

# Iran's Atomic Chief Decries IAEA Failure to Close Detonator Probe

By [Gareth Porter](#)

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*The head of Iran's Atomic Energy Organisation, Ali Akbar Salehi, says the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) should now close its investigation of the issue of Iran's development of high explosives detonators the IAEA has said may have been part of a covert nuclear weapons programme.*

IAEA Director General Yukiya Amano has thus far refused to close the file on the issue, which is the first one Iran and the IAEA had agreed to resolve as part of an agreement on the question of what the Agency calls "possible military dimensions" of the Iranian nuclear programme.

In an interview with IPS in his office in Tehran, Salehi said that the IAEA should have ended the investigation of the detonator issue in keeping with an understanding he claimed had been reached between the two sides on procedures for carrying out the February 2014 "Framework for Cooperation" agreement.

Referring to IAEA officials, Salehi said, "To the best of my knowledge and the best of my information, they have come up with the conclusion that what Iran has said is consistent with their findings."

The use of the term "consistent with" the IAEA's information from all other sources would be identical to the formulation used by the IAEA in closing its inquiry into six "unresolved issues" that Iran and the IAEA agreed to resolve in an August 2007 "Work Programme".

Salehi said the IAEA had agreed to do the same thing in regard to the issues included in the "Framework for Cooperation" agreement.

"We have agreed that once our explanations were enough to bring this to conclusion they would have to close that issue," Salehi said.

"They should not keep the issue open," said the U.S.-educated Salehi.

The most recent IAEA report, dated May 23, confirmed that Iran had shown the Agency documents supporting the Iranian contention that it had carried out exploding bridge-wire (EBW) experiments for civilian applications rather than as part of a nuclear weapons programme.

Reuters had reported May 20 that the IAEA had requested that Iran provided "verification documents" to support Iran's claim that it had a valid reason for developing an EBW detonator programme.

But a “senior official close to the Iran dossier” – meaning a senior IAEA official – was quoted by The Telegraph on May 23 as claiming it was “still too early “ to say that the information was “credible”.

However, the Agency was obviously capable of reaching an assessment of the credibility of the information within a relatively short time.

However, Amano declared in a Jun. 2 press conference that the IAEA would provide an assessment of its investigation on the EBW issue “in due course, after a good understanding of the whole picture.”

Unlike the August 2007 Work Plan, which resulted in the IAEA closing the files on six different issues that had opened over nearly five years, the February 2014 “Framework” agreement has not been made public. So Salehi’s claim could not be independently confirmed.

But when asked for the IAEA’s response to Salehi’s statements that the Agency had agreed to close the investigation of an issue once Iran had provided the needed information and had accepted the validity of Iran’s explanation, Amano’s spokesperson, Gill Tudor, did not address either of these statements directly.

In an email to IPS Thursday, she said, “As the Director General has made clear, the Agency’s approach is to consider each issue and then provide an assessment after we have a good understanding of the whole picture.”

Amano’s declaration was clearly intended to indicate that he has no intention of clearing Iran of the suspicion on the EBW programme until the larger issue of “possible military dimensions” of Iran’s nuclear programme is resolved.

The spokesperson’s refusal to deny Salehi’s assertions implies that they accurately reflect both the unpublished “Framework” agreement and what IAEA officials told the Iranians on May 20.

Amano appears to be holding back on his official acceptance of Iran’s documentation on this and other issues until an agreement is reached between Iran and the P5+1. The “possible military dimensions” issue, which involves the authenticity of the large collection of documents said to have come from an alleged secret Iranian nuclear weapons research programme from 2001 to 2003, is not likely to be resolved any time soon.

Amano had pledged to support the U.S. policy toward Iran in return for U.S. support for his candidacy to replace then IAEA Director General Mohamed ElBaradei in 2009, according to a diplomatic cable released by Wikileaks.

Since taking over in November 2009, he has not deviated from the U.S and P5+1 position that Iran has had a nuclear weapons programme in the past.

Iran had denounced the documents as fraudulent from the beginning, and ElBaradei and other senior officials believed they were probably forged by a foreign intelligence service, according to published sources. A former IAEA official who asked not to be identified confirmed ElBaradei’s belief to IPS.

Nevertheless, under pressure from the George W. Bush administration (2001-2009), the IAEA endorsed the documents as “credible”, starting with its May 2008 report.

Until Iran showed the documents to IAEA officials last month, the IAEA had taken the position in reports that Iran remains under suspicion, because it had acknowledged having carried out a programme of EBW research and development for civilian and conventional military applications but had not provided proof of those applications.

In its first reference to the issue, the May 2008 IAEA report said Iran had “acknowledged that it had conducted simultaneous testing with two to three EBW detonators with a time precision of about one microsecond” but that “this was intended for civil and conventional military applications.” The report thus led the reader to infer that Iran had acknowledged the authenticity of parts or all of the documents on the EBW studies they had been asked to explain and had sought to describe them as having non-nuclear applications.

But the report failed to clarify that the experiments outlined in the document under investigation had involved EBW detonators firing at a rate of 130 nanoseconds – eight times faster than the ones Iran had acknowledged, as had been revealed by then Deputy Director General Olli Heinonen in a February 2008 briefing for member states.

Based on the false premise that Iran had admitted to carrying out the experiments shown in the intelligence documents, the IAEA demanded that Iran provide the details of its EBW development programme and allow visits to the site where Iran conducted testing of its EBW experiments.

The objective of that demand appears to have been to provoke a rejection by Iran which could then be cited as evidence of non-cooperation. When Iran refused to provide information on its conventional military applications of EBW technology, which were obviously secret, the Barack Obama administration and its allies used it to justify new international economic sanctions against Iran.

The idea that Iran was obliged to prove that it had a legitimate non-nuclear need for EBW technology was disingenuous. Iran’s development of anti-ship missiles is well documented, as is the fact that such weapons use EBW technology for their firing mechanisms.

Iran apparently resolved the issue by providing documentary evidence of one or more civilian applications of EBW technology in Iran.

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