

Our World: From AMIA to Armageddon

Caroline Glick , THE JERUSALEM POST

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According to foreign reports, Israel destroyed a nuclear weapons installation in Syria in September. Never has a larger story been pushed under the rug by so many so quickly. What are we to make of this?

Over the weekend former federal prosecutor and the head of the non-governmental International Intelligence Summit, John Loftus, released a report on Iraq's weapons of mass destruction program. His report was based on a private study of captured Iraqi documents. These were the unread Arabic language documents that US forces seized, but had not managed to translate after overthrowing Saddam Hussein in 2003.

After a prolonged battle between Congress and then director of US National Intelligence John Negroponte, President George W. Bush ordered those documents posted on a public access Web site last year. They were taken down after it was discovered that among the Iraqi documents were precise descriptions of how to build nuclear weapons.

As Loftus summarized, "The gist of the new evidence is this: Roughly one-quarter of Saddam's WMD was destroyed under UN pressure during the early to mid 1990s. Saddam sold approximately another quarter of his weapons stockpile to his Arab neighbors during the mid-to-late-1990's. The Russians insisted on removing another quarter in the last few months before the war. The last remaining WMD, the contents of Saddam's nuclear weapons labs, were still inside Iraq on the day when the coalition forces arrived in 2003. His nuclear weapons equipment was hidden in enormous underwater warehouses beneath the Euphrates River. Saddam's entire nuclear inventory was later stolen from these warehouses right out from under the Americans' noses."

Loftus then cites Israeli sources who claim that the Iraqi nuclear program was transferred to the Deir az Zour province in Syria.

LOFTUS'S REPORT jibes with a report published on the Web site of Kuwait's Al Seyassah's newspaper on September 25, 2006. That report, which I noted last November, cited European intelligence sources and claimed that in late 2004 Syria began developing a nuclear program near its border with Turkey. Syria's program, which was run by President Bashar Assad's brother Maher and defended by an Iranian Revolutionary Guards brigade, had by mid-2006 "reached the stage of medium activity." The Kuwaiti report stated that the Syrian nuclear program was based "on equipment and materials that the sons of the deposed Iraqi leader, Uday and Qusai transferred to Syria by using dozens of civilian trucks and trains, before and after the US-British invasion in March 2003."

The program, which was run by Iranians with assistance from Iraqi scientists and scientists from the Muslim republics of the former Soviet Union, "was originally built on the remains of the Iraqi program after it was wholly transferred to Syria." These reports and several others like them which have surfaced over the past several years tell us interesting and disturbing things.

FIRST, THEY show just how difficult it is to gather accurate information on the status of weapons of mass destruction programs.

From the 1991 Gulf War until the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003, Iraq's weapons of mass destruction programs were a top issue on the international agenda. And yet, year in and year out, UN inspectors, who were on the ground throughout most of the period, failed to provide an accurate picture of those programs. Indeed, the documents and reports regarding the transfer of those programs to Syria show those inspection reports were wildly off the mark.

And not only did the UN fail. The US itself also failed. After invading Iraq and overthrowing Saddam's regime, the US military and intelligence arms took almost no action to ensure that suspected sites were secured and searched. The US failed to pursue clear intelligence reports indicating that in the weeks before the invasion, suspicious truck convoys had traveled from Iraq to Syria carrying what were presumed to be weapons of mass destruction components.

As for Syria, still today, after Israel reportedly destroyed the Syrian nuclear installation at Deir az Zour, the US and the international community as a whole behave as though nothing is out of order. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice met with her Syrian counterpart Waleed Muallem on November 3 and invited Syria to demand the Golan Heights from Israel at her peace conference at Annapolis later this month.

THE SYRIAN and Iraqi cases also show that political courage and intellectual honesty are the keys to intelligence collection and analysis regarding weapons of mass destruction programs. When leaders and intelligence officials are uninterested in finding information about these programs, they are guaranteed to discover nothing. And when they wish to do nothing about information that they have, they can easily argue that their information was inconclusive. In contrast, if they decide to act on intelligence information that challenges preconceived notions and entrenched political interests, they are guaranteed to suffer the condemnations of those who have an interest in continuing to downplay or deny the dangers those programs manifest.

Against the backdrop of the international and American inability and unwillingness to handle the Iraqi and Syrian nuclear programs, the reports coming out from Iran regarding the mullocracy's nuclear program and the American and Israeli responses to it are nothing less than terrifying.

Last week, the IAEA acknowledged that Iran is currently operating 3,000 centrifuges. At this rate of uranium enrichment, Iran will be capable of producing an atomic bomb in a year. This means that diplomacy today is a dead letter. It is too late to talk Iran out of its nuclear program.

Perhaps more disturbing than the IAEA report - written by Muhammad ElBaradei, who with the exception of the mullahs themselves is probably the man least interested in taking action against Iran's program - were the Israeli and US responses to it. Prime Minister Ehud Olmert reportedly told his ministers that Israel needs to develop contingencies for the day after Iran joins the nuclear club.

THE US is not merely developing contingencies for the day after. It is working to whitewash Iran's role in fomenting the insurgency in Iraq in an effort to restart direct negotiations with Teheran. According to the *New York Sun*, Rice and Secretary of Defense Robert Gates are so eager to ascribe a decrease in Iraqi violence to Iran that they are willing to pooh-pooh the US military's own achievements in its "surge" in Iraq.

The danger implicit in the US and Israeli decisions to plan for the day after Iran gets the bomb is made clear by two recent developments.

First, Sunday *The New York Times* reported that since Sept. 11, the US has been assisting the Pakistanis in securing their nuclear facilities. Speaking to the *Times*, John E. McLaughlin, the former deputy director of the CIA, said, "I am confident of two things, that the Pakistanis are very serious about securing this material, but also that someone in Pakistan is very intent on getting their hands on it."

This story makes clear that even if a regime is considered trustworthy, if threatened by jihadists there is a danger that its nuclear weapons will fall into their hands. If that happens, the notion of deterrence is thrown out the window.

THE LATEST developments in the investigation of the 1994 bombing of the AMIA Jewish center in Buenos Aires provide even more reason for worry. Thirteen years ago, Iran ordered its terror arm Hizbullah to attack the AMIA building. Eighty-five people were killed.

Two weeks ago, Argentina requested that Interpol issue international arrest warrants against five Iranians and one Lebanese man implicated in the bombing. Interpol complied. Last week, Iran responded to Interpol's move by demanding that Interpol issue arrest warrants against five Argentines involved in the investigation of the AMIA bombing. Iran accused them of the "crime" of insulting Iran.

This is an unsettling state of affairs on several levels. The AMIA bombing involved a state contracting a terror group to carry out a massive attack against innocent civilians simply because they were Jewish. For years, for political reasons, the Argentine government derailed its own investigation of the attack. Indeed, it took 14 long years for Argentina to request that Interpol issue arrest warrants.

And then, in a sign of contempt for the international community, Iran announced its counter-warrant demand. And the world has said nothing.

The point is, even if one believes the dubious argument that the Iranian regime can be trusted with nuclear weapons, given the AMIA precedent there is no reason to doubt that Iran would eventually transfer its weapons to Hizbullah or some other Iranian terror group to detonate in Israel.

What the Iranians learned, and indeed what Israel should have learned from the investigation of the AMIA bombing, is that no one will automatically point a finger at Iran for an attack carried out by Iran's terror proxies.

AND SO we return to Iran's nuclear bomb program, which like the Syrian and Iraqi programs, is partially hidden from view, but which the pro-Iranian IAEA claims is just one year away from completion. And we return to the US and Israel acting as though it is possible to live with a nuclear-armed Iran.

We look at all of this, and we ask: How can Washington and Jerusalem be so irresponsible? We look at Olmert's reported willingness to countenance a nuclear-armed Iran, and we wonder, how can he try to wish away an impending threat of nuclear annihilation?

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