



## Is Iran Trying to Develop Nuke Weapons? Where's the Proof?

Discussions between Iran and the P5+1 group of international mediators — consisting of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council and Germany — resumed at a meeting in Geneva on January 18. Four days earlier, U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry and Iran's foreign minister Mohammad Javad Zarif held three meetings during which they sought to iron out details of an agreement that would lift stringent financial and trade sanctions imposed on Iran since 2006.



"Secretary Kerry and Foreign Minister Zarif reconvened this evening to continue discussion about the nuclear negotiations in advance of the start of the next round of talks tomorrow," Reuters quoted a U.S. State Department spokeswoman saying.

The United States and the other P5+1 members have demanded that Iran adhere to verifiable limits on its uranium enrichment program. The standoff stems from disagreement over whether the program is in place to produce nuclear fuel and medical isotopes, as Iran claims, or can be used to produce nuclear weapons, as the West asserts.

Zarif appeared on Iranian television prior to Sunday's meeting, during which he advised Western governments to ease off on their pressure against Iran. "If Western countries intend to negotiate with Iran, they should make a political decision, which might be difficult for some, and cease applying pressure," he said.

Both sides in the negotiations have agreed to extend the discussions until July 1. They hope to reach a preliminary agreement by March 1 and conclude the technical details of implementing it by the July deadline. They have not yet decided the date and location of their next round of discussions.

At the heart of the negotiations are efforts by Iran to have sanctions removed and the insistence by the P5+1 nations that Iran must scale back uranium enrichment program to certain levels before this will be done. The Western nations also insist that Iran allow inspections to verify that it is abiding by the terms of any agreement that may be reached.

The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) determined back in September 2005 that Iran had not complied with its agreement to limit its nuclear program. In February 2006, the IAEA Board reported those conclusions to the UN Security Council. The Security Council (citing Chapter VII of the UN Charter) then passed Resolution 1696 imposing sanctions against Iran unless it suspended its uranium enrichment program.

A statement posted on the U.S. State Department website on the topic of "Iran Sanction" reads, in part:

In response to Iran's continued illicit nuclear activities, the United States and other countries have imposed unprecedented sanctions to censure Iran and prevent its further progress in prohibited



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nuclear activities, as well as to persuade Tehran to address the international community's concerns about its nuclear program. Acting both through the United Nations Security Council and regional or national authorities, the United States, the member states of the European Union, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Canada, Australia, Norway, Switzerland, and others have put in place a strong, inter-locking matrix of sanctions measures relating to Iran's nuclear, missile, energy, shipping, transportation, and financial sectors.

Before delving into the question of whether Iran is actually in the process of producing nuclear material that has military applications, several points in the above statement must be addressed. The statement uses such terms as "illicit," "prohibited," and "international community's concerns." Such language raises the question of whether there exists authority that supersedes the authority of sovereign nations and which may therefore make laws prohibiting those nations from doing anything except waging war against other nations. The violation of Iran's national sovereignty apparently advocated by our State Department seems to derive its authority from the "international community's concerns."

Since the only international community powerful enough that its concerns matter is the UN, it puts our government in a perilous position. For if the national sovereignty of Iran may be superseded by the UN, why not the national sovereignty of the United States?

The threat to U.S. sovereignty emanating from the UN is a separate topic, however. More to the point of today's discussion: Is Iran producing stores of uranium enriched to sufficient levels to produce nuclear weapons?

*The New American* discussed the technical aspects of Iran's nuclear fuel enrichment program in a November 30, 2013, article, "[UN Inspectors to Visit Iran's Nuclear Facilities](#)." That article cited a White House press release dated November 24, 2013 about an agreement that had been reached on Iran's nuclear program. The release noted some of the details:

First of all, Iran has committed to halt all enrichment above 5 percent and dismantle the technical connections required to enrich above 5 percent. Iran has committed to neutralize its stockpile of near 20 percent uranium, and this is, of course, what has been of principal concern to us in terms of their stockpile. It will dilute below 5 percent, or convert to a form that is not suitable for further enrichment, its entire stockpile of near 20-percent enriched uranium before the conclusion of this six-month phase.

Iran also promises to halt progress on the growth of its 3.5 percent-enriched uranium stockpile over the next six months, in addition to neutralizing the stockpile of 20 percent-enriched uranium.

Low-enriched uranium, suitable for powering nuclear reactors, is generally enriched to a level of 3-4 percent U-235. Highly enriched uranium has a greater than 20 percent concentration of U-235; however, the fissile uranium used in nuclear weapons usually contains 85 percent or more of U-235.

In return for Iran's cooperation, the United States has agreed to end *some* of its sanctions on the Islamic nation, including those on Iran's petrochemical exports. However, notes the White House statement, "The revenue that Iran earns from these sales over the next six months will continue to be restricted by our sanctions." However, U.S. policy "is designed so that the core of our sanctions, the sanctions that have had a tremendous bite — the oil, banking and financial sanctions — all remain in place."

In a more up-to-date report released last month, Reuters news agency noted:



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The monthly update by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), seen by Reuters, said Iran was not enriching uranium above a fissile concentration of 5 percent, far below the 90 percent level needed for atomic arms. It also said Iran had not made “any further advances” to its activities at two enrichment facilities and an unfinished heavy water reactor.

Even as U.S. diplomats are trying to reach an agreement on Iran satisfactory to all parties, there are voices in the Senate eager to hit Iran with harsher sanctions, should the Islamic republic fail to toe the line. Senators Robert Menendez (R-N.J.) and Mark Kirk, (R-Ill.) have authored a bill to impose new sanctions on Iran if there is no agreement on its nuclear program by July.

“If anything can stop Iran from getting nuclear weapons, it is maintaining the united bipartisan front in Congress to end Iran’s uranium enrichment and plutonium paths to the bomb,” Kirk said in a statement.

Since even the IAEA seems satisfied that Iran is complying with agreements to limit enrichment of uranium to levels consistent with peaceful purpose, Kirk’s language is nothing if not overly provocative.

A calmer voice of reason existed in Congress back in 2012, when former Representative Ron Paul (R-Texas) vehemently opposed a bill to impose sanctions on Iran. Paul called the bill, which passed the House 421-6, the “Obsession With Iran Act 2012.”

Paul said in a speech: “What we continue to be doing is obsess with Iran and the idea that Iran is a threat to our national security. Iran happens to be a Third World nation. They have no significant navy, air force, or intercontinental ballistic missiles.”

One wonders if the reason the big powers like to push Iran around so much is precisely because they have such a weak military. China is estimated to have about 250 nuclear warheads, yet there is no call to impose sanctions on that communist tyranny. Maybe because it also has a military of more than two million active and two million reserve personnel, almost 5,000 armored fighting vehicles, almost 3,000 aircraft, and more than 500 naval vessels.

Iran makes a much better whipping boy.

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