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## VON HIPPEL ON ALBRIGHT

by Jeffrey Lewis | July 2, 2008 | 30 Comments

Von Hippel posted a comment in defense of Albright which emphasizes the most important point that the most important credential is one's work. And by that standard, David is invaluable.

The comment is buried on the website where the original article was posted. Here is the full text:

### A Nuclear Expert Who Is

Scott Ritter's attack on David Albright, "The Nuclear Expert Who Never Was," suggests that only those who have spent years on the "inside" or have some other official credential are true experts. He is wrong.

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Ritter is correct that Albright's expertise does not stem from either his participation in IAEA inspections or a PhD in nuclear physics. You can't get the kind of expertise that Albright has developed that easily. Albright started to work on nuclear-proliferation issues as a researcher in Princeton University's Program on Science and Global Security. He ultimately established his own NGO, the Institute on Science and International Security (ISIS).

One measure of Albright's expertise is the invaluable and authoritative book, *Plutonium and Highly Enriched Uranium 1996: World Inventories Capabilities and Policies* (Stockholm International Peace Research Institute and Oxford University Press, 1997). Albright was the lead author both alphabetically and in terms of his contributions. As an academic, I would be proud to be a co-author. Indeed, Albright's two co-authors are senior professors at distinguished universities in the U.K. and Netherlands.

Albright was not interested in an academic career, however. He decided that it was more important to inform the public debate over nonproliferation – initially through his excellent articles in the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* and then, as journalists began to beat their way to his door, directly through releases to the media.

Albright pioneered the use of commercial satellite images to provide independent information on nuclear-related construction in countries of proliferation concern. The ISIS book, *Solving the North Korean Nuclear Puzzle* that he co-edited with Kevin O'Neill in 2000, is still the most authoritative published work on the subject.

As Albright became more visible and trusted as an independent expert, insiders with important information began to come to him for help to get their story out. Some governmental experts who disagreed with the CIA

claim that the aluminum tubes that Iraq was importing were for manufacturing centrifuges came to Albright, for example, at a critical time in the U.S. debate over Iraq's supposedly resurgent nuclear-weapons program.

Albright is also obviously well respected in the IAEA. He is always the first outsider I know to get a copy of the latest IAEA report on the results of its inspections in Iran. This gives him a chance to make a quick analysis to inform the media on the significance of the new findings. I am glad that the media has this alternative to whatever spin the Administration decides to apply.

Albright's role has its risks. In a confusing situation, he does not have the luxury of being able to sit on a result for months as is possible in academia. As a result, he has made some mistakes — as we all have. But there is no doubt that the communities of academics, NGOs and journalists who have come to depend

upon his analyses are much better off with his guidance than we would be without it. Indeed, in 2006, the American Physical Society, the professional society of American physicists, gave Albright its Joseph A. Burton Forum Award. The citation was “For his tireless and productive efforts to slow the transfer of nuclear weapons technology. He brings a unique combination of deep understanding, objectivity, and effectiveness to this vexed area.”

I don't know what set Scott Ritter off but his attack on Albright, while incendiary, is almost completely without substance. There is virtually no discussion of specific issues where he believes Albright was mistaken. Ritter is way off base.

Frank von Hippel, Professor of Public and International Affairs, Princeton University

Co-chair International Panel on Fissile Materials

Former Assistant Director for  
National Security, White House Office  
on Science and Technology Policy,  
1993-94

To put it another way, if you could pick one person to have on an desert island while you worked out a technical problem relating to nonproliferation, would you pick David Albright or Scott Ritter?

I pick Albright.



Filed Under: [administrivia](#)

## COMMENTS

ataune ([History](#))

July 2, 2008 at 4:49 pm

“He is always the first outsider I know to get a copy of the latest IAEA report on the results of its inspections in Iran.”

This is obviously a false statement. If it was true and proovable, it would have been the most damaging evidence against the impartial activities of the IAEA. The only ones who can get the first copies of this kind of results are the states represented in the IAEA board (35 of them). It is evident, but better kept mum, that diverse Intelligence agents get the

first hand to this kind of documentation. But again, officially, nobody “outside” can get the results directly from “inside”, unless the results are public.

nukeman7 ([History](#))

July 2, 2008 at 4:50 pm

I’ve had the pleasure of working with David Albright many times over the years and have always found him to be very knowledgeable about proliferation issues. In those areas where he did not possess direct knowledge of the science he turned to those with the required expertise. I’ve provided much information to David Albright and some of this information can be found on the ISIS website or referenced in their articles. I also served as a consultant to the UN Action Team and know how much they respect they have for David Albright.

What stands out about his work is the number of countries he has reported on and the associated analysis. He and Corey Hinderstein were among the first to openly use overhead photography to try and identify suspected facility and for this alone they stand out.

It is interesting to watch those with little understanding of the science involved in proliferation criticize those who have contributed so much over the years.

hass ([History](#))

July 2, 2008 at 6:55 pm

You don't necessarily have to "choose" between Albright or Ritter so that's a false dilemma. Considering the role of "the experts" and their claims about "WMDs in Iraq" then there is good reason for cynicism in general.

And Albright's ISIS probably gets the IAEA reports because the US reps give it to him, rather than the IAEA (which would be breaking its laws if it did so.) Indeed, that ISIS is used as the conduit to leak this information only raises more questions.

The good professor assures us that Albright is "visible" and "respected" etc but doesn't address the content of Ritter's criticism about Albright's substantive qualifications. No doubt that Albright is a popular pundit, but that's not exactly the same thing as being a nuclear weapons expert, is it?

Jeffrey Lewis ([History](#))

July 2, 2008 at 8:01 pm

Ataune. Stop being fatuous.

Hass. The choice was meant figuratively — that's why it was located on a desert island.

The point of course, is that flaws or not Albright is a much more reliable analyst than Ritter.

I didn't actually detect any substance in Ritter's essay — particularly compared with Frank's enumeration of Albright's various contributions.



Brad Lohaus

July 2, 2008 at 8:30 pm

Can we get a link to the original article? I didn't see it in the post.

Brad Lohaus

July 2, 2008 at 8:35 pm

Perhaps the thing that bugs Ritter is that Albright is not an objective and detached observer. As Von Hippel's discussion of the award given to Albright points out, he is an **advocate** for a particular outcome and for a particular perspective when it comes to nuclear weapons. To be fair, I know of no place where he has ever claimed objectivity.

However, perhaps Ritter is frustrated that he is viewed as having an agenda while Albright is viewed as objective, when in fact they both have an agenda.

Brad Lohaus

July 2, 2008 at 8:37 pm

Sorry — one more quick comment. Wonk, you said you did not detect "any substance" in Ritter's essay. Ritter basically accuses him of falsifying his resume. That is a pretty strong allegation and one, if true, that would be really, really important. I have no clue if it is true, but that is a serious claim. Maybe even a libelous one.

ataune ([History](#))

July 2, 2008 at 8:46 pm

I am not being fatuous !  
I am just pointing out to the fundamental flaw in Frank's reasoning : if what he says is true then respect for Albright bring dis-respect for IAEA and vice-versa.

Lets all accept that what he is saying is not true. For the sake of IAEA and non-proliferation !

Jeffrey Lewis ([History](#))

July 2, 2008 at 11:19 pm

Here is the [link](#).

It is fatuous to suggest that David must be "a third rate analyst" because otherwise we have to conclude that someone at the top of the IAEA is leaking information. If that bothers you, then level your criticism at the leaker and suggest we take away his Nobel prize.

Similarly — and this is why I say there is no substance to the criticism — the fact that the news media pads David's resume doesn't make his calculations wrong.

An analyst's work is his credential. I don't always agree with David — and I cringe when I see him described as a former weapons inspector — but I always have found him to put the analysis ahead of the agenda.

Speaking of libel, Ritter has taken back the things he said about Bob Kelley, which he shouldn't have.

For the most part, I get it right. In writing about David Albright, the "Inspector who never was", I made a point at refuting the qualifications of someone who has injected himself into a debate which has life-or-death consequences. This is the privilege of us all, especially as concerned citizens. But when the observations and comments of some are given more weight than others due to experience and expertise, it is important that the basis of this experience and expertise be evaluated fairly and accurately so as to neither underplay nor exaggerate their relevance.

In 1992 David Albright was a researcher, not in any formal capacity as a governmental analyst or 'expert on mission', but rather as an individual working for a private organization dedicated to nuclear matters. His impressive study on the inventory of plutonium and highly enriched uranium, published in 1992, brought him to the attention of Maurizio Zifferero, the head of the IEA Iraq Action Team, either as a result of a collaboration which began prior to the publication of the study, or afterwards. This collaboration was well underway by the time Bob Kelley arrived at the IAEA in 1992, and it was

Maurizio, not Bob, who served as the primary conduit of sensitive IAEA information to David Albright. Bob actively participated in this cooperation, but as part of a larger corporate effort, spearheaded by Maurizio Zifferero, and not any individual initiative. The initial focus of effort for David Albright was Iraq's electromagnetic isotope separation, or EMIS, work, and associated procurement activities. Why Maurizio decided to share sensitive information with a non-government affiliated individual lacking in any formal training on either EMIS or procurement networks may never be known; Maurizio passed away in 1997. Maurizio Zifferero's passing brought with it a corresponding 'house cleaning' at the IAEA, with Zifferero's successor, Gary Dillon, severing all of the informal, unofficial contacts Zifferero had established between the IAEA Iraq Action Team and outsiders, including David Albright.

In my essay on David Albright, I discussed the role played by Bob Kelley in facilitating Albright's access to the IAEA. That there was a close relationship between the two is without debate. Bob Kelley left the IAEA in 1993 to return to the United States, where he worked on behalf of the Department of Energy. He returned to the IAEA to participate in inspections in both 1994 and 1995, and later in 2002-

2003. During this time he co-authored an article with David Albright which assessed Iraq's veracity following the defection of Hussein Kamal in August 1995. David Albright had indicated his desire to travel to Iraq as a member of an IAEA inspection team ever since he started his relationship with Maurizio Zifferero in 1992; in June 1996 he finally got his wish, more because of the intervention of Zifferero than any relationship with Bob Kelley or any other IAEA personnel. Bob Kelley today has no involvement with the IAEA's activities in either Iran or Syria, and does not interact with David Albright as had been the case back in the 1990's. Any inference that Bob Kelley continues to serve as a source for David Albright's writings on Iran and Syria was unintentional. Clearly there is a source inside the IAEA who shares sensitive nuclear investigation-related materials with Albright. This person is not Bob Kelley, who continues to serve the world community in support of ongoing nuclear non-proliferation activities.

ataune ([History](#))

July 2, 2008 at 11:40 pm

Jeffrey,

The leaker is most likely not number one but number two !

Regards

Brad Lohaus

July 3, 2008 at 2:06 am

I disagree that an analysts work is his credential. People lose their jobs all the time for lying on their resume.

You are certainly right about media exaggeration. However, here is the key question from a libel perspective and a truth perspective. When Albright describes his own qualifications, either in print, on his web page, or in other places, does he tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth?

If the answer to that question is no, it calls into question his credibility. I have no idea what the answer to that question is. You are much more familiar with him than I am. What's the answer to that question? I think lying on a resume or CV or written description of who you are and what you have done is a really big deal. So if this is true, it is a big deal. Is it true?

Mark Konrad ([History](#))

July 3, 2008 at 2:47 pm

This [comment](#) was posted at [Dr Juan Cole's site](#) in response to a defence of Albright:

Dear Ian,

Thank you for your kind response.

I am always surprised at how our so-called experts continually expose the general public to at best half-truths and at worst outright lies. Let me consider the statement by Dr Albright that you quote. Take 800 kg of 4% enriched Uranium. Multiply 800 kg by 0.04, and you get 32 kg of pure fissile material. The critical mass for Uranium-235 is 52 kg. [I have taken Uranium-235 because it is the most abundant fissile isotope of Uranium. The critical mass for Uranium-233 is 15 kg, however if one looks at tables of Uranium isotopes, the abundance of Uranium-233 is so small that it is not included in most of these. Here are the most abundant isotopes of Uranium: Uranium-234 (0.005%), Uranium-235 (0.72%) and Uranium-238 (99.275%). To be sure,  $0.005 + 0.72 + 99.275 = 100$ .] The question arises as to how Dr Albright has done his/her calculations. Please note that the above calculations are utterly elementary and for carrying them out one does not need to have a PhD in physics, mathematics or any other subject matter; the mere ability to count on one's fingers would suffice.

Let me now assume that the above-mentioned critical mass has bearing on 80% enriched material and not on 100% enriched material. We have  $32 \times \frac{10}{8} = 40$  kg. Clearly, 40 kg of 80% enriched material is still 12 kg short of the above-mentioned 52 kg.

I do not know Dr Albright, and even less, I do not know where s/he may have earned the title "Dr", but assuming that this person is not pursuing a political agenda, it must be evident that this person is not capable of even carrying out elementary arithmetic calculations. We, the public, must be critical and demand from our so-called experts to make public the considerations by which they keep scaring us to death, preparing us psychologically to

bomb yet another sovereign nation to stone age. Please note that in my above calculations I took the upper bound of the range 700-800 kg given by “Dr” Albright. Had I taken the lower bound (i.e. 700 kg), I would have put “Dr” Albright and her/his ilk to a greater shame. As an aside, where has “Dr” Albright his/her “20-25 kilograms of weapons-grade uranium” from? Methinks this is outright fraud.

Incidentally, to my best knowledge the exact amount of fissile material required for making a working atomic bomb is classified (what is certain, is that this amount cannot be less than the critical mass). It is conceivable that for a working atomic bomb one needs, say, 80 kg of Uranium-235 — the 80 kg of fissile material is divided into two pieces (each under-critical, since  $40 < 52$ ) which are brought together in the process of ignition. To appreciate this fact, the agreement between the USA and Russia for inspecting each other’s stock piles of nuclear material/weapons contains an explicit clause which precludes exact mass measurements; I seem to remember that the accuracy of these measurements must not exceed 80%. One should realize that a nuclear bomb that is not capable of going critical is utterly useless as a weapon: it will cause a relatively weak explosion (as a result of an initial short-lived under-critical chain reaction — the explosion is brought about by a sudden thermal expansion of the material, causing a shock wave), leading to a radioactive contamination of a relatively small area around the explosion site.

In my above calculations, I took for granted the assumption that Iran had the technical and scientific capability of converting 800 kg of the material that is enriched to 4% to 100%, or 80%, pure Uranium-235. If you re-read my previous Comment, you will realize that my basic argument there was that to my best knowledge Iran at present does not possess the technical ability and the scientific base for carrying out this conversion. In other words, no matter what quantity of 4%



enriched Uranium-235 Iran may possess (let us assume 8000 kg, instead of “Dr” Albright’s 800 kg), Iran to my best knowledge does not possess the expertise to convert this amount of material into even 1 kg of bomb-grade material. The fact is that none of the steps in the cascade of physical and chemical processes that are required for producing fissile material can be skipped over, and this is why the complexity of making fissile material is almost infinitely more than that involved in making 4% enriched material. You could liken the situation with that of cracking a code that is 100 bits long; knowing 4 bits of this code is almost nothing in comparison with knowing all the 100 bits of the code. I doubt that the present American Administration is willing, if at all capable of, to contemplate these crucial issues.

You ask me to name some names. I cannot do that, as by doing so I will be crossing a line that I cannot cross on ethical grounds (I am not in the business of naming names). If you are associated with any research Institute dealing with issues related to proliferation problems, you could always commission a research into the scientific publications by the scientists residing in Iran. As I wrote in my previous message, in my personal day-to-day research I encounter from time-to-time some publications by Iranian scientists. My personal judgement is (as I explained in my previous Comment) that none of these publications suggest to me that Iran may be on the path of producing fissile material. I may be mistaken (simply because I have never done any systematic study of the Iranian scientific publications), however as the above simple calculations may have made clear, I seem to be infinitely more knowledgeable on these issues than “Dr” Albright and a host of other darlings of our public media. I should like to emphasize that even a small amount of knowledge is infinitely more than utter ignorance, whether genuine or contrived. You should consider the qualification “infinitely more knowledgeable” in this

light, as I am not so immodest as to qualify myself even as knowledgeable.

Yours sincerely,

BF.

Jeffrey Lewis ([History](#))

July 3, 2008 at 3:23 pm

Dear Mark

BF is a good example of the sort of person who hasn't the slightest idea of what he is talking about, but feels totally comfortable calling Albright names.

Tom

July 3, 2008 at 4:29 pm

So, Albright doesn't have a PhD? Big deal. Given how often a PhD is confused with a license to bu\*\*sh\*\*, transforming its holder into a mass media-compatible "universal expert", this doesn't strike me as a deficiency, really.

But seriously, looking at the landscape of first rate non-government experts in the US, I see a variety of PhDs, for instance in condensed matter physics, in particle physics, computational physics, laser physics, and so on. Now, how exactly do these degrees help the folks who hold them to analyze and understand foreign nuclear weapons programs? Right, they provide a solid science skillset with which they can read open or

declassified or leaked technical reports, check for consistency, perform calculations and simulations, infer properties, draw conclusions.

But that's all.

Now, I believe (and his excellent work bears ample witness) that Albright's double Master's did indeed provide him with a solid scientific base and sufficient "formal training". He did not spend three additional years in some dark laboratory, shooting with lasers at semiconductors or whatever. So what? Certainly, this would not have helped him much in the career he chose to pursue.

If you accept only scientists with formal training in nuclear weapons science as credible analysts, well, how should I put it? Would there be any analysts left? How many former nuclear weapons scientists are there today, exactly, who earn their money as non-government experts?

Still, someone should give Albright a (very well deserved) honorary doctorate – and quickly, so that we can all move on with the more pressing issues.

Andy ([History](#))

July 3, 2008 at 5:37 pm

Perhaps BF can explain to us lemmings how Little Boy was able to destroy Hiroshima with less than 52kg of U-235.

Yale Simkin ([History](#))

July 3, 2008 at 7:42 pm

Jeez,  
that guy that Mark quoted at Juan Cole's site gives  
cluelessness a bad name.

Tom

July 3, 2008 at 8:09 pm

I should have read Albright's bio more carefully. He  
already has an honorary doctorate... Ah well, it's a  
very frustrating debate.

Dave ([History](#))

July 4, 2008 at 12:44 am

@Yale Simkin

That was a pretty amazing demonstration of  
ignorance, all right. I had my mouth open in  
astonishment while reading most of it...

Josh SN ([History](#))

July 4, 2008 at 12:27 pm

He was not acting as a scientist, or relying on  
scientists, when he made his claims about Iraqi

WMD.

If he had done a bad calculation, or not taken a factor into account, I could easily understand (since I, myself, don't know these equations).

He helped make the Iraq War happen based on his role as pundit. The only four scientific studies (two Lancet, one WHO, one Iraqi) extrapolated give a million dead, easily.

(CNN, 10/5/02): "In terms of the chemical and biological weapons, Iraq has those now. How many, how could they deliver them? I mean, these are the big questions."

(L.A. Times, 4/20/03): "If there are no weapons of mass destruction, I'll be mad as hell. I certainly accepted the administration claims on chemical and biological weapons."

Andy ([History](#))

July 4, 2008 at 4:43 pm

Josh,

Almost everyone at the time believed Iraq still had stockpiles of chem and bio weapons, including those who had access to the highest levels of intelligence information BEFORE Bush came to office like President Clinton and his senior staff. Clinton said several times up to and through 2003 that he thought Saddam had hidden stockpiles. Even Ritter suggested the possibility, though he said that Iraqi production facilities had been destroyed before 1998, so any existing weapons would have passed their shelf-lives and so were not a threat.

So if you want to impugn Albright and those who you believe “made the Iraqi war happen” then you’re going to need a compile a pretty big and comprehensive list.

I also think one needs to differentiate between what one believes are facts and what one believes is good policy. The fact is that many believed Iraq still had WMD but were opposed to the policy of invasion. After the debacle of Iraq, it seems many no longer attempt to independently validate information separate from its policy implications. Instead, the level of skepticism seems often to be wholly based on what that information might mean for policy and what policy that information would support. Hence, for Ritter and Dr. Prather and others who are vocal advocates against confrontation with Iran, any information which may lend support to that policy is viewed with extreme skepticism while information that points the other direction is accepted with little, if any, criticism. If the unwanted information or analysis cannot be assaulted, then the credibility of the purveyor is. It’s my opinion this is the real reason behind Ritter’s and Prather’s (and many others) attack against David Albright, the timing of which coincides with Albright’s report on the Swiss smugglers and advanced weapon designs. They didn’t seem to have any issues with David when he was skeptical of the Bush administration’s claims.

The point of all this is to suggest that such argumentative tactics are not a recipe for sound and rational policy debate.

hass ([History](#))

July 4, 2008 at 6:54 pm

There is a bigger problem that’s being overlooked in

this discussion. We have never had an accounting for the role played by Experts and Think Tanks and their role in the build-up to the Iraq war. In many instances the same talking heads or their equivalents are back, doing the same thing.

You see, the problem with these media “experts” in general, is that even if they’re personally honest, they nevertheless are presented as “independent experts” only in order to promote an agenda, and some of them willingly go along with it for the sake of personal popularity or because they agree with the agenda. Albright’s record shows this. While he personally insists that he doesn’t favor an attack on Iran for example, he is regularly quoted in the media scare pieces about Iran, usually calculating how soon Iran will “have enough enriched uranium for a bomb” – never mentioning, for example, that this hypothetical calculation leaves out the fact that Iran produces LEU which can’t be used to make a bomb at all, or that Iran’s centrifuges operate under IAEA safeguards, or that Iran has offered to place limits on its program that would address even the theoretical concern about making bombs (multilateral enrichment.) As Ritter rightly points out, Albright was the one to sound alarm bells about how Iran “could” (or not) have obtained “advanced weapons designs” – totally based on speculation.

In short, he’s part of the Bush administration’s framing of the issue as “Iran is rushing to make a bomb” and so he’s feeding the corollary to that frame too: “Iran must be stopped by force if necessary.”

This is a big problem. It was precisely this sort of deference and obsequiesness by the “experts” who were complicit in misleading us all about the “WMDs in Iraq” Thus, my concern is that Albright is part of that pattern repeating itself. (Note we haven’t heard much from Milholin’s Wisconsin Project on Nuclear Disarmament after he accused Blix of

being “irrelevant” for “failing” to find the WMDs in Iraq)

Andy ([History](#))

July 4, 2008 at 9:20 pm

Hass and I posted on top of each other, and by serendipity he has illustrated my point beautifully. For Hass the “big problem” is not whether or not Albright’s information (or that of any other so-called pundit) is accurate, what’s important is that the information (regardless of its validity) could support, or be “framed” toward an end that Hass (or whomever) doesn’t want – in this case an attack on Iran. The implication is that the accuracy of the information is secondary to its implications for policy. To that I say hooey. Information can and should be evaluated independently of biases based on both source and policy to the greatest extent possible.

Unfortunately, Hass does not provide a solution to this “big problem” so we are left to speculate. Should Albright suppress anything that might lead toward the undesirable outcome? Should he have sat on this info or spun or framed it differently to support a better conclusion? I can see no cure for this disease Hass identifies that is not as bad or worse than the disease itself. The only cure, IMO, is the careful evaluation of all information regardless of source or conclusion it appears to point to.

In that regard and with respect to David Albright, the biggest problem is that there isn’t much in the way of analysis or evaluation of what he actually wrote since all the criticism and hullabaloo is focused on whether he’s qualified to even write on the subject to begin with, and if he’s a part



(knowingly or not) of some psyop leading to war with Iran. Ritter's hit-piece has circumnavigated the net and judging from the comments to that hit-piece there are many people who now feel they can simply discount and ignore anything Albright has to say in the future. Please explain to me how this furthers US policy or promotes greater understanding of any nonproliferation issues?

Yale Simkin ([History](#))

July 4, 2008 at 10:50 pm

Josh,

Consider what that quote from Albright actually says – *"In terms of the chemical and biological weapons, Iraq has those now. How many, how could they deliver them? I mean, these are the big questions."*

To me he is saying that, OK, Iraq has chem and bioweapons (which is what the intelligence services claim as true), **BUT**, what is the real risk to the world?

Is it a small, ineffective stockpile? What evidence exists that they can actually *deliver* these things?

I see his quote as, not a push for war, but as the opposite. He seems to be saying, "Hold on, we need a lot more data before we go charging in."

Your second quote is his anger at being misled even about the very existence of any WMDs.

These are not the statements of a war-monger.

Miles Pomper ([History](#))

July 5, 2008 at 3:55 pm

Can Scott Ritter really have written this phrase with a straight face?:

“David Albright has a history of being used by those who seek to gain media attention for their respective claims.”

Does Mr. Ritter forget his well-publicized testimony on behalf of then Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott? That testimony embarrassed the Clinton administration and helped lead to the Iraq Liberation Act of 1998, which not only helped undermine confidence in the UN weapons inspections process, but served as much of the legal underpinning for the 2002 war resolution. David Albright is a talented researcher who gets attention because he offers insightful analyses not because he is being used as an explicit partisan tool.

XYZ

July 5, 2008 at 8:16 pm

Lost in all of the accusations about the reliability of Albright or Ritter or Prather was an interesting observation that Prather made about the size of nukes with removable cores. He states that “removable fissile “capsules,” are large, heavy and essentially undeliverable by ballistic missile” and that “– that the secret to making a compact missile-deliverable nuke was to make a non-removable pit out of Plutonium-239 and to boost it with Tritium.” (see <http://www.antiwar.com/prather/?articleid=13025>) Can anyone tell me if these are accurate statements as they would have implications for the ability of both Pakistan and India to deliver their respective nuclear weapons if

they are telling the truth about their deployment methods. What is the size and weight difference (if any) between warheads with and without removable pits. Also if Dr. Prather is correct then the design that the Tinner's are accused of pedaling would be of little use to Iran until it began to produce both Pu and tritium. (Please ignore my initial incomplete submission.)

hass ([History](#))

July 6, 2008 at 3:04 am

Actual Andy-by serendipity your own suggestion — that people who criticize the pundits aren't really concerned about the veracity of their allegations but merely don't agree with an agenda — itself amounts to an ad hominem fallacy that disregards what people are saying and instead you're questioning people's alleged motivations in speaking up.

Anyway, information can be "accurate" and yet false because it is incomplete or selective or leaves out relevant facts etc. This is common — spin-doctors rarely blatantly lie, instead they spin the "truth" to make it misleading even if technically accurate. It's not a question of my liking or disliking a framing — when the framing leaves out facts then it is misleading.

The solution: don't believe the "experts" and exercise critical thinking skills. And if I were a nuclear expert/pundit, I'd insist that the media not use me and my quotes to promote an agenda, and if they did then I would at least take pains to set the record straight.

Yale Simkin ([History](#))

July 6, 2008 at 4:40 am

XYZ – So Prather claims that it takes tritium-boosted, sealed-pit warheads to be missile-deliverable.

I have read Prather's stuff from time-to-time, and based upon my experiences each time, I have arrived at a firm conclusion:

Prather is to the Art of Nonsensical BS what Disney is to the Art of Animation.

Let's take a trip down memory lane, back to the mists of the early 1950's...

1952 Nuclear Test: **SNAPPER-HOW**  
(A Ted Taylor Special)

Diameter of Implosion System: 54cm  
Mass: 250kg  
No Tritium Boosting  
No Sealed Pit  
Yield: 14 kilotons

Here is the production version of that device as the warhead for the MK12 bomb:

So, if we follow the truism that Anything That Exists Is Possible, then we are forced to accept the conclusion that not only is Prather (as usual) wrong, but that he is totally full of it.

Yossi

July 7, 2008 at 7:22 pm

Two little remarks.

Albright and his assistant allegedly discovered BoE's pump house in an exhaustive imagery search and told the world it's a nuclear reactor indication. They didn't tell us there are other similar pump stations nearby along the river bank, e.g. a nice one about 4km south with 3 pipes entering the river.

On the other hand ISIS should get credit for citing USIC experts without adopting their position. This was wise in view of the heavy handed data manipulation. A good example is the "construction photo" (the one showing a Yongbyon style building with vertical poles, allegedly before it was boxified):

\* The poles are located in wrong places from an engineering point of view if made of concrete, i.e. not growing from a corner or wall. If they were made of steel we would expect them to penetrate the ceiling or have a massive basis but we don't see this.

\* The poles blend into the super-structure and a nearby wing in spite of being separate objects. This is because normal shadowing is missing.

\* At least one pole has no symmetry counterpart.

\* Two windows, one above the other, on the left side immediately under a pole are hyper-sharp and totally black (rgb=0,0,0) unlike other windows. The lower one lost its rectangular form and became a parallelogram. If this is an attempt to hide some feature what was it? Asad peeping out? That the pole doesn't penetrate the ceiling and so doesn't have a real basis?

\* The poles upper part look distorted. Could such a large effect caused by scanning a print or re-sampling?

In short, like many other people Albright is not an angel nor a devil. He simply tries to make a living in a perverted world.

Andy ([History](#))

July 8, 2008 at 3:06 pm

Hass,

You misstate my position. Criticizing so-called “pundits” – or rather, criticizing what pundits say – is vital and necessary as long as the criticism is focused on their arguments. Where is the “critical analysis” of Albright’s latest piece? It sure hasn’t come from Ritter or Prather or even you.

Your point about “spin doctors” is true but also irrelevant because spin is itself subjective and information can be evaluated regardless of the spin it’s been given. The problem is that those who are driven more by agenda only see spin when it is disagreeable to their predispositions. When the spin agrees with their biases then it’s “truth” or “critical analysis” in their eyes. Regardless, if the media spins Albright’s or anyone else’s comments, whose fault is that? Are we to ignore Albright because the NYT or Fox uses his statements out of context?

Finally, as for “experts,” we all rely on them to one extent or another to buttress or make our arguments for us. You are certainly no exception considering your promotion of Michael Spies’ views here, on Wikipedia and elsewhere.

Annette Schaper ([History](#))

July 10, 2008 at 7:42 am

Copy of what I posted yesterday at the original site:

Scott Ritter writes three pages in order to denounce a colleague for being called “a former U.N weapons inspector” although his role was more marginal than that of Scott Ritter.

My respect for David Albright stems from the quality of his work. I have met many “inspectors”, “officials”, “professors”, and “weapon physicists”, as well as “students”, “commentators”, or “colleagues” and many more. In the many years of my work I have learned at least one thing, and that is: Look at the quality, seriousness, usefulness, and honesty of one’s work and derive the respect from this. Don’t look at titles or press attention.

In this sense, the results that David Albright, often together with colleagues, has given to the international nonproliferation community rank among the highest. Just some examples:

The book “Plutonium and Highly Enriched Uranium 1996”, co-authored by Albright, Berkhout, and Walker, together with updates on the ISIS Web site, is up to today THE basis for a large range of follow-up work: examples are topics like a Fissile Material Cutoff Treaty, safeguards, future nuclear material control regimes, assessment of proliferation dangers etc. What makes the book valuable are not only the figures, but also the honest and transparent description of the methods how these figures have been gained, to which extent they may be trusted, which error margins must be assumed and why. Not only non-governmental experts work with them but also generations of diplomats and governments of non-nuclear weapon states. Definitely, it would be desirable if governments and their “officials” would publish more precise figures.

This is just the case the book makes.

Another example are the timely comments by ISIS on topics of North Korea, Iran, Iraq and other proliferation cases. It is always clear what is INFORMATION and what is an offer of interpretation of this information. Colleagues like myself are most thankful for this service.

On his three pages, Scott Ritter repeats again and again how important his own experience as an inspector is. Unfortunately, he forgets to explain his criteria for the use of the term “dilettante”. Instead he even fortifies this term by adding “in every sense”. Being himself a historian, how can he have the qualification to decide about the physics skills of a physicist? How can he know how well another physicist understands topics like energy and fuel consumption of a nuclear reactor etc? A little more modesty would have been more convincing, this way I feel reminded of an aggrieved child who complains that although his singing sounded so much better, the other child got so much more applause.

A dilettante in diplomacy might be an excellent expert in nuclear weapon physics, or the other way round, an expert in psychology of deceiving inspectors might be a dilettant in designing an implosion design etc. That’s why you always need interdisciplinary teams with eagerness to respect and learn from each other.

Finally, being a physicist myself who “never worked as a nuclear physicist on any program dedicated to the design and/or manufacture of nuclear weapons.” (in our country you won’t find a single one), I nevertheless feel and – I believe – am regarded qualified to comment on nonproliferation, proliferation risks of various nuclear technologies, nuclear safeguards, nuclear disarmament etc. Ritter’s superficial comment to disqualify a respectable expert although not being himself a



“nuclear weapon physicist”, is an insult not only to Albright but also to all his colleagues world wide.

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