

No Iran Attack? Don't be so sure...

By [Justin Raimondo](#)

Global Research, December 08, 2007

Antiwar.com 5 December 2007

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

Theme: [Intelligence, US NATO War Agenda](#)

In-depth Report: [IRAN: THE NEXT WAR?](#)

The release of the [National Intelligence Estimate](#) on Iran's alleged nuclear weapons program has everyone breathing a sigh of relief. According to our best intelligence, the Iranians stopped their weapons program in 2003. The liberal pundits and the more reasonable Sullivanesque conservatives are shouting "Hallelujah!" War has been averted! My response: not so fast.

Before we segue into all the reasons why we shouldn't be letting our guard down, however, let's take a moment or three to savor the War Party's distress. This morning's edition of *National Review Online* is a veritable cornucopia of spittle-on-the-screen invective. There's a whole section devoted to debunking the debunkers, and each and every article is a study in sophistry elevated almost to an art form.

Michael Ledeen avers that since "you can't prove a negative," the NIE is wrong. Thus, there is no need for any empirical evidence, since, after all, you can't be 100 percent certain, so Iran is guilty as a given. And weren't these the same guys who thought Iraq had WMD? What Ledeen fails to mention is that he and his gang *agreed* with that assessment, but in the solipsistic universe of the neocons, a different set of rules applies.

Victor Davis Hanson is uncharacteristically laconic. Instead of the usual 1,200 words detailing why the failure to strike Iran yesterday will lead to the Decline of the West and the Victory of Islamofascism, we get little more than 200 words of self-contradicting evasions: the NIE report, taken at face value, proves the Iraq war was a success – after all, it succeeded in deterring the Iranians, who would have gone nuclear had they not witnessed the wrath of the Americans up close. He then turns around, however, and refutes himself by smugly asking us to "expect a variety of rebuttals to this assurance that for 4 years the Iranians haven't gotten much closer to producing weapons grade materials." So, then, the Iraq war did *not* sufficiently impress the Iranians to divert them from going down the nuclear road? Which is it?

On a scale of one to 10 – one meaning Ledeenian incoherence and 10 meaning a chameleon-like ability to mimic rationality – I give Michael Rubin a nine. He's a clever boy who can think of six different reasons why "no" means "yes."

What about "the Syrian episode," Rubin asks: doesn't that prove the Iranians are going after nukes without having to produce one themselves? But it proves nothing of the kind. "[The Syrian episode](#)" is an elaborate hoax carried out by the one country that has everything to gain by provoking war between the U.S. and Iran. The best analysis I've seen describes the Dair-el-Zor strike as an attack on a giant underground weapons depot, where medium- and long-range missiles bought from North Korea and Iran are stored. My best guess is that Israel's amen corner in the national security bureaucracy saw the NIE coming and

engineered the Israeli strike to raise the possibility of imported nukes.

Forgetting that the NIE is supposed to be entirely wrong, Rubin avers that it proves “pressure works” and that it’s time “for another round of sanctions” on Tehran. If they do what we want, punish them. And if they don’t, punish them some more. This is the neocon prescription: torture the world, and don’t let up when they scream – and never take yes for an answer.

Rubin has all the talking points laid out like pearls on a string: if they stopped in 2003, then weren’t they talking about the “dialogue of civilizations” in somewhat less than good faith? Except we don’t know how advanced that program was, or how seriously they took it, and, in any case, as things now stand, *they won’t have an operable nuke for at least a decade*. Evading this vital piece of information is the whole point of Rubin’s Olympic-level display of verbal gymnastics.

The best defense being a good offense, Rubin comes up with this: “Will the analysts who agreed with Iran come clean and explain how they got it wrong?” Who are these “analysts,” and how, exactly, did they “get it wrong”? No one said the Iranians didn’t have nuclear *aspirations*. What the analysts inside the government and in the non-neocon think-tanks were saying, and continue to say, is that the Iranians aren’t even close to going nuclear, that they’ve had technical difficulties and just don’t have the capacity at present. There is no imminent threat, no need to act, no reason to put a military strike against Iran “on the table,” as have all the Democratic and Republican presidential candidates except Dennis Kucinich and Ron Paul.

According to Rubin, it wasn’t the alarmists like himself who got it wrong: the Iranians are inveterate liars and can’t be trusted under any circumstances. What’s difficult for the neocons at this point is to transfer the liar-liar-pants-on-fire epithet to our own government. Are they now saying we can’t trust the CIA, the DIA, and the rest any more than we trust the Iranian mullahs? Has the American intelligence community been infiltrated by the Revolutionary Guards? Good luck with *that* one, guys...

Oh, this is truly a comedic situation, and I just can’t help taking an inordinate amount of pleasure in listening to the chorus of outrage that has greeted the NIE in neocon-land. It’s like music to my ears! Ah, but I’m saving the best – Norman Podhoretz, obviously – for last. For now, we’ll just have to content ourselves with the second- and third-tier neocon hacks at NRO and the [Weekly Standard](#). I’m just getting warmed up...

I had an especially good laugh over Frank Gaffney’s contribution, which dismisses the NIE with the assertion that, since no one “outside a very small circle in Iran has *certain knowledge* about the current state of Iran’s nuclear-weapons program,” therefore “we had better be prepared to use military force.” In Gaffney’s world, life is risky: if you can’t prove you *aren’t* a terrorist, then get ready for Guantanamo. Countries have it worse. Washington must know *for certain* that a given country isn’t about to nuke Washington, and they’re guilty until proven innocent. If you’re the leader of a Muslim nation in the Middle East with a long history of hostility to Israel, expect an attack at any moment.

Poor Seth Leibsohn is beside himself. He’s so distraught by the NIE that he does us all a service by compiling a wide range of sources for the report’s conclusions. The *New York Times* attributes the estimate to “new information obtained from covert sources over the

summer,” the *Washington Post* says it was “intercepted calls between Iranian military commanders, that steadily chipped away at the earlier assessment,” the *Washington Times* points to the defection of “a senior Iranian official, Ali Rez Asgari,” who “defected to the West during a visit to Turkey in February.” *USA Today*, on the other hand, somewhat vaguely claims it was “news photos” that played a major role in turning the spooks around. “Maybe it’s all of this,” Leibsohn concludes, to which one can only add: *Duh!*

The *Weekly Standard* runs one Thomas Joscelyn, a blogger associated with fringe neocon David Horowitz and his David Horowitz Freedom Center. As a self-proclaimed “terrorism expert,” Joscelyn had the honor of being cited by Rush Limbaugh recently for “proving” that Saddam Hussein and Osama bin Laden really *were* in cahoots, in spite of the National Commission on 9/11’s conclusion that no such links existed. He demands that the intelligence community immediately release to him the evidence for its conclusions – this in spite of his acknowledgment, in the beginning of his piece, that it can and should do no such thing.

The NIE seems to have unhinged the lesser neocons, who are reduced to the sort of noises a small mammal makes when cornered. Norman Podhoretz, however, is quite a different story: his contribution to the “debate” is a perfect gem of the purest nihilism, a textbook example of Bizarro World logic. According to Podhoretz, since the last NIE was wrong, this one *cannot* be right. They were wrong then, he wails, so how can we trust them now? This principle, applied to, say, the realm of science, would ensure that no progress, no advance on the road to truth, no technological or theoretical innovation would ever be possible, because, after all, scientists have been wrong before. But truth is not Podhoretz’s concern: he’s already determined, *a priori*, that the truth is whatever he says it is.

This kind of radical subjectivism leads naturally to an accusation that the whole thing is a political ploy by Bush-haters in the national security bureaucracy who are sabotaging the lovely war he thought he talked the president into. Podhoretz has “dark suspicions,” he confides, that the intelligence community is “bending over backwards” to avoid the mistakes it made during the run-up to war with Iraq. Naturally, he avoids mentioning that he, Norman Podhoretz, was just as wrong as they were, if not more so – so why, given his own Bizarro World logic, should we believe anything *he* says?

According to Norm, it wasn’t the Iranians who succumbed to pressure from the international community to end their nuclear weapons program, it was the intelligence community that caved in to pressure in producing this NIE. Intercepts, defectors, news photos, whatever – he isn’t interested. The whole thing is a plot by the advocates of “appeasement” to undermine the sacred goal of killing thousands of Iranians and embroiling us in another war in the Middle East.

Okay, that was fun, now wasn’t it? Yet there is a price to pay for all this glorious gloating – all pleasures, my Catholic conscience tells me, come with a price. A number of commentators are now certain that, as Fred Kaplan puts it, “If there was ever a possibility that President George W. Bush would drop bombs on Iran, the chances have now shrunk to nearly zero.”

If only it were so.

The Iranian nuclear issue has always been a slow-burning fuse. It took the neocons a good decade to gin up the invasion of Iraq and frame the Ba’athist regime on charges of covert

WMD: taking on the much more formidable Persians, in the face of a more skeptical public, naturally requires an even greater effort. Think of it as a long-term project, one that has been set back for the moment – but the damage isn't irreparable. This NIE can always be revised, although we can say with confidence that the thorough debunking undertaken by the intelligence community in this instance has thrown the War Party on the defensive. Hence the howls of rage coming from the peanut gallery.

However, the nuclear issue has never been the primary thrust of the neocons' case for war with Iran: far more important has been the accusation that we are *already at war* with Iran because they're supposedly funding, harboring, and directing "terrorist" activities against U.S. troops in Iraq. According to what the administration has been saying for many months, the Iranians are killing U.S. soldiers – so when are we going to take them out? Hillary Clinton, too, is asking this question: that's why she voted for the Kyl-Lieberman resolution declaring the Iranian Revolutionary Guards to be an official "terrorist" organization, the only time a military component of a foreign regime has been so defined. Kyl-Lieberman will give the president full authority to engage in "hot pursuit" and precipitate a cross-border incident with Iran that could easily escalate into a full-scale military conflict.

It's a very long Iranian-Iraqi border that snakes through every enclave of ethno-religious tension in the region. Somewhere in that vast and volatile wilderness the first shots of what George W. Bush warns is going to be World War III will be fired: it's the most likely scenario, far more plausible and defensible than a strike at what the administration claims are nuclear facilities in or near heavily populated Iranian cities.

War with Iran is no less likely now than it was last week, last month, or last year. Indeed, it is conceivable that the chances of just such a provocation occurring sometime before we get a new president have *increased*, precisely *because* the War Party has been dealt such a devastating setback on the nuclear front. Desperation makes people do very odd things, and in this case I would reverse one of Victor Davis Hanson and Michael Rubin's arguments and apply it to those seemingly intent on taking us into yet another disastrous war, including the president.

Hanson and Rubin argue that the Iranians are not entirely of sound mind, that all that stuff about the Twelfth Imam returning indicates an irrational millennialism that can only end in a nuclear conflagration. In short, the Iranians are crazy.

I suggest Rubin, Podhoretz, et al., take a good, long look in the mirror. Unlike Iran's hardliners, ours are openly calling for war. As crazy as Ahmadinejad and his pals may be, Podhoretz and his pals are even wackier.

I'd sure like to believe that the relatively rational sectors of our government – the professional intelligence analysts, career diplomats, and assorted "realists" in the national security bureaucracy – have succeeded in putting a stake through the heart of the neocons and spiking the much-rumored war plans of this administration. Unfortunately, I owe it to my readers to tell it like it is: don't break out the champagne just yet. Oh, and keep your eye on the Iran-Iraq border, including the somewhat blurry line of demarcation in the Gulf. We aren't in the clear yet, not by a long shot, and we won't be until all U.S. troops are out of Iraq.

[**Comment on Global Research Articles on our Facebook page**](#)

[**Become a Member of Global Research**](#)

Articles by: [Justin Raimondo](#)

Disclaimer: The contents of this article are of sole responsibility of the author(s). The Centre for Research on Globalization will not be responsible for any inaccurate or incorrect statement in this article. The Centre of Research on Globalization grants permission to cross-post Global Research articles on community internet sites as long the source and copyright are acknowledged together with a hyperlink to the original Global Research article. For publication of Global Research articles in print or other forms including commercial internet sites, contact: publications@globalresearch.ca

www.globalresearch.ca contains copyrighted material the use of which has not always been specifically authorized by the copyright owner. We are making such material available to our readers under the provisions of "fair use" in an effort to advance a better understanding of political, economic and social issues. The material on this site is distributed without profit to those who have expressed a prior interest in receiving it for research and educational purposes. If you wish to use copyrighted material for purposes other than "fair use" you must request permission from the copyright owner.

For media inquiries: publications@globalresearch.ca