

The Complete “Idiot’s Guide” to Iran and the Bomb

By [Global Research News](#)

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[Who What Why](#)

Region: [Middle East & North Africa](#)

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[Nuclear War](#)

By Christian Stork

[Who What Why](#)

As our Nobel laureate President ascended to the podium on September 25 at the United Nations for his last international speech before the election, we again were the recipients of fine oratory and rhetorical flourish about America’s problems in the world. Focusing on the Middle East, Central Asia, and North Africa—what’s often misleadingly termed, “the Muslim world”—Obama singled out Iran’s treaty-entitled uranium enrichment activities, [saying](#) “make no mistake: a nuclear-armed Iran is not a challenge that can be contained.”

Obama’s remarks were dutifully transcribed by our stenographer class, as can be expected, despite intelligence-community conclusions to the contrary and the historical precedent of containment as Cold War policy. This follows the latest media scare concerning Iran’s nuclear capabilities, and [the recent tiff](#) between the U.S. and Israel over it. Like Obama’s speech (and because of similarly unchallenged statements by politicians), many media reports [are awash](#) in misleading narratives, incomplete histories, and outright fiction about Iran and its nuclear program.

Given how easily the American public and media [were manipulated](#) into believing that Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass destruction, this moment should give us some pause. The [disastrous effects](#) of that \$3 Trillion Dollar War are still [being felt across the world](#). For those not interested in seeing a much-bloodier, costlier sequel, I offer this introductory course in intellectual self-defense. The only way to rebuff and dismantle propaganda is to be aware of the truth on which it claims to comment.

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Lesson #1: Iran is not building nuclear weapons

National Intelligence Estimate: “We judge with high confidence that in fall 2003, Tehran halted its nuclear weapons program.” ([2007 National Intelligence Estimate Iran: Nuclear Intentions and Capabilities; November 2007](#))

“Several senior Israeli officials who spoke in recent days to The Associated Press said Israel has come around to the U.S. view that no final decision to build a bomb has been made by Iran.” ([Associated Press, “Israel shifts views on Iran”; March 18, 2012](#))

The 2011 National Intelligence Estimate (NIE), a synthesized compilation of data evaluated

by America's 17 intelligence agencies, [declared that there were no serious revisions to the controversial \(for war hawks\) 2007 NIE](#)—which stated Iran *stopped* its nuclear weapons program in 2003. While the 2011 estimate did include updated progress on Iran's civilian nuclear program, such as an increased number of operative centrifuges, it still could not muster any evidence to indicate the program was being weaponized.

These findings echo [reports from the International Atomic Energy Agency \(IAEA\)](#), which has also concluded that Iran is not building nuclear weapons. The IAEA accounts are typically pored over for the slightest hint of ambiguity or malevolence, which are then promulgated as the most important takeaways in Western news summaries.

A recent example of such deliberate obfuscation was the IAEA report on Iran from August 30, 2012. [Typical American media accounts](#) highlighted the increase in Iran's nuclear infrastructure (underground centrifuge production, etc.), while failing to mention that their stockpile of 20%-enriched uranium—the only material capable of being enriched further to 85% or weapons grade—[had actually diminished](#) as a result of conversion to fuel plates for use in the Tehran Research Reactor, which produces medical isotopes. Thus nuclear development is highlighted, under the false premise that that equals progress toward a weapon, while exculpatory evidence is discarded: a case study in how news and propaganda function.

A civilian nuclear program [is not easily converted into a weapons program](#). Before a country can begin the latter, it must break the [IAEA monitoring seals](#) on its uranium stockpile, which is also under constant camera detection. It must also kick out international inspectors, who currently have unfettered access to all of Iran's nuclear sites. Completing those very public steps would be the first *true* warning indicators that Iran was building nuclear weapons.

As a signatory to the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT), Iran [is entitled](#) to enrich uranium to low levels for domestic power consumption and medical treatment, such as radiation therapy for cancer patients.

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Lesson #2: Iran is not a threat to the US

The United States military is the largest, most sophisticated machine of force and violence the world has ever seen. After factoring in foreign military aid and nuclear weapons maintenance, [the U.S. spends over an estimated \\$1 trillion](#) (that's >\$1,000 billion) on defense annually.

By contrast, Iran [spends somewhere between \\$10-12 billion on defense](#) annually, *after* factoring in foreign and domestic paramilitary units such as the Revolutionary Guards and Basij—Iran's domestic volunteer militia. This is "less than the United Arab Emirates, and only between 25% to 33% of Saudi defense spending," [notes](#) Anthony Cordesman of the Center for Strategic and International Studies. It spends approximately 1/5 of the amount allocated by the six sheikdoms of the Gulf Cooperation Council—America's staunchest regional allies (save for Israel) and the guardians of Western access to crude.

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Lesson #3: Iran is not an existential threat to Israel

Ehud Barak, Israeli Defense Minister: “Iran does not constitute an existential threat against Israel.” ([Reuters, Report: Barak says Iran is not existential threat to Israel; September 17, 2009](#))

Dan Halutz, former Chief of Staff of the Israel Defense Forces and Commander of the Israeli Air Force: “Iran poses a serious threat, but not an existential one. The use of this terminology is misleading. If it is intended to encourage a strike on Iran, it’s a mistake. Force should be exerted only as a last resort.” ([YNet, Former IDF Chief: Iran doesn’t pose an existential threat; February 2, 2012](#))

Tamir Pardo, Director of the Mossad: “Does Iran pose a threat to Israel? Absolutely. But if one said a nuclear bomb in Iranian hands was an existential threat, that would mean that we would have to close up shop and go home. That’s not the situation. The term existential threat is used too freely.” ([Haaretz, Mossad Chief: Nuclear Iran not necessarily existential threat to Israel; December 29, 2011](#))

Israel maintains [a competitive advantage](#) in total amount spent on munitions and assets, as well as a massive edge in terms of technological sophistication. Israel spends almost twice as much as Iran on defense appropriations and is able to buy the world’s most advanced weaponry from the United States (mostly with U.S. taxpayer money, [laundered through foreign aid](#)). Iran, by contrast, is heavily dependent on the dated [munitions it received under the Shah](#) and acquires rudimentary missile technology from China and North Korea with its own money.

Even if Iran were pursuing nuclear weapons, [Israel’s own stockpile](#)—estimated at a several hundred high-yield warheads—ensures that Tehran would not engage in a first-strike. Those familiar with the [Cold War doctrine of Mutually Assured Destruction \(MAD\)](#) know that when confronted with the possibility of your own annihilation, so the theory goes, you’re incentivized to refrain from launching a first strike. Israel’s [stationing of nukes on German-made Dolphin class submarines](#) in the Mediterranean assures that even if a first strike were to be carried out on the Jewish state, the perpetrator would still be subject to a retaliatory strike.

However, much as America acts as Israel’s patron, so too [Iran spends a good deal arming and supporting proxy armies](#) in southern Lebanon and the Gaza Strip—Hezbollah and Hamas, respectively. While these forces present a serious challenge to Israeli military incursions into said areas, their ability to project force within Israel’s borders is limited to indiscriminate rocket fire. While dangerous and [psychologically terrifying for civilians](#), such tactics cannot be considered more than a nuisance when comparing capacities for state violence.

Israel is not a signatory to the NPT and repeatedly [refuses propositions](#) for a Middle East Nuclear Weapons-Free Zone (MENWFZ) to be established as a means of ending the stand-off with Tehran, [despite majority support](#) from the Israeli public.

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Lesson #4: Iran’s leadership is not fanatical or suicidal

General Martin Dempsey, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff: “We are of the opinion that the Iranian regime is a rational actor.” ([Global Public Square, Martin Dempsey on Syria, Iran](#))

[and China; February 17, 2012\)](#)

Israel Defense Forces Chief of General Staff, Maj. Gen. Benny Gantz: "I think the Iranian leadership is composed of very rational people." ([CS Monitor, Israeli Army Chief says he doubts Iran will build a nuclear weapon; April 25, 2012](#))

Intellectual orthodoxy holds that even the most tepid criticism of Israeli and American policy vis-à-vis Iran requires a disclaimer by all "serious people" that Iran is a vicious theocratic regime which oppresses its own people. While Iran's [governmental structure is religiously based](#) and [peaceful protests have been met with repression](#), such traits are hardly unique. Saudi Arabia, America's most solid regional ally, enforces religious doctrine [as viciously if not more so](#) than Iran does (such as executing many for practicing freedom of speech and religion as "witches" or "blasphemers"). And, of course, violent government responses to non-violent demonstrations aimed at political change are hardly unknown in free societies (see: [Occupy Wall Street](#)).

Moreover, there's little correlation between the internal repression of a society and its external behavior. The United States, one of the freer societies on the planet, [routinely engages in aggression and the use of brute force](#) to accomplish geopolitical objectives. Conversely, Iran pummels domestic dissent while historically limiting its military involvement outside its borders. The only record of Iranian aggression since the 18th century was when [the U.S.-backed Shah invaded and conquered](#) a series of Arab islands in the early 1970's.

Despite [contentions from the likes of Benjamin Netanyahu](#) that Iran's leadership is capable of pulling the temple down on their heads in a show of Samsonian martyrdom, Tehran's track record and statements indicate otherwise. The more judicious pundits [at least acknowledge](#) as much.

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Lesson #5: Politicians and media stenographers have been claiming Iran is on the verge of developing nuclear weapons since the mid-1980's

House Republican Research Committee in 1992: "98 percent certainty that Iran already had all (or virtually all) of the components required for two or three operational nuclear weapons." ([Christian Science Monitor, Imminent Iran nuclear threat? A timeline of warnings since 1979; November 8, 2011](#))

Iran [began its nuclear program with help from the United States](#) during the 1950's when it was run by Washington's puppet-dictator Shah Reza Pahlavi, who was [installed after the U.S. overthrew the democratically elected government](#) in a 1953 CIA coup known as Operation Ajax. Following the 1979 Islamic revolution, Ayatollah Khomeini condemned all nuclear and chemical weapons as "un-Islamic," stopping the nascent nuclear program in its tracks. Supreme Leader [Ali Khamanei reiterated his predecessor's religious edict](#) some 20 years later.

The 1980's [saw complex American-Iranian and Israeli-Iranian relations](#), whereby discreet deals were made among the antagonistic powers in an effort to accomplish other foreign policy goals. Yet by the early 1990's Iran's growing military prowess and the near-destruction of the major Arab military presence to Israel's east (Iraq) put Iran back on Tel

Aviv's agenda as a strategic competitor. In 1992, then-member of parliament Benjamin Netanyahu [told the Knesset](#) that Iran was 3 to 5 years from having a nuclear weapon—and that the threat had to be “uprooted by an international front headed by the U.S.” [Sound familiar?](#)

American policymakers began to echo Israeli claims during the 1990's, largely in public and without evidence to back them up. These assertions continued in a steady drumbeat of increasingly hostile rhetoric (“The Axis of Evil”) all the way until 2007, when a declassified NIE was released disputing the fact that Iran continued its weapons program in any way beyond 2003. Despite the conclusions, as mentioned in lesson #1, hawks on the left and right continue to peddle demonstrably false claims to this very day.

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Lesson #6: The American and Israeli security establishments are against it

U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton: “We’re watching very carefully about what [Iran] do[es], because it’s always been more about their actions than their words...We’re not setting red lines.” ([Haaretz, Clinton rejects Netanyahu’s call for ‘red lines’ over Iran nuclear program; September 10, 2012](#))

Former Internal Security Chief Yuval Diskin: “...attacking Iran will encourage them to develop a bomb all the faster.” ([Think Progress, Diskin says he has ‘no faith’ in current leadership, April 27, 2012](#))

Former Mossad Chief Meir Dagan: a future Israeli Air Force strike on Iranian nuclear facilities is “the stupidest thing I have ever heard.” ([Haaretz, Former Mossad chief: Israel air strike on Iran ‘stupidest thing I have ever heard’, May 7, 2011](#))

Although the idea of nuclear weapons in the hands of an avowedly hostile regime is as upsetting to Washington as it is to Tel Aviv, the Pentagon brass is opposed to an attack, not because they suddenly favor the regime in Tehran, but because [their own strike simulations predict a great deal of injurious blowback in exchange for, at most, a brief setback in Iran’s nuclear capability.](#)

And despite war hysteria in Israel, fanned by political rhetoric, and legitimate conventional security concerns for the Jewish state, Israeli security and military officials recognize that they [don’t have anywhere near the overwhelming force](#) required to take care of the problem. The only way to ensure that Iran doesn’t develop a nuclear weapons capability would be to install a friendly puppet regime in Tehran, a task far beyond the capability of the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) or the U.S. military at this point.

In lieu of direct military conflict, the U.S. and Israel have adopted a harsh policy of [economic sanctions](#), [cyberwarfare](#), and [covert operations](#)—declarations of war, [by American standards](#)—in an effort to delay Iran’s nuclear progress. But the consensus among knowledgeable players is that any resort to force will have far worse repercussions than benefits.

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Lesson #7: The American and Israeli people are against it

Poll: 7 out of 10 Americans choose diplomacy over military force to end Iran's nuclear ambitions ([Christian Science Monitor, To strike Iran's nuclear facilities or not to strike? Why polls differ; March 14, 2012](#))

Poll: 58% of Israelis oppose a unilateral strike on Iran ([Haaretz, Haaretz poll: Most of the public opposes an Israeli strike on Iran; March 8, 2012](#))

Poll: Only 27% of Jewish Israelis in favor of a unilateral strike on Iran ([Haaretz, Poll: Most Israelis oppose attack on Iran nuclear facilities; August 16, 2012](#))

While public opinion is as malleable as Play-Doh, surveys show that the American and Israeli citizenries are very skeptical about war with Iran. The former, [still reeling from the unpleasant effects of two costly occupations](#) (one ongoing), are overwhelmingly opposed to another war in the Middle East. Likewise, although a majority of Israelis view Iran's nuclear program as more immediately dangerous than their American counterparts do, polling indicates they are opposed to a unilateral strike initiated without American support. This makes sense, given the IDF's military inadequacy for the task at hand, and Israel's proximity to retaliatory proxy forces in southern Lebanon and Gaza.

It is true that survey responses vary depending on how the question is asked. When confronted with the baseless assertion that Iran is building nuclear weapons, many respondents aver that military action is worth it. But when given the correct facts, both populations conclude that the downsides of military force aren't worth the payoff. This aligns with the thoughts of most policymakers within the establishment.

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Lesson #8: An Iranian nuclear weapon will be all-but-assured if the U.S. or Israel attack

Former CIA Director Michael Hayden on war deliberations within the Bush administration: "the consensus was that [a brief bombing campaign] would guarantee that which we are trying to prevent: an Iran that will spare nothing to build a nuclear weapon and that would build it in secret." ([The Hill, Don't let Iran be a second Iraq; February 27, 2012](#))

With so much evidence solidly against their position, U.S. and Israeli hawks have become increasingly strident in their appeal to violence as a means of ending the Iranian "nuclear threat." Many proponents of a strike [have cited](#) the Israeli Air Force raid on Iraq's Osirak reactor in 1981 as a precedent that could be emulated. While comparisons between the two situations [are tenuous at best](#), what's of higher import is the fact that U.S. intelligence concluded that the 1981 attack didn't stop Saddam's nuclear weapons program—it [accelerated it](#). (It was actually the consequences of Saddam's 1991 invasion of Kuwait that brought Iraq's bomb program to a halt.)

Lesson #9: Readers—add your own below in our comments section...

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