

*The Islamic Republic of Iran is committed to the destruction of the United States and Israel, posing conventional threats worldwide via its terrorist proxies. Back home, Tehran is increasingly poised to break out to a nuclear weapons capability. This development is occurring while the world focuses on conflicts elsewhere.*

## **1. Iran is on the threshold of a nuclear weapons capability**

The regime in Iran has [amassed](#) enough enriched uranium to make weapons-grade uranium for a nuclear device within just 12 days, according to the [latest data](#) reported by the United Nations' (UN's) nuclear watchdog, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). Iran could make enough material for 10 nuclear devices within just four months. [Already approaching the nuclear threshold](#), Tehran would likely [require](#) only several more months to build nuclear weapons once it has weapons-grade uranium.

## **2. Iran has expanded its nuclear program to unprecedented levels since President Biden's election**

Initially, Iran exercised [restraint](#) in its nuclear advances for more than two years after President Trump's May 2018 withdrawal from the 2015 Iran nuclear deal, formally known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). Tehran may have been deterred from taking provocative action by the Trump administration's willingness to use [force](#) and [deploy](#) massive economic and financial penalties.

However, since November 2020, Iran has undertaken [major advances](#) toward a nuclear weapons capability, exploiting the Biden administration's relaxing of sanctions as part of its effort to revive the JCPOA. Tehran enriched uranium to 20 percent, then to an unprecedented 60 percent, and then experimented with enriching it to nearly 90 percent (weapons-grade level). The Islamic Republic has also produced uranium metal (a material used in nuclear weapon cores), re-activated its underground Fordow enrichment site, and deployed more than 6,500 fast-generation centrifuges.

## **3. Iran continues to violate the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty**

As one of the original signatories to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), Iran has since failed to meet fully its international commitments to submit to international inspections and not develop or acquire nuclear weapons. Iran has ignored IAEA requests to cooperate with a nearly five-year IAEA investigation into Tehran's undeclared nuclear weapons activities, both past activities and ones that may be ongoing. Specifically, Tehran has refused to answer the IAEA's questions about the regime's production and use of nuclear material at undeclared nuclear sites. These activities violate Iran's safeguards agreement with the IAEA and the NPT, agreements that long preceded the JCPOA and create binding obligations that stand independently.

## **4. Iran possesses the know-how to weaponize by drawing on its previous nuclear weapons program**

Tehran continues to deny that it ever had a nuclear weapons program. However, a trove of sensitive documents captured by Israeli intelligence operatives from an Iranian nuclear archive in mid-2018 revealed [conclusive evidence](#) that Tehran previously had a nuclear weapons program. Specifically, Iran built a site (later revealed to be the Fordow enrichment plant) [to produce](#) weapons-grade uranium. It also possessed a nuclear weapon [design](#) and was preparing atomic weapon [test sites](#) and a ballistic missile [delivery system](#).

Shortly after the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003, Iran appeared to shelve its plan to build nuclear weapons in numerous [secret facilities](#), many of which are described in the archive and remain uninspected by the IAEA. Instead, the regime [planned to hide](#) its weaponization activities at both civilian research institutions and military sites.

## **5. Reduced international monitoring could ease Iran's breakout to a nuclear weapon**

Iran has steadily reduced IAEA monitoring of its nuclear activities since late 2020. In February 2021, Tehran [stopped](#) adhering to an enhanced IAEA inspection agreement, the so-called "Additional Protocol," and halted implementation of JCPOA-related monitoring measures, such as camera surveillance at key nuclear-related sites. In September 2023, Iran [expelled](#) one-third of the IAEA's inspectors with expertise in uranium enrichment. Iran [stores](#) more than 80 percent of its highly enriched uranium stocks at the Esfahan Fuel Fabrication Plant in small, easily moveable containers. It is unclear whether the IAEA has adequate monitoring over these stocks.

## **6. Iran could produce weapons-grade uranium at covert or existing enrichment facilities**

As a result of reduced monitoring, the IAEA is [not able](#) to keep tabs on Iran's production and inventory of fast-generation centrifuges or verify the centrifuges have not been diverted to a secret enrichment site. Iran would require only a few hundred of these advanced centrifuges to quickly produce weapons-grade uranium.

Two of Iran's three enrichment plants — the main Natanz plant and the Fordow fuel enrichment facility — are somewhat fortified against military strikes. Fordow is located furthest underground, under a mountain, and would be better suited to facilitate a rapid breakout to nuclear weapons.

## **7. Iran could finish weaponization just about anywhere — and that means trouble**

Iran may not require a special facility to build a usable nuclear weapon once it has weapons-grade uranium. It could do so, for example, at a highly secure, underground military site. U.S. and allied intelligence agencies may not be able to identify such a site's whereabouts in time to prevent a breakout.

## **8. The U.S. and its European allies are failing to hold Iran accountable for its nuclear provocations**

The United States and its European allies — France, Germany, and the United Kingdom, also known as the "E3" — have prioritized reviving the JCPOA or reaching a new accord instead of deterring Iran from expanding its nuclear program. The IAEA's 35-nation Board of Governors has met 14 times since Biden's inauguration, yet the board has only passed two [censure resolutions](#) demanding Tehran come into compliance with its NPT obligations. No decisive actions followed those censures even though the provocations continued.

The United States and its allies should invoke the "snapback" clause in the United Nations Security Council Resolution that codified the JCPOA, whose purpose is to bring back all prior sanctions on Tehran should it violate the terms of the nuclear deal. Those violations are now flagrant and unceasing. Russia and China cannot prevent a snapback since any party to the JCPOA can trigger it unilaterally.

## **9. Tehran may sprint toward a nuclear weapon while Washington and Jerusalem are distracted**

After Hamas's October 7 attack on Israel, President Biden [warned](#) Iran not to unleash its other proxies nor directly attack Israel. Tehran has [ignored](#) his threats. Its proxies have [attacked](#) U.S. troops in Iraq and Syria dozens of times and injured more than 50 troops.

The erosion of U.S. deterrence could impact Tehran's decisions on whether to cross the nuclear threshold. Tehran may conclude that Israel is distracted and unwilling or unable to launch military strikes against Iranian nuclear sites for fear of igniting a wider Middle East war. Meanwhile, the Biden administration's failure to deter small-scale military strikes by Tehran's proxies raises doubts about Biden's willingness to order military strikes against Iran's nuclear program were Tehran to sprint towards building a nuclear bomb.

## **10. A nuclear Iran would likely further deter U.S. and Israeli action in the region**

Iran [noticed](#) that the Biden administration moderated its support for Ukraine following Russia's nuclear threats. Although Israel's undeclared nuclear weapons capability complicates Iran's calculus, Tehran may opt to cross the nuclear threshold in the belief it could coerce the Biden administration into constraining Israel, further limit American action in the region, and provide cover for its regional expansionist aims. Biden's ineffective deterrence could leave Iran the impression that a nuclear Islamic Republic could force Washington to abandon or limit assistance to Jerusalem and other U.S. regional allies.