

Eight points about Iran's nuclear program: Not what we might think

by [David Cortright](#) in the [June 17, 2008](#) issue

1. The U.S. government's National Intelligence Estimate reported in November 2007 that Iran halted its nuclear weapons program in the fall of 2003. Iran is developing the capacity to enrich uranium, as it is entitled to do under the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty. International inspectors have found no evidence of an actual nuclear weapons program.
2. The director of U.S. national intelligence testified last year that Iran would need several years to develop nuclear weapons capability. Ample time is available to craft an effective diplomatic strategy to prevent nuclear weaponization.
3. The U.S. government is working with European countries and international agencies such as the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and the UN Security Council. Cooperative diplomacy is an effective strategy for encouraging compliance with nonproliferation goals. Iran reportedly restrained its nuclear program in response to increasing international scrutiny, pressure and incentives.
4. U.S. differences with Iran should be resolved through diplomacy, not unilateral sanctions and military threats, which have strengthened the hand of conservatives within Iran and led to further isolation of Iranian reformers.
5. A major goal of U.S. policy should be to maintain and increase Iran's cooperation with the IAEA, so that international inspectors continue to have access to Iranian nuclear facilities and can detect any prohibited activities. Most of what we know about the Iranian nuclear program has come from IAEA inspectors on the ground.
6. Iran has recently increased its cooperation with international inspectors, as part of a special program to clarify questions about its past nuclear activities. In November 2007 and then again in February, IAEA officials reported "good progress" in resolving uncertainties about Iran's nuclear program.

7. Senior Iranian officials have said that Tehran is prepared to negotiate and might allow an international consortium to enrich uranium in Iran. The U.S. should enter into high-level discussions with Iran, without preconditions. Washington should offer incentives to Tehran, such as the lifting of nonmilitary sanctions, to encourage greater Iranian cooperation in denuclearization and regional stabilization efforts.

8. Nonproliferation objectives in Iran should be linked to broader denuclearization efforts. The United States and other nuclear-weapons states have signed the nonproliferation treaty with Iran and more than 180 other countries, pledging to take measures to achieve nuclear disarmament. The U.S. would be in a stronger position to prevent nuclear proliferation by others if it fulfilled its own commitment to negotiate for disarmament.