

# Return of Cheney's One Percent Doctrine

**Exclusive:** Just as happened before the Iraq War, those who want to bomb Iran are scaring the American people with made-up scenarios about grave dangers ahead, new warnings as ludicrous as the “mushroom cloud” tales that panicked the U.S. public a decade ago, reports Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

A weak point in the psyches of many Americans is that they allow their imaginations to run wild about potential threats to their personal safety, no matter how implausible the dangers may be. Perhaps, this is a side effect from watching too many scary movies and violent TV shows.

But this vulnerability also may explain why the current war hysteria against Iran is reviving the sorts of fanciful threats to the United States last seen before the Iraq War. Since right-wing Israelis and their neocon allies are having trouble selling the U.S. public on a new preemptive war in the Middle East, they have again resorted to dreaming up hypothetical scenarios to scare easily frightened Americans.

For instance, in a New York Times Magazine [article](#) on Jan. 29 by Israeli journalist Ronen Bergman which essentially laid out Israel's case for attacking Iran Moshe Ya'alon, Israel's vice prime minister and minister of strategic affairs, is quoted as explaining the need to make Americans very afraid of Iran. Bergman wrote:

“It is, of course, important for Ya'alon to argue that this is not just an Israeli-Iranian dispute, but a threat to America's well-being. ‘The Iranian regime will be several times more dangerous if it has a nuclear device in its hands,’ he went on. ‘One that it could bring into the United States. It is not for nothing that it is establishing bases for itself in Latin America and creating links with drug dealers on the U.S.-Mexican border.

“‘This is happening in order to smuggle ordnance into the United States for the carrying out of terror attacks. Imagine this regime getting nuclear weapons to the U.S.-Mexico border and managing to smuggle it into Texas, for example. This is not a far-fetched scenario.’”

But it is a far-fetched scenario. Indeed, there is zero intelligence to support this fear-mongering about such an Iranian plan. That the New York Times would publish such a provocative assertion without a countervailing pushback from serious U.S. intelligence analysts represents the kind of irresponsible

journalism that the Times, the Washington Post and much of the mainstream U.S. news media displayed during the run-up to war with Iraq.

The fact is that U.S. intelligence agencies have concluded and the Israeli Mossad apparently agrees that Iran has NOT even decided to build a nuclear bomb, let alone that it would do something as nutty as give one to people outside its direct control to attack the United States, thus guaranteeing Iran's own annihilation. [For more on the intelligence, see Consortiumnews.com's "[US/Israel: Iran NOT Building Nukes.](#)"]

Bergman's article, which covers nine pages, also manages to avoid any mention of the fact that Israel has a real and undeclared nuclear arsenal. The Times might have regarded this as a relevant point to include both to explain why Iran might feel it needs a nuclear deterrent and to put into context the actual strategic balance in the Middle East. Instead, the Times article poses the nuclear threat to the region as emanating entirely from Iran.

In a New York Times [report](#) on Friday, Ya'alon was back again, pushing the claim that Iran had been developing an intercontinental missile that could travel 6,000 miles and strike the United States. "That's the Great Satan," he said, using Iran's epithet for the United States. "It was aimed at America, not at us."

In response to that claim, even the Times felt obliged to add some factual counterweight, noting that "the assertions went far beyond what rocket experts have established about Iran's missile capabilities, and American officials questioned its accuracy." There is also the point that such a hypothetical missile attack on the United States would be detected immediately and ensure a devastating counterattack on Iran.

### **'One Percent Doctrine'**

But it should be clear what the game is. Israeli hardliners and American neocons want a return to former Vice President Dick Cheney's "one percent doctrine," as described by author Ron Suskind. That is, if there is even a one percent chance that a terrorist attack might be launched against the United States, it must be treated as a certainty, thus justifying any preemptive military action that U.S. officials deem warranted.

That was the mad-hatter policy that governed the U.S. run-up to the Iraq War, when even the most dubious and dishonest claims by self-interested Iraqi exiles and their neocon friends were treated as requiring a bloody invasion of a country then at peace.

In those days, not only was there a flood of disinformation from outside the

U.S. government, there also was a readiness inside George W. Bush's administration to channel those exaggerations and lies into a powerful torrent of propaganda aimed at the American people, still shaken from the barbarity of the 9/11 attacks.

So, the American people heard how Iraq might dispatch small remote-controlled planes to spray the United States with chemical or biological weapons, although Iraq was on the other side of the globe. The New York Times hyped bogus claims about aluminum tubes for nuclear centrifuges. Other news outlets spread false stories about Iraq seeking uranium from Niger and about supposed Iraqi links to al-Qaeda terrorists.

There was a stampede of one-upsmanship in the U.S. news media as everyone competed to land the latest big scoop about Iraq's nefarious intentions and capabilities. Even experienced journalists were sucked in. In explaining one of these misguided articles, New York Times correspondent Chris Hedges told the *Columbia Journalism Review* that "We tried to vet the defectors and we didn't get anything out of Washington that said, 'these guys are full of shit.'"

Based in Paris, Hedges said he would get periodic calls from his editors asking that he check out defector stories originating from Ahmed Chalabi's pro-invasion Iraqi National Congress. "I thought he was unreliable and corrupt, but just because someone is a sleazebag doesn't mean he might not know something or that everything he says is wrong," Hedges said. [For details, see Consortiumnews.com's "[Iran/Iraq 'Defectors' and Disinformation.](#)"]

### **More Scary Talk**

Even after the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003 and the eventual realization that the fear-mongering was based on falsehoods, President Bush kept up the scary talk with claims about Iraq as the "central front" in the "war on terror" and al-Qaeda building a "caliphate" stretching from Indonesia to Spain and thus threatening the United States.

Fear seemed to be the great motivator for getting the American people to line up behind actions that, on balance, often created greater dangers for the United States. Beyond the illegality and immorality of attacking other countries based on such fabrications, there was the practical issue of unintended consequences.

Which is the core logical fallacy of Cheney's "one percent doctrine."

Overreacting to an extremely unlikely threat can create additional risks that also exceed the one percent threshold, which, in turn, require more violent responses, thus cascading outward until the country essentially destroys itself in pursuit of the illusion of perfect security.

The “one percent doctrine” is like the scene in “The Sorcerer’s Apprentice” as the lazy helper enchants a splintering broom to carry water for him but then cannot control the ensuing chaos of a disastrous flood.

The rational approach to national security is not running around screaming about imaginary dangers but evaluating the facts carefully and making judgments as to how the threats can be managed without making matters worse.

But Israel’s right-wing leadership and the American neocons apparently believe that the U.S. public is not inclined to rush off into another costly war if a realistic assessment prevails. Americans might be even less supportive if they understood that what Israel is actually after is a continued free hand to launch military campaigns against Palestinians in Gaza or Hezbollah in Lebanon.

At more candid moments, that is what Israeli leaders actually indicate. For instance, Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak told Bergman that the real worry was not that Iran would hurl a nuclear bomb at Israel but that a nuclear-armed Iran could offer some protection to the Palestinians and the Lebanese when Israel next decides it must inflict military punishment on them, as occurred in 2006 and 2008-2009.

“From our point of view,” Barak said, “a nuclear state offers an entirely different kind of protection to its proxies. Imagine if we enter another military confrontation with Hezbollah, which has over 50,000 rockets that threaten the whole area of Israel, including several thousand that can reach Tel Aviv. A nuclear Iran announces that an attack on Hezbollah is tantamount to an attack on Iran. We would not necessarily give up on it, but it would definitely restrict our range of operations.”

But Americans are not likely to favor getting dragged into another war so Israel can freely use its extraordinary military might to pummel lightly armed Arab militants and the surrounding civilian populations. For such a cause, would Americans be happy to see gas prices spike, the fragile economic recovery falter, the federal budget deficit swell, and more American soldiers be put in harm’s way?

Almost certainly not. So, the propaganda target again must be that weak point in the American psyche, that tendency to let the imagination run wild with movie-like scenarios of danger and violence.

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

**Robert Parry broke many of the Iran-Contra stories in the 1980s for the**

Associated Press and Newsweek. His latest book, *Neck Deep: The Disastrous Presidency of George W. Bush*, was written with two of his sons, Sam and Nat, and can be ordered at [neckdeepbook.com](http://neckdeepbook.com). His two previous books, *Secrecy & Privilege: The Rise of the Bush Dynasty from Watergate to Iraq* and *Lost History: Contras, Cocaine, the Press & 'Project Truth'* are also available there.

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## What Israel Really Feels about Iran

Israel does not really see Iran as an “existential threat,” at least not in the sense that Iran would fire a hypothetical nuclear bomb at Israel. Rather, Israel fears that an Iranian bomb would tilt the strategic balance, since Israel now holds a nuclear monopoly in the region, as William Blum explains.

By William Blum

As we all know only too well, the United States and Israel would hate to see Iran possessing nuclear weapons. Being “the only nuclear power in the Middle East” is a great card for Israel to have in its hand. But, in the real, non-propaganda world, is US/Israel actually fearful of an attack from a nuclear-armed Iran? In case you’ve forgotten ...

In 2007, in a closed discussion, Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni said that in her opinion “Iranian nuclear weapons do not pose an existential threat to Israel.” She “also criticized the exaggerated use that [Israeli] Prime Minister Ehud Olmert is making of the issue of the Iranian bomb, claiming that he is attempting to rally the public around him by playing on its most basic fears.” [Haaretz.com (Israel), Oct. 25, 2007; print edition Oct. 26]

2009: “A senior Israeli official in Washington” asserted that “Iran would be unlikely to use its missiles in an attack [against Israel] because of the certainty of retaliation.” [Washington Post, March 5, 2009]

In 2010, the *Sunday Times* of London (Jan. 10) reported that Brigadier-General Uzi Eilam, war hero, pillar of the Israeli defense establishment, and former director-general of Israel’s Atomic Energy Commission, “believes it will probably take Iran seven years to make nuclear weapons.”

Early last month, U.S. Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta told a television audience: “Are they [Iran] trying to develop a nuclear weapon? No, but we know that they’re trying to develop a nuclear capability.” [“Face the Nation”, CBS, Jan. 8, 2012; [see video](#)]

A week later we could read in the *New York Times* (Jan. 15) that “three leading Israeli security experts, the Mossad chief, Tamir Pardo, a former Mossad chief, Efraim Halevy, and a former military chief of staff, Dan Halutz, all recently declared that a nuclear Iran would not pose an existential threat to Israel.”

Then, a few days afterward, Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak, in an interview with Israeli Army Radio (Jan. 18), had this exchange:

**Question:** Is it Israel’s judgment that Iran has not yet decided to turn its nuclear potential into weapons of mass destruction?

**Barak:** People ask whether Iran is determined to break out from the control [inspection] regime right now ... in an attempt to obtain nuclear weapons or an operable installation as quickly as possible. Apparently that is not the case.

Lastly, we have the U.S. Director of National Intelligence, James Clapper, in a report to Congress: “We do not know, however, if Iran will eventually decide to build nuclear weapons. ... There are “certain things [the Iranians] have not done” that would be necessary to build a warhead. [*The Guardian* (London), Jan. 31, 2012]

Admissions like the above, and there are others, are never put into headlines by the American mass media; indeed, only very lightly reported at all; and sometimes distorted, On the Public Broadcasting System (PBS News Hour, Jan. 9), the non-commercial network much beloved by American liberals, the Panetta quote above was reported as: “But we know that they’re trying to develop a nuclear capability, and that’s what concerns us.”

Flagrantly omitted were the preceding words: “Are they trying to develop a nuclear weapon? No ...” [“PBS’s Dishonest Iran Edit”, FAIR (Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting), Jan. 10, 2012]

One of Israel’s leading military historians, Martin van Creveld, was interviewed by *Playboy* magazine in June 2007:

**Playboy:** Can the World live with a nuclear Iran?

**Van Creveld:** The U.S. has lived with a nuclear Soviet Union and a nuclear China, so why not a nuclear Iran? I’ve researched how the U.S. opposed nuclear proliferation in the past, and each time a country was about to proliferate, the U.S. expressed its opposition in terms of why this other country was very dangerous and didn’t deserve to have nuclear weapons.

“Americans believe they’re the only people who deserve to have nuclear weapons, because they are good and democratic and they like Mother and apple pie and the

flag. But Americans are the only ones who have used them. ...

“We are in no danger at all of having an Iranian nuclear weapon dropped on us. We cannot say so too openly, however, because we have a history of using any threat in order to get weapons ... thanks to the Iranian threat, we are getting weapons from the U.S. and Germany.”

And throughout these years, regularly, Israeli and American officials have been assuring us that Iran is World Nuclear Threat Number One, that we can't relax our guard against them, that there should be no limit to the ultra-tough sanctions we impose upon the Iranian people and their government.

Repeated murder and attempted murder of Iranian nuclear scientists, sabotage of Iranian nuclear equipment with computer viruses, the sale of faulty parts and raw materials, unexplained plane crashes, explosions at Iranian facilities ... Who can be behind this but US/Israel? How do we know? It's called “plain common sense.” Or do you think it was Costa Rica? Or perhaps South Africa? Or maybe Thailand?

Defense Secretary Panetta recently commented on one of the assassinations of an Iranian scientist. He put it succinctly: “That's not what the United States does.” [*Reuters*, Jan. 12, 2012]

Does anyone know Leon Panetta's e-mail address? I'd like to send him my list of United States assassination plots. More than 50 foreign leaders were targeted over the years, many successfully. [See <http://killinghope.org/bblum6/assass.htm> ]

Not long ago, Iraq and Iran were regarded by US/Israel as the most significant threats to Israeli Middle-East hegemony. Thus was born the myth of Iraqi Weapons of Mass Destruction, and the United States proceeded to turn Iraq into a basket case.

That left Iran, and thus was born the myth of the Iranian Nuclear Threat. As it began to sink in that Iran was not really that much of a nuclear threat, or that this “threat” was becoming too difficult to sell to the rest of the world, US/Israel decided that, at a minimum, it wanted regime change. The next step may be to block Iran's lifeline, oil sales using the Strait of Hormuz.

Ergo, the recent US and EU naval buildup near the Persian Gulf, an act of war trying to goad Iran into firing the first shot. If Iran tries to counter this blockade, it could be the signal for another US Basket Case, the fourth in a decade, with the devastated people of Libya and Afghanistan, along with Iraq, currently enjoying America's unique gift of freedom and democracy.

On Jan. 11, the *Washington Post* reported: “In addition to influencing Iranian leaders directly, [a US intelligence official] says another option here is that [sanctions] will create hate and discontent at the street level so that the Iranian leaders realize that they need to change their ways.”

How utterly charming, these tactics and goals for the 21st Century by the leader of “The Free World”. (Is that expression still used?)

The neo-conservative thinking (and Barack Obama can be regarded as often being a fellow traveler of such) is even more charming than that. Listen to Danielle Pletka, vice president for foreign and defense policy studies at America’s most prominent neo-con think tank, American Enterprise Institute:

“The biggest problem for the United States is not Iran getting a nuclear weapon and testing it, it’s Iran getting a nuclear weapon and not using it. Because the second that they have one and they don’t do anything bad, all of the naysayers are going to come back and say, ‘See, we told you Iran is a responsible power. We told you Iran wasn’t getting nuclear weapons in order to use them immediately.’ ... And they will eventually define Iran with nuclear weapons as not a problem.” [Video of Pletka making these remarks]

What are we to make of that and all the other quotations above? I think it gets back to my opening statement: Being “the only nuclear power in the Middle East” is a great card for Israel to have in its hand. Is US/Israel willing to go to war to hold on to that card?

**William Blum is the author of *Killing Hope: US Military and CIA Interventions Since World War 2*; *Rogue State: A Guide to the World’s Only Superpower*; *West-Bloc Dissident: A Cold War Memoir*; *Freeing the World to Death: Essays on the American Empire*. Portions of the books can be read, and signed copies purchased, at [www.killinghope.org](http://www.killinghope.org). This article was originally published in Blum’s *Anti-Empire Report*.**

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## In Iran Dispute, Who’s at Fault?

The Israeli government and the major U.S. news media are escalating their rhetoric in support of a new “preemptive” war, this time against Iran. Yet, as with the Iraq invasion, little attention is focusing on the rules of international law and which side is in the wrong, as Nat Parry describes.

By Nat Parry

As saber-rattling against Iran intensifies, the question of which side in this confrontation really violates international obligations has largely been avoided.

Instead the widespread assumption in the West is that Iran is at fault. On Wednesday, a bipartisan group of former U.S. politicians, generals and officials said the United States should deploy ships, increase covert activities and use more bellicose rhetoric to make more “credible” the threat of a U.S. military strike to stop Iran’s nuclear program.

In last week’s State of the Union address, President Barack Obama accused the Islamic Republic of shirking its international obligations and repeated a now familiar threat to Iran, which implicitly includes the possibility of a nuclear strike against Tehran or suspected nuclear sites in the country

“Let there be no doubt,” Obama said, “America is determined to prevent Iran from getting a nuclear weapon, and I will take no options off the table to achieve that goal. But a peaceful resolution of this issue is still possible, and far better, and if Iran changes course and meets its obligations, it can rejoin the community of nations.”

Viewed in conjunction with the Obama administration’s new defense strategy, published just prior to the State of the Union, this ambiguous warning to Iran that “no options are off the table” becomes more clear and more ominous.

In the official White House playbook, entitled “Priorities for 21st Century Defense,” the U.S. nuclear posture is described in a section called “Maintain a Safe, Secure, and Effective Nuclear Deterrent.” It says: “As long as nuclear weapons remain in existence, the United States will maintain a safe, secure, and effective arsenal.”

Further, “We will field nuclear forces that can under any circumstances **confront an adversary with the prospect of unacceptable damage**, both to deter potential adversaries and to assure U.S. allies and other security partners that they can count on America’s security commitments.”

There is no mention in the defense strategy of pursuing nuclear disarmament, an explicit obligation of the United States as a state party to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and as the world’s leading possessor of nuclear weapons.

As the 2010 NPT Review Conference reminded states parties to the treaty: “The Conference recalls that the overwhelming majority of States entered into legally binding commitments not to receive, manufacture or otherwise acquire nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices in the context, inter alia, of the

corresponding **legally binding commitments by the nuclear-weapon States to nuclear disarmament** in accordance with the Treaty.”

The Conference further regretted that nuclear-armed countries such as the United States have failed to live up to their end of the NPT bargain: “The Conference, while welcoming achievements in bilateral and unilateral reductions by some nuclear-weapon States, notes with concern that the total estimated number of nuclear weapons deployed and stockpiled still amounts to several thousands. The Conference expresses its deep concern at the continued risk for humanity represented by the possibility that these weapons could be used and the catastrophic humanitarian consequences that would result from the use of nuclear weapons.”

When it comes to disputes over compliance with the treaty, however, for example Western suspicions that Iran is pursuing nuclear weapons or Iranian complaints that the U.S. is failing to disarm, the Review Conference reiterated the obligation that only diplomatic means should be pursued, and that “attacks or threats of attacks” must be avoided:

“The Conference emphasizes that responses to concerns over compliance with any obligation under the Treaty by any State party should be pursued by diplomatic means, in accordance with the provisions of the Treaty and the Charter of the United Nations.

“The Conference considers that attacks or threats of attack on nuclear facilities devoted to peaceful purposes jeopardize nuclear safety, have dangerous political, economic and environmental implications and raise serious concerns regarding the application of international law on the use of force in such cases, which could warrant appropriate action in accordance with the provisions of the Charter of the United Nations. The Conference notes that a majority of States parties have suggested a legally binding instrument be considered in this regard.”

It should be noted that despite the unequivocal claims from Washington and in the U.S. media that Iran is pursuing nuclear weapons, there is actually considerable ambiguity over this claim. Former CIA analyst Ray McGovern recently wrote [an article for Consortiumnews.com](#), reminding readers of a formal National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) from November 2007.

The NIE was issued unanimously by all 16 U.S. intelligence agencies and included the following conclusion: “We judge with high confidence that in fall 2003, Tehran halted its nuclear weapons program; Tehran’s decision to halt its nuclear weapons program suggests it is less determined to develop nuclear weapons than we have been judging since 2005.”

This 2007 joint assessment of the U.S. intelligence community was essentially restated by Defense Secretary Leon Panetta last month, who stated frankly on national television that Iran is not currently attempting to develop nuclear weapons.

“Are they trying to develop a nuclear weapon? No. But we know that they’re trying to develop a nuclear capability. And that’s what concerns us,” Panetta told “Face the Nation” host Bob Schieffer. “And our red line to Iran is to not develop a nuclear weapon. That’s a red line for us.”

For its part, Iran has consistently said its nuclear program is peaceful, for electricity and medical purposes. If the Iranian government decides it is in its security interests to attain nuclear weapons, however, it has the legal right under Article 10 of the Non-Proliferation Treaty to withdraw:

“Each Party shall in exercising its national sovereignty have the right to withdraw from the Treaty if it decides that extraordinary events, related to the subject matter of this Treaty, have jeopardized the supreme interests of its country. It shall give notice of such withdrawal to all other Parties to the Treaty and to the United Nations Security Council three months in advance. Such notice shall include a statement of the extraordinary events it regards as having jeopardized its supreme interests.”

But Iran has not chosen to withdraw, and in accordance with its obligations under the NPT, is continuing to cooperate with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), which has the sole authority under the treaty to ascertain states parties’ commitments on non-acquisition of nuclear weapons.

A high-level IAEA delegation just completed a visit to Iran on Wednesday, and officials intend to travel to Iran again “in the very near future,” said the delegation’s leader. The three-day trip was aimed at resolving points of dispute over the country’s past atomic activities.

“We had three days of intensive discussions about all our priorities, and we are committed to resolve all the outstanding issues,” IAEA safeguards chief Herman Nackaerts said after the team arrived in Vienna, Austria, according to the Associated Press. “And the Iranians said they are committed, too.”

“We had a good trip,” Nackaerts added. Global Security Newswire noted that “The official’s remarks suggested the trip had yielded substantive results.”

“The Agency is committed to intensifying dialog. It remains essential to make progress on substantive issues,” IAEA Director-General Yukiya Amano said in a statement on the return of the agency’s delegation.

"The IAEA explained its concerns and identified its priorities, which focus on the clarification of possible military dimensions to Iran's nuclear program," Amano was quoted as saying. During the talks, the IAEA also discussed with Iran the topics and initial steps to be taken, as well as associated modalities, he added.

Iran's official IRNA news agency had reported on Tuesday that the spirit of the talks between Iranian officials and the IAEA team was "positive and constructive."

Yet, despite these promising diplomatic developments, the U.S. and its allies continue pursuing a war-footing posture in confronting Tehran.

Washington has lobbed accusations that Iran is not only developing nuclear weapons, but is also threatening to strike within the United States. According to the Washington Post: "An assessment by U.S. spy agencies concludes that Iran is prepared to launch terrorist attacks inside the United States, highlighting new risks as the Obama administration escalates pressure on Tehran to halt its alleged pursuit of an atomic bomb."

The story added, "In congressional testimony Tuesday, U.S. intelligence officials indicated that Iran has crossed a threshold in its adversarial relationship with the United States."

Director of National Intelligence James R. Clapper Jr. testified to Congress that the alleged Iranian plot to assassinate the Saudi ambassador in Washington last October "shows that some Iranian officials, probably including Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, have changed their calculus and are now more willing to conduct an attack in the United States in response to real or perceived U.S. actions that threaten the regime."

There are also new claims being floated that the Iranian regime has links with al-Qaeda, allegations not unlike the spurious accusations Bush administration officials made about Saddam Hussein in preparing the American public for war with Iraq ten years ago. As the Wall Street Journal reports Friday under the headline "US fears Iran's links to Al Qaeda as officials believe country may have provided aid to terror group":

"U.S. officials say they believe Iran recently gave new freedoms to as many as five top Al Qaeda operatives who have been under house arrest, including the option to leave the country, and may have provided some material aid to the terrorist group.

"The men, who were detained in Iran in 2003, make up Al Qaeda's so-called management council, a group that includes members of the inner circle that

advised Usama bin Laden and an explosives expert widely considered a candidate for a top post in the organization.”

Defense Secretary Panetta is now publicly voicing concerns that U.S. ally Israel is preparing to attack Iran in the near future, which would almost certainly bring the United States into a direct conflict. As David Ignatius wrote Thursday in the Washington Post:

“Panetta believes there is a strong likelihood that Israel will strike Iran in April, May or June, before Iran enters what Israelis described as a ‘zone of immunity’ to commence building a nuclear bomb. Very soon, the Israelis fear, the Iranians will have stored enough enriched uranium in deep underground facilities to make a weapon, and only the United States could then stop them militarily.”

But as the saber-rattling intensifies, so does the grassroots response to this threat of a new U.S. war in the Middle East. Dozens of demonstrations are planned across the United States for Saturday to oppose a potential war against Iran as well as ongoing U.S. sanctions.

A statement by the veterans’ antiwar group March Forward, which is participating in the protests, offers a reminder of the disastrous consequences of the past decade of U.S.-led wars in the Middle East and Central Asia:

“We’ve just endured 10 years of Washington’s wars for “national security,” which only seem to benefit those who are making a profit, while on the other hand causing massive bloodshed overseas and severe lack of money for people’s needs here at home.

“Like with Iraq, the U.S. government’s sanctions, assassinations, and threats of war towards Iran have nothing to do with self-defense or human rights, but what is best for big business in one of the most profitable regions in the world.”

The call to action lists some basic realities regarding nuclear proliferation, international law and U.S. hypocrisy in the Middle East, reading in part:

Fact: Iran does not possess a nuclear weapon.

Fact: Iran has the right, according to international law, to develop nuclear energy for civilian use.

Fact: Iran’s nuclear energy program is regularly monitored by the International Atomic Energy Agency.

Fact: Iran has never started a war (in its modern history).

Fact: The United States possesses 10,600 nuclear warheads in its stockpile,

7,982 of which are deployed and 2,700 of which are in a contingency stockpile. The total number of nuclear warheads that have been built from 1951 to present is 67,500.

Fact: The United States is the only country to have ever used nuclear weapons. It did so when it incinerated hundreds of thousands of Japanese people living in the cities of Nagasaki and Hiroshima. Neither city had any military significance.

Fact: The United States has spent \$7 trillion on nuclear weapons. The U.S. military budget for 2012 alone is about equal to Iran's entire Gross National Product.

Fact: Israel, the largest recipient of U.S. foreign aid (about \$3 billion in 2011), unlike Iran, possesses hundreds of nuclear weapons.

Fact: Israel, unlike Iran, refuses to sign the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, or allow the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) into Israel to monitor its nuclear program.

Nat Parry is co-author of *Neck Deep: The Disastrous Presidency of George W. Bush.*

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## Divining the Truth about Iran

**Exclusive:** Like before the invasion of Iraq, the U.S. news media is flooding Americans with alarmist accounts about Iran's alleged pursuit of nuclear weapons. Even when U.S. officials suggest nuance and caution, the media ignores the signals, as ex-CIA analyst Ray McGovern reports.

By Ray McGovern

Watching top U.S. intelligence officials present the annual "Worldwide Threat Assessment" before the Senate Intelligence Committee, I found myself wondering if they would depart from the key (if politically delicate) consensus judgment that Iran is NOT working on a nuclear weapon.

In last year's briefing, Director of National Intelligence James Clapper had stood firm on this key point, despite severe pressure to paint Iran in more pernicious terms. On Tuesday, I was relieved to see in Clapper's testimony a reiteration of the conclusions of a formal National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) of November 2007, issued unanimously by all 16 U.S. intelligence agencies,

including judgments like this:

“We judge with high confidence that in fall 2003, Tehran halted its nuclear weapons program; Tehran’s decision to halt its nuclear weapons program suggests it is less determined to develop nuclear weapons than we have been judging since 2005.”

Sadly, this judgment still comes as news to many of those Americans who are malnourished on the low-protein gruel of the Fawning Corporate Media (FCM) even though the NIE was immediately declassified in 2007 and has been in the public domain for more than four years.

Granted, former President George W. Bush did not like it, not one bit. In an unusually revealing comment in his memoir *Decision Points*, Bush complained bitterly that “the NIE tied my hands on the military side,” preventing him from attacking Iran. That was the course strongly favored by hawkish Vice President Dick Cheney with his PhD *summa cum laude* in Preventive War.

And, America’s FCM consistently ignores the official NIE when writing news stories hyping Iran’s nuclear threat. However, if you read the articles very closely you may see references to Iran supposedly working toward the “capacity to build” nuclear weapons, not that Iran is actually working on building a nuclear bomb.

The distinction is important, but it is so subtle as to be misleading. Most casual readers would simply assume that Iran is building a nuclear bomb.

The FCM’s rhetorical shift from accusing Iran of “building” nukes to seeking a “capacity to build” them is reminiscent of Bush’s sleight of hand when he went from talking about Iraq’s supposed WMD “stockpiles” to its WMD “programs” after it turned out there were no WMD stockpiles.

Oddly, even when Israeli sources concur with this key point that Iran has NOT decided to build a nuclear bomb as the Israeli newspaper Haaretz and Defense Minister Ehud Barak indicated recently the FCM in the United States continues to leave the impression among Americans that Iran is on the verge of having nukes. [See Consortiumnews.com’s [“US/Israel: Iran NOT Building Nukes.”](#)]

You will almost never see in a major U.S. newspaper the assessment backed by the 16 U.S. intelligence agencies that Iran is NOT building nuclear weapons. At most, you’ll see a boilerplate phrase about Iran denying that it is. You’re also not likely to see references to the fact that Israel has a sophisticated nuclear arsenal of its own.

**‘Tell-It-Like-It-Is’ Intelligence**

Still, it's encouraging to see U.S. intelligence officials resist bending with the prevailing political winds the way the malleable CIA director, George Tenet, and his deputy John McLaughlin did when they orchestrated the fraudulent October 2002 NIE on Iraq's "weapons of mass destruction."

After they left in disgrace (having contributed to the bloody war in Iraq), fresh institutional blood was brought in to manage intelligence estimates. In a professional sense, the two were not a hard act to follow. But courage can still be a rare commodity in the careerist world of Official Washington.

What happened is that the new managers launched a bottom-up assessment of all the evidence on Iran's nuclear development program. They reached conclusions based on what they found, not on what was politically expedient; they spoke truth to power, and, in the process, helped prevent yet another disastrous war.

This year, though, there was good reason to worry that the current intelligence managers might succumb to pressure for a more "politically correct" course. One factor has been the rising crescendo in the FCM, echoing the Israeli government's hyperbolic fears regarding a "nuclear threat" from Iran.

The FCM, for example, gave unconscionably inflammatory coverage to a highly misleading November 2011 report by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) on Iran. The FCM ignored available evidence from WikiLeaks documents showing that the new IAEA management was collaborating behind-the-scenes with U.S. and Israeli officials on the Iran issue.

And there was growing concern that National Intelligence Director Clapper might be outmaneuvered by the new CIA Director David Petraeus, the retired four-star general who is always the darling of Congress.

The ambitious Petraeus's own words have shown him groveling before the Israel Lobby, to the point of backing away from his own congressional testimony of March 2010, a small segment of which was implicitly critical of Israeli intransigence on the issue of Palestine.

E-mails revealed Petraeus begging neocon pundit Max Boot to help him withstand criticism from neocon circles over the rare burst of honesty that had slipped into Petraeus's prepared testimony. Petraeus then mistakenly shared the e-mail train with blogger James Morris, who made them public.

On Tuesday, Petraeus was pandering again in his gratuitous repetition of the neocons' characterizations of the IAEA report. Petraeus said: "The IAEA report was a very accurate reflection of reality, of the situation on the ground. I think that is the authoritative document when it comes to informing the public of all the countries of the world of the situation there."

This is a remarkable statement coming from the head of the CIA, an agency that was one of the principal drafters of the NIE in 2007, which stands at variance with the politically tinged IAEA report, which labored to make the case that Iran was gaining expertise needed to build a nuclear bomb.

However, there were, in fact, significant overlaps in the IAEA's description of Iran's nuclear program and the key judgments of the NIE, but you would hardly know that from reporting in the FCM. The IAEA report contains no smoking gun regarding Iran's intentions about building nuclear weapons, but notes that much of Iran's progress occurred prior to fall 2003 when the NIE reported that Iran abandoned its weapons program.

Still, many pundits and politicians walked away with two misleading messages from the IAEA report: that it refuted the NIE and that Iran is now making a break for the bomb. Both representations are false, yet the assertions have been repeated often enough to give them traction with the public and Congress, which was evident in Petraeus's remarks.

As Petraeus knows better than most, the National Intelligence Estimate is the genre of intelligence assessment that the U.S. government considers "authoritative." I found it shameful, but not surprising, that he would identify himself with the IAEA rather than with the U.S. intelligence community. Shameful pandering, which Clapper, to his credit, would have none of.

The way the wind seems to be blowing from the White House and Capitol Hill, however, I think it a good bet that, before many months go by, Petraeus will be taking over the job of his current nominal boss, and Clapper will be set out to pasture for special services not rendered.

### **The Media on the Briefing**

True to form, the FCM offered little truth in its reports on the Tuesday briefing and quite a lot of distortion. Very little mention was made of Clapper's key assertion that Iran is not building nuclear weapons, just as the FCM discreetly averted its eyes and ears from Defense Secretary Leon Panetta's definitive statement to that effect on Jan. 8.

The Washington Post initially ran an article by Greg Miller titled, "Iran, perceiving threat from West, willing to attack on U.S. soil, U.S. intelligence report finds." That title was then squished to fit at the top of page one, right next to a smiling photo of Mr. and Mrs. Romney, and reads "U.S. spy agencies see new Iran risk: Tehran more willing to launch attacks on American soil, they say."

For his story, Miller selects the two short paragraphs in which Clapper claims

that some Iranian officials, probably including Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, “are now more willing to conduct an attack in the United States in response to real or perceived U.S. actions that threaten the regime.” (I can readily imagine the word-smithing by senior officials that yielded that profound observation.)

In an instant commentary, Salon blogger Glen Greenwald described Miller’s article, correctly, as a “monument to mindless stenographic journalism” and asks if anyone is still “doubting that there is a concerted media-aided fear-mongering campaign aimed at Iran.”

For the record, the New York Times’ Eric Schmitt led off his report in a similar vein: “Some senior Iranian leaders are now more willing to carry out attacks inside the U.S. in response to perceived American threats against their country,” citing senior intelligence officials.

It is not at all picayune to note that the Times dropped the “real or” from Clapper’s “in response to real or perceived U.S. actions that threaten the regime,” thus removing the point that Iran might actually encounter “real” threats from the United States. All that high-priced word-smithing for nothing!

As if further proof were needed about the bias of the FCM, blogger Michael Rozeff took the Boston Globe to task for piecing together two unconnected parts of Clapper’s testimony to leave the impression that Iran is making enriched uranium in order to conduct an attack on the U.S.

### **Who Will Tell the Truth?**

As a former analyst of Soviet affairs, I became familiar with how to dissect controlled media. And as a liaison officer to Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty during the late Sixties, I learned ways to penetrate denied areas with radio waves and other means.

It was those two radio stations, plus VOA and the BBC, that played such a key role in informing Russians and East Europeans about what was possible in the outside world. So, how to break through the blanket of the Fawning Corporate Media to give Americans a shot at knowing what is going on?

It seems a kind of delicious irony that, how to say this, the Russians Are Coming to help those of us hoping to break through the FCM and make our reporting and analysis available to our fellow citizens. As senators were clapping for Clapper, RT (for Russia Today) asked to interview me for their evening news program.

Knowing that my old friend Secretary of State Hillary Clinton has already spoken approvingly of RT, I did not think I needed to ask permission. Here’s what I

said; I can only hope some folks watched it.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ykG29YoC3o8>

Alternative News Blog

RTAmerica interviews Ray McGovern

On Iran/Israel/U.S. Intelligence

January 31, 2012

Ray McGovern works with Tell the Word, a publishing arm of the ecumenical Church of the Saviour in inner-city Washington. He entered CIA's analysis division as a Soviet specialist in 1964 and, after preparing and briefing the President's Daily Brief (1981-85), served as deputy chief of analysis at the Foreign Broadcast Information Service (now the Open Source Center).

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## US/Israel: Iran NOT Building Nukes

**Exclusive:** Recent comments by U.S and Israeli military leaders indicate that the intelligence services of the two countries agree that Iran has *not* decided to build a nuclear bomb, a crack in the Western narrative that the U.S. press corps won't accept, as ex-CIA analyst Ray McGovern explains.

By Ray McGovern

Has Iran decided to build a nuclear bomb? That would seem to be the central question in the current bellicose debate over whether the world should simply cripple Iran's economy and inflict severe pain on its civilian population or launch a preemptive war to destroy its nuclear capability while possibly achieving "regime change."

And if you've been reading the New York Times or following the rest of the Fawning Corporate Media, you'd likely assume that everyone who matters agrees that the answer to the question is yes, although the FCM adds the caveat that Iran insists its nuclear program is for peaceful purposes only. The line is included with an almost perceptible wink and an "oh, yeah."

However, a consensus seems to be emerging among the intelligence and military agencies of the United States and Israel that Iran has NOT made a decision to

build a nuclear weapon. In recent days, that judgment has been expressed by high-profile figures in the defense establishments of the two countries U.S. Defense Secretary Leon Panetta and Israel's Defense Minister Ehud Barak.

You might think that you would have heard more about that, wouldn't you? U.S. and Israel agree that Iran is NOT building a nuclear bomb. However, this joint assessment that Iran has NOT decided to build a nuclear bomb apparently represented too big a change in the accepted narrative for the Times and the rest of the FCM to process.

Yet, on Jan. 18, the day before U.S. Joint Chiefs Chairman Gen. Martin Dempsey arrived for talks in Israel, Israeli Defense Minister Barak gave an interview to Israeli Army radio in which he addressed with striking candor how he assesses Iran's nuclear program. It was not the normal pabulum.

**Question:** Is it Israel's judgment that Iran has not yet decided to turn its nuclear potential into weapons of mass destruction?

**Barak:** confusion stems from the fact that people ask whether Iran is determined to break out from the control [inspection] regime right now in an attempt to obtain nuclear weapons or an operable installation as quickly as possible. Apparently that is not the case.

**Question:** How long will it take from the moment Iran decides to turn it into effective weapons until it has nuclear warheads?

**Barak:** I don't know; one has to estimate. Some say a year, others say 18 months. It doesn't really matter. To do that, Iran would have to announce it is leaving the [UN International Atomic Energy Agency] inspection regime and stop responding to IAEA's criticism, etc.

Why haven't they [the Iranians] done that? Because they realize that when it became clear to everyone that Iran was trying to acquire nuclear weapons, this would constitute definite proof that time is actually running out. This could generate either harsher sanctions or other action against them. They do not want that.

**Question:** Has the United States asked or demanded that the government inform the Americans in advance, should it decide on military action?

**Barak:** I don't want to get into that. We have not made a decision to opt for that, we have not decided on a decision-making date. The whole thing is very far off.

**Question:** You said the whole thing is "very far off." Do you mean weeks, months,

years?

**Barak:** I wouldn't want to provide any estimates. It's certainly not urgent. I don't want to relate to it as though tomorrow it will happen.

As noted in my Jan. 19 article, "Israel Tamps Down Iran War Threats," which was based mostly on reports from the Israeli press before I had access to the complete transcript of the interview, I noted that Barak appeared to be identifying himself with the consistent assessment of U.S. intelligence community since late 2007 that Iran has not made a decision to go forward with a nuclear bomb.

### **A Momentous NIE**

A formal National Intelligence Estimate of November 2007 a consensus of all 16 U.S. intelligence agencies contradicted the encrusted conventional wisdom that "of course" Iran's nuclear development program must be aimed at producing nuclear weapons. The NIE stated:

"We judge with high confidence that in fall 2003, Tehran halted its nuclear weapons program; Tehran's decision to halt its nuclear weapons program suggests it is less determined to develop nuclear weapons than we have been judging since 2005."

The Key Judgments of that Estimate elicited a vituperative reaction from some Israeli officials and in neoconservative circles in the United States. It also angered then-President George W. Bush, who joined the Israelis in expressing disagreement with the judgments. In January 2008, Bush flew to Israel to commiserate with Israeli officials who he said should have been "furious with the United States over the NIE."

While Bush's memoir, *Decision Points*, is replete with bizarre candor, nothing beats his admission that "the NIE tied my hands on the military side," preventing him from ordering a preemptive war against Iran, an action favored by hawkish Vice President Dick Cheney.

For me personally it was heartening to discover that my former colleagues in the CIA's analytical division had restored the old ethos of telling difficult truths to power, after the disgraceful years under CIA leaders like George Tenet and John McLaughlin when the CIA followed the politically safer route of telling the powerful what they wanted to hear.

It had been three decades since I chaired a couple of National Intelligence Estimates, but fate never gave me the chance to manage one that played such a key role in preventing an unnecessary and disastrous war, as the November 2007

NIE did.

In such pressure-cooker situations, the Estimates job is not for the malleable or the faint-hearted. The ethos was to speak with courage, and without fear or favor, but that is often easier said than done. In my days, however, we analysts enjoyed career protection for telling it like we saw it. It was an incredible boost to morale to see that happening again in 2007.

Ever since the NIE was published, however, powerful politicians and media pundits have sought to chip away at its conclusions, suggesting that the analysts were hopelessly naive or politically motivated or vengeful, out to punish Bush and Cheney for the heavy-handed tactics used to push false and dubious claims about Iraq's WMD in 2002 and 2003.

### **A New Conventional Wisdom**

There emerged in Official Washington a new conventional wisdom that the NIE was erroneous and wasn't worth mentioning anymore. Though the Obama administration has stood by it, the New York Times and other FCM outlets routinely would state that the United States and Israel agreed that Iran was developing a nuclear bomb and then add the wink-wink denial by Iran.

However, on Jan. 8, Defense Secretary Panetta told Bob Schieffer on "Face the Nation" that "the responsible thing to do right now is to keep putting diplomatic and economic pressure on them [the Iranians] and to make sure that they do not make the decision to proceed with the development of a nuclear weapon."

Panetta was making the implicit point that the Iranians had not made that decision, but just in case someone might miss his meaning, Panetta posed the direct question to himself: "Are they [the Iranians] trying to develop a nuclear weapon? No."

Barak's Jan. 18 statement to Israeli Army radio indicated that his views dovetail with those of Panetta and their comments apparently are backed up by the assessments of each nation's intelligence analysts. In its report on Defense Minister Barak's remarks, the Israeli newspaper Haaretz on Jan. 19 summed up the change in the position of Israeli leaders as follows:

"The intelligence assessment Israeli officials will present to Dempsey indicates that Iran has not yet decided whether to make a nuclear bomb. The Israeli view is that while Iran continues to improve its nuclear capabilities, it has not yet decided whether to translate these capabilities into a nuclear weapon or, more specifically, a nuclear warhead mounted atop a missile. Nor is it clear when Iran might make such a decision."

At the New York Times, the initial coverage of Barak's interview focused on another element. An article by Isabel Kershner and Rick Gladstone appeared on Jan. 19 on page A5 under the headline "Decision on Whether to Attack Iran is 'Far Off,' Israeli Defense Minister Says."

To their credit, the Times' Kershner and Gladstone did not shrink from offering an accurate translation of what Barak said on the key point of IAEA inspections: "The Iranians have not ended the oversight exercised by the International Atomic Energy Agency. They have not done that because they know that that would constitute proof of the military nature of their nuclear program and that would provoke stronger international sanctions or other types of action against their country."

But missing from the Times' article was Barak's more direct assessment that Iran apparently had not made a decision to press ahead toward construction of a nuclear bomb. That would have undercut the boilerplate in almost every Times story saying that U.S. and Israeli officials believe Iran is working on a nuclear bomb.

#### **But That's Not the Right Line!**

So, what to do? Not surprisingly, the next day (Jan. 20), the Times ran an article by its Middle East bureau chief Ethan Bronner in which he stated categorically: "Israel and the United States both say that Iran is pursuing the building of nuclear weapons, an assertion denied by Iran, ..."

By Jan. 21, the Times had time to prepare an entire page (A8) of articles setting the record "straight," so to speak, on Iran's nuclear capabilities and intentions: Here are the most telling excerpts, by article (emphasis mine):

1- "European Union Moves Closer to Imposing Tough Sanctions on Iran," by Steven Erlanger, Paris:

"Senior French officials are concerned that these measures [sanctions] will not be strong enough to push the Iranian government into serious, substantive negotiations on **its nuclear program which the West says is aimed at producing weapons.**"

"In his annual speech on French diplomacy on Friday, President Nicolas **Sarkozy accused Iran of lying, and he denounced what he called its 'senseless race for a nuclear bomb.'**"

"Iran says it is enriching uranium solely for peaceful uses and denies a military intent. But **few in the West believe Tehran, which has not cooperated fully with inspectors of the International Atomic Energy Agency and has been**

**pursuing some technologies that have only a military use.”**

(Pardon me, please. I'm having a bad flashback. Anyone remember the Times' peerless reporting on those infamous "aluminum tubes" that supposedly were destined for nuclear centrifuges, until some folks did a Google search and found they were for the artillery then used by Iraq?)

2- "China Leader Warns Iran Not to Make Nuclear Arms," by Michael Wines, Beijing

"Prime Minister Wen Jiabao wrapped up a six-day Middle East tour this week with stronger-than-usual **criticism of Iran's defiance on its nuclear program.**"

"Mr. Wen's comments on Iran were unusually pointed for Chinese diplomacy. In Doha, Qatar's capital, he said China 'adamantly opposes Iran developing and possessing nuclear weapons.'"

"Western nations suspect that Iran is working toward building a nuclear weapon, while Iran insists its program is peaceful."

3- "U.S. General Urges Closer Ties With Israel." by Isabel Kershner, Jerusalem

"Though Iran continues to insist that its nuclear program is only for civilian purposes, Israel, the United States, and much of the West are convinced that Iran is working to develop a weapons program. "

### **Never (Let Up) on Sunday**

Next it was time for the Times to trot out David Sanger from the Washington bullpen. Many will remember him as one of the Times' stenographers/cheerleaders for the Bush/Cheney attack on Iraq in March 2003. An effusive hawk also on Iran, Sanger was promoted to a position as chief Washington correspondent, apparently for services rendered.

In his Jan. 22 article, "Confronting Iran in a Year of Elections," Sanger pulls out all the stops, even resurrecting Condoleezza Rice's "mushroom cloud" to scare all of us, and, not least, the Iranians. He wrote:

"'From the perception of the Iranians, life may look better on the other side of the **mushroom cloud,**' said Ray Takeyh, a senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations. He may be right: while the Obama administration has vowed that it will never tolerate Iran as a nuclear weapons state, a few officials admit that they may have to settle for a 'nuclear capable' Iran that has the technology, the nuclear fuel and the expertise to become a nuclear power in a matter of weeks or months."

Were that not enough, enter the national champion of the Times cheerleading

squad that prepared the American people in 2002 and early 2003 for the attack on Iraq, former Executive Editor Bill Keller. He graced us the next day (Jan. 23) with an op-ed entitled “Bomb-Bomb-Bomb, Bomb-Bomb-Iran?” though he wasn’t favoring a military strike, at least not right now. Here’s Keller:

“The actual state of the [nuclear] program is not entirely clear, but the best open-source estimates are that if Ayatollah Ali Khamenei ordered full-speed-ahead, which there is no sign he has done, they could have an actual weapon in a year or so. In practice, Obama’s policy promises to be tougher than Bush’s. Because Obama started out with an offer of direct talks, which the Iranians foolishly spurned, world opinion has shifted in our direction.”

Wow. With Iraqi egg still all over his face, the disgraced Keller gets to “spurn” history itself, to rewrite the facts. Sorry, Bill, it was not Iran, but rather Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and other neocons in the U.S. Department of State and White House (with you and neocon allies in the press cheering them on), who “foolishly spurned” an offer by Iran in 2010 to trade about half its low-enriched uranium for medical isotopes. It was a deal negotiated by Turkey and Brazil, but it was viewed by the neocons as an obstacle to ratcheting up the sanctions.

In his Jan. 23 column, with more sophomoric glibness, Keller wrote this:

“We may now have sufficient global support to enact the one measure that would be genuinely crippling, a boycott of Iranian oil. The Iranians take this threat to their economic livelihood seriously enough that people who follow the subject no longer minimize the chance of a naval confrontation in the Strait of Hormuz. It’s not impossible that we will get war with Iran even without bombing its nuclear facilities.”

How neat! War without even trying!

### **The Paper of (Checkered Record)**

Guidance To All NYT Hands: Are you getting the picture? After all, what does Defense Minister Barak know? Or Defense Secretary Panetta? Or the 16 agencies of the U.S. intelligence community? Or apparently even Israeli intelligence?

The marching orders from the Times’ management appear to be that you should pay no heed to those sources of information. Just repeat the mantra: Everyone knows Iran is hard at work on the Bomb.

As is well known, other newspapers and media outlets take their cue from the Times. Small wonder, then, that USA Today seemed to be following the same guidance on Jan. 23, as can be seen in its major editorial on military action

against Iran:

**“The U.S. and Iran will keep steaming toward confrontation, Iran intent on acquiring the bomb to establish itself as a regional power, and the U.S. intent on preventing it to protect allies and avoid a nuclear arms race in the world’s most volatile region.**

“One day, the U.S. is likely to face a wrenching choice: bomb Iran, with the nation fully united and prepared for the consequences, or let Iran have the weapons, along with a Cold War-like doctrine ensuring Iran’s nuclear annihilation if it ever uses them. In that context, sanctions remain the last best hope for a satisfactory solution.”

And, of course, the U.S. press corps almost never adds the context that Israel already possesses an undeclared arsenal of hundreds of nuclear weapons, or that Iran is essentially surrounded by nuclear weapons states, including India, Pakistan, Russia, China and at sea the United States.

### **PBS Equally Guilty**

PBS’s behavior adhered to its customary don’t-offend-the-politicians-who-might-otherwise-cut-our-budget attitude on the Jan. 18 “NewsHour” about 12 hours after Ehud Barak’s interview started making the rounds. Host Margaret Warner set the stage for an interview with neocon Dennis Ross and Vali Nasr (a professor at Tufts) by using a thoroughly misleading clip from former Sen. Rick Santorum’s Jan. 1 appearance on “Meet the Press.”

Warner started by saying: “Back in the U.S. many Republican presidential candidates have been vowing they’d be even tougher with Tehran. Former Senator Rick Santorum spoke on NBC’s Meet the Press: ‘I would be saying to the Iranians, you open up those facilities, you begin to dismantle them and make them available to inspectors, or we will degrade those facilities through air strikes and make it very public that we are doing so.’”

Santorum seemed totally unaware that there are U.N. inspectors in Iran, and host David Gregory did nothing to correct him, leaving Santorum’s remark unchallenged. The blogosphere immediately lit up with requests for NBC to tell their viewers that there are already U.N. inspectors in Iran, which unlike Israel is a signatory to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and allows IAEA inspections.

During the Warner interview, Dennis Ross performed true to form, projecting supreme confidence that he knows more about Iran’s nuclear program than the Israeli Defense Minister and the U.S. intelligence community combined:

**Margaret Warner:** If you hamstringing their [Iran's] Central Bank, and the U.S. persuades all these other big customers not to buy Iranian oil, that could be thought of as an act of war on the part of the Iranians. Is that a danger?

**Ross:** I think there's a context here. The context is that **the Iranians continue to pursue a nuclear program. And unmistakably to many, that is a nuclear program whose purpose is to achieve nuclear weapons.** That has a very high danger, a very high consequence. So the idea that they could continue with that and not realize that at some point they have to make a choice, and if they don't make the choice, the price they're going to pay is a very high one, that's the logic of increasing the pressure.

Never mind that the Israeli Defense Minister had told the press something quite different some 12 hours before.

Still, it is interesting that Barak's comments on how Israeli intelligence views Iran's nuclear program now mesh so closely with the NIE in 2007. This is the new and significant story here, as I believe any objective journalist would agree.

However, the FCM, led by the New York Times, cannot countenance admitting that they have been hyping the threat from Iran as they did with Iraq's non-existent WMDs just nine years ago. So they keep repeating the line that Israel and the U.S. agree that Iran is building a nuclear weapon.

In this up-is-down world, America's newspaper of record won't even report accurately what Israel (or the CIA) thinks on this important issue, if that goes against the alarmist conventional wisdom that the neocons favor. Thus, we have this divergence between what the U.S. media is reporting as flat fact, i.e., that Israel and the United States believe Iran is building a bomb (though Iran denies it) and the statements from senior Israeli and U.S. officials that Iran has NOT decided to build a bomb.

While this might strike some as splitting hairs since peaceful nuclear expertise can have potential military use this hair is a very important one. If Iran is not working on building a nuclear bomb, then the threats of preemptive war are not only unjustified, they could be exactly the motivation for Iran to decide that it does need a nuclear bomb to protect itself and its people.

**Ray McGovern works with Tell the Word, a publishing arm of the ecumenical Church of the Saviour in inner-city Washington. During his 27-year career as a CIA analyst, he prepared, and briefed, the President's Daily Brief, and chaired National Intelligence Estimates. He now serves on the Steering Group of Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS).**

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# Asking Questions Before a War

The neocons who rushed the United States into war with Iraq are trying the same with Iran, albeit with less influence over President Obama than President Bush. Still, the truncated debate on Iran is causing flashbacks among some policy experts who fear a repeat of Iraq, as ex-CIA analyst Paul R. Pillar notes.

By Paul R. Pillar

Leslie Gelb has a piece worth reading at *The Daily Beast* about Americans' propensity to save their tough questions about American overseas military adventures until after such expeditions are undertaken and go sour, rather than asking the questions before the expeditions begin.

"We're doing this terrible thing all over again," says Gelb. "As before, we're letting a bunch of ignorant, sloppy-thinking politicians and politicized foreign-policy experts quick-march us off to war." Gelb's current concern is the push to go to war against Iran, but he is describing a pattern that has been all too familiar in the past.

Gelb is well qualified to make such observations, based on his experience in directing the writing of the *Pentagon Papers* as well as his later work as a journalist, State Department official and president of the Council on Foreign Relations.

The internal deliberations, described in the *Pentagon Papers*, on intervening in Vietnam in the mid-1960s were actually quite thorough in most respects, although they were trumped by images of falling dominoes and a fatalistic belief that even a losing war effort had to be waged to keep U.S. credibility intact.

Deliberations outside the government were nothing close to thorough. The Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, which became the congressional authorization for the war, was passed speedily after only brief hearings.

Nearly four decades later, external deliberations on launching a war against Iraq were even more cursory. This time, a congressional authorizing resolution was passed with *no* hearings. As for deliberations inside the Bush administration, there weren't any.

Unlike with the Vietnam War, there was an astounding absence of any policy process for determining whether the war was a good idea. Many of the questions that have since been asked in public hand-wringing over the Iraq War about who said what at the time are almost irrelevant, because hardly anyone was paying

attention to things that were said that turned out to be important.

Gelb lays out some questions that ought to be asked about any military action against Iran. I've raised such questions as well. In fact, I raised a large number of them almost five years ago in an op-ed in the *Washington Post* titled "What to Ask Before the Next War."

A couple of my questions are now outdated. With the completed withdrawal of U.S. troops from Iraq, for example, we fortunately no longer have to wonder what Iran would do to those troops in retaliation. And in asking what a war against Iran would do to the price of oil, the possible figure I posited of \$150 per barrel surely understates where the price would go in response to hostilities today. (When I was writing in February 2007 oil was selling for around \$60 per barrel; this week Brent Crude was going for about \$111.)

But most of the questions are just as relevant as they were in 2007. If I was raising such questions five years ago, that means we should have had plenty of time to study them, especially for something as drastic as launching another offensive war.

I invite you to look at the questions and ask whether public debate has adequately considered them, let alone provided answers adequate to justify another such adventure. Those questions included:

"What would be the urgency of taking forceful action, given that the announced estimate is that Iran is still several years from acquiring a nuclear weapon? If Iran were to acquire nuclear weapons, how would that change its behavior and affect U.S. interests? In particular, why would deterrence, which has kept nuclear peace with other adversaries, not work with Iran?

"How much would Iran's nuclear efforts be set back, especially given that bombs are not very good at destroying knowledge and expertise? Would the Iranian response be appreciably different from that of Iraq after Israel bombed its nuclear reactor in 1981 (Iraq redoubled its nuclear efforts while turning to different methods for producing fissile material)?

"How would Tehran respond to an act of war? What terrorism might it launch against the United States? What other military action might it take, with the risk of a wider war in the Persian Gulf? Other effects concern Iranian politics. How much would the direct assertion of U.S. hostility strengthen Iranian hard-liners, whose policies are partly premised on such hostility? How much would it add to all Iranians' list of historical grievances against the United States and adversely affect relations with future governments?

"Some might argue that the worst case that could ensue from an Iranian nuclear

weapon is so bad that it trumps all other considerations. But there is no more reason than there was with Iraq to consider the worst case of only one side of the policy equation. And the worst case that could result from U.S.-Iranian combat is plenty frightening.”

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

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## Israel Tamps Down Iran War Threats

**Exclusive:** For months, Israeli hardliners and their neocon allies in the United States have been beating the war drums over Iran. But apparent resistance to war from President Obama has brought a softening of rhetoric in Israel, as ex-CIA analyst Ray McGovern reports.

By Ray McGovern

In a stunning departure from recent Israeli threats to attack Iranian nuclear facilities, Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak on Wednesday used an interview with Israel’s Army radio to assert that any attack on Iran “is very far off,” adding, “We haven’t made any decision to do this.”

When pressed as to whether “very far off” meant weeks or months, Barak replied: “I wouldn’t want to provide any estimates. It’s certainly not urgent. I don’t want to relate to it as though tomorrow it will happen.” The world should be thankful for small favors.

Even more intriguing was the phrasing that the Israeli newspaper Haaretz put under its headline, “Barak: Israel ‘very far off’ from decision on Iran attack.” In a sub-head, Haaretz highlighted an equally important change in Israel’s stance regarding Iran:

**“Israel believes Iran itself has not yet decided whether to make a nuclear bomb, according to intelligence assessment to be presented later this week to U.S. Joint Chief of Staff [Martin] Dempsey.”**

Haaretz did not specify its sourcing for that information. However, if it’s correct, it puts Israel in line with senior U.S. policy and intelligence officials, like Defense Secretary Leon Panetta and Director of National

Intelligence James Clapper, who have tenaciously held to the “Iran-has-not-yet-decided” judgment since it was promulgated unanimously by the 16 U.S. intelligence agencies in November 2007.

That National Intelligence Estimate stated up front: **“This NIE does *not* (italics in original) assume that Iran intends to acquire nuclear weapons.”** Among its declassified Key Judgments were:

“We judge with high confidence that in fall 2003, Tehran halted its nuclear weapons program; Tehran’s decision to halt its nuclear weapons program suggests it is less determined to develop nuclear weapons than we have been judging since 2005.”

If you thought that those conclusions in 2007 might be greeted in Official Washington or Tel Aviv with the sighs of relief, you would have been mistaken. Not only were the Israelis in high dudgeon, but so were President George W. Bush and, even more so, Vice President Dick Cheney, who had been persuaded to attack Iran’s nuclear facilities in 2008.

Here’s what Bush wrote in his memoir, *Decision Points*: “But after the NIE, how could I possibly explain using the military to destroy the nuclear facilities of a country the intelligence community said had no active nuclear weapons program?”

For his part, Cheney publicly expressed his chagrin at the wobbliness of his president/protégé. The former Vice President told “Fox News Sunday” on Aug. 30, 2009, that he was isolated among Bush advisers in his enthusiasm for war with Iran.

### **This Time It’s Different**

Before Wednesday, when Defense Minister Barak promised no imminent Israeli attack on Iran, the unholy alliance between Israeli hawks and American neoconservatives was exuding confidence that they would prevail in Washington and also in Tel Aviv in pressing for war with Iran.

Yet, this alliance faced two key obstacles that weren’t there when a similar coalition successfully pushed the invasion of Iraq in 2003. This time, the White House and other key elements of the U.S. national security apparatus are dead set against attacking Iran or provoking an Iranian attack. They have apparently now made that clear, in unmistakable terms, to Israeli leaders.

And this time, U.S. intelligence has not been “fixed around the policy.” CIA analysts have not been badgered into falsifying their assessments to please higher-ups.

To disrupt what had appeared to be an unstoppable march toward war with Iran, gaining momentum in December and early January, Defense Secretary Leon Panetta intervened with his own rendition of "Let me be clear."

Appearing on CBS's "Face the Nation" on Jan. 8, and apparently unsure whether host Bob Schieffer would have the courage to ask the \$64 question, Panetta decided to ask it himself rhetorically: **"Are they [the Iranians] trying to develop a nuclear weapon? No."**

Yet, in a highly illustrative example of media hypersensitivity on this issue, PBS was not even willing to let the Defense Secretary's comment reach the ears of the network's listeners. Its "NewsHour" program deleted Panetta's emphatic "no" and played only his subsequent comment:

"But we know that they are trying to develop a nuclear capability. And that's what concerns us. And our red line to Iran is do not develop a nuclear weapon. That's a red line for us."

Got that? Panetta said Iran is not trying to develop a nuclear weapon, but Iran better not develop a nuclear weapon because that's a red line for us. Clearly, Panetta was trying to be all things to all people, but he had spoken emphatically to the key question of whether Iran was "trying to develop a nuclear weapon? No."

But Panetta's declaration was so discordant from the anti-Iranian propaganda that has been pouring out of Washington's elite opinion circles that PBS appears to have reflexively censored the Defense Secretary's crucial assessment. After all, if Panetta was allowed to say that Iran was not working on a bomb, all the smart pundits who have been telling the American people the opposite would look rather stupid.

### **Israeli Reaction**

The word "no" also didn't sit well in Israel. There, it appears Israeli hardliners felt that some drastic measure might be needed to stop what was shaping up as a new initiative by the Obama administration to steer the looming crisis with Iran away from the cliff, or at least from the Strait of Hormuz. Israeli hardliners fretted that the U.S. and Iran might be interested in direct talks to defuse the rising tensions. So, what could be done?

On Jan. 11, just three days after Panetta's assertion that the Iranians were *not* trying to develop a nuclear weapon, assassins in Tehran attached a bomb to a car carrying Mostafa Ahmadi Roshan, an Iranian scientist connected with Iran's nuclear development program. The attack killed Roshan, making him the fifth such victim in the last couple of years.

Suspicion immediately focused on Israel, which has historically engaged in cross-border assassinations of people it considers a threat. Usually in these cases, Israel offers some ambiguous semi-denial. This time, however, Israeli officials mostly swaggered. Israel's chief military spokesman, Brig. Gen. Yoav Mordechai, posted a statement on Facebook, saying: "I don't know who settled the score with the Iranian scientist, but I certainly am not shedding a tear."

And a leak from the Israeli Parliament revealed that on Jan. 10, the day before the killing, Israeli Forces Chief of Staff Lt. Gen. Benny Gantz told the Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee that during 2012 Iran would see things happen to it "unnaturally," a reference that Israeli defense and intelligence officials understood to mean covert actions against Iran's nuclear program.

For months now, Israeli officials have spoken almost giddily of the "unnatural" setbacks that have plagued Iran's nuclear program, including cyber-war attacks. Israeli press reports termed Gantz's testimony "particularly prescient."

Even usual apologists for Israeli violence, such as the New York Times, agreed that Israel was likely behind the "unnatural" death of Roshan. *Time* magazine was even more direct, citing "Western intelligence officials" in a report that said: "Like three previous Iranian scientists ambushed on their morning commute, the latest nuclear expert to die on his way to work was a victim of Israel's Mossad."

The Obama administration clearly was not amused by the assassination. The White House and State Department issued unusually prompt and strong denials of U.S. complicity. Panetta went so far as to say, "We have some ideas as to who might be involved. But we don't know exactly "

On Jan. 12, President Obama called Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and the White House took the unusual step of releasing a photo of Obama on the phone with Netanyahu. Though the White House did not disclose the details of the conversation, the Obama administration soon signaled not only its displeasure with the murder of Roshan but annoyance over what appeared to be an Israeli strategy to ratchet up tensions with Iran.

Obama's call was followed by the strongest and most tangible move since Panetta's statement on *Face the Nation*. Three days after the killing of Roshan, large-scale joint U.S.-Israeli military exercises planned for this spring were abruptly postponed, without any cogent explanation.

Amid all this, what has become clearer and clearer is that Israel's chief objective vis-à-vis Iran is not so much thwarting a possible Iranian effort to obtain a nuclear weapon, but rather what we old-timers at the CIA used to call

“government overthrow”, the current sobriquet being “regime change.”

Arguably, if the Israelis were genuinely interested in ending or limiting Iran’s nuclear program, they would probably not continue doing all they can to sabotage diplomatic efforts toward that end. A stroll down memory lane may be instructive.

### **Blowing Up Peace**

On Oct. 1, 2009, Tehran shocked virtually everyone by agreeing to a proposal to send most (as much as 75 percent) of its low-enriched uranium abroad to be turned into fuel for a small reactor that produces medical isotopes. (To state what may be obvious, one needs low-enriched uranium before one can refine it to levels needed for medical research and then even higher to weapons-grade.)

In Geneva, Iran’s chief nuclear negotiator, Saeed Jalili, gave Tehran’s agreement “in principle” to the swap plan to representatives of the U.N. Security Council plus Germany. The meeting was chaired by Javier Solana of the European Union. Reversing the Bush administration’s allergy to talking with “bad guys,” Obama had sent Under Secretary of State William Burns to the Geneva meeting.

A 45-minute tête-à-tête between Burns and Jalili marked the highest-level U.S.-Iranian talks in three decades. It was agreed that swap talks would resume on Oct. 19 in Vienna. Jalili also expressed Iran’s agreement to open the newly revealed uranium enrichment plant near Qum to international inspection within two weeks, which Tehran did.

Even the *New York Times*, which has been one of the most strident media voices against Iran, was forced to acknowledge that “if it happens, [the swap] would represent a major accomplishment for the West, reducing Iran’s ability to make a nuclear weapons quickly, and buying more time for negotiations to bear fruit.”

It was at this hopeful moment when on Oct. 18, 2009 Jundallah, a terrorist organization supported by the Israeli Mossad and other intelligence agencies, detonated a car bomb in southeastern Iran ripping apart a meeting of top Iranian Revolutionary Guards commanders and tribal leaders. Jundallah also mounted a roadside attack on a car full of Guards in the same area.

Killed in the attacks were a brigadier general who was deputy commander of the Revolutionary Guards ground forces; the Revolutionary Guards brigadier commanding Sistan-Baluchistan; and three other brigade commanders. Dozens of other military officers and civilians were left dead or wounded.

Jundallah took credit for the bombings, which followed years of lethal attacks

on Revolutionary Guards, policemen and other Iranian officials, including an attempted ambush of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's motorcade as he drove through the area in 2005.

The Oct. 18 attack was the bloodiest in Iran since the 1980-88 war with Iraq. It was a safe bet the Revolutionary Guards leaders went to their patron, Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, with telling evidence that the West cannot be trusted.

The attack also came one day before talks were to resume at the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in Vienna to follow up on the Oct. 1 breakthrough. The timing of Jundallah's bombings strongly suggested that the attacks were designed to scuttle those talks.

So, instead of progress on getting Iran to surrender much of its low-enriched uranium, Khamenei issued an angry statement on Oct. 19 condemning the terrorists, who he said "are supported by certain arrogant powers' spy agencies."

Iran dispatched a lower-level Iranian technical delegation to Vienna for the Oct. 19 meeting, not Iran's leading nuclear negotiator, Saeed Jalili, who stayed away as the Iranians began to raise objections that foreshadowed backsliding on their earlier willingness to part with as much as three-quarters of their low-enriched uranium.

### **Half a Loaf**

In 2010, Brazil and Turkey tried to resurrect this deal with a new overture that was privately encouraged by President Obama. The Brazil-Turkey initiative soon won acceptance in Tehran.

On May 17, 2010, Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva announced success in persuading Iran to send some of its low-enriched uranium to Turkey in exchange for higher-enriched uranium that would be put to peaceful medical uses.

Lula da Silva, in particular, had become very concerned that, without some quick and smart diplomacy, Israel was likely to follow up a series of escalating sanctions by attacking Iran. Mincing no words, da Silva said: "We can't allow to happen in Iran what happened in Iraq. Before any sanctions, we must undertake all possible efforts to try and build peace in the Middle East."

The two leaders secured an agreement on the same quantity of low-enriched uranium that had been envisioned in the Oct. 1 talks. Tehran agreed to exchange that amount for nuclear rods that would have no applicability for a weapon, but the quantity now represented about half of Iran's supply because more had been

produced in the intervening months.

Rather than embrace this Iranian concession as at least a step in the right direction, American neocons launched a political/media offensive to torpedo the deal. Though Obama had sent a private letter encouraging the leaders of Brazil and Turkey to undertake the swap negotiations, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and her neocon friends moved quickly to sink it. Instead, they pressed for harsher and harsher sanctions.

The Fawning Corporate Media, particularly the editorial sections of the Washington Post and the New York Times, did their part by insisting that the deal was just another Iranian trick that would leave Iran with enough uranium to theoretically create one nuclear bomb.

### **Focus Instead on Sanctions**

With the swap deal scuttled, a perturbed Lula da Silva released the text of Obama's encouraging letter, but Obama still acquiesced to Clinton's demands for tougher economic sanctions against Iran. On May 18, 2010, Official Washington and especially the neocons had something to cheer about.

"We have reached agreement on a strong draft [sanctions resolution] with the cooperation of both Russia and China," Secretary Clinton told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, making clear that she viewed the timing of the sanctions as a riposte to the Iran-Brazil-Turkey agreement. "This announcement is as convincing an answer to the efforts undertaken in Tehran over the last few days as any we could provide," she declared.

In the ensuing months, the propaganda drumbeat against Iran grew steadily louder, with dubious allegations about Iran plotting an assassination of the Saudi ambassador in Washington and the IAEA, under new pro-U.S.-Israeli leadership, issuing an alarmist report about Iran's purported nuclear progress.

Congress also enacted even more draconian sanctions aimed at crippling Iran's banking system and preventing it from selling oil, Iran's principal source of income. Obama arranged to have waivers inserted in the sanctions legislation, meaning he can hold off imposing penalties if he feels that's needed to protect the U.S. economy or national security.

Obama also appears to have reengaged in efforts to seek a peaceful solution to the Iranian nuclear issue.

### **Gen. Dempsey's Arrival**

So, that's the backdrop for Joint Chiefs Chairman Gen. Martin Dempsey's talks in

Israel with his counterpart, Lt. Gen. Benny Gantz, and other senior officials, beginning Thursday evening.

Given the preparatory work and Haaretz's report that Israeli intelligence agrees that Iran has yet to decide about building a nuclear bomb, Israel may not challenge Dempsey's expected efforts to tamp down tensions.

The Haaretz article states: "The intelligence assessment Israeli officials will present later this week to Dempsey indicates that Iran has not yet decided whether to make a nuclear bomb. The Israeli view is that while Iran continues to improve its nuclear capabilities, it has not yet decided whether to translate these capabilities into a nuclear weapon – or, more specifically, a nuclear warhead mounted atop a missile. Nor is it clear when Iran might make such a decision."

But Dempsey's visit bears close watching to see if the alteration in Israeli rhetoric is durable and reflected on the ground. In the past, Israel's Likud leaders have played hardball with American leaders, often by enlisting the help of their influential allies in the United States. If "regime change" remains the real priority, then Israeli leaders won't be likely to warm to the idea of negotiating over Iran's nuclear program.

**Ray McGovern works with Tell the Word, a publishing arm of the ecumenical Church of the Saviour in inner-city Washington. He served a total of 30 years as an Army infantry/intelligence officer and CIA analyst, and is a co-founder of Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity. His Web site is [www.raymondmcgovern.com](http://www.raymondmcgovern.com).**

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## Neocons Dream Up Scary Iran Scenarios

As American neocons continue to walk the United States toward another war in the Middle East, this time with Iran, they have been laboring to come up with rationales, including alarmist scenarios of what a nuclear-armed Iran might do geopolitically, as ex-CIA analyst Paul R. Pillar explains.

By Paul R. Pillar

The alarmism about the prospect of Iran developing a nuclear weapon is unmatched by any comparably intense attention to exactly why such a possibility is supposedly so dire.

Among the voluminous opinion pieces, panel discussions, campaign rhetoric and miscellaneous outcries on facets of this subject, one could search in vain for any detailed analysis of just what difference the advent of an Iranian nuke would make. Most of the discourse on the topic simply seems to take as a given, not needing any analysis, that an Iranian nuclear weapon would be so bad that to prevent it warrants considering even extreme measures.

Recently Ash Jain of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy produced what appears to fill this gap. His monograph, titled "Nuclear Weapons and Iran's Global Ambitions: Troubling Scenarios," is, at least on the face of it, a serious effort to analyze the regional and global consequences of Iranian nuclear weapons.

It is the most extensive consideration of this question I have seen from anyone who clearly believes that an Iranian nuke would be very bad. As such, Jain deserves credit for taking this stab at the subject. As a serious, extensive effort, his paper can be taken as demonstrating the limits of any case about the dangers of Iranian nuclear weapons.

Jain begins by stacking the deck in describing the Iranian objectives that presumably would underlie any use to which the Iranians would put a nuclear capability. Nuclear weapons in the hands of a "pragmatic regime" driven primarily by "a desire to protect and deter outside attack" would be far different, he says, from their possession by an "ideological regime," which is the label he pins on Iran.

This is consistent with much of the alarmist rhetoric, which depicts the Iranian regime as somehow fundamentally different from most governments in how it thinks and operates and what it aspires to. But what exactly defines an "ideological regime" and distinguishes it from a "pragmatic regime"?

There is plenty of ideology floating around, some of which has significant implications for foreign policy and international security, and the more one thinks about it, the more one realizes that the regime in Tehran isn't so different after all.

This example ought to be too obvious to need pointing out, but we recently had a government right here in Washington that got so influenced by an ideology (in this case, the neoconservative kind) that it launched a major offensive war of choice thousands of miles away, at much cost and misery to the United States. Is this what Jain means by an "ideological regime"?

Jain allows that "some analysts" see the Iranian regime, like many other regimes, concerned with its own survival and with deterring and preventing

hostile actions from those who have given it good reason to be perceived as threats, in this case, Israel or the United States. Then he dismisses this view in a single sentence as “inconsistent not only with Iranian activities on the ground but with the longstanding public statements of its own leaders.”

But he never actually addresses the record of Iranian activities on the ground. That record in fact shows a lot of pragmatism and even caution.

Jain does go on to quote at length the public statements of Iranian leaders, to depict an Iran driven by revolutionary and aggressive objectives, but does not weigh any of this rhetoric against the fundamental interests of defense and survival. He also does not distinguish between what is merely rhetoric or political blather for domestic or international purposes and what represents genuine, active objectives of the Islamic Republic.

None of this, however, is what is most significant about Jain’s paper and what it demonstrates about the limits of argumentation about an Iranian nuclear weapon supposedly being a dire threat. Jain does not fall back on the familiar but crude notion of Iranian leaders as a bunch of mad mullahs who are irrational, cannot be deterred and cannot be trusted not to push the launch button for any crazy reason.

Instead Jain takes the more sophisticated approach one more often hears in discussions of this subject among policy elites: that the real danger of an Iranian nuke is not that Tehran would launch a nuclear bolt out of the blue but instead that such capability would somehow lead to other forms of aggressive or dangerous Iranian behavior.

The Iran he depicts is not an irrational actor but instead a very calculating one that pursues an assortment of regional and global objectives. And so most of Jain’s paper is a scenario-by-scenario rendition of all kinds of nastiness that Iran could conceivably perpetrate, either within its own region or farther field.

The possibilities discussed run from strong-arming Persian Gulf states to reduce the U.S. military presence in the region to expanding a strategic relationship with Hugo Chavez’s Venezuela. All of these scenarios are put under the heading “Iran as a Nuclear Weapons State”. And each scenario has a subsection titled “Impact of a Nuclear Capability.”

But here’s the main thing to notice: nowhere is there any explanation of exactly *how* and *why* a nuclear capability would make a difference in Iranian behavior. The most that Jain can offer is to assert several times that because Iran would be “shielded by a nuclear weapons capability” it might do thus-and-so. We never

get an explanation of exactly how such a shield should be expected to work.

The scenarios are basically just a spinning out of an assortment of things one could imagine Iran doing, some of which have some relationship to things Iran is already doing and some of which are only flights of fancy. Nuclear weapons play hardly any role in these products of imagination.

In this respect Jain's approach is again typical of most of the ringing of the Iranian nuclear alarm bell one hears in sophisticated policy advocacy. The idea is that armed with a nuke, Iran would somehow become more aggressive and troublesome because it would be feeling its oats. (Jain doesn't use this phrase, but I have heard others arguing in the same direction use exactly those words.) The argument really is that vague.

If one is to get beyond arguments that are as mushy as oatmeal and to try to put together a more rigorous analysis, several things would be required to conclude that the advent of a nuclear weapon would change Iranian behavior. One is that there is something Tehran wants to do and sees it as in its interest to do but, as a non-nuclear-weapons state, is not doing now.

Second, the reason Iran is not doing that behavior now is that someone else is holding over its head a threat of retribution or retaliation if it were to indulge in the behavior. Third, the other party would no longer wield such a threat if Iran had a nuclear weapon, and the reason it no longer would wield the threat is that it considers it credible that Iran would escalate to the nuclear level whatever matter is in dispute.

I have thought hard to come up with plausible scenarios that meet these requirements and have been unable to do so. The last requirement, about credibility of escalation to the nuclear level, is especially hard to meet. I have not heard from anyone else any plausible scenarios that meet these requirements either.

Applying this kind of rigor to Jain's scenarios reveals how inapplicable a change in Iran's nuclear status would be to any of them. To take one example in which he endeavors to mention nuclear weapons beyond the general "shield" notion, he talks about Hizballah and Hamas possibly becoming more emboldened because Iran might extend a nuclear umbrella to these groups.

So in the face of Israel's overwhelming nuclear superiority, Iranian decision-makers would be willing to risk Tehran to save Gaza? Could Tehran expect anyone to believe that? Another of Jain's scenarios, which is to create in league with Venezuela a latter-day version of the Cuban missile crisis, stretches credibility even more.

The crude and sophisticated versions of the alarm-ringing are not all that different, because the sophisticated version ultimately depends on the credibility of Iranian leaders, under certain circumstances, actually pushing that launch button.

Jain concedes that “the United States might succeed in deterring Iran’s use of nuclear weapons, as well as direct military aggression against its allies” but contends that the intimidation, subversion and other behaviors he discusses “could pose a greater challenge.” The fatal flaw in the argument is that if the use of nuclear weapons is not credible because it is deterred, than the mere possession of such a weapon is strategically incapable of shielding other behavior.

A presentation such as Jain’s, given all the extensive scenario-building involving a wide variety of things that most of us can agree we would not like to see Iran do, coupled with the window-dressing about “impact of a nuclear capability,” can create the impression that a lot of awful stuff could really happen as a result of Iran getting a nuclear weapon.

But take a second look, bearing in mind that the issue is not how many unpleasant things we can conceive of Iran doing, but rather what *difference* a nuclear capability would make in its ability or inclination to do those things, and there isn’t really any substance there.

One should also note how much all of this type of argumentation is not a matter of what is probable but instead only of what is possible and what Iran “could” do. (Sounds a lot like all that war-selling rhetoric about what Saddam Hussein “could” do with his presumed weapons of mass destruction, doesn’t it?)

Jain is not being deceptive; he duly acknowledges that he is dwelling in the realm of mere possibilities. But we ought to keep this in mind when we get to what we all know this is eventually about. “At some point,” says Jain in his conclusion, “the costs and risks of more coercive options, including military strikes against Iranian nuclear facilities, may have to be weighed against the costs and risks of allowing Iran to obtain a nuclear capability.”

Indeed, let there be such a weighing. And when such a weighing is done, let the same standards for assessing costs and risks be applied to the coercive options as are applied to an Iranian nuclear capability.

If assessment of the costs and risks of militarily attacking Iran ranged as fancifully far into mere possibilities and bad things that “could” happen as do the discussions in Jain’s paper and elsewhere of the costs and risks of an Iranian nuke, then the consequences to U.S. interests of a resort to military

force would be seen to be not just very bad but horrendous.

Meanwhile, Jain deserves compliments for making perhaps the most extensive attempt I have seen to construct an argument about the hazards of an Iranian nuclear weapon. As such, his paper enables us to see just what such an argument consists of. No real shield or anything else substantial. Just some oats.

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

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## Is Iran-Nuke Fear Realistic?

As U.S.-Iran tensions gain a dangerous momentum with an Iranian court just giving a death sentence to an alleged CIA spy neocon-dominated Washington has jumped on the bandwagon toward war. But the Independent Institute's Charles V. Peña says the underlying assumptions deserve more scrutiny.

By Charles V. Peña

In the war of words between Iran and the United States, Tehran has drawn a line in the sand (actually, the Persian Gulf).

According to Maj. Gen. Ataollah Salehi, the commander in chief of the Iranian army, "We recommend to the American warship that passed through the Strait of Hormuz and went to the Gulf of Oman not to return to the Persian Gulf." This comes hot on the heels of the Iranians test-firing a new radar-evading missile and threatening to close the Strait of Hormuz.

So what's all the aggressive huffing and puffing about? Well, the United States is imposing economic sanctions on Iran, which the Iranians aren't taking kindly to. Of course, the U.S. takes the position that imposing such sanctions is perfectly justified (I mean, what else is a superpower to do when another country doesn't do exactly what we want it to do?).

But according to Republican presidential hopeful Jon Huntsman, if the Iranians reacted to sanctions by attempting to close the Strait of Hormuz (cutting off the flow of oil from the Persian Gulf, which is roughly equivalent to imposing economic sanctions on the United States and other oil-dependent countries), doing so would be "an act of war."

This, of course, after the U.S. has already engaged in an analogous action that apparently isn't considered an act of war (except to Ron Paul). Of course, that makes about as much sense as what the hullabaloo is about to begin with.

It seems that the United States doesn't like the idea of the mullahs in Tehran and Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad getting their hands on a nuclear weapon. Iran has an active nuclear program, it recently produced their first nuclear fuel rod, which the Iranians claim is for peaceful purposes, but the U.S. doesn't believe that.

At the heart of U.S. disbelief are centrifuges that can be used to enrich uranium to weapons grade. But there isn't anything in the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treat (NPT), to which Iran is a signatory, that prohibits a country from enriching uranium.

Moreover, the foundation of the NPT is a false promise. Essentially, non-nuclear-weapons states (such as Iran) agree not to develop nuclear weapons (Article II) in exchange for nuclear-weapons states (such as the U.S.) agreeing to eventually (with no specific deadline) divest themselves of their nuclear weapons (Article VI). Apparently, the Iranians believe this about as much as that there is a bridge in Brooklyn for sale.

But why would the Iranians want nukes anyway? It couldn't be that neighboring Israel has nuclear weapons (not that the Israelis are admitting that they do). And it certainly couldn't be because U.S.-imposed regime change via military force (most recently right next door to Iran in Iraq) seems to happen to countries that don't have nuclear weapons, e.g., notice that regime change in North Korea is happening because Kim Jong-Il died of natural causes.

Not that either of these could be considered legitimate concerns, from Iran's perspective. And if the Iranians got nukes, the West's argument goes, that would be the end of the world because they would most certainly use them. After all, Ahmadinejad supposedly threatened to wipe Israel off the map.

This assumes, of course, that the Iranians are suicidal. It is hard to imagine that the Israelis would sit idly by and not retaliate with their nuclear arsenal (which is likely enough to wipe Iran off the map). Ditto for any concerns about Iran lobbing a nuke at the United States (with an even larger and more capable nuclear arsenal that could wipe Iran off the map several times over, not to mention the minor detail that the Iranians don't have a delivery platform capable of reaching the United States).

But Iran is a state sponsor of terrorism, the argument goes, so wouldn't they give nukes to terrorists? This, of course, was a central tenet of the Bush

administration's rationale for invading Iraq to depose Saddam Hussein in the wake of 9/11.

But the reality is that there is no history of any country with dreaded weapons of mass destruction giving them away to terrorists. Indeed, Saddam Hussein was known to have both chemical and biological weapons (in the 1980s) and he supported terrorists, but he never gave those weapons to terrorists.

It is also hard to fathom why the regime in Tehran would spend billions of dollars (perhaps tens of billions of dollars) in pursuit of nuclear weapons technology only to give it away to terrorists (the Bushehr reactor complex is estimated to have cost \$4-6 billion, and the Iranians are believed to be constructing three to five more nuclear facilities at an estimated cost of \$3.2 billion).

So strip away the veneer of threats and posturing, and the underpinning logic is anything but logical. Unfortunately, this passes for and seems to be accepted as sound foreign policy.

**Charles V. Peña is Senior Fellow at the Independent Institute as well as a senior fellow with the Coalition for a Realistic Foreign Policy.**

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## Saudi Faults Israel/Iran for Arms Race

**Exclusive:** A prominent Saudi leader says his country might have to develop a nuclear bomb if Israel's nuclear arsenal is not dismantled and if Iran is not dissuaded from obtaining nukes, an indication that oil-rich Saudi Arabia sees the WMD threat as coming from Israel as well as Iran, reports Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

Prince Turki bin Faisal, a prominent member of the Saudi royal family, has cited Israel's existing nuclear arsenal as well as Iran's alleged pursuit of an A-bomb as justification for his country's possible development of its own weapons of mass destruction.

Prince Turki, Saudi Arabia's former intelligence chief and ex-ambassador to the United States, warned that the six-nation Gulf Cooperation Council consisting of Saudi Arabia and other Persian Gulf oil states might need WMDs because they could find themselves trapped between two nuclear powers.

"If our efforts and the efforts of the world community fail to bring about the

dismantling of the Israeli arsenal of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons and preventing Iran from acquiring the same, then why shouldn't we at least study seriously all available options, including acquiring WMDs, so that our future generations will not blame us for neglecting any courses of action that will keep looming dangers away from us," he told a GCC conference in Riyadh on Dec. 5.

Prince Turki's comments represent a deviation from the approach by the West and the United Nations to concentrate their attention singlemindedly on Iran's alleged nuclear ambitions while virtually ignoring the fact that Israel possesses a sophisticated nuclear arsenal.

That double standard was underscored when the new leadership of the UN's International Atomic Energy Agency consulted secretly with officials of Israel's nuclear weapons program regarding Iran's alleged progress toward building a nuclear bomb.

As Geoffrey Pyatt, the American chargé in Vienna, Austria, reported in a [July 9, 2009, cable](#), the new IAEA director Yukiya Amano, a Japanese diplomat, not only thanked the United States for masterminding his election but agreed to private meetings with Israeli officials.

Pyatt learned 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," i.e. keeping the pressure on Iran, which insists that its nuclear program is intended for peaceful purposes only.

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.'"

Amano also agreed to private "consultations" with the head of the Israeli Atomic Energy Commission, Pyatt reported. Pyatt's cable was obtained by WikiLeaks and was first reported by the Guardian in the UK. [For details, see Consortiumnews.com's ["Slanting the Case on Iran's Nukes."](#)]

Then, last month, Amano reportedly relied on allegations obtained, in part, from Israel for a surprisingly harsh denunciation of Iran regarding its alleged nuclear-bomb progress. Widely trumpeted in the Western press, the IAEA report has spurred new tensions between Iran and Israel's allies in Europe and the United States.

Yet, even as the U.S. and Europe ratchet up economic sanctions against Iran

while leaving open the option of a military strike the West continues to ignore the existence of Israel's nuclear arsenal and has placed no demands on Israel to even acknowledge it, let alone dismantle it.

Though Prince Turki's remarks received only minor notice in the U.S. press the New York Times ran a brief Associated Press story at the bottom of page A9 on Wednesday the AP story contained an unusual recognition that "most defense analysts believe that Israel has nuclear weapons, but it has refused to confirm or deny their existence."

The prospect of a WMD program by the Gulf Cooperation Council countries received more attention in some of the energy trade press. For instance, Oilprice.com writer John C.K. Daly reported that Prince Turki's "idea of supporting Gulf countries acquiring weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) if Israel and Iran do not constrain their nuclear programs represents the edge of a precipitously slippery slope."

Daly added, "Turki's comments should not be dismissed lightly. Given his long term position at the very epicenter of Saudi power and his previous positions on Iran [favoring negotiations between Washington and Tehran], bin Turki's change of attitude is significant.

"Reading the Riyadh tea leaves, bin Turki has established an explicit link between Iran's purported nuclear armaments program and Israel's de facto one. Given that this connection has been advanced by one of Washington's closet Middle East allies and the world's leading exporter of oil, expect the Obama administration to pay close attention, even as it sends out for gallons of Maalox."

The possibility that Israel's actual nuclear program as well as Iran's speculative one is spurring a nuclear arms race in the Middle East also should be unsettling to U.S. policymakers for another reason: the hard-line Sunni Muslims who rule Saudi Arabia have had ambiguous associations with senior al-Qaeda leaders, who recruited mostly Saudis for the 9/11 terrorist attacks.

While Prince Turki was head of Saudi intelligence, he personally met five times with al-Qaeda founder Osama bin Laden, who was himself a Saudi. Prince Turki's known contacts with bin Laden dealt mostly with their collaboration in the 1980s regarding the CIA-backed war against Soviet forces in Afghanistan. Their last meeting reportedly was in early 1990.

Even though Prince Turki and other Saudi leaders broke with bin Laden when he began urging terror attacks on American targets, the precise relationship between some Saudi officials and al-Qaeda remained unclear – and the prospect of

Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states possessing nuclear bombs would represent another possible avenue for terrorists to gain control of a devastating weapon.

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

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

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