The Hague International Model United Nations

Forum: Security Council (SC)

Issue: The question of the Iranian nuclear power programme

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Introduction

Iran's nuclear power programme has gone through many changes for decades, mainly driven by political change, foreign pressure and shifting security. By 1988, then-Iranian President Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani had announced that Iran would accelerate its efforts to develop nuclear technology.[1] According to assessments, Iran's pursuit for nuclear capabilities has been driven by a complex interplay of strategic, security, and political considerations, including deterrence, national security, and regional influence. Possessing nuclear capabilities would not only grant Iran a strategic edge over its regional rivals but also serve as a counterbalance to Israel's nuclear arsenal.

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The motivations behind the programme are described in strategic terms. Iran's pursuit for nuclear capabilities has been driven by a complex interplay of strategic, security, and political considerations, including deterrence, national security, and regional influence. Possessing nuclear capabilities would not only grant Iran a strategic edge over its regional rivals but also serve as a counterbalance to Israel's nuclear arsenal.

Recent developments continue to raise alarm. Reports include the IAEA warning that Iran is not forthcoming on past nuclear activities, due to the discovery of uranium enriched to 83.7%, and findings that Iran's stockpile of enriched uranium is 22 times above the 2015 deal's limit. [2][3][4] Continuing updates also note that Iran says it is activating new centrifuges after being condemned by the UN nuclear watchdog, and therefore showing the ongoing tensions surrounding verification, and compliance.[5]

Definition of Key Terms

Arak Reactor

A “heavy water reactor in Iran designed to use natural uranium and heavy water, producing spent fuel that contains plutonium. In its original form it could have yielded enough plutonium for 1–2 nuclear weapons per year if coupled with reprocessing.”

Centrifuge

“Centrifuges are machines used in uranium enrichment facilities to spin uranium hexafluoride gas at high speeds, separating lighter uranium (235) from the heavier uranium (238)

Heavy-Water reactor

“A heavy-water reactor (HWR) is a type of nuclear reactor which uses heavy water (deuterium oxide D_2O) as a neutron moderator and often as a coolant; its low neutron absorption allows the reactor to operate with natural uranium fuel.”

Natanz Facility

“The Natanz Nuclear Facility … is one of the nuclear facilities in Iran, built near Natanz for uranium enrichment.”

Safeguards Agreement

“Under a comprehensive safeguards agreement, the IAEA has the right and obligation to ensure that safeguards are applied on all nuclear material […] for the exclusive purpose of verifying that such material is not diverted to nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices.”

Sanctions

“Sanctions are measures taken by countries or international organizations to restrict economic, trade, or other relations with a state in order to influence its behavior, often imposed in response to violations like nuclear proliferation.”

The P5 + 1

“The P5+1 refers to a group of six world powers — the five permanent members of the UN Security Council (China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States) plus Germany”

Uranium Enrichment

"Uranium enrichment is the process of increasing the proportion of the fissile isotope U-235 in uranium, usually by separating uranium hexafluoride gas through cascades of centrifuges."

Weapons-Grade Uranium

"Weapons-grade nuclear material […] is any fissionable nuclear material that is pure enough to make a nuclear weapon … Highly enriched uranium is considered weapons-grade when it has been enriched to about 90 % U-235."

Background Information

Origins of Iran's nuclear programme (1950s–1979)

Iran's nuclear activities began in 1957 under Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi as part of the U.S. Atoms for Peace initiative.[6] The Shah insisted Iran had the right under the NPT to acquire all aspects of nuclear technology, including sensitive fuel-cycle capabilities like enrichment and reprocessing, which raised U.S. concerns. Declassified U.S. documents from 1975–76 indicate Washington was uneasy with Iran's push for a plutonium reprocessing plant, fearing it could be used to produce weapons-grade material.[7] Indeed, while the Shah publicly disavowed any intent to build nuclear weapons, he hinted that if other countries went nuclear or Iran's security environment changed, the nuclear military option would become a priority. By the late 1970s Iran had launched several major nuclear projects in collaboration with Western firms.

In 1974, he established the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI), charging it with constructing 20 nuclear power reactors, a uranium enrichment facility, a reprocessing plant, and producing 23,000 MWe of nuclear power.[8] These projects were intended to diversify energy and support Iran's industrial expansion. When the Islamic Revolution erupted in 1979, nuclear development came to a halt. Bushehr-1 was about 80% complete and Bushehr-2 ~50% complete when work was halted, the Darkhovin project was cancelled.[9]

Post-revolution changes and external assistance (1979–2002)

Following the revolution, the new leader, Ayatollah Khomeini, had some concerns about this nuclear programme viewing it as "un-Islamic" until 1984.Beginning in 1987, Iran received nuclear plans and imports, such as centrifuges, from unknown foreign entities, suspected to originate from A.Q. Khan's underground nuclear network.[10] Iran admitted to receiving a total of about 2,000 centrifuge components and some subassemblies from foreign sources between 1985 and 1997.[11] China supplied Iran with uranium compounds in 1991, including UF6, UF4, and UO2, which Iran did not declare to the IAEA.[12]

Exposure of undeclared sites and rise of international scrutiny (2002–2013)

In 2002, a press conference revealed Iran's secret nuclear activities in Natanz and Arak, demonstrating enrichment and heavy-water capabilities never disclosed to the IAEA.[13] Even though Iran states that its earlier uranium enrichment activities were intended for civilian energy production, the enrichment capabilities revealed in 2002 were consistent with potential weapons use. This revelation brought about demands for complete inspections of Iran's nuclear facilities by the International Atomic Energy Agency, for which Iran has rejected all of these requests.

Diplomacy followed. By 2003, diplomatic contact between Iran and the EU trio (E3) France, Germany, and the UK began, though Iran's suspension of enrichment was short-lived. Under President Ahmadinejad, the programme accelerated significantly.

"With great honor, I declare that as of today our dear country has joined the nuclear club of nations and can produce nuclear fuel on an industrial scale," said Ahmadinejad in 2007.[14]

The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA)

Diplomatic efforts and the JCPOA (2013–2018)

A shift in posture occurred when President Rouhani decided to move forward with more moderation, reconciliation, and transparency. This enabled renewed negotiations with the P5+1, which are the United States, the United Kingdom, France, the Russian Federation, the People's Republic of China and Germany.

This process resulted in the 2015 agreement, which is the much-known Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). The JCPOA was signed stipulating that Iran would reduce its uranium enrichment activities to limit its capacity to produce nuclear weapons, agreeing that its nuclear facilities would be inspected by the IAEA response[15], Western economic sanctions on Iran were lifted. For several years, IAEA assessments confirmed that Iran adhered to its JCPOA commitments.[16]

Collapse of JCPOA constraints and renewed escalation (2018–present)

However due to political changes the agreement was undermined. Iran reduced compliance, resumed high-level enrichment, and restricted transparency. News and IAEA reports documented repeated warnings, for example that IAEA warns that Iran was not truthful on past nuclear activities. Inspectors also found uranium particles enriched to 83.7%, a level very dangerous, close to weapons-grade.[171]

By 2023, Iran's stockpile of enriched uranium reached a staggering 22 times above the 2015 deal's limit.[18] In response to renewed censure, Iran says it is activating new centrifuges after being

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condemned by the UN nuclear watchdog.[19]These developments illustrate continuing escalation, declining transparency, and renewed concern over Iran's nuclear intentions.

Major Countries and Organizations Involved

Iran

Iran expanded its nuclear activities after sanctions pressure increased. Following the U.S. withdrawal Iran began a step-by-step reduction of its JCPOA commitments. In July 2019, Iran breached the 300 kg cap and exceeded the enrichment purity limit by raising enrichment to about 4.5%.[20] These moves reduced transparency and intensified scrutiny of its nuclear power programme.

United States

U.S. policy decisively shaped the crisis. The election of President Donald Trump proved fateful for the JCPOA. In 2018, President Trump announced the unilateral withdrawal citing flaws in the deal and ordering the reimposition of U.S. sanctions.[21] These sanctions pressured Iran and triggered its incremental nuclear escalation.

European Union

The EU focused on diplomacy and sanctions enforcement. The EU implements UN sanctions through EU legislation including travel bans, an asset freeze, and prohibitions on making funds or economic resources available.The EU supported the JCPOA, since on 14 July 2015, Iran and the 'E3/EU3' agreed on a Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, to ensure the nuclear programme would exist for exclusively peaceful purposes.[22]

Israel

Israel views Iran's nuclear progress as an existential threat. Israel has consistently viewed the potential for regional powers to acquire nuclear weapons as an existential threat and has previously attacked nuclear facilities and has assassinated Iranian nuclear scientists. The conflict between Iran and Israel has been intensifying since the October 7, 2023 attacks by Hamas, as Hamas is partially funded by Iran.

International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)

The IAEA monitors Iran's nuclear programme. Monitoring and Verification in Iran' is the IAEA's special coverage of inspection activities including the application of IAEA safeguards. Access has sharply declined, since 13 June 2025, the Agency has had no access to any of the safeguarded nuclear facilities nor has it received any of the legally required reports.[23] The IAEA warns it cannot provide

assurance that Iran's nuclear material is peaceful without restored access.[24]

Timeline of Events

Date	Description of event
1957	Beginning of Iran's nuclear programme
February, 1979	Islamic Revolution halts nuclear projects
1987	Iran begins receiving A.Q. Khan network assistance
1988	Rafsanjani announces renewed nuclear efforts
1991	China supplies undeclared uranium materials
August, 14th, 2002	Undeclared facilities are publicly revealed
October 21st, 2003	Iran and EU-3 sign interim Paris Agreement and Iran suspends enrichment
April, 9th, 2007	Iran declares themselves as a member of the "nuclear club"
July 14th, 2015	JCPOA is signed between Iran and the P5+1
January 16, 2016	JCPOA Implementation day and IAEA confirms compliance and sanctions lift
May, 8th, 2018	The United States withdraws from the JCPOA
July 2019	Iran breaches JCPOA limits on enriched uranium
January 2023	IAEA finds uranium enriched to 83.7%
October, 7th, 2023	Hamas attacks Israel
June, 13th, 2025	IAEA loses access to Iran's safeguarded facilities

Previous Attempts to solve the Issue

International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)

With the use of many inspections and safeguards, the IAEA has repeatedly attempted to resolve

the issue. Iran agreed to sign and implement an Additional Protocol as a voluntary, confidence-building measure, and therefore increased access and monitoring was ensured. However, the cooperation got weaker over time, and the Agency has consistently stated it is unable to conclude that Iran's nuclear programme is entirely peaceful, ergo limiting the effectiveness of technical oversight without any political backing.

United Nations Security Council (UNSC)

The UN Security Council adopted a series of resolutions demanding that Iran suspend all enrichment-related activities, which were followed by some economic and arms-related sanctions. Even though these measures did increase the pressure, Iran has consistently refused to give up its enrichment programme, demonstrating that those sanctions alone failed to secure long-term compliance.

Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action

The most comprehensive diplomatic effort was the JCPOA. Under the JCPOA, Iran committed to limit uranium enrichment to 3.67%, reduce its stockpile to 300 kg, and allow enhanced IAEA monitoring, which was exchanged for sanctions relief. Although the IAEA verified Iran's compliance, the agreement was no longer in order after the United States withdrew from the deal in May 2018, leading to Iran abandoning its commitments and resume its nuclear expansion.

Possible Solutions

Restoring full IAEA access through a verification-for-relief mechanism

A major challenge in addressing Iran's nuclear programme is the absence of a complete IAEA oversight. Since 13 June 2025, the Agency has had no access to any of the safeguarded nuclear facilities nor has it received any of the legally required reports.[25] Due to this absence a massive uncertainty was created regarding Iran's nuclear material and enrichment activities. In order to solve this, reversible economic incentives to Iran's restoration of full IAEA inspection rights could play a major role. Some things that this would include is, reopening all safeguarded sites, reinstating monitoring equipment, and allowing immediate inspector access. As the Agency has warned, they have now lost continuity of knowledge in relation to the current inventories of nuclear material in Iran, including highly enriched uranium.[26]

Creating regional nuclear transparency and safety framework

The conflict between Iran and Israel has been intensifying since the October 7, 2023 attacks by

Hamas, as Hamas is partially funded by Iran. That highlights the role of a regional framework that could require all nuclear-capable states in the region to adopt common transparency standards, including regular reporting and shared early-warning procedures. Iran must urgently allow the Agency to restart its safeguards activities in accordance with the NPT Safeguards Agreement. By applying those measures to all nations in this region could decrease the risk of Iran being singled out, and the focus will be set on safety and not political alignment.

Implementing step-by-step enrichment freeze with economic incentives

In July 2019, Iran breached the 300 kg cap and exceeded the enrichment purity limit by raising enrichment to about 4.5%.[27] Due to the fact that these breaches were phased and reversible, a viable solution could be a structured freeze, where Iran would be forced to put a stop to any further increases in enrichment or stockpile size, which in exchange would be put with reversible economic incentives. This also aligns with Iran since it wants to begin a step-by-step reduction of its JCPOA commitments. In that way Iran's nuclear programme will be stabilised and it gives the rest of the world hope for rebuilded trust.

Political incentives to encourage Iranian compliance

Political obstacles remain central to the nuclear dispute. There needs to be a way to convince Iran to work with international regulatory bodies, particularly the IAEA. The Security Council is uniquely positioned to do so, as United Nations Security Council Resolution 2231 is the primary legal basis for U.N. sanctions on Iran.[28] Rather than relying exclusively on pressure, compliance could be encouraged through incentives. Export controls alone cannot bring a determined nuclear programme to a full stop, and therefore must be coupled with diplomacy, monitoring, sanctions, and other measures. In exchange for renewed cooperation with the IAEA, Iran could be offered phased sanctions suspension, limited access to frozen assets, or protection from secondary sanctions, allowing the Security Council to directly link political benefits to verified compliance.

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