

Unnamed Western Officials Spread Dubious Claims About Iran

Reports claim without evidence that Iran considered attacking a DC Army base and that Iran is hiding a nuclear program that could be used to make weapons

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With a possible revival of the Iran nuclear deal on the table, there are many forces at work opposing a US return to the accord, known as the JCPOA. One form this opposition takes is through anonymous leaks to Western media outlets that are happy to publish whatever intelligence officials tell them to. This week, two dubiously-sourced reports came out that accused Iran of plotting an attack in Washington and operating a secret nuclear program. Missing from the stories was any evidence to back up the claims.

On Sunday, [The Associated Press published a story](#) that cited “two senior US intelligence officials” who claimed that Iran made threats against Fort McNair, a waterfront Army base in Washington DC. The officials said the NSA intercepted communications of Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps discussing possible “USS Cole-style attacks” on Fort McNair, referring to the 2000 attack on a US Navy destroyer off Yemen that was launched using a small explosive-laden boat. The AP story offers no other evidence to back up the claim besides the word of the unnamed officials.

Iran hawks benefit from such stories since it gives the US more reasons not to return to the JCPOA. But another reason to hype a threat to Fort McNair was explained in the AP story. The US Army wants to create a security buffer zone extending 250 to 500 feet into the water of the Washington Channel, the busy waterway that Fort McNair sits on. Eleanor Holmes Norton, DC’s representative to Congress, has been fighting this buffer zone and said the military has shown her no evidence that constitutes a threat big enough to justify it.

“I have asked the Department of Defense to withdraw the rule because I’ve seen no evidence of a credible threat that would support the proposed restriction,” Norton said. “I have a security clearance. And they have yet to show me any classified evidence.”

The AP doesn’t explain these doubts until a few paragraphs into the story, so most readers with faith in the outlet that read the headline and skimmed a few paragraphs are left believing Iran is considering attacking Washington.

Following the *AP* report, on Monday, [The Telegraph published](#) a story that cited unnamed “Western intelligence officials” who claimed Iran is “deliberately concealing key components of its nuclear program from UN inspectors that can be used for producing nuclear weapons.” The officials claimed that Iran is hiding equipment that can be used to enrich uranium at 90 percent, which is needed for weapons-grade.

The *Telegraph* report follows a familiar script. For decades now, Western and Israeli officials have claimed Iran is operating a secret nuclear weapons program. Like most of these claims, the *Telegraph* offers absolutely no evidence to corroborate the story. All the officials say is that they tracked containers they “believe” this equipment is held in through satellite images.

President Biden claims that he wants to revive the JCPOA but has taken no action to do so. He is demanding that Iran reverse the activity of its civilian nuclear program to comply with the limits set by the agreement before sanctions imposed by the Trump administration are lifted. Since the US is the party that violated the deal, Tehran wants Biden to act first.

While Biden has not lifted sanctions, his administration is calling for talks with Iran to restore the JCPOA. This is enough to evoke a [strong response from Iran hawks in Congress](#). With intense domestic pressure and opposition to the JCPOA from US allies like Israel and Saudi Arabia, it is unlikely that Biden will take a unilateral action like lifting sanctions to revive the JCPOA. Dubiously-sourced reports like the ones from *AP* and the *Telegraph* give Iran hawks more ammunition to pressure Biden into not returning to the agreement. In the meantime, Iran’s economy remains under crippling economic sanctions, and ordinary Iranians continue to suffer.

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Michel Chossudovsky

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