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The Benefit of Exposing the Iranian Nuclear Archive

Shmuel Even

On May 8, 2018, US President Donald Trump announced that the United States would withdraw from the nuclear agreement reached with Iran in July 2015. In his statement, the President referred to the Iranian nuclear archive exposed by Israel as decisive evidence of Iran's deceitfulness and its intentions in the military nuclear realm. Trump described the weakness of the agreement's verification mechanisms and the lapses in the deal, emphasizing that even after the agreement, the regime in Tehran continued to demonstrate an extremely aggressive stance toward the surrounding region in the Middle East and toward the United States, which it was able to do given the funds that flowing into Iran once the sanctions were lifted. This is also Israel's position.

Conceptually, the disclosure of information is a tool that aims to influence target audiences in a particular way. Such an exposure operation involves a stage of intelligence information collection and processing, followed by a stage of marketing the information and conveying the message in various ways (openly and publicly, through diplomatic channels, anonymously, and secretly). The exposure of information is usually part of a broader security campaign. Against this background, this article examines the public exposure of the Iranian nuclear archive on April 30, 2018 vis-à-vis the goals of the expositor, namely, Israel, which is opposed to the nuclear agreement in its current form. This position differs from the belief that it would be best to maintain the agreement and refrain from endangering it, like European leaders, whose goals contravene the exposure of the information. The article below does not discuss the disagreement between the two positions.

The Public Exposure

In his television appearance of April 30, 2018, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu revealed that Israel had obtained more than 100,000 documents on Iran's secret military nuclear program (Project Amad) that had been stored in an archive in Tehran. Netanyahu showed an original Iranian presentation indicating that in the past, Iran intended to design, produce, and test five nuclear warheads that were designed to be mounted on missiles. This was proof that Iran lied in its declarations that it had not previously engaged in a military nuclear project. At the same time, Netanyahu's presentation contained no recent information regarding Iran's subsequent work on a military nuclear project, including during the period following the agreement with the

world powers in July 2015. The public event was preceded by exposure in a secret diplomatic framework in which Israel shared information with the United States and other countries.

The exposure was followed by interviews with Prime Minister Netanyahu in the world media, and was highlighted by President Trump in his statement on the United States withdrawal from the agreement, as proof regarding Iran's intentions in the nuclear realm. Even before his announcement regarding the withdrawal, Trump said that the information exposed by Israel completely supported his position that the JCPOA was a very bad agreement. West European countries, which oppose withdrawing from the agreement, have claimed that the information exposed by Netanyahu actually supported the need to continue the current nuclear agreement with Iran (as Iran was untrustworthy and the agreement mandated mechanisms to supervise its actions).

Analysis of the Exposure Event

The primary target audience of the exposure event appears to have been the international community, including the citizens of the countries that signed the agreement. The aim of the exposure was to prepare public opinion in the United States and around the world for Trump's declaration and to make it difficult for leaders who supported maintaining the agreement to justify this position. For many years Israel has undertaken an exposure effort as part of its overall effort to thwart the nuclear threat and the threats of terrorism and subversion posed by Iran. This exposure was meant to influence the international system and stop Iran. As a result of the nuclear agreement between Iran and the world powers, Israel found itself isolated, that is, until the arrival of the Trump administration, which declared its intention to withdraw from the agreement unless it was modified, which is what it did. Today, the international system is divided, with the United States standing beside Israel.

Additional possible target audiences of the exposure event include:

- a. The Iranian regime: Such profound and extensive exposure could create suspicions and a lack of confidence in the Iranian system and deter elements involved in secret projects. In doing so, it could make it difficult for Iran to develop prohibited military abilities.
- b. The citizens of Iran: The exposure could strengthen the position of those who oppose the regime's approach, which is implemented at the expense of the welfare of the population and the economy, especially after Trump's announcement of the renewal of the sanctions.
- c. The citizens of Israel: For them, the exposure was meant to illustrate the concrete nature of the existential threat posed by Iran in the long term and to generate unity regarding the need to contend with it in the present.

The following parameters serve to assess the quality of the exposure event:

New knowledge: Contrary to the foundation of the July 2015 agreement, the presentation proved that Iran has a secret project to preserve the knowledge of a military nuclear project. The archive is not a forgotten archive but rather the archive of an active project that was moved from one location to another in order to preserve its secrecy. Its exposure bolsters the evidence, on a detailed level, that Iran was lying when it denied its efforts to acquire a military nuclear capability (the July 2015 nuclear agreement required Iran to disclose its past work in this realm) and in its declarations that it intended to limit its nuclear activity to civilian needs alone. The archival materials greatly enhance the existing knowledge base and prove the existence of a connection between the nuclear project and surface to surface missile systems, which were not limited by the agreement. At the same time, the Prime Minister's presentation, which was based on archival material, contained no information about Iranian activities to advance a military nuclear project in latter years, including following the agreement.

Reliability: In this sense, the exposure marked a step up, as Israel independently obtained a great deal of authentic information on the level of original documents.

Relevance: The exposure was carried out at the height of the political efforts to improve the agreement prior to Trump's decision. It was apparently meant to prepare world public opinion for his statement regarding the United States withdrawal from the agreement.

Marketing: In addition to the quality of the information that was exposed, it is widely agreed that the exposure was excellent in terms of its marketing, including the production of the television event, the issue's presentation by Israel's most senior political echelon, the advance coordination with Western media elements, and follow-up interviews.

Consequently, the exposure has strengthened the accusations against Iranian trustworthiness, has emphasized the issue on the world agenda with precision timing, and has provided support to the US position on the matter. In addition, it has forced European leaders who are party to the agreement to explain, also at home, how they support an agreement based on the false disclosure of past Iranian nuclear activity. This is likely to increase the burden of responsibility they bear regarding their continued partnership in the nuclear agreement, and may also result in tighter supervision and control over Iran's actions in the future.

Possible Risks

Presumably the intelligence risk (the potential exposure of intelligence sources and Iran's ability to learn from the event, which will result in an improvement in information security) was weighed against the strategic benefit of the exposure. According to non-

Israeli publications, the Iranians discovered the breach even prior to the information's publication, meaning that if there was damage (no information on this is available), it was not caused by the public exposure.

The intelligence gathering operation is not considered an act of war, and Iran has already announced its intention to respond to attacks in Syria that it attributes to Israel. That being the case, the exposure does not appear to have increased the risk of tensions between Israel and Iran, which is already high.

At this stage, the risk of miscalculation (the possibility that the effect of the exposure will differ from what was intended) does not appear to be the case.

Conclusion

The exposure was an impressive and professional operation. It was meant to help prepare public opinion for President Trump's statement and to make it more difficult for the other leaders who are party to the agreement and who are in no hurry to enter into a confrontation with Iran. In light of the importance of the great threat that Iran poses to Israel, the exposure operation was a vital step in a long uphill battle. The alternative of not exposing the material would have meant giving up the chance of using the information to create cognitive value and leaving it in the archives of the intelligence community.