

MEMMO

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Action Needed as Iran Passes Key Nuclear Threshold

Iran has accumulated significantly higher quantities of low-enriched uranium (LEU) than previously reported, according to alarming new information from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). Tehran now has enough LEU to produce a nuclear weapon if it further enriched that material to weapons-grade level. Iran has compounded its defiance of U.N. Security Council Resolutions by denying the IAEA access to critical Iranian facilities and accurate information about its nuclear program. The United States and our allies should immediately undergird a diplomatic approach to Iran with more robust economic, diplomatic and political sanctions to persuade Iran to end its illicit activity.

Iran has amassed a sufficient quantity of uranium to produce a nuclear weapon if it further enriched that material to weapons-grade level.

- Iran has now acquired more than 2,200 pounds of low enriched uranium that—if further enriched to a weapons-grade level—is enough for one first-generation implosion bomb.
- Using its existing centrifuges, Iran would need only 2-3 months to raise the enrichment level of its uranium stockpile to weapons-grade.
- Director of National Intelligence Dennis Blair testified on Capitol Hill that Iran has “the scientific, technical, and industrial capacity eventually to produce nuclear weapons.” He said Tehran may be able to produce enough highly enriched uranium for a nuclear bomb as early as next year.
- In the past three months Iran completed the installation of nearly 1,500 new centrifuges—the machines used to enrich uranium. This represents an increase of more than 40 percent.
- Iran has also begun manufacturing fuel rods for its heavy water reactor at Arak. Once operational, the spent fuel rods could be reprocessed to obtain high-quality plutonium. According to David Albright of the Institute for Science and International Security, the reactor will be able to produce 17-22 pounds of plutonium per year, enough for one to two bombs’ worth of nuclear material.



Iran’s heavy water reactor at Arak could be used to produce plutonium for nuclear weapons.

International inspectors lack access to key Iranian nuclear facilities, making accurate assessments of Iran’s nuclear program impossible.

- IAEA inspectors are allowed to conduct a physical inventory of Iran’s uranium stockpiles at the Natanz enrichment facility only once a year. This lack of access allowed Iran to understate the amount of enrichment carried out last year by nearly 30 percent.
- For six months IAEA inspectors have been denied access to Iran’s heavy water reactor at Arak. In December, Iran completed construction of a domed containment structure over the reactor, making further use of satellite imagery to monitor construction of the reactor impossible.

- According to the IAEA report, lack of access to the heavy water reactor “could adversely impact the Agency’s ability to carry out effective safeguards at that facility.” U.N. Security Council Resolution 1737 demanded that Iran cease all heavy water activity, a demand ignored by Tehran.
- Also, contrary to the request of the Security Council, Iran has failed to implement the Additional Protocol to the Non-Proliferation Treaty, a prerequisite for inspectors to provide credible assurance about the absence of undeclared nuclear material and activities.
- Iran has failed to cooperate with repeated IAEA requests for design information or access to additional locations related to the manufacturing of centrifuges, research and development on uranium enrichment, uranium mining and milling.
- Iran continues to stonewall ongoing IAEA efforts to resolve outstanding questions about possible military nuclear efforts and has essentially cut off communications with the IAEA.

Enhanced U.S. diplomatic efforts must not be open-ended and should be carried out independent of Iran’s political calendar.

- As the United States looks to engage with Iran and in light of the rapid pace of advancements in Iranian capabilities, it is crucial this process begin as soon as possible and not be open-ended.
- For too long, Iran has been allowed to use negotiations as a way to delay sanctions while continuing to advance its nuclear program. Iran can only be given a few months to negotiate without verifiably suspending its enrichment and reprocessing activities.
- The U.S. should not wait until after Iranian elections in June to engage Tehran. Deferring such talks will allow Iran to achieve further nuclear capabilities, making the achievement of a successful outcome that much harder.

Engagement should be backed with tougher sanctions to enhance the probability of success.

- It is critical that Tehran not misconstrue U.S. engagement as a reward for its continuing intransigence. Engagement should be combined with tougher sanctions in order to demonstrate the ramifications for Iran if it abuses America’s genuine desire for better relations.
- To increase the negotiating leverage on Iran, the United States should work with its allies today on spelling out additional tough sanctions that will be imposed on Iran if talks are not successful.
- Sanctions are having an increasingly negative impact on the development of Iran’s oil and gas infrastructure. Iran announced on March 11 that French energy company Total will be pulling out of a large gas development project with Iran “because of sanctions against Iran.”
- The United States should sanction Iran’s Central Bank, foreign banks that continue to conduct transactions with sanctioned Iranian entities, and companies doing business with Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps as a means of enhancing pressure on Iran’s regime.
- The United States should implement current law and sanction foreign energy companies investing more than \$20 million in Iran’s energy sector. President Obama and Secretary of State Clinton both voted to enact this legislation as senators.
- The United States should lead an international diplomatic effort to prohibit the export to Iran of refined petroleum products, a move Obama backed during the campaign. With Iran forced to import 40 percent of its gasoline, limiting the country’s access to such products would have a dramatic economic effect.