



ElBaradei's Real Agenda

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On Friday, International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Director General Mohamed ElBaradei submitted a report on Iran's nuclear program to the IAEA's Board of Governors. It concluded that, barring "one major remaining issue relevant to the nature of Iran's nuclear programme" -- including a mysterious "green salt project" -- Iran's explanations of its suspicious nuclear activities "are consistent with [the IAEA's] findings [or at least] not inconsistent."

The report represents Mr. ElBaradei's best effort to whitewash Tehran's record. Earlier this month, on Iranian television, he made clear his purpose, announcing that he expected "the issue would be solved this year." And if doing so required that he do battle against the IAEA's

technical experts, reverse previous conclusions about suspect programs, and allow designees of Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadi-nejad an unprecedented role in crafting a "work plan" that would allow the regime to receive a cleaner bill of health from the IAEA -- so be it.

Mr. ElBaradei's report culminates a career of freelancing and fecklessness which has crippled the reputation of the organization he directs. He has used his Nobel Prize to cultivate an image of a technocratic lawyer interested in peace and justice and above politics. In reality, he is a deeply political figure, animated by antipathy for the West and for Israel on what has increasingly become a single-minded crusade to rescue favored regimes from charges of proliferation.

Mr. ElBaradei assumed the directorship on Dec. 1, 1997. On his watch, but undetected by his agency, Iran constructed its covert enrichment facilities and, according to the 2007 U.S. National Intelligence Estimate, engaged in covert nuclear-weapons design. India and Pakistan detonated nuclear devices. A.Q. Khan, the Pakistani nuclear godfather, exported nuclear technology around the world.

In 2003, Libyan strongman Moammar Gadhafi confessed to an undetected weapons effort. Mr. ElBaradei's response? He rebuked the U.S. and U.K. for bypassing him. When Israel recently destroyed what many believe was a secret (also undetected) nuclear facility in Syria, Mr. ElBaradei told the New Yorker's Seymour Hersh that it is "unlikely that this building was a nuclear facility," although his agency has not physically investigated the site.

The IAEA's mission is to verify that "States comply with their commitments, under the Non-Proliferation Treaty and other non-proliferation agreements, to use nuclear material and facilities only for peaceful purposes." Yet in 2004 Mr. ElBaradei wrote in the New York Times that, "We must abandon the unworkable notion that it is morally reprehensible for some countries to pursue weapons of mass destruction, yet morally acceptable for others to rely on them for security."

IAEA technical experts have complained anonymously to the press that the latest report on Iran was

revamped to suit the director's political goals. In 2004, Mr. ElBaradei sought to purge mention of Iranian attempts to purchase beryllium metal, an important component in a nuclear charge, from IAEA documents. He also left unmentioned Tehran's refusal to grant IAEA inspectors access to the Parchin military complex, where satellite imagery showed a facility seemingly designed to test and produce nuclear weapons.

The IAEA's latest report leaves unmentioned allegations by an Iranian opposition group of North Korean work on nuclear warheads at Khojir, a military research site near Tehran. It also amends previous conclusions and closes the book on questions about Iran's work on polonium 210 - - which nuclear experts suspect Iran experimented with for use as an initiator for nuclear weapons, but which the regime claims was research on radioisotope batteries. In 2004, the IAEA declared itself "somewhat uncertain regarding the plausibility of the stated purpose of the [polonium] experiments." Today it finds these explanations "consistent with the Agency's findings and with other information available."

The IAEA director seems intent on undercutting Security Council diplomacy. Just weeks after President George Bush toured the Middle East to build Arab support for pressure on Tehran, Mr. ElBaradei appeared on Egyptian television on Feb. 5 to urge Arabs in the opposite direction, insisting Iran was cooperating and should not be pressured. And as he grows more and more isolated from

Western powers intent on disarming Iran, Mr. ElBaradei has found champions in the developing and Arab world. They cheer his self-imposed mission -- to hamstring U.S. efforts to constrain Iran's program, whether or not the regime is violating its non-proliferation obli-

gations or pursuing nuclear weapons.

In working to undermine sanctions, however, Mr. ElBaradei demeans the purpose of his agency and undercuts its non-proliferation mission. He also makes military action all the more likely.

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