

MEMO

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NIE: Iran Remains a Danger

Despite the focus of early news reports, the new National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) actually reinforces the danger posed by Iran's continuing pursuit of the ability to make nuclear weapons. Iran, the world's leading state sponsor of terrorism, remains a threat, vowing to destroy Israel and calling for a world without the United States. Tehran has made significant progress in its ability to enrich uranium—the critical component for nuclear weapons—in direct defiance of multiple U.N Security Council resolutions. The NIE's conclusions that Iran is vulnerable to pressure makes clear that concerted international efforts to impose tough sanctions is the best way to prevent Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapons capability.

The NIE confirms that Iran has pursued nuclear weapons and is continuing key nuclear activities needed to produce atomic arms.

- The NIE's dramatic revelation that Iran had a clandestine nuclear weapons program is perhaps the clearest official confirmation to date that Iran's nuclear efforts—which the regime lied about for 18 years—are ultimately intended to produce an atomic bomb.
- The NIE confirms that Iran's nuclear program, including uranium enrichment—the key process needed to produce the fuel for nuclear weapons—is continuing and the NIE only assesses with “moderate confidence” that Iran has not restarted its weapons program.
- Iran's nuclear efforts, combined with its long-range missile and warhead development programs, could lead to weaponization at a time of its choosing.
- The NIE also confirms that Iran is “keeping open the option to develop nuclear weapons.” Iran's projected timeline for achieving the capability to produce a nuclear weapon has not changed since the last NIE two years ago. Iran will likely be able to produce sufficient fissile material for a weapon by the early part of the next decade, and a weapon within a few years thereafter.



The National Intelligence Estimate on Iran says Tehran made “significant progress” in its enrichment of uranium at its nuclear facility in Natanz.

The NIE says that Iran could restart its “weapons” program any time the regime decides to do so.

- While the unclassified version of the NIE states that Iran stopped nuclear weapon design and weaponization work, the report does not reveal the status of the weapons program when it was halted or indicate that the program was dismantled. This clandestine effort could easily be restarted when Iran has enriched enough uranium to produce a bomb.
- The NIE does not conclude definitively that the Iranian leadership “is willing to maintain the halt of its nuclear weapons program indefinitely.” Israel believes that Iran has already restarted its weapons efforts and sees Iran’s continued enrichment activities as a major threat.
- The NIE also did not rule out that “Iran has acquired from abroad—or will acquire in the future—a nuclear weapon or enough fissile material for a weapon.”

Without a focused international effort to stop Iran, Tehran will achieve a nuclear weapons capability.

- Sanctions are having an effect on Iran and should be increased to ensure that Tehran does not acquire a nuclear weapons capability.
- The combination of current sanctions and the threat of additional measures have already led scores of financial institutions and businesses to end their operations in Iran. Sanctions are increasingly spurring criticism of government policies by top Iranian political leaders and financial experts.
- The NIE concludes that Iran’s actions have been guided by a cost-benefit calculus and is vulnerable to additional pressure, saying: “Our assessment that the program probably was halted primarily in response to international pressure suggests Iran may be more vulnerable to influence on the issue than we judged previously.”
- Tough sanctions offer the best hope to dissuade Iran from resuming its nuclear weapons program. Intensifying sanctions would raise the costs for Iran and increase the chances that it may comply with U.N. Security Council requirements to suspend its enrichment program.