

GEORGE JAHN ONCE AGAIN GRANTS ANONYMITY FOR DUBIOUS IRAN ACCUSATION

Just under two weeks ago, AP's George Jahn released the infamous cartoon around which he built a dubious nest of mostly anonymous charges that Iran had conducted work toward developing a neutron trigger device for nuclear weapons, using an explosive containment chamber at the Parchin military site. Jahn further repeated anonymous claims from "diplomats" that satellite imagery showed activity claimed to be Iran "cleaning" the site to remove traces of radioactivity.

It is simply impossible to "clean" radioactivity from a steel chamber in which uranium has been used to generate neutrons, as the neutrons would result in making the entire thickness of the steel chamber radioactive, as I showed in this post. The only way that Iran would be able to hide evidence of work on a neutron trigger device at Parchin would be to dismantle and remove the entire chamber. It most likely would be necessary to raze the entire building as well, since the structural steel in the building surrounding the chamber also likely would have been made radioactive by the neutrons.

Since negotiations between Iran and the P5+1 countries will continue next month in Moscow, those who prefer a war with Iran now must find new areas in which to accuse Iran of weapons work. George Jahn dutifully stepped up to play his role in this process again today, granting anonymity to "diplomats" who make a vague accusation that Jahn dressed up into a highly sensational headline that is backed up by few facts and then rendered essentially meaningless when he goes further into the information. At

the AP's site, Jahn's article carries the headline "APNewsBreak: Higher enrichment at Iranian site". The Washington Post decided that headline wasn't incendiary enough, and so their version reads "APNewsBreak: Diplomats say UN experts find enrichment at Iranian site closer to arms level".

The story itself is quite short. It opens:

Diplomats say the U.N. nuclear agency has found traces of uranium at Iran's underground atomic site enriched to higher than previous levels and closer to what is needed for nuclear weapons.

Wait a minute. This whole thing is about "traces" of uranium enriched to a higher level. Missing from the entire article is any detail of how much material was found or to what level the uranium was enriched. The highest level of enrichment currently declared by Iran is 20%, which the press in the recent past has been describing as only a short "technical step" away from the the 90%+ needed for a nuclear weapon.

The next two paragraphs from Jahn basically render his entire story moot:

The diplomats say the finding by the International Atomic Energy Agency does not necessarily mean that Iran is secretly raising its enrichment threshold.

They say the traces could be left during startup of enriching centrifuges until the desired level is reached. That would be a technical glitch only.

So, in other words, these "diplomats" are doing their best to create a crisis over something that is a mere "technical glitch" and represents an insignificant amount of material. Of course, for those who only see the headline, especially the one on the Post's website, the idea will have been planted that Iran is cheating on its

declared enrichment program and secretly producing material that is ready to be placed into a weapon.

As I pointed out in this post, all of these incendiary press reports about Iran and uranium enrichment overlook a very important basic set of facts:

Somewhat overlooked in all the hype over the explosion chamber accusations is a very important point regarding Iran's uranium enrichment work. As noted in an article by Reuters today, such work is very closely monitored by the IAEA already:

They say Iran's production of uranium refined to a fissile concentration of 20 percent, which it started two years ago, seems to have remained steady in recent months after a major escalation of the work in late 2011 and early this year.

Progress in Iran's controversial nuclear program is closely watched by the West and Israel as it could determine the time the Islamic Republic would need to build nuclear bombs, should it decide to do so.

Getting Iran to stop the higher-level enrichment is expected to be a priority for world powers when they meet with Iran in Baghdad next week in an attempt to start resolving the decade-old dispute over Tehran's atomic ambitions.

"It is still going strong. I hear it is unchanged," one diplomat accredited to the U.N. nuclear watchdog, which regularly inspects Iran's declared atomic sites, said

about the country's most sensitive nuclear activity.

[Emphasis added]

What we also know from this close monitoring, as reported in the IAEA's November, 2011 report (pdf), is that all enriched uranium produced at these monitored sites is accounted for, so any presumed weapons development would have to assume an undeclared site where enrichment is being carried out:

While the Agency continues to verify the non-diversion of declared nuclear material at the nuclear facilities and LOFs declared by Iran under its Safeguards Agreement, as Iran is not providing the necessary cooperation, including by not implementing its Additional Protocol, the Agency is unable to provide credible assurance about the absence of undeclared nuclear material and activities in Iran, and therefore to conclude that all nuclear material in Iran is in peaceful activities.

Unless credible evidence is brought forward demonstrating that a significant amount of material has been produced by Iran that is enriched beyond the known 20% enrichment level, then accusations such as the one repeated today by Jahn should be quickly brushed aside as nothing more than the war hawks doing their best to recreate the 2003 Iraq scenario in which contrived evidence is used to start a war of choice.

Update: While this post was being written, the version of the article at the Washington Post web site was updated and we now know that the

traces found were enriched to 27% uranium:

The International Atomic Energy Agency has found traces of uranium enriched up to 27 percent at Iran's Fordo enrichment plant, the diplomats told The Associated Press.

That is still substantially below the 90-percent level needed to make the fissile core of nuclear arms. But it is above Iran's highest-known enrichment grade, which is close to 20 percent, and which already can be turned into weapons-grade material much more quickly than the Islamic Republic's main stockpile, which can only be used for fuel at around 3.5 percent.

/snip/

The diplomats said a confidential IAEA report on Iran's nuclear program to be released later Friday to the agency's 35-nation board will mention of the traces of 27-percent enrichment found at Fordo.

That update changes nothing about how flimsy and contrived this particular accusation is. A minor technical detail is being amplified entirely out of proportion to create sensational headlines. Sadly, history tells us that this strategy can be successful. And so much for that report being "confidential".