

Intel Analysis: Why are the IAEA and EIBaradei protecting Iran?

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gerald m. steinberg, Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs , THE JERUSALEM POST Nov. 5, 2007

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For over three years, the quarterly IAEA reports on Iran contained details of violations, obstruction of inspector's visits, important inconsistencies between official claims and the results of tests from samples taken from various facilities and other forms of non-compliance. But the final assessment in each report, signed by the director-general, absurdly concluded that this evidence did not demonstrate that Iran was seeking nuclear weapons.

Dr. Mohamed EIBaradei, director-general of the International Atomic Energy Agency, may have chosen what he saw as the path of least resistance by acquiescing to Iran's aspirations to become a nuclear power. This was also the dominant view in Europe, at least until the rise of Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and the realization that stable deterrence based on the US-Soviet Cold War model was not applicable to a nuclear-armed Iran.

EIBaradei's complicity in the Iranian effort to acquire nuclear weapons is counterproductive. The further that Iran advances, the higher the probability of confrontation and military action in the next two-to-four years.

Instead, if the IAEA and EIBaradei were to join in the effort to warn and deter the Iranian regime, it might still be possible to halt the uranium enrichment and similar activities without needing to use force.

Denying the obvious

The repeated statements by EIBaradei, incongruously denying that Iran is seeking and making progress towards acquiring nuclear weapons, are difficult to explain. The evidence is staring everyone in the face: the banks of centrifuges from A.Q. Khan's proliferation supermarket (used by Pakistan for its bomb) and other technology inappropriate for a civil power program; the subterfuge that kept these and other activities from the IAEA inspectors for many years; the import of components and evidence of facilities for testing weapons design. Taken together, the case is overwhelming, not only in Washington and Jerusalem, but also in Paris, London, Moscow and Beijing.

So why is EIBaradei insisting on denying the obvious? He is an Egyptian national, but without a history of ideologically or religiously motivated policies or statements, and does not share the visceral anti-Israel and anti-Western positions held by Nasserites like Amr Mousa (ex-foreign minister and now head of the Arab League).

Indeed, when EIBaradei was first nominated to head the IAEA after many years as a lower-level official, the Egyptian government proposed another candidate. And in official visits to Israel, EIBaradei showed a high level of diplomatic skill in repeating the traditional call for universal accession to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, but acknowledging the complexity of the Israeli situation. His statements and activities projected an image of an international civil servant who took these obligations and commitments seriously.

Seeking to rehabilitate the IAEA

In this spirit, during his first years as IAEA director-general, beginning in 1997, EIBaradei continued and even accelerated the effort to rehabilitate the IAEA and its tattered image as the world's nuclear proliferation watchdog under the 1970 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

In 1981, following the Israeli operation that destroyed Iraq's nuclear reactor before it could start producing plutonium, the IAEA was exposed as lacking professionalism and credibility. Officials were shown to have closed their collective eyes to Saddam Hussein's illegal diversions from an ostensibly civil nuclear program to weapons development, leaving then-prime minister Menachem Begin with no alternative to military action.

The IAEA's inspectors and verification experts worked to reestablish credibility, enforcing enhanced safeguards that were designed to prevent the kind of subterfuge employed by Saddam. Their detailed reports on the status of Iraq's nuclear program during this period (and its limitations) turned out, in some areas, to be more accurate than US government assessments.

And while ElBaradei's interpretation of the dangers posed by Saddam's continuing nuclear activities downplayed the implications, and he argued against the military action that removed Saddam Hussein, the IAEA did not cover up or tamper with the evidence.

Ignoring the evidence on Iranian nuclear weapons development

But on Iran, the IAEA under ElBaradei has again lost credibility and is covering up wholesale violations of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and the efforts of extremist leaders of the Islamic Republic to acquire nuclear weapons.

For over three years, the quarterly IAEA reports on Iran contained the details of violations, obstruction of inspector's visits, important inconsistencies between official claims and the results of tests from samples taken from various facilities, and other forms of non-compliance.

But the final assessment in each report, signed by the director-general, absurdly concluded that this evidence did not demonstrate that Iran was seeking nuclear weapons. This process delayed the imposition of sanctions that might have dissuaded Iran from this path.

Eventually, even the more reluctant leaders in Russia, China and India recognized the overwhelming nature of the evidence, rejected ElBaradei's assertions, and voted in September 2005 to officially find Iran in non-compliance with the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and to start the sanctions process.

Since then, ElBaradei's summaries of the quarterly IAEA reports, which are the basis for UN Security Council reviews and consideration of increased sanctions, continue to deny the Iranian threat. He also has started to echo Iranian claims to be beyond the "point of no return" in enriching uranium to the level required for weapons - a boast that the IAEA's own data does not support. This has again cast the IAEA as a target for derision and ridicule and led some key professionals to leave the agency.

ElBaradei's behavior also has slowed the impact of the limitations imposed by the US-led international "coalition of the willing" on Iranian banks and financial institutions. These targeted sanctions have had a very direct impact on the regime and leadership, leading to signs of rising dissatisfaction and acts of defiance in Iran. There is evidence that more sanctions would accelerate the internal opposition and slow or even force a halt to the effort to acquire nuclear weapons.

Explaining ElBaradei's behavior

It is difficult to explain the logic of ElBaradei's behavior, which is the opposite of what is expected for the head of an international watchdog organization whose decisions have a major impact on international security and stability.

One factor may be personal: In 2005, when the Bush administration opposed his selection for a third term as director-general, in large part because of the Iranian cover-up, they failed to get much support in the Board of Governors. Supporting Iran is the most effective form of retaliation against the United States.

Beyond this dimension, ElBaradei understandably wants to defend the IAEA and the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty framework from a wrenching confrontation over the Iranian nuclear weapons program that could mark the end of this security framework based on treaties and international enforcement organizations. He may have chosen what he sees as the path of least resistance by acquiescing to Iran's aspirations to become a nuclear power.

This was also the dominant view in Europe, at least until the rise of Ahmadinejad and the realization that stable deterrence based on the US-Soviet Cold War model was not applicable to a nuclear-armed Iran and a regional arms race.

After having failed to prevent the US invasion of Iraq, the IAEA's director-general may now be overcompensating by embracing the Iranian claims in the hope of preventing a military attack on Iran. His angry reaction to unconfirmed reports that Israel destroyed a North Korean-built nuclear reactor in Syria, and the demand that information on Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty violations be provided to the IAEA for action, can also be understood as an attempt to salvage the agency's severely damaged reputation.

But if this is EIBaradei's objective, his complicity in the Iranian effort to acquire nuclear weapons and the obvious attempt to cover up the evidence is counterproductive. The further that Iran advances, the higher the probability of confrontation and military action in the next two-to-four years.

Instead, if the IAEA and EIBaradei were to join in the effort to warn and deter the Iranian regime, it might still be possible to halt the uranium enrichment and similar activities without needing to use force. This is the only way that the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty will survive, and the world will be spared the dangers of a radical Iranian regime armed with nuclear weapons.

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From the archives

Hubris
by 'Cicero' at October 11, 2005 12:24 AM

Charles Johnson noted that while IAEA and Mohamed EIBaradei received the Nobel Peace Prize for working against nuclear proliferation, Britain's MI5 has uncovered 360 clandestine nuclear arms organizations -- MI5 Unmasks Covert Arms Programmes:

More than 360 private companies, university departments and government organisations in eight countries, including the Pakistan high commission in London, are identified as having procured goods or technology for use in weapons programmes.

The length of the list, compiled by MI5, suggests that the arms trade supermarket is bigger than has so far been publicly realised. MI5 warns against exports to organisations in Iran, Pakistan, India, Israel, Syria and Egypt and to beware of front companies in the United Arab Emirates, which appears to be a hub for the trade.

Mr. Johnson continued with a London Times piece that highlights the IAEA's failure to abate the proliferation of nuclear weapons materials:

Before the 1991 Gulf War (before Dr EIBaradei's appointment), the IAEA failed to detect Saddam's nuclear programme. After the war, it was startled by the scale of his work to make fissile material.

Under Dr EIBaradei, the IAEA missed the Libyan nuclear programme, which Libya chose to reveal after the 2003 Iraq war.

It missed Iran's 20-year covert nuclear research programme, exposed by Iranian dissidents three years ago.

It failed to detect the "nuclear supermarket" run by A. Q. Khan, the Pakistani scientist who sold plans and components to Libya, North Korea and Iran.

It was slow to sound the alarm about North Korea's conversion of its civil nuclear power into a weapons programme. The US accused North Korea of weapons ambitions in 2002.

Striking a defiant pose in the face of history's plough may be all that's left of the progressive sphere -- or whatever it should be called at this point. I am struck at how the left is betting the farm on an ideology that insists that peacemakers only peddle carrots, having evolved past the need to use the threat of force. It's disheartening to see institutions that are meant to promote and reward progressivism implode into irrelevance, giving themselves mutual pats on the back.

One of President Bush's big mistakes was his famous appearance on an aircraft carrier with the 'Mission Accomplished' banner displayed behind him. Clearly, the mission in Iraq was only then beginning, as we have been seeing since. Much hay has been made of his blunder. Giving accolades and a medal to people like Mohamed EIBaradei in the era of nuclear hyper-proliferation smacks of the same hubris. It shows an imperious pride that presumes much but actually controls little. If it weren't so pathetic and dangerous, it would be comical.

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MI5 unmask covert arms programmes

Document names 300 organisations seeking nuclear and WMD technology

Ian Cobain and Ewen MacAskill
Saturday October 8, 2005
The Guardian

The determination of countries across the Middle East and Asia to develop nuclear arsenals and other weapons of mass destruction is laid bare by a secret British intelligence document which has been seen by the Guardian.

More than 360 private companies, university departments and government organisations in eight countries, including the Pakistan high commission in London, are identified as having procured goods or technology for use in weapons programmes.

The length of the list, compiled by MI5, suggests that the arms trade supermarket is bigger than has so far been publicly realised. MI5 warns against exports to organisations in Iran, Pakistan, India, Israel, Syria and Egypt and to beware of front companies in the United Arab Emirates, which appears to be a hub for the trade.

The disclosure of the list comes as the Nobel peace prize was yesterday awarded to Mohamed ElBaradei, head of the UN watchdog responsible for combating proliferation. The Nobel committee said they had made the award because of the apparent deadlock in disarmament and the danger that nuclear weapons could spread "both to states and to terrorist groups".

The MI5 document, entitled Companies and Organisations of Proliferation Concern, has been compiled in an attempt to prevent British companies inadvertently exporting sensitive goods or expertise to organisations covertly involved in WMD programmes. Despite the large number of bodies identified, the document says the list is not exhaustive.

It states: "It is not suggested that the companies and organisations on the list have committed an offence under UK legislation. However, in addition to conducting non-proliferation related business, they have procured goods and/or technology for weapons of mass destruction programmes."

The 17-page document identifies 95 Pakistani organisations and government bodies, including the Pakistan high commission in London, as having assisted in the country's nuclear programme. The list was compiled two years ago, shortly after the security service mounted a surveillance operation at the high commission which is the only diplomatic institution on the list. Abdul Basit, the deputy high commissioner, said: "It is absolute rubbish for Pakistan to be included. We take exception to these links."

Some 114 Iranian organisations, including chemical and pharmaceutical companies and university medical schools, are identified as having acquired nuclear, chemical, biological or missile technology. The document also attempts to shed some light on the nuclear ambitions of Egypt and Syria: a private chemical company in Egypt is identified as having procured technology for use in a nuclear weapons programme, while the Syrian atomic energy commission faces a similar charge. Eleven Israeli organisations appear on the list, along with 73 Indian bodies, which are said to have been involved in WMD programmes.

The document also highlights concerns that companies in Malta and Cyprus could have been used as fronts for WMD programmes. The United Arab Emirates is named as "the most important" of the countries where front companies may have been used, and 24 private firms there are identified as having acquired WMD technology for Iran, Pakistan and India.

A spokesman for the UAE government said it had always worked "very closely" with the British authorities to counter the proliferation of WMD.

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/nuclear/article/0,2763,1587752,00.html>