

# The Iranian Nuclear Program: Its Implications for Global Security

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**Abstract:** The main aim of this article will be to look at what are the regional and global implications of the Iranian nuclear program especially in light of the ongoing nuclear negotiations between Iran and the United States. Initially it is asked how the nuclear program has impacted Iran's relations with neighboring countries especially Israel and Saudi Arabia. Then the impact of sanctions on Iran which have been imposed due to the nuclear program is looked at. After this a historical background is provided to the Iranian nuclear program right from the era of the Shah to that of the Islamic Republic. Following this the position of the Iranian people and the government on the nuclear program is studied. It is found out that majority of Iranians accept the importance of the nuclear program. The Iranian government has always maintained the peaceful nature of its nuclear program. After this we look at the US perspective. The US has been consistently opposed to Iran acquiring nuclear weapons. The current negotiations between Iran and the United States offers hope that this dispute will be resolved peacefully.

**Keywords:** Iran, Islamic Republic, Nuclear Program, Shah, West

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The nature of this research work is analytical. The purpose of this work is to look into the nature of the Iranian nuclear program and its impact on the West Asian region and the world at large. The main contribution of this paper is to look at the effect the nuclear program has had on Iran and its relations with neighboring countries and the world at large.

Iran's nuclear program has always been a bone of contention between the Islamic Republic and the West. While the Western countries have looked at it as a threat to global security, Iran has looked at it as an inherent right which had been denied to it by the West, and which it has succeeded in achieving on its own. For the West Iran's nuclear program is an inherent threat to the security of its key ally in the region, Israel. The Iranians on the other hand have repeatedly stressed the peaceful nature of their nuclear program. This is in spite of the continuing Iranian rhetoric of "wiping Israel off from the face of the earth". The Israelis take this threat very seriously and have even said that they will strike Iran on its own, independent of Western countries if the Islamic Republic develops nuclear weapons capability. There is also the fear that an Iranian nuclear weapon will spark an arms race in the region, with Iran's Gulf Arab neighbors being wary of their giant neighbor acquiring any sort of nuclear weapon. Numerous sanctions have been placed on Iran to curb its nuclear program in addition to the sanctions already in place following the 1979 Islamic Revolution which installed the present regime.

These sanctions have mostly hurt the common people while the regime continues to exist. Both Russia and China have been providing technical and material support to the Iranian program in defiance of Western diktats. Cyber attacks have also been carried out to thwart the nuclearization of Iran through the use of a virus called Stuxnet. But this has raised many ethical questions and as of now no country has claimed responsibility for these cyber attacks. Most of Iran's nuclear installations is distributed throughout the country and placed underground. This makes it very difficult for Israel or any other nation to carry out clinical attacks to destroy the nuclear program.

Thus Israel cannot do to Iran what it did to Iraq in 1980 when it bombed its Osiraq nuclear power plant and destroyed it completely thus ending Iraq's hope of becoming a nuclear weapons state. Iran's neighbors to the east, Pakistan and India both have nuclear weapons, while Israel is unofficially a nuclear weapons state. So it's not that Iran is going to introduce nuclear weapons in the region.

But because of the anti-Western nature of the Islamic regime, the West will never accept an Iranian nuclear weapons program. Even the Supreme Leader of Iran Ayatollah Khamenei has issued a fatwa which has said that nuclear weapons are forbidden in Islam. But the Western countries have not given this much importance. The West believes Iran to be an irrational state actor largely because of the radical Shia Islamic ideology of its regime.

The only way the West will accept an Iranian nuclear program is if there is a regime change in that country. There has also been a spate of assassinations of Iranian nuclear scientists. No country has yet claimed responsibility for these attacks.

## 2. BACKGROUND

The nuclear program of Iran was launched in the 1950s with the help of the United States as part of the Atoms for Peace program. The participation of the United States and Western European governments in Iran's nuclear program continued until the 1979 Iranian Revolution that toppled the Shah of Iran.

The foundations for Iran's nuclear program were laid on 5 March 1957, when a "proposed agreement for cooperation in research in the peaceful uses of atomic energy" was announced under the auspices of Eisenhower's Atoms for Peace program.

In 1967, the Tehran Nuclear Research Center (TNRC) was established, run by the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI). The TNRC was equipped with a U.S.-supplied, 5-megawatt nuclear research reactor, which was fueled by highly enriched uranium.

Iran signed the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) in 1968 and ratified it in 1970, making Iran's nuclear program subject to IAEA verification.

The Shah approved plans to construct, with U.S. help, up to 23 nuclear power stations by 2000. In March 1974, the Shah envisioned a time when the world's oil supply would run out, and declared, "Petroleum is a noble material, much too valuable to burn ... We envision producing, as soon as possible, 23,000 megawatts of electricity using nuclear plants."

Iran had deep pockets and close ties to the West. U.S. and European companies scrambled to do business in Iran. Bushehr would be the first plant, and would supply energy to the inland city of Shiraz. In 1975, the Erlangen/Frankfurt firm Kraftwerk Union AG, a joint venture of Siemens AG and AEG, signed a contract worth \$4 to \$6 billion to build the pressurized water reactor nuclear power plant. Construction of the two 1,196 MWe, and was to have been completed in 1981.

The joint stock company Eurodif operating a uranium enrichment plant in France was formed in 1973 by France, Belgium, Spain and Sweden. In 1975 Sweden's 10% share in Eurodif went to Iran as a result of an arrangement between France and Iran. The French government subsidiary company Cogéma and the Iranian Government established the Sofidif (*Société franco-iranienne pour l'enrichissement de l'uranium par diffusion gazeuse*) enterprise with 60% and 40% shares, respectively. In turn, Sofidif acquired a 25% share in Eurodif, which gave Iran its 10% share of Eurodif. Mohammed Reza Shah Pahlavi lent 1 billion dollars (and another 180 million dollars in 1977) for the construction of the Eurodif factory, to have the right of buying 10% of the production of the site.

"President Gerald Ford signed a directive in 1976 offering Tehran the chance to buy and operate a U.S.-built reprocessing facility for extracting plutonium from nuclear reactor fuel. The deal was for a complete 'nuclear fuel cycle'." At the time, Richard Cheney was the White House Chief of Staff, and Donald Rumsfeld was the Secretary of Defense. The Ford strategy paper said the "introduction of nuclear power will both provide for the growing needs of Iran's economy and free remaining oil reserves for export or conversion to petrochemicals."

Then-United States Secretary of State Henry Kissinger recalled in 2005, "I don't think the issue of proliferation came up." However, a 1974 CIA proliferation assessment stated "If [the Shah] is alive in the mid-1980s ... and if other countries [particularly India] have proceeded with weapons development we have no doubt Iran will follow suit."

The Shah also signed a nuclear cooperation agreement with South Africa under which Iranian oil money financed the development of South African fuel enrichment technology using a novel "jet nozzle" process, in return for assured supplies of South African (and Namibian) enriched uranium.

Following the 1979 Revolution, most of the international nuclear cooperation with Iran was cut off. Iran has later argued that these experiences indicate foreign facilities and foreign fuel supplies are an unreliable source of nuclear fuel supply.

At the time of the revolution, Iran was a joint owner in the French Eurodif international enrichment facility, but the facility stopped supplying enriched uranium to Iran shortly afterwards. Kraftwerk Union stopped working at the Bushehr nuclear project in January 1979, with one reactor 50% complete, and the other reactor 85% complete, and they fully withdrew from the project in July 1979. The company said they based their action on Iran's non-payment of \$450 million in overdue payments, while other sources claim the construction was halted under pressure from the United States.

From the beginning of 1990s, Russia formed a joint research organization with Iran called *Persepolis* which provided Iran with Russian nuclear experts, and technical information. Five Russian institutions, including the Russian Federal Space Agency helped Tehran to improve its missiles. The exchange of technical information with Iran was personally approved by the SVR director Trubnikov. President Boris Yeltsin had a "two track policy" offering commercial nuclear technology to Iran and discussing the issues with Washington.

### 3. POSITION OF IRAN

Interviews and surveys show that the majority of Iranians in all groups favor their country's nuclear program. Polls in 2008 showed that the vast majority of Iranians want their country to develop nuclear energy, and 90% of Iranians believe it is important (including 81% very important) for Iran "to have a full fuel cycle nuclear program." Though Iranians are not Arab, Arab publics in six countries also believe that Iran has the right to its nuclear program and should not be pressured to stop that program. A poll in September 2010 by the International Peace Institute found that 71 percent of Iranians favored the development of nuclear weapons, a drastic hike over the previous polls by the same agency. However, in July 2012, a poll on an Iranian state-run media outlet found that 2/3 Iranians support suspending uranium enrichment in return for a gradual easing of sanctions. Meir Javedanfar, an Iranian-born commentator with the Middle East Economic and Political Analysis Company, stated that while Iranians may want nuclear energy, they don't want it at the price the government is willing to pay.

In explaining why it had left its enrichment program undeclared to the IAEA, Iran said that for the past twenty-four years it has "been subject to the most severe series of sanctions and export restrictions on material and technology for peaceful nuclear technology," so that some elements of its program had to be done discreetly. Iran said the U.S. intention "is nothing but to make this deprivation" of Iran's inalienable right to enrichment technology "final and eternal," and that the United States is completely silent on Israel's nuclear enrichment and weapons program.

The Iranian government has repeatedly made compromise offers to place strict limits on its nuclear program beyond what the Non-Proliferation Treaty and the Additional Protocol legally require of Iran, in order to ensure that the program cannot be secretly diverted to the manufacture of weapons. These offers include operating Iran's nuclear program as an international consortium, with the full participation of foreign governments. This offer by the Iranians matched a proposed solution put forth by an IAEA expert committee that was investigating the risk that civilian nuclear technologies could be used to make bombs. Iran has also offered to renounce plutonium extraction technology, thus ensuring that its heavy water reactor at Arak cannot be used to make bombs either. More recently, the Iranians have reportedly also offered to operate uranium centrifuges that automatically self-destruct if they are used to enrich uranium beyond what is required for civilian purposes. However, despite offers of nuclear cooperation by the five permanent members of the UN Security Council and Germany, Iran has refused to suspend its enrichment program as the Council has demanded. Iran's representative asserted that dealing with the issue in the Security Council was unwarranted and void of any legal basis or practical utility because its peaceful nuclear program posed no threat to international peace and security, and, that it ran counter to the views of the majority of United Nations Member States, which the Council was obliged to represent.

Iran insists enrichment activities are intended for peaceful purposes, but much of the West, including the United States, allege that Iran is pursuing nuclear weapons, or a nuclear weapons "capability". The 31 August 2006, deadline called for

Iran to comply with UN Security Council Resolution 1696 and suspend its enrichment-related activities or face the possibility of economic sanctions.

Iran asserts that there is no legal basis for Iran's referral to the United Nations Security Council since the IAEA has not proven that previously undeclared activities had a relationship to a weapons program, and that all nuclear material in Iran (including material that may not have been declared) had been accounted for and had not been diverted to military purposes.

Iran also minimizes the significance of the IAEA's inability to verify the exclusively peaceful nature of Iran's nuclear program, arguing the IAEA has only drawn such conclusions in a subset of states that have ratified and implemented the Additional Protocol.

Iran ceased implementation of the Additional Protocol and all other cooperation with the IAEA beyond that required under its safeguards agreement after the IAEA Board of Governors decided to report its safeguards non-compliance to the UN Security Council in February 2006. Iran insisted that such cooperation had been "voluntary".

Iran has maintained that the Security Council's engagement in "the issue of the peaceful nuclear activities of the Islamic Republic of Iran" are unlawful and malicious. Iran also argues that the UN Security Council resolutions demanding a suspension of enrichment constitute a violation of Article IV of the Non-Proliferation Treaty which recognizes the inalienable right of signatory nations to nuclear technology "for peaceful purposes."

Iran agreed to implement the Additional Protocol under the terms of the October 2003 Tehran agreement and its successor, the November 2004 Paris agreement, and did so for two years before withdrawing from the Paris agreement in early 2006 following the breakdown of negotiations with the EU-3. Since then, Iran has offered not only to ratify the Additional Protocol, but to implement transparency measures on its nuclear program that exceed the Additional Protocol, as long as its right to operate an enrichment program is recognized.

On 9 April 2007, Iran announced that it has begun enriching uranium with 3 000 centrifuges, presumably at Natanz enrichment site. "With great honor, I declare that as of today our dear country has joined the nuclear club of nations and can produce nuclear fuel on an industrial scale", said Ahmadinejad.

On 22 April 2007, Iranian foreign ministry spokesman Mohammad Ali Hosseini announced that his country rules out enrichment suspension ahead of talks with EU foreign policy chief Javier Solana on 25 April 2007.

Reacting to the November 2009 IAEA Board of Governors resolution demanding that Iran immediately stop building its newly revealed nuclear facility and freeze uranium enrichment, Foreign Ministry spokesman Ramin Mehmanparast described the resolution as a "show ... aimed at putting pressure on Iran, which will be useless." The Iranian government subsequently authorized the country's Atomic Energy Organization to begin building ten more uranium-enrichment plants for enhancing the country's electricity production.

Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad on 1 December brushed aside the threat of UN sanctions over his country's failure to accept a UN-proposed deal on its nuclear program, stating that such a move by western nations would not hinder Iran's nuclear program. Ahmadinejad told state television that he believed further negotiations with world powers over his country's nuclear program were not needed, describing warnings by Western powers that Iran would be isolated if it fails to accept the UN-proposed deal as "ridiculous."

#### **4. US POSITION**

President George W. Bush insisted on 31 August 2006, that "there must be consequences" for Iran's defiance of demands that it stop enriching uranium. He asserted "the world now faces a grave threat from the radical regime in Iran. The Iranian regime arms, funds, and advises Hezbollah."

A congressional report released on 23 August 2006, summarized the documentary history of Iran's nuclear program, but also made allegations against the IAEA.

Through 2008, the United States repeatedly refused to rule out using nuclear weapons in an attack on Iran.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Whether Iran's nuclear program issue is resolved peacefully remains to be seen. One major solution to this problem is the establishment of a nuclear weapon free zone in West Asia. But this is unacceptable to the Israelis. So far, as far as available information goes Iran has behaved as a rational actor on this issue. Iran has already declared itself to be a nuclear state. With the election of moderate president Hassan Rouhani there is hope yet that this issue will be resolved peacefully. One of the main possibilities is that an Iranian nuclear weapon will spark an arms race in the Gulf and the wider region. This will surely create more instability in the region.

After it acquires nuclear weapons Iranian leaders will most probably behave in a rational manner like any other state that has acquired nuclear weapons before them.

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