

Open Defiance

Despite some headlines to the contrary, the National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) on Iran published in early winter only reinforced our understanding of the danger posed by Tehran's ongoing pursuit of a nuclear weapons capability.

The NIE's dramatic revelation that the Islamic Republic had a clandestine nuclear weapons program is perhaps the clearest official confirmation to date that Iran's nuclear efforts—which the regime illegally concealed for more than 18 years—are ultimately intended to produce an atomic bomb.

If Iran is trying to suggest otherwise, the regime's actions are unconvincing. Iranian leaders boast, and the NIE confirmed, that Tehran is pressing ahead with its efforts to enrich uranium—the most important and difficult step in developing a nuclear weapon. Thus, Iran could restart its weapons program any time the regime chooses to do so.

Without a focused international effort to stop Iran, Tehran will likely achieve a nuclear weapons capability soon. Fortunately, not only the United States but many other key global players as well agree that now is no time to back down from efforts to isolate the Islamic Republic for its illicit atomic work.

"I don't see why we should renounce sanctions," French President Nicolas Sarkozy said. "What made Iran budge so far has been sanctions and firmness." Standing beside Sarkozy, German Chancellor Angela Merkel added that "Iran continues to pose a danger."

British Foreign Secretary David Miliband penned an op-ed in the Financial Times, noting that Iran is still pursuing "an enrichment program that has no apparent civilian application, but which could produce fissile material for a nuclear weapon." He called for the "resolve and unity of the international community" in confronting Iran.

The U.N.'s nuclear watchdog remains concerned about Iranian intentions. "We are still worried about certain aspects of Iran's nuclear program, and we need answers, particularly about so called military aspects of the program," a senior International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) official said.

Tough sanctions offer the best hope to dissuade Iran from pursuing a nuclear weapons program. Iran has already ignored two binding U.N. Security Council resolutions demanding that it verifiably suspend its efforts to enrich uranium. Now is the time for stringent diplomatic and financial sanctions against Tehran. Until Iran suspends enrichment and reveals the scope of its past and present nuclear activities, the rest of the world cannot afford to back down.