



PERSPECTIVES

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[The IAEA Report on Tehran's Nuclear Program: It's Time to Hit Iran](#)

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: The recent IAEA report reaffirms suspicions that Iran is pursuing nuclear weapons. While this might generate an additional round of sanctions on Iran, these are unlikely to bring about change in Iran's nuclear policy. Israel will soon face a difficult decision on whether to deal a military blow to Iran's nuclear installations – unless the US lives up to its superpower responsibilities. A US strike on Iranian nuclear infrastructure is not only necessary, it is also the only course of action that can prevent the impending American retreat from Iraq and Afghanistan from signaling the denouement of US clout in the Middle East.

The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) this week finally submitted a report expressing “serious concerns” about activities within Iran’s nuclear program that indicate a clear military dimension, though this continues to be denied by Tehran. The report confirms what Israel has claimed for years – that Iran is in pursuit of a nuclear bomb. There is nothing in this report that has not been known to Western intelligence agencies for some time.

The report reveals the Iranian strategy of creating an impenetrable fog around its nuclear program and procrastinating in its negotiations with the West in order to buy time while building a nuclear weapon. Yet, the radical Islamist regime in Tehran has continued to deny the truth, contending that the IAEA allegations are based on fake documents. Moreover, the Russians and the Chinese also doubt the

report's validity, questioning whether there could be a different, more benign interpretation to the facts gathered therein.

Will the report make any difference? Probably not.

The IAEA under the leadership of Yukiya Amano deserves credit for calling a spade a spade and not giving in to Russian, Chinese and Iranian pressures. Amano has restored some credibility to the IAEA, which under former Director General Mohamed Baradei had largely become an accomplice of Iran. But following the report's publication, the access of the IAEA to sensitive installations in Iran will probably be greatly curtailed.

Nevertheless, the IAEA report puts the Iranian nuclear issue back onto the international agenda, at least for a while, after a period when the so-called "Arab Spring" deflected much attention away from it. The recent publication of leaked information about a possible and/or impending Israeli military action against Iranian nuclear installations also serves to focus international attentions in an effective manner.

The West, particularly the US, may now find it more difficult to ignore Iran's progress on the nuclear path or to dismiss the additional evidence disclosed about duplicitous Iranian behavior. Indeed, senior officials in Western capitals have indicated the need to consider more stringent sanctions on Iran in order to convince Iranian decision-makers to stop uranium enrichment and weaponization. Yet, truly "crippling" sanctions against Iran may never be implemented since Russia and China are unlikely to support such steps. Actually, there is no certainty that most of Europe will agree to this move since, despite the lip service to anti-Iran policies, German firms, among others, continue to trade freely with the Mullahs. This is reminiscent of the days when Iraq's Saddam Hussein, who was developing long-range missiles and chemical weapons, was courted by European merchants.

Israel may find satisfaction in being proven right – again. But the bitter truth is that most of the world does not want to hear the troubling news about Iran, particularly if military action might be needed to correct the situation. That is why much of the world has done very little so far to avert the emergence of a nuclear Iran. It prefers to assume an ostrich posture, ignoring the dangers to the Middle East and beyond that are likely to result from Iranian nuclear proliferation.

Moreover, Western elites have fooled themselves into thinking that the Iranians can be dissuaded from building an atomic weapon by economic sanctions. These

Westerners have difficulty comprehending that the rulers in Tehran are ready to allow their people to suffer in order to attain a nuclear weapon, which is a political objective of great importance. The bomb is needed to gain influence in the Middle East and in the world. But above all, it is critical for the survival of the Iranian regime because it is useful in deterring foreign intervention.

Unfortunately, US President Obama and various European leaders recently reinforced a lesson that the Iranians have likely already internalized: that giving up weapons of mass destruction and cooperating with the West does not guarantee regime survival; rather, it makes you vulnerable to Western military attacks. This of course was the moral of the Western military intervention in Libya to topple Qaddafi.

No matter what diplomatic activity emanates from the IAEA report, the Iranians will be rewarded with more time. Thus far, their strategy of gaining time has worked remarkably well. As the clock keeps ticking, Iran is moving closer to obtaining nuclear weapons.

Not surprisingly, this means that Israel may be left alone to deal with a problem that threatens more than just the Jewish state. Israel has done the world's "dirty work" in the past by attacking the Iraqi nuclear reactor in 1981 and the Syrian nuclear reactor in 2007. It may soon face another difficult decision.

The big question now is whether the US will live up to its superpower responsibilities. Obama does not seem fit for this type of job. Yet, a recent visit of mine to Washington gave me a glimmer of hope. The "arms control crusaders" in America understand that if Iran goes nuclear the whole international arms control architecture would collapse. Their pressure, together with the presidential promise not to allow Iran to become a nuclear power, in addition to electoral difficulties, might yet bring about a muscular American response.

A strong American action would be highly favorable since America is currently in retreat from Iraq and Afghanistan. The only way to withdraw respectably from the Middle East is with a big bang in Iran. In fact, this is what most of America's friends in the region, who fear a nuclear Iran and a declining US, desperately pray for.

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