

Iranian Public Ready to Deal on Nuclear Weapons, But Not Uranium Enrichment

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President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad at the August 2006 inauguration of the Arak heavy water reactor (Iranian government photo)

The Iranian public is ready to support a deal committing the Iranian government to renounce the development of nuclear weapons and allow full inspections. Iranians are not willing, however, to support giving up the enrichment of uranium for nuclear energy.

A new poll by sponsored by [Terror Free Tomorrow](#) and conducted by D3 Systems shows that a slight majority of Iranians (52%) believe their country should develop nuclear weapons. Nonetheless, overwhelming majorities support a deal under which Iran would provide "full inspections and a guarantee not to develop or possess nuclear weapons" in exchange for incentives, including:

- trade and capital investment overall to create more jobs (favored by 80%)
- trade and capital investment in energy refineries to lower the price of gasoline (79%)
- medical, education and humanitarian assistance to Iranian people in need (80%)
- technological assistance for developing peaceful nuclear energy (80%)

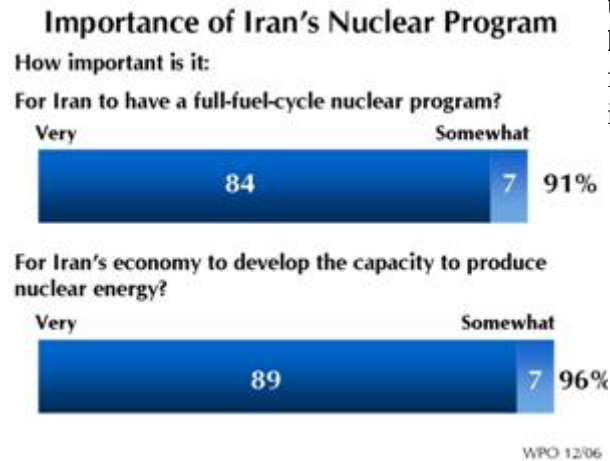
A slight majority (51%) would also be willing to offer "full transparency by Iran to assure there are no Iranian endeavors to develop or possess nuclear weapons" as part of a process of normalizing relations with the United States.



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Iranians are not ready to negotiate away their nuclear energy program, however. In the Terror Free Tomorrow (TFT) poll an extraordinarily high 92 percent approves (78% strongly) of Iran's effort to develop nuclear energy.

In June 2006, the United States, Russia, China, Britain, Germany and France offered Iran a package of economic incentives in return for a commitment to stop enriching uranium. Iran rejected the offer, maintaining that its enrichment program serves only peaceful purposes. Since then Security Council sanctions aimed at leadership to change the United Nations has twice approved forcing Iran's its mind.



Soft Support for Nuclear Weapons

Polls from other organizations also suggest that though Iranians support nuclear energy, they do not put a high priority on developing nuclear weapons. A [WPO poll](#) conducted in the fall of 2006 found that two thirds approved of Iran being part of the NPT, even when reminded that this meant Iran was prohibited from developing nuclear weapons. Only 15 percent favored Iran withdrawing from the treaty while 60 percent were opposed.

The TFT poll shows that only 29 percent of Iranians consider "developing an arsenal of nuclear weapons" to be a "very important long-term goal" for the government of Iran. In contrast, "improving the Iranian economy" is considered very important by 88 percent and "seeking trade and political relations with Western countries" by 47 percent.

Together these results suggest that Iranian support for developing nuclear weapons is soft and that they may view their nuclear program as a bargaining chip. A slight majority would be willing to forego the development of nuclear weapons in order to normalize relations with the United States and overwhelming majorities would do so in exchange for economic incentives.

Strong Support for Enrichment

The 2006 WPO poll found that nine out of 10 Iranian respondents thought it was "important" for Iran to have a full-fuel-cycle program, including a remarkably high 84 percent who said "very important" and another 7 percent who viewed it as "somewhat important." Only 4 percent said such a program was not important.

In contrast to their willingness to renounce nuclear weapons in exchange for incentives, Iranians showed strong resistance to negotiating away Iran's ability to enrich uranium. The survey presented Iranian respondents with a series of incentives that might be offered in exchange for giving up its program and then asked how significant each one was. In no case did a majority of Iranians consider the incentives significant.

The incentives dismissed as insignificant included the "US making an official commitment to not use military force against Iran" (dismissed by 66%), "repealing US legislation calling for regime change in Iran" (64%), "Europe committing to ensure Iranian access to enriched uranium" (62%), "lifting US economic sanctions against Iran" (59%), "unfreezing Iranian assets held by the US" (57%), and the United States "providing spare parts for civilian aircraft" (57%). Even transferring "nuclear energy technology to Iran" did not attract much enthusiasm (dismissed by 58%). The one incentive that was only dismissed by a plurality (46%) was allowing Iran to join the WTO.

Iranians also insist that military threats would have little impact on their support for Iran's nuclear policies. Asked in a May 2005 Zogby poll how they would react if "Iran is faced with military strikes in order to stop its nuclear program," only 28 percent said that it would make them less likely to support the program. Nearly half (47%) said this would only make them more supportive.

Other scenarios elicited similar responses. Asked how they would react "if Iran is threatened with sanctions by the United Nations," only 27 percent said they would be less likely to support Iran's nuclear program and 47 percent said they would be more likely. Fifty-two also said that "if the price Iran paid for its nuclear program was a worsening of its economy," they would still be more inclined to continue the program (less inclined, 37%).