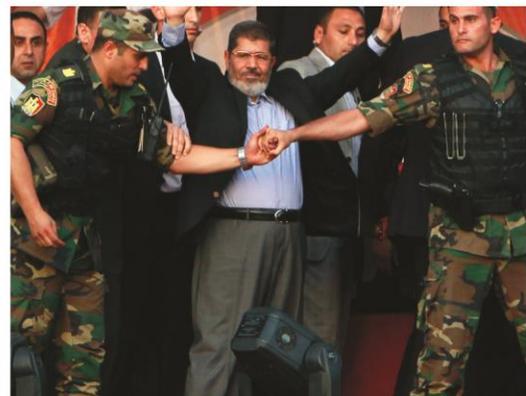


# FACT SHEET

# THE IRANIAN NUCLEAR PROGRAM

Overview | The Shah's Nuclear Program | Resumption of the Program |  
Rising Int'l Concerns | Negotiations & Sanctions | Other Resources |

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# THE IRANIAN NUCLEAR PROGRAM - FACT SHEET

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# THE IRANIAN NUCLEAR PROGRAM - FACT SHEET

## OVERVIEW

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Iran has been engaged in pursuing nuclear activities for over 50 years. Initially the program under the Shah was encouraged and assisted by the United States and other Western powers. Once the Shah was overthrown in 1979 and replaced by Ayatollah Khomeini's Islamic regime, the West pulled its support. Upon coming to power, Khomeini discontinued the nuclear program, but later restarted it with Russian, Chinese and North Korean help.

Although Iran has maintained its nuclear program is for peaceful purposes and it has cooperated to a certain extent with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), nevertheless evidence abounds that the regime's long term desire is to obtain nuclear weapons.

According to the BBC, "the IAEA was unable to confirm Iran's assertions that its nuclear program was exclusively for peaceful purposes and that it had not sought to develop nuclear weapons."<sup>1</sup>

James Clapper, the US Director of National Intelligence said in 2011 that Iran is "keeping open the option to develop nuclear weapons... We do not know, however, if Iran will eventually build nuclear weapons."<sup>2</sup>



Illustrative photo of a nuclear reactor in Switzerland

Ayatollah Ali Akbar Hashemi-Rafsanjani, the former President of Iran, said: "If a day comes when the world of Islam is duly equipped with the arms Israel has in possession, the strategy of colonialism would face a stalemate because application of an atomic bomb would not leave anything in Israel but the same thing would just produce damages in the Muslim world."

Targeted strikes in the past by Iraq and have slowed down Iran's nuclear program, but not halted it.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-11709428>

<sup>2</sup> <http://edition.cnn.com/2012/03/08/world/meast/iran-nuclear-progam-analysis/>

# THE IRANIAN NUCLEAR PROGRAM - FACT SHEET

Negotiations with the world powers, beginning in 2003 with three European powers (Great Britain, France and Germany) and later joined by the U.S., Russia and China, aimed to reach a lasting settlement which would enable Iran to pursue peaceful nuclear energy while preventing the development of nuclear weapons.

An interim agreement between Iran and the P5+1 (the group of six countries mentioned above) was signed November 2013. In it, Iran agreed to halt the enrichment of uranium to 20% purity in exchange for limited economic sanctions relief. The deal came into force on January 20 and is set to expire on June 20, 2014.<sup>3</sup> The agreement has a provision for renewal without change for a further six months, should the parties wish it.

## THE SHAH'S NUCLEAR PROGRAM

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Before the Islamic Revolution of 1979, Iran was ruled by Shah Mohammed Reza Pahlavi. His close ties with the West brought him economic and military support. France and Germany enthusiastically supported all aspects of the Iranian nuclear program, the U.S. also invested considerably in the project but had reservations about non-proliferation and whether or not the Shah actually wanted to obtain nuclear weapons.<sup>4</sup>

In 1957, the Eisenhower administration signed a civilian nuclear cooperation deal with Iran as part of the 'Atoms for Peace' plan. This program allowed countries access to nuclear energy and nuclear research in exchange for giving up any ambitions towards possession of nuclear weapons.<sup>5</sup> The specific arrangement with Iran was termed Cooperation Concerning Civil Uses of Atoms.

Iran signed the Treaty on Nuclear Non-Proliferation (NPT) on July 1, 1968.<sup>6</sup>

According to the Brookings Institute: "The Atoms for Peace program provided the foundations for Iran's nuclear program by providing key nuclear technology and education."<sup>7</sup>



Official logo of the 'Atoms for Peace' Program, launched by Eisenhower in 1953

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<sup>3</sup> [http://eeas.europa.eu/statements/docs/2013/131124\\_03\\_en.pdf](http://eeas.europa.eu/statements/docs/2013/131124_03_en.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> [http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2010/12/29/the\\_shahs\\_atomic\\_dreams](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2010/12/29/the_shahs_atomic_dreams)

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.brookings.edu/blogs/up-front/posts/2013/12/18-sixty-years-atoms-peace-iran-nuclear-program-rowberry>

<sup>6</sup> <http://disarmament.un.org/treaties/t/npt>

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.brookings.edu/blogs/up-front/posts/2013/12/18-sixty-years-atoms-peace-iran-nuclear-program-rowberry>

# THE IRANIAN NUCLEAR PROGRAM - FACT SHEET

A small nuclear reactor for research purposes was gifted soon after the signing of the deal to the newly formed Tehran Nuclear Research Center. This kick-started Iran's nuclear program which was accelerated throughout the 1970s.

**GUESS WHO'S BUILDING NUCLEAR POWER PLANTS.**

The Shah of Iran is sitting on top of one of the largest reservoirs of oil in the world.

Yet he's building two nuclear plants and planning two more to provide electricity for his country.

He knows the oil is running out — and time with it.

But he wouldn't build the plants now if he doubted their safety. He'd wait. As many Americans want to do.

The Shah knows that nuclear energy is not only economical, it has enjoyed a remarkable 30-year safety record. A record that was good enough for the citizens of Plymouth, Massachusetts, too. They've approved their second nuclear plant by a vote of almost 4 to 1. Which shows you don't have to go as far as Iran for an endorsement of nuclear power.

**NUCLEAR ENERGY. TODAY'S ANSWER.**

1970s era American advertisement for nuclear power

The Shah established the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI), which saw its budget rise from \$31 million to \$1 billion. In 1975, the AEOI formed an agreement with Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) to train nuclear scientists in a specialized Master's degree program. At around the same time, the German firm Kraftwerk Union signed a deal to construct two reactors at Bushehr.

The Shah also concluded a deal for a 10% stake in a multinational enrichment facility in France called Eurodif. Iran lent \$1 billion to France in exchange for the stake, giving it access to enriched uranium from the facility.

The Eurodif scheme was designed to avoid proliferation of nuclear technology, while allowing access to nuclear material.

Iran still owns the 10% stake, but France has refused access to the enriched uranium since the Islamic Revolution.<sup>8</sup>

In 1979, the Shah's deeply unpopular regime was overthrown, resulting in the return from exile of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini and the establishment of the Islamic Republic.

The new regime cancelled the nuclear program claiming it was 'un-Islamic'.

Western powers were suspicious of the intentions of the new regime and universally restricted access to both nuclear material and technology.

<sup>8</sup> [https://www.armscontrol.org/act/2006\\_01-02/JANFEB-IranEnrich](https://www.armscontrol.org/act/2006_01-02/JANFEB-IranEnrich)

# THE IRANIAN NUCLEAR PROGRAM - FACT SHEET

## THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC'S NUCLEAR PROGRAM

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In the early 1980s, Iran decided to resume its nuclear program. Unable to rely on Western assistance, the clerical regime turned to Russia, China and North Korea for support.<sup>9</sup>

In 1983, Iran informed the IAEA that the country had restarted its nuclear program, although the decision had been made two years before that. Beginning in 1985, Iran was supplied with nuclear technology and materials by China, which helped construct a reactor at Esfahan. The Esfahan reactor is a critical part of Iran's nuclear infrastructure.<sup>10</sup>

Although China's assistance was officially for civilian nuclear purposes according to the RAND Corporation, "much of what China has actually provided, including support on uranium enrichment, has a military dimension as well."<sup>11</sup>

Around the same time as Iran was accelerating cooperation with China over its nuclear program, it was also gaining missile technology from North Korea in order to improve its capabilities for the Iran-Iraq war (1981-1988). Iran funded North Korean research and development programs, including reverse engineering of Iraqi Scud missiles, in return for options to purchase missiles.<sup>12</sup>

Over the course of the war, Iraq bombed the Bushehr reactor several times, slowing down the nuclear program. The facility finally became operational in 2011.<sup>13</sup>



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<sup>9</sup> <http://www.cfr.org/iran/irans-nuclear-program/p16811>

<sup>10</sup> <http://nuclearenergy.ir/history/>

<sup>11</sup> [http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/occasional\\_papers/2012/RAND\\_OP351.pdf](http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/occasional_papers/2012/RAND_OP351.pdf)

<sup>12</sup> <http://humanities.tau.ac.il/iranian/en/previous-reviews/10-iran-pulse-en/117-10>

<sup>13</sup> [http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2011/09/11/waiting\\_for\\_bushehr](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2011/09/11/waiting_for_bushehr)

# THE IRANIAN NUCLEAR PROGRAM - FACT SHEET

## RISING INTERNATIONAL CONCERNS

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As Iran's nuclear program progressed, fears began to surface that Tehran was seeking to develop nuclear weapons.

In 1984, a British Defense magazine, *Jane's Defence Weekly*, ran a story claiming "Iran is engaged in the production of an atomic bomb, likely to be ready within two years, according to press reports in the Persian Gulf last week."<sup>14</sup>

This report marked the first time that fears over Iran's nuclear program and possible acquisition of nuclear weaponry became widespread in the West.

At the beginning of the 1990s, after the fall of the USSR, Russia began cooperating with Iran, starting a joint research program termed *Persepolis*, which Russia provided Iran with information and technical expertise, including staff. Russia assisted in the construction of the Bushehr reactor which had not yet been completed, and had suffered extensive damage from Iraqi bombing raids.<sup>15</sup>



Iranian President Rouhani with Russian leader Vladimir Putin

Iran also made arrangements with Pakistan, benefitting immensely from the expertise of Pakistani nuclear scientist Abdul Qadeer Khan (aka AQ Khan) who was the father of the Pakistani nuclear weapons program.<sup>16</sup>

In November 1991, IAEA Director General Hans Blix said that there was 'no cause for concern' regarding Iran's nuclear program.

The U.S. began imposing sanctions directed against Iran's nuclear program around this time. In 1992, the Iraq-Iran Non-Proliferation Act was passed forbidding any person or entity from assisting Iran in obtaining "chemical, biological, nuclear, or destabilizing numbers and types of

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<sup>14</sup> <http://blogs.cfr.org/zenko/2012/01/03/iran%E2%80%99s-nuclear-program-history-and-eight-questions/>

<sup>15</sup> <http://static.cejiss.org/data/uploaded/13835989405560/7.pdf>

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.ibtimes.com/iran-pakistan-nuclear-partners-214092>

# THE IRANIAN NUCLEAR PROGRAM - FACT SHEET

advanced conventional weapons." This was followed in 1995 by a comprehensive ban on all trade and investment with Iran.<sup>17</sup>

In 1998, the U.S. announced that it was concerned about Iran's nuclear program and whether it would lead to Iran becoming a nuclear weapons state.<sup>18</sup> This echoed fears long expressed by Israeli intelligence agencies.

It was widely reported that the Supreme Leader of Iran, Ayatollah Ali Hosseini Khamenei, issued an oral *fatwa* (an Islamic religious decree) in 2003 forbidding the use of nuclear weapons on Islamic grounds. No written evidence seems to exist for the *fatwa* in question.



Iranian nuclear equipment confiscated in Spain

However, the Supreme Leader can overrule anyone, including Islamic law and his own previous statements. The Washington Institute for Near East Policy notes that "The Supreme Leader also has the final say on nuclear decision making. He is not constrained by his previous *fatwas*, which he can alter or reverse, or the opinions of other *mujtahids* (Islamic jurists). And if he believes that expediency calls for the acquisition, deployment or use of nuclear weapons, religious principles would not prevent the Islamic republic from doing so."<sup>19</sup>

This principle of expediency and the survival of the Islamic republic above all other concerns was enshrined into state doctrine by the previous Supreme Leader, the late Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini.

From the same report: "Before he died Ayatollah Khomeini affirmed the Islamic Republic's authority to destroy a mosque or suspend the Five Pillars of Islam if such measures were rendered necessary by the 'expediency' or 'interests' of the regime. Thus, Khomeini formalized the supremacy of *raison d'etat* over the tenets of Islam as the core principle guiding domestic and foreign policy decision-making in Iran. The regime's principle of expediency elevates the survival of the Islamic Republic to a supreme religious value, since only by this means can revolutionary Islam triumph. It then becomes the justification for the often extreme means used by the regime to stay in power."

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.cfr.org/iran/lengthening-list-iran-sanctions/p20258>

<sup>18</sup> <http://edition.cnn.com/2012/03/06/world/meast/iran-timeline/>

<sup>19</sup> <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/uploads/Documents/pubs/PolicyFocus115.pdf>

# THE IRANIAN NUCLEAR PROGRAM - FACT SHEET

Furthermore, according to the Shiite theological doctrine of *taqiyya*, it is permitted to utilize deceit and dissimulation when it is perceived to be in the service of the global Muslim community. The Iranian regime's leadership are ideological adherents of Shiite Islamic doctrine and thus consider themselves legally empowered to employ deceit as they see fit.

## NEGOTIATIONS AND SANCTIONS

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Negotiations between Iran and the so-called E3, the three European powers of Britain, France and Germany began in 2003. The respective foreign ministers of these countries paid a joint visit to Iran, where they issued a joint declaration with Iran in which Tehran affirmed its commitment to refrain from pursuing nuclear weapons technology and to cooperate with the IAEA, while Britain, France and Germany affirmed Iran's right to a peaceful civilian nuclear program.<sup>20</sup>



The P5+1 and Iran at the negotiating table in Geneva

In the same year, the IAEA released a report on Iran's nuclear program. It discussed Iran's admission that it had concealed parts of its nuclear program and called on Iran to cooperate fully with the organization in future. This was to include free and open access to nuclear facilities for IAEA inspectors.<sup>21</sup>

The report stated: "The recent disclosures by Iran about its nuclear programme clearly show that, in the past, Iran had concealed many aspects of its nuclear activities, with resultant breaches of its obligation to comply with the provisions of the Safeguards Agreement."

The report also noted the IAEA's mistrust of Iran saying "given Iran's past pattern of concealment, it will take some time before the Agency is able to conclude that Iran's nuclear program is exclusively for peaceful purposes."

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<sup>20</sup> [http://www.iaea.org/newscenter/focus/iaeairan/statement\\_iran21102003.shtml](http://www.iaea.org/newscenter/focus/iaeairan/statement_iran21102003.shtml)

<sup>21</sup> <http://www.iaea.org/Publications/Documents/Board/2003/gov2003-75.pdf>

# THE IRANIAN NUCLEAR PROGRAM - FACT SHEET

In 2006, the E3 were joined by Russia, China and the U.S. This group is alternatively known as the E3+3 or the P5+1, referring to three European powers + Russia China and America, or the five world powers plus Germany. They released a joint statement in 2006 reaffirming the principles of peaceful nuclear technology under strict supervision by the international community.<sup>22</sup>



The Iranian delegation to the Geneva talks

Negotiations were combined with a policy of sanctions imposed by the UN Security Council, in an attempt to force Iran to cooperate fully with the IAEA and to deter it from attempting to gain nuclear weapons.

The US has imposed its own bevy of sanctions, including but not limited to restrictions on financial involvement with Iranian companies and the seizure of

Iranian assets such as the Piaget Building in New York (650 Fifth Avenue), which had been owned by the Alavi Foundation, an Iranian non-profit accused by the State Department of aiding terrorism.<sup>23 24</sup>

The UN Security Council has passed six resolutions condemning Iran.<sup>25</sup>

1. **July 2006:** Resolution 1696 called on Iran to halt all enrichment of uranium, while calling on countries not to aid the Iranian nuclear program in any way. It threatened sanctions should Iran not comply.
2. **December 2006:** Resolution 1737 was passed in response to Iran's failure to comply with the July 2006 resolution. It echoed the demands made previously, and with an additional demand to halt work on heavy water reactor projects. It also established a committee to monitor the progress of Iran's compliance.
3. **March 2007:** Resolution 1747 was passed as a result of Iran's failure to comply with the previous two resolutions. It called on Iran to cooperate fully with the IAEA and to prove that its nuclear program is solely peaceful. Additionally, it asked Iran to take into account the negotiation proposals made in 2006 by the P5+1 for a more permanent negotiated agreement.
4. **March 2008:** Resolution 1803 censured Iran for refusal to comply with any of the previous resolutions and asked again that the Islamic Republic cooperate fully with the IAEA. It also added additional names to the original list of people whose assets were to be frozen on the grounds of their aiding and abetting Iran's nuclear program.

<sup>22</sup> [http://www.consilium.europa.eu/ueDocs/cms\\_Data/docs/pressdata/en/reports/90569.pdf](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/ueDocs/cms_Data/docs/pressdata/en/reports/90569.pdf)

<sup>23</sup> <http://www.cfr.org/iran/lengthening-list-iran-sanctions/p20258>

<sup>24</sup> <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-27089659>

<sup>25</sup> <http://www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/Security-Council-Resolutions-on-Iran>

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5. **September 2008:** Resolution 1835 reaffirms the previous four resolutions as well as the Security Council's commitment to a negotiated settlement.
6. **June 2010:** Resolution 1929 reiterated the demands made in previous resolutions to cease and desist from all activities pertaining to uranium enrichment and nuclear weapons development. It also imposed an extensive range of sanctions including a total arms embargo and a ban on Iranian investment in missile technology or uranium mining abroad.

Despite all these sanctions and negotiations Iran has continued its uranium enrichment program.

The latest agreement, referred to as the Interim Agreement, was signed in December 2013 and gave modest sanctions relief in exchange for Iran halting enrichment of uranium to 20% purity. Officially termed the Joint Plan of Action, it aimed to lay the ground work for a future permanent solution.<sup>26</sup>

## OTHER RESOURCES

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**Nuclear Fatwa: Religion and Politics in Iran's Proliferation Strategy – Washington Institute for Near East Policy**

<http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/uploads/Documents/pubs/PolicyFocus115.pdf>

**China and Iran: Economic Political and Military Relations – Rand Corporation Center for Middle East Public Policy**

[http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/occasional\\_papers/2012/RAND\\_OP351.pdf](http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/occasional_papers/2012/RAND_OP351.pdf)

**Iran's Nuclear Policy: Russia's Perspective - Central European Journal of International and Strategic Studies**

<http://static.cejiss.org/data/uploaded/13835989405560/7.pdf>

**Iran's Nuclear Program: Tehran's Compliance With International Obligations – Congressional Research Service**

<http://fas.org/sgp/crs/nuke/R40094.pdf>

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<sup>26</sup> <http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/11/24/us-iran-nuclear-agreement-text-idUSBRE9AN0FS20131124>