



THE IRAN “THREAT” IN A KAFKAESQUE WORLD

EDWARD S. HERMAN AND DAVID PETERSON

From June 2003 to August 2012, the International Atomic Energy Agency published thirty-eight full written reports on Iran’s nuclear program and conducted numerous inspections in the country. Yet although the Agency has never determined that Iran is pursuing nuclear weapons, Iran has never been able to free itself from the relentless U.S. campaign against its nuclear program. This article shows how the United States has mobilized the multilateral institutions to place Iran’s nuclear program on the international stage and kept it there. It also examines the parallel role played by the news media, which have resumed their role of a decade ago when they helped Washington make a fraudulent case for invading Iraq on “weapons of mass destruction” grounds. The essay contends that the alleged Iranian nuclear weapons threat is a U.S. and Israeli propaganda construct intended to mask their own real threat to attack Iran.

ONCE THE UNITED STATES AND BRITAIN had dealt a deathblow to Saddam Hussein’s Iraq in spring 2003, the last remaining major challenge to the spread and deepening of U.S.-led Western hegemony in the Middle East was the Islamic Republic of Iran. Indeed, it has been Iran’s independence for the past thirty-three years that makes it a “threat” in the sense in which U.S. and Israeli policymakers use the term. And it is U.S. power that has made the “international community,” including multilateral institutions like the United Nations and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), conform to and advance U.S. policy goals by taking this “threat” seriously and mobilizing to police and punish Iran.

Not only have the United States and Israel threatened Iran with military attack in violation of the UN Charter’s prohibition that “All Members shall refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force” (Article 2.4), they have been carrying out actual military and terrorist

EDWARD S. HERMAN is professor emeritus of finance at the Wharton School, University of Pennsylvania, and has written extensively on economics, political economy, and the media. Among his books are *Corporate Control*, *Corporate Power* (Cambridge University Press, 1981), *The Real Terror Network* (South End Press, 1982), and, with Noam Chomsky, *The Political Economy of Human Rights* (South End Press, 1979) and *Manufacturing Consent* (Pantheon, 2002). **DAVID PETERSON** is an independent journalist and researcher based in Chicago. Together they are the co-authors of *The Politics of Genocide* (Monthly Review Press, 2nd ed., 2011).

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actions against Iran (direct and indirect) for years,¹ not to mention flooding Iran and Western capitals with anti-regime propaganda. And just as the United States used the UN Security Council (UNSC) to wage a harsh economic war on Iraq for thirteen years prior to the 2003 invasion,² so has it used the UNSC to impose sanctions on Iran since 2006. This economic war, coupled with the total embargo on Iranian oil by the United States and European Union since summer 2012, has imposed an increasingly heavy toll on Iran's civilian population.³

Yet, even as U.S. and Israeli threats to Iran are far into the implementation stage, the Iranian threat to these two nuclear weapons states is far from evident. Iran possesses no nuclear weapons and is subject to an inspections regime and other forms of surveillance that make its nuclear program the most closely monitored in the world. The charge that it is pursuing nuclear weapons has never been confirmed by the IAEA, and Iran has long contended that it is simply exercising its "inalienable right" under Article IV of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) to use "nuclear energy for peaceful purposes" and "without discrimination."⁴ Iran has never threatened to attack either the United States or Israel except in retaliation for an attack by them on its national territory, notwithstanding Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's sometimes ill-considered pronouncements.⁵ More importantly, even if Iran did acquire nuclear weapons it could not realistically be the first to use them without committing national suicide. From the U.S. and Israeli perspectives, certainly, Iran's possession of nuclear weapons would increase its deterrent capabilities and constrain both Israel's and the United States' ability to use their vastly superior conventional forces in the Middle East. At the same time, an alleged Iran nuclear weapons "threat" also provides the two countries with a rationale for pursuing regime-change against that country. We return to each of these matters below.

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THE IRAQ PRECEDENT AND DOUBLE STANDARDS

The current advance towards war on Iran dates back to 2002, a year that opened with George W. Bush labeling Iraq, Iran, and North Korea the "axis of evil, arming to threaten the peace of the world."⁶ That summer, already hot on the trail of the non-existent Iraqi weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and proclaiming a new national security doctrine whereby the United States arrogated to itself the right to take "preemptive action" against states that threaten "us, our allies, and our friends with weapons of mass destruction,"⁷ the White House began issuing presidential statements about U.S. opposition to the "unelected people who are the real rulers of Iran."⁸ This stance, remarkably hypocritical

in light of past U.S. support of the Shah and its ongoing support of other regional dictatorships, was assailed by Iran's democratically-elected reformist President Mohamed Khatami as "war-mongering" and "open interference" in Iran's affairs.⁹

In 2002, however, the United States and Britain were far more focused on pressing for ever-more onerous inspections of Iraq's alleged WMD program, always claiming that they weren't sufficiently thorough given the serious threat to international peace and security they posed. When the weapons inspectors of the United Nations Monitoring, Verification and Inspection Commission (UNMOVIC) had found nothing by late 2002 despite the most intrusive inspections-regime in history,¹⁰ and when a majority of the fifteen-member UNSC in early 2003 had made clear that they would not provide a yes-vote authorizing force,¹¹ the United States and Britain simply bypassed the Council and attacked Iraq anyway, launching the war on 20 March 2003.

The end of the war's "official" phase on 1 May 2003, when Bush delivered his "Mission Accomplished" speech on the deck of the U.S. aircraft carrier *Abrabam Lincoln*, allowed the United States to turn its attention to the alleged threat posed by Iran's nuclear program.¹² The U.S. media, which had not yet even begun to apologize for their gullibility in disseminating their government's pre-invasion lies about Iraqi WMD,¹³ quickly resumed their role as uncritical conduit for the U.S.-driven construction of the nuclear *weapons* threat, this time Iran's. Similarly, the UN leadership, unchastened by its collaboration in the Iraq war despite having been lied to, also resumed its earlier service. Indeed, one of the most interesting features of the Iraq experience was how the UN had been used to prepare the ground for the already-decided invasion and occupation. The UNSC in particular, despite its reluctance to authorize the use of force, not only failed to condemn the aggression when it was launched, but subsequently ratified this gross violation of the UN Charter by granting the United States occupation rights.¹⁴ Nor did the subsequent deaths of hundreds of thousands of Iraqis and the creation of at least four million refugees in any way hinder the U.S. ability to resort to the UN in the succeeding years, as evidenced by its compliance with the U.S. agenda on Iran.

Besides the UN precedent, another feature of the U.S. aggression process against Iran is the use of double standards on questions pertaining to nuclear programs, whether *civilian* or *military*: One standard for the U.S. target (currently Iran), another for the United States and any country whose nuclear weapons have U.S. approval (Israel, India, and Pakistan). These double standards are so deeply embedded within the international system that they can be applied almost unnoticed. From 1953 to 1979, when the Shah dictatorship was in power, the United States encouraged Iran to develop its civilian nuclear energy technology and entered into three-way agreements with the IAEA to ship fissionable material there.¹⁵

In the heyday of the Shah’s program in the mid-1970s, the announced goal was “23,000 megawatts from nuclear power stations”—roughly the same goal with double the population pursued by Iran today.¹⁶ In 2005, when Henry Kissinger was asked by the *Washington Post* to explain the policy differences compared to when he was secretary of state, he simply said: “They were an allied country, and this was a commercial transaction. We didn’t address the question of them one day moving toward nuclear weapons.”¹⁷ Such frank (and inconvenient) admissions of the thorough politicization of Iran’s treatment are rare.

Once the Shah was ousted by the Islamic Revolution, Iran instantly became a U.S. target. So did its longstanding plans to develop nuclear energy, with U.S. pressure now forcing contractors in other countries to cancel projects on various pretexts. Ever since, whenever a foreign government has negotiated with Iran to restart one or more of the nuclear energy projects left unfinished when the Shah departed, or to start new projects, the United States has objected that such aid would speed Iran’s development of nuclear weapons, enable Iran to threaten its neighbors, and undermine both the global non-proliferation regime and the fight against international terrorism. Thus, when Russia and China agreed in 1995 to build several nuclear power plants in Iran, China rescinded its plans under U.S. pressure.¹⁸ Yet, U.S. aid to India and Pakistan continued without significant interruption after May 1998, when first India and then Pakistan detonated nuclear weapons and declared themselves nuclear powers outside the NPT.¹⁹ Indeed, from 2005 to 2008, Washington and New Delhi negotiated an agreement whereby the United States would continue to supply India with nuclear technology, as well as fissionable material, with no demand that India join the NPT or open itself to inspections.²⁰

In an even more extreme application of the double standard, U.S. ally and client Israel had from the start received active assistance developing its nuclear capability, and with the help of the United States, France, and Germany, it has built up a substantial arsenal since. This includes some 150–250 nuclear warheads (the exact number is unknown) plus delivery systems by land, sea, air, and ballistic missile. And throughout more than forty years of such unparalleled help, Israel refused to sign the NPT and subject itself to IAEA inspections and was never pressed to do so. A secret agreement was even struck between U.S. President Richard Nixon and Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir in 1969 under which the United States agreed to accept—and remain silent about—Israel’s nuclear weapons program. This agreement, often referred to as the “U.S.-Israeli nuclear understanding,”²¹ was reaffirmed by U.S. President Barack Obama and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in May 2009. Netanyahu boasted about it in September that same year after the UN General Assembly (UNGA) summit, telling Israel’s Channel 2 television station that at his meeting with Obama in May, he “asked to receive from

him an itemized list of the strategic understandings that have existed for many years between Israel and the United States on that issue.” Obama had obliged. In effect, “The president gave Israel an NPT treaty get out of jail free card,” one Senate staffer told the *Washington Times*.²²

So thoroughly built-in is this double standard that when the IAEA’s General Conference in Vienna in September 2009 voted forty-nine to forty-five to adopt a binding resolution that “calls upon Israel to accede to the NPT and place all its nuclear facilities under comprehensive IAEA safeguards”²³—in other words, that Israel’s nuclear *weapons* program was to be treated the same as Iran’s *civilian* nuclear program—the English-language media observed near total silence about the event. The only major newspaper that reported it was the next-day’s *Irish Times*,²⁴ and nothing showed up in any major U.S. print media.

Similarly unmentioned is the fact that the United States is itself in violation of the NPT (as is every member of the Founding Five states—the United States, Russia, Britain, France, and China—that tested a nuclear weapon prior to 1 January 1967). Article VI of the NPT requires that all parties to the treaty “pursue negotiations in good faith on effective measures relating to the cessation of the nuclear arms race at an early date and to nuclear disarmament, and on a treaty on general and complete disarmament under strict and effective international control.” But the Founding Five have not done this. The United States has openly striven to upgrade its nuclear weapons to make their use more practicable in conventional warfare settings,²⁵ and both the United States and NATO have publicly declared the importance that the Alliance attaches to a “credible” nuclear posture “to preserve peace and prevent coercion and any kind of war.”²⁶ Nevertheless, in a Kafkaesque moment, UNSC Resolution 1887, adopted with much fanfare during the opening week of the UNGA’s 2009 session in September, called upon the “Parties to the NPT” to live up to the treaty’s “nuclear arms reduction and disarmament” demands.²⁷ Indicative of the depth of the institutionalized reality-denial was the fact that the rampant violations and double standards in no way tempered the indignation of the United States and its allies concerning Iran’s alleged NPT violations.

THE UN AS A TOOL OF THE U.S. AGGRESSION PROCESS

Power rules the international system, and its multilateral institutions embody this principle. The rule of power has made the United States (and client-state Israel) exempt from the UN Charter’s prohibition of outright aggression, which the Nuremberg Final Judgment called the “supreme international crime.” It is true that Secretary-General Kofi Annan on more than one occasion pointed out that the 2003 invasion of Iraq by the United States and Britain was “not in conformity with the Charter,”²⁸ in the milquetoast phrase he preferred to the more accurate

"illegal" when dealing with U.S. crimes, but he didn't suggest that the UN should do anything about it. Indeed, in his first official statement after the start of the war, Annan noted regretfully that "if we had persevered a little longer, Iraq could yet have been disarmed peacefully,"²⁹ thus repeating the false propaganda line used by the United States and Britain to launch their war in the first place. In fact, Iraq had already carried out a unilateral crash-dismantlement of its nuclear weapons program as early as the second half of 1991,³⁰ so Iraq did not need to be "disarmed."

If Kofi Annan was always very accommodating to U.S. demands, his successor, Ban Ki-moon, is even more so. Not only has Ban failed to utter a word in objection to U.S. and Israeli threats to attack Iran, but despite the Nuremberg-defined "supreme international crimes" committed by the United States against Afghanistan and Iraq during the past decade, he has gone out of his way to claim that the "UN and the U.S. have a shared objective of promoting human rights, democracy and freedom and peace and security," and to call for "a strong partnership between the United Nations and the United States."³¹ Like his predecessor, Ban knows who is Boss. Speaking before the 16th Summit of the Non-Aligned Movement in Tehran in late August 2012, Ban chastised Iran's president for allegedly "deny[ing] historical facts, such as the Holocaust," and chastised the Islamic regime for "[c]laiming that another United Nations Member State, Israel, does not have the right to exist."³² He also "urge[d] Iran to take the necessary measures to build international confidence in the exclusively peaceful nature of its nuclear program."³³ He thus placed his stamp on the trifecta of U.S.-Israeli allegations against Iran, while saying nothing about the myriad U.S. and Israeli threats and actions affecting the daily lives of Iranians.

As indicated above, the UNSC is again performing with regard to Iran the role it played on behalf of U.S. interests in Iraq back in 2002–2003, the parallels being sufficiently clear to make enumeration unnecessary. Going along with the various allegations, pressures, and demands targeting Iran today feeds into the U.S. agenda, just as it did a decade ago on Iraq.

The mere existence of an IAEA inspections program focused on Iran, and the fact that it has been dragged out for ten years, has enabled the United States to create the impression that Iran really does pose a grave threat. It also allows the United States to divert attention from the real threats that it poses itself, including its own contribution to the spread of nuclear weapons by its refusal to live up to its own disarmament obligations and its acquiescence in the nuclear weapons programs of Israel, India, and Pakistan outside the NPT. Far from enhancing world peace, the WMD inspection regime as implemented has provided the United States with platforms for disseminating false, tendentious, and selective allegations against both Iraq and Iran since early 2002.

Tasked with monitoring Iran's nuclear program, the IAEA faces the same impossible situation as Hans Blix's UNMOVIC faced when called upon to refute U.S.-British charges of Iraq's violations of its disarmament obligations under UNSC resolutions dating back to April 1991.³⁴ Thus, no matter how many times IAEA inspectors "verify the non-diversion of declared nuclear material at the nuclear facilities . . . declared by Iran under its Safeguards Agreement," no amount of inspections, however intense, will ever be able to refute the Alice-in-Wonderland allegation that the IAEA still cannot "provide credible assurance about the absence of undeclared nuclear material and activities in Iran."³⁵ Given the impossibility of proving a negative, the IAEA, inevitably, is incapable of proving conclusively that Iran is not pursuing nuclear weapons. Once the IAEA became more directly involved in the Iranian program mid-2003, the WMD inspections process quickly took on an institutional life of its own. Between 6 June 2003 and 30 August 2012, the IAEA devoted thirty-eight written reports to Iran's nuclear program and passed twelve resolutions on the issue through September 2012. After the United States convinced the IAEA's Board to transfer Iran's nuclear file to the UNSC (which it did via its resolution of 4 February 2006³⁶), the Council itself added its own Presidential Statement and six resolutions to the dossier.³⁷ The intensity of the IAEA's focus on Iran was revealed in an IAEA document leaked in August 2012 concerning its plan to form a "special Iran Task Force of nuclear weapons experts, intelligence analysts and other specialists." According to the Associated Press (AP), "Creating a unit focused on only one country is an unusual move for the IAEA, reflecting the urgency the U.N. nuclear watchdog is attaching to Iran."³⁸

Equally striking is the company that Iran has kept at the IAEA over the past ten years, during which the Agency also devoted written reports to Syria (twelve), North Korea (eleven), Libya (five), Iraq (four), South Korea (three), and Egypt (one), and adopted resolutions concerning North Korea (ten), Libya (two), and Syria (one). This selectivity reinforces what was already apparent, namely that the IAEA's most consequential role has become a strictly political one: The harassment of those non-nuclear-weapon NPT signatories targeted with destabilization and regime-change by the United States, Britain, and France (almost exclusively Iran, North Korea, Libya, and Syria), while ignoring the Founding Five and the three rogues (Israel, India, and Pakistan).

A change in the IAEA leadership has also served the U.S. agenda with regard to Iran. Mohamed ElBaradei, who stepped down as director-general of the agency in November 2009, was a relatively independent figure who drew cautious conclusions and challenged U.S. war-party interpretations of IAEA findings; in 2005, Washington even tried unsuccessfully to block his reappointment to a third term, arguing that he was "too soft" on Iran.³⁹ ElBaradei expressed regret that Israel, India, and Pakistan had become nuclear weapon states outside the NPT and beyond the IAEA's jurisdiction, refused to declare that Iran's nuclear

program had military “ambitions,” and sometimes contradicted Western claims regarding Iran’s alleged misbehavior. Even so, as IAEA director he was obligated to focus on Iran with a stream of inspections and reports, and—like Hans Blix as head of UNMOVIC in Iraq—he could not avoid contributing to Washington’s anti-Iran campaign.⁴⁰

After ElBaradei announced that he would not seek a fourth term, the United States won a four-month battle with the Third World members on the IAEA’s Board to defeat their candidate, Abdul Samad Minty, South Africa’s ambassador to the IAEA and an advocate for developing countries’ rights to peaceful uses of nuclear energy under the NPT, as well as for nuclear disarmament.⁴¹ In contrast, Yukiya Amano, the victorious U.S. candidate, argued that the IAEA should focus on non-proliferation issues above all else and leave disarmament issues to other organizations. The final vote on 2 July 2009 split down North-South lines.⁴² A good indication of Amano’s thinking can be gleaned from former U.S. ambassador to the UN John Bolton’s comment that he would “reduce the politicization of the IAEA.”⁴³

A U.S. diplomatic cable from October 2009 published by WikiLeaks revealed that the U.S. ambassador to the IAEA in Vienna found that “In several meetings with [U.S. government] officials . . . Amano displayed remarkable congruence of views with us on conducting the Agency’s missions.” Amano “thanked the U.S. for having supported his candidacy and took pains to emphasize his support for U.S. strategic objectives for the Agency,” stating that “he was solidly in the U.S. court on every key strategic decision, from high-level personnel appointments to the handling of Iran’s alleged nuclear weapons program.”⁴⁴ Since being elected, Amano has embraced the wilder side of the allegations directed at Iran, as in November 2011 when the IAEA, under his leadership, published (as an annex to its thirty-fifth report) the notorious “Possible Military Dimensions to Iran’s Nuclear Weapons,” a document long withheld by ElBaradei on grounds that it had been stitched together from the self-interested charges of states that regard Iran as their enemy.⁴⁵ Amano’s aides have also been accused of sharing information about Iran with members of the U.S. Congress, as well as U.S. diplomats at the IAEA.⁴⁶ Like Ban Ki-moon at the UN, Amano is a perfect choice for ensuring IAEA cooperation in the U.S. aggression program. And as with Ban, his service on behalf of the U.S. drive towards war with Iran is exemplary, and treated by the mainstream media as justice in action.

THE MEDIA AS CHEERLEADERS FOR U.S. AGGRESSION

The global power-asymmetries and biases that are built into the relevant multilateral institutions are reflected even more clearly by the mainstream media. In fact, it is the feedback-dynamic that exists between the two that has enabled the United States to foster and then

sustain the sense of “crisis” around Iran’s nuclear program. The table below quantifies the degree of focus accorded to the nuclear programs of ten different countries, including Iran, by a broad sample of mainstream English-language wire services and newspapers (taken together) and by the *New York Times* (alone) over a ten-year period (2002–2012). Specifically, the table shows the total number of items (e.g., articles, reports, op-eds) during the period covered that focused on the nuclear program of *each* of the ten countries individually, without mention of the other nine.

Table: Differential Media Focus on Ten Nuclear Programs, 1 July 2002–30 June 2012⁴⁷

Country	English-Language Wires Services and Newspapers (Total number of items)	<i>New York Times</i> (Total number of items)
Egypt	603	6
India	9,902	23
Iran	79,058	527
Iraq	19,686	283
Israel	900	5
Libya	15,471	19
North Korea	603	45
Pakistan	1,804	9
South Korea	2,065	1
Syria	452	5

These numbers correlate closely with U.S. political priorities, showing that when the United States declares a country’s nuclear program to be a problem, the media also treat it as a problem, covering it heavily, whether or not that country’s nuclear program has a military dimension or the country poses a credible threat of initiating a war. Thus, Israel possesses nuclear weapons, regularly threatens to attack Iran, and has as recently as 2006 and 2008 carried out wars in the region, whereas Iran possesses no nuclear weapons and has not attacked or publicly threatened to attack another country.⁴⁸ Yet, the volume of media attention devoted to Iran’s nuclear program over the ten-year period was 88 times greater than that devoted exclusively to Israel’s (and 105 times greater in the *New York Times* alone). Iraq and Libya also possessed no nuclear weapons, but both countries far outranked Israel in the volume of media attention devoted to their nuclear programs. These numbers display media bias at the outer limits, and this bias is very closely aligned with U.S. policy.

But the table still understates the true contrast in the intensity of coverage. Taking the *New York Times* as a proxy for the English-language media in general, over the ten-year period the *Times* published 3,000–4,000 items mentioning Iran’s nuclear program, many focused exclusively on that topic.⁴⁹ It also published 231 editorials dealing with Iran and its nuclear program.⁵⁰ During the first three months of 2006 (i.e., the year that Iran’s nuclear program was taken up by the UNSC), there were only seven days that the *Times* failed to mention the program in some manner on its pages; for the entire month of January, the *Times* mentioned the program every day but one. During the ten years, the *Times* also reported on and/or editorialized about every one of the IAEA’s thirty-eight written reports on the program, all twelve of the IAEA’s resolutions, all six of the UNSC resolutions, and its one Presidential Statement. In baseball lingo, with 57 for 57, the *Times* batted a perfect 1000 on this topic so well-fitted to official U.S. policy and the newspaper’s own biases.

Intensity of focus is a key ingredient of a propaganda campaign, as it alerts the public to the great importance of the issues involved, and shows that the policies being pursued by the government are justified and urgent. In this case, this huge flow of articles and the complementary editorial barrage reveal other characteristics of a propaganda campaign as well. First, the demonization of Iran’s leadership, repeatedly depicted as dishonest, secretive, harboring malign intentions towards Israel, the United States, and its neighbors, maintaining links with terrorists, and so on. Iran’s government is “illegitimate,”⁵¹ its nuclear program “illicit.”⁵² The cover of the 14 May 2005 issue of the *Economist* features Grand Ayatollah Ali Khamenei smiling contentedly down at the mushroom cloud rising from the palm of his hand under the boldfaced heading “Return of the axis of evil.”⁵³ While Ahmadinejad’s reckless and provocative statements have provided a useful target for anti-Iranian propaganda, the vitriolic Western attacks on the Iranian leadership were well-advanced before he was elected president in 2005.

The *Times*, both in its news articles and editorials, hints—and quite often explicitly states—that Iran’s leaders plan to build nuclear weapons and are not just trying to exercise their NPT rights to develop nuclear energy for peaceful purposes. Just five days before the 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq, the *Times* editorialized that Iran was even closer to achieving nuclear weapons than was Iraq, and that Iran “has a plant capable of enriching natural uranium into bomb fuel”⁵⁴—a feat that Iran has not achieved to this day, nearly ten years later. Similarly, when Iran finally terminated the voluntary suspension of uranium enrichment it had observed from late 2003 through early 2006, the *Times* charged that “Iran defied the international community and

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started spinning centrifuges.” This theme of “defiance”—of Iran “thumbing its nose at Security Council resolutions”⁵⁵—has remained a staple of *Times* editorializing ever since.⁵⁶

Reporters and editors pounce on every hint and rumor that Iran has not been entirely forthcoming about its program. So eager are they to find “smoking guns” that they commit errors. Thus, in February 2010, the *Times* published an article by David E. Sanger and William J. Broad entitled “Inspectors Say Iran Worked on Warhead.” Basing themselves on the first IAEA report on Iran of the new Amano era,⁵⁷ the authors wrote that the IAEA “had extensive evidence of ‘past or current undisclosed activities’ by Iran’s military to develop a nuclear warhead,” and that “Iran’s weapons-related activity apparently continued ‘beyond 2004,’ contradicting an American intelligence assessment published [in late 2007] that concluded that work on a bomb was suspended at the end of 2003.”⁵⁸ None of these allegations was substantiated by the content of the IAEA report. Nowhere did the IAEA state anything like “Iran worked on warhead”—the *Times*’s headline and one of Sanger and Broad’s main contentions. Nor did the IAEA claim anything definitive like “Iran’s weapons-related activity . . . continued ‘beyond 2004,’” only that it wanted to discuss this among other issues with Iran.⁵⁹ The article went so far as to predict that the report would “accelerate Iran’s confrontation with the United States and other Western countries.”⁶⁰

Equally important in propaganda is the structure of the premises and the distorted context. The unstated official and media premises in this case are that the United States and Israel are good and have the right to possess nuclear weapons and strive for their own “security,” whereas Iran is evil and therefore forfeits such rights. This rests in good part on the automatic demonization of Iran and the assumption that the United States is valiantly trying to contain the demon. Thus, the *Times* sternly editorializes on Iran’s contempt for international law (e.g., “it would be a violation of international law for Iran to build nuclear weapons;”⁶¹ “Tehran’s latest threat to block global oil shipping should leave no doubt about its recklessness and its contempt for international law”⁶²), while ignoring the multiple and gross U.S. violations of the UN Charter, its obligations as an NPT signatory, its facilitation of Israel’s ongoing violations of the Fourth Geneva Convention, and so on. Similarly essential is the propaganda premise that the supposedly “multilateral” institutions are truly neutral and dispense justice, which allows the media to close their eyes to the serious politicization of the Iranian nuclear issue. But the IAEA, like UNSCOM and UNMOVIC in Iraq before it, has been subject to compelling pressure and influence by the United States and its allies, rendering any assumption of neutrality unwarranted.

A last important point of context here concerns the real versus the official reason for keeping Iran’s nuclear program on the agenda of the “international community” since 2003, sustaining anxieties through

ceaseless allegations of secret nuclear weapons development and other misdeeds, while carrying out the very concrete actions of ruthless economic warfare against its people, assassinations, cyber warfare, and other forms of aggression,⁶³ and openly threatening military assault through repeated emphasis on "all options on the table." Yet, Iran is deemed not to have a legitimate security problem or the right to self-defense. In this context, the noted Israeli military historian and strategist Martin van Creveld stated in 2004 that, with U.S. forces encircling Iran, "Had the Iranians not tried to build nuclear weapons, they would be crazy."⁶⁴

There is no doubt that the longstanding U.S. objective towards the Islamic Republic is to bring about regime change and its replacement by a more compliant puppet-regime. Like the propaganda role that the apocryphal Iraqi WMDs played in the U.S. campaign of regime change there, so has the existence of an Iranian nuclear program made possible a WMD-type pretext for destabilizing and perhaps militarily attacking Iran to achieve that end.

Indeed, the equally longstanding U.S. refusal to negotiate with Iran over both its nuclear program and regional security matters dates back to the first half of 2003 if not earlier, and reveals U.S. objectives quite clearly. As a WMD-type pretext for destabilizing and perhaps one day militarily attacking Iran, the existence of Iran's nuclear program has been a propaganda boon for the United States, and one that it does not want to end peacefully. For this reason, the United States simply will not permit a negotiated solution to the Iranian nuclear question, but will keep it a burning and unresolved issue, sabotaging any and every proposed settlement plan.⁶⁵ It will sometimes hold talks with Iran, though most often through proxies or in the context of the P5-Plus 1 mechanism.⁶⁶ But contrary to popular misperceptions, and theatrics aside, the U.S. position has progressively hardened over the years, while the trajectory of the sanctions has climbed steadily upwards. Whether under Bush or Obama, the unchanging U.S. policy remains that Iran must be prevented from engaging in any uranium enrichment activities within its borders, thus denying Iran its rights under Article IV of the NPT.

The propaganda campaign built around Iran's nuclear threat, therefore, is essentially strategic. The former head of the Israeli National Security Council, General Giora Eiland, dismisses the likelihood of an Iranian attack on his country. Rejecting Netanyahu's rhetoric about a nuclear-armed Iran constituting an "existential threat" to Israel, Eiland speaks instead of the "worsening of Israel's strategic position in regard to conventional warfare"—that is, the deterrent effect that Iranian nukes would have on Israel's ability to use military force beyond its borders. He further mentions the "message that will reverberate" from Indonesia to Morocco: that "Islamic determination has triumphed," and that "victory over the West is possible."⁶⁷

Thus, the eventuality of an Iran with nuclear weapons would “destabilize” the entire region in the Kafkaesque sense of reducing Israel’s freedom to make war. The conclusion seems to be that the United States and Israel must attack Iran today, before it acquires the means to deter such an attack and, by virtue of possessing nuclear weapons, enters into the dreaded “zone of immunity” that Israeli policymakers have long feared.

THE REAL THREAT—TO IRAN, AND THE WORLD

“[T]hough I am accused of something, I cannot recall the slightest offense that might be charged against me. But that even is of minor importance. The real question is, who accuses me? What authority is conducting these proceedings?”—Franz Kafka

When the IAEA’s Board first “call[ed] on Iran to suspend all further uranium enrichment-related activities” in its resolution of September 2003, “pending provision by the Director General of the assurances required by Member States,”⁶⁸ the fix was on, and Iran knew it. The head of Iran’s Atomic Energy Organization, Gholam-Reza Aghazadeh, called the resolution “extreme unilateralism posed under a multilateralist cloak,”⁶⁹ while Ali Akbar Salehi, Iran’s ambassador to the IAEA, called it a “prescription . . . designed for not being filled,” for “fabricating a hasty ruling of non-compliance,” and for an “express ticket to the Security Council.”⁷⁰

The more than nine years since have done nothing to refute these judgments. Given that the ultimate U.S. objective since 1979 has been the Islamic Republic’s removal from power, nothing that Iran’s clerical regime could do with its nuclear program would make a difference. As long as the regime survives, Iran will always be found “noncompliant” and face new allegations, sanctions, and threats; and the IAEA will regularly plead that it is “not in a position to provide credible assurance about the absence of undeclared nuclear material activities in Iran,” in the terminology so dear to the “all options are on the table” consensus.

In July 2012, U.S. National Security Adviser Thomas Donilon secretly briefed Netanyahu in Jerusalem “to make clear that the United States is seriously preparing for the possibility that negotiations [with Iran] will reach a dead end and military action will become necessary.” According to one American official, “Donilon shared information on U.S. weaponry and military capabilities for dealing with Iran’s nuclear facilities, including those deep underground”⁷¹—clearly an allusion to the nuclear-warhead-tipped B61-11 earth-penetrating “bunkerbusters.”⁷²

The same day that the Donilon-briefing was leaked to *Ha’Aretz*, U.S. Republican presidential candidate Mitt Romney delivered a speech in Jerusalem’s Old City. “We have a solemn duty and a moral imperative to deny Iran’s leaders the means to follow through on their malevolent intentions,” Romney told his Israeli hosts—and the entourage of rich U.S.

backers who accompanied him to Israel. “In the final analysis, of course, no option should be excluded. We recognize Israel’s right to defend itself, and that it is right for America to stand with you.”⁷³ Of course, if the real threat for Israel is the curtailment of its freedom to remove Palestinians from the occupied territories and to commit aggression against other regional states, then what “Israel’s right to defend itself” really means is the right to dispossess and conquer—and to not have to face a serious military rival in its neighborhood. But we are dealing with Kafkaesque politics here, not moral universes or even reality.

Addressing the opening of the 67th Session of the UN General Assembly in late September 2012, Netanyahu held-up a simple diagram of a time-bomb with a burning fuse. “The relevant question is not when Iran will get the bomb,” he said. “The relevant question is at what stage can we no longer stop Iran from getting the bomb. The red line must be drawn on Iran’s nuclear enrichment program because these enrichment facilities are the only nuclear installations that we can definitely see and credibly target.”⁷⁴ Netanyahu’s words in New York that day echoed a line, barely remembered, he had pushed ten years earlier in a commentary titled “The Case for Toppling Saddam” published in the *Wall Street Journal*. Namely: “The longer America waits, the more dangerous he becomes.”⁷⁵

But even at its most severe,⁷⁶ the IAEA has never claimed that Iran is trying to develop nuclear *weapons*. The last major U.S. National Intelligence Assessment of Iran’s “Nuclear Intentions and Capabilities” in November 2007 concluded with “high confidence that in fall 2003, Tehran halted its nuclear weapons program”⁷⁷—which prompted George W. Bush’s regretful comment that these “eye-popping” words “tied my hands on the military side. . . . [H]ow 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?”⁷⁸

As was reported to the IAEA no later than in August 2005, the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Ayatollah Khamenei, “has issued the Fatwa that the production, stockpiling and use of nuclear weapons are forbidden under Islam and that the Islamic Republic of Iran shall never acquire these weapons”⁷⁹—a prohibition that dates back at least to 1995.⁸⁰ Khamenei reiterated his prohibition in April 2010: “We consider the use of such weapons as *haram* (religiously forbidden) and believe that it is everyone’s duty to make efforts to secure humanity against this great disaster.”⁸¹ And again, before the 16th Summit of the Non-Aligned Movement held in Tehran in August 2012, “I stress that the Islamic Republic has never been after nuclear weapons. . . . Our motto is: ‘Nuclear energy for all and nuclear weapons for none.’”⁸²

If the real threat for Israel is curtailing its freedom to remove Palestinians from the occupied territories, then what “Israel’s right to self-defense” really means is the right to dispossess.

Of course it is possible that Khamenei's repeated prohibitions are intended to buy time until Iran's nuclear program is sufficiently advanced to "break out" from its civilian shell and start producing weapons. But they do represent Iran's public commitments at the very highest level of the clerical regime to join (in dramatic contrast to Israel) the other states in the region in a near-universal international consensus favoring the adoption of an enforceable Nuclear-Weapons-Free Zone in the Middle East.⁸³ Instead of debating and reporting on these matters and trying to assess their truth, the Western political establishment and mainstream media find it easier to suppress them.

There are an estimated forty "latent nuclear states" in the world "that could make bombs but choose not to," and Iran is only one of them.⁸⁴ Yet, it is the mere possibility that Iran could switch its nuclear program from civilian to one with a military dimension that provides the pretext for the increasingly crippling sanctions-regime and a potential U.S.-Israeli attack. The potential for a switch provided the pretext for one "key conclusion" of the 2010 U.S. Nuclear Posture Review, which states that the "United States will not use or threaten to use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear weapons states that are party to the NPT and in compliance with their nuclear non-proliferation obligations"⁸⁵—unambiguously, a first-strike threat directed at Iran and North Korea only. Meanwhile, the United States views the Middle East as a vital military base for projecting power against future adversaries: Not just Iran, but Russia and, above all, China.⁸⁶

* * *

Moments before his extrajudicial murder at the end of *The Trial*, Kafka's protagonist wonders "Where was the judge he'd never seen? Where was the high court he'd never reach?"

K.'s "trial" lasted one year. Without having committed a significant offence, Iran's has lasted ten years, with no end in sight. Iran's chief "tormentors" are two countries that have ignored (Israel) or violated and manipulated (the United States) the NPT and the IAEA on behalf of their own political agenda, with the cooperation of the "international community." Both are beyond the reach of international law. Both possess nuclear weapons. We can only hope that the world awakens from this Kafkaesque nightmare, and puts the real villains on trial or under restraint.

ENDNOTES

1. On the George W. Bush administration's sabotage and terrorist operations inside Iran, see, for instance, Seymour M. Hersh, "The Iran Plans," *New Yorker*, 17 April 2006; Hersh, "The Redirection," *New Yorker*, 5 March 2007; and Hersh, "Preparing the

Battlefield," *New Yorker*, 7 July 2008. On the assassination of scientists whose work was related to Iran's nuclear program, see Roula Khalaf et al., "The Sabotaging of Iran," *Financial Times*, 12 February 2011; Richard Engel and Robert Windrem, "Israel Teams

with Terror Group to Kill Iran's Nuclear Scientists, U.S. officials tell NBC News," NBC News, 9 February 2012; and "Iran to Present 'Victims of Terror' Encyclopedia to UN," FARS News Agency, 29 August 2012.

2. On the human toll of the thirteen-year sanctions regime, see Anthony Arnove, ed., *Iraq Under Siege: The Deadly Impact of Sanctions and War*, rev. ed. (Boston: South End Press, 2002); and Hans C. von Sponeck, *A Different Kind of War: The UN Sanctions Regime in Iraq* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2006). On the systematic bombing campaign waged by U.S. and allied forces to prepare the ground for the 2003 invasion, see David Peterson, "Spikes of Activity," ZNet, 30 January 2009, <http://www.zcommunications.org/znet/viewArticle/20429>; and David Peterson, "British Records on the Prewar Bombing of Iraq," ZNet, 30 January 2009, <http://www.zcommunications.org/znet/viewArticle/20430>.

3. See Annie Lowrey and David E. Sanger, "U.S. Bets on Changing Iran's Tune With New Sanctions Aimed at Lifeblood," *New York Times*, 1 July 2012; Thomas Erdbrink, "Already Feeling Pain, Iran Is Bracing for More Under New Oil Sanctions," *New York Times*, 2 July 2012; and Thomas Erdbrink and Rick Gladstone, "Sanctions Are Toughest Yet for Iranians, Leaders Say," *New York Times*, 4 July 2012. Indicative of the devastating impact of the sanctions (which U.S. State Department spokesperson Victoria Nuland called "the most punishing sanctions we have ever been able to amass as an international community" at her 1 October 2012 Daily Press Briefing), the Iranian Rial plummeted by as much as 80 percent year-over-year by October 2012 against major foreign currencies. See Peter Beaumont, "The currency war on Iran," *The Guardian*, 2 October 2012; "Police in Iran clash with currency protestors," Al Jazeera, 4 October 2012, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2012/10/2012103113527747494.html>; and Finian Cunningham, "U.S., allies wage economic war on Iran," Press TV, 3 October 2012. Also see the 2012 *Iran Sanctions Report* (Public Affairs

Alliance of Iranian Americans, August, 2012), esp. "Comparison Between U.S., U.N. and EU and Allied Country Sanctions," pp. 12–17, <http://www.paaia.org/CMS/Data/Sites/1/PDFs/Iran%20Sanctions%20Report%202012.pdf>.

4. *Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons* (INFCIRC/140), International Atomic Energy Agency, effective March 5 1970, <http://www.iaea.org/Publications/Documents/Infcircs/Others/infcirc140.pdf>.

5. The widespread conviction of actual Iranian threats have been fueled by Ahmadinejad's rhetoric, most notoriously his statement allegedly calling for Israel to be "wiped off the map" at a conference in Tehran in late October 2005. The phrase came from a loose (and thus misleading) translation by an Iranian news agency, but the exact, literal translation reads: "Our dear Imam [Khomeini] said that the occupying regime [Israel] in Jerusalem would disappear from the page of time [*az safeh'i ruz-e gar*] . . . just as the regime of the shah disappeared." The "wiped off the map" version made international headlines, prompting both the Iranian Foreign Ministry and Ahmadinejad himself immediately to protest the misinterpretation, and in a nationally televised sermon in early November 2005, Supreme Iranian leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei insisted that "the Islamic Republic never has threatened and never will threaten any country." See, for instance, Eric Hooglund, "Decoding Ahmadinejad's Rhetoric on Israel," in E. Hooglund and Leif Stenberg, eds., *Navigating Contemporary Iran: Challenging Economic, Social and Political Perceptions* (London: Routledge, 2012), pp. 197–214; Juan Cole, "Hitchens Hacker and Hitchens," *Informed Comment*, 3 May 2006; Jonathan Steele, "Lost in Translation," *The Guardian*, 14 June 2006; and Robert Mackay, "Israeli Minister Agrees Ahmadinejad Never Said Israel 'Must Be Wiped Off the Map,'" *New York Times* Blog—The Lede, 17 April 2012.

6. George W. Bush, State of the Union Address, White House Office of the Press Secretary, 29 January 2002.

7. George W. Bush, Graduation Speech at West Point, White House Office of the Press Secretary, 1 June 2002;

and George W. Bush, *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington, D.C.: President of the United States, September 2002), chapter 5, "Prevent Our Enemies from Threatening Us, Our Allies, and Our Friends with Weapons of Mass Destruction."

8. George W. Bush, Statement on Iran, White House Office of the Press Secretary, 12 July 2002.

9. "Iran: Khatami Says U.S. 'War-Mongers' Threaten World," BBC Monitoring International Reports, 14 July 2002; and Dana Priest, "Iran's Emerging Nuclear Plant Poses Test for U.S.," *Washington Post*, 29 July 2002.

10. UNMOVIC was created by UNSC Resolution 1284 on 17 December 1999. But it was UNSC Resolution 1441 on 8 November 2002 that gave Iraq one "final opportunity to comply with its disarmament obligations" (para. 2); although, as history shows, Iraq already had complied, its WMD programs having been dismantled in the early 1990s (see note 30). Thus, Resolution 1441's assertion in late 2002 that Iraq was in violation of its disarmament obligations (para.1) was a fabrication designed to advance the imminent U.S.-Britain war on Iraq.

11. As France's UN Ambassador Jean-Marc de La Sablière stated upon hearing of the U.S.-British decision to drop their effort to gain Security Council approval: "During the last days members of the Council repeatedly stated that . . . it would not be legitimate to authorize the use of force now while the inspections set up by the resolution are producing results. And now I understand that the [U.S.-British cosponsors of the draft resolution] made some bilateral consultations last night and this morning and the result is that the majority of the Council confirms that they do not want to authorize the use of force." ("UK, US and Spain won't seek vote on draft resolution, may take 'own steps' to disarm Iraq," UN News Center, 17 March 2003.)

12. According to the *New York Times*, in early May 2003, officials from the Bush administration began to express concerns that "Iran has stepped up its covert nuclear program," sought "broad international support for an official finding that Tehran has

violated its commitment not to produce nuclear weapons," and began "pressing nations that sit on the board of the [IAEA] . . . to declare that Iran has violated the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty." (Steven R. Weisman, "New U.S. Concerns on Iran's Pursuit of Nuclear Arms," *New York Times*, 8 May 2003.)

13. See "The Times and Iraq," Editorial, *New York Times*, 26 May 2004.

14. UNSC Resolution 1546 of 8 June 2004, by creating a Multinational Force for Iraq and placing the United States in charge of it, granted retroactive *de jure* legitimacy to the U.S.-Britain war and occupation.

15. See, for instance, the 7 June 1967 *Supply Agreement: Contract for the Transfer of Enriched Uranium and Plutonium for a Research Reactor in Iran* (IAEA INFCIRC/97), and the 6 May 1969 *Agreement Between the International Atomic Energy Agency, the Government of Iran and the Government of the United States of America for the Application of Safeguards* (IAEA INFCIRC/127).

16. See Greg Bruno, "Background: Iran's Nuclear Program," Council on Foreign Relations, 10 March 2010.

17. Dafna Linzer, "Past Arguments Don't Square With Current Iran Policy," *Washington Post*, 27 March 2005.

18. On China, see John M. Goshko, "China Drops Reactor Deal With Iran," *Washington Post*, 28 September 1995; and R. Jeffrey Smith, "China's Pledge to End Iran Nuclear Aid Yields U.S. Help," *Washington Post*, 30 October 1997. Russia maintained its efforts to develop Iran's civilian nuclear energy sector until the adoption of sanctions on Iran's nuclear program by the UNSC in 2006.

19. John F. Burns, "Pakistan, Answering India, Carries Out Nuclear Tests," *New York Times*, 29 May 1998.

20. See Siddharth Varadarajan, "The truth behind the Indo-U.S. nuclear deal," *The Hindu*, 29 July 2005.

21. See Avner Cohen, *Israel and the Bomb* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998); and "Israel Crosses the Threshold," National Security Archive Electronic Briefing Book no. 189, 28 April 2006.

22. Eli Lake, "Obama agrees to keep Israel's nukes secret," *Washington Times*, 2 October 2009.

23. See "Israeli nuclear capabilities" (GC(53)/RES/17), IAEA, 18 September 2009.

24. Mark Weiss, "Israel spurns nuclear watchdog's call to open atomic sites to inspection," *Irish Times*, 19 September 2009.

25. See Matthew Cardinale, "U.S. Nukes Agency Pushes New Bomb Production," Inter Press Service, 30 September 2009. Known within the U.S. Department of Energy as the Complex Modernization Program, it is but "another title to give [the National Nuclear Security Administration] permission to build new bombs," anti-nuclear weapons activist Bobbie Paul observed.

26. See *The Alliance's Strategic Concept*, adopted by the North Atlantic Council in Washington, D.C., 23–24 April 1999, esp. "Characteristics of Nuclear Forces," para. 62–64.

27. UN Security Council Resolution 1887, 24 September 2009, para. 4–5. The resolution also called on all states that are not Parties to the NPT "to accede to the Treaty as non-nuclear weapon States so as to achieve its universality at an early date, and pending their accession to the Treaty, to adhere to its terms."

28. "Excerpts: Annan interview," BBC News, 16 September 2004.

29. Kofi Annan, "Statement by the Secretary-General on Iraq," 20 March 2003.

30. Hussein Kamel, Saddam Hussein's son-in-law and Iraq's top leader in charge of its WMD programs, confirmed these facts to U.S. and UNSCOM intelligence when he defected to Jordan in 1995. See Hans Blix, *Disarming Iraq* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2004), pp. 256–57; also see the declassified CIA assessment, *Misreading Intentions: Iraq's Reaction to Inspections Created Picture of Deception* (Director of Intelligence, Central Intelligence Agency), 6 January 2006, <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/news/20120905/CIA-Iraq.pdf>.

31. Ban Ki-moon, "Secretary-General's press encounter following his meeting at the White House with U.S. president George Bush," 16 January 2007.

32. On the propaganda uses of the phrase "right to exist" in relation to Israel, see David Peterson, "Israel's

Right to Exit," ZBlogs, 3 May 2008, <http://www.zcommunications.org/israels-right-to-exist-by-david-peterson>.

33. UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's remarks to the high-level segment of the sixteenth Non-Aligned Movement Summit in Tehran (SG/SM/14481), 30 August 2012.

34. See Security Council Resolution 687, 8 April 1991, para. 8–14.

35. *Implementation of the NPT Safeguards Agreement and relevant provisions of Security Council resolutions in the Islamic Republic of Iran* (GOV/2012/37), IAEA, 30 August 2012, para. 52.

36. See *Implementation of the NPT Safeguards Agreement in the Islamic Republic of Iran* (GOV/2006/14), IAEA, 4 February 2006, para. 2, 8.

37. Presidential Statement (S/PRST/2006/15, 19 March 2006), and six resolutions: 1696 (31 July 2006), 1737 (23 December 2006), 1747 (24 March 2007), 1803 (3 March 2008), 1835 (27 September 2008), and 1929 (9 June 2010).

38. George Jahn, "IAEA establishes Iran Task Force," Associated Press, 29 August 2012.

39. See, for instance, Steven R. Weisman, "U.S. Presses for New Director of the U.N.'s Atomic Agency," *New York Times*, 14 December 2004.

40. See Mohamed ElBaradei, *The Age of Deception: Nuclear Diplomacy in Treacherous Times* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2011), esp. pp. 112–47, 191–213, and 241–313. It's worth noting that out of the 321 pages of text that comprise ElBaradei's memoirs, more than forty percent are devoted to Iran's nuclear program.

41. The *New York Times* reported that the "choice of candidates reflected a division in the I.A.E.A. between the Western and industrialized nations that lead the nuclear club and define the atomic agency's prime role as a watchdog, and developing countries more interested in the broader use of nuclear energy." (Sharon Otterman, "Atomic Agency's New Chief Favors Strict Policy on Iran," 3 July 2009.) The Associated Press reported that "Developing countries supported Amano's rival, South Africa's Abdul Samad Minty, considered ready to

challenge the U.S. and other nuclear power countries on issues such as disarmament—and which are generally supportive of Iran's claims to having a right to nuclear power." (George Jahn, "UN nuclear agency chooses veteran Japanese diplomat as its new director general," 2 July 2009.)

42. The 2 July 2009 ballot that elected Yukiya Amano Director General of the IAEA was taken in secret, so no country-by-country breakdown of the voting is available. But of the thirty-five countries then-serving on the IAEA's Board of Governors and eligible to vote for a successor to Mohamed ElBaradei, twenty-three voted for Amano, eleven for Abdul Samad Minty, and one abstained—and it was this abstention that gave Amano the required two-thirds majority.

43. Jahn, "UN nuclear agency chooses veteran Japanese diplomat as its new director general," Reuters, 26 September 2012.

44. U.S. Ambassador Glyn Davies, "SUBJECT: IAEA: AMANO READY FOR PRIME TIME," Vienna, 16 October 2009, para. 1–2, one of the more than 250,000 "Secret U.S. Embassy Cables" published by WikiLeaks, 28 November 2010, <http://wikileaks.org/cablegate.html> (here posted to *The Guardian's* website, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/us-embassy-cables-documents/230076>). Not surprisingly, the *New York Times* did not find the cables newsworthy; its only mention of them was a short and dismissive paraphrase of a report in "Iran's state news agency, IRNA," in which "Mr. Amano appeared to say that his position on Iran's nuclear program was not substantially different from the American administration—an admission [IRNA] takes as proof that he is an American pawn." Robert F. Worth, "Report May Complicate Denials by Iran," *New York Times*, 9 November 2011.

45. See *Implementation of the NPT Safeguards Agreement and relevant provisions of Security Council resolutions in the Islamic Republic of Iran* (GOV/2011/65), 8 November 2011, esp. the fourteen-page annex, "Possible Military Dimensions to Iran's Nuclear Programme." As David Morrison pointed out in a report on behalf of the Peace and Neutrality Alliance of Ireland:

"The 'information' contained in this annex is of a very different character [than in the report proper]. None of it was acquired by IAEA inspectors as a result of direct observations in Iran. It consists of allegations—the words 'alleged', 'allegedly', and 'allegation' occur 28 times in total—supplied to the IAEA by third parties, including the U.S. and Israel, most of them referring to possible activities by Iran before 2003." ("Some Facts About Iran's Nuclear Activities," Peace and Neutrality Alliance, Ireland, 25 April 2012, pp. 8–9.)

46. "UN atomic chief dodges accusations of leaking info to U.S.," Agence France Presse, 2 December 2010; George Jahn, "UN nuclear chief says he cannot confirm all Iranian atom activities peaceful," Associated Press, 2 December 2010.

47. Factiva database searches carried out under the "Wire" (*twir*) and "Newspapers: All" (*tnwp*) categories, as well as the *New York Times* (*nytf*) category on 11 August 2012, for the ten-year period 1 July 2002 through 30 June 2012. To generate the numbers for each country's nuclear program, we used the database-limiter *not* to exclude from our reported totals all items that also mentioned the name of any one or more of the other nine countries in Table 1. We used this limiter because we wanted to increase the probability that our searches picked up items in which a particular country's nuclear program (civilian or military or both) was discussed, but we did not want our searches to pick-up irrelevant mentions of a particular country in media items that made no mention of its nuclear program. Were we to loosen these restrictions (for example, by searching the same wire services and newspapers for items that mentioned only "Iran" and "nuclear" or only "Israel" and "nuclear") the totals would be far greater (for Iran: 484,632; and for Israel: 169,051), but our searches would no longer capture only items that discussed each country's nuclear program, making comparison of the differential media focus on each country's nuclear program impossible.

48. See note 5 above.

49. By an "item" appearing in the *New York Times*, we mean everything

from major to minor articles, editorials, op-eds, and letters, book reviews, and even blogs; we excluded from this estimate News Summaries, Inside the *Times* listings, World Briefings, and similar blurb-like items.

50. Nexis database searches carried out under the Advanced Search > *New York Times* category on 18–23 August 2012, for the ten-year period 1 July 2002 through 30 June 2012. The exact search parameters were: (a) For the complete newspaper: (*Iran* and nuclear*) and (*plant or program or reactor or arms or weapon* or international atomic energy agency or iaea or Security Council*) and not (*news summary or inside the times or world briefing or paperback row*); and (b) for editorials alone: (*Iran* and nuclear and editorial desk*) and (*plant or program or reactor or arms or weapon* or international atomic energy agency or IAEA or security council*) and not (*op-ed or letters or news summary or inside the times or world briefing or paperback row*).

51. "The Truth About Iran," Editorial, *New York Times*, 10 November 2011.

52. See, for instance, "The Peace Prize," Editorial, *New York Times*, 10 October 2009; "Congress, Sanctions, and Iran," Editorial, *New York Times*, 3 June 2010; and "What the Inspectors Say," Editorial, *New York Times*, 13 June 2011.

53. See "Return of the axis of evil," *The Economist*, 14 May 2005, <http://media.economist.com/sites/default/files/imagecache/print-cover-full/20050514issuecovUS400.jpg>.

54. "Iran's Nuclear Ambitions," Editorial, *New York Times*, 14 March 2003. It is worth noting that eight months later, the IAEA reported that Iran had not yet reached a uranium enrichment level beyond 1.2 percent, underscoring the outlandishness of the *Times's* allegation. See *Implementation of the NPT Safeguards Agreement in the Islamic Republic of Iran* (GOV/2003/75), IAEA, Annex 1, "Detailed Technical Chronology," 10 November 2003, para. 51, 53.

55. "Iran's Nuclear Quest," Editorial, *New York Times*, 28 August 2012.

56. "Still Spinning," Editorial, *New York Times*, 14 August 2006. Also

see, for instance, "Remember Iran?" Editorial, *New York Times*, 23 September 2008; and "Read the Report," Editorial, *New York Times*, 10 September 2010.

57. See *Implementation of the NPT Safeguards Agreement and relevant provisions of Security Council resolutions 1737 (2006), 1747 (2007), 1803 (2008) and 1835 (2008) in the Islamic Republic of Iran* (GOV/2010/10), 18 February 2010.

58. David E. Sanger and William J. Broad, "Inspectors Say Iran Worked on Warhead," *New York Times*, 19 February 2010.

59. GOV/2010/10, 18 February 2010, para. 41–43.

60. For more creative misreporting on Iran by Sanger and Broad, see their article on the IAEA's August 2012 report and particularly their discussion of Iran's alleged "cleansing" of a site at the Parchin military base, a claim never made in the report but fed to Sanger and Broad by an anonymous "senior American official." The Parchin allegations could prove highly useful for anti-Iran propaganda purposes going forward, as they enable the IAEA to sustain the plea of uncertainty about what the absence of evidence at the allegedly sanitized site means. David E. Sanger and William J. Broad, "Report Details Progress By Iran at Nuclear Bunker," *New York Times*, 31 August 2012.

61. "Iran's Nuclear Ambitions," Editorial, *New York Times*, 14 March 2003.

62. "Dangerous Tensions With Iran," Editorial, *New York Times*, 13 January 2012.

63. See note 1 above.

64. Martin van Creveld, "Sharon on the warpath: Is Israel planning to attack Iran?" *International Herald Tribune*, 21 August 2004.

65. See Seyed Hossein Mousavian, *The Iranian Nuclear Crisis: A Memoir* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2012). Also see Mohammad Javad Zarif, "Tackling the Iran-U.S. Crisis: The Need for a Paradigm Shift," *Journal of International Affairs* 6, no. 2 (Spring/Summer 2007), pp. 73–94.

66. The P5-Plus 1 is comprised of the Permanent Five members of the

UNSC (Britain, China, France, Russia, and the United States) plus Germany.

67. Ari Shavit, "Ex-IDF general: U.S. missed chance for diplomatic solution to Iran nuclear issue," *Ha'Aretz*, 12 July 2012.

68. *Implementation of the NPT Safeguards Agreement in the Islamic Republic of Iran* (GOV/2003/69), Resolution adopted by the Board of Governors, 12 September 2003, para. 3.

69. "Iran fully committed to its NPT responsibility—Official," Payvand Iran News, 15 September 2003.

70. See *Communication dated 12 September 2005 from the Permanent Mission of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the Agency* (INFCIRC/657), IAEA, 15 September 2005, specifically the 12 September 2003 statement by Iran to the IAEA Board of Governors, pp. 68–72, <http://www.iaea.org/Publications/Documents/Infircs/2005/infirc657.pdf>.

71. Barak Ravid, "U.S. presented Netanyahu with contingency plan for Iran strike," *Ha'Aretz*, 29 July 2012.

72. See Matthew L. Wald, "U.S. Refits a Nuclear Bomb To Destroy Enemy Bunkers," *New York Times*, 31 May 1997 and Dan Williams, "Eying Iran Reactor, Israel Seeks U.S. Bunker Bombs," Reuters, 21 September 2004. Also see the discussion of the "B61-11 Earth-Penetrating Weapon" at the GlobalSecurity.org website, <http://www.globalsecurity.org/wmd/systems/b61-11.htm>.

73. Mitt Romney, "Remarks in Jerusalem," Mitt Romney For President, Campaign Official Website, 29 July 2012.

74. Benjamin Netanyahu, Speech to the United Nations General Assembly in New York, Prime Minister's Office, 27 September 2012.

75. Benjamin Netanyahu, "The Case for Toppling Saddam: The longer America waits, the more dangerous he becomes," *Wall Street Journal*, 20 September 2002. Also see John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt, *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007), "Israel and the Iraq War," pp. 233–38.

76. See, for instance, "Possible Military Dimensions to Iran's Nuclear

Programme," the annex of the IAEA's 8 November 2011 document (GOV/2011/65).

77. See *Iran: Nuclear Intentions and Capabilities*, Office of the Director of National Intelligence, November, 2007, para. A, p. 6, http://www.dni.gov/files/documents/Newsroom/Reports%20and%20Pubs/20071203_release.pdf. Also see the *Unclassified Report to Congress on the Acquisition of Technology Relating to Weapons of Mass Destruction and Advanced Conventional Munitions, Covering 1 January to 31 December 2011*, Office of the Director of National Intelligence, February 6 2012, pp. 2–4, http://www.dni.gov/files/documents/Newsroom/Reports%20and%20Pubs/2011_report_to_congress_wmd.pdf.

78. George W. Bush, *Decision Points* (New York: Crown, 2010), p. 419.

79. For this mention of the Khamenei Fatwa, see *Communication dated 12 September 2005 from the Permanent Mission of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the Agency* (INFCIRC/657), IAEA, 15 September 2005, specifically the August 2005 Statement from Iran to the IAEA Board of Governors, pp. 121–25; here p. 121, <http://www.iaea.org/Publications/Documents/Infircs/2005/infirc657.pdf>.

80. See Mousavian, *The Iranian Nuclear Crisis*, pp. 313–14. Also see Gareth Porter, "Report on Iran's Nuclear Fatwa Distorts Its History," Inter Press Service, 18 April 2012.

81. *Message from His Eminence Ayatollah Sayyid Ali Khamenei, Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran, to the International Conference on Nuclear Disarmament*, 17 April 2010, as archived at the UN General Assembly (A/64/752) and the UN Security Council (S/2010/203), 22 April 2010.

82. "Address by Grand Ayatollah Khamenei . . . to the XVI Summit of Heads of State or Government of the Non-Aligned Movement" (NAM 2012/ Doc. 8), Tehran, 30 August 2012, <http://nam.gov.ir/Portal/File/ShowFile.aspx?ID=16a114b9-4730-4947-b38e-c2cda14f82c6>.

83. See *Application of IAEA Safeguards in the Middle East* (GOV/2011/55-GC(55)/23), IAEA,

2 September 2011, para. 7–8; and Dr. Shaul Chorev, "Text of the Letter from Israel" (Annex 3), 2 May 2011. Also see *Application of IAEA Safeguards in the Middle East* (GOV/2012/38-GC(56)/17), IAEA, 27 August 2012, para. 8–9. And see Amir Oren, "Israel rejects U.S.-backed Arab plan for conference on nuclear-free Mideast," *Ha'Aretz*, 20 September 2012.

84. See William J. Broad, "How To Help Iran Build a Bomb," *New York Times*, 30 September 2012.

85. Robert Gates, *Nuclear Posture Review Report* (Washington, D.C.: U.S.

Department of Defense, April 2010), pp. viii, ix, 17, and 46.

86. See Hillary Clinton, "The future of politics will be decided in Asia, not Afghanistan or Iraq, and the United States will be right at the center of the action," *Foreign Policy*, November/December 2011; Barack Obama, *Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership: Priorities for the 21st Century* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Defense, January 2012), pp. 2, 4; and John Reed, "All Hands on Deck: How the U.S. is using the Gulf states to deter Iran," *Foreign Policy*, 9 July 2012.



Cartoon by artist Khalil Bendib