

Iran's Nuclear Strategy:

Understanding Tehran's Acquisition Pathway

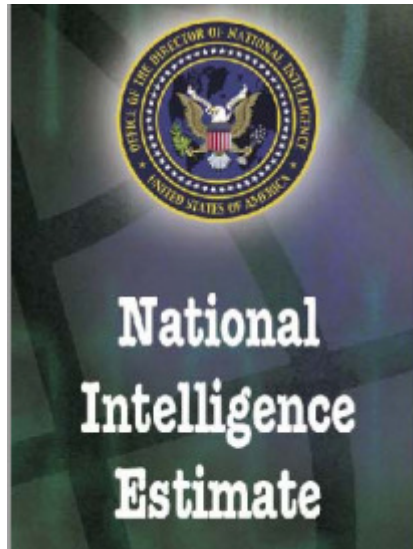
Patrick Disney
Yale University
Jackson Institute for Global Affairs

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Key Takeaway:

- *Western nonproliferation policy toward Iran risks ENCOURAGING Iranian weaponization*
 - *Iran likely to use sabotage, cyber attack, assassinations, as pretext to push for a bomb*

Starting Point: Iran Already Possesses a Nuclear Weapons Capability



Nov. 2007 - NIE:

“Iran has the scientific, technical and industrial capacity eventually to produce nuclear weapons if it decides to do so.”

**Nuke Agency Says Iran Can
Make Bomb**

September 18, 2009

No Decision Yet on Weaponization

- Strong reasons not to:
 - Security
 - Prestige
 - Domestic Politics
- Keeping option open through self-sufficiency
 - Iran-Iraq War lesson
- Cost-Benefit Calculation
 - Fundamentally a political decision



Provocation Begets Provocation

- “Soft Aggressive” Foreign Policy:
 - Respond to pressure with pressure
- Consensus most likely to emerge in response to provocation
- Nov. 28, 2009: BoG Censure → Nov. 30: Announcement of 10 new enrichment facilities

“We had no plan to build many nuclear sites like Natanz but...the West adopted an attitude toward Iran which made the Iranian government to pass the ratification on construction of ten sites similar to the Natanz enrichment facility.”

-Ali-Akbar Salehi



ISNA/PHOTO:AMIR KHOLOOSI

This Means Trouble for the US

- Western Policy Objective: Delay Iranian acquisition of a bomb
 - Sabotage, Assassination, Cyber Attack, Sanctions
- Misaligned with reality of Iranian decision making
- Seeking to dissuade ambivalent actors from that which they do not intend to do can backfire
 - “Rally ‘round the flag”

Result: Encouraging Iranian Push for a Bomb

- Iran's view: bearing all the costs of a weapons program, but none of the benefits
- Two options:
 - Accede to West's demands; or
 - Weaponize
- Former requires credible commitment to reward good behavior
 - But Iran believes will be punished regardless
- Nothing to lose by going nuclear

Needed: A Broader View of the Risks of Current Policy

- Focus has been on imposing pressure to give Iran a reason not to weaponize
- Must also be careful NOT to give Iran a reason TO weaponize