

A Tale of Sound and Fury Signifying Nothing: Iran's Nukes

Manufactured Crisis: The Untold Story of the Iran Nuclear Scare
by Gareth Porter (New York: Just World Books, 2014)

Reviewed by William O. Beeman



Gareth Porter has been the most conscientious follower of the fantasy danger of Iran's purported "nuclear weapons program." In this new, meticulously documented book, he exposes the many lies and half-truths that have been promulgated over more than two decades to try and convince the American public and the world that Iran is the chief danger to international peace.

Before plunging into the details of the book, let me state its conclusions unequivocally: Iran has never been proven to have a nuclear weapons program. Any

claim to the contrary is absolutely false. The attempt to claim that such a weapons program exists was the result of a decades-long effort on the part of American neoconservatives allied with right-wing forces in Israel to legitimize hostile actions against Iran designed to effect regime change there.

Porter's account is fascinating and appalling reading. It is fascinating because he has created a compelling narrative showing how the framework for attacking Iran in this way evolved over decades. One of the most telling episodes in the book concerns President George H.W. Bush. In 1989 he was willing to improve relations with Iran eliminating sanctions that had been in place since the revolution of 1978-79. At that time American hostages were being held by Shi'a forces in Lebanon. Then Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Velayati intervened, and all American prisoners were released. Bush was grateful and was supported by his national security advisor, Brent Snowcroft, but suddenly his administration reversed course.

As Porter describes it, though he and Bush wanted improved relations, everyone else on the national security team insisted that Iran was "deeply engaged in other acts of terrorism that made it very, very difficult to improve the relationship" (p. 87). Porter goes on to demonstrate that these "other acts of terrorism" were unsubstantiated. Essentially the decision not to go forward with improved relations was a political one and not based on any proven Iranian actions.

After Robert Gates, who had served on the National Security Council, became CIA director, the disinformation about Iran continued. Porter documents that in 1992 it was Gates who first declared, with no hard evidence at all, that "Iran is developing a capability to produce weapons of mass destruction," and was "seeking to acquire a nuclear weapons capability."

In this way the juggernaut against Iran was launched. Although the national intelligence estimate for that year declared that Iran would not seriously threaten U.S. interests, Gates' estimate became gospel for the balance of the Bush administration, carrying forward into the Clinton, Bush, and Obama administrations. Gates' influence was indeed extremely telling.

After the tragedy of September 11, 2001, the George W. Bush administration was dominated by neoconservatives who had been active since the administration of his father and were anxious to see regime change throughout the Middle East. They ignored the fact that the Iranian nuclear energy program had started in earnest during the last years of the regime of Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, and declared that Iran had been undertaking "secret" nuclear developments. In fact, these were not at all secret, and had been governed by the rules of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty to which Iran and the United States (but not Israel, Pakistan, India, or North Korea) were signatories, and which guaranteed Iran the "inalienable right" to the peaceful development of nuclear power.

The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) was charged with carrying out inspections of Iran's nuclear program (and indeed, the nuclear programs of all signatories to the treaty). They never once found the slightest evidence that Iran had a nuclear weapons program or had diverted any nuclear material for military use. Still Gates' 10-year-old assertion that Iran was seeking to acquire a nuclear weapons capability, though completely unproven, was seized upon by the neoconservatives who wanted to bring down the Iranian regime.

As Porter documents, the IAEA quickly became politicized. Its head, Mohamed ElBaradei, was excoriated by the George W. Bush administration, who tried to get him fired because he would not assert that Iran was building nuclear weapons. His eventual successor, Yukio Amano, was more compliant. Though still not able to say that Iran had a demonstrable nuclear weapons program, IAEA reports after he took office used convoluted language to suggest that they "could not eliminate the possibility" that Iran might be building nuclear weapons. Several attempts on Iran's part during the Bush administration to negotiate over misunderstandings of its program were rebuffed by Washington, partially due to those same neoconservatives in his administration, notably John Bolton, who served as United Nations ambassador on a recess appointment during the crucial period from 2005-2006 and made it his mission to attack Iran with falsehoods at every turn.

Porter presents example after example of the U.S. media, most notably The New York Times, distorting the facts about Iran's nuclear activities. Every action and decision was placed under a microscope, and though Iran had only completed one reactor in development since before the revolution, and was far from completing any facility for additional generation of nuclear power, the hyperbole in the press made it seem that Iran would have a bomb tomorrow. Lobbying groups such as the American Enterprise Institute (AEI), the Washington Institute for Near East Policy (WINEP), and the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) influenced these writings and lobbied the U.S. Congress for more stringent sanctions on Iran with the aim of completely dismantling Iran's 40-year-old nuclear program. They also supported military action against Iran either by the United States or by Israel. Porter's book features the famous picture of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu pointing to a picture of a Warner Brothers cartoon bomb and inveighing against Iran.

Porter's book is essential reading for all Americans wary of the manufactured path to war. It shows how ideology can distort facts, and can be used as a weapon to sway public opinion in directions that are inimical to world interests. As talks with Iran in Vienna over its nuclear program proceed, Porter notes that the Obama administration, only after ridding itself of the extended influence of Robert Gates, has finally made attempts to wind down the two decades of baseless attacks on Iran to try and forge a rapprochement. The question remains whether warmongers in Washington, Israel, and some nations in Europe will come to their senses and let this happen.

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