

# “Countdown to Zero”: Hollywood Movie Promotes War on Iran

A review

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Theme: [Media Disinformation](#), [Military Militarization](#)  
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Seductive, fascinating and frightening, *Countdown to Zero* motivates the public to support complete nuclear disarmament and to fear Iran, which is conveniently the next country the US wants to invade. Framed in no-nuke rhetoric, Countdown to Zero is not-so-subtle agitprop. The film relies on conventional geopolitics to whip up conventional audiences into another conventional state of panic. Islamo-terrorists just can't acquire this technology! This is painfully similar to what we were told prior to the invasion of Iraq.

Director and writer: Lucy Walker

Producer: Lawrence Bender

Magnolia Pictures, Participant Media, The History Channel, World Security Institute

89 mins.

Website: <http://www.takepart.com/zero>

In 2002, Condoleezza Rice warned the world, “We don’t want the smoking gun to be a mushroom cloud.” Invading forces never found weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) in Iraq. They did find plenty of oil, though, which corporations seized for pennies on the dollar. [1] The same reason – WMDs – is now being used against Iran. When Zero mentions Islamo-terrorists seeking nuclear technology, it spotlights Iranian president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. Repeatedly.

Zero features war hawks Tony Blair, Ronald Reagan, Zbigniew Brzezinski, James Baker, and Pakistan’s Pervez Musharraf, as well as spies and analysts, including Valerie Plame. Past or current members of the Carlyle Group, the Trilateral Commission and the Council on Foreign Relations share the screen with well-financed groups ostensibly focused on nuclear nonproliferation.

Some of the film’s talking heads promoted, engaged in and/or profit from the “War on Terror,” which critics deem a euphemism for Western resource wars in the Middle East. James Baker, who served under both Bushes, makes a brief appearance. Until 2005, he legally represented the Carlyle Group, a private equity firm dominated by former heads of state who profit enormously on Middle East wars. [2]

Joe Cirincione of the Council on Foreign Relations (and of Ploughshares, a non-proliferation group) [3] delivers most of the Iran-is-bad message:

“Iran is the tip of the spear. It’s the big problem that we have to solve.”

This marks a 180-degree reversal from his position in 2007 when he described to Asia Times:

“‘a group of people inside the administration who view Iran as Nazi Germany’ and who are ‘constantly exaggerating’ the threat from Iran.” [4]

But that isn’t the only inconsistency.

Nine nations reportedly have nuclear weaponry: the US, Russia, the UK, France, China, Israel, India, Pakistan and North Korea. Of these, India, Pakistan, Israel and North Korea are not current signatories to the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT). [5]

Leaving India and Israel free of criticism, Zero disparages nuclear members Pakistan and North Korea. Key information on these two nations presented in the film conflicts with other information publicly available – in some cases for over a decade.

First keep in mind that invading Iran is part of the “Long War” in which the US and its allies seek control of the entire region for access to its gas, oil and minerals. Long War proponent, Zbigniew Brzezinski, briefly appears in Zero. In 1997, he published *The Grand Chessboard: American Primacy and Its Geostrategic Imperatives*. [6] Among those imperatives is the need to control Iran, a “primarily important geopolitical pivot.” [p.47]

Iran stands in the way. India does not. Neither does Pakistan or Israel. Brzezinski writes of the Central Asian states:

“Moreover, they are of importance from the standpoint of security and historical ambitions to at least three of their most immediate and more powerful neighbors, namely Russia, Turkey and Iran, with China also signaling an increasing political interest in the region. But the Eurasian Balkans are infinitely more important as a potential economic prize: an enormous concentration of natural gas and oil reserves is located in the region, in addition to important minerals, including gold.” (p.124, emphasis added)



Johannes Koepl, a former German defense ministry and NATO official, called *Grand Chessboard* “a blueprint for world dictatorship.” [7] Iran is pivotal in those plans; *Zero* demonizes Iran. This is precisely the same fear mongering elites used when leading us into war on Iraq.

*Zero* isn’t even wholly anti-nuke; it only condemns nuclear arms. The film spends time, for example, on the Reagan-Gorbachev nuclear disarmament talks without mentioning what drove Gorbachev to the table: the April 26, 1986 Chernobyl nuclear reactor explosion. [8] The Ukraine government reports that the explosion released 100 times more radiation than the bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. [9] But *Zero* doesn’t mention this or any other civilian nuclear accident. [10] The goal is not to ban all nuclear use, even though a nuclear power incident (by accident or sabotage) is just as deadly.

And, it presents absurdities. According to *Zero*, Osama bin Laden is alive and well and living in Pakistan, which Secretary of State Hillary Clinton also recently asserted. [11] Never mind that a dialysis-dependent man [12] on the run in rugged terrain for nine years would have likely died by now. [13] Elites refuse to give up their bogeyman.

A closer look into those nations that refuse to sign the NPT reveals different treatment by the US based on corporate investment deals. That difference is reflected in *Zero*. Though sanctions are applied against North Korea on the grounds it refuses to reach a nuclear accord, the U.S. trades nuclear technology with Israel, India and Pakistan, according to sources enumerated below.

## A Look at India

It’s hard to take the nuclear powers seriously about disarmament, writes Russ Wellen in *Foreign Policy in Focus*. [14] India refused to sign not only the NPT, but also the Proliferation Security Initiative, the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, and the Missile Technology Control Regime. India is now gearing up its anti-satellite system for deployment by 2015.

In *India's Quest for Dual-Use Technology*, [15] nuclear research scientist Matthew Hoey mentions an India defense paper "that demonstrated a clear interest within the Indian military of deploying not only a space-based [directed-energy] laser but also a hypersonic suborbital delivery system with global-strike capability."

Yet, somehow, India escapes "rogue state" status, with its attendant economic sanctions. Wellen cites Hoey who reported that the Bush Administration lifted the 1998 sanctions against India for its nuclear tests, "and then progressively loosened export and commerce laws against India." Going even further:

"[In 2008] the United States approached the Nuclear Suppliers Group ... to grant a waiver to India to commence civilian nuclear trade.... The implementation of **this waiver makes India the only known country with nuclear weapons which is not a party to the Non Proliferation Treaty ... but is still allowed to carry out nuclear commerce with the rest of the world.**" (emphasis added)

So why the focus on Iran in this film? Why no concern about India, with its internal "insurgencies" necessitating 'Operation Green Hunt' (as the natives call it)? Wellen explains:

"As Andrew Lichterman and M.V. Ramana write in *Beyond Arms Control* (2010, Critical Will), '... the nuclear deal is part of a broader set of [US-Indian] agreements [which] US-based multinationals are ... hoping to use ... as a wedge to further open India to foreign investment and sales.'"

Oh, corporate profits are at stake. *Zero's* talking heads don't condemn India for refusing to sign the NPT, likely because India has opened its tribal areas to multinational mining companies. [16] Once those pesky tribes are removed (via Operation Green Hunt), massive profits can be made in destroying ecosystems for the underlying minerals.



#### A Look at Pakistan

Nuclear member Pakistan also refused to sign the NPT, but its relationship with the US has been fitful. In 1979, President Carter suspended aid after discovering a nuclear enrichment facility. After the Soviets invaded Afghanistan later that year, aid resumed in 1981 under President Ronald Reagan. In 1990, President Bush suspended all aid after confirming that

Pakistan had acquired a nuclear bomb. [17]

In good graces once again, Pakistan just learned it will receive \$7.5 billion in aid from the US. [18] Since 2001, Pakistan has received at least \$12 billion in aid and “military reimbursements” from the U.S.

While speaking at the Brecht Forum last year, [19] Noam Chomsky (not in the film) accused the US of facilitating both India and Pakistan’s development of nuclear weaponry.

“Pakistan’s nuclear arsenals were developed with Reagan’s crucial aid. And India’s nuclear weapons program got a major shot in the arm with the recent US-India nuclear agreement.”

Former CIA expert on Pakistan’s nuclear secrets, Richard Barlow, may be the source of Chomsky’s accusation. In the 1980s, Barlow blew the whistle “that senior officials in government were ... breaking US and international non-proliferation protocols to ... sell it banned WMD technology.” [20]

Zero makes no mention of US involvement in Pakistan acquiring nuclear capability. It tells us that China gave Pakistan a blueprint for a nuclear bomb, and that Pakistani nuclear weapons scientist, Abdul Qadeer Khan, provided the rest. We’re told that A.Q. Khan set up a “full service” nuclear trade “in the early 1980s.” CIA operative Valerie Plame then tells us that the US didn’t begin focusing on Khan “until the late 1990s,” long after Pakistan joined the nuclear club.

This is simply not plausible, even if Richard Barlow was not the expert on Pakistan nuclear secrets in the 1980s as he asserts. Someone in the US was watching Khan in the 1980s or Bush would not have had been inspired to suspend aid to Pakistan in 1990.

Another discrepancy between these two sources: Zero reports that Pakistan joined the nuclear club in 1990, whereas Barlow asserts it was in 1984, two years after Reagan renewed aid to the country. Regardless, US aid was not cut off until after Pakistan acquired the bomb.

A Look at Israel

Zero also does not condemn Israel for its nuclear program, despite its refusal to sign the NPT. The film asserts Israel has 80 nuclear weapons, which contradicts revelations made by nuclear technician, Mordechai Vanunu, in 1986. [21] An independent nuclear physicist examined Vanunu and his documents and reported that, in 1986, Israel had enough material for 150 nuclear bombs. [22]

Of note, Obama expanded nuclear trade with Israel last month. [23]

Another absurdity asserted by Valerie Plame in Zero is that “ Hamas is a terrorist organization.” But, since when is defending your homeland from invasion an act of terrorism? Take a look at this map of Palestine lands seized by Israel over the past 60 years:



Plame won global sympathy when the Bush Administration outed her as a CIA spy. [24] Then, it was that Iraq had obtained yellowcake uranium from Nigeria, which her husband, former US Ambassador Joe Wilson, refuted in a New York Times piece in 2003. [25] For this, she was outed as a spy. How ironic that she would now help advance the cause of war today with terrorist fear mongering – the same propaganda that Bush used.

Why even mention Hamas? Gaza's popularly elected government clearly has no capability of acquiring and deploying WMDs. It's barely alive under Israel's military strikes and continual (and deadly [26]) blockade of food, medicine and building materials.

That statement – 'Hamas is a terrorist organization' – stands alone in the film, with no further comment. It's pure psyops. The U.S.'s unending support [27] of Israel's ongoing genocide in Palestine [28] does more to create instability than it does to secure peace in the region.

## A Look at North Korea

Zero mocks nuclear club member North Korea, using old black and white footage of a stern Kim Jong Il, yet worries about its potential to trade nuclear secrets regionally. Its fears are realized as North Korea may be assisting Myanmar (Burma) in achieving nuclear capability, according to several sources reported in Bloomberg recently. [29]

Hillary Clinton just increased sanctions against North Korea for its continuing refusal to sign nuclear accords, but the US may have a tougher time in Myanmar, given Chevron's lucrative arrangement with the military junta. [30] The Carlyle Group, with its many business interests in South Korea, [31] also held (and may still hold) business interests in Myanmar. [32]

Given US handling of India and Israel, and its massive infusion of cash into Pakistan, three states which have not signed the NPT, can we expect a similar pass on a nuclear Myanmar (but not North Korea) given corporate interests in that regime?





## A Well-Made Film

Put aside for the moment Islamo-terrorist bashing, elite plans for invading Iran, and the deadly hypocrisy of the US using depleted uranium in Iraq after finding it did not have its own WMDs. Watching war hawks demand complete nuclear disarmament is sobering.

Filmmaker Lucy Walker uses potent imagery, like the tennis ball representing how much highly enriched uranium is needed to destroy an entire city.

She also shows numerous accidents with planes carrying nuclear weapons. Citizens do need to be concerned that nuclear accidents are possible. This is one of the supporting themes of the film. "If the probability isn't zero, it will happen," warns nuclear physicist Frank von Hippel.

Mentioned in Zero under "Accidents" is the B-52 flight over the US in 2007, which carried six nuclear warheads. News reports in the film assert, "nobody knew – not the aircraft's crew, not the commanders on the ground." Six nuclear warheads could never be loaded onto a plane and flown 1,500 miles across the U.S. without anyone having a clue. This was no accident.

One unintended message may be that rogue forces within the US military are a threat. Indeed, former UN Ambassador Gordon Duff recently speculated about such a frightening scenario. [33] Decommissioning the US arsenal is just as important as all other nuclear arsenals. The US, in fact, is the only nation confirmed to have used all three WMDs: nuclear, biological and chemical. This is a claim that not even the immortal Osama bin Laden can make.

"Hiroshima, Nagasaki, Fallujah. And so it turns out that there were weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, though not until we arrived and started using them."  
~Bob Koehler, "The suffering of Fallujah." [34]

As presented, the history of nuclear proliferation is morbidly fascinating. Rare video footage offers a glimpse into the eyes of Robert Oppenheimer, the man who understood – and yet created – the means to end life on Planet Earth. He admits that the technology will spread; that it cannot be made secure.

Mikhail Gorbachev also appears, calling for complete nuclear disarmament. He put it most succinctly in a 2007 article: "It is becoming clearer that nuclear weapons are no longer a

means of achieving security; in fact, with every passing year they make our security more precarious.” [35]

We can all agree on complete nuclear disarmament. We can all take Zero’s suggestion to pressure our public servants into bringing the number of nuclear weapons down to zero, a process begun in 1963.

But, let us also recognize war propaganda when it surfaces. The film’s sincerity in promoting complete nuclear disarmament is undermined by its transparent promotion of war on Iran and by its failure to condemn nuclear energy. By not condemning all nuclear power, Countdown to Zero misses a golden opportunity to unite peace activists with safe-energy ones to rid the world of such a dangerous, destructive technology. Nuclear fallout is deadly – whether from weapons or energy plants.

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