



AIPAC

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Iran: Questions and Answers

1. *Why would a nuclear-capable Iran be a threat to the United States and a destabilizing force in the entire Middle East?*

Iran may have the independent capability to develop a nuclear weapon within a year. With such a capability, Iran would be a strategic nightmare for the United States and all countries of the Middle East. Possession of a nuclear weapon would radically shift the strategic calculus in the region. Simply by possessing nuclear weapons, Iran would dramatically increase its ability to throw its weight around in the Middle East. All of the Gulf Arab states would be much more vulnerable to Iranian influence. A nuclear Iran could severely limit American freedom of action against an emboldened Iran's activities elsewhere in the region.

If Iran gets a nuclear weapon, a nuclear arms race in the Middle East could result, with several countries seeking that capability. If Iran has it, Turkey, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Syria may all feel the necessity to get it. That could lead to the end of our decades-long global efforts to stop the spread of nuclear weapons. Iran might also choose to sell or give the technology to other countries or terrorist groups. Imagine one nuclear weapon in the hands of a suicide bomber.

In sum, Iran's influence and freedom of action would increase, and the U.S. and its allies would have their influence diminished. Iran has seen how much more cautiously we have dealt with North Korea and Pakistan, two countries that already have nuclear weapons, than with Iraq and Afghanistan, two countries that don't. Iran already has missiles that can reach Israel and parts of Europe. Iran is also working on missile delivery systems that could hit virtually all of Europe, and has plans for ones that could reach the United States.

2. *Why is Iran a threat to Israel?*

Even without a nuclear weapon, Iran is already a threat to Israel. As the world's leading state sponsor of terrorism, Iran finances, arms and trains Hizballah, the "Party of God" terror group in southern Lebanon that has killed hundreds of Americans, Europeans and Israelis since the 1980s. Hizballah currently has some 13,000 rockets poised to strike Israel, many of which have the capability of hitting Israel's population centers. Hizballah has also penetrated the West Bank and Gaza in recent years and is responsible for many of the terror attacks launched against Israelis from these areas. Iran also supports other terrorist groups such as Palestinian Islamic Jihad.

If Iran actually gets a nuclear bomb, along with its advanced missile delivery capability, the entire Zionist enterprise of the last 120 years will be at risk. Iran's leaders have publicly called for the destruction of Israel. They have boldly stated that it would take just one bomb to wipe Israel off the face of the map, while the Muslim world can absorb many nuclear bombs. Of course, Iran wouldn't

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actually have to use a nuclear weapon against Israel to threaten Israel's security. Mere possession of such a weapon would increase Iran's influence in the region and limit Israel's freedom to act in its own self-defense against Hizballah and others bent on Israel's destruction.

3. *As a party to the NPT, why shouldn't Iran be allowed to continue its nuclear development program under IAEA safeguards? Isn't Iran permitted to develop nuclear energy for peaceful purposes?*

Iran is a longtime member of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (the NPT) and has legally foresworn acquiring nuclear weapons. All its nuclear activities are treaty-bound to be constantly safeguarded by the International Atomic Energy Agency, the IAEA. However, for 18 years, Iran had a clandestine nuclear program that came to light only two years ago when an Iranian opposition group exposed hidden nuclear facilities in Iran. Since that time, the IAEA has verified through inspectors on the ground in Iran the existence of these facilities.

Now that its nuclear program has been revealed, experts believe Iran has used the cover of a civilian nuclear program to secretly pursue nuclear arms. Clearly, this is not allowed under the NPT. While it is true that NPT parties are permitted to have "peaceful" nuclear programs, this does not mean that countries like Iran can use such programs as legal disguises to defeat the very purpose of the treaty. Otherwise, any country would be permitted to seek a nuclear fuel cycle under the NPT and simply break out of the treaty at the last moment and divert its technology to weapons development. By then, it would be too late for the world to act.

Iran's claim that its nuclear program is intended only for peaceful purposes, to produce electricity, is simply not credible. It would be much cheaper for Iran to produce electricity by using its vast deposits of natural gas—Iran has one of the world's largest proven reserves of natural gas, on top of its huge petroleum deposits.

Iran demands that it have mastery over the entire nuclear fuel cycle—from mining its own natural uranium to enrichment and reprocessing. Once Iran has that capability, it will have the independent ability to start production of nuclear weapons at a moment's notice. Even if it were to place its program under IAEA inspection, Iran could kick out the inspectors whenever it wanted. Moreover, it may well be that the IAEA even now has not uncovered all of Iran's nuclear activities.

Iran has already violated proliferation safeguards under the NPT by lying about its program for years as well as secretly importing technology and know-how from, among others, the Khan network in Pakistan for the purpose of building a bomb.

4. *In what specific ways has Iran violated its Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty commitments?*

Since 1987, Iran has pursued a clandestine nuclear program in violation of its obligations under the NPT. All of the following activities have been seen or documented by IAEA inspectors over the past two years. (None of it comes from intelligence agencies).

Iran has:

- built a pilot uranium enrichment facility and is now completing a huge enrichment facility that would produce enough highly enriched uranium for up to 50 nuclear weapons a year.
- imported 1.8 tons of uranium secretly from China.
- constructed a facility to convert the uranium into uranium hexafluoride gas to be fed into centrifuges for enrichment.
- imported the designs for centrifuges and is manufacturing them in Iran.
- experimented with separating plutonium, the second route to a nuclear weapon.

- built a heavy-water conversion facility to be used in heavy-water nuclear reactors, which produce great amounts of plutonium as part of the spent fuel.
- experimented with polonium, a radioactive isotope that has one primary purpose: to trigger a nuclear explosive device.

5. To stop Iran from developing its nuclear program, wouldn't it be more useful for the United States to have a direct dialogue with Iran and offer carrots as well as sticks?

Won't further diplomatic and economic sanctions backfire and encourage rather than discourage Iran from developing its nuclear program? Wouldn't diplomacy be better than isolation?

The European Union, led by “the EU-3”—Britain, France, and Germany—are now negotiating with Iran with the support of the US. They are offering economic incentives to Iran if it dismantles its enrichment and reprocessing capabilities. Iran, however, insists on maintaining those capabilities, offering instead to have them under IAEA safeguards. Very little progress has occurred.

Dialogue with Iran will not work if it ends up legitimizing Iran's pattern of cheating. While as far as we know, efforts by the EU-3 have been successful in getting Iran to temporarily suspend its uranium enrichment, Iranian officials continuously stress that this is only temporary and that they soon expect to resume their nuclear development program. They claim an unfettered right to complete the nuclear fuel cycle.

Offering incentives to Iran before it actually dismantles its nuclear program will lead only to failure. As it did after reaching an earlier agreement with the EU in 2003, Iran will cheat until it gets caught and increase its demands--all while continuing its misbehavior--until a new temporary agreement is reached.

Iran, for example, is once again taking advantage of the EU's good intentions by threatening to break out of the current agreement and resume its uranium enrichment program unless the Europeans meet their demands. A better answer would be for the Europeans to stand up to Iran and demand a complete termination of its nuclear efforts. Iran's failure to respond accordingly would result in the Europeans joining the United States in referring the entire matter to the U.N. Security Council which could impose legally-binding, strict multilateral sanctions. The global community still has a lot of leverage it can use with Iran but must act before it is too late.

6. If Israel has a nuclear capability, why shouldn't Iran?

Unlike Iran, Israel would never use nuclear weapons unless faced with the most dire of circumstances, nor would it share or sell its nuclear capabilities to other regimes or terrorist groups, a clear risk with Iran. Israeli nuclear capabilities have not led to a nuclear arms race in the Middle East; Iranian possession could very well lead to such an outcome. Iran is a supporter of international terrorism whose stated purpose is the destruction of the State of Israel. It seeks a nuclear weapon in order to expand its regional influence and intimidate its neighbors. A nuclear bomb controlled by radical clerics in Tehran will destabilize the entire Middle East.

7. Since the Bush Administration policies already are tough on Iran, what role is there for Congress? What is the purpose of the “Iran Freedom Support Act?”

Congress can supplement the efforts of the Administration by demonstrating its own resolve. Congress is now considering legislation that would seek to increase the economic pressure on Iran to stop its nuclear program and that would seek to support those forces inside and outside of Iran fighting for a civil society and a democratic government there. It would tighten existing sanctions on Iran, urge divestment by American stockholders in foreign companies (American companies are already prohibited) which are

developing the Iranian petroleum sector—Iran’s one hard currency earner, and seek to support groups promoting a civil society in Iran.

This bill is based on the premise that increased economic pressure on Iran may alter Iranian policies. Iranian leaders are sensitive to the possibility of political turmoil as their economy worsens.

8. If Iran is so determined to acquire a nuclear weapons capability, how will this legislation stop them? Haven’t previous legislative efforts failed?

Previous efforts by Congress and the President (in the form of both laws and executive orders) have helped slow money, technology and know-how from flowing to Iran. For example, the Iran Libya Sanctions Act (ILSA), which passed in 1996, has served to slow foreign investment in Iran’s energy sector. The Iran Nonproliferation Act (2000) has been used to sanction foreign companies helping the Iranian nuclear program. The current legislation, the “Iran Freedom Support Act,” is designed to add to the economic and diplomatic approaches currently underway. The EU is engaged in negotiations with Iran and the issue could soon be referred to the United Nations Security Council.

Sanctions and diplomatic pressure can work, especially if the Europeans and the United Nations will collaborate with the United States and demonstrate resolve. Iranian leaders appear to be sensitive to how their country is perceived in the world community as well as to recent developments in the Middle East. For their own internal political reasons (i.e. fear of political turmoil), they might be responsive to a unified, multilateral regime of economic sanctions combined with provisions in this bill.

Sixty percent of Iranians are either unemployed or underemployed. Sixty-five percent of Iranians are under the age of 30. Most of them have learned to hate the regime and yearn for democracy, both because of the lack of economic opportunity and because of the Islamic strictures forced.

There are those among the ruling mullahs who understand this. They know that their citizens have watched developments elsewhere in the region, the fact that millions of Iraqis defied death threats to go and vote, that free elections were held by the Palestinians, that the Lebanese marched successfully in the streets of Beirut to remove the Syrian presence and domination of their country, and that Egypt has announced multiparty presidential elections. These mullahs believe that further economic and political isolation will erode regime stability. We need to make them more nervous still, so that they understand that the continued pursuit of nuclear weapons doesn’t lead to regime stability, but rather its precise opposite.

9. But aren’t we opposed to divestment? Isn’t it being used by some against Israel?

Divestment is a tool, not a principle. Sometimes its use is appropriate, sometimes it isn’t. It was used effectively and, many would argue, appropriately to help bring down the apartheid regime in South Africa. Its use against Israel, a democratic nation struggling against terrorism to maintain its existence, freedom, and democracy, is absolutely wrong. Its use to put pressure on a rogue regime seeking nuclear weapons that would destabilize the Middle East is perfectly appropriate.