

MEMO

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Iranian Nuclear Weapons Capability Unacceptable

Iran is approaching a nuclear weapons capability. Iran's acquisition of such a capability—even before it possesses an actual nuclear weapon—would mark a significant new regional danger, as Tehran would be able to use its status as a nuclear-capable state to increase its regional leverage, threaten broad American interests, and likely spur a nuclear arms race. The United States must make clear that Iran will not be permitted to achieve a nuclear weapons capability.

Iran with a nuclear weapons capability would likely spur a nuclear arms race and pose a significant proliferation risk.

- Iran's acquisition of a nuclear weapons capability—the ability to quickly produce a nuclear weapon at a time of its choosing—would likely be enough to spur a regional nuclear arms race as Arab nations pursue their own capabilities.
- This heightened interest in nuclear technology would likely spread beyond the Middle East, marking the death knell of the global non-proliferation regime.
- Many Arab states, including the UAE, Kuwait, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Jordan, have already begun or indicated their intention to begin “peaceful” nuclear programs—potentially a first step toward a nuclear weapons capability.
- Saudi Arabia has indicated it will seek a nuclear capability if Iran's program is not stopped. Prince Turki al-Faisal said in December that if international efforts to prevent Iran from obtaining nuclear weapons fail, “we must, as a duty to our country and people, look into all options we are given, including obtaining these weapons ourselves.”
- Iran could also directly share its nuclear technology and know-how with other anti-American regimes and terrorists, greatly increasing the threat of proliferation, nuclear terrorism and blackmail. Iran has already made numerous offers to share its nuclear technology with countries such as Venezuela.



Iran has offered to share its nuclear technology with allies such as Venezuela's Hugo Chavez.

Iran's acquisition of a nuclear weapons capability would be extremely destabilizing and allow Tehran to act as if it already had a weapon.

- A nuclear-capable Iran would likely be motivated to further intensify its support of Middle East terrorist groups, particularly Hamas and Hizballah, with a reduced fear of being held responsible for its actions. Advanced weaponry that Iran has withheld from Hizballah may be transferred to the terror group if Tehran believes its nuclear capability shields it from retribution.
- Arab leaders already deeply anxious over the prospect of a nuclear Iran would be highly susceptible to Iran's use of its perceived nuclear umbrella to intimidate them and radicalize their people. Iran would likely extend the significant influence it already exerts in Iraq, Bahrain, Lebanon and other Arab nations.

- International oil markets would likely see a nuclear-capable Iran as an increased threat to the secure flow of oil from the Persian Gulf and hence add a risk premium to global oil prices. A nuclear-capable Iran would be able to increase its influence within OPEC and exert greater control over the flow of oil tankers through the Straits of Hormuz.

If the United States allows Iran to acquire a nuclear weapons capability, its global credibility and interests would be undermined.

- The United States for decades has opposed Iran’s efforts to acquire a nuclear weapons capability. Should the U.S. now acquiesce to Iran having this capability, it would call into question America’s influence, power and determination to protect its interests.
- Decreased U.S. credibility could cause Arab states to curry favor with Iran or look to other nations—including Russia and China—for security alliances and economic cooperation. America’s ability to act against terrorism and other threats emanating from the region could be severely restrained.
- The ability of the United States to address regional crises could be limited if Iran achieves a nuclear capability. For example, the United States may be more limited in future crises like that in Syria today if an Iranian regime with a nuclear capability is willing to fully back its allies.
- Iran’s failed plot to target the Saudi ambassador to Washington “shows that some Iranians ... are now more willing to conduct an attack in the United States,” according to Director of National Intelligence James Clapper. Iran’s acquisition of a nuclear capability will only serve to strengthen the willingness of Iran to carry out attacks against American interests.

The United States must make clear that Iran will not be allowed to have a breakout capability and increase sanctions to prevent such an outcome.

- While the administration has emphasized that the United States will prevent Iran from developing or acquiring nuclear weapons, the United States must also make clear Iran will not be allowed to acquire the capability to quickly produce a nuclear weapon.
- The United States also should not adopt a policy oriented toward containing a nuclear Iran. A nuclear-capable Iran can spur a regional nuclear arms race and destabilize a delicate region. Moreover, given the nature of the Iranian regime, there is no guarantee that Iran will not actually use or transfer a nuclear weapon.
- The time needed to prevent Iran from achieving nuclear weapons capability is quickly expiring. The United States must act quickly—and with the full force of its remaining economic and political tools—to prevent such a scenario.
- The president must strictly enforce recently passed legislation regarding the Central Bank of Iran (CBI). He should sanction any foreign financial institution conducting significant transactions with the CBI. The United States must also continue to press buyers of Iranian oil to look elsewhere for supplies.
- At the same time, the United States must make clear that all options remain on the table to prevent Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapons capability.