

# The UN nuclear agency, the US and Iran

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With the Obama administration escalating its diplomatic campaign for a further round of UN sanctions against Iran, a report issued by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) last week provided an apparent boost to US propaganda that Tehran is developing a nuclear weapons capacity.

While the 10-page report is largely a rehash of previous IAEA documents, there was a shift in emphasis, most strikingly in the six-paragraph section headed “Possible Military Dimensions”. For the first time, the IAEA openly raised “concerns” that Iran might have been engaged in research activities related to the manufacture of a nuclear weapon that continued beyond 2004.

The report was seized upon to justify US plans for further punitive measures against Iran. In an article last Friday entitled, “Inspectors Say Iran Worked on Warhead”, the *New York Times*, for instance, declared that the IAEA had extensive evidence of “past or current undisclosed [nuclear] activities”. It also noted that the IAEA report contradicted the National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) produced by US intelligence agencies in late 2007, which concluded that Iran had ended all nuclear weapons research in 2003.

A *Washington Post* editorial on Saturday declared that the IAEA report contained “a lot of bad news”. It highlighted Iran’s production of enriched uranium and the agency’s concerns about the possible existence of weapons research. It applauded the IAEA’s new head Yukiya Amano for ensuring “the agency will scrupulously carry out its technical mission and honestly report the facts”. The newspaper lambasted the former head, Mohammed ElBaradei, for preventing “the IAEA from reporting all that it knew about Iran’s pursuit of a bomb” and refusing “to draw obvious conclusions”.

The clear purpose of such claims is to heighten fears that Iran is pushing ahead with secret nuclear weapons programs, as is commonly asserted as fact in the more rabid sections of the American media. Yet the IAEA report contained no new

evidence of Iranian nuclear weapons programs and no evidence at all of any current research. The shift in emphasis in the document has far more to do with the change in the agency’s director than any concern for the facts. The reality is that the IAEA has become politicised by the issue of Iran’s nuclear programs to the point where its ostensibly technical reports have provoked sharp internal divisions.

The targetting of the 2007 US intelligence assessment and ElBaradei in the media is no accident. The NIE, completed as the Bush administration ratcheted up its campaign against Tehran, effectively punctured its alarmist allegations about Iranian nuclear weapons programs. The assessment immediately came under heavy criticism from Israel and the most militarist sections of the US political establishment. ElBaradei has been bitterly opposed by the US ever since he contradicted Bush’s lies and stated, prior to the 2003 invasion, that Iraq had no nuclear programs.

On Iran’s nuclear programs, political infighting within the IAEA has focussed on what are known as “the alleged studies”—various activities ranging from experiments with high explosives of the type used to initiate a nuclear blast to studies in neutron triggers for a bomb and a nuclear payload for a missile. The main point about the studies, which are frequently cited in the Western media as proof of Iran’s nuclear intentions, is that they are “alleged”. Tehran has consistently claimed that the “alleged studies” have been fabricated.

In fact, much of the “evidence” has been supplied by intelligence agencies—in all likelihood, either Israeli, American or European—that have vested interests in proving that Iran is intent on constructing a bomb. Many of the claims are based on documents supposedly found on a laptop computer smuggled out of Iran and first revealed in 2005. The US has not handed over the computer to the IAEA nor allowed any of the documents to be made public.

Given its dubious character, ElBaradei refused to incorporate this intelligence into IAEA reports. His stance

was not only opposed by the US and European powers, but internally by IAEA deputy director general Olli Heinonen, who has reportedly pressed for a document detailing Iran's alleged nuclear weapons experiments to be publicly released. Last October, excerpts from a 67-page draft internal IAEA report entitled "Possible Military Dimensions of Iran's Nuclear Program" were leaked to the international media, which highlighted the claim that Tehran had sufficient information to build a workable nuclear bomb.

Only limited portions of the document were made public. The most extensive material is to be found on the US-based Institute for Science and International Security (ISIS) web site, which notes that much of the information came from the highly publicised laptop. The ISIS suggests that the laptop might not even exist, but was simply invented by American intelligence agencies to protect a source or sources inside Iran. Whatever the exact nature of the "laptop," its documents have not been verified and certainly do not constitute proof that Iran is building a nuclear weapon.

The efforts of the US and its allies to replace ElBaradei as IAEA director with someone more amenable to their interests finally succeeded last year. As described in an *Asia Times* article by analyst Peter Lee yesterday: "In July 2009, after six ballots and protracted arm-twisting, the candidate seen as ElBaradei's philosophical successor, Abdul Samad Minty of South Africa, was defeated in favour of the West's preferred choice, Japan's Yukiya Amano."

The article cited James Acton of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace as saying: "The United States and most developed nations supported Amano, in part because they believe that he is less likely to soft-pedal reports on Iran..." With last week's report, Amano has lived up to expectations—as the favourable coverage in the *Washington Post's* editorial demonstrates. The new IAEA director has presented the same doubtful intelligence not only as "extensive" but "broadly consistent and credible in terms of the technical detail".

It is not possible from the available public information to rule out the possibility that Iran has secret nuclear weapons programs. The *World Socialist Web Site* has unequivocally condemned any attempt by the Iranian regime to build a nuclear bomb, pointing out that it would not protect working people in Iran from imperialist attack, but only heighten the danger. Any nuclear weapons' ambitions of the Iranian bourgeoisie are aimed at boosting its regional influence, which would inevitably lead to deepening national rivalries and conflict.

However, the US-led campaign to impose tougher UN penalties on Iran has nothing to do with preventing the danger of nuclear conflict. The US stance is utterly hypocritical. While threatening Iran, which is a signatory to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, with sanctions and military attack, the Obama administration turns a blind eye to stockpiles of nuclear bombs of its allies—India, Pakistan and Israel—that refuse to even sign the treaty.

Washington's main purpose is to fashion a regime in Tehran that is more amenable to its economic and strategic interests in Iran and the key energy-rich regions of the Middle East and Central Asia. Since the beginning of the year, the Obama administration has been steadily intensifying pressure on Iran. US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton struck a new note last week when she declared that Iran was coming under "a military dictatorship" of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC). The rhetoric was clearly aimed at encouraging opposition inside Iran to the IRGC in order to effect a regime change in line with US interests.

This week Clinton is visiting Latin America, where, as she told the Senate yesterday, Iran would again be on top of her diplomatic agenda. Clinton is spearheading a diplomatic offensive to line up support for a UN Security Council resolution sanctioning Iran, to consolidate US alliances in the Middle East and elsewhere and to undermine Iranian allies such as Syria. In her comments yesterday, Clinton boasted of "tremendous progress" with Russia and of making headway with China, which, of the veto-wielding members of the UN Security Council, has been the most resistant to new penalties on Iran.

Already involved in the neo-colonial occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan as well as pushing Pakistan toward open civil war, the Obama administration is embarked on a reckless course of action against Iran that will only heighten tensions throughout the region and raise the dangers of further conflict and wars.



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