

# Former Israeli Nuke Chief: Iran Is 10 Years Away from Having the Bomb

By [Washington's Blog](#)

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Theme: [Militarization and WMD](#)

In-depth Report: [IRAN: THE NEXT WAR?](#)

## ... And May Not Even Want to Build One

Ynet [reports](#):

An insider in Israel's nuclear program believes that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is employing needless fearmongering when it comes to Iran's atomic aspirations, in order to further his own political aims.

Brigadier General (res.) Uzi Eilam, who for a decade headed the Israel Atomic Energy Commission, does not believe that Tehran is even close to having a bomb, if that is even what it really aspires to.

"The Iranian nuclear program will only be operational in another **10 years**," declares Eilam, a senior official in Israel's atomic program. "Even so, **I am not sure that Iran wants the bomb.**"

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Uzi Eilam comes from the heart of Israel's secret security mechanisms, having served in senior roles in the defense establishment that culminated in a decade as the head of the atomic agency.

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Eilam is one of the central figures in the development of Israel's nuclear and missile programs in the last half century: Before his decade heading the Atomic Energy Commission, he was head of the IDF's Administration for the Development of Weapons and Technological Infrastructure ....

Netanyahu and other politicians have struck terrible, unnecessary fear into the hearts of the Israeli public, and thankfully the flames fanned over the issue seemed to have died down for now."

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"Besides, **what good would bombing do? It would only unite the Iranian people behind its government, and provide it with an incentive to continue the project, with far more resources. Bombing would achieve the direct opposite of what we desired.**"

No, the old man hasn't lost his mind ... This is what many top level Israeli, American and international leaders have been saying for years.

For example, Haaretz [noted](#) in 2012:

The intelligence assessment Israeli officials will present later this week to [Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Martin ] Dempsey indicates that Iran has not yet decided whether to make a nuclear bomb.

The Israeli view is that while Iran continues to improve its nuclear capabilities, it has not yet decided whether to translate these capabilities into a nuclear weapon - or, more specifically, a nuclear warhead mounted atop a missile. Nor is it clear when Iran might make such a decision.

Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta [said](#) in 2012:

Are they [the Iranians] trying to develop a nuclear weapon? **No**. But we know that they're trying to develop a nuclear capability. And that's what concerns us.

Director of National Intelligence James Clapper [confirmed](#) in a Senate hearing - following the release of the classified National Intelligence Estimate in 2011 - that he has a "high level of confidence" that Iran "**has not made a decision as of this point to restart its nuclear weapons program.**"

Mohamed ElBaradei - who spent more than a decade as the director of the IAEA - [said](#) that he had not "seen a shred of evidence" that Iran was pursuing the bomb.

Six former ambassadors to Iran within the last decade say that [there is no evidence that Iran is building nuclear weapons](#), and that Iran is complying with international law.

The International Atomic Energy Agency [states](#):

All nuclear material in the facility remains under the Agency's containment and surveillance.

In other words, all nuclear fuel is accounted for and is being controlled and monitored by the international agency tasked with nuclear non-proliferation.

What about Iran's enriching uranium to 20%? The IAEA [considers](#) 20 percent enriched uranium to be low-enriched uranium and "a fully adequate isotopic barrier" to weaponization. In other words, 20% is well within the legal guidelines for developing a program of nuclear energy.

Indeed, under the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), Iran is acting in a wholly legal fashion. As the six former ambassadors cited above note:

In terms of international law, the position of Europe and the United States may be less assured than is generally believed.

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Most experts, even in Israel, view Iran as striving to become a "threshold country", technically able to produce a nuclear weapon but abstaining from doing so for now. Again, nothing in international law forbids this ambition. Several other countries are close to, or have already reached, such a

threshold, with a commitment not to acquire nuclear weapons. Nobody seems to bother them.

Nuclear physicist Yousaf Butt – former fellow in the Committee on International Security and Arms Control at the National Academy of Sciences, scientific consultant for the Federation of American Scientists, and frequent contributor to the Bulletin of Atomic Scientists – [points out](#):

Iran is not doing anything that violates its legal right to develop nuclear technology. Under the NPT, it is not illegal for a member state to have a nuclear weapons capability— or a “nuclear option.” If a nation has a fully developed civilian nuclear sector — which the NPT actually encourages — it, by default, already has a fairly solid nuclear weapons capability. For example, like Iran, Argentina, Brazil, and Japan also maintain a “nuclear option” — they, too, could break out of the NPT and make a nuclear device in a few months, if not less. And like Iran, Argentina and Brazil also do not permit full “Additional Protocol” IAEA inspections.

The real legal red line, [specified](#) in the IAEA’s “Comprehensive Safeguards Agreements,” is the diversion of nuclear materials to a weapons program. However, multiple experts and official reports have affirmed over the years that they have **no evidence** that any such program exists.

The IAEA [stated](#) in 2011 that Iran’s research program into nuclear weapons:

**Was stopped rather abruptly pursuant to a ‘halt order’ instruction issued in late 2003.**

And Americana and Israeli intelligence chiefs say that attacking Iran will actually [speed up its ability to produce a nuclear bomb](#).

The good news is that there is a *simple solution* to the ongoing tensions with Iran.

Specifically, [a fuel swap would end the tensions](#). As Yousaf Butt [writes](#):

[A commentator] proposes a fuel swap to resolve the nuclear standoff: Iran would curtail its enrichment in exchange for foreign-supplied 20 percent enriched uranium fuel plates for its research reactor. In fact, in 2010, just such a deal [was brokered](#) by Turkey and Brazil but the United States could not take “yes” for an answer. Though Iran [has just accepted](#) an offer of new talks brokered by Turkey, new sanctions passed by Congress and signed into law by President Barack Obama have made it even more unlikely that the two sides can reach an agreement.

So why are so many pushing for war with Iran, instead of doing a fuel swap?

Perhaps because:

- The people pushing for war against Iran are the same neocons who pushed for war against Iraq based on false statements that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction. See [this](#), [this](#) and [this](#)

- The U.S. has been claiming [for more than 30 years](#) that Iran was on the verge of nuclear capability (and the U.S. apparently [helped fund](#) the Iranian nuclear program)
- War against Iran was planned [at least 20 years ago](#)
- Other recent claims against Iran have [largely been debunked](#)
- The CIA [admits](#) that it hired Iranians in the 1950's to pose as Communists and stage bombings in Iran in order to turn the country against its democratically-elected prime minister
- Pulitzer-prize winning investigative reporter Seymour Hersh says that the Bush administration (and especially Dick Cheney) helped to [fund terrorist groups within Iran](#) (see confirming articles [here](#) and [here](#))
- The [New York Times](#), [Washington Post](#) and others are reporting, former New York City Mayor Rudy Giuliani, former Homeland Security Secretary Tom Ridge, former national security adviser Fran Townsend and former Attorney General Michael Mukasey - who all said that the terrorists were going to get us if we didn't jettison the liberties granted under the Bill of Rights - are now supporting terrorists in Iran
- The war against Iran has already begun. See [this](#), [this](#) and [this](#)

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