understandable to the average individual with circles, arrows, and other enhancements." The next section of Wick's letter remains classified more than three decades later on national security grounds.

On the letter's second page, Wick describes his contact with CIA Director Casey regarding Murdoch's phone call to seek the CIA's cooperation in releasing the satellite photographs and making other public relations moves to influence domestic and international public opinion, including "a presidential press conference similar to President Kennedy's during the Cuban missile crisis."

Wick said President Reagan "could present large blow-ups while experts would be on hand to provide explanations in greater detail. Bill Casey agreed to re-check the objections raised by his people when we initially discussed release of the photographs last year. Bill's people still oppose release of the photographs for

'legal and security considerations.' However, Bill said we do not want to be too rigid and protective, given Murdoch's observations and with so much hanging in the balance on the upcoming German elections."

Wick added that he and Casey wanted NSC Advisor Clark to take this "major public diplomacy question" to the Senior Policy Group (SPG) to consider overriding the CIA staff's objections. (Wick's letter was declassified last month by the National Archives in response to a Freedom of Information Act request that I filed in 2013.)

### **Dangerous Tensions**

In 1983, the escalating tensions with the Soviet Union over the SS-20s and the deployment of U.S. cruise missiles in Europe led to what became known as "the New Cold War," with Reagan rapidly expanding the U.S. military budget and engaging in extreme anti-Soviet rhetoric.

In a March 23, 1983 speech to the nation about the supposed Soviet threat, Reagan did release a few satellite images but they were of facilities in Cuba and Central America, not eastern Europe and the SS-20s. "I wish I could show you more without compromising our most sensitive intelligence sources and methods," Reagan said.

A CIA historical review in 2007 revealed that the Reagan administration in the early 1980s was intentionally raising tensions with the Soviet Union, in part, by mounting provocative military exercises near its borders. In response, Moscow raised its nuclear alert levels fearing a possible U.S. first strike, a hair-trigger risk for an accidental nuclear conflict that was not well understood in Washington at the time.

The CIA study reported: "New information suggests that Moscow ... was reacting to US-led naval and air operations, including psychological warfare missions conducted close to the Soviet Union. These operations employed sophisticated concealment and deception measures to thwart Soviet early warning systems and to offset the Soviets' ability ... to read US naval communications."

The Soviets were also spooked by Reagan's harsh "evil empire" rhetoric and weapons build-up, prompting "Soviet officials and much of the populace to voice concern over the prospect of a US nuclear attack," the CIA study said. "Moscow's threat perceptions and Operation RYAN [a special intelligence operation to collect data on the U.S. threat] were influenced by memories of Hitler's 1941 surprise attack on the USSR (Operation BARBAROSSA)."

As a major global publisher with close ties to Thatcher's government, Murdoch saw himself as part of this ideological struggle and volunteered his news

outlets to support hard-line Thatcher-Reagan policies against the Soviets. Documents previously released by Reagan's presidential library in Simi Valley, California, revealed the key role played by Cohn in connecting Murdoch with the top echelon of the Reagan administration.

Both Roy Cohn and Ronald Reagan got their starts in politics during the anti-communist purges in the 1950s, Cohn as Sen. Joe McCarthy's chief counsel and Reagan as a witness against alleged communists in Hollywood. Cohn, a hardball political player, built his reputation as both an anti-communist and anti-gay crusader who aggressively interrogated witnesses during the Red Scare and the Lavender Scare, claiming that the U.S. government was infiltrated by communists and homosexuals who threatened the nation's security.

Cohn's high-profile role in the McCarthy hearings ultimately ended when he was forced to resign over charges that he targeted the U.S. Army for an anti-communist purge because it had refused to give preferential treatment to one of his close associates, G. David Shine. Though Cohn denied he was romantically involved with Shine and a homosexual relationship was never proven Cohn's own homosexuality became publicly known after he underwent treatment for AIDS in the 1980s, leading to his death in 1986.

However, in Cohn's final years, he enjoyed close personal ties to the Reagan administration and exchanged warm notes with Reagan himself. But, more significantly, Cohn, as one of Murdoch's lawyers, brought the influential publisher into the Oval Office on Jan. 18, 1983, to meet with Reagan and Wick. A photograph of that meeting also released by the Reagan library shows Cohn leaning forward, speaking to Reagan who is seated next to Murdoch.

"I had one interest when Tom [Bolan, Cohn's law partner] and I first brought Rupert Murdoch and Governor Reagan together and that was that at least one major publisher in this country would become and remain pro-Reagan," Cohn wrote in a [Jan. 27, 1983 letter](#) to senior White House aides Edwin Meese, James Baker and Michael Deaver. "Mr. Murdoch has performed to the limit up through and including today."

The letter noted that Murdoch then owned the "New York Post over one million, third largest and largest afternoon; New York Magazine; Village Voice; San Antonio Express; Houston Ring papers; and now the Boston Herald; and internationally influential London Times, etc." [For more details on Cohn's role, see Consortiumnews.com's "[How Roy Cohn Helped Rupert Murdoch.](#)"]

### **Financing Propaganda**

Following the Jan. 18, 1983 meeting, Murdoch became involved in a privately

funded propaganda project to help sell Reagan's hard-line Central American policies, according to other documents. That PR operation was overseen by senior CIA propaganda specialist Walter Raymond Jr. and CIA Director Casey.

By late 1982, the Reagan administration was gearing up for an expanded propaganda push in support of the President's aggressive policies in Central America, including support for the Salvadoran and Guatemalan militaries both notorious for their human rights violations and for the Nicaraguan Contra rebels who also were gaining an unsavory reputation for acts of terrorism and brutality.

This PR campaign was spearheaded by CIA Director Casey and Raymond, one of the CIA's top covert operation specialists who was transferred to the National Security Council staff to minimize legal concerns about the CIA violating its charter which bars influencing the American public. To further shield the CIA from possible fallout from this domestic propaganda operation, Casey and Raymond sought to arrange private financing to pay for some activities.

On Jan. 13, 1983, NSC Advisor Clark noted in a memo to Reagan the need for non-governmental money to advance the PR project. "We will develop a scenario for obtaining private funding," Clark wrote, as cited in an unpublished draft chapter of the congressional Iran-Contra investigation. Clark then told the President that "Charlie Wick has offered to take the lead. We may have to call on you to meet with a group of potential donors."

Five days later, on Jan. 18, 1983, Roy Cohn accompanied Rupert Murdoch into the Oval Office for a face-to-face meeting with President Reagan and USIA Director Wick. Nine days later, in the Jan. 27, 1983 letter to Meese, Baker and Deaver written on the letterhead of the Saxe, Bacon & Bolan law firm Cohn hailed the success of Murdoch's "warm meeting with the President and the goodwill created by Charlie Wick's dinner."

But Murdoch was also thin-skinned. Cohn complained about what Murdoch saw as a presidential snub when Reagan bypassed the Boston Herald during a late January 1983 trip to Boston. Michael McManus, the deputy assistant to the President, offered an effusive apology to Cohn: "we were all sorry about the confusion surrounding a possible Presidential visit to the Boston Herald.

"I also called Mr. Murdoch as you suggested, explained the situation to him and apologized for any confusion. I am sure you are aware of our continued high regard for Mr. Murdoch personally and our appreciation of the importance of what he is doing."

Despite Cohn's complaint about the slight to Murdoch, the Australian media

magnate appears to have pitched in to help the CIA-organized outreach program for Reagan's Central American policies. Now declassified documents indicate that Murdoch was soon viewed as a source for the private funding.

On May 20, 1983, longtime CIA propagandist Raymond, who was overseeing the "perception management" project aimed at both domestic and foreign audiences, wrote that \$400,000 had been raised from private donors brought to the White House by USIA Director Wick.

Raymond said the funds were divided among several organizations including Accuracy in Media, a right-wing group that attacked reporters who deviated from Reagan's propaganda themes, and the neoconservative Freedom House (which later denied receiving White House money, though it made little sense that Raymond would lie in an internal memo).

As the White House continued to cultivate its ties to Murdoch, Reagan held a second Oval Office meeting with the publisher, on July 7, 1983, who was accompanied by Charles Douglas-Home, the editor of Murdoch's flagship UK newspaper, the London Times.

In an Aug. 9, 1983 memo summing up the results of a Casey-organized meeting with five leading ad executives regarding how to "sell" Reagan's policies in Central America, Raymond referred to Murdoch as if he were one of the benefactors helping out.

In a memo to Clark, Raymond said the project would involve a comprehensive approach aimed at persuading a majority of Americans to back Reagan's Central American policies. "We must move out into the middle sector of the American public and draw them into the 'support' column," Raymond wrote. "A second package of proposals deal with means to market the issue, largely considering steps utilizing public relations specialists or similar professionals to help transmit the message."

To improve the project's chances for success, Raymond wrote, "we recommended funding via Freedom House or some other structure that has credibility in the political center. Wick, via Murdoch, may be able to draw down added funds for this effort." Raymond included similar information in a separate memo to Wick in which Raymond noted that "via Murdock [sic] may be able to draw down added funds" to support the initiative. (Raymond later told me that he was referring to Rupert Murdoch.)

In a March 7, 1984 memo about the "'Private Funders' Project," Raymond referred to Murdoch again in discussing a request for money from longtime CIA-connected journalist Brian Crozier, who was "looking for private sector funding to work on



the question of 'anti-Americanism' overseas."

Raymond wrote: "I am persuaded [sic] it is a significant long term problem. It is also the kind of thing that Ruppert [sic] and Jimmy might respond positively to. Please look over the stack [of papers from Crozier] and lets [sic] discuss if and when there might be further discussion with our friends."

Murdoch's News Corp. has not responded to several requests for comment about the Reagan-era documents.

### **Murdoch's Rise**

With these close ties to Reagan's White House and Thatcher's 10 Downing Street, Murdoch's media empire continued to grow. To meet a regulatory requirement that U.S. TV stations must be owned by Americans, Murdoch became a naturalized citizen of the United States in 1985. Murdoch also benefited from the Reagan administration's relaxation of media ownership rules which enabled him to buy more TV stations, which he then molded into the Fox Broadcasting Company, which was founded on Oct. 9, 1986.

In 1987, the "Fairness Doctrine," which required political balance in broadcasting, was eliminated, which let Murdoch pioneer a more aggressive conservatism on his TV network. In the mid-1990s, Murdoch expanded his political reach by founding the neoconservative Weekly Standard in 1995 and Fox News on cable in 1996. At Fox News, Murdoch hired scores of prominent politicians, mostly Republicans, putting them on his payroll as commentators.

Last decade, Murdoch continued to expand his reach into U.S. mass media, acquiring DirecTV and the financial news giant Dow Jones, which included The Wall Street Journal, America's leading business news journal.

As his empire grew, Murdoch parlayed his extraordinary media power into the ability to make or break political leaders, especially in the United States and the United Kingdom. In December 2014, the UK's Independent reported that Ed Richards, the retiring head of the British media regulatory agency Ofcom, accused British government representatives of showing favoritism to Murdoch's companies.

Richards said he was "surprised" by the informality, closeness and frequency of contact between executives and ministers during the failed bid by Murdoch's News Corp. for the satellite network BSkyB in 2011. The deal was abandoned when it was discovered that journalists at Murdoch's *News of the World* tabloid had hacked the phone of murdered schoolgirl Milly Dowler and others.

"What surprised everyone about it not just me was quite how close it was and the

informality of it," Richards said, confirming what had been widely reported regarding Murdoch's access to powerful British politicians dating back at least to the reign of Prime Minister Thatcher in the 1980s. The Reagan documents suggest that Murdoch built similarly close ties to leading U.S. politicians in the same era.

These glimpses behind the curtain also reveal how these symbiotic or some might say incestuous relationships have developed between media magnates and likeminded politicians. Though Murdoch might argue that he was simply following his ideological beliefs and putting his news outlets behind his political goals it's also clear that his commitment to right-wing causes proved very profitable as well.

**Investigative reporter Robert Parry broke many of the Iran-Contra stories for The Associated Press and Newsweek in the 1980s. You can buy his latest book, *America's Stolen Narrative*, either in [print here](#) or as an e-book (from [Amazon](#) and [barnesandnoble.com](#)). You also can order Robert Parry's trilogy on the Bush Family and its connections to various right-wing operatives for only \$34. The trilogy includes *America's Stolen Narrative*. For details on this offer, [click here](#).**

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## A Prized Iran-Nuke Myth Unraveling

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

By Gareth Porter

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

Now Iran has agreed to allow the IAEA to visit the site at Parchin and environmental samples have already been collected at the site. However, the politically charged tale of the bomb test chamber of Parchin is beginning to unravel. IAEA director general Yukiya Amano entered the building in which the explosives chamber had supposedly been located on Monday and announced

afterward that he found “no equipment” in the building.

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

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

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

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

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

### **Disputed intelligence**

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

It was true that there was more activity than normal at the site on those days, they told Jahn, but nothing resembling the activities claimed by the unidentified state’s “intelligence summary.” One of those two countries denying

the story was clearly the United States. Pentagon spokesman Captain John Kirby told Jahn he had “seen nothing to indicate that those concerns are warranted.”

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

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

### **Israeli-supplied Documents**

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

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

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

The report revealed that the imagery showed “virtually no activity at or near the building housing the containment vessel” during that entire period. The imagery clearly suggested that Iran had not been using the site for any sensitive activities, much less the activities suggested by the IAEA in its report, during the seven years, nor had they engaged in any cleanup of the site.

And an earlier episode sheds further light on the issue. In 2004, John Bolton, then President George W. Bush’s Iran policymaker, leaked satellite imagery of

sites at Parchin that had features someone believed might be high explosives testing facilities.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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