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## **The Fantasy of an Iranian Bomb**

***Iran has never had a nuclear bomb—why does Israel insist that it’s an imminent threat?***

It remains a classic moment in United Nations history. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu used the dignified setting of a General Assembly speech in the fall of 2012 to raise the specter of an Iranian nuclear bomb. He displayed a cartoonish drawing of what he said was an Iranian bomb with a lighted fuse on top and asked: “How much enriched uranium do you need for a bomb? And how close is Iran to getting it?” He called his crude drawing a “diagram.”

The catcalls came immediately. Jon Stewart of *The Daily Show* waved a copy of the Israeli drawing that night and said, “Bibi, bubbe, what’s with the Wile E. Coyote nuclear bomb?” Stewart showed his antidote to the bomb: a cartoon drawing of a giant magnet. Robinson, James A. **Best Price: \$17.37 Buy New \$22.75** (as of 05:55 UTC - Details)

Fifteen months earlier, in a [report](#) for the *New Yorker*, I disclosed that a highly secret National Intelligence Estimate, whose conclusions were unanimously approved by delegates from seventeen American intelligence and counterintelligence agencies, found that there was no conclusive evidence that Iran had made any effort to build the bomb before or after the American invasion of Iraq in 2003. (A similar unproven allegation, that Iraq possessed an undeclared nuclear and chemical weapons arsenal, was used by the administration of George W. Bush and Dick Cheney to justify the invasion in the wake of the September 11 attacks of 2001.)

As in 2012, there is still no evidence that Iran, which does utilize low levels of enriched uranium to run its sole nuclear power plant, has the capacity to produce the needed amounts of highly enriched uranium for a bomb. Nor is there any evidence of a secure facility capable of fabricating enriched uranium into a solid nuclear core that could trigger a bomb. The

American intelligence community has spent years, without success, searching for signs of an underground fabrication facility with ventilation holes that could surface many miles away—in Iran’s more than 600,000 square miles. It’s been decades of searching for air holes.

I reported then that CIA and Special Forces teams had dropped sensors disguised as stones capable of measuring the weight of vehicles traveling on roads leading to mountain complexes in Iran to determine whether trucks in the area went in heavy and came out light. That would be a clue to possible secret weapons work going on inside. Street signs near universities suspected of conducting nuclear research in heavily populated areas of Tehran were removed and replaced with identical signs implanted with radiation detectors. Street disturbances were triggered late at night by the gutsy American operatives in downtown Tehran to divert passersby and enable American technicians to replace a brick quickly in a suspected nuclear research building with a perfect match capable of measuring, as a Geiger counter would, nuclear emanations. No signs of nuclear emissions were found.

None of this has altered the view of the Israeli leadership that Iran, under its revolutionary Islamic government, is a soon-to-be nuclear power. At the time I wrote about the NIE, it was clear that the new estimate would be politically sensitive, in terms of the US-Israeli relationship. “If Iran is not a nuclear threat,” I was told at the time by a senior official, “the Israelis have no reason to threaten imminent military action. The guys who worked this are good analysts, and their bosses backed them up.” Christopher C. Horner **Best Price: \$1.28 Buy New \$7.79** (as of 05:35 UTC - Details)

That was then and this is now. The Biden administration made it plain after taking office, an informed official told me, that it has little interest in NIEs, which are prepared by CIA experts who consult with many of the best scholars in the areas being studied. For example, the final document in the 2012 study of the nuclear capability of Iran was reviewed and evaluated by an esteemed scholar teaching at a major American university who, when he and I spoke privately, vouched for the integrity of the report.

There has been no known NIE dealing with the current war in Ukraine, the on-going Israeli war in Gaza, or the consequences of an oft-threatened Israeli assault on Iran.

Israel is now involved in an expanding exchange of missiles with Hezbollah, the Shitte militia in Lebanon that, under the religious and military leadership of Sheikh Hassan Nasrallah, has steadily expanded its political role within the country along with its arsenal of long-range missiles. Israel has evacuated more than 100,000 residents in the past few months whose homes near the Lebanese border have been or could be under missile attack. Israel has returned fire deep into southern Lebanon by missile and air strikes.

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