

Opinionline: Is flip-flop on Iran really good news?

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From around the nations news editors these opinions on the NIE

Chicago Tribune, in an editorial: "The (National Intelligence Estimate) provides some comfort, some confidence. Two caveats, though. One: The NIE remains just that — an estimate. ... Iran suspended its weapons program in 2003? Then U.S. intel experts were either wrong in 2005 when they said Iran had a program, or they're wrong now. Two: The Iranians continue to be less than fully cooperative with the IAEA (International Atomic Energy Agency), which still raises a level of suspicion. The safest path will be to continue to push international efforts to persuade Iran to give up its enrichment efforts and accept an agreement to be supplied fuel for its nuclear power program. ... The NIE surely will reduce the threat of an imminent military confrontation. ... The world though, can't afford to close its eyes just yet."

(Photo — Iran’s president: Mahmoud Ahmadinejad at a Russian-built nuclear power plant last year in eastern Iran. / Reuters)

Robert Kagan, columnist, The Washington Post: "With its policy tools broken, the Bush administration can ... seize the initiative, and do the next administration a favor, by opening direct talks with Tehran. ... Some argue that you can't talk to a country while seeking political change within it. This is nonsense. The United States simultaneously contained the Soviet Union, negotiated with the Soviet Union and pressed for political change in the Soviet Union. ... There's no reason the United States cannot talk to Iran while beefing up containment in the region. ... If Tehran complies with its nuclear obligations; ceases its support for terrorist violence; and treats its people with justice, humanity and liberalism, it will be welcomed into the international community, with all the enormous economic, political and security benefits this brings. That offer has always been on the table, and the United States gives away nothing by making it explicit."

St. Louis Post-Dispatch, in an editorial: "Just seven weeks ago, (President) Bush said that anyone 'interested in World War III' should be concerned with Iran's intentions. ... Americans deserve to know that the nation's chief executive operates on fact, not ideology. ... The NIE report published this week ... correlated (previous findings) with new intelligence. That more rigorous process changed the conclusion. ... It would take until the middle of the next decade before Iran had enough material to produce weapons. The alarmists should stand down. International sanctions against Iran should remain in place, and diplomatic efforts should be ramped up. Iran is a nation with a well-educated middle class and a population yearning to be part of the wider world. ... Simplistic rhetoric and scare tactics only reinforce the extremists."

The Wall Street Journal, in an editorial: "The real issue is not Iran's nuclear weapons program, but its nuclear program, period. As the NIE acknowledges, Iran continues to ... build the capability to make the fuel for a potential bomb. ... in open defiance of binding United Nations resolutions. ... The larger worry here is how little we seem to have learned from our previous intelligence failures. Over the course of a decade, our intelligence services badly underestimated Saddam Hussein's nuclear ambitions, then overestimated them. Now they have done a 180-degree turn on Iran, and in such a way that will contribute to a complacency that will make it easier for Iran to build a weapon. Our intelligence services are supposed to inform the policies of elected officials, but increasingly their judgments seem to be setting policy. This is dangerous."

Robert Baer, columnist, Time: "The real story behind this NIE is that the Bush administration has finally concluded Iran is a bridge too far. With Iranian-backed Shiite groups behaving themselves, things are looking up in Iraq. ... In private, the (Persian) Gulf Arabs have been reminding Washington that Iran is a rabid dog: Don't even think about kicking it, the Arabs tell us. If you have to do something, shoot it dead. Which is something the United States can't do. So how far is Iran from a nuke? The new NIE says 10 to 15 years. ... But that's a wild guess. The truth is that Iran is a black hole. ... Iran could build a bomb and we wouldn't know until they tested it. Yet for now we should ... be happy with the good news: Armageddon is postponed." Posted at 12:16 AM/ET, December 07, 2007 in Foreign Affairs - Middle East - Forum, Forum commentary, Iran - Forum, Nuclear weapons - Forum, Opinionline, Politics - Forum, Politics, Government - Forum | Permalink