

THE NATIONAL INTEREST

Published on *The National Interest* (<http://nationalinterest.org>)

Source URL (retrieved on Jun 10, 2013): <http://nationalinterest.org/commentary/ten-reasons-iran-doesnt-want-the-bomb-7802>

Ten Reasons Iran Doesn't Want the Bomb

| [More](#) ^[1]

| [Seyed Hossein Mousavian](#) ^[2]

| December 4, 2012

| [Seyed Hossein Mousavian](#) ^[2]



Since the beginning of Iran's nuclear crisis, the West has been convinced that one approach offers the best hope of altering Tehran's nuclear policy and halting its enrichment activities: comprehensive international sanctions and a credible threat of military strike. During the same period, I have repeatedly warned my friends in the West that such punitive pressures, no matter how severe, will not change the Iranian leadership's mindset, and that a military option would be catastrophic for Iran, the region and beyond.

Almost a decade has passed and the unrelenting Western pressures applied on Iran have not achieved the objectives they set. Instead, they have resulted in Iran having an expanded and more sophisticated nuclear program. It is time for the West to acknowledge these realities.

The question that remains is whether Iran ultimately aims to get a nuclear weapon. If Iran isn't after the bomb, then the Western accusations and concerns would be reduced enough to allow a diplomatic solution.

The following reasons aim to strengthen the case for why Iran is not after a nuclear bomb:

1. Religious Obligations: Besides an international commitment to Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), Iran has religious obligations against nuclear weapons. Based ^[3] on ^[4] the Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei's religious edict or fatwa, the use of nuclear weapons and all other types of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) is forbidden or haram—constituting a sin, while being useless, costly, harmful and a serious threat to humanity. Iran's authorities were informed about this religious view in 1995, eight years prior to Iran's enrichment program became known to the West. Leaving no room for discrepancy, all Muslim Shia grand ayatollahs have issued the same religious *fatwa*.

Iran's stance against weapons of mass destruction, which is far from new, has been put to the test. During the Iran-Iraq war, Saddam Hussein ordered chemical weapons to be used against Iran in the 1980s, resulting in 100,000 Iranian soldiers and civilians being killed or injured. Iran did not retaliate in kind primarily because Imam Ruhollah Khomeini was against the use of weapons of mass destruction based on religious beliefs.

2. No Long-Term Advantage: Based on Iranian assessments, the possession of nuclear weapons would provide only a short-term regional advantage that would turn into a longer-term vulnerability. It would trigger a regional nuclear arms race, bringing Egypt, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia into the fold sooner or later.

3. Technology Choices: The technical configurations Iran has chosen for its nuclear program demonstrate a preference for a robust enrichment capability rather than for a rapid nuclear weapons breakout capability. Iran's development program is focused on next-generation nuclear technologies, rather than mass production or maximum installation of centrifuges. There are more advantageous configurations Iran could implement if it was determined to acquire weapons in the near term.

Iran has shown no urgency to advance its nuclear dual-use efforts. Even the activities detailed in the November 2011 International Atomic Energy Agency report are not directed at any specific nuclear weaponization. According ^[5] to Robert Kelly, an American top nuclear expert and the former International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) inspector, the report was misleading and aimed to bolster hardliners "by taking information and feeding it as raw meat to people who want to move forward with war."

4. Isolation: Iran recognizes that by becoming a nuclear weapons state, it will compel Russia and China to join the United States and implement devastating sanctions that would paralyze the Iranian economy.

Iran recognizes that becoming a nuclear weapons state would give the Israelis ample ammunition to rally the United States and the international community on a perceived existential threat to its existence for creating another war in the Middle East.

5. Aspirations: Iran's ultimate strategy is to be a modern nation, fully capable of competing with the West in terms of advanced technologies. The majority of Iran's prominent politicians believe that possessing nuclear weapons would be an obstacle in the long-term for Iran's access to vast technological cooperation with developed countries. They do not want to see Iran come under the kind of extreme international isolation levied against North Korea.

6. Goodwill: During negotiations from 2003 to 2005, with Iran and France, Germany, and the UK (the EU-3), Iran submitted proposals which included a declaration to cap enrichment at 5 percent; to export all low-enriched uranium or fabricate it into fuel rods; to commit to an additional

protocol to its IAEA safeguards agreement and subsidiary arrangements to the agreement, which would provide maximum transparency; to allow the IAEA to make snap inspections of undeclared facilities; and to ship its enriched uranium to another country for fabrication into fuel rods for Tehran Research Reactor. Similarly, Iran welcomed [6] the Russian step-by-step proposal in the summer of 2011, which addressed [7] all the West's concerns about Iran's nuclear activities.

These offers were intended to ensure that no enriched uranium would be diverted to a nuclear weapons program in the future. That's why the Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman recently said [8]: "Iran, in order to prove its goodwill, has even gone beyond the commitments enumerated in the agency's regulations." But the United States and EU still rejected the offer.

7. No Stockpile: Accusations levied against Iran for stockpiling enriched uranium to build nuclear weapon are misleading, since Iran requires 27 tons of uranium enriched at 3.5 percent level annually to provide fuel for its only nuclear power plant in Bushehr. Up to now, Iran has produced about 7 tons and needs an additional 20 tons.

8. Enrichment Offers: The West's biggest concern and therefore highest priority in nuclear talks have centered on Iran's 20 percent enriched uranium. First in February 2010 and for the second time in September 2011, Iran proposed to stop its 20 percent enrichment in return for fuel rods—and once again the West declined. At a meeting between EU Foreign Policy Chief Catherine Ashton and Iran's leading nuclear negotiator Saeed Jalili on September 19, Iran once again offered [9] to suspend its enrichment of uranium to 20 percent, provided proportionate reciprocation would be taken by P5+1. "If they give us the 20 percent [enriched] fuel, we will immediately halt 20 percent [enrichment]," Ahmadinejad said [10] in an interview with Iranian state-run television. But Europe responded to his goodwill by placing more sanctions.

9. Deterrence: A major accusation levied against Iran is that once it acquires nuclear weapons, it will use it against the United States and Israel. This makes no rational sense, since any provocation by Iran against two states that possess thousands and hundreds of nuclear weapons respectively would result in Iran's total annihilation. Iran has publically acknowledged [11] this fact.

10. Forget Regime Change: The view of some U.S. politicians is that Iran's motive for seeking nuclear weapons is nuclear deterrence—to ensure Washington would not attack it at will, instigate regime change or reach its objectives. If this concern is accurate, then Iran's nuclear weapons could be used to prevent war—a positive outcome. But this concern relies on the wrong premise, as Iran has not aimed to acquire nuclear weapons in the face of a concerted effort by the United States and the West to engineer regime change in Tehran, including the use of war. During eight years of Iraqi aggression against Iran, the United States and the West did their utmost to support the aggressor and yet failed to bring defeat to Iran. Paradoxically for some, Iran without nuclear weapons has become more powerful year after year in the past 34 years, stymying Western efforts to bring about the collapse of the regime. Meanwhile, the U.S. and Israeli positions in the region have declined despite the thousands of nuclear weapons between them.

The Deal

These are just a few reasons the West should enter into a genuine, face saving and realistic solution—rather than continuing to push aggressively and ineffectively against Iranian nuclear development.

Tehran would only accept a deal in which the P5+1 recognizes Iran's legitimate rights of

enrichment under the NPT and gradually lifts the sanctions. In return, to assuage Western worries, Iran would operationalize Ayatollah Khamenei's fatwa banning nuclear arms, implement the Additional Protocol and the Subsidiary Arrangements (Code 3.1), and cooperate with the IAEA to resolve technical ambiguities and its worries about possible military dimensions. It would also export its enriched uranium stockpile beyond domestic consumption or convert it to fuel rods, cap enrichment at 5 percent, and establish a multilateral consortium for enrichment in Iran.

This package can guarantee Iran's legitimate NPT rights of enrichment while ensuring that Iran will remain a non-nuclear-weapon state forever.

Ambassador Seyed Hossein Mousavian is a research scholar at Princeton's Woodrow Wilson School and a former spokesman for Iran's nuclear negotiators. His latest book is The Iranian Nuclear Crisis: A Memoir [12], published by Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

More by

Seyed Hossein Mousavian [2]

Topics: Grand Strategy [13] Nuclear Proliferation [14] Weapons Inspections [15] WMD [16] Security [17]

Regions: Iran [18]

Tags: International Atomic Energy Agency [19] Imam Ruhollah Khomeini [20] Robert Kelly [21] Saddam Hussein [22] Seyed Hossein Mousavian [23] Ali Khamenei [24] Disaster [25] Institute for Science and International Security [26] International relations [27] Iran [28] Iran and weapons of mass destruction [29] Iran–United States relations [30] Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty [31] Nuclear program of Iran [32] Nuclear proliferation [33] Nuclear weapons [34] Politics of Iran [35] Technology [36] War [37] Weapon of mass destruction [38]

Source URL (retrieved on Jun 10, 2013): <http://nationalinterest.org/commentary/ten-reasons-iran-doesnt-want-the-bomb-7802>

Links:

[1] <http://www.addthis.com/bookmark.php?v=250&username=nationalinterest>

[2] <http://nationalinterest.org/profile/smousavi-princetonedu>

[3] <http://www.cnn.com/2012/08/30/world/meast/iran-khamenei-speech/index.html?iref=mpstoryviews>

[4] http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/iran-we-do-not-want-nuclear-weapons/2012/04/12/gIQAjMNnDT_story.html

[5] http://therealnews.com/t2/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=31&Itemid=74&jumival=7594

[6] http://www.armscontrol.org/act/2011_10/Iran-Nuclear-Program-Interview-Iranian-Ambassador-Ali-Asghar-Soltanieh

[7] http://www.armscontrol.org/2012_07-08/The_Iranian_Nuclear_Dispute_Origins_and_Current_Options

[8] <http://tehrantimes.com/politics/102371-iran-welcomes-constructive-dialogue-with-51-mehmanparast>

[9] <http://www.ipsnews.net/2012/09/iranian-diplomat-says-iran-offered-deal-to-halt-20-percent-enrichment/>

[10] <http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article>

[/ALeqM5hgcXVoTiNqpEZNAJWJB3Zf_t95Tg?docId=CNG.0d7475ce7de608317f0ef718cc8c43a2.c11](http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5hgcXVoTiNqpEZNAJWJB3Zf_t95Tg?docId=CNG.0d7475ce7de608317f0ef718cc8c43a2.c11)

[11] <http://m.guardiannews.com/commentisfree/2012/oct/02/iran-nukes-deterrence?cat=commentisfree&type=article>

[12] <http://carnegieendowment.org/2012/05/03/iranian-nuclear-crisis-memoir/ap15>

[13] <http://nationalinterest.org/topic/security/grand-strategy>

[14] <http://nationalinterest.org/topic/security/nuclear-proliferation>

[15] <http://nationalinterest.org/topic/security/weapons-inspections>

[16] <http://nationalinterest.org/topic/security/wmd>

[17] <http://nationalinterest.org/topic/security>

[18] <http://nationalinterest.org/region/middle-east/persian-gulf/iran>

[19] <http://nationalinterest.org/tag/organization/international-atomic-energy-agency>

[20] <http://nationalinterest.org/tag/person/imam-ruhollah-khomeini>

[21] <http://nationalinterest.org/tag/person/robert-kelly>

[22] <http://nationalinterest.org/tag/person/saddam-hussein>

- [23] <http://nationalinterest.org/tag/person/seyed-hossein-mousavian>
- [24] <http://nationalinterest.org/tag/ali-khamenei>
- [25] <http://nationalinterest.org/tag/disaster>
- [26] <http://nationalinterest.org/tag/institute-for-science-and-international-security>
- [27] <http://nationalinterest.org/tag/international-relations>
- [28] <http://nationalinterest.org/tag/iran>
- [29] <http://nationalinterest.org/tag/iran-and-weapons-of-mass-destruction>
- [30] <http://nationalinterest.org/tag/iran%E2%80%93united-states-relations>
- [31] <http://nationalinterest.org/tag/nuclear-non-proliferation-treaty>
- [32] <http://nationalinterest.org/tag/nuclear-program-of-iran>
- [33] <http://nationalinterest.org/tag/nuclear-proliferation>
- [34] <http://nationalinterest.org/tag/nuclear-weapons>
- [35] <http://nationalinterest.org/tag/politics-of-iran>
- [36] <http://nationalinterest.org/tag/technology>
- [37] <http://nationalinterest.org/tag/war>
- [38] <http://nationalinterest.org/tag/weapon-of-mass-destruction>