



Sanction Iran's Suppliers

Iran can now complete the entire nuclear fuel cycle without outside help. Or at least that's what the head of the country's Atomic Energy Organization claims. The likely truth is that Iran has not yet reached that capability. Despite Iran's bravado, the Islamic Republic remains dependent on outside materials to keep its nuclear program operating.

Still, that is no reason to stop worrying about the Islamist theocracy's nuclear ambitions. Someday—and someday soon—Iran could be self-sufficient.

For many years, the United States has been trying to stop shipments of nuclear supplies to Iran and punish those responsible for exporting the materials. Presidents Clinton, Bush and Obama each signed executive orders that target the assets of any entity involved in weapons of mass destruction or missile proliferation. And Congress has targeted Iran with sanctions legislation for more than a decade.

The most recent of these laws, the Comprehensive Iran Sanctions, Accountability, and Divestment Act, imposed new penalties on countries that serve as transshipment points for illicit materials heading to Iran. The legislation also targeted Islamic Republic's dependence on refined petroleum and, as demonstrated by the reaction to recent subsidy cuts on gasoline in Iran, the Islamic Republic is feeling the pressure.

Yet, much more needs to be done to enforce these laws and to stop Iran from acquiring parts for its nuclear program. U.S. law requires that the State Department issue a report every six months on companies aiding Iran, and requires the implementation of sanctions against the entities. Neither the Bush nor the Obama administration has met the reporting deadlines set by Congress.

In fact, the report for fiscal year 2007 was only recently delivered to Congress. The administration needs to compile these reports on time and sanction the companies identified in the reports, including those from China.

In addition, the United States needs to station additional enforcement personnel at key trading hubs around the world. It's hard to conduct investigations and prevent illicit shipments to Iran if there are not enough people assigned to do that. The United States currently has just one export enforcement agent in China and one in the United Arab Emirates. That won't do the trick.

By targeting those who enable Iran's nuclear and missile program, the United States can slow Iran's progress towards a nuclear weapon capability. Such a slowdown can allow more time for international sanctions—which are having real impact on Iran's economy—to persuade Iran's leaders that their nuclear ambitions are not worth the cost.