



National Security Program

Assessing the Effectiveness of Sanctions on Iran:

A Call for Independent Review



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ABOUT BPC

Founded in 2007 by former Senate Majority Leaders Howard Baker, Tom Daschle, Bob Dole and George Mitchell, Bipartisan Policy Center (BPC) is a non-profit organization that drives principled solutions through rigorous analysis, reasoned negotiation and respectful dialogue. With projects in multiple issue areas, BPC combines politically balanced policymaking with strong, proactive advocacy and outreach.

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Introduction

Preventing Iran from achieving nuclear weapons capability is the most urgent national security challenge facing the United States. In a February 2012 report, *Meeting the Challenge: Stopping the Clock*, a Bipartisan Policy Center Task Force called for a robust and comprehensive triple-track strategy: the simultaneous pursuit of diplomacy, sanctions, and visible, credible preparations for a military option. The report cautioned that while tough sanctions are important, time is of the essence and could run out before sanctions take full effect. Their goal is not to damage the Iranian economy but to force the Tehran regime to cease its nuclear program. **We urge Congress to assess and report at regular intervals the progress of Iran's nuclear program to determine the degree to which sanctions are forcing Iran to slow down or cease nuclear development.**

Rationale

Analysis of IAEA reports demonstrates Iran's nuclear program has advanced dramatically: doubling its uranium enrichment rate since 2009, enriching uranium to higher levels, testing advanced centrifuge models, beginning enrichment at a previously undisclosed underground facility, and continuing its weaponization program. Indeed, our calculations suggest that Iran could produce enough highly enriched uranium for a nuclear device in as little as 43 days. That window could close to just 11 days by the end of 2012. With Iran' drawing so close to a nuclear weapons capability, our choice of policy must be mindful of these time constraints.

Yet, there is too little reliable, comprehensible, public information from a neutral source about the status of Iran's nuclear program either to guide policymakers' decisions on new sanctions and other measures or to inform public debate. We therefore believe that Members of Congress and the American public should regularly receive credible, independent information about the progress of Iran's nuclear program, and the impact sanctions are having on it.

Recommendation

We recommend Congress appoint an independent study group supported and staffed by existing policy institutions to report quarterly on the progress of Iran's nuclear program and the impact that sanctions are having on it.

REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

These quarterly reports should be addressed both to Congress and the general public; they should inform policy decisions and general public discussion of the threat posed by Iran's nuclear program. Thus, the reports should primarily draw upon open source materials and be made public in an unclassified form. A classified annex might also be considered if it is necessary and its preparation does not retard the reporting process.

METRICS

The sole metric of the effectiveness of sanctions should be the progress of Iran's nuclear program. Although the proposed assessment may collect and report information on Iranian macro-economic indicators, business dealings and energy shipments, it should focus on evaluating Iran's advance toward a nuclear weapons capability on the basis of information reported by the International Atomic Energy Agency and other sources.

Additionally, the assessment should pay attention to Iranian behavior that may signal either greater intransigence or openness concerning its nuclear program, including:

- Discovery of additional undisclosed nuclear facilities;
- Removal of any nuclear materials from safeguarded areas;
- Denial of access for international inspectors to suspected nuclear facilities;
- Attempts to procure materials and technology related to the nuclear program; and
- Any information about Iran's research into the building of nuclear weapon.

Ultimately, on the basis of the above information, the assessments should evaluate:

- Time Iran likely needs to produce sufficient fissile material for a nuclear device;
- How much that estimate has changed since the last reporting period; and
- Any factors to have contributed to the change in estimate.

Possible Models

There are a number of possible assessment models, but we believe a hybrid approach of an independent study group supported by an existing institution, best combines the advantages and avoids the disadvantages of the other models.

- *Independent Commission:* Congressionally-appointed independent commission with its own staff, e.g. National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States (9/11 Commission).
- *Congressional Panel:* A formal or informal panel of Members of Congressional, e.g. Select Committee on U.S. National Security and Military/Commercial Concerns with China (Cox Committee).
- *Government Accountability Office Report:* require the Government Accountability Office (GAO) to report periodically on the matter.
- *Institutionally-Supported Independent Study Group:* Congressionally-appointed, but supported and staffed by existing policy institutions, e.g. Iraq Study Group (ISG).

We recommend this last, hybrid model, though on a smaller, more nimble and expedited scale than the ISG. Leveraging the pre-existing structure, staff and expertise of a policy institution ensures that reporting can begin and be produced promptly. Appointment by congressional leadership of bipartisan, independent experts will lend the group authority and ensure that its findings will incorporate a diversity of views.