

FEAR-MONGERING OVER NEW IAEA IRAN REPORT FALLS FLAT

Try as they might, those who are pushing hard for a military attack on Iran under the guise of preventing Iran obtaining nuclear weapons are finding it impossible to whip up enough fear to overcome the media frenzy surrounding the home stretch of the Presidential Election season. Today's biggest dose of fear-mongering is courtesy of Jodi Rudoren and David Sanger at the New York Times:

For Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, the International Atomic Energy Agency on Thursday offered findings validating his longstanding position that while harsh economic sanctions and diplomatic isolation may have hurt Iran, they have failed to slow Tehran's nuclear program. If anything, the program is speeding up.

But the agency's report has also put Israel in a corner, documenting that Iran is close to crossing what Israel has long said is its red line: the capability to produce nuclear weapons in a location invulnerable to Israeli attack.

Despite Rudoren and Sanger claiming that Iran is "close" to "the capability to produce nuclear weapons in a location invulnerable to Israeli attack", a closer examination of both data they present in the article and of the IAEA report itself shows that Iran's "progress" toward a weapon is precarious at best.

For example, a chart in the Times article shows the proliferation of centrifuges at the Qom facility which is located inside a mountain and presumed to be immune from Israeli (but probably not US) bombs. The figure shows that the total

number of installed centrifuges at this facility has increased steadily from 0 in September of 2011 to 2,140 this month. However, the same figure also shows that only 696 of those centrifuges are functioning and the number of functioning centrifuges has not changed over the course of the three reports issued in February, May and August of this year.

The claim that Iran's program is "speeding up" also looks quite dubious in light of this report from Fredrik Dahl of Reuters:

Iran has sharply increased the number of centrifuges it has in the fortified Fordow bunker, a U.N. report said on Thursday, showing Tehran has continued to expand its nuclear program despite Western pressure and the threat of an Israeli attack.

/snip/

But the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) report said the newly-installed machines, which are not yet operating, were all so-called IR-1 centrifuges – a 1970s-vintage model which has been prone to breakdowns in the past.

Iran has for years been trying to introduce centrifuges with several times the capacity of the IR-1 version it now uses for the most sensitive part of its atomic activities.

If it eventually succeeded in deploying the newer models for large-scale enrichment, it could significantly reduce the time needed to stockpile refined uranium, which can be used to generate electricity or, if processed much further, nuclear explosions.

Nowhere in the Rudoren and Sanger report and only near the very end of Dahl's report, do we get the most important reminder about Iran's

nuclear material, and even then it is buried while making a different point:

The IAEA, which regularly inspects Iran's declared nuclear sites, has little access to facilities where centrifuges are assembled and the agency's knowledge of possible centrifuge progress is mainly limited to what it can observe in Natanz.

That aside about the IAEA regularly inspecting Iranian facilities is hugely important and missing from most media accounts of the push toward an attack on Iran. Here is the relevant passage from the most recent IAEA report (pdf) itself:

Under its Safeguards Agreement, Iran has declared to the Agency 16 nuclear facilities and nine locations outside facilities (LOFs). Notwithstanding that certain of the activities being undertaken by Iran at some of the facilities are contrary to the relevant resolutions of the Board of Governors and the Security Council, as indicated below, the Agency continues to verify the non-diversion of declared material at these facilities and LOFs.

[emphasis added]

IAEA inspectors are onsite at Iran's nuclear facilities and they confirm that all of Iran's nuclear material is accounted for, with none being diverted for unknown purposes. Despite all the bluster from the war mongers that Iran is making progress toward a weapon, the fact remains that uranium enrichment still goes only to 20% and not to the 90%+ needed for a weapon, Iran's functioning enrichment centrifuges are still very old technology and all uranium entering the enrichment process has been accounted for by IAEA inspectors.

With such gaping holes in the claims that Iran

is dangerously close to “break out” capability on weapons development, it is no surprise that this latest round of beating the drum for war is being lost in the attention on the upcoming election.