

MEMMO

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Mounting Pressure Needed as Iran Advances Nuclear Program

Despite renewed international dialogue with Iran, expectations remain low that Tehran will meet minimal international demands to end its nuclear weapons quest. The International Atomic Energy Agency reports that Iran is pressing ahead with its nuclear efforts, more efficiently operating a greater number of centrifuges and advancing work on weaponization and missile technology. While recently imposed international sanctions are having a real impact in Iran, they have not yet brought about a change in the regime's behavior. Sustaining and increasing that pressure offer the best prospect to persuade Tehran to change course.

Iran is continuing to advance its nuclear program and has overcome some technical hurdles.

- Iran announced Dec. 5 that it had delivered for the first time homemade “yellowcake”—a concentrated form of uranium required for producing fuel for nuclear enrichment—to a fuel-conversion facility in the city of Isfahan.
- Iran, according to the latest IAEA report, has increased its low-enriched uranium production rate over the past three months and now has enough material—if further enriched—for three nuclear bombs.
- Iran appears to have overcome some technical challenges in its enrichment program, including a short stoppage of some enrichment activity possibly caused by the so-called Stuxnet computer virus, and is now operating almost 28 percent more centrifuges than in August.
- During the past year, Iran has also increased the efficiency of its production of 20 percent enriched uranium. That level represents 85 percent of the work needed to produce fuel for a nuclear weapon.



Despite some technical problems, Iran has stockpiled enough low-enriched uranium to produce the fuel for three nuclear bombs.

Despite protests that its nuclear program is entirely peaceful, Iran is continuing to work on weaponization and long-range missiles.

- Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral Michael Mullen recently warned that Iran continues to pursue nuclear weaponization, saying, “Iran is still very much on a path to be able to develop nuclear weapons, and including weaponizing them, putting them on a missile and being able to use them.”
- Iran has failed to respond to repeated IAEA requests for information on the building of additional uranium enrichment facilities, prompting the agency to express concern about “undisclosed” activities including the possible development of a nuclear warhead.

- A recent U.N. experts committee report revealed that Iran allegedly received “nuclear-related and ballistic missile-related equipment, know-how and technology” from North Korea.
- According to a *New York Times* report on State Department cables leaked by Wikileaks, North Korea may also have supplied Iran with advanced missiles capable of striking most of Western Europe and Russia. The North Korean missile is capable of carrying a nuclear warhead.

Sanctions are hurting Iran’s regime and causing increasing tensions within the ruling elite.

- At the same time, some recent difficulties with its nuclear program have caused some disruption in Tehran’s efforts while heightening political tensions within the regime, providing hope that sanctions may still have an opportunity to succeed.
- In November, the Iranian parliament revealed that it had planned to impeach Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad over his mishandling of the economy. Only interference by Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei prevented the parliament from proceeding on the charges.
- With increasing economic difficulties, the Iranian government has approved reductions in public subsidies on food, gas and other basic commodities. The pending subsidy cuts would quadruple the price of many basic commodities.
- Iranian state-run media affiliated with Ahmadinejad’s conservative rival, Parliamentary Speaker Ali Larijani, claimed that Iran is experiencing one of the worst unemployment rates among oil-producing nations.
- The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) expressed unprecedented criticism of Ahmadinejad’s efforts to consolidate centers of power under his control. An article published in the IRGC’s monthly magazine accused Ahmadinejad of disregarding the law and creating division in Iran.

The United States and its allies must press Iran to suspend its uranium enrichment program before Iran crosses essential nuclear thresholds.

- While international sanctions are clearly having an impact on the Iranian economy, the United States cannot rest until Iran gives up its quest for nuclear weapons capability.
- Tehran must not be allowed to use renewed talks with the United States and other powers to press ahead with its nuclear program and avoid further sanctions. The international community must continue to step up sanctions until Iran has fully and verifiably suspended all illicit nuclear activity.
- The Obama administration must press forward with full enforcement of U.S. sanctions laws until Iran suspends its nuclear program. The president should penalize companies working in Iran’s energy sector, aiding the IRGC, or facilitating Tehran’s illicit financial activities.
- Crippling sanctions combined with tough diplomacy still provide the best chance to prevent policymakers from facing a very stark choice: accepting a nuclear-armed Iran or using military action to prevent Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapons capability.