

Intelligence Assessments of Iran's Nuclear Program

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Developing an effective policy to prevent an Iranian nuclear weapon is crucial, as a nuclear-armed Iran would represent a serious security risk to the United States.

The debate over Iran policy options however, is frequently obscured by misunderstandings of the status of Iran's nuclear program and misrepresentations of official statements.¹ A fact-based debate is essential to developing an effective policy towards Iran.²

This fact sheet sets the record straight by presenting the official IAEA and U.S. assessments of the status of Iran's nuclear program.

IAEA Assessments

The assessments produced by the International Atomic Energy Agency are based on intelligence provided by member states which the agency deems credible,³ along with data collected through inspections and consultations with Iranian officials.

Based upon these sources, the IAEA has determined that Iran's structured nuclear weapons program was disbanded in 2003, although alleged weaponization experiments may have continued on an ad hoc basis after 2003.

Moreover, the IAEA acknowledges that due to restricted access to some Iranian nuclear facilities (such as the Parchin complex) and a lack of cooperation from Iran, the agency is not able to conclusively verify the peaceful nature of Iran's entire nuclear program.

The IAEA's conclusions have remained unchanged since their November 2011 report.



Photo Courtesy of Dean Calma/IAEA

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November 2011 IAEA Report

“[W]ork on the AMAD Plan [purportedly a comprehensive program including research on uranium enrichment, explosives testing, and delivery vehicles] was stopped rather abruptly pursuant to a ‘halt order’ instruction issued in late 2003 by senior Iranian officials.”⁴

“The Agency has serious concerns regarding possible military dimensions to Iran’s nuclear programme. After assessing carefully and critically the extensive information available to it, the Agency finds the information to be, overall, credible. The information indicates that Iran has carried out activities relevant to the development of a nuclear explosive device. The information also indicates that prior to the end of 2003, these activities took place under a structured programme, and that some activities may still be ongoing.”

“Given the concerns identified above, Iran is requested to engage substantively with the Agency without delay for the purpose of providing clarifications regarding possible military dimensions to Iran’s nuclear programme...”⁵

November 2012 IAEA Report

“[A]s Iran is not providing the necessary cooperation...the Agency is unable to provide credible assurance about the absence of undeclared nuclear material and activities in Iran, and therefore to conclude that all nuclear material in Iran is in peaceful activities.”⁶

“It is a matter of concern that the extensive and significant activities which have taken place since February 2012 at the location within the Parchin site to which the Agency has requested access will have seriously undermined the Agency’s ability to undertake effective verification.”⁷

U.S. Assessments

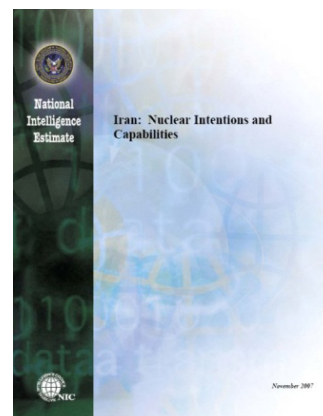
Like the IAEA, the U.S. intelligence community assess that Iran’s nuclear weapons program was discontinued in 2003. Moreover, U.S. intelligence also maintains that Iran’s leadership has not yet decided to pursue a nuclear weapon.

This assessment has been publicly repeated by several U.S. national security experts.

2007 National Intelligence Estimate

“We judge with high confidence that in fall 2003, Tehran halted its nuclear weapons program; we also assess with moderate-to-high confidence that Tehran at a minimum is keeping open the option to develop nuclear weapons.”⁸

“We assess with moderate confidence Tehran had not restarted its nuclear weapons program as of mid-2007, but we do not know whether it currently intends to develop nuclear weapons.”⁹



Lieutenant General Ronald Burgess

Former Director, Defense Intelligence Agency

“The bottom line assessments of the [2007 National Intelligence Estimate] still hold true... We have not seen indication that the [Iranian] government has made the decision to move ahead with the program. But the fact still remains that we don’t know what we don’t know.”¹⁰

Media interview,
January 2010



James Clapper

Director of National Intelligence

“We continue to assess Iran is keeping open the option to develop nuclear weapons in part by developing various nuclear capabilities that better position it to produce such weapons, should it choose to do so. We do not know, however, if Iran will eventually decide to build nuclear weapons.”¹¹

Testimony before Congress on the annual Worldwide Threat Assessment,
February 2011



Senator Olympia Snowe: “I gather we agree with the fact that Iran has not made a decision to weaponize at this point. Director Clapper, do you agree on that?”

Director Clapper: “Yes, but they are certainly moving on that path. But we don’t believe they’ve actually made the decision to go ahead with a nuclear weapon.”¹²

Testimony before Congress on the annual Worldwide Threat Assessment,
January 2012

Leon Panetta

Secretary of Defense

“[T]he intelligence is clear that [the Iranians] have not made a firm decision to proceed with the development of a nuclear weapon.”¹³

Media Interview,
March 2012



General Martin Dempsey

Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff

General Dempsey: “[W]e also know -- or believe we know -- that the Iranian regime has not decided that they will embark on the effort to weaponize their nuclear capability.”

Fareed Zakaria, CNN: “Do you think that is still unclear, that they’re moving on a path for nuclear technology, but whether or not they choose to make a nuclear weapon is unclear?”

General Dempsey: “It is. I believe it is unclear, and on that basis I think it would be premature to exclusively decide that the time for a military option was upon us.”¹⁴

Media Interview,
January 2012



Endnotes

1. Greg Thielmann and Benjamin Loehrke, “Chain reaction: How the media has misread the IAEA’s report on Iran,” *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, November 23, 2011, <http://www.thebulletin.org/web-edition/features/chain-reaction-how-the-media-has-misread-the-iaeas-report-iran>, accessed October 2012.
2. The Iran Project, “Weighing the Benefits and Costs of Military Action against Iran,” September 2012, <http://www.scribd.com/doc/106806148/IranReport-092412-Final#fullscreen>, accessed October 2012.
3. IAEA Director General, “Implementation of the NPT Safeguards Agreement and relevant provisions of Security Council resolutions in the Islamic Republic of Iran,” International Atomic Energy Agency, November 8, 2011, <http://www.iaea.org/Publications/Documents/Board/2011/gov2011-65.pdf>, accessed October 2012, Page 8.
4. *Ibid.* Annex Page 6. Under the AMAD Plan experiments were conducted in uranium enrichment, explosive testing, and payload reengineering of the Shahab 3 missile.
5. *Ibid.* Page 9.
6. IAEA Director General, “Implementation of the NPT Safeguards Agreement and relevant provisions of Security Council resolutions in the Islamic Republic of Iran,” International Atomic Energy Agency, November 16, 2012, http://www.isis-online.org/uploads/isis-reports/documents/Iran_safeguards_report_November_2012.pdf, accessed November 2012, Page 12.
7. *Ibid.*
8. National Intelligence Council, “Iran: Nuclear Intentions and Capabilities,” Office of the Director of National Intelligence, November 2007, http://www.dni.gov/files/documents/Newsroom/Reports%20and%20Pubs/20071203_release.pdf, accessed October 2012.
9. *Ibid.*
10. Gary Thomas “US Defense Spy Chief: Iran Undecided on Nuclear Bomb” <http://www.voanews.com/content/us-defense-spy-chief-iran-undecided-on-nuclear-bomb-81256887/111417.html>, accessed October 2012.
11. James Clapper, “Statement for the Record on the Worldwide Threat Assessment of the U.S. Intelligence Community for the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence,” Office of the Director of National Intelligence, February 16, 2011, http://www.dni.gov/files/documents/Newsroom/Testimonies/20110216_testimony_sfr.pdf, accessed October 2012. Page 4.
12. Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, “Current and Projected National Security Threats to the United States,” Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, January 31, 2012, http://www.fas.org/irp/congress/2012_hr/threat.pdf, accessed October 2012, Page 59.
13. Leon Panetta, “Secretary of Defense Leon E. Panetta Interview with Al-Hurra Television,” U.S. Department of Defense, March 16, 2012, <http://www.defense.gov/Transcripts/Transcript.aspx?TranscriptID=4995>, accessed October 2012.
14. Martin Dempsey, “Fareed Zakaria GPS Interview with Gen. Martin Dempsey,” CNN, February 19, 2012, <http://transcripts.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/120219/fzgps.01.html>, accessed October 2012.

Building a New American Arsenal

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Gone are the days when a nation's strength could be measured by bombers and battleships. Security in this new era requires a New American Arsenal harnessing all of America's strengths: the force of our diplomacy; the might of our military; the vigor of our economy; and the power of our ideals.

We believe that America must lead other nations in the pursuit of our common goals and shared security. We must confront international challenges with all the tools at our disposal. We must address emerging problems before they become security crises. And to do this, we must forge a new bipartisan consensus at home.

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We live in a time when the threats to our security are as complex and diverse as terrorism, the spread of weapons of mass destruction, climate change, failed and failing states, disease, and pandemics. The same-old solutions and partisan bickering won't do. America needs an honest dialogue about security that is as robust as it is realistic.

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