

Questions Answers Iranian Nuclear Program with Timeline and Video's

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Iran's Nuclear Weapons Program Questions and Answers, with detailed Timeline

Q&A: Iran's nuclear programme The United Nations nuclear supervisory organisation, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), meets on 13 September 2004 to discuss Iran's nuclear activities. News Online examines the issues.

Why will the IAEA be discussing Iran?

The IAEA has been trying to find out the extent of Iran's nuclear programme and, in particular, whether it is secretly trying to build a nuclear weapon.

In the past it has criticised Iran for not declaring all its activities, and it has been checking to see if Iran is complying with the inspection rules. A report from the head of the IAEA Mohamed ElBaradei will be presented to the meeting.

What are the main issues?

These partly relate to Iran's development of a facility to enrich uranium which it had not declared, as it should have. The IAEA wants to know exactly what is going on.

It has asked where Iran acquired some advanced centrifuges, known as P2. Centrifuges are used to separate enriched uranium so that it can be used to fuel a nuclear reactor.

It is suspected that Iran got these from the network operated by the Pakistani scientist, Dr AQ Khan, whose activities were recently uncovered.

The IAEA also wants to know the source of traces of both low and highly enriched uranium on other centrifuges. Iran says they must have come in with equipment from abroad. Media reports say that Mr ElBaradei might accept the Iranian explanation.

Why is the enrichment of uranium such an issue?

Under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, a country can enrich uranium to provide reactor fuel but the problem is that the same technology can then be used to enrich uranium further to weapons grade standard.

A country could then simply withdraw from the treaty and build a bomb. Or it could use its knowhow to enrich uranium to weapons grade levels secretly.

Therefore the IAEA insists that any enrichment programme is fully declared and safeguarded.

What is Iran's case?

Iran says it needs to enrich fuel itself, because getting it from another country would be unreliable, and that it has no intention of building a bomb. It has started to mine the uranium ore which will be used in the enrichment process.

It says it has answered questions as best it can, and will fully co-operate under a more strict regime of inspections known as an Additional Protocol.

It also says it wants to develop a civil nuclear energy programme because its oil reserves are not unlimited, and points out that the West once supplied the deposed Shah with nuclear reactors.

Did Iran not agree with European governments to freeze its enrichment programme?

It did. Three European governments, Britain, France and Germany (the E3), had offered to get fuel for Iran if it gave up on enrichment. Iran is now saying that the agreement is at an end. It is resuming its enrichment programme and President Mohammed Khatami says that Iran "will have" an enrichment programme to produce fuel.

What is the American view?

The United States claims that Iran is trying to build a bomb. It wants Iran reported to the Security Council. John Bolton, the Under Secretary for Arms Control, told a congressional committee in June: "The United States strongly believes that Iran has a clandestine program to produce nuclear weapons."

Israel believes the same. It has begun a diplomatic campaign urging the IAEA to take Iran to the Security Council.

Both the US and Israel point to other Iranian activities in the nuclear field, such as the construction of a heavy water reactor, as evidence that it wants to develop nuclear weapons.

Will there be sanctions against Iran?

That is possible, but they can be imposed only by the Security Council. The US wants Iran to be reported to the Council but others feel that more time is needed.

The IAEA Board meeting in September will be followed by one in November. Some analysts feel that Iran will be given a warning in September and that the crunch might come in November depending on Mr ElBaradei's report.

What would be the strategic implications if Iran built a nuclear bomb?

Some argue that it is in Iran's interest to build a bomb because it might think that this would deter an American or other attack one day.

However, if the US thought Iran was about to acquire such a weapon, it might attack its facilities anyway.

The Israelis are already concerned, with the head of Mossad, its intelligence service, saying not long ago that the Iranian nuclear programme represented the greatest ever threat to Israel.

So a pre-emptive Israeli strike, of the kind it carried out on an Iraqi reactor in 1981, is possible at some stage.

What is the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty?

The NPT was an agreement opened for signature in 1968 under which those countries with nuclear weapons (the US, Russia, China, Britain and France) were allowed to keep them but agreed not to give them to anyone else.

However, other countries are allowed to develop nuclear power for peaceful purposes under the inspection of the IAEA.

The nuclear weapons countries also promised to work towards nuclear disarmament, but this has not really happened.

And several nuclear-weapons capable states - Israel, India and Pakistan - have not signed up to the treaty so they can develop weapons. Another, North Korea, has withdrawn from it.

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Iran's Nuclear Program - TIMELINE
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Iran's Nuclear Facility
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-----Timeline: Iran A chronology of key events:

224-651 AD - Sasanian dynasty rules Persia; Zoroastrianism is dominant religion.

636 - Arab invasion brings end of Sasanian dynasty and start of Islamic rule.

9th century - Emergence of modern Persian language (or Farsi), written using a form of Arabic script. 9-13th century - Decline of Islamic Caliphate; rise of Seljuk Turk dynasties.

1220 - Invasion by Mongol forces of Genghis Khan.

1501 - Shah Ismail I becomes first ruler of Islamic Safavid dynasty; Shi'i Islam declared state religion.

1639 - Treaty of Qasr-e Shirin (or Treaty of Zuhab) ends about 150 years of war against Ottoman Empire.

1736 - Nadir Shah becomes monarch; end of Safavid dynasty.

1828 - Iran cedes control of Caucasus to Russia after second Russo-Persian war.

1890 - "Tobacco Riots": ruler Naser al-Din Shah forced to withdraw trade concessions granted to Britain after mass protests.

1907 - Introduction of constitution which limits the absolutist powers of rulers.

1914-1918 - Iran declares neutrality but is scene of heavy fighting during World War I.

1921 February - Military commander Reza Khan seizes power.

1923 - Reza Khan becomes prime minister.

1925 December - Parliament votes to make Reza Khan ruler.

1926 April - Reza Khan crowned Reza Shah Pahlavi. Mohammad Reza, the Shah's eldest son, is proclaimed Crown Prince.

1935 - Formerly known as Persia, Iran is adopted as the country's official name.

Shah installed

1941 - The Shah's pro-Axis allegiance in World War II leads to the Anglo-Russian occupation of Iran and the deposition of the Shah in favour of his son, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi.

The Shah was forced into exile in 1979 and died in 1980

1950 - Ali Razmara becomes prime minister and is assassinated less than nine months later. He is succeeded by the nationalist, Mohammad Mossadeq.

1951 April - Parliament votes to nationalise the oil industry, which is dominated by the British-owned Anglo-Iranian Oil Company. Britain imposes an embargo and a blockade, halting oil exports and hitting the economy. A power struggle between the Shah and Mossadeq ensues and the Shah flees the country in August 1953.

1953 August - Mossadeq is overthrown in a coup engineered by the British and American intelligence services. General Fazlollah Zahedi is proclaimed as prime minister and the Shah returns.

Campaign to modernise

1963 January - The Shah embarks on a campaign to modernise and westernise the country. He launches the 'White Revolution', a programme of land reform and social and economic modernisation. During the late 1960's the Shah became increasingly dependent on the secret police (SAVAK) in controlling those opposition movements critical of his reforms.

1978 September - The Shah's policies alienate the clergy and his authoritarian rule leads to riots, strikes and mass demonstrations. Martial law is imposed.

Shah exiled, Khomeini returns

1979 January - As the political situation deteriorates, the Shah and his family are forced into exile.

1979 1 February - The Islamic fundamentalist, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, returns to Iran following 14 years of exile in Iraq and France for opposing the regime.

Ayatollah Khomeini led the 1979 Islamic Revolution

1979 1 April - The Islamic Republic of Iran is proclaimed following a referendum.

1979 November - Islamic militants take 52 Americans hostage inside the US embassy in Tehran. They demand the extradition of the Shah, in the US at the time for medical treatment, to face trial in Iran.

1980 January - Abolhasan Bani-Sadr is elected the first President of the Islamic Republic. His government begins work on a major nationalization programme.

1980 July - The exiled Shah dies of cancer in Egypt.

Iran-Iraq war

1980 22 September - Start of Iran-Iraq war which lasts for eight years.

1981 January - The American hostages are released ending 444 days in captivity.

1981 June - Bani-Sadr is dismissed, he later flees to France.

1985 - After the US and Soviet Union halted arms supplies, the US attempted to win the release of hostages in Lebanon by offering secret arms deals, this would later become known as the Iran-Contra affair.

1988 July - 290 passengers and the crew of an Iran Air Airbus are mistakenly shot down by the USS Vincennes.

Ceasefire

1988 July - Iran accepts a ceasefire agreement with Iraq following negotiations in Geneva under the aegis of the UN.

Hardliners called for author Salman Rushdie's death

1989 February - Ayatollah Khomeini issues a religious edict (fatwa) ordering Muslims to kill British author, Salman Rushdie, for his novel, 'The Satanic Verses', considered blasphemous to Islam.

1989 3 June - Ayatollah Khomeini dies. On 4 June, President Khamene'i is appointed as new supreme leader.

1989 August - Ali Akbar Hashemi-Rafsanjani is sworn in as the new president.

1989 November - The US releases 567 million dollars of frozen Iranian assets.

Major earthquake kills thousands

1990 June - A major earthquake strikes Iran, killing approximately 40,000 people.

1990 - Iran remains neutral following Iraq's invasion of Kuwait.

1990 September - Iran and Iraq resume diplomatic ties.

US imposes sanctions

Reformist Khatami: Isolated by conservative resurgence

1995 - US imposes oil and trade sanctions over Iran's alleged sponsorship of "terrorism", seeking to acquire nuclear arms and hostility to the Middle East process. Iran denies the charges.

1997 May - Mohammad Khatami wins the presidential election with 70% of the vote, beating the conservative ruling elite.

1998 September - Iran deploys thousands of troops on its border with Afghanistan after the Taleban admits killing eight Iranian diplomats and a journalist in Mazar-e Sharif.

Student protests

1999 July - Pro-democracy students at Tehran University demonstrate following the closure of the reformist newspaper 'Salam'. Clashes with security forces lead to six days of rioting and the arrest of more than 1,000 students.

Reformists have been frustrated at the slow pace of change

2000 February - Majlis elections. Liberals and supporters of Khatami wrest control of parliament from conservatives for the first time.

2000 April - The judiciary, following the adoption of a new press law, bans the publication of 16 reformist newspapers.

2000 May - Inauguration of the Sixth parliament.

Khatami's second term

2001 June - President Khatami re-elected.

2002 January - US President George Bush describes Iraq, Iran and North Korea as an "axis of evil", warning of the proliferation of long-range missiles being developed in these countries. The speech causes outrage in Iran and is condemned by reformists and conservatives alike.

UN is keeping tabs on Iran's nuclear programme

2002 September - Russian technicians begin construction of Iran's first nuclear reactor at Bushehr despite strong objections from US.

2003 June - Thousands attend student-led protests in Tehran against clerical establishment.

2003 September - UN nuclear watchdog, IAEA, gives Tehran weeks to prove it is not pursuing an atomic weapons programme.

2003 October - Shirin Ebadi becomes Iran's first Nobel Peace Prize winner; lawyer and human rights campaigner became Iran's first female judge in 1975 but was forced to resign after 1979 revolution.

2003 November - Iran says it is suspending its uranium enrichment programme and will allow tougher UN inspections of its nuclear facilities. IAEA concludes there is no evidence of a weapons programme.

2003 December - 40,000 people are killed in an earthquake in south-east Iran; the city of Bam is devastated.

Conservative resurgence

2004 February - Conservatives regain control of parliament in elections. Thousands of reformist candidates were disqualified by the hardline Council of Guardians before the polls.

Former President Rafsanjani remains influential President 1989-1997 Heads powerful Expediency Council
2004 June - Iran is rebuked by the IAEA for failing to fully cooperate with an inquiry into its nuclear activities.

2004 November - Iran agrees to suspend most of its uranium enrichment under a deal with the EU.

2005 June - Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, Tehran's ultra-conservative mayor, wins a run-off vote in presidential elections, defeating cleric and former president Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani.

Nuclear crisis

2005 August-September - Tehran says it has resumed uranium conversion at its Isfahan plant and insists the programme is for peaceful purposes. IAEA finds Iran in violation of the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

2006 January - Iran breaks IAEA seals at its Natanz nuclear research facility.

Iran is an ally of Lebanon's Shia Muslim Hezbollah group Tehran says its support is moral, political Israel, US accuse Iran of supplying arms Group emerged in 1980s with financial backing from Iran
Bomb attacks in the southern city of Ahvaz - the scene of sporadic unrest in recent months - kill eight people and injure more than 40.

2006 February - IAEA votes to report Iran to the UN Security Council over its nuclear activities. Iran resumes uranium enrichment at Natanz.

2006 April - Iran says it has succeeded in enriching uranium at its Natanz facility.

2006 31 August - UN Security Council deadline for Iran to halt its work on nuclear fuel passes. IAEA says Tehran has failed to suspend the programme.

Holocaust denial

2006 December - Iran hosts a controversial conference on the Holocaust; delegates include Holocaust deniers.

UN Security Council votes to impose sanctions on Iran's trade in sensitive nuclear materials and technology. Iran condemns the resolution and vows to speed up uranium enrichment work.

2007 February - IAEA says Iran failed to meet a deadline to suspend uranium enrichment, exposing Tehran to possible new sanctions.

2007 March - Diplomatic stand-off with Britain after Iran detains 15 British sailors and marines patrolling the mouth of the Shatt al-Arab waterway separating Iran and Iraq.

2007 April - President Ahmadinejad says Iran can produce nuclear fuel on an industrial scale.

IAEA says Iran has begun making nuclear fuel in its underground uranium enrichment plant. It also says that Iran has started up more than 1,300 centrifuge machines.

2007 May - IAEA says Iran could develop a nuclear weapon in three to eight years if it so chooses.

2007 June - Protests erupt after government imposes petrol rationing amid fears of possible UN sanctions.

2007 July - Iran announces plans to stop making cars that only run on petrol and switch to dual-fuel vehicles, which also run on gas.

Iran agrees to allow inspectors to visit the Arak nuclear plant following talks with the IAEA.

2007 October - US announces sweeping new sanctions against Iran, the toughest since it first imposed sanctions almost 30 years ago.

2007 November 7 - (CRNews added) Iranian President Ahmadinejad announces Iran has reached a goal of 3,000 active Centrifuges. US President George W. Bush and French President Nicholas Sarkozy meet in Washington D.C. and announce jointly that it is unacceptable for Iran to possess a Nuclear Weapon.

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