

Iran's Challenge to the Nuclear Nonproliferation Regime

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President Bush has made clear on numerous occasions that the paramount security challenge of our time is to prevent the world's most dangerous weapons from falling into the hands of the world's most dangerous regimes. We have reoriented U.S. national security policy to confront this challenge, and Iran today provides a key test of our efforts. Just two days ago in his State of the Union address, President Bush stated:

The Iranian Government is defying the world with its nuclear ambitions, and the nations of the world must not permit the Iranian regime to gain nuclear weapons. America will continue to rally the world to confront these threats.

We have seen encouraging signs over the past several weeks, and in particular over the past few days, of the growing determination of the international community to prevent Iran from succeeding in its quest to produce nuclear weapons. President Ahmadinejad has helped focus international attention on Iran's intentions, most famously in his speech calling for Israel to be "wiped off the map," but in fact international concern has been growing for years.

Since late 2002, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) has been investigating evidence of undeclared nuclear activities and facilities in Iran. Over the past three years, the IAEA has issued nine written reports spelling out the results of its investigation. These reports document that since the mid-1980s, Iran has systematically carried out secret nuclear activities, including undeclared uranium enrichment and undeclared plutonium separation. They expressly accuse Iran of "Failure on many occasions to cooperate to facilitate implementation of safeguards, as evidenced by extensive concealment activities."

There can be little doubt that the reason Iran has purposefully concealed its nuclear fuel cycle activities for almost 20 years is because those activities are aimed at developing nuclear weapons. While the IAEA has successfully cornered the Iranians into admitting some of these activities, Iran has continued to withhold full cooperation. As IAEA Director General ElBaradei informed the IAEA Board in his September 2005 report, "In view of the fact that the Agency is not yet in a position to clarify some important outstanding issues after two and a half years of intensive inspections and investigations, Iran's full transparency is indispensable and overdue."

Estimates of the total cost of Iran's nuclear fuel cycle-related investments range from \$600 million to \$1 billion and higher. It is next to impossible to conclude that Iran is making investments of this magnitude other than for nuclear weapons -- especially given Iran's large oil and gas reserves, its lack of any functioning nuclear reactors, and Russia's contractual commitment to supply fuel for the one reactor currently under construction for at least the first ten years of operation.

The Iranian regime has pursued dual technological routes to attain the capability to produce fissile material for nuclear weapons. We believe Iran currently is pursuing a plutonium program through the construction of a heavy water research reactor and a heavy water plant. In addition, Iran's aggressive pursuit of uranium enrichment technology has been well documented by the IAEA and others. The construction of facilities to convert and enrich uranium is ongoing.

Just last month Iran removed IAEA seals at the Natanz Enrichment Facility and elsewhere, and stated its intention to feed UF6 into centrifuges for what it claims are "research and development" purposes. This is critically important, because once the Iranians have been able to master this technology, they will be capable of conducting large scale uranium enrichment and producing enough fissile material for nuclear weapons.

One particularly damning piece of evidence recently revealed by the IAEA is a document uncovered by inspectors indicating that Iran received information from a clandestine nuclear proliferation network on casting and machining hemispheres of uranium metal. This is alarming because there are no known applications for such hemispheres other than nuclear weapons. As with a number of other questions posed by the IAEA, Iran has yet to fully explain its dealings with this clandestine proliferation network.

An Iranian regime with nuclear weapons is simply unacceptable. It would be able to threaten strikes against U.S. forces, as well as our friends and allies in the Middle East, Europe and Asia. We know that Iran is currently producing a 1300-km range ballistic missile known as the Shahab-3 and has expressed publicly its intention to pursue a long-range ballistic missile capability. Furthermore, we are concerned that if Iran acquires nuclear weapons, the result could be a nuclear proliferation domino effect in the region that would be devastating to the global nonproliferation regime.

So what actions are we undertaking to prevent Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapon? Recognizing that international cooperation is necessary to resolve this problem, the United States has actively supported the diplomatic efforts of the United Kingdom, France, and Germany -- the so-called EU3. We applauded the November 2004 Paris agreement between the EU3 and Iran, under which Iran promised to suspend all enrichment related activities in order to create an atmosphere conducive to negotiations. We then lent our support to the EU3's diplomatic proposal last year that offered Iran robust economic incentives and nuclear cooperation with the EU.

When Iran rejected that proposal and resumed uranium conversion this past August, the IAEA Board of Governors responded by adopting a resolution on September 24 that found Iran in noncompliance with its safeguards obligations. The Board also found that Iran's clandestine nuclear activities and the lack of confidence in its stated peaceful intentions raise questions that are within the competence of the United Nations Security Council.

It is important to note that, under Article XII.C of the IAEA Statute, a noncompliance finding requires a "report" to the Security Council. The Board's September 24 resolution expressly provided that the Board would "address the timing and content" of the required report at a later date. At the November IAEA Board meeting, despite the fact that we were confident we had a majority of votes for an immediate report to the Security Council, we supported a request by the EU to again postpone making that report, so as to broaden international support and to give Iran additional time to change course.

Despite efforts by the EU3 and entreaties by Russia to find a way forward, Iran continued to reject all serious diplomatic overtures. Last month Iran took a further step away from the Paris Agreement by removing IAEA seals in order to resume uranium enrichment activities.

This past Tuesday, the foreign ministers of the Britain, France, Germany, Russia, China, and the United States met in London and agreed that at the Extraordinary IAEA Board beginning today in Vienna, the IAEA Board should immediately report Iran to the Security Council, and that the Security Council should take up the issue after the IAEA Director General's report to the March IAEA Board meeting. Thus, our patience has paid off, as we have broadened international support to include both Russia and China.

While both President Bush and Secretary Rice have indicated that now is the time for the IAEA Board to report Iran to the Security Council, such action does not mean that diplomacy has come to an end. Rather, we will look to the Security Council to reinforce the efforts of the IAEA. We fully expect the Security Council to call upon Iran to cooperate with the IAEA. The Council may also decide to enhance the IAEA's legal authority to investigate all aspects of Iran's nuclear program.

We have traveled a bumpy road since the IAEA Board first adopted a resolution condemning Iran's failure to comply with its safeguards obligations back in November 2003, and much work lies ahead of us. But we are making progress, and the United States will remain committed to working with the EU3, Russia, China, and other members of the international community to turn Iran into a showcase example of effective multilateralism.

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