

INFORMATION FLOW IS KEY IN IRAN WAR POSTURING

As Marcy points out this morning, Iran is now emphasizing the many ways that the US is waging war on Iran. What I find interesting in both the physical attacks, whether they hit equipment or people, and the propaganda attacks waged in the media is that the flow of information is of overwhelming importance. I'll hit three examples of the importance of information flow in the posturing for war with Iran.

Information Flow Between IAEA and Intelligence Agencies

Iran is now disclosing remarkable details on the August attack that disrupted electricity to the Fordo uranium enrichment plant near Qom. Especially intriguing is a fake rock discovered later that appeared to house electronics for monitoring communications at the site. But more important to me is that Iran is using the Fordo event to renew its claims that the IAEA is too closely affiliated with both US and Israeli intelligence. Consider this report today from Fars News in Iran, titled "Iran Angry at IAEA's Use of External Sources of Information for Reports". The article begins by lamenting that IAEA relies on information from US and Israeli intelligence:

Head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) Fereidoun Abbasi lamented that the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) uses external and unreliable sources of information for reporting Iran's peaceful nuclear program.

"Unfortunately, the IAEA is influenced by intelligence sources outside the Agency, and its information leaks and the CIA and Mossad benefit from the leaked information," Abbasi said in a

meeting with members of the Iranian parliament's National Security and Foreign Policy Commission in Tehran on Tuesday.

The article goes on to note that IAEA inspectors appeared to know instantaneously when the power was disrupted at the Fordo plant and links this to accusations of infiltration of IAEA:

In relevant remarks earlier this month, Abbasi also warned the IAEA about infiltration of saboteurs and terrorists.

/snip/

"On Friday August 17, 2012, power lines running from the city of Qom to Fordow facility were cut using explosives. It should be reminded that power outage is a way of damaging centrifuge machines. In the early hours of the following day, (IAEA) inspectors demanded a snap inspection of the facility," he said, addressing an IAEA meeting in Vienna.

"Isn't there any connection between the visit and the blast? Who else could have quick access to the facility other than IAEA inspectors to register and report dysfunctions?" he asked.

The fake rock would still have been operating on August 17, so Iran has told us that US and/or Israeli intelligence would have known immediately of the loss of power. And yet, somehow this information also made its way to IAEA within only a few hours. Such a sequence of events certainly paints a picture of the intelligence community having very good lines of communication with the IAEA and the information flow appears to go in both directions.

Control of Information on Uranium Enrichment

Just as was the case for explaining that the disputed explosion chamber at Parchin likely is

used for nanodiamond research rather than nuclear trigger research, a report from b at Moon of Alabama should have completely defused the yammering over the August report on Iran from the IAEA. We learn from b that although Iran produced a large amount of 20% enriched uranium during the reporting period, much of Iran's stockpile of 20% enriched uranium was converted to fuel plates for the Tehran Research Reactor that produces medical isotopes. Importantly, once converted to fuel plates, the uranium is no longer in a chemical form that can be put back into centrifuges for further enrichment to weapons grade. As a result, b is the only person who could bring us this important news just after the report was released:

Not only is any Uranium Iran has below weapons grade but, according to the new IAEA report, Iran has today less enriched Uranium that could quickly be converted into a nuclear weapon than it had in May 2012, the time of the IAEA's last report (GOV/2012/23) on the issue.

Of course, this point was completely lost on the corporate media, even though it was published back on August 31. Here is Joby Warrick wringing his hands over enrichment on Monday:

At the same time, the Obama White House has proven to be no more successful than its predecessors at halting Iran's nuclear advance, the singular goal that has driven U.S. policy on Iran since the George H.W. Bush administration. Indeed, Iran's rate of production of enriched uranium has nearly tripled since Obama took office, while hopes that the president can deliver a solution to the crisis have faded, even among his former admirers in Iran.

Warrick completely leaves out the fact that Iran has converted much of its 20% enriched uranium

to a form that is useless for enrichment to weapons grade. Is Warrick's omission a deliberate play into the strategy of the war mongers or does it demonstrate a level of ignorance that should render him ineligible for any further reporting on the nuclear issue in Iran?

Control of Information on Negotiations

A very strange sequence of events this week points out how both Iran and the US control information flow about the state of any negotiations on Iran's nuclear program. On Monday, Gareth Porter published an exclusive interview with Ali Asghar Soltanieh, who represents Iran in its negotiations with the IAEA. Porter revealed that Saeed Jalili, who is Iran's negotiator with the P5+1 group of nations, had conveyed to EU negotiator Catherine Ashton a willingness for Iran to halt all 20% uranium enrichment in return for an end to the sanctions that have been put in place:

Iran has again offered to halt its enrichment of uranium to 20 percent, which the United States has identified as its highest priority in the nuclear talks, in return for easing sanctions against Iran, according to Iran's permanent representative to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

Ali Asghar Soltanieh, who has conducted Iran's negotiations with the IAEA in Tehran and Vienna, revealed in an interview with IPS that Iran had made the offer at the meeting between EU Foreign Policy Chief Catherine Ashton and Iran's leading nuclear negotiator Saeed Jalili in Istanbul Sep. 19.

Of course, Warrick's article on Monday not only misses this development, but it states no new breakthroughs are expected:

No firm dates for new negotiations have been set, and Middle East analysts say no breakthrough is likely until after the November election.

However, it's not just mouthpieces for the US-Israel hardliners that ignore Soltanieh's disclosure. Iran's PressTV reported Tuesday that Soltanieh refuted that his interview with Porter took place:

Iran's ambassador to International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) has denied false remarks the Inter Press Service (IPS) attributed to him about the Islamic Republic's nuclear energy program, Press TV reports.

"Let me tell you! I've taken part in no interviews about [the country's uranium] enrichment and relevant issues with anyone in the past one month. I've not said such a thing," Ali Asghar Soltanieh told Press TV on the phone on Tuesday.

But the PressTV denial of the interview now appears to be refuted by an article today from Mehr News, where the Porter interview is quoted. It's hard to see how this article can be seen as anything other than confirmation both that the interview took place and that Iran did indeed offer to halt 20% enrichment in return for dropping the sanctions, especially since the article is headlined "Iran has offered to halt 20 percent enrichment if sanctions lifted":

Iran has offered to stop enriching uranium to a purity level of 20 percent if the West lifts sanctions against Tehran, Iran's ambassador to the Vienna-based International Atomic Energy Agency says.

/snip/

Ambassador Ali Asghar Soltanieh said the offer was made once again in an informal

meeting between Iran's chief nuclear negotiator Saeed Jalili and European Union foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton in Istanbul on September 18.

/snip/

"We are prepared to suspend enrichment to 20 percent, provided we find a reciprocal step compatible with it," Soltanieh said in an interview with the Inter Press Service News Agency published on Monday.

"We said this in Istanbul," he added. "If we do that there shouldn't be sanctions."

By email, Porter told me that he is looking into the reasons why Soltanieh would have called PressTV to deny the interview and hopes to publish more information on the turn of events.

At the very least, it appears that there are differing factions within Iran with differing views on whether it should be publicized that Iran is willing to suspend 20% enrichment in return for dropping the sanctions. At the same time, the US press is too consumed with fears over 20% enrichment and joyous descriptions of the pain inflicted on Iran's civilians by the sanctions to notice that new peace opportunities might be up for negotiation.

Update: IPS has added the following note on Gareth Porter's article reporting on his interview with Soltanieh:

Iranian Ambassador Ali Asghar Soltanieh has reportedly denied the interview on which this Sep. 24 story was based. The interview, conducted by telephone on Sep. 20, is the third story that IPS has published based on interviews with the ambassador, and like the others, it accurately reflects the ambassador's statements to IPS reporter Gareth Porter. We regret the fact that the

ambassador has felt the need to deny any
or all of it.