October 1, 2009

**From:** Office of the President

**To:** National Security Council

**Re:** Request for Recommendations on the Iranian Nuclear Program

*Overview:*

The President requests the NSC to reexamine the United States policy towards the government of Iran, and to provide a set of recommendations about how to best fulfill the President’s goal of peacefully preventing Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapon.

The most recent (2007) National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) determined that the Iranian government came close to obtaining the technical capability to develop nuclear weapons, but had halted its program in response to international pressure. The report concluded that, at the earliest, Iran could develop a nuclear weapon in 2009, although it set the more likely window at 2010-2015.

Among the key conclusions of this report:

* “We assess with high confidence that Iran has the scientific, technical and industrial capacity eventually to produce nuclear weapons if it decides to do so”.
* “We assess with moderate confidence that Iran probably would use covert facilities— rather than its declared nuclear sites—for the production of highly enriched uranium for a weapon.”
* “We do not have sufficient intelligence to judge confidently whether Tehran is willing to maintain the halt of its nuclear weapons program indefinitely while it weighs its options, or whether it will or already has set specific deadlines or criteria that will prompt it to restart the program. “

By late 2009, two years after the NIE, there are strong indications that Iran has restarted its research and may be developing a nuclear arsenal. This revelation includes reports of secret nuclear processing facilities intended to produce weapons-grade uranium (see timeline below). For this reason, the President is concerned that insufficient time exists for the current US policy—a mix of economic sanctions and diplomatic pressure (see stage 2 below)—to compel Iran to negotiate in good faith before it obtains a nuclear capability.

*Background:*

Resolution of this issue is a longstanding priority for the Administration. President Obama consistently campaigned on the promise to eliminate Iran’s nuclear program though forceful diplomacy—backed, if needed, with strong economic sanctions. During his campaign, for example, the president declared that:

*“We cannot tolerate nuclear weapons in the hands of nations that support terror. Preventing Iran from developing nuclear weapons is a vital national security interest of the United States. … I will use all elements of American power to pressure the Iranian regime, starting with aggressive, principled and direct diplomacy - diplomacy backed with strong sanctions and without preconditions.*

*We will pursue this diplomacy with no illusions about the Iranian regime. Instead, we will present a clear choice. If you abandon your nuclear program, support for terror, and threats to Israel, there will be meaningful incentives. If you refuse, then we will ratchet up the pressure, with stronger unilateral sanctions; stronger multilateral sanctions in the Security Council, and sustained action outside the UN to isolate the Iranian regime. That's the diplomacy we need. And the Iranians should negotiate now; by waiting, they will only face mounting pressure.[[1]](#footnote-1)*

Upon entering office, the President adopted a new policy with respect to Iran’s nuclear program. The policy aims to secure guarantees that Iran’s domestic nuclear program remains restricted to domestic power generation and research. It consists of three stages, each of which constitutes successive escalation.

Stage 1:

Negotiate with the Iranian government about the disposition of its nuclear program. After several attempts, Iran has rejected overtures to negotiate.

Stage 2:

Build an international coalition of states to impose punitive economic sanctions, thereby pressuring Iran to negotiate. This is a politically difficult and time-consuming approach, as it requires the cooperation of China, Russia, the European Union, Japan, and other major actors. If successful, though, it avoids a military conflict. Building an effective coalition and then imposing sanctions will take time—perhaps years—with additional time needed before the sanction exert sufficient pressure to induce the desired effect. We are still in the early days of this second stage. The United States and its allies worry that Iran may complete a weapons program before the sanctions work and negotiations conclude.

Stage 3:

Conduct military operations on Iranian nuclear facilities to degrade and delay their nuclear program. Military action is the option of last resort. Not only is the use of force restricted under international law, but it also may drag the United States into a broader Middle Eastern conflict. Indeed, Iran has threatened to target Israel with missiles should the United States (or Israel) attack it.

The record reveals that Iran complies unevenly with international agreements to curtail its nuclear ambitions.[[2]](#footnote-2) Now, despite several United Nations sponsored initiatives designed to limit Iran’s nuclear ambitions strictly to civilian purposes (e.g., nuclear power), the government in Teheran appears to be accelerating its efforts to acquire a nuclear weapon. In 2009, the United States discovered two secret enrichment facilities. Other key developments include:

2003

September: The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Board of Governors adopts a resolution calling for Iran to suspend all enrichment – and reprocessing- related activities. The resolution requires Iran to declare all material relevant to its uranium-enrichment program and allow IAEA inspectors to conduct environmental sampling at any location. The resolution requires Iran to meet its conditions by October 31st 2003.

October: Iran agrees to meet IAEA demands by the October 31st deadline. In a deal struck between Iran and European foreign ministers, Iran agrees to suspend its uranium–enrichment activities and ratify an additional protocol requiring Iran to provide an expanded declaration of its nuclear activities and granting the IAEA broader rights of access to sites in the country.

## 2004

June: The IAEA rebukes Iran for failing to cooperate with IAEA inspectors. Iran responds by refusing to suspend enrichment-related activities as it had previously pledged.

November: Iran notifies the IAEA that it will suspend enrichment-related activities following talks with France, Germany, and the United Kingdom. According to the so-called Paris Agreement, Iran would maintain the suspension for the duration of talks among the four countries. As a result, the IAEA Board of Governors decides not to refer Tehran to the UN Security Council.

## 2005

February: Russia and Iran conclude a nuclear fuel supply agreement in which Russia would provide fuel for the Bushehr reactor it is constructing and Iran would return the spent nuclear fuel to Russia. The arrangement is aimed at preventing Iran from extracting plutonium for nuclear weapons from the spent nuclear fuel.

August: Iran begins producing uranium hexafluoride at its Isfahan facility. As a result, France, Germany, and the United Kingdom halt negotiations with Tehran.

September: The IAEA adopts a resolution finding Iran in noncompliance with its safeguards agreement by a vote of 22-1 with 12 members abstaining. The resolution says that the nature of Iran’s nuclear activities and the lack of assurance in their peaceful nature fall under the purview of the UN Security Council, paving the way for a future referral.

## 2006

February: A special meeting of the IAEA Board of Governors refers Iran to the UN Security Council. The resolution “deems it necessary for Iran to” suspend its enrichment-related activities, reconsider the construction of the Arak heavy-water reactor, ratify the additional protocol to its safeguards agreement, and fully cooperate with the agency’s investigation.

February: Iran tells the IAEA that it will stop voluntarily implementing the additional protocol and other non-legally binding inspection procedures.

April 11, 2006: Iran announces that it has enriched uranium for the first time. The uranium enriched to about 3.5 percent was produced at the Natanz pilot enrichment plant.

June 6, 2006: China, France, Germany, Russia the United Kingdom, and the United Sates (the P5+1, referring to the five permanent members of the UN Security Council and Germany) propose a framework agreement to Iran offering incentives for Iran to halt its enrichment program for an indefinite period of time.

July: The UN Security Council adopts Resolution 1696, making the IAEA’s calls for Iran to suspend enrichment –related and reprocessing activities legally binding for the first time.

August: Iran delivers a response to the P5+1 proposal, rejecting the requirement to suspend enrichment but declaring that the package contained “elements which may be useful for a constructive approach.”

December: The UN Security Council unanimously adopts Resolution 1737, imposing sanctions on Iran for its failure to suspend its enrichment-related activities. The sanctions prohibit countries from transferring sensitive nuclear- and missile-related technology to Iran and require that all countries freeze the assets of ten Iranian organizations and twelve individuals for their involvement in Iran’s nuclear and missile programs.

## 2007

March: The UN Security Council unanimously adopts Resolution 1747 in response to Iran’s continued failure to comply with the council’s demand to suspend Uranium enrichment.

August: Following three rounds of talks in July and August, the IAEA and Iran agree on a “work plan” for Iran to answer long-standing questions about its nuclear activities, including work suspected of being related to nuclear weapons development.

December: The United States publicly releases an unclassified summary of a new National Intelligence Estimate report on Iran’s nuclear program. The NIE says that the intelligence community judged “with high confidence” that Iran halted its nuclear weapons program in the fall of 2003 and assessed with moderate confidence that the program had not resumed as of mid-2007. The report defines Iran’s nuclear weapons program as “design and weaponization work” as well as clandestine uranium conversion and enrichment. The NIE also said that Iran was believed to be technically capable of producing enough highly enriched uranium for a nuclear weapon between 2010 and 2015.

## 2008

March: The UN Security Council passes Resolution 1803, further broadening sanctions on Iran. It requires increased efforts on the part of member states to prevent Iran from acquiring sensitive nuclear or missile technology and adds 13 persons and seven entities to the UN blacklist.

June: The P5+1 present a new comprehensive proposal to Iran updating its 2006 incentives package. The new proposal maintained the same basic framework as the one in 2006, but highlighted an initial “freeze-for-freeze” process wherein Iran would halt any expansion of its enrichment activities while the UN Security Council agreed not to impose additional sanctions

2009

February: Iran announces that it successfully carried out its first satellite launch, raising international concerns that Iran’s ballistic missile potential was growing.

April: Following an Iran policy review by the new Obama administration, the United States announces that it would participate fully in the P5+1 talks with Iran, a departure from the previous administration’s policy requiring Iran to meet UN demands first.

June: Iran holds presidential elections. Incumbent Mahmoud Ahmadinejad is declared the winner amid many indications that the election was rigged. This sparks weeks of protests within Iran and delays diplomatic efforts to address Iran’s nuclear program.

September: United States President Barack Obama, British Prime Minister Gordon Brown, and French President Nicolas Sarkozy announced that Iran has been constructing a secret, second uranium-enrichment facility, Fordow, in the mountains near the holy city of Qom. IAEA spokesman Marc Vidricaire said that Iran informed the agency September 21 about the existence of the facility, but U.S. intelligence officials said Iran offered the confirmation only after learning that it had been discovered by the United States.

**Assignment 5: Crisis Response Memo**

The NSC must draft a crisis response memo, outlining its recommendations to the President. How should the Administration address the Iranian nuclear threat? This task is time sensitive. The longer you take, the closer Iran gets to obtaining a nuclear weapon.

*Format:*

The NSC will meet under the leadership of its Acting Chairperson.

*Deadline:*

The Gamemaster will provide you with the specific date on which the President expects to receive the memo.

*Essential components*:

* Executive summary (i.e., what the NSC ultimately recommends in brief)
* Identification of the policy options available;
* Evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of each policy option identified;
* Proposal of one or more policy recommendations; and
* The justification for (or reasoning behind) the recommendation(s) the NSC makes.

*Some advice:*

How to write differs by discipline and purpose. Writing a policy paper will therefore be unlike other writing assignments you have done in the past. To get a sense of what it entails:

* Read Herman, Luciana. (2018) “Tips for Writing Policy Papers” (available in Repository C); and
* Look at the ‘policy analysis worksheet’ section below.

*Research:*

To craft an effective policy, it is critical that you develop a clear understanding of Iran’s intentions and capabilities. To **begin** researching this topic, review the documents in Repository C. Pay close attention to the most recent *National Intelligence Estimate*, but also consider its conclusions in light of the timeline provided above. You, your institution, and the NSC may also wish to consider additional evidence (i.e., items not in the repository); only evidence produced before the date of the President’s memo will be permitted in the game, however.

*Policy Analysis Worksheet:*

To make a well-informed policy recommendation to the President, you need to consider the various policy options available, as well as their relative strengths and weaknesses. Table 1 offers one template for such an analysis. The rows hold the policy options (e.g., invite Iranian leaders to a state dinner at the White House), while the columns hold the dimensions along which you will evaluate each policy option (e.g., how happy does it make you, how much does it cost, and so on). These dimensional evaluations then aggregate—however you choose—into a final assessment in the last column. Such an exercise has enormous value. It organizes your thinking and analysis, allowing you to compare policy options along a consistent set of dimensions. This, in turn, permits you both to select the ‘best’ policy (however you define that) and, perhaps more importantly, to explain to the President *why* you think that policy is ‘best’.

The analysis produced from this exercise becomes the raw material for your National Security Council Recommendation. In other words, once you have the information in Table 1, you explain it—in significant detail—in the final Recommendation Memo to the President. This will require you to outline each option (e.g., what is it *exactly*), catalog each option’s strengths and weaknesses (and the dimensions along which you are evaluating these), identify the option(s) that you recommend that the President select and why, and identify the option(s) you recommend that the President should avoid and why. You then attach an executive summary to the front so that the President can get the gist quickly. In short, you turn the table—whose logic the President will not understand, since he was not privy to your discussions—into a text that outlines the thinking and debate you undertook in Council.

It helps to remember that Table 1 is only a template. This means that you do not need to use it; indeed, you may find other methods of policy analysis more helpful. Furthermore, if you use the template in Table 1, it is only a guide. There are no ‘set’ number of policy options or dimensions that you must consider—although a greater number of each necessarily provides a more thorough analysis. Your memo ultimately needs to convince the President that you engaged in a thoroughly researched and debated policy process. If in doubt, err on the side of including too much!

**Table 1. Summary and Evaluation of Options**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Policy Option | Evaluative Dimensions | | | | |
| [Dimension 1] | [Dimension 2] | [Dimension 3] | [Dimension 4] | [Final Assessment] |
| [Option 1] |  |  |  |  |  |
| [Option 2] |  |  |  |  |  |
| [Option 3] |  |  |  |  |  |
| [Option 4] |  |  |  |  |  |

**National Security Council Recommendation:**

**US Response to Iranian Nuclear Program**

[Date]

To: The Office of the President  
From: The National Security Council  
Re: Response to “Request for Recommendations on the Iranian Nuclear Program”

Executive Summary

* What the NSC recommends (in brief)

All Options Considered

* [first]
* [second]
* [third]

Strengths and Weaknesses of Each Option Considered

* [first]
* [second]
* [third]

Recommendation(s) and the Detailed Justification(s) That Support(s) Them

*Note: You may, but do not need to, use this document as a template for your final response to the President. As an alternative to the above structure, for example, the NSC could combine the sections on ‘all options considered’ and ‘strengths and weaknesses of each option considered,’ evaluating each option one at a time. Whatever structure you adopt for the final document, the document must contain all essential components listed in the assignment—i.e., an executive summary, all the options that the NSC considered, an evaluation of each considered option’s strengths and weaknesses, and one or more policy recommendations to the President, including the detailed reasoning that supports the recommendation(s).*

1. 2008 Obama campaign speech. Available online at: https://www.theguardian.com/world/2008/jul/16/uselections2008.barackobama. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. See (https://www.armscontrol.org/factsheet/Timeline-of-Nuclear-Diplomacy-With-Iran [↑](#footnote-ref-2)