

“No Shred of Evidence”, Iran Building Nukes, Ex Head of IAEA Says

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Global Research, June 02, 2011

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The former Director-General of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) said in a new published report that he had not seen “a shred of evidence” that Iran was “building nuclear-weapons facilities and using enriched materials.”

Mohamed ElBaradei, the Nobel Peace Prize recipient who spent 12 years at the IAEA, told investigative journalist Seymour Hersh, “I don’t believe Iran is a clear and present danger. All I see is the hype about the threat posed by Iran.”

El Baradei, who is now a candidate for the presidency of Egypt, added, “The core issue is mutual lack of trust. I believe there will be no solution until the day that the United States and Iran sit down together to discuss the issues and put pressure on each other to find a solution.”

El Baradei’s remarks are contained in an article by Hersh titled “Iran And The Bomb,” published in the June 6th issue of *The New Yorker* magazine.

Hersh points out that the last two U.S. National Intelligence Estimates (N.I.E.s) on Iranian nuclear progress “have stated that there is no conclusive evidence that Iran has made any effort to build the bomb since 2003.”

An N.I.E. Report supposedly represents the best judgment of the senior offices from all the major American intelligence agencies.

The latest report, which came out this year and remains highly classified, is said by Hersh to reinforce the conclusion of the last N.I.E. Report of 2007, that “Iran halted weaponization in 2003.”

A retired senior intelligence officer, speaking of the latest N.I.E. Report, told Hersh, “The important thing is that nothing substantially new has been learned in the last four years, and none of our efforts—informants, penetrations, planting of sensors—leads to a bomb.”

Hersh revealed that over the past six years, soldiers from the Joint Special Operations Force, working with Iranian intelligence assets, “put in place cutting-edge surveillance techniques” to spy on suspected Iran facilities. These included:

- # Surreptitiously removing street signs and replacing them with signs containing radiation sensors.

- # Removing bricks from buildings suspected of containing nuclear enrichment activities and

replacing them “with bricks embedded with radiation-monitoring devices.”

Spreading high-powered sensors disguised as stones randomly along roadways where a suspected underground weapon site was under construction.

Constant satellite coverage of major suspect areas in Iran.

Going beyond these spy activities, two Iranian nuclear scientists last year were assassinated and Hersh says it is widely believed in Tehran that the killers were either American or Israeli agents.

Hersh quotes W. Patrick Lang, a retired Army intelligence officer and former ranking Defense Intelligence Agency(DIA) analyst on the Middle East as saying that after the disaster in Iraq, “Analysts in the intelligence community are just refusing to sign up this time for a lot of baloney.”

The DIA is the military counterpart of the Central Intelligence Agency(CIA).

Hersh writes that Obama administration officials “have often overstated the available intelligence about Iranian intentions.” He noted that Dennis Ross, a top Obama adviser on the region, told a meeting of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee that Iran had “significantly expanded its nuclear program.”

Hersh noted further that last March, Robert Einhorn, the special arms control adviser to Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, told the Arms Control Assn. The Iranians “are clearly acquiring all the necessary elements of a nuclear-weapons capability.”

Additionally, Senator Joseph Lieberman, a strong Israel supporter, told Agence France-Presse, “I can’t say much in detail but it’s pretty clear that they’re(Iran) continuing to work seriously on a nuclear-weapons program.”

Hersh recalled that “As Presidential candidates in 2008, both Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton had warned of an Iranian nuclear arsenal, and occasionally spoke as if it were an established fact that Iran had decided to get the bomb.”

But last March, Lieutenant General James Clapper, the Director of National Intelligence which creates the N.I.E. Assessments, told the Senate Armed Services Committee that Iran had not decided to re-start its nuclear weapons work. When asked by Committee Chairman Carl Levin, “What is the level of confidence that you have (in that estimate)? Is that a high level?” Clapper replied, “Yes, it is.”

At a round of negotiations in Istanbul five months ago, Iranian officials told Western diplomats that the United States and its allies need to acknowledge Iran’s right to enrich uranium and that they must lift all sanctions against Iran.

Clinton adviser Einhorn has said that because of those sanctions Iran may have lost as much as \$60 billion in energy investments and that Iran had also lost business in such industries as shipping, banking, and transportation. “The sanctions bar a wide array of weapons and missile sales to Iran, and make it more difficult for banks and other financial institutions to do business there,” Hersh writes.

However, Hersh says, "The general anxiety about the Iranian regime is firmly grounded" even if there is no hard evidence it is working to build a nuclear weapon. "President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad has repeatedly questioned the Holocaust and expressed a desire to see the state of Israel eliminated, and he has defied the 2006 United Nations resolution calling on Iran to suspend its nuclear-enrichment program."

He goes on to write that while IAEA inspectors "have expressed frustration with Iran's level of cooperation and cited an increase in production of uranium...they have been unable to find any evidence that enriched uranium has been diverted to an illicit weapons program."

One approach to resolving the Iran nuclear issue has been suggested by former ranking American diplomat Thomas Pickering, a retired ambassador who served in Russia, Israel, Jordan and India, and who has been active in the American Iranian Council, devoted to the normalization of relations with Iran.

According to Hersh, Pickering has been involved "in secret, back-channel talks with...some of the key advisers close to Ahmadinejad" and has long sought a meeting with President Obama. Hersh quotes one of Pickering's colleagues as saying if Obama were to grant a meeting, Pickering would tell him: "Get off your no-enrichment policy, which is getting you nowhere. Stop your covert activities. Give the Iranians a sign that you're not pursuing regime change. Instead, the Iranians see continued threats, sanctions, and covert operations."

The website *Politico.com* reports in its May 31 issue that a senior Administration intelligence official asserted Hersh's article was nothing more than "a slanted book report."

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