

# Containing Iran



Containing Iran:  
Obama's Policy of "Tough Diplomacy"

By

Sasan Fayazmanesh

**CAMBRIDGE  
SCHOLARS**

---

P U B L I S H I N G

Containing Iran: Obama's Policy of "Tough Diplomacy",  
by Sasan Fayazmanesh

This book first published 2013

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

12 Back Chapman Street, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2XX, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data  
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Copyright © 2013 by Sasan Fayazmanesh

All rights for this book reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the copyright owner.

ISBN (10): 1-4438-5247-3, ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-5247-0

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction .....	1
Chapter One.....	14
The Bush Administration’s Last Attempts to Contain Iran	
Chapter Two .....	70
The 2008 US Presidential Election and Iran	
Chapter Three .....	109
President-elect Obama and Iran	
Chapter Four.....	154
The Short-lived “Tough Diplomacy”	
Chapter Five .....	207
“Tough Diplomacy” Turns into Tough Policy	
Chapter Six .....	250
Sanctions Bite, but They are Not Enough	
Chapter Seven.....	301
Pressure Mounts	
Chapter Eight.....	345
The Architect of “Tough Diplomacy” Leaves, but Toughness Remains	
Chapter Nine.....	402
The Tough Gets Tougher, but no Containment	
Conclusions .....	446
Notes.....	455
Index .....	502



## INTRODUCTION

Writing history as it unfolds is a precarious endeavor. One does not know what to expect next and what the endgame is. Yet, there are times when a historical event is so important, and may involve so many lives, that one has no choice but to document it as it unfolds. This was the case when I wrote *The United States and Iran: Sanctions, Wars and the Policy of Dual Containment*, a book that was published in 2008 and republished in 2011.<sup>1</sup> The book dealt with nearly three decades of attempts by the US and Israel to “contain” Iran.<sup>2</sup> To the extent that this policy involved Iraq as well, occasionally the containment of Iraq was also included.

In the 2008 book I argued that containing Iran originally began during the Carter Administration with the so-called hostage crisis and the freezing of Iranian assets in 1979. But soon after it morphed into the policy of dual containment of Iran and Iraq, as the Carter Administration gave Saddam Hussein the green light to invade Iran. It was hoped that the war between Iran and Iraq would lead to the resolution of the hostage crisis and the overthrow of the Iranian government. But the US also hoped that down-the-line there would be a regime change in Iraq. This was evident in the fact that while the US was helping the Iraqi government, the Israelis were selling arms to Iran with the full knowledge of the US. Indeed, the Carter Administration itself was considering the possibility of providing Iran with military spare parts.

The dual containment policy became more overt and intense under the Reagan Administration. While the US blatantly supported Saddam Hussein in the war and went even as far as engaging Iran at the behest of Hussein, at the same time it took measures to assure that Hussein would not be victorious either. Giving false information to both sides and selling arms to Iran, mostly with the help of the Israelis in the “Iran-Contra scandal,” were examples of the double role that the Reagan Administration played in the Iran-Iraq war. After the war, the US and Israel concentrated primarily on containing Iraq.

Following the US invasion of Iraq in 1990-91, and the temporary containment of Saddam Hussein, once again, Iran became the main target of containment by means of sanctions. During the Clinton Administration the Israeli lobby groups, especially the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) and its affiliate the Washington Institute for Near

East Policy (WINEP), became the main architects of the US foreign policy toward Iran and underwriters of sanctions. Actually, it was in this period that Martin Indyk, the former head of WINEP and subsequently the national security advisor to President Clinton, claimed to have devised the policy of dual containment of Iran and Iraq. Indyk, along with other theoreticians of the Israeli lobby groups, formulated three sins of Iran as the main reasons for containing it: Iran's support for international terrorism, opposition to the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, and pursuit of weapons of mass destruction.

The containment of Iran, as well as Iraq, became more intensified with the election of George W. Bush and the takeover of the Middle East policy-making process by the neoconservatives. Individuals affiliated with the Israeli lobby groups, such as Paul Wolfowitz, Richard Perle (both on the Board of Advisors of WINEP) and David Wurmser, became instrumental in turning the policy of dual containment into the policy of "dual rollback." Iraq was targeted for invasion and it was hoped that Iran would be contained thereafter by means of more severe unilateral and multilateral sanctions and, if necessary, military actions by the US, Israel or both. Israeli leaders, however, were more interested in targeting Iran rather than Iraq. But they ultimately settled for the neoconservative policy, hoping that after Iraq they could push Iran to the top of the US's "to do list," to use Ariel Sharon's words. Similar to the case of Iraq, the US and Israel used the allegation that Iran was developing weapons of mass destruction as the main reason to impose more severe sanctions and to prepare the ground for an eventual military operation.

The opportunity arose when in 2002 the Mujahedin-e-Khalq-e-Iran (MEK or MKO), an Iranian exile group working closely with the US and Israel, claimed that Iran was constructing illegally a uranium enrichment facility and a heavy water production plant. Following these claims, a case was made for reporting Iran to the United Nations Security Council and imposing sanctions. In July of 2006 the Security Council Resolution 1696 was passed, demanding that Iran suspend all enrichment-related and reprocessing activities. Iran did not halt its enrichment and the Security Council Resolution 1737, the first UN sanctions resolution against Iran, was enacted in December of 2006. This was the crown jewel of the US-Israeli policy of containment of Iran, the result of years of effort to pass multilateral sanctions against Iran. Subsequently, the Bush Administration managed to pass another set of sanctions against Iran in the Security Council, Resolution 1747 in March of 2007.

My 2008 book ended at a time when a third Security Council sanctions resolution against Iran was expected. Indeed, since the resolution of March



2007 asked the Director General of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to prepare a report within 60 days as to whether Iran had complied with the demands of Resolutions 1737 and 1747, and since Iran had no intention of complying with these resolutions, it was expected that the next UN resolution against Iran would pass sometimes in June 2007. Yet, such a resolution did not materialize in the month of June. Nor did it appear as I concluded my book in July 2007. Actually, it took nearly a year for the third round of UN sanctions to be imposed against Iran. Why it took so long and what intervened in between will be dealt with in this book. However, the main subject of this book is Obama Administration's policy toward Iran, as well as the role that Israel, the European Union (EU) and the IAEA have played in formulating and implementing the US policy.

President Barack Obama came to office promising engaging Iran. Yet, in reality his administration followed the policy of "tough diplomacy," which included, among other acts, imposing "crippling sanctions" against Iran. Indeed, a close look at the Obama Administration's Iran policy reveals certain continuity between this policy and the policy of "dual containment" pursued by the previous administrations, particularly by the George W. Bush Administration. The current volume will examine closely the policy of "tough diplomacy."

Specifically, it is argued that given the history of containment policy, it was not difficult to predict prior to the 2008 presidential election that regardless of the outcome, the US foreign policy toward Iran would be determined largely by Israel and its various lobby groups in the US, especially AIPAC and WINEP. Indeed, it was easy to foresee that if Obama became president, Dennis Ross, Obama's closest advisor on Iran and the former director of WINEP, would play a leading role in determining the policy. Based on Ross's writings and WINEP's publications, one could expect that Obama would pursue a "tough" or "aggressive diplomacy" with Iran. The diplomacy, as Ross and WINEP had formulated, was intended to give an ultimatum to Iran in some face to face meetings, telling Iran to either accept the US-Israeli demands or face aggression, including, ultimately, a naval blockade and military actions. The meetings were also intended to create the illusion of engaging Iran in negotiations and, in so doing, gaining international support for the subsequent aggressive actions.

What was expected in fact happened. Once Obama came to office Dennis Ross became special advisor to the Secretary of State for the "Gulf and Southwest Asia," then special assistant to President Obama and his senior director for the "Central Region." Thus, once more, an individual

associated with WINEP became the main architect of Iran policy and in that capacity continued, with some modifications, the same policy that had been pursued by the Bush Administration.

It should, of course, be noted that besides Ross there have been other Iran policy makers close to Israel and its lobby groups in the Obama Administration. One such person, who left office in 2011, was Stuart A. Levey, the former Under Secretary for Terrorism and Financial Intelligence. Levey, a leftover from the Bush Administration, managed to carry on a crusade against Iran by formulating and implementing financial sanctions against Iran. Nevertheless, for the most part the Obama Administration policy toward Iran proceeded along Ross's policy of "tough" or "aggressive diplomacy." How the policy was implemented is the main subject of the new book and is briefly discussed below.

As mentioned earlier, one of the main aims of the policy of "tough diplomacy" was to create the impression that the US is trying its best to engage Iran. This was tried soon after President Obama took office. For example, Obama's message of March 21, 2009, on the occasion of the Persian New Year, was intended to create such an impression. To the uninitiated the message appeared to be conciliatory. But to those familiar with the history of the US-Iran relations, the message contained nothing that was essentially new and, indeed, accused Iran of some of the same charges that the Israeli lobby had concocted since the 1990s. Actually, a few days later Obama showed how little the US policy had changed when in his trip to Prague he spoke about a "real threat" posed by Iran to its "neighbors and our allies" and advocated the same missile defense system proposed by the Bush Administration.

By the summer of 2009, while numerous unilateral sanctions were being renewed, passed or contemplated, the Obama Administration was working hard to pass the fourth multilateral, United Nations Security Council sanctions resolution against Iran. In order to get the Russian vote in the Security Council, in July 2009 Obama offered the Russians a quid pro quo: in exchange for a deal on the expiring 1991 Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty and postponing the US deployment of anti-missile system in Europe, Russia would agree to impose harsher sanctions against Iran. Later, the Obama Administration sweetened the deal by promising to drop the deployment of an anti-missile system in Europe altogether.

On October 1, 2009, Iran held a meeting with 5 permanent members of the Security Council (US, Britain, France, Russia and China) and Germany, commonly referred to as the P5+1. This, and three other meetings, one on October 19, 2009, and two others in December 2010 and January 2011, were the only formal "engagements" that Iran had with the

Obama Administration. The first two meetings centered mainly on the swap of Iran's low enriched uranium for higher enriched uranium intended to be used by a reactor in Tehran that produces isotopes for medical purposes. The swap deal was viewed by many, both inside and outside of Iran, as a ploy by the US to get enriched uranium out of Iran and then give Iran an ultimatum to stop any further enrichment or face the fourth round of UN sanctions. Even some US officials described the deal as a clever ploy.

Under massive pressure at home, President Ahmadinejad's government, which had originally agreed to the swap, tried to modify the deal. Yet, the Obama Administration rejected any modification and began the final push for the fourth round of UN sanctions. By this time many US officials, including Secretary Clinton, were admitting openly that the Obama Administration's policy had been, throughout, not just an "engagement policy" but a "two-track policy" and that it was now time for the "pressure track." This was, indeed, similar to the "carrot and stick policy" of the Bush Administration, which was always no more than offering Iran a stick.

What stood between Iran and a new Security Council resolution however, was China, which was opposed to additional UN sanctions. The Obama Administration therefore cajoled China, twisted its arms, and even threatened it financially, to make it go along with the new set of sanctions. By mid-March 2010 China's resistance to slow down the US-Israeli push had weakened, and toward the end of March China agreed to discuss the US proposal for the fourth round of UN sanctions. Now, the only stumbling block in getting a near unanimous vote in the Security Council was the presence of three non-permanent members on the Security Council, Turkey, Brazil and Lebanon, which opposed the sanctions despite massive pressure by the US to make them go along.

On May 17, 2010, Brazil and Turkey struck a deal with Iran for swapping enriched uranium, almost the same deal that had been offered by the P5+1 to Iran in October 2009. The only difference between this so-called tripartite agreement and the US proposed swap deal was that Iran would send the low enriched uranium to Turkey rather than Russia, as it had been initially proposed. The Obama Administration rejected the tripartite agreement, making it clear that the original swap deal proposed was a ploy and that the ultimate intention of the US had been, all along, to use the deal to impose, in the language of Benjamin Netanyahu and Hillary Clinton, "crippling sanctions" against Iran.

On June 9, 2010, Resolution 1929, the fourth UN sanctions resolution against Iran, was passed by the Security Council, with Brazil and Turkey

voting “no” and Lebanon abstaining. This was, of course, the same resolution that the Bush Administration was unable to pass due to time running out. The passage of the resolution officially ended the “diplomacy” phase of the Obama Administration’s Iran policy. After this multilateral sanction the US and EU intensified their unilateral sanctions, despite Russia’s protest that the measures were exceeding the parameters agreed upon and reflected in the UN Security Council resolution.

With the Obama Administration giving the green light, the US Congress passed, on June 24, 2010, one of the most severe unilateral sanctions acts against Iran, the Comprehensive Iran Sanctions, Accountability, and Divestment Act (CISADA). The act had been in the pipeline for some time, but had been held back until the passage of the UN Resolution 1929. CISADA, which was signed by President Obama on July 1, 2010, strengthened the harshest sanctions act passed during the Clinton era, the Iran-Libya Sanctions Act.

After CISADA much of the new sanctions against Iran were enacted by the State and Treasury Departments, particularly under the leadership of Stuart Levey and his successor, David Cohen. In addition, there were once again repeated talks of possible military attacks on Iran by Israel, the US or both. These were not just the usual talks by the Israelis, neoconservatives or media pundits, but threats made by some high officials in the Obama Administration, such as the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Mike Mullen who stated on NBC’s “Meet The Press” on August 1, 2010, that “military actions have been on the table and remain on the table.” The push for attacking Iran intensified in late October and early November of 2010 as more Israeli and American officials and media pundits appealed to President Obama.

The combination of continuous threats and increasing sanctions affected the Iranian economy. In the fall of 2010 the value of Iran’s currency fluctuated wildly. The fluctuation was clearly a manifestation of uncertainty, speculation and fear that were mostly caused by the cumulative effect of sanctions. The sanctions were also exacerbating the rate of inflation in Iran and reducing the rate of growth of the economy. For example, while the rate of growth in Iran’s real GDP in 2007 was 7.8%, the rate for 2010, according to the April 2011 report of the International Monetary Fund, was only 1.0%. The same report forecasted the rate of growth in Iran’s real GDP for 2011 to be 0%.

The Obama Administration appeared to be fully aware of the toll that the sanctions were taking on the Iranian economy and adopted a wait-and-see attitude, despite the pressure exerted on it by Israel and its supporters to engage in military adventures against Iran. It also appears that the

current administration found various forms of sabotage—such as the introduction of the Stuxnet computer worm in the Iranian nuclear facilities, assassination of Iranian nuclear scientists—as well as agitation among separatist movements in Iran, quite useful in containing Iran. The issue of human rights violations in Iran also became a tool in the hands of the Obama Administration to mount verbal attacks against Iran.

By the end of 2010 the US policy toward Iran was back on the same track that it had been for over thirty years, a blatant containment policy. In other words, the policy of "tough diplomacy" had no more "diplomacy" left in it; it was simply a tough policy. The two meetings between Iran and the P5+1, on December 6, 2010, and January 21, 2011, were therefore devoid of any substance and merely provided forums for the two sides to express their grievances.

With the advent of the so-called Arab Spring, and the preoccupation of the US, Europe and Israel with the revolutionary upheavals in the Middle East, there were less news reports in the popular US media about Iran and the need to contain it. Indeed, to the extent that the "Arab Spring" challenged some aspects of the old order in the Middle East and created uncertainty about the future of this order, the pressure on Iran slightly subsided. But once the dust started to settle, the attention turned, once again, toward Iran, and the push by Israel, its lobby groups, and supporters in the US Congress, to intensify sanctions and threaten Iran militarily resumed. Moreover, the campaign of assassinating Iranian nuclear scientists, sabotaging Iranian nuclear facilities and trying to stir up ethnic tensions intensified.

In addition, there was increasing pressure on the IAEA to accept the US demands. Under IAEA's new director, Yukiya Amano—who was the preferred candidate of the West to replace Mohamed ElBaradei as the Director General of IAEA in 2010—Iran has faced harsh and confrontational reports about its nuclear activities. Indeed, the November 8, 2011 report of IAEA on Iran's implementation of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) Safeguards Agreement was the harshest ever. The subsequent reports have continued to be confrontational.

Sanctions and threats of military action against Iran intensified after the November 2011 IAEA report. What Israel, its lobby groups, and their supporters in the US government wanted most was sanctioning the Iranian Central Bank. Such a sanction had been considered since the presidential election of 2008. The sanction was finally included in the 2012 National Defense Authorization Act, which President Obama signed on December 31, 2011 and has been implemented ever since. In January 2012, the Council of European Union passed similar sanctions against the Central

Bank and the energy sector of Iran. In addition to these sanctions, there were repeated talks of possible military attacks on Iran by Israel, the US or both. For the most part, however, the threats, particularly by Israel, had been used to impose more severe sanctions.

Beginning April of 2012 Iran and the P5+1 held five more rounds of meetings, including meetings at the technical level. These meetings, similar to the earlier ones, produced no agreement between the two sides. It was, indeed, difficult to expect any agreements as long as more and more draconian sanctions were being levied against Iran and there were repeated talks of military attacks.

As this book is being concluded at the end of President Obama's first term in office, the combination of continuous threats and increasing sanctions has brought about massive economic hardship in Iran. However, these difficulties have not been translated into what the architects of the policy of "tough diplomacy" had been waiting for, that is, widespread discontent in Iran. Nor have the sanctions resulted in a complete collapse of the Iranian economy. That is why Obama has cautioned against launching a "premature strike" against Iran. In order to launch a successful strike, the economic conditions in Iran must become as dismal as they were in Iraq before it was invaded.

In the final analysis, the Obama Administration's policy of "tough diplomacy" has so far mostly followed the script written by individuals associated with Israel and its lobby groups. The policy is similar to those pursued by the neoconservatives under the previous administration. But while the "carrot and stick policy" of the Bush Administration was implemented in a brutish way, the Obama Administration's "two-track policy" has been carried out in a more refined way.

Whether this policy will continue in the next four years of the Obama Administration and whether it will succeed to contain Iran remains to be seen. The policy, however, cannot be understood without a detailed analysis; and this book provides such an analysis. Indeed, as I argued in my 2008 book, the devil is in the details. Without delving into the minutiae, it is difficult to comprehend the obsession of the US, Israeli and European leaders with containing Iran, the unprecedented sanctions that the Obama Administration and European Council have levied, the unparalleled threats issued, and the leading role that Israel and its various lobby groups play in formulating and implementing the US foreign policy toward Iran.

In dealing with the details, this book relies on primary sources, including electronic news reports, such as reports by the Associated Press (AP), Agence France Presse (AFP), United Press International (UPI), and

Reuters, governmental documents, such as text of sanctions and executive orders, as well as reports issued by the IAEA on Iran. These reports and documents have been collected by the author over the years on a daily basis and, in the case of news reports, cross referenced for accuracy. Once put together chronologically, I believe they tell the history of the attempts to contain Iran better than any other kind of analysis. Thus, quoting many reports and documents in this book, without much paraphrasing, filtering, or interpretation, is deliberate. This, of course, does not mean that raw news is taken at face value. When a piece of news is clearly tainted, it is pointed out.

It should also be pointed out that while some references are made to foreign and domestic policies of the Iranian government, the focus of this book, similar to the 2008 book, is mostly on the US policy toward Iran. Hence, this book does not try to analyze either the foreign policy of Iran or its domestic policy. This, of course, should not be construed as condoning Iran's internal and external policies.

Even though the book is a continuous narrative, covering chronologically the unfolding of the policy of "tough diplomacy," it is still divided into nine chapters. Chapter 1 deals with the last two years of the Bush Administration's attempts to contain Iran. The chapter starts with a discussion of the National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) on Iran in 2007, arguing that in fall 2003 Iran halted its nuclear weapons program. However, the NIE on Iran was dismissed not only by Israel but, eventually, by the Bush Administration. The US also contended that Iran was destabilizing Iraq and Afghanistan. Divestment and unilateral sanctions continued, particularly as a result of pressure by Israel. In addition, there was a great deal of pressure exerted by the US and Israel on the IAEA and its Secretary General Mohamed ElBaradei to submit harsher reports on Iran. Indeed, there were calls for the removal of ElBaradei, if he did not do what was expected of him. The pressure resulted in somewhat tougher IAEA reports on Iran. With the dismissal of the NIE on Iran and harsher IAEA reports, United Nations Security Council Resolution 1803 was passed on March 3, 2008, levying more unilateral sanctions on Iran. Shortly after, the push for the fourth UN sanctions resolution started. However, the US economy was in a recession, the Bush Administration was running out of time and the 2008 US presidential election was approaching. Containment of Iran was left to the next administration.

Chapter 2 is focused on the 2008 US presidential election and the issue of containment of Iran. After analyzing the views of advisors to both presidential candidates, and similarities in their views, the chapter concentrates on the ultimate winner of the election, Barack Obama.

Obama's early speeches as a Senator, particularly at the AIPAC policy conferences, are analyzed to show that the policy of "tough diplomacy" was articulated very early on. Subsequently, it is argued, the policy became tougher and clearer as various lobby groups, such as WINEP and United Against Nuclear Iran (UANI), tried to articulate it further. Indeed, Dennis Ross, the main architect of the policy of "tough diplomacy," who was Obama's chief advisor on Iran before and after the presidential election, had played a pivotal role in both WINEP and UANI.

Chapter 3 concentrates on Obama assuming the office of the presidency and what many expected him to do with regard to Iran: change the Bush Administration's policy of "carrot and stick" and engage Iran in negotiations. It is argued that if one looks at details, from the very beginning there appeared to be no substantive change in US policy toward Iran. Indeed, it is shown that some of the same individuals who served in the Bush Administration, such as Under Secretary for Terrorism and Financial Intelligence Stuart Levey, continued to serve in the Obama Administration and pursued their relentless policy of sanctioning Iran. Israel and its allies in the US Congress, too, pushed for more and more sanctions. Even though President Obama appeared to speak of reconciliation with Iran on a few occasions, by spring 2009, while old sanctions were being renewed, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton was talking about imposing "tough" or "crippling sanctions" on Iran. By the summer of 2009, the Obama Administration was hard at work trying to pass the fourth UN sanctions resolution against Iran. More pressure was also exerted on the IAEA and ElBaradei to issue tougher reports on Iran. Actually, under pressure, ElBaradei was forced to leave his post and was replaced by Yukiya Amano who was the preferred candidate of the West. The chapter also examines the contentious presidential election in Iran and how the issue was handled by the US and Israel.

Chapter 4 deals with the beginning of the end of any pretense to engage Iran diplomatically. Iran's first meeting in the fall of 2009 with the five permanent members of the Security Council plus Germany, commonly referred to as the P5+1, is first examined. These meetings centered mainly on the swap of Iran's low enriched uranium for higher enriched uranium intended to be used in a reactor in Tehran that produces isotopes for medical purposes. The swap deal was viewed by many, both inside and outside of Iran, as a ploy by the US to get enriched uranium out of Iran and then give Iran an ultimatum to stop any further enrichment or face the fourth round of UN sanctions. As expected the talks failed and the failure, as well as massive pressure from Israel and its various lobby groups, paved the way for the passage of the fourth UN sanctions



resolution against Iran. It will be shown that harsher and harsher IAEA reports, issued particularly under Amano, also contributed to the passage of a UN Security Council resolution. By now US officials were actually confessing that from the very beginning the Obama Administration's policy toward Iran had been not an engagement policy per se but a "two-track policy," a policy that very much resembled the "carrot and stick policy" of the previous administration.

Chapter 5 continues with the theme of the previous chapter, i.e., how the policy of "tough diplomacy" turned merely into a tough policy. To put it differently, the chapter examines the transformation of the "two-track policy" into "pressure track." It begins with the US rejecting the so-called tripartite agreement between Iran, Brazil and Turkey, an agreement that would have resulted in nearly the same kind of swap of enriched uranium offered earlier by the P5+1 to Iran. The rejection came because the Obama Administration was intent in passing the fourth set of UN sanctions. The Security Council Resolution 1929, which levied more sanctions on Iran, passed on June 9, 2010. It will be argued that this was the same sanctions resolution that the Bush Administration was pushing for earlier but was unable to pass. The new multilateral set of sanctions by the UN was followed by an unprecedented set of unilateral sanctions by the US and EU. Among these were the 2010 Comprehensive Iran Sanctions, Accountability, and Divestment Act and a wave of other sanctions imposed on Iran by the US Department of the Treasury. The string of new sanctions and continuous threats of military attack by the US and Israel created economic crises in Iran, especially a crisis in currency. Yet, the Iranian economy, contrary to expectation of Iran's adversaries, did not collapse. Sanctions therefore intensified and the IAEA continued its confrontational approach toward Iran.

Chapter 6 further follows the effect of sanctions and threats of military attack on the Iranian economy. It begins with the US adopting a wait and see attitude toward the impact of the new multilateral and unilateral sanctions, and Israel arguing that sanctions are not enough. The chapter then moves on to discuss a campaign of sabotage, particularly cyber-attacks, and assassinations of Iranian nuclear scientists, purportedly carried by the US and Israel. After examining another IAEA report, the chapter analyzes the meetings between Iran and the P5+1 in the winter of 2010, meetings that produced no substantive results amidst pressure exerted by the neoconservatives and Israel for more sanctions. Following the "Arab Spring" and a relative lull in media reports on Iran, a new campaign of sanctions was unleashed, even though the NIE on Iran reiterated what had been stated in 2007, i.e., that Iran had not decided to

build a nuclear weapon. Continued confrontational approach by the IAEA and its reports on Iran—which were hyped by the media and pundits—as well as the push by Israel, its lobby groups, and its supporters in the US Congress, contributed to a new string of sanctions.

Chapter 7 continues with the subject matter of the previous chapter and shows the noose tightening around Iran's neck. The chapter discusses how the alleged plot by an Iranian-American to kill the Saudi Ambassador in the US laid the ground for what adversaries of Iran had been pursuing for a long time, sanctioning Iran's Central Bank. The chapter also analyzes the IAEA reports, especially the sensational report of November 2011 and its famous annex. Even though there was almost nothing new in the annex besides the allegations that in 2009 Israel had pressured the IAEA to release, it paved the road for more sanctions and threats of military attacks on Iran. In particular, the Central Bank of Iran came under concerted and coordinated sanctions by the US and its European allies. The new set of sanctions, once again, shook the Iranian economy and caused a severe currency crisis and higher rates of inflation.

Chapter 8 starts with the departure of Dennis Ross, the chief architect of the policy of "tough diplomacy" and the main advisor to President Obama on Iran. It is argued that even though Ross officially left his position, the policy that he helped to lay out remained intact, especially since he continued to exert influence even after leaving office. The campaign to assassinate Iranian nuclear scientists continued. So did the campaign to levy more crippling sanctions and bringing about added fear by means of military threats. Additional reports by the IAEA and more pressure from the Israeli lobby groups increased economic hardship in Iran. Yet, the economy of Iran did not collapse and Iran did not capitulate. Thus, after much delay, in the spring of 2012 the P5+1 resumed meetings with Iran in the midst of more threats, sanctions and sabotage. After two rounds of negotiations, as expected, no fruitful results were achieved. The IAEA, too, engaged in a flurry of Iran related activities, including an unexpected visit to Iran by Secretary General Amano. But, as the subsequent report of the IAEA showed, there was no agreement in developing the so-called structured approach in resolving outstanding issues.

Chapter 9 concentrates on Obama Administration's last efforts to contain Iran before the 2012 US presidential election. The chapter begins with a discussion of more threats of military action against Iran by both Israel and the US before and after the spring 2012 meetings between the P5+1 and Iran. However, it is argued these threats were becoming less frequent as Benjamin Netanyahu's government was facing an election at

home and was criticized by some Israeli military and intelligence officials for beating the drums of war. The Obama Administration was also issuing less threats and adopting a wait and see attitude as sanctions, particularly those against Iran's Central Bank and energy sector, by both the US and the Council of European Union, were taking their toll on the Iranian economy. The chapter covers the last three rounds of meetings between Iran and the P5+1 in the late spring and early summer of 2012. Once again, these meetings, which took place in the midst of new sanctions imposed on Iran, produced no tangible results. Additional sanctions and Israeli leaders' war rhetoric followed the failed rounds of meetings. Following an IAEA report, Netanyahu issued a new redline for Iran's atomic program and the US State Department officially removed MEK from its list of designated terrorist organizations. The Iranian economy continued its downward spiral and the value of Iran's currency reached new lows. Yet, there was no sign of economic collapse in Iran. After four years, the policy of "tough diplomacy" did not appear to have achieved its primary goal and Iran was not contained.

## CHAPTER ONE

# THE BUSH ADMINISTRATION'S LAST ATTEMPTS TO CONTAIN IRAN

On August 23, 2007, a piece of seemingly insignificant news appeared on AP newswires. It stated that a “draft intelligence report on Iran suggests a change in the Tehran regime appears unlikely any time soon.” The news was attributed to unnamed “U.S. officials.” According to these “officials,” the report “anticipates little progress in getting Iran to halt its nuclear program or stop supporting militant groups in the region.” The news went on to say that this report is the “latest in a series of reports from the nation’s 16 intelligence agencies, the new National Intelligence Estimate [NIE] on Iran is nearly complete and could be shared with President Bush and other policymakers within weeks.”

In the next few months not much appeared in the mainstream media about the NIE on Iran. A few pieces about the report, however, appeared in unconventional media. In particular, on November 8, Inter Press Service (IPS) News Agency’s Gareth Porter wrote that the NIE “on Iran has been held up for more than a year in an effort to force the intelligence community to remove dissenting judgments on the Iranian nuclear programme, and thus make the document more supportive of U.S. Vice President Dick Cheney’s militarily aggressive policy toward Iran, according to accounts of the process provided by participants to two former Central Intelligence Agency officers.” Porter further stated that “former CIA intelligence officer who has asked not to be identified told IPS that an official involved in the NIE process says the Iran estimate was ready to be published a year ago but has been delayed because the director of national intelligence wanted a draft reflecting a consensus on key conclusions—particularly on Iran’s nuclear programme.” In addition, Porter stated that according to former CIA officer Philip Giraldi, intelligence analysts have had to “review and rewrite their findings three times, because of pressure from the White House.” Giraldi was quoted as saying that the “White House wants a document that it can use as evidence for its Iran policy.”

Shortly after the appearance of such reports the Office of the Director of National Intelligence released a nine-page brief titled "Iran: Nuclear Intentions and Capabilities."<sup>1</sup> Under "Key Judgments" the brief stated:

We judge with high confidence that in fall 2003, Tehran halted its nuclear weapons program; we also assess with moderate-to-high confidence that Tehran at a minimum is keeping open the option to develop nuclear weapons. We judge with high confidence that the halt, and Tehran's announcement of its decision to suspend its declared uranium enrichment program and sign an Additional Protocol to its Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty Safeguards Agreement, was directed primarily in response to increasing international scrutiny and pressure resulting from exposure of Iran's previously undeclared nuclear work.

The brief claimed that Iran had exerted "considerable effort from at least the late 1980s to 2003 to develop such [nuclear] weapons." Furthermore, the report stated: "We judge with moderate confidence Iran probably would be technically capable of producing enough HEU [highly enriched uranium] for a weapon sometime during the 2010-2015 time frame." Lastly, the report stated: "We assess with moderate confidence Tehran had not restarted its nuclear weapons program as of mid-2007." We will return to the NIE claim that between the 1980s and 2003 Iran did try to develop nuclear weapons and the forecast that Iran would be capable of producing HEU for a nuclear weapon by 2010-2015. But first the more sensational aspect of NIE's judgment will be examined.

The US Office of the National Intelligence expressing with high confidence that in fall 2003 Tehran halted its nuclear weapons program was potentially a terrible blow to the US and Israel's attempt to pass the third UN set of sanctions against Iran. As I have pointed out in my 2008 book, Russia and China were dragged reluctantly into supporting the previous UN sanctions resolutions against Iran. The NIE report on Iran could have made these countries even more reluctant to impose new UN sanctions against Iran; and this was, indeed, the immediate reaction of Russia and China. AP reported on December 7, 2007, that in Belgium Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice was pressing for new UN sanctions against Iran, but "Russia ignored her calls to punish Iran." AP quoted Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov to say in reference to NIE's conclusion: "It fully confirms the information that we have: that there is no military element in their nuclear program. We hope very much that these [European-led] negotiations with Iran will continue." Similarly, on December 6, 2007, Chinadaily.com quoted Lavrov to say: "We will assess the situation on proposals for a new resolution in the United Nations

Security Council on the basis of (several) factors, including the publication by the US of data showing that Iran does not have a military nuclear program.” According to the same report, in reference to the NIE’s conclusion, the Chinese UN Ambassador Wang Guangya stated: “I think the [UN] council members will have to consider that, because I think we all start from the presumption that now things have changed.” Such comments made it clear why the US was uneasy about releasing the NIE judgment.

After the brief was made public the Bush Administration’s reluctance to release it was widely reported. *The Washington Post*, for example, wrote on December 8, 2007, that the new information posed “profound challenges” to the Bush Administration and that Mike McConnell, the director of national intelligence, had decided to keep the new findings secret, but out of fear of leaks and charges of a cover-up “reluctantly reversed course in a flurry of discussions last weekend.” Interestingly enough, *The Washington Post* also stated that “only the Israelis had gotten a heads-up” about the report. The US Congress, European allies and the IAEA, *The Washington Post* went on to say, were not given full briefings about the report until hours before it was released.

Given the NIE claim that since 2003 Iran had not had a nuclear weapons program, it is understandable that the Bush Administration was quite unhappy with the report and did not want it to be made public. As pointed out in my 2008 book, for years the US and Israel had used a menu option that contained numerous accusations against Iran; but, similar to the case of Iraq, they had ultimately settled on the issue of nuclear weapons as the main point for targeting Iran. The NIE report undermined this main point; and, therefore, it became harder for the US and Israel to push for military action against Iran or even push for a third and harsher round of UN sanctions.

Immediately after the release of the NIE on Iran Israel expressed its displeasure with the report and tried to undermine it. An AP headline on December 5, 2008, read “Israel feels alone after report on Iran.” The AP report went on to say that the new NIE finding is “putting a burden on the Jewish state, which has long relied on Washington to lead the international charge against Iran’s nuclear ambitions.” According to the report, since the US was now less likely to take military action, an “increasingly nervous Israel might feel compelled to strike out on its own.” Defense Minister Ehud Barak, the report went on to say, stated that “his own intelligence analysis indicates Iran is still trying to develop a nuclear weapon.” Similarly, President Shimon Peres stated that “many intelligence assessments around the world have later turned out to have been

inaccurate.” A few days later, Israel sent a team to the US to counter the NIE report, according to AFP. The delegation, AFP reported on December 16, 2007, left Israel for the US “with the goal of proving to the Americans that the Iranian nuclear weapons programme is definitely still in development.” The team, AFP stated, will argue that since 2003 Iran has “launched a new production line that is not fully known about by Western espionage officials.”

It was not just Israelis who were coming to the US to set the record straight; the US officials were traveling to Israel to get straightened as well. Under the heading “Israelis Brief Top U.S. Official on Iran,” *The New York Times* reported on December 11, 2007, that Admiral Mike Mullen, the top military official in the United States, “made an unusual visit to Israel and got a polite earful today about Israel’s gloomy assessment of Iran’s nuclear ambitions.” The report went on to say that in a meeting with Ehud Barak and Israeli intelligence officials, “Admiral Mullen and his staff heard out Israel’s concern that Iran is heading for a nuclear bomb, unless deterred, by the end of 2009 at the earliest, or, more likely, sometime in 2010-11.”

The neoconservative allies of Israel were also unhappy with the NIE on Iran and tried to undermine it. For example, on December 6, 2007, Reuters stated that according to *Der Spiegel*, the former US ambassador to the United Nations John Bolton had said that NIE’s report was “politics disguised as intelligence.” Bolton, Reuters wrote, described the report as a “‘quasi-putsch’ by the agencies.” On the same day, Bolton repeated the same argument in an opinion piece in the *Washington Post* when he wrote: “Too much of the intelligence community is engaging in policy formulation rather than ‘intelligence’ analysis, and too many in Congress and the media are happy about it.” He found NIE’s “key judgments” flawed and concluded that “the NIE opens the way for Iran to achieve its military nuclear ambitions in an essentially unmolested fashion, to the detriment of us all.” The neoconservative commentator Norman Podhoretz went beyond Bolton in his assessment of the NIE report.<sup>2</sup> In his December 3, 2007, in an article titled “Dark Suspicions about the NIE” in the *Commentary* he stated that the new NIE report “has just dealt a serious blow to the argument some of us have been making that Iran is intent on building nuclear weapons and that neither diplomacy nor sanctions can prevent it from succeeding.”<sup>3</sup> He then went on to say that he suspects that the “intelligence community,” which had been burned in the case of Iraq, “is now bending over backward to counter what has up to now been a similarly universal view . . . that Iran is hell-bent on developing nuclear weapons.” Moreover, he stated, “the intelligence community is now

bending over backward to maximize the time it will take Iran to reach the same goal.” “But,” he went on to say:

I entertain an even darker suspicion. It is that the intelligence community, which has for some years now been leaking material calculated to undermine George W. Bush, is doing it again. This time the purpose is to head off the possibility that the President may order air strikes on the Iranian nuclear installations.

Similar views were expressed by the Israeli lobby groups. One such group was the Israel Project, a Washington-Jerusalem based Israel lobby organization that purportedly conducted its own public opinion poll on the NIE report.<sup>4</sup> UPI gave this “poll” legitimacy when, on December 14, 2007, it published the results under “U.S. poll: Iran still dangerous.” According to the UPI report, the Israel Project telephoned 800 likely voters and found that “69 percent of respondents said they believe Iran is actively seeking to create nuclear weapons.” “Sixty-four percent of those polled,” the group claimed, “expressed fears that the United States ‘will be less safe’ due to the estimate ‘because it might lead to reduced pressure on Iran to stop its nuclear capacity for good.’”<sup>5</sup>

The US designated terrorist group, Mujahedin-e-Khalq-e-Iran—which, as I have in 2008, worked closely with the US and Israel—also came out to condemn the NIE on Iran and dismissed its finding. On December 11, 2007, Alireza Jafarzadeh, who was identified by AFP as the former “US spokesman for the National Council of Resistance of Iran,” stated in Washington that the “weaponization program is alive, is active, and has been resumed since 2004.” Jafarzadeh, according to an AFP report, contended that Iran’s “top-secret weapons program was in fact moved from one site at Lavizan-Shian and scattered across various underground installations in 2004.” He further stated, according to AFP, that “he had shared his analysis with contacts in the US intelligence community before the NIE’s publication, but suggested a ‘certain agenda’ by some in the community anxious to downplay Iran’s threat.” He was then quoted to say: “I don’t think the international community, I don’t think the United States government can afford to make such mistakes and provide the opportunity for the mullahs to get the bomb before we all know.” Similarly, AP reported on December 11, 2007, that in Brussels MEK spokesman, Mohammad Mohaddessin, stated: “We announce vehemently that the clerical regime is currently continuing its drive to obtain nuclear weapons.” According to Mohaddessin, the “clerical regime leaks false information and intelligence to Western intelligence services, through double agents.” Mohaddessin reportedly located the site where “nuclear



bombs” were being produced “just now” and said that this is contrary to NIE on Iran.

Israel and its allies were not the only ones trying to undermine the NIE judgment that Iran halted its nuclear weapons program in 2003. The Bush Administration itself, at the highest echelon, tried to ignore the claim and argued that as far as the US policy toward Iran is concerned the judgment makes no difference. According to an AP report on December 5, 2007, Secretary of State Rice, while in Ethiopia, was asked about the NIE on Iran. She responded by saying: “It is the very strong view of the administration that the Iranian regime remains a problematic and dangerous regime and that the international community must continue to unite around the Security Council resolutions that have passed. . . Iran needs to stop enrichment and reprocessing activities because those enriching and reprocessing activities permit, if they are perfected, a state to acquire fissile material for a nuclear weapon.” Similarly, in a news conference on December 4, 2007, President Bush was repeatedly asked about the NIE judgment and the fact that it contradicted his harsh rhetoric about Iran, particularly when on October 17, 2007, he warned about the prospect of World War III. He was also asked if he knew then about the NIE on Iran and whether he worried that the report “undermines U.S. credibility.” After some convoluted comments, Bush stated that “it wasn’t until last week that I was briefed on the NIE that is now public.” He further stated:

Iran was dangerous, Iran is dangerous, and Iran will be dangerous if they have the knowledge necessary to make a nuclear weapon. The NIE says that Iran had a hidden—a covert nuclear weapons program. That’s what it said. What’s to say they couldn’t start another covert nuclear weapons program?

After being asked again if he wants to tone down his “World War III” rhetoric in light of the NIE on Iran, Bush again stated that:

I still feel strongly that Iran is a danger. Nothing has changed in this NIE that says, okay, why don’t we just stop worrying about it. Quite the contrary. I think the NIE makes it clear that Iran needs to be taken seriously as a threat to peace. My opinion hasn’t changed.

As I have argued in 2008, over the years, following the Israeli officials, the Bush Administration had changed its position from “not allowing Iran to develop nuclear weapons” to “not allowing Iran to have the knowledge of enriching uranium.” Given this argument, it made no difference to

President Bush and his administration what the NIE stated about Iran halting its nuclear weapons program in 2003.

A few weeks after the above mentioned press conference, President Bush moved even further away from the NIE on Iran. In a piece of news titled “Bush takes distance from key Iran findings,” AFP reported on January 26, 2008, that while in Saudi Arabia President Bush warned his host of “Iran threat” despite the NIE and stated: “I defended our intelligence services, but made it clear that they’re an independent agency; that they come to conclusions separate from what I may or may not want.” Bush, went on to tell “the king that the Iranians ‘were a threat, they are a threat, and they will be a threat if we don’t work together to stop their enrichment.’” AFP also alluded to an article in *Newsweek* magazine according to which “Bush had all but disowned the NIE in talks with Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert.” Indeed, the *Newsweek* article, which was published on January 21, 2008, stated that, according to some unnamed official, Bush “told the Israelis that he can’t control what the intelligence community says, but that [the NIE’s] conclusions don’t reflect his own views about Iran’s nuclear-weapons program.”<sup>6</sup> In Israel Bush, of course, got an earful about how wrong the NIE on Iran was. AFP headline on January 12, 2008, read “Israel stressed to Bush that Iran is a nuclear ‘threat.’” The report quoted Amos Gilad, reserve general and political adviser to Defense Minister Ehud Barak, to say: “We tried hard to present him [Bush] the situation as we see it. . . From a professional point of view the situation is clear: there is an Iranian nuclear threat. . . After deep scrutiny, the intelligence services reached the same conclusion—Iran is striving to obtain nuclear weapons.” Bush apparently concurred, since the report paraphrased him as saying: “Iran posed a threat to world peace and should not be allowed to develop the know-how to build a nuclear weapon.”

In the next few weeks the Bush Administration continued to undermine the NIE’s conclusion that in 2003 Iran halted its nuclear weapons program. On March 24, 2008, *The Washington Post* published a report titled “Administration Puts Its Best Spin on Iran Report.” The report stated that comments made by both President Bush and Vice President Cheney show their continued unhappiness with the NIE’s conclusion. The report then quoted Bush telling the US-funded Farsi language Radio Farda that Iranian leaders have “declared they want to have a nuclear weapon to destroy people.” *The Washington Post* stated that this statement of the President went “well beyond the findings of the NIE.” Indeed, President Bush had made the same statement on a number of occasions and, at times, had to be corrected by the White House staff.<sup>7</sup> *The Washington Post*

also pointed out that when asked by an ABC reporter if he endorses NIE's finding, Vice President Cheney would only say "I have high confidence they [Iran] have an ongoing enrichment program."<sup>8</sup> The report added that "Bush and Cheney have spent months trying with mixed success to focus the public on the parts of the NIE that suggest malign Iranian intentions, such as the ongoing uranium-enrichment program." Finally, the report stated that in "recent weeks, senior intelligence officials also have expressed regret over the way the estimate was made public—even as they have stood by the key findings themselves." The report quoted Thomas Fingar, chairman of the National Intelligence Council, to say: "If we had thought that this was going to be released, we would have written the key judgments differently than we did."

Finally, perhaps the most ironic challenge to NIE's conclusion came from the director of the Central Intelligence Agency. On March 30, 2008, AFP stated that in an interview with NBC television CIA chief Michael Hayden expressed his personal belief that "Iran is pursuing a nuclear weapons program, but also stood by the agency's assessment that the program was suspended in 2003." Hayden tried to explain this contradictory position by saying: "Personal belief, yes. It's hard for me to explain. This is not court of law stuff." He further reasoned that "Iran's defiance of UN Security Council sanctions showed the Islamic republic had something to hide with its production of enriched uranium," according to AFP.

The NIE's judgment that "in fall 2003, Tehran halted its nuclear weapons program" was, for all practical purposes, dead. The Israelis, neoconservatives, the Bush Administration at its highest echelons, and even the CIA director had effectively killed and buried the judgment. The US and Israel could once again push for additional UN sanctions against Iran without worrying about the US intelligence agencies' estimate.

### **Iran's purported past nuclear weapons program**

As stated in 2008, the 2005 NIE on Iran expressed "uncertainty about whether Iran's ruling clerics have made a decision to build a nuclear arsenal" (*The Washington Post*, August 2, 2005). Nothing was reported in 2005 about Iran having exerted considerable effort from the 1980s to 2003 to develop nuclear weapons, a contention which appeared in the NIE report in 2007. What was behind this new assertion? The 2007 NIE key judgment did not indicate how the intelligence agencies arrived at their conclusions. But some conjectures did appear in the newspapers about the possible sources of the new judgments. For example, on December 8,

2007, *The Guardian* wrote that “intelligence came from an exotic variety of sources: there was the so-called Laptop of Death; there was the Iranian commander who mysteriously disappeared in Turkey. Also in the mix was video footage of a nuclear plant in central Iran and intercepts of Iranian telephone calls by the British listening station GCHQ [Government Communications Headquarters].” On the same day *The Washington Post* published a more elaborate piece on the source of the NIE on Iran:

The origin of the latest intelligence can be traced to the summer of 2004, when an Iranian man turned up in Turkey with a laptop computer and the phone number of a German intelligence officer. He called the number, and within 24 hours, analysts at CIA headquarters in Langley were poring over thousands of pages of drawings and information stored on the computer indicating that Iran had been trying to retrofit its longest-range missile, the Shahab III, to carry a nuclear payload. It was designated Project 1-11 and seemed to confirm a nuclear weapons program.

The information retrieved from the laptop formed the backbone of a National Intelligence Estimate issued in 2005 that declared “with high confidence” that Iran was working to build a bomb. Armed with that, the Bush administration spent the past two years pressing European allies, Russia and China to sanction Iran if it did not give up its uranium enrichment program, despite Tehran’s insistence that it was only for civilian energy.

With tension rising, Congress asked last year for a new NIE. Bush was pushing for more information as well during his deep-dive sessions. “We’ve got to get more information on Iran so we know what they’re up to,” one official paraphrased Bush saying.

As analysts scrambled to finish by April, they were reaching the conclusion that Iran was still a decade away from nuclear weapons, senior intelligence and administration officials said. For three years, the intelligence community had not obtained new information on Project 1-11, vexing administration officials who worried that a cold trail would lead to doubts about the reliability of the laptop’s information. “They just wouldn’t budge,” complained one such official, who declined to be identified to speak candidly.

By June, analysts had an almost complete draft of a new NIE, and it provoked a sharp debate. “The less data you have, the more you argue,” said a source familiar with the discussions. Some officials pressed the CIA’s Iran desk to follow up on Project 1-11. CIA Director Michael V. Hayden and National Security Agency Director Keith B. Alexander responded by directing vast manpower and technology toward spying on Iranians who may have been involved in the warhead effort.

With Bush pressing for more information, the intelligence community finally came up with something new—a series of communications intercepts, including snippets of conversations between key Iranian

officials, one of them a military officer whose name appeared on the laptop. Two sources said the Iranians complained that the nuclear weapons program had been shuttered four years earlier and argued about whether it would ever be restarted.

There had been clues for those willing to see them. For one thing, the laptop contained no new drawings on its hard drive after February 2003, said officials familiar with it. And during a dinner in Tehran with visiting American experts in 2005, Iranian leaders Hashemi Rafsanjani and Hassan Rowhani flatly declared that the country's nuclear weapons research had been halted because Iran felt it did not need the actual bombs, only the ability to show the world it could.

"Look, as long as we can enrich uranium and master the [nuclear] fuel cycle, we don't need anything else," Rafsanjani said at the dinner, according to George Perkovich of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. "Our neighbors will be able to draw the proper conclusions."

*The Washington Post* story differed from that of *The Guardian* in that in it there was no mention of the Iranian commander "who mysteriously disappeared" in Turkey. Actually, as numerous reports pointed out in 2007 the missing Iranian commander, who apparently had been questioned by the Americans, had no knowledge of Iran's nuclear program (*The Washington Post*, March 8, 2007). Also, in *The Washington Post* story there was no mention of the video footage of a nuclear plant in central Iran, a video footage whose relevance to the story remained unexplained in *The Guardian*. What was in *The Washington Post* and not in *The Guardian* was the alleged comment made by Rafsanjani and Rowhani in the presence of "American experts." But it is hard to expect the two stating that Iran halted its nuclear weapons research, given that the official policy of the Islamic Republic had always been that pursuing nuclear weapons is against Islam. Also, not found in *The Guardian* report was the piece about Rafsanjani stating to Perkovich that simple enrichment of uranium is enough to intimidate Iran's neighbors, a statement which is unlikely to have been made by Rafsanjani. What, however, the two reports, as well as similar reports, had in common was that the information came mostly from a laptop.

In my 2008 book I have discussed the story of the mysterious laptop in great detail and will further discuss it when I deal with the IAEA reports. For the time being, a summary of the story in *The Washington Post* on February 8, 2006, will suffice.<sup>9</sup> According to this report, in the mid 2004 the US intelligence service came to possess a stolen laptop that originated from Iran and contained "drawings on modifying Iran's ballistic missiles in ways that might accommodate a nuclear warhead." The "laptop," the

report goes on to say, was “the laptop allegedly stolen from an Iranian whom German intelligence tried, unsuccessfully, to recruit as an informant.” Yet, the laptop “was whisked out of the country by another Iranian who offered it up to foreign intelligence officials in Turkey as evidence of a nuclear weapons program.” The report went on to say that nowhere on any of the laptop documents, however, does the word “nuclear” appear. The report also discussed the mystery surrounding the authenticity of the content of the laptop:

U.S. intelligence considers the laptop documents authentic but cannot prove it. Analysts cannot completely rule out the possibility that internal opponents of the Iranian leadership could have forged them to implicate the government, or that the documents were planted by Tehran itself to convince the West that its program remains at an immature stage.

CIA analysts, some of whom had been involved only a year earlier on the flawed assessments of Iraq’s weapons programs, initially speculated that a third country, such as Israel, may have fabricated the evidence. But they eventually discounted that theory.

*The Washington Post* report, of course, did not mention that the intelligence services of the US and Israel often work very closely with one another and, therefore, the CIA dismissing Israel as the possible source of fabrication did not mean much. Indeed, as I have pointed out in 2008, Iran had repeatedly maintained that the laptop scenario is a ploy by both the US and Israel to tarnish its relation with the IAEA. Indeed, as I pointed out in 2008, Iran had repeatedly maintained that the laptop scenario is a ploy by both the US and Israel to tarnish its relation with the IAEA. I have also pointed out that the IAEA, which was informed about the content of the laptop in 2005, doubted the authenticity of the story. Several newspaper reports in 2007 indicated that most of the information given by the CIA and other US intelligence agencies to the IAEA had turned out to be incorrect, and therefore, the IAEA doubted the US claim concerning the laptop. For example, *The Guardian* quoted one skeptical IAEA official as saying: “First of all, if you have a clandestine programme, you don’t put it on laptops which can walk away. . . The data is all in English which may be reasonable for some of the technical matters, but at some point you’d have thought there would be at least some notes in Farsi. So there is some doubt over the provenance of the computer.” As will be seen later, it appears that under pressure the IAEA changed its position in 2008 with regard to the authenticity of the laptop story. But what is at issue here is that the mysterious laptop seems to have been the primary reason for the NIE’s claim that Iran exerted considerable effort from at least the late