

Global Security Monitor

Net Assessment: Iran

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Global Security Monitor

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I. Purpose

One of the chestnuts facing policymakers in successive US and allied administrations for the last thirty years is the radical Shia theocracy in Iran. It came to power in 1979 following the overthrow of the Shah in the Islamic Revolution, one of the seminal events in modern Middle Eastern history. The Iranian regime is a negative actor in international polity. It stands in defiance of international norms regarding its burgeoning nuclear program and as a state sponsor of international terrorism.

The purpose of our *Net Assessment: Iran* is to provide policymakers prescriptions for a way forward regarding the regime in Teheran. However, we approach the Iranian case in a holistic manner. Thus, our assessment has a broader scope in examination of the whole of Iran's behavior, goals, and capabilities. The nuclear issue is a symptom, not the underlying cause, of the problem with Iran.

II. Summary

Iran achieves nuclear breakout probably in early 2010. Its civilian and military nuclear programs are more advanced than what is publicly acknowledged. The Western democracies led by the United States fail to act to stanch Teheran's nuclear and ballistic missile programs and forcefully confront the radical regime. Israel does act but only in a delaying maneuver after the West wavers. The Middle East becomes more radicalized and the world lives under the constant threat of nuclear blackmail by Teheran directly or its proxy terrorist friends. The nightmare scenario is realized because of the sore lack of political will from the Western powers, namely the United States, to confront the challenge presented.

III. The Problem: Case Against Iran

Terror, Inc.

Iran is a negative actor in international polity because of the regime's overarching self-styled radical Shia ideology forming the prism from which it views the world and its international policy. Teheran seeks to destroy the state of Israel, to build regional hegemony over the predominantly Arab Middle East, and ultimately to reconstitute the Sassanid Empire under a consolidated radical Shia Islamic rule from Teheran. From its position as [OPEC's second oil producer and fourth in the world](#), Iran funds international terrorism as the main instrument of its international policy to exert influence and achieve the abovementioned policy goals. Its reach goes beyond the Middle East as evidenced by the [bombing of the Israeli embassy in Buenos Aires, Argentina](#), and subsequent attacks on Jewish interests there. Indeed, Teheran is Terror, Inc., described by the U.S. State Department as the "[most active sponsor of state terrorism.](#)"

'Dead End' with IAEA

As an ambitious terrorist state, Iran's active programs to acquire nuclear weapons and build long-range ballistic missiles (see below) to deliver them represent a clear and present danger to global security. Despite being a signatory of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), Teheran remains defiant in its treaty obligations to declare its nuclear facilities and the quantity of low-enriched uranium, and to allow inspections of known facilities. The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) has succeeded as a cataloguer of the Iranian nuclear program, but lacks the enforcement powers to make Teheran comply with its treaty obligations. The limited information (supplemented by intelligence agencies) gathered by the IAEA is sufficient to ring alarm bells throughout world capitals. Upon his retirement last month, the agency's director, Mohamed ElBaradei, declared negotiations with Iran over cooperation at a "[dead end](#)" which is significant given Mr. ElBaradei's permissive view of Teheran. Moreover, the latest revelation of an additional [nuclear site in Qom](#) is more evidence of Teheran's deception and bad faith.

Stalled P5+1 Negotiations

Teheran's cat and mouse game with the world has repeated on several fronts. In the 1990s, the EU-3 (United Kingdom, France, and Germany) attempted to halt uranium enrichment. Doomed from the start given France and Germany are two of Iran's largest European trading partners, nevertheless some slowing in enrichment was heralded as a success. However, no dramatic breakthrough was achieved and another collection of nations tried to get cooperation from Teheran on the nuclear issue – the P5+1 (China, France, Russia, United Kingdom, United States + Germany).

Again, Iran met and talked with interlocutors in European capitals and again no progress resulted. Now Teheran declares no more negotiations.

Failed US 'Transformative' Approach

The new US administration of President Barak Hussein Obama promised a fresh approach from the hard line of his predecessor – direct negotiations with Teheran as some observers hailed as [transformative diplomacy](#). The young president's Nowruz (Iranian New Year) [YouTube video](#) message, television [interview](#) with *Al Arabiya* and his humble [speech in Cairo](#) to the Muslim world were supposed to generate good will and show good intentions towards the Middle East in general. From the G-8 meeting in July of this year, President Obama gave Iran a September 23 deadline to open serious negotiations over its nuclear program. The deadline, like many in the years before, passed without any price paid by the tyrannical regime in Teheran. US President Obama's end of the year deadline for Iran to accept the deal of transferring its low-enriched uranium (LEU) will pass without consequence.

Defiance and Deception

Iranian ambassador Ali Asghar Soltanieh to the IAEA declared in an [interview with *Der Spiegel*](#) reported on November 24, 2009: "We're not going to abandon our enrichment activities in Iran." Teheran's recent incendiary boast of building [10 more uranium enrichment facilities](#) is defiance writ double. Furthermore, Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad [declared](#) "The Zionist regime (Israel) and its (western) backers cannot do a damn thing to stop Iran's nuclear work" on state-run television at a meeting in Isfahan. Hiding or better yet not declaring the Qom plant until last month is more evidence of the regime's depth of deception. Also regarding the Qom site, the IAEA believes [construction](#) began on the facility [five years before](#) Iran contends. Thus, the timeline on the Iran nuclear program continues to be a source of discussion and difficulty in determining exactly its stage of development. This is an important fact discussed more in detail below.

Failure of Economic Sanctions

Iran is under an economic sanctions regime imposed unilaterally by some countries and by the United Nations. The efficacy of economic sanctions has been studied widely, but as a matter of policy, they do not alter the behavior of the targeted state. The international community hopes economic sanctions halt the uranium enrichment program and curb Teheran's penchant for international terrorism. When applied in the international policy arena, [sanctions](#) are used to "send signals and not, as is commonly perceived, to exert economic leverage." In wake of its recent recalcitrance, the discussion of "crippling sanctions" appears idle chatter. Again, the timeline of the nuclear program is paramount. New sanctions take time to start up while the bite is negligible in the policy arena.

Growing Ballistic Missile Capabilities

“Iranian missiles are able to target any place that threatens Iran,” a general in the Revolutionary Guards, Abdullah Araqi, [boasted](#) to the Fars news agency in late September upon firing the Sejjil missile during war games. Some Western observers doubt some of Iran’s public statements regarding its capabilities. However, the [general direction](#) of increasing sophistication and range of its missiles are not in dispute. The Sejjil is a solid-fuel rocket, an improvement upon the liquid-fuel Shahab model, because it can be [prepared to launch faster](#). Long-range rockets based on the Shahab model and multi-reentry vehicle missiles are also being tested. While [US intelligence projects](#) an ICBM capability further out into the future, Iran’s missile project aided by both North Korea and China is another worrisome development combined with its ambitious and advanced military nuclear program. The threat from Iranian missiles is so severe the US military, in a sign of acquiescence of a nuclear tyranny in Teheran, is [testing hypothetical scenarios](#) in January.

IV. Key Judgments

Our timeframe for the validity of these judgments is until the Russian-built nuclear plant at Bushehr goes operational which is now anticipated in [March 2010](#). A revision will occur then.

Our key judgments are based on an analysis of available open sources and a realistic assessment of the Iranian regime's intentions and iron will to realize its strategic goals in face of the current feckless Western leadership bereft of the courage of its convictions, namely the United States.

1. Iran achieves nuclear breakout in early 2010. The timeline for the overt Iranian nuclear program is ambiguous and we judge with high probability that it is more advanced than publicly admitted by the Western powers.
2. Iran's quest for a weaponized nuclear arsenal is the regime's crown jewel and is not negotiable. Thus, negotiations are a fool's errand with the tyrants in Teheran. Negotiations are used to shield its [suspected](#) parallel secret nuclear program for military purposes and to "[defuse momentum](#) for further international sanctions while Iran continues to move forward on its nuclear program."
3. Time lost at the negotiation table actually has *increased*, not decreased, the urgency for more forceful and rapid action to confront the regime in Teheran.
4. Israel launches a pre-emptive strike on suspected and known nuclear enrichment and ballistic missile sites resulting in a mild setback for the regime's plan overall. The United States intervenes to protect the Strait of Hormuz but limits its military involvement in the narrow defense of the seas.
5. The United States does not act to rid Iran of its nuclear program or forcefully confront the tyranny in Teheran.
6. A spike in international terrorism results from the Israeli action including increased Hezbollah and Hamas activity in southern Lebanon and Gaza respectively.
7. Iran wins by maintaining a good part of its nuclear program and the holding its autocratic grip on its people. Its regional neighbors seek more accommodation with a nuclear Teheran. Egypt weighs a nuclear program.
8. Israel discretely informs Teheran any attack by missiles will result in a nuclear reply on the Iranian homeland.
9. The world must prepare for a nuclear Iran by shifting to "enhanced deterrence" to contain the regime and limits its influence however

unpalatable the option. A renewed interest in missile defense is advisable in Western capitals.

10. The Iran example provides a fillip to nuclear and missile proliferation around the world.

V. Policy Prescriptions

Given the aforementioned key judgments, we offer the following policy prescriptions as guidance as Iranian nuclear breakout appears imminent.

1. The Teheran tyranny only will respond to a credible threat to the survival of its regime. The United States should still forcefully confront the regime as the only policy toward the current radical leadership in Teheran though there is no political will or courage to do so. The rogue regime in Teheran is the fundamental problem while the nuclear program standoff is a mere symptom. A severe setback to global terrorism is possible by tackling Teheran. The Iranian regime has not paid for its innumerable terrorist attacks since the 1980s, the death of American and allied troops in Iraq, and the countless others via its proxy terror groups. The Iranian people would be allowed to breathe easily after the hijack of their country by the current radical leadership.

2. Covert operations should be fully funded and creativity employed to shake the regime's grip on the Iranian people and to sabotage the nuclear and missile programs.

3. Pretensions of more sanctions should be abandoned. The time for diplomacy has long passed.

VI. Conclusions

It is decision time regarding the Iranian problem.

The main source of instability in the Middle East needs to be confronted. The nuclear issue, while important, is a fraction of Iran's threat to global security. The convergence of nuclear weapons and the ballistic missiles to deliver them driven by a corruption of religion embodied in the Teheran tyranny with a messianic vision is a nightmare scenario for global security experts across the world. Therefore, it is regrettable the current effete Western leadership refuses to confront this clear and present danger to free and open societies based on the rule of law.

The myopic denial of Iran's threat emboldens other enemies of freedom and peace around the globe. The United States, the single country that can be the game changer in the Iranian problem, is led by a pacifist president who severely misunderstands the basic dynamics of power politics and use of force to compel acceptable norms and standards of civilized behavior. Diplomacy not backed by the credible use of force is futile.

In face of a radical terrorist regime, one of its main global nemeses, on the brink of gaining nuclear weapons and the missiles to deliver them eventually to the continental United States, the current administration in Washington temporizes and allows the aggressor to set the pace and tempo of the challenge. Washington should also revisit its reflexive opposition to missile defense as a fallback position to acquiescing to a nuclear Iran.

That the United States and its Western allies do not have the moral strength or temerity to act is one of humankind's most memorable moments in the early twenty-first century. The price of non-action will be calculated by the precipitous radicalization and nuclearization of the Middle East and beyond. The coming nuclear blackmail by an Iranian regime hell-bent on imposing its radical vision and will on its neighbors in general, and on the world in particular is a high cost for non-action. The current radical leadership is incompatible with a stable global order.