

Disinformation, Iran, and a Russian-sponsored Nuclear Deal

By Cliff Kincaid - November 6, 2014

This is a story of how politics makes strange bedfellows. Medea Benjamin of Code Pink is in bed with the Koch Brothers, in an emerging alliance designed to make it acceptable for Iran to develop nuclear weapons. The stakes are high for the U.S. but especially for Israel.



Medea Benjamin and Barry Posen (right) at a Charles Koch Institute forum.

President Obama on Wednesday was asked directly by the press if he intended to circumvent Congress on a nuclear deal with Iran. He said that while the Iranians “have negotiated seriously around providing assurances that they’re not developing a nuclear weapon for the first time,” there is no deal just yet. He said that Russia has “worked with us cooperatively in trying to find ways to make sure that we can verify and have confidence going forward that Iran doesn’t have the capacity to develop a nuclear weapon...”

One late report indicates that Obama will accept a deal whereby Russia will somehow safeguard some of the Iranian nuclear material and make sure it doesn’t get used for Iranian nuclear weapons development. Vladimir Putin must be considered reliable and trustworthy by the White House. A new report from the Wall Street Journal indicates Obama has even written Iran’s Ayatollah Khamenei about a nuclear deal, in exchange for help against ISIS, in a development we predicted. This, too, has been engineered by Russia, to divert attention from Putin’s on-going invasion of Ukraine and increasing nuclear threats to NATO members.

Not having directly answered the question, Obama was asked at his news conference whether he has “the power unilaterally to relax sanctions [on Iran], to implement an agreement.” He went into another long answer, saying at first, “Yeah, there are a series of different sanctions. There are multilateral sanctions, there are U.N. sanctions. There are sanctions that have been imposed by us, this administration, unilaterally. And I think it’s different for each of those areas.” The implication was that, if he gets a deal, he could lift some of those sanctions on his own, without getting Congressional approval. But he never said he would submit the deal itself to Congress for approval. Apparently he will be content to get Russia’s approval.

The coverage of this convoluted “answer” has failed to note that Obama in the past has cited an alleged fatwa or Islamic edict against nuclear weapons, supposedly issued by the Iranian Ayatollah. He didn’t mention that on Wednesday, perhaps because he has subsequently been informed it doesn’t really exist.

We have demonstrated through an analysis of the evidence that the alleged fatwa does not exist, and that talk about the document was an Iranian disinformation ploy, probably concocted with the help of Iran’s Russian sponsors. One of the sources of the disinformation was a New York Times column, “We Do Not Have a Nuclear Weapons Program,” by Javad Zarif, the Iranian ambassador to the United Nations from 2002 to 2007, who declared, “Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, the leader of the Islamic Republic, has issued a decree against the development, production, stockpiling and use of nuclear weapons.”

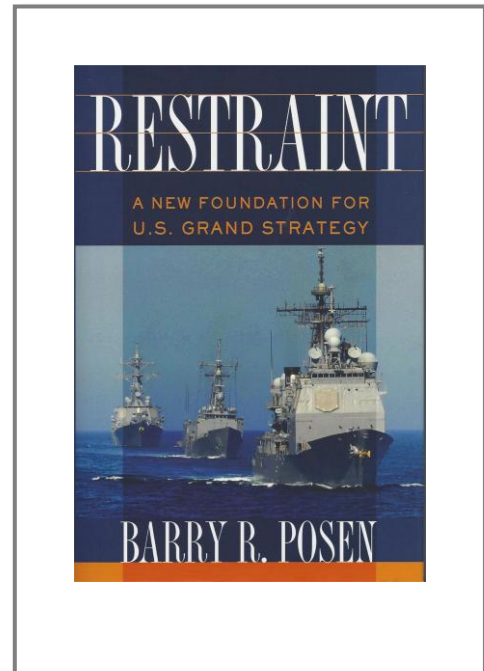


If that's the case, then why should we have a problem with the Iranian nuclear program? Of course, nobody believes the Iranians. The bottom line is that the fatwa was not written down, and nobody in the West has seen it. Even if it does exist somewhere, why should it be accepted as a genuine expression of Iranian intent?

This deceptive claim has surfaced again, buried in a footnote to another footnote of a new book, *Restraint: A New Foundation for U.S. Grand Strategy*. The author is Barry R. Posen, who wrote his own New York Times column under the title of "We Can Live With a Nuclear Iran."

Posen, an MIT professor, states categorically (on page 77) that Ayatollah Khamenei "issued a fatwa, revealed in 2005, against the development, production, stockpiling and use of nuclear weapons (although the purpose of this fatwa is opaque)."

It's not clear what he means about the purpose being opaque. However, his footnote for this claim is an academic paper, "Assessing Iran's Nuclear Program," by Mark Fitzpatrick, and dated autumn 2006. The paper includes the statement, "Those who argue that Iran's intentions are peaceful point to Ayatollah Ali Khamenei's fatwa against the development, production, stockpiling and use of nuclear weapons." This has a footnote to the New York Times article by Javad Zarif.



What's opaque in all of this is Posen's failure to be absolutely clear that his passage borrows directly from the Fitzpatrick paper, and that Fitzpatrick's paper in turn was based on a dubious Iranian source. Checking one footnote to another is the only way to determine that this sequence of connections leads to nothing of substance.

Yet, Posen claims in his book that the fatwa was "revealed" to exist, as if it had leaked out and proved the Iranians were peaceful after all.

What is also fascinating about all of this is that Posen's book was promoted at an October 29 Koch Institute event, "Restraint and U.S. Foreign Policy: A Conversation" with Barry R. Posen. William Ruger, vice president of research and policy at the Charles Koch Institute, introduced Posen and engaged in a friendly give-and-take, designed to provide a platform for his views. No opposing views were presented. Later, Posen entertained a group of prominent foreign policy thinkers at a private dinner.

Among other things, his book claims, "The evidence that Iran is governed by religious fanatics bent on martyrdom does not stand up well to close scrutiny."

He also argues in the book (which apparently went to press before the Russian invasion of Ukraine) that Russia is not “poised for a renewal” of its past and “is not a rising power.”

For those who may have missed the significance, this is the Koch Institute of “Koch Brothers” fame. This institute bears the name of one of the Koch Brothers -- Charles Koch, a libertarian thinker in foreign affairs. It turns out that both of the billionaire brothers are pro-free enterprise in their economic outlook, which makes them enemies of the left, but that their foreign policy views are far outside of the conservative mainstream. William Ruger of the Koch Institute favorably reviewed the Posen book for *The American Conservative* magazine, which despite its name has become a mouthpiece for the view that Vladimir Putin is a force for good in the world and a Christian statesman.

We Can Live With a Nuclear Iran

Barry R. Posen

MIT Center for International Studies

The *American Conservative* also favorably reviewed Gareth Porter’s book, *Manufactured Crisis: the Untold Story of the Iran Nuclear Scare*, which insists Iran is not developing nuclear weapons. The review quoted some kind comments from Paul Pillar, a former top CIA official also in the Koch Institute audience to hear Posen’s presentation.

The Koch sponsorship of Posen and his book became even more interesting as I was making my way into the event and happened to notice Medea Benjamin of Code Pink, the well-known Marxist pro-Muslim agitator, going in as well. “What are you doing here?” I asked. “This is a Koch Institute event.”



Gareth Porter (left) at Iran conference

I learned that Benjamin, who rubs elbows with various enemies of the United States and Israel, ranging from the late Hugo Chavez to Cuban Communists to Hamas officials, was not there to disrupt the event or make a scene by shouting, as she usually does. She was there under her original name, "Susan Benjamin," and her classic pink outfit was somewhat hidden under a tan blazer. She was there to learn first-hand how the far-left could find common cause with those on the libertarian right. It was a serious and solemn occasion for her that should be eye-opening for traditional Reagan-style foreign policy conservatives.



Barry Posen and Medea Benjamin

She told me candidly that she was there because she thought she would agree with Posen on foreign policy matters. She must have been familiar with his writings on Iran. She also told me that Koch Industries' business dealings with Russia and China didn't bother her. (Koch Industries also did business with Iran at one point). After the event was done, and Posen had made his case for U.S. "restraint" in foreign policy, I understood what she was talking about. I noticed that she was engaged in friendly conversation with the professor.

Benjamin, a vocal opponent of U.S. aid to Israel, had just returned from Iran, where she had participated in a "New Horizon" conference, also dubbed "The 2nd Annual International Conference of Independent Thinkers & Film Makers."

The topics included "Mossad's Role in the 9/11 Coup d'Etat," a reference to the claim that Israel had a role in the terrorist attacks that were blamed on Muslims to justify the U.S. going to war in the Middle East.

A regime sponsoring a conference like this is supposed to be believed when it comes to an alleged fatwa against nuclear weapons?

The announced themes included:

- Philosophy and False Flags: Neo-conservatism, Zionism and 9/11.
- Mossad-9/11 Links: The Empirical Evidence.
- Zionist Fingerprints on the 9/11 Cover-up.
- 9/11 and the Holocaust as pro-Zionist "Public Myths."

Benjamin was on a panel titled, "The Gaza War & BDS Movement Strategies against the Zionist Regime." BDS refers to the movement for a campaign of Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions against Israel.

A panel titled, “Manufactured Crisis: The Untold Story of the Iran Nuclear Scare,” featured the aforementioned Gareth Porter. A veteran academic leftist, he has quite a record of demonstrating an inability or unwillingness to recognize evil in the world. He was identified in James L. Tyson’s 1981 book, *Target America*, as “one of the most active defenders of the bloody Pol Pot regime in Cambodia as well as the Vietnamese communists.” The Pol Pot regime killed about two million Cambodians, in what became known as the “killing fields,” after Vietnam fell to the Communists.

Activist Medea Benjamin raps US military doctrine



In his book, *Far Left of Center: The American Radical Left Today*, Harvey Klehr notes that Porter was an associate fellow at the Institute for Policy Studies, a Marxist research group in Washington, D.C., and achieved notoriety for being among “the most ardent defenders” of the Pol Pot regime. Porter had argued in his book, *Cambodia: Starvation and Revolution*, that the Pol Pot regime had found “a collective framework designed to release the creative energies of the people.”

Porter, who has never apologized for his views on communism, seems to have shifted to defending the regime in Iran.



Like Barry Posen, he also accepts the idea of an Iranian fatwa against nuclear weapons, despite the lack of evidence for its actual existence. Even though critics argue that “no published text of the fatwa can be found,” Porter says it may have been issued orally.



William Ruger and Barry Posen

When Glenn Kessler of the Washington Post attempted to verify its existence, he reported that Caitlin Hayden, a spokeswoman for the White House National Security Council, said that “the Iranian government was the best source for information” about it. He said an Iranian website did not provide the text of the original fatwa but cited “Western news reports as evidence that Khamenei has reiterated it on several occasions.”

This is classic disinformation, using the Western press to “confirm” something that does not in fact exist.

It’s easy to see how someone Like Gareth Porter or Medea Benjamin would fall for such a ploy. But a Koch-sponsored academic scholar such as Posen? However, with a billionaire in his corner, one who has a lot of influence over the Republican Party, Posen’s notion of U.S. foreign policy “restraint” in the face of the Iran nuclear weapons program cannot be dismissed or ignored.

Restraint and U.S. Foreign Policy
A Conversation

Wednesday, October 29, 2014

Host
William P. Ruger, Ph.D.
Vice President of Research & Policy,
Charles Koch Institute

Special Guest
Barry R. Posen, Ph.D.
Ford International Professor of Political Science
and Director of the Security Studies Program at
MIT & Author of *Restraint: A New Foundation*
for U.S. Grand Strategy

COUNCIL on FOREIGN RELATIONS

Home Regions Topics Experts Publications Events Resources

Home Iran MIT Paper: We Can Live With a Nuclear Iran (Pdf)

Must Read [Print](#) [Email](#) [Share](#) [Cite](#)

MIT Paper: We Can Live with a Nuclear Iran (PDF)

Barry Posen argues that fears about a nuclear Iran are overstated.