

IAEA IRAN REPORT FALLOUT CONTINUES: FRANCE LEADS MILITANCY, MEK RUMORS, IRAN RECONSIDERS COOPERATION

Reaction to the leaked IAEA report on Iran's nuclear technology continues. In a remarkable article in the New York Times that reads more like an Op-Ed (h/t MadDog), we see the writer urging the US to join the more militant posturing coming from . . . France. [It appears that the world has now completely inverted from the days of Freedom Fries in 2003.] In addition, the New York Times has joined in repeating the whispers that some sort of Mossad-MEK operation was involved in the blast in Iran that killed the head of their missile development program. Also, Iran is discussing changing the extent to which it cooperates with the IAEA. International intrigue surrounding Iran also is enhanced with conflicting reports on the cause of death of Ahmed Rezaei in Dubai. Rezaei is the son of Mohsen Rezaei, who previously served as head of the Revolutionary Guards, ran for President of Iran and now heads the Expediency Council. Dubai has termed the death a suicide but most Iranian sources are labeling it suspicious.

The Op-Ed piece in the New York Times masquerading as a news article is penned by John Vinocur who is based in Paris for the Times' sister publication the International Herald Tribune. Vinocur opens with a slap at US leadership:

If the Obama administration wants to lead from behind in imposing sanctions

to halt Iran's nuclear weapon drive, it shouldn't look for France to play the convenient associate.

That's not the way the French would describe their role in the world. Rather, the fact is that France, in many respects, led the United States into battle in Libya and provided much of the willpower leading to a victory over the Qaddafi regime that is shared by the Americans, British and others.

Vinocur then misrepresents the findings of the IAEA report, stating flatly that "the Iranians now have enough fuel on hand to produce four nuclear weapons", leaving out the key piece of information that this fuel has not yet been enriched to weapons grade and that there is no evidence or even any suggestion that Iran is engaging in enrichment to weapons grade.

Vinocour goes on to add drama by attributing very strong language to French President Nicholas Sarkozy:

Most certainly, it is a reaffirmation of President Nicolas Sarkozy's conviction that an Iranian nuclear capability or bomb is the single greatest threat to the world's security.

After ruminating on the ineffectiveness of current sanction approaches, Vinocour goes on to suggest that blocking Iranian access to the EU communications satellite it currently uses for domestic transmissions would be a proper response after finding disappointment in the fact that a military option is quite unlikely.

In addition to that opinion piece masquerading as news, the New York Times also chose to repeat the rumors that have begun to circulate regarding the blast that killed the Iranian head of its missile program:

Revolutionary Guards officials have said

the blast took place during a weapons transfer. They have not said why General Moghaddam was at the military base.

Time magazine's Web site cited an unnamed Western official who said the blast was the work of the Mossad, the Israeli intelligence service. Tikun Olam, a blog on Middle Eastern politics, cited an unnamed Israeli official who said it was the work of the Mossad and the Mujahedeen Khalq, a group of Iranian exiles that has a history of killings and sabotage aimed at overthrowing Iran's government.

Similar accusations were made after at least two bombings that killed Revolutionary Guards officers in recent years. The corps has also been a target of Iranian insurgent groups including Jundallah, a Sunni militant group based near Iran's border with Pakistan."

There is a very interesting nexus of this story, in which both Western and Iranian news outlets seem to be enhancing the prominence of a figure whose role, according to the Times article was "previously unknown outside Iranian military circles". The Iranian news agency Mehr is running a story stating that the IAEA has no role in regulating the Iranian missile program. Quoting Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Saleh:

"The agency is only responsible for the oversight of countries' nuclear activities. The oversight of missile activities of member states does not fall within the ambit of the agency," he told IRNA.

"The agency has no responsibility for dealing with member states' conventional weapons and missile activities. It is not stipulated by the IAEA Statute and the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty,"

he said.

He added, "If the agency claims that it has documents about Iran's nuclear program, why does it not present them to Iran so that we can examine them?"

"The agency claims that these documents are about the manufacture of missiles which are capable of carrying nuclear warheads, but it is possible to develop a powerful and high-performance missile and fit a powerful 'non-nuclear' warhead on it," Salehi, a nuclear physicist, stated.

Recall that much of the controversy over the IAEA report centers on Iranian work that has been described as aimed at developing a high-explosives based trigger for a nuclear device that has been made small enough to fit on a missile.

In further Iranian statements about the IAEA in Mehrs, we hear from the Speaker of their Parliament that Iran is reconsidering its level of cooperation with the IAEA:

Iranian Parliament Speaker Ali Larijani says that the Majlis deems it necessary to revise Iran's cooperation with the International Atomic Energy Agency.

/snip/

There is no new point in the IAEA's report, the senior lawmaker said, adding Iran had previously answered all the questions about false claims mentioned in the report.

Iran cleared up all the ambiguities over its nuclear activities under the modality plan signed by Tehran and the UN nuclear watchdog in 2007, but the agency has changed course and raised issues, which had previously been settled, he said.

Hmm. I wonder how one could conclude that “the agency has changed course”? Could it be the fact that the IAEA got a new Director General two years ago?

Finally, we have the mysterious death of Ahmed Rezaei:

The reported death in Dubai of the son of a prominent Iranian politician and former Revolutionary Guard commander has generated suspicion in the Iranian media.

Though local police call it a case of suicide, the Iranian media have raised questions about the death of Ahmed Rezaei, whose body was found Saturday in his hotel suite in the United Arab Emirates, according to news reports.

He is the son of Mohsen Rezaei, who serves as secretary-general of Iran’s influential Expediency Council, which advises Iran’s supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

/snip/

The Abu Dhabi-based English daily the **National** said the body of Rezaei, 31, was found in his room at the four-star Hotel Gloria in Dubai Media City on Saturday. Police believe it was a suicide, according to the newspaper.

“There is no criminal suspicion,” the paper quoted Khalil Mansouri, head of the Dubai police’s criminal investigation department, as saying. Mansouri added that forensic tests indicated that Ahmed Rezaei had been dead for about 12 hours before his body was found.

This LA Times article then goes on to an AP story saying that local police sources indicated that Rezaei was found with a slit wrist.

However, Mehr has a very different version of the story:

Ahmad Rezaii, the son of Mohsen Rezaii, the secretary of the Expediency Council, has been found dead in his room at Gloria Hotel in Dubai, reports said on Sunday.

He reportedly died after receiving an electric shock. An official at the Expediency Council told the Mehr News Agency that Ahmad Rezaii's death was "suspicious".

Stay tuned, it appears that developments are continuing to unfold along several fronts simultaneously.