What's at stake: A world free of war and the threat of war. A nation much abused by the USA, threatened with annihilation by US and Israeli nuclear arms, is accused of seeking nuclear arms no different from the other 8 nuclear nations, signs agreement preventing it from having nuclear arms, but US Congress threatens to block agreement.
Here is the link to all the newsletters archived in the OMNI web site.

http://www.omnicenter.org/newsletter-archive/ These newsletters offer information that enables us to examine morality and judgment of our leaders and their policies, of power. Here is the link to the Index: http://www.omnicenter.org/omni-newsletter-general-index/

Contents: Iran Newsletter #26 at end.
http://omnicenter.org/donate/

Contents: Iran Newsletter #27

See http://www.bravenewfilms.org/ for graphics and films.

Background
Gareth Porter, Manufactured Crisis, Google Search, July 29, 2015
Isacowitz, Iran Leaders Not Anti-Semitic, But Anti-Zionist
Chomsky, The Iranian Threat
Landay, Israel’s Nuclear Arsenal
Cheslow, Israeli Think Tank

Support the Agreement
Film from Global Zero/Just Foreign Policy, with Jack Black, Morgan Freeman, Queen Noor, and others
Film from Greenwald, Brave New Film: Contact Members of Congress, Thank Pres. Obama and Secretary Kerry
NAPF, Contact your Representatives

The Future
The Nation Editorial
Background

GARETH PORTER, Manufactured Crisis: The Untold Story of the Iran Nuclear Scare.

Manufactured Crisis provides unique and timely background to the ongoing diplomacy around Iran's nuclear technology program. In it, award-winning investigative journalist Gareth Porter offers a well documented critique of the official 'western' account of what the Iranian government has been doing, and why. In Manufactured Crisis, Porter brings together the results of his many years of research into the issue--including numerous interviews with former insiders. He shows that the origins of the Iran nuclear "crisis" lay not in an Iranian urge to obtain nuclear weapons but, rather, in a sustained effort by the United States and its allies to deny Iran its right, as guaranteed in the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, to have any nuclear program at all. The book highlights the impact that the United States' alliance with Israel had on Washington's pursuit of its Iran policy and sheds new light on the US strategy of turning the International Atomic Energy Agency into a tool of its anti-Iran policy.

Manufactured Crisis by Gareth Porter - Just World Books

justworldbooks.com/manufactured-crisis/

[Gareth Porter] exposes the many lies and half-truths that have been promulgated ... In his book, Manufactured Crisis: The Untold Story of the Iran Nuclear Scare, ...

Manufactured Crisis: The Untold Story of the Iran Nuclear ...

harpers.org/.../manufactured-crisis-the-untold-story-of...  Harper's Magazine

May 6, 2014 - In Manufactured Crisis, The Untold Story of the Iran Nuclear Scare(Just World Books), award-winning investigative journalist Gareth Porter ...

"Manufactured Crisis: The Untold Story of the Iran Nuclear ...

www.youtube.com/watch?v=f9A5zvFisMs

Feb 27, 2014 - Uploaded by Roger Hawkins

Gareth Porter talks about his new book, "Manufactured Crisis: the Untold ... Crisis: The Untold Story of the ...

A Review of Gareth Porter's Manufactured Crisis: The Untold ...
May 7, 2014 - In his new book Manufactured Crisis: The Untold Story of the Iran Nuclear Scare, award-winning, veteran investigative journalist Gareth Porter ...

Manufactured Crisis: The Untold Story of the Iran Nuclear ...

Middle East Policy Council

Book Review. Manufactured Crisis: The Untold Story of the Iran Nuclear Scare. Gareth Porter. Reviewed by Paul R. Pillar, Nonresident senior fellow, Center for ...

Manufactured Crisis. The Untold Story of the Iran Nuclear ...

www.globalresearch.ca/manufactured-crisis-the-untold-story-of-the-iran-


Overcoming the “Manufactured Crisis” with Iran - FPIF

Foreign Policy in Focus

Mar 3, 2014 - But Gareth Porter, author of the fascinating new book Manufactured Crisis: The Untold Story of the Iran Nuclear Scare, published this February ...

Manufactured Crisis: The Untold Story of the Iran Nuclear ...

https://www.foreignaffairs.com/.../manufactured-crisis-unt...

Foreign Affairs

Apr 21, 2014 - Manufactured Crisis: The Untold Story of the Iran Nuclear Scare. By Gareth Porter Reviewed by John Waterbury ...

Manufactured Crisis: the Untold Story of the Iran Nuclear ...

therealnews.com/2020-manufactured-crisis-the-untold-

The Real News

Mar 30, 2014 - Manufactured Crisis: the Untold Story of the Iran Nuclear Scare ... Journalist-scholar Gareth Porter has published another fine book on U.S. ...

Iran and the Myth of Anti-Semitism

BY ROY ISACOWITZ. IN THESE TIMES NEWSLETTER (AUGUST 15, 2015).

Iranian rhetoric isn't anti-Semitic, it's anti-Zionist.
Iran Is Not the Greatest Threat to World Peace

I also received Chomsky's essay from Tikkun/Rabbi Lerner, who credited TomDispatch.com for permission to reprint.

“Th There’s a clear way to ensure a nuclear-free Middle East, but Washington is not interested.

Wh Who Is the Gravest Danger to World Peace?

By By Noam Chomsky

Throughout the world there is great relief and optimism about the nuclear deal reached in Vienna between Iran and the P5+1 nations, the five veto-holding members of the U.N. Security Council and Germany. Most of the world apparently shares the assessment of the U.S. Arms Control Association that “the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action establishes a strong and effective formula for blocking all of the pathways by which Iran could acquire material for nuclear weapons for more than a generation and a verification system to promptly detect and deter possible efforts by Iran to covertly pursue nuclear weapons that will last indefinitely.”

There are, however, striking exceptions to the general enthusiasm: the United States and its closest regional allies, Israel and Saudi Arabia. One consequence of this is that U.S. corporations, much to their chagrin, are prevented from flocking to Tehran along with their European counterparts. Prominent sectors of U.S. power and opinion share the stand of the two regional allies and so are in a state of virtual hysteria over “the Iranian threat.” Sober commentary in the United States, pretty much across the spectrum, declares that country to be “the gravest threat to world peace.” Even supporters of the agreement here are wary, given the exceptional gravity of that threat. After all, how can we trust the Iranians with their terrible record of aggression, violence, disruption, and deceit?
Opposition within the political class is so strong that public opinion has shifted quickly from **significant support** for the deal to an **even split**. Republicans are almost unanimously opposed to the agreement. The current Republican primaries illustrate the proclaimed reasons. Senator Ted Cruz, considered one of the intellectuals among the crowded field of presidential candidates, warns that Iran may still be able to produce nuclear weapons and could someday use one to set off an Electro Magnetic Pulse that “would take down the electrical grid of the entire eastern seaboard” of the United States, killing “tens of millions of Americans.”

The two most likely winners, former Florida Governor Jeb Bush and Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker, are battling over whether to bomb Iran **immediately after** being elected or after the **first Cabinet meeting**. The one candidate with some foreign policy experience, Lindsey Graham, describes the deal as “a death sentence for the state of Israel,” which will certainly come as a **surprise** to Israeli **intelligence** and strategic analysts — and which Graham knows to be utter nonsense, raising immediate questions about actual motives.

Keep in mind that the Republicans long ago abandoned the pretense of functioning as a normal congressional party. They have, as respected conservative political commentator Norman Ornstein of the right-wing American Enterprise Institute observed, become a “radical insurgency” that scarcely seeks to participate in normal congressional politics.

Since the days of President Ronald Reagan, the party leadership has plunged so far into the pockets of the very rich and the corporate sector that they can attract votes only by mobilizing parts of the population that have not previously been an organized political force. Among them are extremist evangelical Christians, now probably a majority of Republican voters; remnants of the former slave-holding states; nativists who are terrified that “they” are taking our white Christian Anglo-Saxon country away from us; and others who turn the Republican primaries into spectacles remote from the mainstream of modern society — though not from the mainstream of the most powerful country in world history.

The departure from global standards, however, goes far beyond the bounds of the Republican radical insurgency. Across the spectrum, there is, for instance, general
agreement with the “pragmatic” conclusion of General Martin Dempsey, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, that the Vienna deal does not “prevent the United States from striking Iranian facilities if officials decide that it is cheating on the agreement,” even though a unilateral military strike is “far less likely” if Iran behaves.

Former Clinton and Obama Middle East negotiator Dennis Ross typically recommends that “Iran must have no doubts that if we see it moving towards a weapon, that would trigger the use of force” even after the termination of the deal, when Iran is theoretically free to do what it wants. In fact, the existence of a termination point 15 years hence is, he adds, “the greatest single problem with the agreement.” He also suggests that the U.S. provide Israel with specially outfitted B-52 bombers and bunker-busting bombs to protect itself before that terrifying date arrives.

“The Greatest Threat”

Opponents of the nuclear deal charge that it does not go far enough. Some supporters agree, holding that “if the Vienna deal is to mean anything, the whole of the Middle East must rid itself of weapons of mass destruction.” The author of those words, Iran’s Minister of Foreign Affairs Javad Zarif, added that “Iran, in its national capacity and as current chairman of the Non-Aligned Movement [the governments of the large majority of the world’s population], is prepared to work with the international community to achieve these goals, knowing full well that, along the way, it will probably run into many hurdles raised by the skeptics of peace and diplomacy.” Iran has signed “a historic nuclear deal,” he continues, and now it is the turn of Israel, “the holdout.”

Israel, of course, is one of the three nuclear powers, along with India and Pakistan, whose weapons programs have been abetted by the United States and that refuse to sign the Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT).

Zarif was referring to the regular five-year NPT review conference, which ended in failure in April when the U.S. (joined by Canada and Great Britain) once again blocked efforts to move toward a weapons-of-mass-destruction-free zone in the
Middle East. Such efforts have been led by Egypt and other Arab states for 20 years. As Jayantha Dhanapala and Sergio Duarte, leading figures in the promotion of such efforts at the NPT and other U.N. agencies, observe in “Is There a Future for the NPT?,” an article in the journal of the Arms Control Association: “The successful adoption in 1995 of the resolution on the establishment of a zone free of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) in the Middle East was the main element of a package that permitted the indefinite extension of the NPT.” The NPT, in turn, is the most important arms control treaty of all. If it were adhered to, it could end the scourge of nuclear weapons.

Repeatedly, implementation of the resolution has been blocked by the U.S., most recently by President Obama in 2010 and again in 2015, as Dhanapala and Duarte point out, “on behalf of a state that is not a party to the NPT and is widely believed to be the only one in the region possessing nuclear weapons” — a polite and understated reference to Israel. This failure, they hope, “will not be the coup de grâce to the two longstanding NPT objectives of accelerated progress on nuclear disarmament and establishing a Middle Eastern WMD-free zone.”

A nuclear-weapons-free Middle East would be a straightforward way to address whatever threat Iran allegedly poses, but a great deal more is at stake in Washington’s continuing sabotage of the effort in order to protect its Israeli client. After all, this is not the only case in which opportunities to end the alleged Iranian threat have been undermined by Washington, raising further questions about just what is actually at stake.

In considering this matter, it is instructive to examine both the unspoken assumptions in the situation and the questions that are rarely asked. Let us consider a few of these assumptions, beginning with the most serious: that Iran is the gravest threat to world peace.

In the U.S., it is a virtual cliché among high officials and commentators that Iran wins that grim prize. There is also a world outside the U.S. and although its views are not reported in the mainstream here, perhaps they are of some interest. According to the leading western polling agencies (WIN/Gallup International), the prize for “greatest threat” is won by the United States. The rest of the world
regards it as the gravest threat to world peace by a large margin. In second place, far below, is Pakistan, its ranking probably inflated by the Indian vote. Iran is ranked below those two, along with China, Israel, North Korea, and Afghanistan.

“The World’s Leading Supporter of Terrorism”

Turning to the next obvious question, what in fact is the Iranian threat? Why, for example, are Israel and Saudi Arabia trembling in fear over that country? Whatever the threat is, it can hardly be military. Years ago, U.S. intelligence informed Congress that Iran has very low military expenditures by the standards of the region and that its strategic doctrines are defensive — designed, that is, to deter aggression. The U.S. intelligence community has also reported that it has no evidence Iran is pursuing an actual nuclear weapons program and that “Iran’s nuclear program and its willingness to keep open the possibility of developing nuclear weapons is a central part of its deterrent strategy.”

The authoritative SIPRI review of global armaments ranks the U.S., as usual, way in the lead in military expenditures. China comes in second with about one-third of U.S. expenditures. Far below are Russia and Saudi Arabia, which are nonetheless well above any western European state. Iran is scarcely mentioned. Full details are provided in an April report from the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), which finds “a conclusive case that the Arab Gulf states have… an overwhelming advantage of Iran in both military spending and access to modern arms.”

Iran’s military spending, for instance, is a fraction of Saudi Arabia’s and far below even the spending of the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Altogether, the Gulf Cooperation Council states — Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE — outspend Iran on arms by a factor of eight, an imbalance that goes back decades. The CSIS report adds: “The Arab Gulf states have acquired and are acquiring some of the most advanced and effective weapons in the world [while] Iran has essentially been forced to live in the past, often relying on systems originally delivered at the time of the Shah.” In other words, they are virtually obsolete. When it comes to Israel, of course, the imbalance is even greater. Possessing the most advanced U.S. weaponry and a virtual offshore military base
for the global superpower, it also has a huge stock of nuclear weapons.

To be sure, Israel faces the “existential threat” of Iranian pronouncements: Supreme Leader Khamenei and former president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad famously threatened it with destruction. Except that they didn’t — and if they had, it would be of little moment. Ahmadinejad, for instance, predicted that “under God’s grace [the Zionist regime] will be wiped off the map.” In other words, he hoped that regime change would someday take place. Even that falls far short of the direct calls in both Washington and Tel Aviv for regime change in Iran, not to speak of the actions taken to implement regime change. These, of course, go back to the actual “regime change” of 1953, when the U.S. and Britain organized a military coup to overthrow Iran’s parliamentary government and install the dictatorship of the Shah, who proceeded to amass one of the worst human rights records on the planet.

These crimes were certainly known to readers of the reports of Amnesty International and other human rights organizations, but not to readers of the U.S. press, which has devoted plenty of space to Iranian human rights violations — but only since 1979 when the Shah’s regime was overthrown. (To check the facts on this, read The U.S. Press and Iran, a carefully documented study by Mansour Farhang and William Dorman.)

None of this is a departure from the norm. The United States, as is well known, holds the world championship title in regime change and Israel is no laggard either. The most destructive of its invasions of Lebanon in 1982 was explicitly aimed at regime change, as well as at securing its hold on the occupied territories. The pretexts offered were thin indeed and collapsed at once. That, too, is not unusual and pretty much independent of the nature of the society — from the laments in the Declaration of Independence about the “merciless Indian savages” to Hitler’s defense of Germany from the “wild terror” of the Poles.

No serious analyst believes that Iran would ever use, or even threaten to use, a nuclear weapon if it had one, and so face instant destruction. There is, however, real concern that a nuclear weapon might fall into jihadi hands — not thanks to Iran, but via U.S. ally Pakistan. In the journal of the Royal Institute of International Affairs, two leading Pakistani nuclear scientists, Pervez Hoodbhoy and Zia
Mian, write that increasing fears of “militants seizing nuclear weapons or materials and unleashing nuclear terrorism [have led to]... the creation of a dedicated force of over 20,000 troops to guard nuclear facilities. There is no reason to assume, however, that this force would be immune to the problems associated with the units guarding regular military facilities,” which have frequently suffered attacks with “insider help.” In brief, the problem is real, just displaced to Iran thanks to fantasies concocted for other reasons.

Other concerns about the Iranian threat include its role as “the world’s leading supporter of terrorism,” which primarily refers to its support for Hezbollah and Hamas. Both of those movements emerged in resistance to U.S.-backed Israeli violence and aggression, which vastly exceeds anything attributed to these villains, let alone the normal practice of the hegemonic power whose global drone assassination campaign alone dominates (and helps to foster) international terrorism.

Those two villainous Iranian clients also share the crime of winning the popular vote in the only free elections in the Arab world. Hezbollah is guilty of the even more heinous crime of compelling Israel to withdraw from its occupation of southern Lebanon, which took place in violation of U.N. Security Council orders dating back decades and involved an illegal regime of terror and sometimes extreme violence. Whatever one thinks of Hezbollah, Hamas, or other beneficiaries of Iranian support, Iran hardly ranks high in support of terror worldwide.

“Fueling Instability”

Another concern, voiced at the U.N. by U.S. Ambassador Samantha Power, is the “instability that Iran fuels beyond its nuclear program.” The U.S. will continue to scrutinize this misbehavior, she declared. In that, she echoed the assurance Defense Secretary Ashton Carter offered while standing on Israel’s northern border that “we will continue to help Israel counter Iran’s malign influence” in supporting Hezbollah, and that the U.S. reserves the right to use military force against Iran as it deems appropriate.
The way Iran “fuels instability” can be seen particularly dramatically in Iraq where, among other crimes, it alone at once came to the aid of Kurds defending themselves from the invasion of Islamic State militants, even as it is building a $2.5 billion power plant in the southern port city of Basra to try to bring electrical power back to the level reached before the 2003 invasion. Ambassador Power’s usage is, however, standard: Thanks to that invasion, hundreds of thousands were killed and millions of refugees generated, barbarous acts of torture were committed — Iraqis have compared the destruction to the Mongol invasion of the thirteenth century — leaving Iraq the unhappiest country in the world according to WIN/Gallup polls. Meanwhile, sectarian conflict was ignited, tearing the region to shreds and laying the basis for the creation of the monstrosity that is ISIS. And all of that is called “stabilization.”

Only Iran’s shameful actions, however, “fuel instability.” The standard usage sometimes reaches levels that are almost surreal, as when liberal commentator James Chace, former editor of Foreign Affairs, explained that the U.S. sought to “destabilize a freely elected Marxist government in Chile” because “we were determined to seek stability” under the Pinochet dictatorship.

Others are outraged that Washington should negotiate at all with a “contemptible” regime like Iran’s with its horrifying human rights record and urge instead that we pursue “an American-sponsored alliance between Israel and the Sunni states.” So writes Leon Wieseltier, contributing editor to the venerable liberal journal the Atlantic, who can barely conceal his visceral hatred for all things Iranian. With a straight face, this respected liberal intellectual recommends that Saudi Arabia, which makes Iran look like a virtual paradise, and Israel, with its vicious crimes in Gaza and elsewhere, should ally to teach that country good behavior. Perhaps the recommendation is not entirely unreasonable when we consider the human rights records of the regimes the U.S. has imposed and supported throughout the world.

Though the Iranian government is no doubt a threat to its own people, it regrettably breaks no records in this regard, not descending to the level of favored U.S. allies. That, however, cannot be the concern of Washington, and surely not Tel Aviv or Riyadh. It might also be useful to recall — surely Iranians do — that not a day has
passed since 1953 in which the U.S. was not harming Iranians. After all, as soon as they overthrew the hated U.S.-imposed regime of the Shah in 1979, Washington put its support behind Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein, who would, in 1980, launch a murderous assault on their country. President Reagan went so far as to deny Saddam’s major crime, his chemical warfare assault on Iraq’s Kurdish population, which he blamed on Iran instead. When Saddam was tried for crimes under U.S. auspices, that horrendous crime, as well as others in which the U.S. was complicit, was carefully excluded from the charges, which were restricted to one of his minor crimes, the murder of 148 Shi’ites in 1982, a footnote to his gruesome record.

Saddam was such a valued friend of Washington that he was even granted a privilege otherwise accorded only to Israel. In 1987, his forces were allowed to attack a U.S. naval vessel, the USS Stark, with impunity, killing 37 crewmen. (Israel had acted similarly in its 1967 attack on the USS Liberty.) Iran pretty much conceded defeat shortly after, when the U.S. launched Operation Praying Mantis against Iranian ships and oil platforms in Iranian territorial waters. That operation culminated when the USS Vincennes, under no credible threat, shot down an Iranian civilian airliner in Iranian airspace, with 290 killed — and the subsequent granting of a Legion of Merit award to the commander of the Vincennes for “exceptionally meritorious conduct” and for maintaining a “calm and professional atmosphere” during the period when the attack on the airliner took place. Comments philosopher Thill Raghu, “We can only stand in awe of such display of American exceptionalism!”

After the war ended, the U.S. continued to support Saddam Hussein, Iran’s primary enemy. President George H.W. Bush even invited Iraqi nuclear engineers to the U.S. for advanced training in weapons production, an extremely serious threat to Iran. Sanctions against that country were intensified, including against foreign firms dealing with it, and actions were initiated to bar it from the international financial system. In recent years the hostility has extended to sabotage, the murder of nuclear scientists (presumably by Israel), and [Message clipped] View entire message

Rabbi Lerner’s reply to Chomsky:
Noam Chomsky on “The Iranian Threat”

August 20, 2015

Editor’s note: Noam Chomsky’s analysis (read below after reading this) is an important counter to the endless drum of US propaganda from both parties about the threat from Iran. So much self-deception is thrown at Americans that we are not to blame when even the best among us begins to repeat analyses that forget or obscure the actual role that the US plays in the world today, as Chomsky begins to outline (though he doesn’t really explore the more powerful distorting role of global capitalism, which is not to be blamed solely on the US). Unfortunately, Chomsky underplays the anti-Semitism that the Iranian mullahs have fanned in Iran. They may never have explicitly called for Israel’s physical destruction, but they had plenty of time to clarify what they’ve meant by what seems like code language with such destruction in mind—all they needed to do to eliminate what Chomsky considers an unfair charge would be to publicly affirm that they don’t intend or seek to eliminate the state that was created as a refuge for Jews. We at Tikkun have sent that request to Iranian leaders, but they haven’t responded. Nor have they repudiated past Iranian governments' attempts to deny the Holocaust, and there is little doubt that the constant calls for “death to Israel”—while not translated into death to the Iranian Jews who claim to be safe in Iran and who support the Iranian nuclear deal despite Netanyahu's opposition—are rarely perceived by Iranians as somehow distinct from “death to the Jews.” And the mullahs' near-genocidal policies toward the Baha'i and repression of other religious minorities are outrageous, as has been their suppression of dissent and countless human rights violations. (As an aside, I want to express compassion for the Jewish people whose Holocaust-rooted post-traumatic-stress-disorder still generates a fearful attitude that makes us so easily manipulated by opportunists and militarists like Netanyahu and his AIPAC, American Jewish Committee, Conference of Presidents of Major (sic) Jewish Organizations allies, manipulation that leads many Jews to support policies that are actually destructive to the best interests of the Jewish people, the US, Israel, and the peoples of the world. To consider just two examples: maintaining the Occupation of the West Bank, rather than helping the Palestinians
create an economically and politically viable Palestinian state living in peace and harmony with Israel; or the too-widespread Jewish vocal opposition to the nuclear agreement with Iran, though most Jews support the deal. Tragically, and unjustifiably, this tilt toward militarist and ungenerous policies may eventually be the foundation for a resurgence of anti-Semitism globally. I have compassion for my people, just as I have compassion for the many middle-income and poorer Americans who end up supporting right-wing policies that are actually destructive to their own long-term best interests—but that compassion should must be accompanied by our powerful challenge to the policies they support and the racism that is too often a component of their fears.)

We at *Tikkun*, while supporting the nuclear arms agreement, also continue to support any nonviolent efforts by the people of Iran to overthrow the Iranian regime of the mullahs and create a state that is safe for its minorities and for dissent. We do so with deep humility, recognizing that we ourselves live in a society that is not safe for African Americans and other people of color, a society with many repressive policies and which, while allowing free speech on the individual and small group level, nevertheless manages to manipulate the public sphere in such a way that the ideas presented by *Tikkun*, by Chomsky, by those who believe that the strategy of domination which pervades both major political parties and fundamental assumptions of the world should be replaced by a strategy of generosity (e.g. our proposed Global Marshall Plan [www.tikkun.org/gmp](http://www.tikkun.org/gmp)) rarely get heard by the vast majority of Americans. So please read the article by Noam Chomsky below! Thanks to [TomDispatch.com](http://www.tomdispatch.com) for permission to reprint this piece.

– Rabbi Michael Lerner, editor, *Tikkun*

If you wish to comment on this introduction or the article itself, write me at: rabbilerner.tikkun@gmail.com  

**Why Is Israel's Nuclear Arsenal Not Mentioned in Iran Deal Debate?**

Thursday, 20 August 2015 00:00 By Jonathan S. Landay, McClatchy DC | News
Analysis

Why Is Israel's Nuclear Arsenal Not Mentioned In Iran Deal Debate?

By Jonathan S. Landay, McClatchy DC | News Analysis


There's one major issue that President Barack Obama, his supporters and his critics assiduously have avoided as they battle over the deal designed to prevent Iran from obtaining nuclear weapons: Israel's own nuclear arsenal.

An open secret for decades, the Israeli stockpile is estimated at some 80-100 warheads, though Israel refuses to confirm or deny its existence under a policy of deliberate ambiguity. The arsenal was developed as the ultimate guarantor of the Jewish state's survival against threats from its hostile neighborhood.

Yet as the sides joust over the Iran deal's impact on Israel's security, Obama has been silent on the Israeli arsenal as a potential deterrent against Iranian cheating on the accord. Opponents, led by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, haven't touched the issue, either. And it hasn't figured in the public hearings that Congress is holding as part of a 60-day review that will culminate in a Republican-led bid to kill the Iran accord next month.

To some experts, the fierce debate over whether the Iran deal endangers Israel or makes it safer will be incomplete and misleading as long as it skirts the Middle East's only nuclear arms stockpile.

"I refer to it (Israel's arsenal) as the 800-pound gorilla in the room," said Avner Cohen, an Israeli-American academic who's written several ground-breaking histories of the Israeli nuclear program. "In all the discussion about Iran and Israel, one must keep in mind that Israel has been a well-established nuclear weapons state for 40 years. It has a very strong, credible deterrent that Iran doesn't have."

Cohen, an Iran deal supporter, also believes that it's difficult to understand Israeli leaders' fervent opposition to the accord - especially Netanyahu's unprecedented interference in domestic US politics - without understanding that they're worried about maintaining an undeclared nuclear monopoly they've enjoyed for decades.

"Part of the 800-pound gorilla missing in the debate is an indication of Israel's true interest," said Cohen, a professor of nonproliferation studies at the Middlebury Institute of International Studies at Monterey, Calif. "Israel's primary but unstated interest is to keep its own nuclear monopoly, in other words, not to allow anyone else (in the region) to have the bomb, not to allow anyone else to even get close to the bomb. The Israelis are concerned that the nuclear deal with Iran effectively provides Iran certain international legitimacy for being a special nuclear status, and the Israelis don't like it."

"You can't talk about the overall security environment in the Middle East unless you address the reality of Israel's own nuclear status," he said.

Others oppose injecting Israel's arsenal into the debate as an unnecessary distraction.

"I don't think it makes sense to factor it in," said Gary Samore, a deal supporter who served as Obama's first senior arms control adviser and recently resigned as head of an advocacy group that opposes the accord. "Nobody involved in this debate ... is saying that it's OK if Iran gets nukes because Israel can deter their use."

Samore, director of research at Harvard University's Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, believes the discussion needs to stay focused on the purpose of the deal. "The question is: 'Does this deal prevent Iran from getting nuclear weapons?'" he said. He believes it does.

The White House declined to respond to questions about why the Obama administration hasn't made Israel's nuclear
deterrent part of the most contentious US foreign policy debate since the 2003 US-led invasion of Iraq. Questions emailed to the Republican chairmen and the senior Democrats on the Senate and House foreign affairs committees went unanswered.

The silence reflects US adherence to a 1969 arrangement - a senior CIA official concluded a year earlier that Israel was capable of building warheads - in which the United States and Israel agreed that both would keep mum about the Israeli weapons program, which is centered at the Dimona nuclear complex in the Negev Desert.

But it also has become a political taboo - Cohen refers to a "code of political silence" - for most serving and former American officials to publicly discuss the Israeli stockpile, which is the target of a longstanding proposal for a UN-recognized weapons-of-mass-destruction-free zone in the Middle East.

Pushed by Iran, Arab nations and others, the proposal is supported by the Obama administration. But the White House doesn't believe that the current conditions in the region are conducive to proceeding with the plan.

Some experts said that discussing the Israeli arsenal could give credence to assertions by Iran that the threat posed by Israel was the reason it concealed what it claims was a peaceful nuclear program from the UN nuclear watchdog for 18 years, until 2002. Most experts believe the real motivation for the program - and an alleged warhead research effort - was the 1980-88 war with Iraq, in which Iran was hit with chemical weapons.

"It would be a mistake to bring Israel's nuclear capability into the Iran debate. Iranians spoke from time to time about shouldn't it (the deal) bring in Israel? But that was for rhetorical purposes," said Robert Einhorn, a retired veteran US diplomat who was on Obama's Iran negotiating team. "When the negotiations got serious, there was never any mention of that. I took their public comments about Israel's capability to be a kind of smokescreen, a diversion."

Israel's nuclear program began in the 1950s. Public disclosure first came in 1986 from a disgruntled Israeli technician, Mordechai Vanunu, who was jailed for 18 years and is barred from traveling abroad.

Numerous details have since emerged in books, academic research, media reports, occasional comments by US and Israeli officials and declassified US diplomatic and top-secret intelligence reports. These reports include a 1974 Special National Intelligence Estimate that declared, "We believe that Israel already has produced nuclear weapons."

The Israeli program was built with foreign aid, especially from France, which helped Israel build its reactor and a plant at Dimona that separates plutonium from spent fuel. Israel also relied on extensive subterfuge, including deceiving American inspectors who visited Dimona, the alleged theft of bomb-grade uranium from the United States and a suspected clandestine test blast off the South African coast in 1979.

Yet as part of the 1969 arrangement to remain silent about Israel's arsenal, the United States reportedly agreed to stop pushing Israel to join the Non-Proliferation Treaty, the keystone of the global system to halt the spread of nuclear weapons. Israel remains outside the treaty - along with nuclear weapons states India, Pakistan and North Korea - while Iran joined in 1968.

Israel's arsenal "would certainly" comprise warheads for mobile missiles and aircraft-deliverable bombs, according to the Federation of Atomic Scientists.

Israel also has taken delivery of five of six advanced German-made submarines reportedly capable of launching nuclear-tipped cruise missiles, which would significantly boost the Jewish state's ability to deter potential existential threats with devastating retribution.

Those capabilities, some experts said, should be part of the Iran deal debate. That's because they raise the question of whether MAD - the theory of mutually assured destruction that many experts believe averted nuclear war between the United States and the former Soviet Union - would apply to Israel and Iran should Tehran secretly develop warheads.

"Israel lives in a dangerous neighborhood, but Israel is well-equipped to deter any nuclear threat that might come from its neighborhood," said Daryl Kimball, a deal supporter who heads the Arms Control Association, a policy institute. "If the Iranians two of three or four decades from now, or another country in the region, were to develop nuclear weapons, it would be extremely dangerous. Yet Israel would retain a mutually assured destruction capability that could potentially
deter such a threat."

Samore disagrees. From Israel's perspective, he said, its arsenal didn't dissuade Iran, Iraq, Libya and Syria from pursuing covert nuclear programs. Israeli warplanes destroyed Iraq's reactor in 1981 and Syria's reactor in 2007. The late Libyan dictator Moammar Gadhafi renounced his nuclear weapons program in 2003.

"The whole point of Israel's nuclear arsenal . . . is to deter threats to the country. Except you have to say that from Israel's standpoint, the pressure for proliferation in the Arab Middle East has been steady," Samore said. "From Israel's standpoint, it's hard to argue that having that extra security blanket worked."

Some experts think that the Israeli arsenal could dissuade Iran from secretly developing a nuclear arsenal in violation of its deal with the United States, Russia, China, France, Britain and Germany.

"It's a legitimate discussion point on whether it (the Israeli arsenal) is a check on Iranian cheating (on the nuclear deal). I think it is," said Peter Huessy, a deal critic and president of Geostrategic Analysis, a national security consultancy. "The Israeli nuclear deterrent has absolutely no bearing on whether Iran should have nukes. Iran should not and Israel's deterrent is its own business."

Cohen takes a different tact, arguing that Israel's stockpile outgrew its original role of being Israel's ultimate security guarantor when the Jewish state's conventional military strength surpassed that of any other country in the region decades ago.

Instead, he contended, Israel now relies on its nuclear arsenal, whether deliberate or not, "as a political way to project power and national determination."

"Nuclear weapons, especially for a right-wing-oriented Israel, is no longer a matter of existential survival. It is a way to project Israel as the most powerful, the unchallenged, the strongest factor in the region that can project a sense of strength, confidence and will," said Cohen. "The rise of Iran questions that."

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Jonathan S. Landay

Jonathan S. Landay, national security and intelligence correspondent, has written about foreign affairs and US defense, intelligence and foreign policies for 15 years. >From 1985-94, he covered South Asia and the Balkans for United Press International and then the Christian Science Monitor. He moved to Washington in December 1994 to cover defense and foreign affairs for the Christian Science Monitor and joined Knight Ridder in October 1999. He speaks frequently on national security matters, particularly the Balkans. In 2005, he was part of a team that won a National Headliners Award for "How the Bush Administration Went to War in Iraq." He also won a 2005 Award of Distinction from the Medill School of Journalism for "Iraqi exiles fed exaggerated tips to news media."

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SUPPORT THE AGREEMENT

July 29, 2016 info@justforeignpolicy.org

Dear Art,

"The agreement currently on the table is the best way to ensure Iran doesn’t build a f*#@ing bomb!"

That’s what Morgan Freeman says in a video Global Zero just released in which Freeman, Jack Black, and Natasha Lyonne join Middle East experts such as Former US Ambassador Thomas Pickering and Queen Noor in hilariously digging into those who oppose the deal.

Watch the video and share it with your friends who still don’t get it:

We at Just Foreign Policy are working overtime to press Congress to support the deal, to ensure that the media accurately portrays it, and to give you the information and materials you need to do the same. We’re trying to raise $3000 by the end of July 31 to help fund this work. Will you help by making a $15 tax-deductible donation?

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If you would like to send a check instead, here’s our address:

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Thank you for all you do to support the Iran deal,

Robert Naiman, Megan Iorio, and Avram Reisman
Just Foreign Policy
Dear Dick,

What do Bolton, Netanyahu, Graham and others opposing the Iran nuclear deal have in common? They were passionate supporters and pushers of the Iraq war.

To the opposition of the Iran deal, President Obama recently stated, “Let’s not mince words: The choice we face is ultimately between diplomacy and some form of war — maybe not tomorrow, maybe not three months from now, but soon.”

And now, as the President is trying to broker the historic deal, Sen. Charles Schumer - who also voted for the Iraq war - is sabotaging the Iran deal, claiming the United States should call for a “better deal.”

Schumer was wrong about Iraq and is wrong about the Iran deal.

The reality is that those calling for “a better deal” have never offered a viable plan on how to get one. Opposing this deal and offering no alternative is putting us on the path to war, which we all know will come at a tremendous cost.

Call Congress TODAY and urge them to support diplomacy by supporting the Iran deal!

Share this video to get others to take action!

Don’t let us be lead into another war.

Onward,

Robert Greenwald, President
Brave New films

P.S. As the push for war continues, we need your financial support more than ever. Donate today to make more videos that advocate for diplomacy not war.

Support Diplomacy, Not War

–

Thousands of NAPF supporters have already written to their Senators and Representative asking them to support the deal between Iran and the P5+1.

If you have not yet taken action, please don’t wait any longer. In just a few weeks, Congress will vote on whether or not to support the deal. It is important that the United States support
diplomacy over war.

Please contact your Senators and Representative today.

The Nuclear Age Peace Foundation works for the abolition of nuclear weapons worldwide. We feel it is important that, while we work tirelessly for global nuclear abolition, we also work to uphold deals such as this one that demonstrate the power of cooperation over violence.

Click here to take action today.

US and IRAN: Future?

The Nation editorial, “Breakthrough with Iran” (August 3-10, 2015). Looks beyond the agreement to a transformed US policy in the region—e.g. the removal of the missile “defense” weapons “placed in Europe under the pretense of protect the continent from an Iranian attack, and for nations that actually have nuclear weapons to join or comply with the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, which Iran has always supported.” The entire essay is much worth reading. --Dick

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None of the senators or representatives publishes his e-mail address, but each can be contacted by filling in forms offered through his website.

Senator John Boozman: (202)224-4843
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Senator Tom Cotton: (202)224-2353,
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Rep. Rick Crawford, 1st District: (202)225-4076
Website Email: http://crawford.house.gov/contact/

Rep. French Hill, 2nd District: (202)225-2506
Website Email: https://hill.house.gov/contact/email

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