

Security Council Topic Area A: The Situation in Iran

Since August 2002 Iran has been a pressing source of concern for the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) following the revelation of two secret nuclear facilities. The revelation of these facilities drew into question the nature of the Iranian nuclear program. While Iran was initially cooperative with the IAEA, that cooperation ended in early 2006 with its announcement of intent to resume all research and development activities. In April 2006, President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad announced that Iran had “joined the nuclear countries of the world,” and that Iran had no intention of giving up its right to enrich uranium as part of negotiations over its nuclear program. The Security Council agreed in early June 2006 on a set of proposals for Iran, containing both incentives and disincentives with the goal of deterring Iranian uranium enrichment. Iran rejected the proposals, calling them “insulting and humiliating.” Following the rejection of the proposals, the Security Council issued the first (S/RES/1696) of what would become six resolutions between July 2006 and June 2010 banning arms exports, freezing assets, and restricting the travel of individuals, groups, and companies associated with the nuclear program.

During this time, negotiations continued regarding efforts to persuade Iran to halt its uranium enrichment program. In 2009, Russia, France, and the United States offered to send a large portion of Iran’s nuclear fuel abroad for further processing. Iran initially refused but later accepted after the proposal was withdrawn following the exposure of the Fordow Fuel Enrichment Plant (FFEP). Following the initial rejection, Iran and several member nations revealed to the IAEA that Iran was constructing a fuel enrichment plant in a tunnel complex on a Revolutionary Guard base in Fordow, near the city of Qom.

While it has been years since the covert nuclear facilities were exposed the question of a military dimension to Iran’s nuclear program remains unanswered. The IAEA has been allowed access to declared Iranian nuclear facilities; however, Iran continues to remain evasive regarding questions raised by the IAEA and Security Council. Iran continually reminds the IAEA of its compliance and findings in Board of Governors’ reports that Iran has not diverted any nuclear material from those sites the IAEA is allowed to access. Western diplomats continue to call into question the validity of Iran’s proposal to domestically supply fuel for its nuclear program as well as the design of its research reactor under construction at Arak. They also question if the Arak reactor is to be a replacement for the Tehran Research Reactor and why the Iranian government proceeded to enrich uranium to 20% against IAEA recommendations and without IAEA safeguards as reported in GOV/2010/10.

There have been repeated statements by Iran regarding the construction of as many as ten new enrichment facilities. The IAEA has not been allowed access to any of these proposed sites, though reportedly five have been chosen. Iran claims it is not obligated to give access to the sites until six months prior to the introduction of nuclear material under the Safeguards Agreement. Iran has routinely neglected to inform the IAEA of nuclear sites until they have been publicly exposed via international media or western intelligence agencies.

Issues with possible military dimensions have been continually called into question by the IAEA. Such issues include alleged studies relating to spherical and hemispherical high-explosive lensing testing; long range missile testing; reentry vehicle modification of Shahab-3 payload replacing the conventional high explosives with a spherical payload; uranium metal milling; and highly synchronous explosive triggering. Additionally, issues relating to transparency and cooperation with the IAEA remain outstanding: continued uranium enrichment to 20%; lack of access to companies producing components for nuclear research and development; and refusal of access to heavy water, uranium processing and mining facilities. Iran claims these issues have arisen from forged documents and that these are “politically motivated” and “baseless” accusations. Iran also claims that “alleged studies” have never been considered outstanding issues. Iran continues to call all Security Council resolutions concerning the Iranian nuclear program “illegal,” claiming it is not bound by modified Code 3.1 of the Subsidiary Arrangements General Part (which requires states report new facilities to the IAEA 180 days before the facility receives nuclear material for the first time) and that its actions do not violate the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).

Efforts have been made by unknown nations or groups to slow Iran’s nuclear progress using cyber-warfare. Following the cyberattack by the Stuxnet virus in 2010 on computers regulating Iranian centrifuges and the Bushehr nuclear reactor, Iranian production of Low Enriched Uranium (LEU) fell. The virus also resulted in a delay in bringing the Bushehr reactor online. The virus appears to have been designed specifically for systems controlling Iranian centrifuge cascades causing them to spin out of control while indicating false readouts within normal operating parameters. Despite this setback, by early 2011 production of LEU had reached pre-Stuxnet, levels and the Bushehr reactor was loaded and had reached the critical level for sustained nuclear fission by 10 May 2011. Iran has placed blame for the Stuxnet virus on Israel and the United States and has blamed the German company Siemens for introducing the virus to Iranian systems. In addition to overcoming the setbacks caused by the Stuxnet virus, analysis by experts suggests that Iran has reached nuclear breakout capacity and with available known quantities of LEU, Iran could produce enough Highly Enriched Uranium (HEU) to build a nuclear weapon within 62 days, or 12 days provided 153.2kg of LEU enriched at 19.7%

In addition, negotiations continue to proceed between Iran and the P5+1 (China, France, Germany, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States) to rectify this issue, with the latest occurring this last April/May.

Questions to consider from your government’s perspective include the following

- How does the presence of the Iranian nuclear program affect the implementation of the Non-Proliferation Treaty?
- What are appropriate actions for the international community to take with regard to Iran’s nuclear program?

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