

ON HIROSHIMA ANNIVERSARY, IRAN DEAL OPPONENTS MAKE ONE MORE PUSH BASED ON PARCHIN PHOTOS



Hiroshima was flattened by the US on August 6, 1945 by the deployment of a nuclear weapon. (Wikimedia Commons)

Seventy years ago today, on August 6, 1945, the US dropped an atomic bomb on Hiroshima, Japan. By November of that same year, approximately 130,000 people were dead because of that single bomb, which targeted a civilian population. Three days later, the US deployed a second nuclear weapon in Nagasaki. It appears that these horrific weapons were not needed, despite the prevailing myth surrounding their use. Even with the subsequent proliferation of nuclear weapons, the US remains the only country to have ever used them outside a testing scenario, while countries as unstable as North Korea and Pakistan have achieved nuclear weapons capability at some level.

As might be expected, Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe is using the occasion of this anniversary to call for an end to nuclear weapons. Last week, Javad Zarif made an excellent move, in suggesting that now that Iran

has signed an agreement with the P5+1 group of countries on its nuclear technology, there should be a push to remove nuclear weapons and all WMD from the Middle East. Recall that Iran has agreed to the most intrusive inspections regime ever put into place in a country that didn't first lose a war, making their call for inspections of Israel's nuclear weapons program especially strong. These two calls together represent an appeal to those who prefer peace over war while placing the highest possible value on civilian lives.

That attitude of favoring peace over war and putting civilians first stands in stark contrast to those who oppose the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action signed by the P5+1 and Iran. As Barack Obama pointed out yesterday, those who are opposing the deal are the same people who were so tragically wrong about the decision to invade Iraq in 2003:

President Obama lashed out at critics of the Iran nuclear deal on Wednesday, saying many of those who backed the U.S. invasion of Iraq now want to reject the Iran accord and put the Middle East on the path toward another war.

/snip/

While calling the nuclear accord with Iran "the strongest nonproliferation agreement ever negotiated," Obama also seemed to turn the vote on the deal into a referendum on the U.S. invasion of Iraq a dozen years ago, a decision he portrayed as the product of a "mind-set characterized by a preference for military action over diplomacy."

Obama said that when he first ran for president, he believed "that America didn't just have to end that war. We had to end the mind-set that got us there in the first place." He added that "now, more than ever, we need clear thinking in our foreign policy."

One of the saddest aspects of this push for war over diplomacy is that much of it comes from deep within the US government itself. In many of my posts on the path to the P5+1 accord with Iran, I have noted the nefarious process of anonymous "disclosures" coming sometimes from "diplomats" and sometimes from "intelligence sources" that get transcribed into the press by a small handful of "reporters". Usually the worst offender on this front is George Jahn of AP. A recent retiree from this fold is Fredrik Dahl who now, ironically, appears to be the primary press contact for the IAEA. But never fear, rushing into the void created by the departure of Dahl (or perhaps his insertion into an operative role further inside the apparatus), we have the dynamic duo of Eli Lake and Josh Rogin. Their blather being put out as "journalism" is not worthy of a link here. If you want to find it, try going to Marcy's Twitter and searching for "not The Onion".

Of course, the high point of this process of manufacturing nuclear charges against Iran and then getting them into the media is the notorious "laptop of death". Running a close second, though, are the charges that Iran has engaged in developing a high explosives trigger device at the Parchin site. Showing that those who engage in this level of deceit have absolutely no pride, the charges of this work have proceeded despite an equally plausible explanation that the high explosives chamber could just as easily have been used to develop nanodiamonds. Further, those making these charges have allowed themselves to be baited into a ridiculous level of "analysis" of satellite photos of the site, with hilarious results from how Iran has played them.

Despite this level of embarrassment, one of the primary tools in this process, David Albright, couldn't resist one last try on the satellite photo front. Yesterday, he breathlessly informed us that there are a couple of new sheds on the Parchin site and there is even some debris. And, get this, a crate has been moved! Seriously,

here is the “meat” of Albright’s analysis (pdf):

ISIS acquired and analyzed commercial satellite imagery of the Parchin site in Iran taken before and after the signing of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) between Iran and the P5+1. Imagery from July 26, 2015 shows new signs of activity that are absent from imagery taken before the JCPOA (see figure 1).

New activity is taking place on the roof of the two southern buildings (left of figure 1). Several possible oil spills are visible in front of the northern building and the central building (suspected of housing high explosive experiments related to the development of nuclear weapons). Additionally, two vehicles are visible at the site. One is either a large vehicle or a small truck. The other vehicle presents signatures that are consistent with some sort of construction vehicle, such as a bulldozer or a steamroller. One of the two crates or containers visible in previous imagery has been moved, and possibly repositioned adjacent to the large central building at the site.

/snip/

Since the last ISIS assessment, which was in late May 2015, two new structures of unknown purpose have appeared adjacent to the two southern buildings at the site. These two structures were not present in ISIS’s previous May 2015 assessment and appeared at the site sometime between May 26 and July 12, 2015. In all three images, two small objects, possibly small containers or crates, are visible at the southern corner of the site, along with two new very small dark and circular-shaped unidentified objects. All the images show the continued presence of debris

surrounding the four buildings at the site.

So, we are supposed to get all worked up and reject the JCPOA because Iran moved a crate? As I have pointed before, the real key to whether explosive trigger development work was carried out with nuclear material is the blast chamber itself. There is a good chance that if enough work of this type took place in the chamber, then there will be a radioactive signature in the chamber itself that cannot be scrubbed out.

And yet, because Lake and Rogin “reported” on Albright’s analysis, Jim Sciutto decided that CNN had to join in on this “story”. But he apparently needed help getting around to writing it, as he cites a “senior intelligence official” who came to him directly. So consider that. We have our President pointing out, in the most articulate manner possible, that the JCPOA represents our best chance to move our foreign policy away from a “war first” mentality, and yet we have a “senior intelligence official” pushing the press to put out reports that are aimed at disrupting Congressional approval of the agreement.

Sadly, Sciutto and Walsh quote Delaware democratic Senator Chris Coons in a serious overstatement of the assessment of what has taken place at Parchin. While Coons does admit that he’s been briefed on the fact that it’s nearly impossible to remove radioactive material to below levels that inspectors can detect, he still moves the propaganda forward:

“What I’m most concerned about going forward is the integrity of the IAEA process: whether they question Iranian scientists, whether they actually have a meaningful inspection at the site of Parchin is more relevant than what they are going to learn. We know what the Iranians did at Parchin,” Coons said.

Excuse, me Senator, but there has been no definitive proof (at least in the public domain) of “what the Iranians did at Parchin”. Everything is still an accusation at this point, and you just played into the hands of those who may well be using cooked-up intelligence to provoke a war. You know, just like the same forces did a little over twelve years ago regarding Iraq.

HOW ABOUT “ANY TIME, ANYWHERE” INSPECTIONS FOR ISRAEL’S NUCLEAR WEAPONS?

While Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu continues his whinging campaign that the West capitulated on a non-existent earlier demand for “any time, anywhere” snap inspections in Iran under the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action negotiated by the P5+1 group of nations with Iran on its nuclear activities, Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif has come forward with a proposal that brilliantly turns the tables on Israel. Writing in the Guardian, Zarif calls on Israel to join in a plan to remove all weapons of mass destruction from the Middle East. Such a plan, of course, would require Israel to give up its poorly-held secret of an arsenal of their own nuclear weapons:

We – Iran and its interlocutors in the group of nations known as the P5+1 – have finally achieved the shared objective of turning the Iranian nuclear programme from an unnecessary crisis into a platform for cooperation on nuclear non-proliferation and beyond.

The nuclear deal reached in Vienna this month is not a ceiling but a solid foundation on which we must build. The joint comprehensive plan of action, as the accord is officially known, cements Iran's status as a zone free of nuclear weapons. Now it is high time that we expand that zone to encompass the entire Middle East.

Also in the Guardian, Julian Borger provides some perspective on Zarif's proposal:

Israel does not officially confirm its nuclear arsenal, but it is believed to have about 80 warheads. Zarif's remarks also represent a rebuke to the five permanent members of the UN security council, all armed with nuclear weapons – the US, Russia, France, the UK and China – as well as the three other nuclear-armed states which, like Israel, are not NPT signatories: India, Pakistan, and North Korea.

/snip/

Since a cold war high in 1986, when global stockpiles of nuclear warheads topped 65,000, the main weapons states have reduced their arsenals considerably. There are now thought to be fewer than 16,000 warheads worldwide, of which 14,700 are held – roughly equally – by the US and Russia. But the disarmament is now approaching a standstill. The Obama administration wanted to follow the 2010 New Start agreement with another, more ambitious, arms control treaty, but the dramatic worsening in relations halted progress. Russia and the US are modernising their nuclear arsenals.

That last bit about the US and Russia modernizing weapons rather than removing them is

especially upsetting, but for now I'd like to concentrate on Zarif's Middle East proposal. Interestingly, Zarif points to Iran's history of restraint on weapons of mass destruction when it came to the Iran-Iraq war. While widespread use of chemical weapons by Iraq in that war is indisputable, Zarif claims that Iran "never reciprocated in kind". The record seems to bear that out. While Iran did develop their own chemical weapons program late in the war, the evidence that they ever used it is murky at best.

Zarif correctly depicts Israel as openly flaunting the nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty while at the same time noting how ironic that position is considering Israel's rabid attitude towards Iran's nuclear program:

One of the many ironies of history is that non-nuclear-weapon states, like Iran, have actually done far more for the cause of non-proliferation in practice than nuclear-weapon states have done on paper. Iran and other nuclear have-nots have genuinely "walked the walk" in seeking to consolidate the non-proliferation regime. Meanwhile, states actually possessing these destructive weapons have hardly even "talked the talk", while completely brushing off their disarmament obligations under the non-proliferation treaty (NPT) and customary international law.

That is to say nothing of countries outside the NPT, or Israel, with an undeclared nuclear arsenal and a declared disdain towards non-proliferation, notwithstanding its absurd and alarmist campaign against the Iranian nuclear deal.

Borger gives us a concise summary of Zarif's proposal:

Zarif makes three proposals: for

negotiations to begin on a nuclear weapons elimination treaty; that this should lead initially to nuclear arsenals being taken off high alert readiness (for example, by removing warheads from missiles); and for the creation of a zone in the Middle East free of weapons of mass destruction.

Again, the irony of Israel's actions are brought into full light here. Another front on which Israel has been vocal regarding the JCPOA relates to restrictions on Iran's missile program. At the same time Israel wants to severely restrict any further development of missiles in Iran, Israel has an arsenal of missiles already fitted with nuclear warheads and ready for launch.

But there is one more point that Zarif puts into his piece that I can't stop marveling at. In his description of how negotiations on his plan could start, we have this:

One step in the right direction would be to start negotiations for a weapons elimination treaty, backed by a robust monitoring and compliance-verification mechanism.

What better spokesman could the world have for a "robust monitoring and compliance-verification mechanism" than the man who just agreed to submit his own country to history's most intrusive inspections program for a country that hasn't just been defeated in a war. He is definitely "walking the walk" when it comes to inspections and compliance. But I can't help wondering if, should such negotiations actually get underway (note: yes, I realize that the chances are much less than zero), Zarif would allow himself, at least once, to call for Israel to submit to "any time, anywhere" inspections of its nuclear program.

IRAN, P5+1 REACH HISTORIC FINAL AGREEMENT, FRUSTRATING OPPONENTS WHO PUSH FOR WAR

It has been nearly 20 months since the group of P5+1 countries (China, France, Germany, the Russian Federation, the United Kingdom and the United States) and Iran reached an interim agreement limiting Iran's work on nuclear technology. Progress since that interim agreement has been painfully slow (and obstructed as much as possible by Israel's Benjamin Netanyahu, neocons in Congress and United Against Nuclear Iran), with a number of "deadlines" for achieving the final agreement missed. Journalists covering the final phase of negotiations in Vienna over the last two weeks eventually got so exasperated with the process that they began reporting on the number of Twizzlers consumed by the negotiators.

Fortunately, the US, led by John Kerry, with technical support from Ernest Moniz (with the backing of Barack Obama) and Iran, led by Javad Zarif, with technical support from Ali Akbar Salehi (with the backing of Hassan Rouhani) did not give up on the process. A final agreement (pdf) has now been published.

The following sentence appears in the agreement twice. It is the final sentence in the Preface and is the third point in the Preamble:

Iran reaffirms that under no circumstances will Iran ever seek, develop or acquire any nuclear weapons.

That is the heart of what the entire process has been about. Iran's uranium enrichment work, which grew to over 18,000 centrifuges installed at two facilities, was viewed as a rapid route to a nuclear weapon. Even though no facility in Iran has been identified where enrichment was proceeding to the highly enriched levels needed for a bomb and Iran had demonstrated no ability to make a bomb from highly enriched material, "conventional wisdom" stated that Iran would only need a few months (as of the signing of the interim agreement) to produce a working bomb. Throughout the process, Iran has claimed the work was only for peaceful uses (electricity production and the production of medical isotopes). Things had gotten really ugly back in 2011 when the IAEA lent credence to claims that originated in the Laptop of Death, where Iran was accused of past work aiming at developing a bomb. By making the blanket statement that Iran will never seek a nuclear weapon, Iran is publicly acknowledging that the West will reinstate economy-crippling sanctions should evidence surface that it is seeking a weapon. Further, by saying it "reaffirms" as much, Iran is sticking to its previous claims that it has not sought a weapon in the past. Those dual points are important enough to be appear twice on the first page of the agreement.

On first blush, the final agreement looks quite robust. I intend to address only the technical aspects of the agreement and will leave to others analysis of the aspects of the plan relating to the removal of sanctions, although it is interesting that it appears that the plan will be submitted for UN Security Council approval before Congress is expected to have a chance to chime in.

The plan is referred to as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, or JCPOA. It establishes a Joint Commission of P5+1 and Iran that will monitor implementation of the agreement.

Enrichment

In order to achieve the primary aim of taking Iran's "breakout time" (the time estimated to produce enough highly enriched uranium for a bomb) from the range of just a few months at the time of the signing of the interim agreement to the stated goal of at least one year, Iran now agrees to stop all enrichment work with radioactive material at its Fordo site (the underground site that prompted the US to develop a new generation of bunker buster bombs) and to greatly reduce the number of centrifuges in use at Natanz. Further, Iran will no longer enrich uranium above 3.67%. Iran agrees to keep its stockpile of 3.67% enriched uranium at 300 kg or less. Here is the wording for the key part of that aspect of the agreement (from page 7):

5. Based on its long-term plan, for 15 years, Iran will carry out its uranium enrichment-related activities, including safeguarded R&D exclusively in the Natanz Enrichment facility, keep its level of uranium enrichment at up to 3.67%, and, at Fordow, refrain from any uranium enrichment and uranium enrichment R&D and from keeping any nuclear material.

6. Iran will convert the Fordow facility into a nuclear, physics and technology centre. International collaboration including in the form of scientific joint partnerships will be established in agreed areas of research. 1044 IR-1 centrifuges in six cascades will remain in one wing at Fordow. Two of these cascades will spin without uranium and will be transitioned, including through appropriate infrastructure modification, for stable isotope production. The other four cascades with all associated infrastructure will remain idle. All other centrifuges and enrichment-related infrastructure will be removed and stored under IAEA continuous monitoring as specified in Annex I.

Heavy Water Reactor

Besides standard enrichment, the other concern for Iran producing material for a bomb was the Arak heavy water nuclear reactor. Such reactors are capable of producing weapons-grade plutonium, although a dedicated facility for reprocessing the spent fuel is needed to produce such material. Iran has agreed to a complete redesign of the Arak reactor (which had not yet been commissioned) so that it no longer is capable of producing weapons-grade plutonium (from page 8):

8. Iran will redesign and rebuild a modernised heavy water research reactor in Arak, based on an agreed conceptual design, using fuel enriched up to 3.67 %, in a form of an international partnership which will certify the final design. The reactor will support peaceful nuclear research and radioisotope production for medical and industrial purposes. The redesigned and rebuilt Arak reactor will not produce weapons grade plutonium. Except for the first core load, all of the activities for redesigning and manufacturing of the fuel assemblies for the redesigned reactor will be carried out in Iran. All spent fuel from Arak will be shipped out of Iran for the lifetime of the reactor. This international partnership will include participating E3/EU+3 parties, Iran and such other countries as may be mutually determined. Iran will take the leadership role as the owner and as the project manager and the E3/EU+3 and Iran will, before Implementation Day, conclude an official document which would define the responsibilities assumed by the E3/EU+3 participants.

Possible Military Dimensions

As mentioned above, the IAEA added credence to the Laptop of Death claims by repeating many of

them in its November, 2011 report on Iran's nuclear program. Despite their shaky provenance, the West has insisted on Iran addressing the claims. The process of addressing them began under the interim agreement, and significant progress was made. The final agreement reads as a total capitulation by Iran on the topic:

14. Iran will fully implement the "Roadmap for Clarification of Past and Present Outstanding Issues" agreed with the IAEA, containing arrangements to address past and present issues of concern relating to its nuclear programme as raised in the annex to the IAEA report of 8 November 2011 (GOV/2011/65). Full implementation of activities undertaken under the Roadmap by Iran will be completed by 15 October 2015, and subsequently the Director General will provide by 15 December 2015 the final assessment on the resolution of all past and present outstanding issues to the Board of Governors, and the E3+3, in their capacity as members of the Board of Governors, will submit a resolution to the Board of Governors for taking necessary action, with a view to closing the issue, without prejudice to the competence of the Board of Governors.

I find it remarkable that Iran is saying that they will address the full set of "concerns" according to the process laid out by the IAEA. Had I been negotiating on Iran's side, I would have insisted that such a move by Iran be accompanied by the US (and Israel) formally admitting to having released StuxNet. Further, I would have insisted that Israel and the US own up to the assassinations of Iranian nuclear scientists as part of the move to clarify PMD. At the very least, I would have called for these admissions to be part of a secret annex to the agreement.

A central part of all the posturing over PMD has

been accusations of work toward a trigger device. Use of a high explosives blast chamber at Parchin has been a central part of accusations on that point. This bit from an annex, on page 45 of the agreement, seems aimed at resolving these (and some other PMD) questions in the future:

T. ACTIVITIES WHICH COULD CONTRIBUTE TO THE DESIGN AND DEVELOPMENT OF A NUCLEAR EXPLOSIVE DEVICE 82. Iran will not engage in the following activities which could contribute to the development of a nuclear explosive device: 82. Designing, developing, acquiring, or using computer models to simulate nuclear explosive devices. 82. Designing, developing, fabricating, acquiring, or using multi-point explosive detonation systems suitable for a nuclear explosive device, unless approved by the Joint Commission for non-nuclear purposes and subject to monitoring. 82. Designing, developing, fabricating, acquiring, or using explosive diagnostic systems (streak cameras, framing cameras and flash x-ray cameras) suitable for the development of a nuclear explosive device, unless approved by the Joint Commission for non-nuclear purposes and subject to monitoring. 82. Designing, developing, fabricating, acquiring, or using explosively driven neutron sources or specialized materials for explosively driven neutron sources.

Conclusion

As this agreement is debated in the press, the starting point for Netanyahu and the neocons in Congress will be that once the agreement ends (ten or fifteen years, depending on the part under consideration), Iran immediately vaults back to being only months away from a bomb. That argument is based on the false assumption that their preferred approach of bombing Iranian nuclear facilities now would permanently end

Iran's quest for a nuclear weapon.

The reality is that under the scenario where the West bombs Iran's facilities, the first response by Iran would be to end all of the current agreements and kick out the IAEA inspectors. Facilities would be reconstructed quickly, and work would proceed at a much faster pace with no inspectors present. Only prolonged war, and prolonged bombing, would provide assurance that work toward a weapon isn't going on.

Rather than bombing the facilities, this agreement provides for Fordo (which it's not really clear we could destroy anyway) to be redirected, under close supervision, to work that excludes any radioactive material. Natanz is allowed only to produce 3.67% uranium, rather than the 20% enrichment it was producing before the interim agreement. Again, this is under very close supervision by IAEA. Arak is converted into something that can never produce weapons grade plutonium.

This historic agreement gives the world a much-needed ten year break in the madness over Iran's nuclear technology. Given this wonderful, unprecedented step, I can't help thinking that Iran and the West will find a way to extend this peace rather than rush to war once the terms of today's agreement run their course.

IRAN, P5+1 "SUCCEEDED IN MAKING HISTORY"

It has been a very long road since the announcement in November of 2013 that a preliminary agreement between Iran and the P5+1 group of nations had been made on Iran's nuclear technology. There have been extensions along the way and times when a permanent deal appeared

imminent along with times when no such deal seemed possible. Despite tremendous pressure from Israel and the neocon lobby who lust after a war with Iran, the outlines for a permanent deal are now in place. What remains is to nail down the details by the June 30 deadline when the extensions of the interim agreement expire. Laura Rozen and Barbara Slavin capture the historic significance of what has been achieved:

We have “found solutions,” Iran Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif first proclaimed on Twitter on April 2, “Ready to start drafting immediately.”

We have “succeeded in making history,” Zarif said at a press conference here April 2. “If we succeed, it is one of the few cases where an issue of significance is solved through diplomatic means.”

We have “reached a historic understanding with Iran, which, if fully implemented, will prevent it from obtaining a nuclear weapon,” US President Barack Obama said from the White House rose garden after the deal was announced April 2.

What stands out about the agreement is just how much Iran was forced to give up on issues that had been seen by most observers as non-negotiable. Jonathan Landay interviewed a number of nuclear experts on the agreement:

On its face, the framework announced Thursday for an agreement that limits Iran’s nuclear program goes further toward preventing Tehran from developing a nuclear weapon than many experts expected it would, including requiring an international inspection system of unprecedented intrusiveness.

The Agreement

The version of the agreement as released by the US can be read [here](#). Let's take a look by sections.

The first section addresses the general concept of uranium enrichment. Although hardliners in the US want all enrichment in Iran stopped, it was clear that Iran would never have agreed to stop. But what has been achieved is staggering. Iran will take two thirds of its existing centrifuges offline. Those centrifuges will be placed in a facility under IAEA inspection, so there is no concern about them winding up in an undisclosed facility. Further, only Iran's original IR-1 centrifuge type will be allowed. That is a huge concession by Iran (everybody knows the IR-1's suck), as they had been developing advanced centrifuges that are much more efficient at enrichment. Many critics of a deal with Iran had suspected that advanced centrifuges would be a route that Iran would use to game any agreement to increase their enrichment capacity if only the number and not the type of centrifuge had been restricted. Further, Iran will not enrich uranium above 3.67% for a period of 15 years. And the stockpile of 3.67% uranium will be reduced by 97%, from 10,000 kg to 300 kg. This reduction also will apply for 15 years. This section also carries an outright statement of targeting a breakout time of 12 months to produce enough enriched uranium for a bomb. [But as always, it must be pointed out that merely having enough enriched uranium for a bomb does not make it a bomb. Many steps, some of which there is no evidence Iran has or could develop under intense international scrutiny, would remain for making a bomb.]

The next section of the agreement is titled "Fordo Conversion". Iran's Fordo site is the underground bunker built for uranium enrichment. Iran has agreed not to enrich uranium at Fordo or to have uranium or any other fissile material present for 15 years. While many have advocated a complete shutdown of Fordo, the agreement provides a very elegant alternative. Fordo will

now become a research site under IAEA monitoring. Had the site shut down, where would all of the scientists who work there now have gone? By keeping them on-site and under IAEA observation, it strikes me that there is much less concern about those with enrichment expertise slinking into the shadows to build a new undeclared enrichment facility.

The section on the Natanz facility follows and it is further documented that only the reduced number of IR-1 centrifuges and no advanced centrifuges will be used. Even research on the advanced centrifuges will be limited and only under IAEA supervision.

The next section addresses inspections and transparency. Iran has agreed to an unprecedented level of IAEA inspections. Some have even suggested on Twitter that Parchin will be inspected, but that is not laid out in the document. What is noted is that Iran will abide by the IAEA's "additional protocol" and investigation of "possible military dimensions" of the nuclear program, which were suggested in part by IAEA after material came from the Laptop of Death. This is another huge concession by Iran that I never expected.

Finally, Iran has agreed to scrap the current reactor core of the Arak heavy water reactor and replace it with a redesigned core that will not produce weapons grade plutonium.

The final sections address sanctions and phasing. Iran, of course, wants immediate cessation of the sanctions. The agreement "suspends" sanctions once IAEA verifies that Iran has taken all of the key steps. I've seen some hawks very concerned about just how these sanctions would "snap back" into place in the event of a breach of the agreement by Iran. I don't find that to be particularly concerning, since it seems virtually certain to me that in the event of a verified breach of the agreement, Israeli bombs would be falling on Iran long before any effects of restored sanctions came into play.

Reactions

The New York Times praises the agreement in an editorial:

The preliminary agreement between Iran and the major powers is a significant achievement that makes it more likely Iran will never be a nuclear threat. President Obama said it would “cut off every pathway that Iran could take to develop a nuclear weapon.”

Officials said some important issues have not been resolved, like the possible lifting of a United Nations arms embargo, and writing the technical sections could also cause problems before the deal’s finalization, expected by June 30. Even so, the agreement announced on Thursday after eight days of negotiations appears more specific and comprehensive than expected.

Fred Hyatt, on the other hand, is stamping his foot like a good little neocon:

THE “KEY parameters” for an agreement on Iran’s nuclear program released Thursday fall well short of the goals originally set by the Obama administration. None of Iran’s nuclear facilities – including the Fordow center buried under a mountain – will be closed. Not one of the country’s 19,000 centrifuges will be dismantled. Tehran’s existing stockpile of enriched uranium will be “reduced” but not necessarily shipped out of the country. In effect, Iran’s nuclear infrastructure will remain intact, though some of it will be mothballed for 10 years. When the accord lapses, the Islamic republic will instantly become a threshold nuclear state.

Wow, Hyatt is spinning faster than an Iranian centrifuge on Stuxnet.

But the biggest surprise of all comes at the end of David Sanger and Michael Gordon's New York Times piece on the deal:

Those conditions impressed two of the most skeptical experts on the negotiations: Gary Samore and Olli Heinonen of the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard and members of a group called United Against Nuclear Iran.

Mr. Samore, who was Mr. Obama's top adviser on weapons of mass destruction in his first term as president, said in an email that the deal was a "very satisfactory resolution of Fordo and Arak issues for the 15-year term" of the accord. He had more questions about operations at Natanz and said there was "much detail to be negotiated, but I think it's enough to be called a political framework."

Mr. Heinonen, the former chief inspector of the International Atomic Energy Agency, said, "It appears to be a fairly comprehensive deal with most important parameters." But he cautioned that "Iran maintains enrichment capacity which will be beyond its near-term needs."

Hell just froze over, folks. Sanger and Gordon appear to have finally given in to my campaign for full disclosure about Heinonen's association with UANI. That Samore and Heinonen have to admit that this is a good deal tells us everything we need to know.

Hearty congratulations are in order for all of the negotiators, especially John Kerry and Javad Zarif. If this deal does get written down and agreed to in anything close to the current understanding of it, their work will stand as the gold standard for patient diplomacy winning out over military action as a means of resolving conflict.

HEINONEN MOVES DECEPTIVE ANTI-IRAN CAMPAIGN FROM WASHINGTON POST OPINION PAGE TO NEW YORK TIMES NEWS PAGE

Last week, I called attention to the fact that in printing an op-ed by Olli Heinonen (co-authored by Michael Hayden and Ray Takeyh), the Washington Post failed to disclose Heinonen's position on the advisory board of the anti-Iran group United Against Nuclear Iran. One week later, the Post still has not corrected its identification of Heinonen. Today, we see that Heinonen's deceptive anti-Iran campaign continues, where he appears as a key expert quoted in a front page New York Times article by David Sanger and Michael Gordon. Once again, Heinonen is only identified by his previous IAEA and current Harvard roles, ignoring his more relevant current role with UANI.

Ironically, today's Times story is a follow-up to a story in November in which Sanger committed a glaring error which still has not been noted by the Times. Heinonen's co-conspirator from the Post op-ed, Ray Takeyh, also makes an appearance in today's Sanger and Gordon article, suggesting that their propaganda will remain as a package deal for the duration of the P5+1 negotiations.

Note also that last Monday, the defamation case by Victor Restis against UANI was thrown out by a district court after the Department of Justice successfully intervened to have the case quashed under a claim that state secrets would have been divulged. Writing in Bloomberg View, Noah Feldman mused:

What makes matters worse is the lingering possibility, indeed probability, that what the government fears is not a true threat to national security, but a severe case of embarrassment. It's difficult to escape the conclusion that United Against is a front organization for U.S. intelligence, possibly acting in conjunction with other foreign intelligence services. The allegation that Restis was doing business in Iran seems almost certain to have come from one of these intelligence services. Would acknowledging cooperation between, say, the Central Intelligence Agency and Mossad regarding Iran really upend national security? True, it's a delicate time in the Iran nuclear negotiations. But no one, least of all the Iranians, doubts that U.S. and Israeli intelligence collaborate.

Though Feldman notes that it seems obvious there is an intelligence conduit between the CIA and/or Mossad and UANI and he even notes that disclosing this now would be awkward for the P5+1 negotiations, he should have gone further to note that this intelligence link, and the subsequent selective leaks, seem aimed to disrupt those negotiations and prevent an agreement.

In that same vein, it should be noted that the Sanger and Gordon article focuses only on barriers to an agreement. In addition to Heinonen and Takeyh, the article also sought out comment from John Boehner. No comment was offered in the article from anyone favoring an agreement or suggesting that Iran has abided by the terms of the interim agreement (although they do note IAEA has reported this cooperation) despite Boehner's protestation that the Iranians don't keep their word.

Further, Sanger and Gordon write that Heinonen published a paper on the breakout time needed

for Iran to enrich enough uranium to weapons grade to produce a bomb. As a scientist, when I read that someone has published a paper, I assume that means it has appeared in a peer-reviewed journal. Following the link in the Times article for Heinonen's "paper", though, brings one to the website for a think tank, where Heinonen's piece is only referred to as a fact sheet. [And, true to form, the site mentions Heinonen's former IAEA role but not his current UANI role.]

It is impossible for me to escape the conclusion that Olli Heinonen and Ray Takeyh are part of an organized propaganda campaign aimed at disrupting the P5+1 talks and preventing an agreement. This propaganda is eagerly published by a compliant press, with the New York Times, Washington Post and AP among the most recent examples I have noted.

It is long past time for Heinonen to list his UANI affiliation in all his public pronouncements. His refusal to do so can only be seen as deception on his part and an effort to lend IAEA and Harvard credence to UANI propaganda.

Update: The US has disputed the central claim of the Sanger and Gordon article at the heart of this post. Sanger and Gordon report on that here.

DOES MOSSAD TAKE REQUESTS?

Yesterday, WSJ caused a stink by reporting that the Obama Administration was pissed because Israel had shared intelligence it gathered about the Iran negotiations and shared it with Congress.

■ Soon after the U.S. and other major

powers entered negotiations last year to curtail Iran's nuclear program, senior White House officials learned Israel was spying on the closed-door talks.

The spying operation was part of a broader campaign by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's government to penetrate the negotiations and then help build a case against the emerging terms of the deal, current and former U.S. officials said. In addition to eavesdropping, Israel acquired information from confidential U.S. briefings, informants and diplomatic contacts in Europe, the officials said.

The espionage didn't upset the White House as much as Israel's sharing of inside information with U.S. lawmakers and others to drain support from a high-stakes deal intended to limit Iran's nuclear program, current and former officials said.

"It is one thing for the U.S. and Israel to spy on each other. It is another thing for Israel to steal U.S. secrets and play them back to U.S. legislators to undermine U.S. diplomacy," said a senior U.S. official briefed on the matter.

The story is not new. Earlier in the month, there were complaints in the conservative press the US had cut intelligence sharing with Israel because of its cherry picking of intelligence. And Bibi himself got caught trying to withhold an intelligence briefing from Senators on a code.

Obviously, I'm not the least bit sympathetic to Bibi's disinformation campaign.

But the Administration has brought this on itself. As I noted last year, the Committees have had to go begging for the intelligence they need to do their job (in this case, to craft an

AUMF to fight ISIL).

As I noted in my Salon piece last week, former Associate Counsel to the White House Andy Wright noted, and today Jack Goldsmith and Marty Lederman note, Tom Udall suggested before Congress funds overt training of Syrian opposition groups, maybe they should learn details about how the covert funding of Syrian opposition groups worked out.

Everybody's well aware there's been a covert operation, operating in the region to train forces, moderate forces, to go into Syria and to be out there, that we've been doing this the last two years. And probably the most true measure of the effectiveness of moderate forces would be, what has been the effectiveness over that last two years of this covert operation, of training 2,000 to 3,000 of these moderates? Are they a growing force? Have they gained ground? How effective are they? What can you tell us about this effort that's gone on, and has it been a part of the success that you see that you're presenting this new plan on?

Kerry, who had been sitting right next to Hagel when the Defense Secretary confirmed this covert op a year ago, said he couldn't provide any details.

I know it's been written about, in the public domain that there is, quote, a covert operation. But I can't confirm, deny, whatever.

(At the end of the hearing he suggested

he has been pushing to share more information, and that he might be able to arrange for the Chair and Ranking Member to be briefed.)

Shortly thereafter, SFRC Bob Menendez confirmed that his committee was being asked to legislate about a war with no details about the covert op that had laid the groundwork for – and created the urgency behind – that war.

To the core question that you raise, this is a problem that both the Administration, as well as the Senate leadership must be willing to deal with. Because when it comes to questions of being briefed on covert operations this committee does not have access to that information. Yet it is charged with a responsibility of determining whether or not the people of the United States should – through their Representatives – support an Authorization for the Use of Military Force. It is unfathomable to me to understand how this committee is going to get to those conclusions without understanding all of the elements of military engagement both overtly and covertly. ... I'll call it, for lack of a better term, a procedural hurdle we're going to have to overcome if we want the information to make an informed judgment and get members on board.

That's only going to increase the thirst for intelligence wherever members of Congress can get it (though interestingly, Bob Corker, currently the Senate Foreign Relations Chair,

says he hasn't been getting Bibi's special briefings).

Information may be power, and the Obama Administration may like hoarding that power. But the vacuum that it leaves can itself exert a lot of power.

Update: I hadn't seen this Yahoo interview with Bob Corker. But he complains that he's not getting intelligence. Instead, they bring Senators to a SCIF so we citizens can't hear the questions.

Yahoo News: A bombshell Wall Street Journal story says the Israelis penetrated the Iranian talks and shared the information with Congress. Are you in a position to confirm any of that? And if the Israelis did what the Journal says they did, did they act appropriately?

Bob Corker: I have never found them actually to be sharing anything different than was in public sources. As I met with Netanyahu the last time, he said, "You know, all this is Google-able – Yahoo-able!" For what it's worth, I get more information about what's happening from foreign ministers than I do from anyone. Not from Israel – foreign ministers that are part of the negotiating teams.

The White House is upset that foreign governments may be giving information to senators because they're not? Every time they meet with us and give us information down in the classified SCIF (Sensitive Compartmented Information Facility) – they really do that so that none of you can hear questions that are asked – I never learn anything that I haven't read about on Yahoo or New York Times or some other place.

WASHINGTON POST FAILS TO DISCLOSE HEINONEN'S UANI CONNECTION IN ANTI- IRAN OP/ED

We are now in the “final” week of negotiations to set the framework for the P5+1 long-term agreement on Iran’s nuclear technology. With so much in the balance, voices are popping up from every direction to offer their opinions on what constitutes a good or bad deal. While Netanyahu’s address to Congress dominated the headlines in that regard, other sources also have not held back on offering opinions. In the case of Netanyahu, informed observers considering his remarks knew in advance that Netanyahu considers Iran an “existential threat” to Israel and that violent regime change in Iran is his preferred mode of addressing Iran’s nuclear technology. When it comes to other opinions being offered, it is important to also have a clear view of the backgrounds of those offering opinions so that any biases they have can be brought into consideration.

With that in mind, the Washington Post has committed a gross violation of the concept of full disclosure in an Iran op/ed they published yesterday. I won’t go into the “substance” of this hit piece on Iran, suffice it note that the sensationalist headline (The Iran time bomb) warns us that the piece will come from an assumption that Iran seeks and will continue to seek a nuclear weapon regardless of what they agree to with P5+1.

The list of authors for this op/ed is an anti-Iran neocon’s wet dream. First up is Michael Hayden. The Post notes that Hayden led the CIA

from 2006-2009 and the NSA from 1999 to 2005. I guess they don't think it's important to note that he now is a principal with the Chertoff Group and so stands to profit from situations in world politics that appear headed toward violence.

The third of the three authors is perhaps the least known, but he's a very active fellow. Here is how Nima Shirazi describes Ray Takeyh:

Takeyh is a mainstay of the Washington establishment – a Council on Foreign Relations Senior Fellow before and after a stint in the Obama State Department and a founding member of the neoconservative-created Iran Strategy Task Force who has become a tireless advocate for the collective punishment of the Iranian population in a futile attempt to inspire homegrown regime change (if not, at times, all-out war against a third Middle Eastern nation in just over a decade). Unsurprisingly, he dismisses out of hand the notion that “the principal cause of disorder in the Middle East today is a hegemonic America seeking to impose its imperial template on the region.”

The Post, of course, doesn't mention Takeyh's association with the group Shirazi describes, nor his membership in another Iran Task Force organized by the Jewish Institute for National Security Affairs.

Sandwiched between Hayden and Takeyh, though, is the Post's biggest failure on disclosure. Olli Heinonen is described by the Post simply as “a senior fellow at Harvard's Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs and a former deputy director general of the International Atomic Energy Agency”. As such, uninformed readers are likely to conclude that Heinonen is present among the authors to serve as a hefty dose of neutrality, given his background in the IAEA. Nothing could be further from the truth.

What the Post fails to disclose is that Heinonen is also a prominent member of the Advisory Board of United Against Nuclear Iran.

Not only is UANI an advocacy group working against Iran, but they are currently embroiled in litigation in which it has been learned that UANI has come into possession of state secrets from the United States. The Department of Justice has weighed in on the UANI case, urging the judge to throw the case out on the grounds that continuing to litigate it will disclose the US state secrets that UANI has obtained. Since the litigation involves UANI actions to “name and shame” companies it accuses of violating US sanctions against Iran, one can only assume that the state secrets leaked to UANI involve Iran.

How in the world could the Washington Post conclude that Heinonen’s role on the Advisory Board for United Against Nuclear Iran would not be something they should disclose in publishing his opinion piece entitled “The Iran time bomb”?

Oh, and lest we come to the conclusion that failing to note Heinonen’s UANI connection is a one-off thing in which Heinonen himself is innocent, noted AP transcriptionist of neocon anti-Iran rhetoric George Jahn used Heinonen in exactly the same way a month ago.

We can only conclude that Heinonen is happily doing the neocons’ bidding in their push for war with Iran.

Update from emptywheel: The judge in Victor Restis’ lawsuit just dismissed the suit on state secrets grounds. Here’s the opinion, h/t Mike Scarcella.

MOVE AFOOT TO GET UN

SECURITY COUNCIL ACTION TO PREVENT GOP MEDDLING AFTER IRAN DEAL

Although Israel's Netanyahu and the 47 Senate Republicans who signed Tom Cotton's letter to Iran are suffering badly in public opinion after their most recent foot-stomping over a potential P5+1 deal on Iran's nuclear technology, there is still a genuine concern that Republicans in Washington could muster support across the aisle from AIPAC-besotted Democrats to circumvent any deal. The concern is especially strong that there would be an effort to prevent lifting economic sanctions on Iran or even to impose new and even harsher sanctions after a deal is enacted.

Fortunately, despite the strong possibility that these war mongers could well get the legislation that they want put into law over a Presidential veto, unilateral sanctions from only the US would be likely to have little effect. To help drive home that point to the learning-challenged MEK-lovers, there is a new move to get the existing sanctions against Iran lifted once a P5+1 deal is reached. Louis Charbonneau reports for Reuters:

Major world powers have begun talks about a United Nations Security Council resolution to lift U.N. sanctions on Iran if a nuclear agreement is struck with Tehran, a step that could make it harder for the U.S. Congress to undo a deal, Western officials said.

/snip/

Some eight U.N. resolutions – four of them imposing sanctions – ban Iran from uranium enrichment and other sensitive atomic work and bar it from buying and selling atomic technology and anything

linked to ballistic missiles. There is also a U.N. arms embargo.

There is a strong legal argument for this move:

U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry told Congress on Wednesday that an Iran nuclear deal would not be legally binding, meaning future U.S. presidents could decide not to implement it. That point was emphasized in an open letter by 47 Republican senators sent on Monday to Iran's leaders asserting any deal could be discarded once President Barack Obama leaves office in January 2017.

But a Security Council resolution on a nuclear deal with Iran could be legally binding, say Western diplomatic officials. That could complicate and possibly undercut future attempts by Republicans in Washington to unravel an agreement.

This could be a lot of fun. The same crew who based their illegal invasion of Iraq on not needing a "permission slip from the UN" are likely to have a total meltdown if they are bypassed in this way.

While the Reuters article on first skimming almost seems to suggest that the Security Council move might involve removing all of the Iran-related resolutions, what seems most likely to me is that in the end, the current sanctions on Iran would be lifted (perhaps over a timetable from the agreement?) but that a number of prohibitions on weapons-related technology would remain in place. Also, any moves seem likely to be coupled with warnings that sanctions would return quickly in the event of any breach of the agreement by Iran.

Often lost in discussion of the sanctions on Iran is the devastating impact of these sanctions on Iranian citizens. The economy in Iran is in tatters, and people are suffering

mightily from it. In February of last year, PBS actually touched on the effects for everyday citizens:

WILLIAM BRANGHAM: But as we saw on our recent visit, many Iranians believe sanctions have impacted them in ways beyond just their wallets.

At the Dr. Sapir Hospital in South Tehran, a Jewish charity hospital that cares for mostly poorer Iranians, we met Dr. Ciamak Moresadegh. He runs the hospital and also represents Iran's Jewish community in the Iranian Parliament. Though his hospital got a donation of several hundred thousand dollars from the Rouhani government a few weeks after our visit, Moresadegh told us because of inflation and Iran's sagging economy, which he blamed in part on sanctions, his hospital was deep in debt.

DR. CIAMAK MORESADEGH, Dr. Sapir Hospital: Since last year, our loss was something about \$1 million per year.

WILLIAM BRANGHAM: One million U.S. dollars?

DR. CIAMAK MORESADEGH: Yes.

This year, we are more than two million U.S. dollar loss, because we want to protect the patients who cannot pay.

WILLIAM BRANGHAM: Dr. Moresadegh says those patients are the real victims. He says sanctions have hurt his ability to get crucial medicines for them. He says drugs for geriatric patients, those with multiple sclerosis and those with certain cancers, including childhood leukemia, are extremely hard to get.

Even though the U.S. Treasury Department, which oversees sanctions in the U.S., specifically allows for the

sale of humanitarian goods like food and medicine, Moresadegh says that repeated warnings and crackdowns about violating sanctions like the ones announced just last week have scared many companies away from doing any business with Iran.

Sadly, this same piece by PBS gave Mark Dubowitz, one of the worst of the Iran war mongers, an outlet to brag about the utility of these sanctions, despite their devastating effects on ordinary citizens far removed from the government figures who ostensibly should be the targets of our actions:

MARK DUBOWITZ, Foundation for the Defense of Democracies: I think that sanctions always disproportionately impact the most disadvantaged people in a society.

WILLIAM BRANGHAM: Mark Dubowitz heads the Foundation for the Defense of Democracies in Washington, D.C. He believes that economic pain has served a purpose. He points out that Iran's new president, Hassan Rouhani, was elected in large part to fix the economy and to reduce sanctions.

And while Iranian leaders deny it, Dubowitz argues it was the pain from sanctions that brought Iran to the negotiating table in Geneva over its nuclear program and Dubowitz argues sanctions should be increased.

MARK DUBOWITZ: The goal of these sanctions in Iran is to put Iran's supreme leader at a fundamental choice between the survival of his regime and a nuclear weapon. And at the very least, those sanctions have now gotten the Iranians to the table. And I think most people agree that but for those tough sanctions, Iran's leader wouldn't be negotiating with the United States and

our allies right now.

It is so sad that Dubowitz and his allies acknowledge the severe impact of sanctions on Iranian citizens but are now quickly moving their goalposts to try to keep sanctions in place even after a deal is reached.

SHOULD EX-SENATOR TIED TO CIA “ACCOUNTABILITY” BE INVOLVED IN THIS KIND OF PROPAGANDA?

In a post on the over-the-top propaganda released by a new 503c4 started by Saxby Chambliss, Evan Bayh, and Norm Coleman, Ryan Cooper makes the comparison with LBJ’s “Daisy” ad targeting Goldwater.

The American Security Initiative was founded by three ex-senators, Saxby Chambliss (R-Ga.), Evan Bayh (D-Ind.), and Norm Coleman (R-Minn.). Their ad is reminiscent of Lyndon Johnson’s “Daisy” ad in 1964, which famously featured a nuclear holocaust. Except it’s the other way around: “Daisy” implied that Barry Goldwater’s snarling bellicosity would lead *him* to start a nuclear war, not the Soviets. A voiceover from Johnson made clear that, despite the evil nature of the Soviet regime, the USSR and America must find some way to co-exist. “These are the stakes: to make a world in which all of God’s children can live... We must either love each other, or we must die.”

Probably a bit unfair to Goldwater. But no more unfair than this new ad, which paints Iran as controlled by murderous suicide bombers intent on mass murder of civilians. The message is clear: Do as we say, or the terrorists will nuke American cities to dust. (Sounds familiar, doesn't it?)

Even Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu doesn't go so far as to say Iran will nuke America. Instead he argues that Iran is run by Nazi-esque madmen, and that a nuclear-armed Iran will "threaten the survival of my country and the future of my people," as he said in his speech before Congress. Israel will be the first target, not the U.S.

Definitely read the whole post, because it's appropriately snarky.

What I don't think is appropriate, however, is that someone so fresh off serving in an "accountability" role at the CIA – overseeing the report that would rubber stamp CIA spying on its overseers – would be involved in such overheated propaganda.

Admittedly, Bayh's conclusions do seem to arise from a similar instinct for disinformation. And his hackery on the Accountability Review Board is consistent with the hackery involved here.

Still, this (plus Saxby's involvement) raised questions – for me at least – on whether some at the CIA had some interest in foiling the Iranian deal.

Has Evan Bayh become a cut-out for CIA propaganda directed at the American people?

INSANITY CONTINUES TO BUILD AROUND PROSPECT OF IRAN NUCLEAR PACT

From the nature of the political feeding frenzy surrounding the ongoing P5+1 negotiations with Iran on Iran's nuclear technology, it is hard to believe that the Joint Plan of Action under which the countries are now operating was extended last November through the end of June of this year. At the time of that extension, the US announced a goal of having the political framework of the final agreement worked out by March 1. That date has now slipped to March 31, but current negotiations are still aimed at getting the political framework in place before the final details get ironed out. But with Benjamin Netanyahu making a speech to a Joint Session of Congress next week and other assorted madness, one would think that we are in the last few hours of the negotiating window.

Of course, one of the groups most upset by the possible outcome of removing the US sanctions against Iran is the MEK. Their latest tantrum, yesterday, in which they tried to claim that they had discovered a new, secret uranium enrichment site, was mostly ignored by the world. Jeffrey Lewis was quick to dismiss the accusation.

I had noted yesterday that Dianne Feinstein and Richard Durbin had tried to give Netanyahu some bipartisany-ness during his visit by inviting him to a closed-door meeting with Senate Democrats, but Netanyahu declined the invitation, inexplicably claiming that meeting would lend a partisan nature to his nonpartisan appearance before Congress. Bibi also got slapped down, though, as his bid to get several Arab ambassadors to show up for his speech has been rejected outright.

Just as the US military hates to see peace break out somewhere where they could otherwise be arming and training freedom fighters, Iran's military seems especially upset by the prospect of a deal with the West. The IRGC is so upset about what is going on that today they broke one of their biggest toys in a fit of rage. Just under a year ago, word came out that Iran was building a replica of a Nimitz-class US aircraft carrier:

Intelligence analysts studying satellite photos of Iranian military installations first noticed the vessel rising from the Gachin shipyard, near Bandar Abbas on the Persian Gulf, last summer. The ship has the same distinctive shape and style of the Navy's Nimitz-class carriers, as well as the Nimitz's number 68 neatly painted in white near the bow. Mock aircraft can be seen on the flight deck.

The Iranian mock-up, which American officials described as more like a barge than a warship, has no nuclear propulsion system and is only about two-thirds the length of a typical 1,100-foot-long Navy carrier. Intelligence officials do not believe that Iran is capable of building an actual aircraft carrier.

/snip/

Navy and other American intelligence analysts surmise that the vessel, which Fifth Fleet wags have nicknamed the Target Barge, is something that Iran could tow to sea, anchor and blow up – while filming the whole thing to make a propaganda point, if, say, the talks with the Western powers over Iran's nuclear program go south.

Marcy had a bit of fun with the barge at the time, comparing it to our F-35 program.

But now, instead of waiting for the P5+1 talks

to “go south”, the IRGC has chosen to destroy their target barge in war games that were launched today. And, just as predicted a year ago, the destruction of the barge was televised. From AP via the Washington Post:

State TV showed footage of missiles fired from the coast and the fast boats striking the mock U.S. aircraft carrier. The drills, which also included shooting down a drone and planting undersea mines, were the first to involve a replica of a U.S. carrier.

“American aircraft carriers are very big ammunition depots housing a lot of missiles, rockets, torpedoes and everything else,” the Guard’s navy chief, Adm. Ali Fadavi, said on state TV, adding that a direct hit by a missile could set off a large secondary explosion. Last month Fadavi said his force is capable of sinking American aircraft carriers in the event of war.

Here is a PressTV segment on the war games, complete with some footage of torpedoes hitting the barge:

Additional footage with more direct hits on the barge can be seen in this PressTV story.

The US Navy has now been sternly warned not to tow any barges into the Strait of Hormuz.

Meanwhile, more negotiations are scheduled for Monday.