

The Iranian Nuclear Threat

Iran's nearly twenty-year secret nuclear program was exposed by an exile group in 2002, and subsequently confirmed by inspectors from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). More than seven years and six United Nations Security Council Resolutions later, the United States continues to lead the international effort to halt Tehran's uranium enrichment program and other activities that could lead to a nuclear weapon.

As the leading state sponsor of terrorism, a nuclear-armed Iran would pose unacceptable threats to global security. The regime's brutal suppression of its own people protesting the June 2009 presidential elections has shown the world the true nature of the regime and has heightened the urgency of stopping Iran's nuclear efforts before they reach fruition. Iran has refused to hold serious talks with the United States and other world powers while continuing to enrich uranium in defiance of U.N. Security Council resolutions. Iran dismissed the 2009 end-of-the-year deadline set by the administration and its allies for Tehran to accept a deal offered by the United Nations to export the majority of its enriched uranium in exchange for nuclear fuel. On June 9, 2010, the U.N. Security Council passed sixth resolution on Iran's nuclear program that imposes significant new sanctions on the regime. On July 1, 2010, President Obama signed into law one of the most comprehensive and toughest sanctions bills



Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad has repeatedly said Iran will not end its uranium enrichment.

that America has ever enacted to date – legislation that Congress passed days earlier with near-unanimous majorities.

Iran Nearing a Nuclear-Arms Capability

In 2006, Iran announced that it had successfully begun enriching uranium. By September 2010, the IAEA released a report showing that Iran had stockpiled more than 5,300 pounds of low-enriched uranium (LEU) that—if further enriched to weapons-grade level—is enough for three nuclear bombs.

Furthermore, Iran has begun converting its stockpile of low enriched uranium (uranium gas enriched to 3.5 percent) into a higher enriched uranium of 20 percent. Enrichment to the 20 percent level represents 85 to 90 percent of the work needed to produce weapons-grade fuel.

The IAEA report also said Iran possesses more than 6,700 centrifuges—machines that spin at

supersonic speeds to enrich the uranium needed to build a nuclear bomb. By increasing the number of centrifuges, Iran can reduce the time it needs to produce enough highly enriched uranium (HEU) for nuclear weapons.

Iran has tested more efficient and advanced centrifuge models, and its stated goal is to assemble more than 50,000 centrifuges for industrial-scale enrichment, which would enable Iran to produce enough HEU for up to 50 nuclear warheads per year.

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Iranian Nuclear Activities Have No Civilian Purpose

In addition, inspectors from the IAEA 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 trigger nuclear explosions, and continues to block IAEA inspections of numerous nuclear facilities.

Iran's Green Salt Project, an alleged clandestine Iranian entity focusing on uranium processing, high explosives and a missile warhead design, remains a matter of serious concern and critical to an assessment of a possible military dimension to Iran's nuclear program. Iran reportedly conducted research and tests on a neutron initiator using uranium deuteride (UD₃). The only application for UD₃ is as a neutron source to trigger an atomic chain reaction in a nuclear warhead.

In September 2009, the United States disclosed Iran was constructing a secret uranium enrichment facility. The size of the facility is insufficient to produce needed fuel for a nuclear power reactor, but ideal to produce (HEU) for at least one bomb a year, and perhaps more. Iran has also been conducting research and tests on technologies needed to deliver a nuclear weapon, including the rapid advancement of its long-range ballistic missile and space program. Tehran has also upped its violent rhetoric and military tests, including war games, rocket and land-mobile missile tests and threats to close the Straits of Hormuz.

A Nuclear Iran Would Destabilize the World

A nuclear-armed Iran would constitute an existential threat to Israel, but would not threaten Israel only. It would likely lead to nuclear proliferation elsewhere in the region and around the globe while fundamentally altering the strategic balance of the Middle East, a vital region for U.S. national security interests.

Nuclear Weapons Would Embolden the Regime

The repression of Iranian protestors after the disputed presidential elections shows the true nature of the Iranian regime: a brutal theocratic dictatorship. Possessing a nuclear weapons capability would only serve to embolden this regime, allowing it to extend its influence throughout the region as part of its hegemonic ambitions. A nuclear-armed Iran would feel confident in further intensifying its support for terrorist allies like Syria, Hamas and Hizballah, which are actively working to undermine U.S. interests and peace efforts. Iran could also share its nuclear technology with anti-American terrorist groups to carry out attacks against U.S. assets worldwide.

A Nuclear Iran Would Destabilize Pro-Western Arab States

Arab countries with strong ties to the United States are terrified of Iran achieving a nuclear weapons capability. Gulf countries in particular fear that Iran will use its nuclear umbrella to intimidate them and radicalize their people. Iran might never need to actually use a nuclear weapon; the mere potential might persuade its neighbors to do Iran's bidding and further distance themselves from the United States.

Nuclear Arms, Missiles Would Pose Major Threat to U.S.

By combining a nuclear weapon with its ballistic missile program—already capable of targeting American troops in the Middle East and parts of Europe—Iran also would pose a serious nuclear threat to the United States and its allies. Such a threat would increase as Iran is able to perfect



Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei has repeatedly called for Israel's destruction.

advanced ballistic missile technology and build missiles capable of striking the United States and Western Europe.

Nuclear Iran Would Spur Regional Arms Race, Kill Non-Proliferation Regime

Iran's acquisition of nuclear weapons also would likely touch off a regional nuclear arms race. Indeed, many Arab states have expressed new interest in "peaceful" nuclear programs as Iran continues its nuclear weapons pursuit. This heightened interest in nuclear technology would likely spread beyond the Middle East, marking the death knell of the global non-proliferation regime. A world in which nuclear weapons have spread widely would be a much more dangerous place and exponentially increase the likelihood that such weapons might actually be used.