

Iran's Pursuit of Nuclear Weapons

“It is clear that Iran’s reckless pursuit of nuclear weapons, coupled with its support for terrorism, threatens the Middle East and beyond.”

—Sen. John McCain (R-AZ)



Iran has ballistic missiles that could carry nuclear warheads 1,500 miles, threatening U.S. troops, Israel, other U.S. allies and vital energy resources.

In 2002, Iran’s decades-long clandestine pursuit of atomic weapons was revealed when an exile group exposed key nuclear facilities. Today, Tehran is defying the international community by enriching uranium, which could serve as the core of a nuclear weapon.

As the leading state sponsor of terrorism, a nuclear-armed Iran would pose unacceptable threats to the United States and its allies. The world can still persuade Iran to give up this effort by imposing a range of economic and diplomatic sanctions. However, time is running out.

Iran is Nearing Nuclear Arms Capability

Having mastered most steps of the nuclear “fuel cycle,” Iran is now conducting advanced atomic work and fast approaching the “point of no return”—when Tehran will have achieved the technical know-how to produce nuclear weapons indigenously.

In 2006, Iran announced that it had successfully enriched uranium. It is now moving ahead with plans to assemble more than 50,000 centrifuges for industrial-scale enrichment, ultimately enabling Iran to produce up to 50 nuclear warheads per year.

Inspectors for the International Atomic Energy Agency have uncovered evidence that Iran has carried out a number of nuclear activities with no known civilian energy purposes. Iran has experimented with polonium, an element whose primary use is to intensify nuclear explosions. Iran also is pursuing equipment that could be used to mold the core of a nuclear warhead and already possesses plans for such a weapon.

A Nuclear Iran Would Threaten America and Its Allies

Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad has publicly called for “a world without the United States and Zionism.” Clearly, the prospect of a nuclear Iran is fraught with peril for America.

First, Iran would be able to deliver nuclear warheads using its growing arsenal of ballistic missiles. The most advanced Iranian missile is already capable of reaching American troops in the Middle East, hitting parts of Europe, attacking Middle Eastern oil and gas refineries and threatening U.S. allies such as Israel, which Ahmadinejad has said should be “wiped off the map.” Iran also may be developing an intercontinental

ballistic missile (ICBM) capable of striking the United States and Western Europe.

Second, possessing nuclear weapons could embolden Iran to carry out its radical foreign policy agenda. Iran could increase its interference with American efforts to rebuild Iraq, where Iranian-backed terrorists are targeting U.S. troops. It could also increase its support for terrorist groups such as the Lebanon-based Hezbollah, which has killed more Americans than any terrorist organization except al-Qaeda.

Third, Iran’s acquisition of nuclear weapons would likely touch off a regional nuclear arms race among other Mideast nations and toll the death knell for the global non-proliferation regime. Indeed, several countries in the region, including Egypt, Morocco, Jordan and Saudi Arabia, have signaled that they are exploring nuclear programs of their own.

Strong Economic and Diplomatic Sanctions Can Still Stop Iran

Iran’s nuclear program would be even more advanced today were it not for critical legislation enacted by Congress that slowed its progress. In addition to elevating Iran’s nuclear

RADICAL RHETORIC



Statements by Iran's Leaders

"God willing...we shall soon experience a world without the United States and Zionism."

—President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, September 15, 2005

"Israel must be wiped off the map."

—Ahmadinejad, October 25, 2005

"Some European countries insist on saying Hitler killed millions of innocent Jews in furnaces... we don't accept this claim."

—Ahmadinejad, December 8, 2005

"The Zionist regime is on the slope of disappearance... the continued crimes of the Zionist regime will only accelerate the downfall of this fake regime."

—Ahmadinejad, December 2, 2006

"The Zionist regime is a symbol of hedonism and the manifestation of the ugly soul of some usurper powers that support it."

—Ahmadinejad, March 1, 2007

"The employment of even one atomic bomb inside Israel will wipe it off the face of the earth, but [such a bomb] would only do damage to the Islamic World."

—Former President Hashemi Rafsanjani, December 14, 2001

program to the top of the international community's agenda, Congress and the administration have helped cut off the flow of money and weapons-related materials into Iran. Legislation passed by Congress has authorized sanctions against foreign companies and entities investing in Iran's energy sector or aiding its ballistic missile and nuclear programs.

These steps have helped. But today, Iran's determination to achieve nuclear capabilities puts the international community at a critical juncture. As President Bush and senior Democratic and Republican leaders have declared, the United States cannot afford to take any option off the table in trying to end Iran's atomic ambitions.

Iran Must Fulfill Its Commitments and Give Up Its Nuclear-Weapons Quest

The U.N. Security Council has passed multiple resolutions demanding that Iran stop enriching uranium and provide unfettered access to U.N. arms inspectors in order to ensure that Iran is not pursuing nuclear arms under the cover of a civil nuclear energy program. Before providing Iran with incentives and rewards, the international community must continue to insist that Iran

fulfills these conditions and must enforce U.N. sanctions. The United States and its allies also should push for further economic and diplomatic penalties if Iran continues to defy Security Council demands.

Meanwhile, Congress is considering legislation tightening sanctions on Iran and increasing support for democratic forces within the country. State-level campaigns to divest public pension funds from companies investing in Iran's petroleum and natural gas sector are another means for cutting off funds Iran could use for atomic work. Strong steps today may enable the world to avoid disaster tomorrow.

The United States and its allies should push for further economic and diplomatic penalties if Iran continues to defy Security Council demands.

Key Points

- Iran secretly pursued nuclear weapons for nearly two decades in violation of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and has defied U.N. Security Council resolutions demanding a freeze in its enrichment of uranium.
- Iran has already mastered most steps required to develop nuclear weapons and is rapidly approaching the point at which it will be able to assemble them without outside help.
- Iran possesses ballistic missiles capable of delivering a nuclear warhead to Israel and parts of Europe and is trying to develop a longer-range intercontinental ballistic missile that could hit the United States.
- U.S. policymakers from both parties have asserted that a nuclear-armed Iran would pose unacceptable threats to the United States and its allies and interests in the Middle East.
- Just as bills passed by Congress have slowed Iran's quest for an atomic bomb, a range of strong sanctions imposed by the international community can still stop Iran before it is too late.