

Iranians Want Capacity to Enrich Uranium But Accept NPT Rules Against Developing Nuclear Weapons

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Americans Would Allow Limited Enrichment, Provided UN Is Given Full Access

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Most Iranians want their country to have the capacity to enrich uranium for nuclear energy, but a majority also agrees that Iran should comply with the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), which forbids signatories from developing nuclear weapons. A majority of Americans are ready to accept a deal allowing Iran to engage in limited enrichment if it also agrees to give UN inspectors full access to make sure that Iran is not developing nuclear weapons.

Two concurrent surveys of public opinion in Iran and the United States, conducted by WorldPublicOpinion.org in partnership with Search for Common Ground, reveal important areas of agreement on the issue of non-proliferation. But they also demonstrate the strength of Iranian resistance to negotiating away their nuclear energy capabilities.

Joseph Cirincione, senior vice president for National Security and International Policy at the Center for American Progress, said the poll demonstrated that both publics, overall, favored pragmatic, diplomatic solutions to their differences.

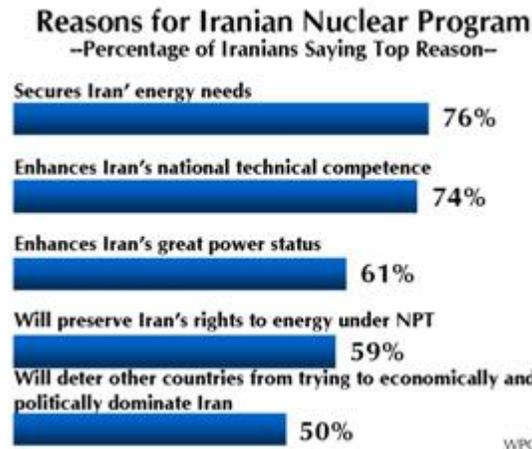
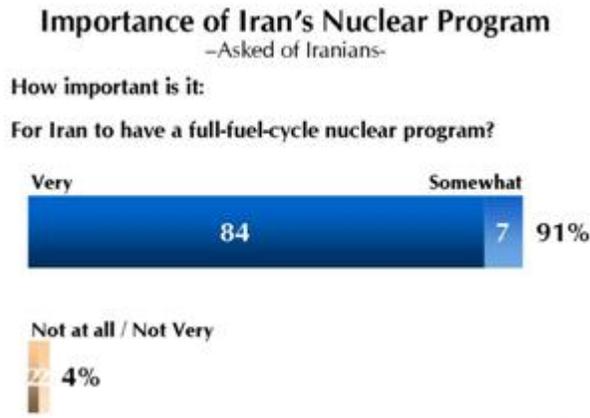
The survey showed "the common sense of both the American people and the Iranian people," Cirincione said at a forum about the study held Jan. 24 at the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies. "In question after question they seem to be able to rise above the rhetoric of their own leaders to find common sense solutions to some of the most crucial questions" facing the two nations.

The poll should also eliminate any doubts, said Trita Parsi, president of the National Iranian American Council, about whether the Iranian people back their government's stand on uranium enrichment.

"This poll put that question to rest," Parsi said at the forum, explaining that it demonstrated the high priority placed by Iranians on self-reliance, both in terms of energy and military capabilities.

The poll of the Iranian public was unprecedented in scope. The questionnaire included 134 substantive questions on a wide range of international issues, administered in face-to-

face interviews in rural and urban areas from Oct. 31 - Dec. 6, 2006. Knowledge Networks executed the U.S. poll during late November and early December, 2006. Both polls used probability-based national samples of 1,000 respondents or more.



Iran's Nuclear Energy Program

An overwhelming nine out of ten Iranians say it is important for Iran to have the capacity to enrich uranium. Majorities cite as key reasons the need to secure their country's energy needs, to enhance its technical competence and to enhance its great power status. Both Iranians and Americans express concern about the threat posed by a disruption in their energy supplies.

Ninety-one percent of Iranians consider it important for Iran to have a "full-fuel-cycle nuclear program," a term widely used in the Iranian press to describe a uranium enrichment program. This includes 84 percent who say that having such a program is "very important." Only 4 percent said having the capacity to enrich such a program was not important for Iran.

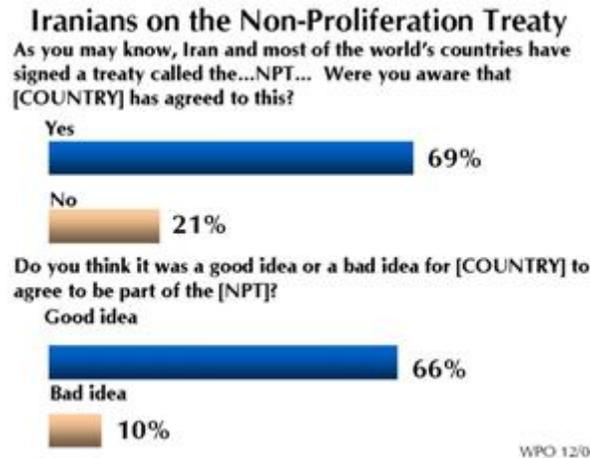
Although Iran is an oil exporting country, the survey findings suggest that Iranians feel they cannot rely on their domestic supply of fossil fuels indefinitely. Fifty-nine percent

say they see "disruption in energy supply" as either a critical (47%) or an important (12%) threat to Iran's vital interests over the next decade.

The poll presented respondents with a series of reasons for having uranium enrichment programs, asking them whether each was "the most important reason," "an important reason, though not the most important," "a minor reason," or "not a reason at all." All five of the reasons presented were enthusiastically labeled "most important" by at least half of the respondents.

The most widely-endorsed justification was that "this program secures Iran's energy needs," which was judged important by 86 percent, including 76 percent who called it the "most important" reason. The idea that such a program "enhances Iran's technical competence" was also seen as important by 86 percent of Iranians (74 percent "most important").

Also widely-endorsed (but somewhat less likely to be seen as "most important") are reasons of a more symbolic or political nature. The idea that such a program would enhance "Iran's great power status" was deemed important by 81 percent and most important by 61 percent. The argument that it would "preserve Iran's rights to nuclear energy under the Non-Proliferation Treaty" was judged important by 73 percent and most important by 59 percent.



energy under the Non-Proliferation Treaty" was judged important by 73 percent and most important by 59 percent.

Iranians were somewhat less convinced that the program would protect them from foreign domination. "The fact that Iran has a nuclear energy program will help deter other countries from trying to economically and politically dominate Iran," was seen as important by 68 percent (50 percent most important).

Iranians seem relatively unconcerned about the safety issues associated with nuclear energy. Eight out of ten agree with the statement, "Nuclear power is relatively safe and an

important source of electricity, and interested countries should build new nuclear power plants." Only a quarter (24%) believe "the risk of terrorist acts involving radioactive materials or nuclear facilities is high," while a plurality of 39 percent say such a risk is low because nuclear facilities and materials are "securely protected."

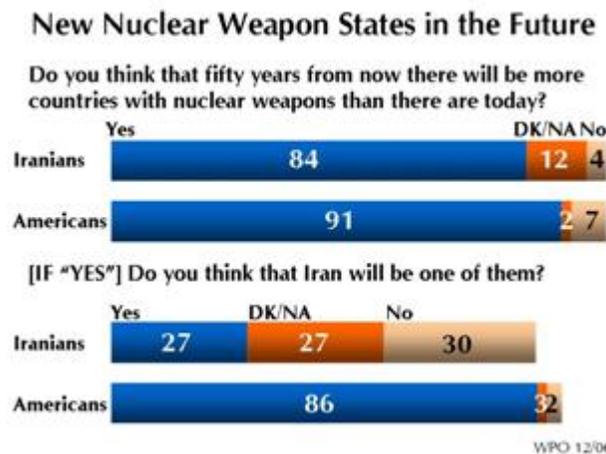
Americans are much less enthusiastic about building new nuclear plants. Only 40 percent (compared with 80 percent of Iranians) believe that nuclear power is relatively safe and that countries should build new plants. They believe, even more strongly than Iranians, that a "disruption in energy supply" would endanger vital U.S. interests: 94 percent say this is an important threat, including 49 percent who believe it is critical.

Nuclear Weapons and the NPT

A large majority of Iranians support their country's participation in the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, which prohibits Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons but affirms its right to develop nuclear energy. Large majorities also support a Middle East nuclear free zone and the ultimate elimination of all nuclear weapons. Americans also strongly support the NPT regime and the eventual elimination of nuclear arms. The two publics disagree about whether the Iranian government seeks to acquire such weapons, however. A large majority of Americans believe it does, while the Iranian public is divided.

A majority of Iranians (69%) say they are aware that under the NPT Iran has agreed that it will not try to acquire nuclear weapons. A majority still believes, however, that it was a "good idea" for Iran to join the treaty. Only 10 percent say it is a bad idea (24% did not answer).

A majority of Iranians also believe the United Nations should monitor compliance with the NPT, despite the fact that the UN Security Council has imposed a unique requirement on Iran to forego uranium enrichment and is considering sanctions. Fifty-three percent say they favor an active role for the United Nations in discouraging countries from acquiring nuclear weapons. A third (35%) disagree. A slim majority (54%) also expresses a positive view of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the UN nuclear watchdog agency, to verify that Iran's has exclusively peaceful purposes.



Iranian support for the NPT may derive from concerns that Iran's neighbors could acquire nuclear weapons. Seventy-six percent of Iranians say the development of nuclear weapons by neighboring countries would be a threat; half of them (52%) think it would be a critical threat. An overwhelming majority (84%) believes that over the next fifty years "there will be more countries with nuclear weapons."

But Iranians are divided over whether Iran will be one of the states that acquire nuclear weapons. About a third of the sample (30%) say they do not believe Iran will get such weapons. Slightly fewer (27%) say it will. And 27 percent do not answer.

Americans agree with most Iranians on nearly all the major questions related to nuclear weapons proliferation. A large majority (78%) says it is a good idea for the United States to be a signatory of the NPT, though fewer Americans than Iranians say they are aware of its provisions. Like Iranians, Americans strongly favor the elimination of all nuclear weapons (82%). And majorities in both countries (71% each) say they would like to see a "nuclear-weapons-free zone in the Middle East that would include both Islamic countries and Israel."

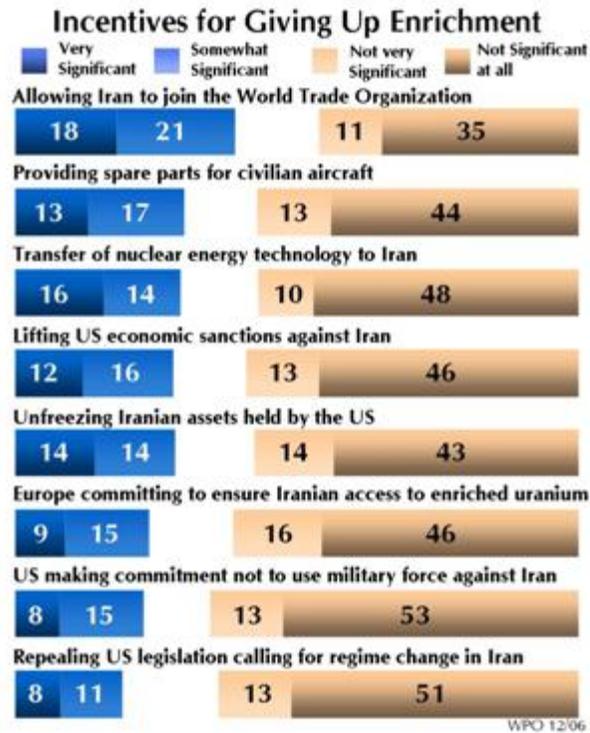
Americans share Iranian pessimism about the future of the non-proliferation regime. They believe overwhelmingly (91%) that there will be more nuclear-armed countries within fifty years. Unlike Iranians, however, Americans are convinced that Iran will be one of these new nuclear states (86%).

Negotiations over Iran's Nuclear Program

Americans are willing to allow Iranians to enrich uranium to very low levels as long as the Iranians agree in turn to provide full access to UN inspectors. Iranians are very reluctant to giving up their uranium enrichment program and reject as insignificant a wide array of possible incentives in return for such a commitment. Americans are a bit more likely to believe that this dispute could lead to military conflict.

U.S. respondents were asked if they would support an agreement allowing Iran to enrich uranium to the very low levels necessary to produce nuclear power but not the high levels required to produce nuclear weapons. In return, Iran would be obligated to afford U.N. inspectors full access to ensure that these enrichment levels were not exceeded.

Fifty-five percent of Americans believe such a deal would be a good idea, including 53 percent of Republicans and 62 percent of Democrats. Thirty-eight percent say this would be a bad idea.



Although Iranians were not asked about this potential deal, they were asked a series of questions regarding possible incentives that might convince them to give up their uranium enrichment program entirely. They were then asked how significant each incentive was. Majorities showed great reluctance to negotiating away this capability, however, rejecting nearly all of the incentives as inadequate.

Offers such as having the United States lift economic sanctions, unfreeze the Iranian assets it holds, and repeal legislation calling for regime change, were dismissed as "not very" or "not at all significant" by majorities of Iranian respondents. An official U.S. "commitment to not use military force against Iran" was also dismissed as inadequate.

The only offer that majorities did not dismiss as insignificant was "allowing Iran to join the World Trade Organization." Thirty-nine percent saw this as at least somewhat significant for Iran. However, a plurality of Iranians (46%) say this is not a significant offer, including 35 percent who consider it "not at all significant."

Americans showed mixed readiness to provide such incentives. Majorities say they are willing to allow Iran to join the WTO (54%) and a plurality (47%) would favor ending U.S. economic sanctions. Americans are divided about whether to unfreeze Iranian assets held by the United States (39% favor, 50% oppose) and to repeal legislation calling for regime change (44% favor, 43% oppose).

Iranians were divided about whether it was likely the United States would take military action against their country. Asked whether they agree or disagree that "a military confrontation between Iran and the United States is likely to occur within the next ten years," 28 percent agree, 39 percent disagree and 20 percent are neutral (14 % no answer).

Half of the sample was asked whether they thought the United States would "take military action against Iran's nuclear facilities in the next year or two" Forty-eight percent say this is at least somewhat likely (11% very likely). Those who believe that a U.S. strike against Iran's nuclear facilities is likely, however, are not significantly more willing to look positively on the proposed incentives for giving up Iran's enrichment program.

Americans are only a bit more inclined to think military force could be used. Forty-nine percent say it is likely the United States will take military action against Iran's nuclear facilities (13% very likely). Forty-five percent consider this unlikely (9% not at all likely). Forty-one percent believe that a military confrontation is likely in the next ten years, 19 percent disagree and 35 percent are neutral.

A majority of Americans (59%) do not believe that air strikes would be able to destroy Iran's nuclear program. Nor do they think the threat of using military force is likely to convince Iran to desist from enriching uranium. An overwhelming 79 percent say they do not believe Iran would halt such activities if the United States "threatens to use air strikes against its enrichment facilities."