

# WebMemo



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## Don't Count on the Security Council to Curb Iran's Nuclear Ambitions

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Iran has ignored another United Nations Security Council deadline to halt its suspect nuclear activities, which are widely believed to mask clandestine efforts to develop nuclear weapons. The United States must push hard for stronger sanctions against Iran, not only at the Security Council but also directly with European and Japanese allies, who have considerable untapped leverage over Tehran. Relying solely on U.N. sanctions, which are likely to be diluted and delayed by Russia and China, will be too little, too late. Unless the European Union and Japan agree to withhold foreign investment, strategic trade, and technology from Iran, there is little chance that Iran's nuclear ambitions will be stopped, short of war.

Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad defiantly proclaimed on Sunday that "Iran has obtained the technology to produce nuclear fuel, and Iran's move is like a train...which has no break and no reverse gear." He was echoed by Deputy Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mohammadi, who warned that "We have prepared ourselves for any situation, even for war." Iranian officials also claimed to have launched a rocket capable of reaching space, although it reportedly rose only to sub-orbital level. Tehran is clearly signaling that it will risk war to preserve its nuclear program.

On "Fox News Sunday," Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice responded: "They don't need a reverse gear. They need a stop button." She indicated that Iran will face growing sanctions and international isolation if it continues on its present course. Economic sanctions ultimately may not be capable of

stopping Iran from attaining a nuclear capability, especially if the push for sanctions is limited to the Security Council. But escalating sanctions imposed by a broad international coalition would at least raise the costs to Tehran's radical regime and possibly slow its nuclear progress.

**Deadline or Dead Letter?** Under the terms of U.N. Security Council Resolution 1737, passed on December 23, 2006, Iran was required to take action by February 21 to freeze its uranium enrichment efforts, stop building a heavy water nuclear reactor capable of producing plutonium that could be used in a nuclear weapon, and fully cooperate with International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) inspectors. Iran has refused to meet any of the three conditions.

The IAEA announced on February 22 that Iran has expanded its uranium enrichment efforts, rather than freezing them as required. The IAEA issued a report revealing that Iran had installed two cascades of 164 centrifuges in its underground plant at Natanz and plans to install and operate 3,000 centrifuges in 18 cascades there by May. In addition, Iran continues to build a heavy water reactor that could enable it to pursue another route to a nuclear weapon. It has failed to fully cooperate with IAEA inspectors.

This paper, in its entirety, can be found at:  
[www.heritage.org/research/MiddleEast/wm1370.cfm](http://www.heritage.org/research/MiddleEast/wm1370.cfm)

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This is not the first time that Iran has shrugged off a Security Council deadline. It ignored a previous demand to halt its suspicious nuclear activities by August 31 of last year. After four months of maddeningly slow negotiations, the Security Council finally administered a diplomatic slap on the wrist to Iran on December 23: a ban on exports of materials and technology that could contribute to Iran's nuclear weapons and missile programs and a freeze on the foreign assets of 10 key Iranian companies and 12 individuals involved in those programs.

Representatives of the five Security Council permanent members and Germany plan to meet today in London to discuss the next steps in the long-simmering diplomatic confrontation with Iran. Measures to be considered reportedly include a mandatory travel ban on Iranian individuals on the U.N.'s list, new additions to that list, an arms embargo on Iran, a ban on export guarantees to Iran, and an expansion of the list of prohibited export items.

All of these suggestions are long overdue. But they are far from sufficient to convince Iran's radical Islamic regime to change its behavior. And Iran is counting on Russia and China to use their veto power at the Security Council to block or water down even these sanctions.

The United States should continue to press the Security Council to take action on Iran's stubborn refusal to abide by its commitments under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and IAEA safeguard agreements. But Washington cannot depend on the U.N. to take decisive action. Both Moscow and Beijing have a vested interest in protecting Tehran from sanctions that would disrupt their growing economic and military ties.

**Probe Iran's Achilles Heel.** After extracting the strongest possible sanctions at the Security Council, the United States must lead an international coalition to take stronger action outside the U.N. framework, where Russia and China will not be able to hamstring the concerted efforts of America's democratic allies.

The United States should lead international efforts to exploit Iran's Achilles heel, its faltering economy. High oil prices have boosted Iran's regime but allowed it to postpone long-needed economic reforms. Iran's rapidly growing population is plagued by high unemployment, high inflation, endemic state corruption, and low economic growth. Iran's oil exports, which provide about 85 percent of export revenues, are projected to shrink without huge injections of foreign investment, technology, and expertise.

Washington should press its European allies and Japan to impose targeted economic sanctions that would deprive Iran of foreign investment, loans, advanced technology, and subsidized trade deals if it continues to defy international demands to halt its prohibited nuclear efforts. Efforts should be made to isolate Iran by banning its leaders' foreign visits until it has met its international obligations.

The United States and its allies should also step up public diplomacy programs to explain to the Iranian people the growing costs of their leaders' stubborn refusal to abide by Iran's treaty commitments. Iran's truculent President, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, already is the target of increasing criticism from Iranian hardliners, as well as moderates, for dismissing the impact of international sanctions. Raising domestic political heat on him, and on the ayatollahs who rule through him, would increase the likelihood that Iran will verifiably suspend its nuclear efforts.

Failing to impose serious economic sanctions on Iran and relying solely on endless and ineffective U.N. negotiations would only give the *appearance* that something is being done to obstruct Iran's nuclear goals. In the long run, this will increase the likelihood of a preventive war against Iran, or allow the emergence of nuclear-armed Iran, or worse yet, lead to a war with a nuclear-armed Iran.

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