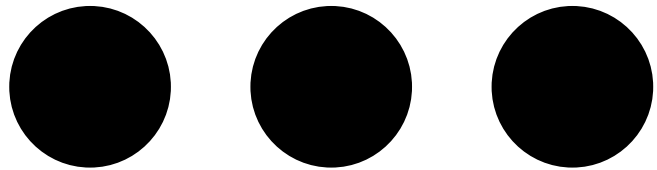




## Do Netanyahu's Iran Claims Pass the Test?

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu (shown) claimed Monday that “Iran lied” about not having a nuclear weapons development program. In fact, along with an impressive multimedia presentation, Netanyahu displayed “half a ton” of Iranian files — including “55,000 pages” and “another 55,000 files on 183 CDs” that “Israel obtained” from Iran in a “great intelligence achievement.” Netanyahu called the files “new and conclusive proof” that Iran has a program to develop nuclear weapons. But do the files prove what Netanyahu claims?



In a video of the presentation, [available on YouTube](#), Netanyahu makes several claims:

- “After signing the nuclear deal in 2015, Iran intensified its efforts to hide its secret nuclear files.”
- The files seized by Israeli intelligence agents include “incriminating documents, incriminating charts, incriminating presentations, incriminating blueprints, incriminating photos, incriminating videos, and more.”
- “The United States can vouch for [the] authenticity” of the files.
- Israel has “known for years that Iran had a secret nuclear weapons program called ‘Project Amad.’”
- Israel “can now prove that Project Amad was a comprehensive program to design, build, and test nuclear weapons.”
- Israel “can also prove that Iran is secretly storing Project Amad material to use at a time of its choice to develop nuclear weapons.”

The “nuclear deal” signed “in 2015” is the [Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action](#) (JCPOA), an agreement between Iran and Western nations for Iran to cease any and all programs related to the development of nuclear weapons. JCPOA requires Iran to submit to regular inspections by the [International Atomic Energy Agency](#) (IAEA). JCPOA was entered into under the Obama administration, and President Trump has expressed criticism of the deal. In fact, though the Trump administration formally certified that Iran was in compliance with JCPOA on March 20, 2017, the president announced on October 13, 2017 that he would not make the certification required by the Iran Nuclear Agreement Review Act. He also called on Congress and other leaders of Western nations to “address the deal’s many serious flaws so that the Iranian regime can never threaten the world with nuclear weapons.”

As *The Guardian* [reported](#) Monday:

Netanyahu’s presentation came less than two weeks before Donald Trump is due to decide whether to



Written by [C. Mitchell Shaw](#) on May 3, 2018

continue to abide by the 2015 deal by waiving US sanctions on [Iran](#). Asked about the Israeli evidence on Monday, Trump said it proved he was “100% right” about the flaws of the agreement, known as the Joint Comprehensive Programme of Action (JCPOA).

“I’ve been saying it’s happening” Trump said at the White House. “They’re not sitting back idly.”

Asked about his intentions on 12 May, the deadline for the sanctions waivers, the president said: “So we’ll see what happens. I’m not telling anyone what I’m doing.”

Trump added that if he did pull out of the JCPOA it would send the “the right message” to North Korea.

Netanyahu’s presentation — and timing — may cause JCPOA to derail.

Israeli officials have [stated](#) that Iran had stored the files in what Netanyahu described as a “dilapidated warehouse” in a remote area in an effort to “prevent the documents from falling into the hands of the inspectors of the International Atomic Energy Agency.”

And while the White House also described the cache of documents absconded by Israeli intelligence agents as containing “new and compelling details” about Iran’s nuclear weapons program, many experts on the issue disagree.

Olli Heinonen, the former chief inspector of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) says the evidence presented by Netanyahu is not new at all. In fact, he says he first saw it in 2005.

From *The Guardian*:

Olli Heinonen, the former chief inspector of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) said his department first saw the documentation that Netanyahu presented in 2005. The safeguards department that Heinonen ran came to the conclusion that the evidence of weapon design work known as the Amad project was credible, but that substantial work on the project ceased in 2003. Heinonen gave a classified briefing on Amad to the IAEA board in 2008.

After watching Netanyahu’s presentation, Heinonen said: “I just saw a lot of pictures I had seen before.”

“Some of the images that we saw I briefed to the board in closed session in February 2008,” Heinonen said. He added that the IAEA did not see the full archive of Amad documentation, but was given the most important evidence. The IAEA made public some of its evidence on Iran’s past nuclear weapons work in 2011. It found that some research work had continued after 2003, but found no evidence of such research activities after 2009.

There is little room for doubt that Iran had previously been in the process of developing a program to create nuclear weapons, but that — though an established fact — is a separate issue from the question of whether the Islamic theocracy is doing so now. The question at hand — and the subject of Netanyahu’s presentation — is about whether or not Iran is in violation of JCPOA. Obviously documents Heinonen saw in 2005 — 10 years before Iran entered into JCPOA — are not “new and conclusive proof” that Iran violated that agreement.

And former CIA Director Michael Hayden said essentially the same thing, telling CNN, “To the best of my knowledge — out of government, not getting the briefings — I think this is fundamentally old news.”

Former presidential candidate and Congressman Dr. Ron Paul agrees, [saying](#), “The only problem with Netanyahu’s “evidence” is that it was all from before the 2007 US National Intelligence Estimate which



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concluded that Iran had abandoned its nuclear weapons program.” In the [video](#) accompanying that statement, Dr. Paul goes even further, saying, “Netanyahu was at it — he gave a major speech, but we’ve heard his speeches before and he’s usually not on the mark.” He went on to say that this time is no different. Paul expressed his opinion that Netanyahu’s “show and tell” speech was intended to “set the stage” for America to “march closer to war with Iran.”

More to the point, though, Dr. Paul asserts that the purpose of JCPOA is to prevent Iran from developing nuclear weapons by regular inspections by the IAEA. Scrapping the agreement would remove the checks and balances that hold Iran accountable.

Dr. Paul is not alone in his assessment. Paleoconservative commentator, author, broadcaster, and politician, Pat Buchanan made many of the same points regarding Netanyahu’s credibility on this subject and his purpose for giving the presentation. He told Fox News’ Sean Hannity that Netanyahu — who he says has been “crying wolf for decades” about Iran — is trying to lead American to war. “Bibi Netanyahu, with due respect, wants the United States to fight a war with Iran on Israel’s behalf.”

Buchanan says the IAEA — who has authority in this area — should be looked to for answers, saying, “Tell the IAEA to go in and either confirm or deny what Netanyahu said. Don’t rely on him. Rely on our CIA coming out and saying, ‘We were wrong, Netanyahu is right, they have a secret atomic bomb program and they’re working on it right now and they have been and we were lied to.’” He added, “What are we going to do, rely on a press conference from Bibi Netanyahu to go to war?”

And while Netanyahu did not actually mention war (both Paul and Buchanan were clearly projecting the lines), he did explicitly mention the United States pulling out of JCPOA, saying that he was sure Trump would “do the right thing.” He followed that up with an appearance on *Fox and Friends* on Tuesday, accusing Iran of attempting to “bamboozle the world” and saying that he hoped Trump would pull out of the deal.

But many European leaders not only dispute the relevance of Netanyahu’s information — since it predates JCPOA and therefore is not evidence of Iran violating the deal — but also his assertion that pulling out of the deal is “the right thing.” As *The Guardian* reported:

The overall initial view in European capitals was that the documents did reveal new material about the scale of Iran’s programme prior to 2015 but that there was nothing showing a subsequent breach of the deal.

The French foreign ministry said that the details needed to be “studied and evaluated” but that the Israeli claims reinforced the need for continuation of the deal – which entails Iran accepting nuclear inspections in return for a loosening of economic sanctions.

“The pertinence of the deal is reinforced by the details presented by Israel,” a statement said. “All activity linked to the development of a nuclear weapon is permanently forbidden by the deal.”

The UK foreign secretary, Boris Johnson, also said the presentation of the claims, by the Israeli prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, showed the importance of keeping the deal. “The Iran nuclear deal is not based on trust about Iran’s intentions, rather it is based on tough verification,” he said.

And Federica Mogherini, the EU’s foreign affairs chief, said that Netanyahu’s presentation and claims had not brought Iran’s compliance with JCPOA “into question” since the IAEA has produced 10 reports saying Iran was in compliance with the requirements and is not developing nuclear weapons.



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Other European leaders expressed similar sentiments. One thing most of those statements have in common is the idea that JCPOA is not about trusting Iran; it is a mechanism to keep Iran in check — and without it, Iran would have no accountability. If Iran were to develop nuclear weapons, the end result would likely be the war both Paul and Buchanan warned of.

*Photo showing Prime Minister Netanyahu during his Tel Aviv press conference: AP Images*



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