

Iran: Clandestine Aims of the US National Intelligence Estimate

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Clandestine aims of NIE report

by Parviz Esmaeili, Tehran Times, 6 December 2007

The latest U.S. National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) on Iran's nuclear program was released on Monday and caused various reactions.

The report by the U.S. intelligence community is the consensus view of all 16 U.S. spy agencies, including the CIA.

Unfortunately, in Iran many people hastily responded positively, and even some government officials expressed the view that the report was favorable to Iran.

This case is similar to the recent report by International Atomic Energy Agency Director General Mohamed ElBaradei, which was called totally positive.

However, like always, ElBaradei's report gave short shrift to Iran's cooperation and the transparency of its nuclear activities but highlighted the alleged ambiguities cited by Western intelligence agencies and their unsubstantiated accusations.

In any case, the issue is not over the contents of ElBaradei's report, because the IAEA director general's claim that the process of Iran's cooperation with the agency is slowing down should have given Iranian officials a signal to be more cautious in evaluating the Arab diplomat's five-page report.

Now the U.S. intelligence agencies' report is being treated in the same hasty and offhand manner as ElBaradei's report was.

Although it is expected that the heavy challenges of the past few years would have made our diplomacy more proficient, it seems that the rashness in adopting stances, the novice diplomatic moves, and the misanalysis of the nature of such reports will cause some problems for us in the future.

What is the content of the U.S. intelligence report?

The intelligence agencies' report can interestingly be divided into evaluations with "high confidence" and "moderate confidence".

The conclusions that are made with high certainty are:

“In fall 2003 (September), Tehran halted its nuclear weapons program.”

Attention: The abovementioned time is exactly after an agreement was made with three European countries, and Iran suspended its uranium enrichment activities.

Moreover, contrary to what was declared in ElBaradei’s recent report (which indicated the Islamic Republic’s nuclear program had been peaceful), the U.S. intelligence report referred to an IAEA report that was issued on September 24, 2005 in which ElBaradei had violated the agency’s regulations by stating that the UN Security Council was authorized to investigate Iran’s motives behind 18 years of concealment!

In this way, ElBaradei created a pretext for referring Iran’s nuclear dossier to the UN Security Council, and he was then immediately appointed to serve a third four-year term as IAEA director general.

While the nuclear watchdog states that it has not observed any non-peaceful nuclear activities, the U.S. intelligence agencies have evaluated Iran’s nuclear program to be of a military nature, so that, unlike a technical approach, this political evaluation would influence public opinion.

“The halt, and Tehran’s announcement of its decision to suspend its declared uranium enrichment program and sign an Additional Protocol to its Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty Safeguards Agreement, was directed primarily in response to increasing international scrutiny and pressure...”

In this way they are trying to justify their decision to pressure Iran and implying that the country is not committed to the agreements.

“Until fall 2003, Iranian military entities were working under government direction to develop nuclear weapons.”

This big lie is not mentioned in any of the IAEA reports and is only an allegation made by the United States.

“Since fall 2003, Iran has been conducting research and development projects with commercial and conventional military applications”; “Iran’s civilian uranium enrichment program is continuing”; “Iran will not be technically capable of producing and reprocessing enough plutonium for a weapon before about 2015”; and “Iran has the scientific, technical and industrial capacity eventually to produce nuclear weapons if it decides to do so.”

These sentences suggest that the pressure that was put on Iran, under the leadership of the U.S. government, has been successful in halting the country’s efforts to produce nuclear weapons and thus should be continued.

The conclusions that were stated with “moderate confidence” are:

“Tehran at a minimum is keeping open the option to develop nuclear weapons”; “Tehran had not restarted its nuclear weapons program as of mid-2007, but we do not know whether it currently intends to develop nuclear weapons”; “Iran does not currently have a nuclear

weapon”; “Iran probably would be technically capable of producing enough HEU (highly enriched uranium) for a weapon sometime during the 2010-2015 time frame”; and “Iran probably has imported at least some weapons-usable fissile material, but... it has not obtained enough for a nuclear weapon.”

But what are the unusual points of the report?

The timing for the release of the NIE is noteworthy.

ElBaradei’s report, which was released on October 30, 2007, states that some of the ambiguities should be cleared up through the modality plan devised by Iran and the IAEA.

In addition, China, Russia, and even other permanent members of the UN Security Council and Germany have made it very clear to the United States that they adamantly believe that only diplomatic methods should be used in the nuclear standoff.

However, it is also important to examine their definition of diplomacy. We suppose that diplomacy means interaction through dialogue in order to reach an understanding, but in the conception of diplomacy of some members of the 5+1 group, any tool can be utilized to exert pressure except Article 42 of the United Nations Charter and the military option.

Moreover, after the Republicans lost the midterm congressional elections and the inconclusive occupation of Iraq, the people of the United States became weary of war. Even former U.S. ambassador to the UN John Bolton has talked about the need to revise the U.S. war policy.

In such a situation, the following points are significant:

(1) It seems that the time to release the report was deliberately chosen to influence public opinion in the United States and other countries in order to validate the policies of U.S. President George W. Bush.

Bush’s policies have in fact failed, and thus a scenario had to be devised which could turn a loser into a winner.

Is it a coincidence that immediately after the report was released, U.S. National Security Advisor Stephen Hadley said that the NIE supported Bush’s strategy of piling pressure on Iran?

(2) Apparently, another objective that the report seeks is to strengthen those who favor imposing sanctions on Iran by pretending that the U.S. is being logical and realistic in regard to the current nature of Iran’s nuclear program and is avoiding the military option.

This means it was meant to kill two birds with one stone. On the one hand, while the U.S. is not capable of handling a military confrontation with Iran, it can act as if avoiding the military option is a voluntary move by the neoconservatives and thus will obtain concessions from Russia, China, and also its domestic opponents.

On the other hand, the U.S. can use the report in its efforts to create an international consensus on the need to impose more illegal and unilateral sanctions on Iran.

Acknowledging this strategy, Hadley said the NIE report proves that the “international

community has to turn up the pressure on Iran — with diplomatic isolation, United Nations sanctions, and with other financial pressure — and Iran has to decide it wants to negotiate a solution.”

In other words, since the report emphasizes that the previous U.S. pressure convinced Iran to abandon its alleged nuclear weapons program, continuing the pressures is necessary for international peace!

(3) Instead of pointing the finger at the neoconservative system of the United States, the report attempts to give the impression that the Islamic Republic of Iran is belligerent by nature and to justify Bush’s statements last month, when, probably in line with this report, he said, “If you’re interested in avoiding World War III, it seems like you ought to be interested in preventing them from having the knowledge necessary to make a nuclear weapon.”

In fact, the report was released to influence world public opinion and convince people that if there is going to be a third world war, Iran will be the instigator, not the U.S.!

Now, we expect high-ranking Iranian officials to avoid making hasty evaluations of such reports and adopting incautious stances toward them.

The fact is that ElBaradei’s report has not created any problems for U.S. objectives and was designed completely in line with the U.S. National Intelligence Estimate.

As mentioned before, it seems that the IAEA director general’s only responsibility is to provide the additional information needed by U.S. intelligence agencies.

Washington’s plot against the Iranian nation and their nuclear program has a technical phase and a political phase.

ElBaradei’s duty is to prepare the technical requirements under the auspices of an allegedly professional international organization, but the main job is put on the shoulders of the U.S. spy agencies and media outlets.

Therefore, we should be aware that ElBaradei’s mission is not yet completed, and in this situation, instead of praising him for making a few positive statements, it would be better for us to be more reasonable and wait until the end of autumn.

The question still remains: Which part of ElBaradei’s report and the NIE was positive

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