

Seeing Mushroom Clouds Again

By Polly Mann



Washington and a compliant media appear to be having visions again, seeing things that others in the world cannot.

The six-page article appearing in the June 6 edition of *The New Yorker*, "Iran and the Bomb," by eminent journalist Seymour Hersh, has created a tsunami of discussion. Since there are many more people who don't read *The New Yorker* than do and since I'm convinced of the importance of the piece, the following is my best effort at honing it down.

In the first paragraph Hersh compares the questions about the possibility of Iran possessing nuclear weapons, or the technology to make them, to the same kinds of questions that were generated about Iraq prior to the U.S. invasion. These statements by influential leaders that "yes, indeed, Saddam Hussein has nuclear weapons," were instrumental in leading the American public to accept the necessity for the Iraq War.

Hersh follows this up in the second paragraph by saying, "Despite years of covert operations inside Iran, extensive satellite imagery, and the recruitment of many Iranian intelligence assets, the U.S. and its allies, including Israel, have been unable to find irrefutable evidence of an ongoing hidden nuclear-weapons program in Iran, according to intelligence and diplomatic officials here and abroad."

What Iran does possess is a nuclear power plant in the city of Busheh, with a second in the planning, and a number of centrifuges. The International Atomic Energy

Agency [IAEA] is monitoring the Iranian enrichment program, and all Iran's major declared nuclear installations are under extensive video surveillance. While IAEA inspectors have expressed frustration with Iran's level of cooperation, they haven't found any evidence that enriched uranium has been diverted to an illicit weapons program.

However, in early March, Robert Einhorn, an advisor to Secretary of State Clinton, in a talk to the Arms Control Association said that Iran was "clearly acquiring all the necessary elements of a nuclear-weapons capability." In a speech given May 12, Thomas E. Donilon, a national-security advisor to President Obama, indicated that America's sanctions policy is increasingly aimed at changing Iran's political behavior, and the specter of nuclear-weapons development has become a tool for accomplishing that goal.



Déjà vu: George W. Bush and National Security Advisor Condoleeza Rice, preparing to wage war in 2003, announced that Iraq could be acquiring weapons of mass destruction. They told the American public that they didn't want the smoking gun of proof to come in the form of a mushroom cloud.

As might be expected, a leading Administration advisor on Israel, Dennis Ross, said at a meeting of the leading American Zionist organization, the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, that Iran had "significantly expanded its nuclear program" and accused it of pursuing the program "in violation of its international obligations." Nevertheless, most Israeli military experts believe that Iran does not now have a nuclear weapon and fear regional proliferation more than they do attack. In early May, Ehud Barak, the Israeli defense minister, in an interview in the Israeli daily Haaretz, said that he did not believe Iran would drop a nuclear bomb on Israel or any other country in the region.

In a recent round of negotiations with the West, Iran insisted on two preconditions to negotiation: lifting of the sanctions and acknowledgment of Iran's right to enrich uranium.

American diplomat Thomas Pickering is convinced that the solution to the nuclear impasse is to turn Iran's power-enrichment programs into an international effort. Iran insists that for progress to be made "Washington had to give a sign that it was no longer interested in regime change."

In an interview with Hersh, Mohamed ElBaradei, who for 12 years was director-general of the International Atomic Energy Agency, said: "During my time at the agency we haven't seen a shred of evidence that Iran has been weaponizing, in terms of building nuclear-weapons facilities and using enriched material. I don't believe Iran is a clear and present danger. All I see is the hype about the threat posed by Iran."

He concluded, "The core issue is mutual lack of trust. I believe there will be no solution until the day that the United States and Iran sit down together to discuss the issues and put pressure on each other to find a solution."

Polly Mann is a co-founder of Women Against Military Madness and writes regularly for this newsletter.