

Estimate of Iran changes, U.S. policy doesn't

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A new intelligence estimate will not change the Bush administration's policy of tough sanctions and diplomacy. Estimate of Iran changes, U.S. policy doesn't By Richard Wolf and Richard Willing, USA TODAY WASHINGTON — A new intelligence estimate that reverses previous U.S. claims that Iran is developing nuclear weapons will not change the Bush administration's policy of tough sanctions and diplomacy. "That was our policy … and that's our policy going forward," said Stephen Hadley, the president's national security adviser. "We have the right strategy." REPORT SUMMARY: Read the NIE assessment PHOTOS PLAY ROLE: Pictures contributed to reassessment IN IRAN: Iran welcomes move to 'correct' nuke claim

Iran ceased its secret nuclear weapons program in 2003 and has not resumed work toward building nuclear arms, a National Intelligence Estimate released Monday says. The estimate reverses claims the intelligence community made two years ago that Iran appeared "determined to develop" a nuclear weapons program. The new estimate did not explain why the intelligence community did not know Iran had stopped its weapons program before the 2005 estimate was released. FIND MORE STORIES IN: George W Bush | Iran | TEHRAN | Intelligence | Estimate The estimate, reflecting the collective judgment of the nation's 16 intelligence agencies, also concludes that Tehran probably is "keeping open the option to develop nuclear weapons" by continuing to build missiles and pursue a civilian nuclear power program. Iran, intelligence analysts concluded, halted weapons development in response to international scrutiny and the threat of increased sanctions. U.S. officials are still trying to enlist more nations to bring sanctions against Iran. On Monday, Undersecretary of State Nicholas Burns said he met with Chinese officials to agree on key issues involved in imposing a third set of United Nations sanctions on Iran for continuing a nuclear weapons program. Shortly after Burns' comments in Singapore, the intelligence community released its estimate saying Iran had stopped its nuclear weapons program in 2003. Despite the differences from the 2005 analysis, intelligence officials thought it was important to set the record straight by making public that "our understanding of Iran's capabilities have changed," said Donald Kerr, deputy director of national intelligence. Monday's estimate was a double "good news story," said Sen. Kit Bond of Missouri, the ranking Republican on the Senate Intelligence Committee. "The intelligence community was willing to reconsider an important intelligence judgment," Bond said. "Iran doesn't appear to be currently working on a bomb." Sen. Joseph Biden, D-Del., who chairs the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, said the estimate undercuts the administration's "obsession with regime change and irresponsible talk of World War III." Last month, President Bush said the U.S. policy toward Iran was aimed at avoiding "World War III." "The NIE makes clear that the right combination of pressure and positive incentives could prompt Tehran to extend the current halt to its nuclear weapons program," said Biden, a Democratic candidate for president. Mordechai Kedar, who served in Israel's military intelligence for 25 years and is a researcher at the Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies in Tel Aviv, said Israel's intelligence community disagrees with the latest estimate. "This is a matter of interpretation of data. I do believe that the U.S. and Israel share the same data, but the dispute is about interpreting the data. … Only a blind man cannot see their efforts to put a hand on a nuclear weapon. They are threatening the world." Contributing: Charles Levinson

News photos contributed to Iran reassessment By Richard Willing, USA TODAY

WASHINGTON — For all of the effort spent trying to determine the scope of Iran's nuclear weapons program, it was a media visit to Iran that helped the intelligence community reconsider its assessment of the program, U.S. intelligence officials said Monday. Photographs taken during the media visit this year weren't decisive in determining when Iran stopped its nuclear program, said an officer who helped prepare a National Intelligence Estimate released Monday. A LESSER THREAT: Threat estimate of Iran changes, tough treatment doesn't IN IRAN: Iran welcomes move to 'correct' nuke claim But the photos from Iran's Natanz nuclear facility were reviewed by intelligence analysts who concluded Iran continues to face "significant technical problems" in using the facility to enrich uranium, the officer said. Four intelligence officials spoke at a briefing on condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of intelligence collection, said Ross Feinstein, a spokesman for the Office of the Director of National Intelligence. The estimate released Monday differed dramatically from one from 2005. The earlier estimate said Iran's secret nuclear weapons program remained in place. All four officials said information that has emerged recently indicates the Iranians halted their secret program less than 12 months before the 2005 estimate was prepared. Information that led to the new estimate continued to be evaluated until a few weeks ago, the officials said. In revising their estimate, intelligence officers said they were mindful of "lessons learned" from a 2002 report that overstated the case for weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. "We had to show our homework," one said, by justifying the new judgments to intelligence agency leaders who OK'd the final

version. Monday's NIE reported with "high confidence" that Iran had stopped its secret nuclear weapons development program in fall 2003. The program was halted in response to "increasing international scrutiny" and pressure stemming from exposure of Iran's ongoing civilian nuclear program, the estimate concluded. The intelligence officials also cited Libya's decision in 2003 to stop its nuclear program and the arrest of Pakistani nuclear scientist A.Q. Khan as reasons Iran stopped trying to develop weapons. The estimate, the collective judgment of the nation's 16 intelligence agencies, said Iran had not restarted its weapons program as of mid-2007 but could resume weapons development. The intelligence community concluded in 2005 that Iran was "determined to develop nuclear weapons despite its international obligations and international pressure." Technical limitations, both estimates concluded, make it hard for Iran to produce weapons-grade uranium before the early years of the next decade, at a minimum. Such a change is a "little unusual," but intelligence estimates are meant to reflect changing assessments, said Gary Sick, who was a member of the National Security Council under Presidents Gerald Ford, Jimmy Carter and Ronald Reagan. "That's what they're there for." Senate Intelligence Committee chair Jay Rockefeller, D-W.Va., said the revised estimate showed the intelligence community had "learned its lessons" from pre-war Iraq intelligence, which overstated the likelihood that Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction. "This demonstrates a new willingness to question (intelligence) assumptions internally," he said. Rep. Silvestre Reyes, D-Texas, chairman of the House Intelligence Committee, vowed to question intelligence officials closely about their classified sources. "Just two years ago, the intelligence community believed that Iran was determined to develop nuclear weapons," Reyes said. Changing projections on country's capabilities Key differences between the intelligence community's 2005 and 2007 estimates on Iran's nuclear program, as described in a nine-page summary report issued Monday by the Office of the Director of National Intelligence.

Issue 2005 report 2007 report Iran's intent to develop nuclear weapons "Assess with high confidence that Iran currently is determined to develop nuclear weapons despite its international obligations and international pressure, but we do not assess that Iran is immovable." "Judge with high confidence that in fall 2003, Tehran halted its nuclear weapons program. Judge with high confidence that the halt lasted at least several years. … Assess with moderate confidence Tehran had not restarted its nuclear weapons program as of mid-2007, but we do not know whether it currently intends to develop nuclear weapons. Judge with high confidence that the halt was directed primarily in response to increasing international scrutiny and pressure resulting from exposure of Iran's previously undeclared nuclear work. Assess with moderate-to-high confidence that Tehran at a minimum is keeping open the option to develop nuclear weapons." "Date of Iran's ability to have nuclear weapons" "We have moderate confidence in projecting when Iran is likely to make a nuclear weapon; we assess that it is unlikely before early-to-mid next decade." "We judge with moderate confidence Iran probably would be technically capable of producing enough HEU (highly enriched uranium) for a weapon sometime during the 2010-2015 time frame." "Date of Iran's possession of enough highly enriched uranium for a nuclear weapon" "Iran could produce enough fissile material for a weapon by the end of this decade if it were to make more rapid and successful progress than we have seen to date." "We judge with moderate confidence that the earliest possible date Iran would be technically capable of producing enough highly enriched uranium for a weapon is late 2009, but that this is very unlikely." Source: Office of the Director of National Intelligence Contributing: Charles Levinson