

The New York Times's Double Standard on Iran's Nuclear Program

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As the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) [verified](#) over the weekend that Iran has completed the measures necessary to comply with the [nuclear deal](#) reached last July with the P5+1 governments, the [New York Times](#) Editorial Board proclaimed “the world is now safer for this.” They lauded the deal as a “testament to patient diplomacy” and President Barack Obama’s “visionary determination to pursue a negotiated solution to the nuclear threat.”

The Editorial Board takes for granted that Iran presents a threat. Iran has always maintained it has never intended to build nuclear weapons, and that its nuclear program was strictly meant to use nuclear technology as a source of energy production. In fact, in 1957 the United States government itself provided Iran with its [first nuclear reactor](#) while the country was ruled by U.S. ally – and murderous dictator – Shah Reza Pahlavi. Iran would later [sign](#) the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) in 1968 and ratify it two years later.

Several years ago [Ayatollah Ali Khamenei](#) declared that “(w)e believe that nuclear weapons (in the world) must be obliterated, and we do not intend to make nuclear weapons.” Previously he had said making nuclear weapons was a “sin.”

But regardless of their professed intentions, the New York Times is skeptical the Iranian government can be trusted. They claim that there still exist “daunting challenges ahead” as the other parties to the agreement need to ensure “the deal is strictly adhered to.” The New York Times’s skepticism is unsurprising. While the Times certainly will not repeat George W. Bush’s “Axis of Evil” language, they internalize the same ideological framework.

Is the *Times*’s skepticism warranted by the Iranian government’s record? That would be hard to argue, as the revolutionary regime in power since 1979 has never invaded another country. Unstated and assumed to be self-evident is the idea that Iran is dangerous and unable to be trusted because it is not aligned with Washington. Rather, it exercises its own independent foreign policy outside of American control.

If there were not a double standard in play, the *Times* would treat the United States government with the same skepticism as Iran. After all, the United States, which possesses at least [7,200 nuclear warheads](#), is the only country in history to have used nuclear weapons – twice, against a country seeking for months to negotiate a conditional surrender.

Unlike Iran, the United States is not complying with the NPT. As a state already in

possession of nuclear weapons, the United States has a responsibility under its treaty obligations to [pursue disarmament](#). The *Times* itself detailed the U.S. government's own modernization of its nuclear weapons in a [front-page article](#) on January 11.

The article by William J. Broad and David E. Sanger notes that Obama promised to work towards nuclear disarmament early in his presidency, saying he would "reduce the role of nuclear weapons in our national security strategy."

However, the [\\$1 trillion plan](#) that later emerged called for the modernization of current nuclear weapons by redesigning and improving them. The *Times* quotes a critical report developed by two former national security officials as saying Obama's plan could be seen "as violating the administration's pledge not to develop or deploy" new nuclear weapons. Neither the report nor the *Times* questions whether this is also a violation of the government's obligations under the NPT.

The *Times* shows a graphic depiction of the enhancements, including a steerable fins, a navigation system and safety features. "The result is a bomb that can make more accurate nuclear strikes and a warhead whose destructive power can be adjusted to minimize collateral damage and radioactive fallout," the caption reads. This may make them "more tempting to use," according to critics.

The title of the article, "As U.S. Modernizes Nuclear Weapons, 'Smaller' Leaves Some Uneasy," is evidence that the debate around the Obama administration's plan is seen as a matter of strategy and cost efficiency, rather than as a violation of international law and a threat to peace. The people left "uneasy" are all close to the national security establishment. Their concerns don't have to do with the program's contravention of the U.S. government's responsibilities under the NPT. The debate is merely one of philosophical differences between policy makers.

Despite Iran's compliance with the nuclear agreement (their continued compliance with the NPT is not even mentioned), the *Times* Editorial Board states that this doesn't mean they "should not be subject to criticism or new sanctions for violation of other United Nations resolutions or American laws." Indeed, they had [previously called](#) the Obama administration's plans to impose new sanctions for Iran's ballistic missile tests "wise."

Aside from the dubious position that the U.S. government should unilaterally impose sanctions related to UN resolutions, they claim that Iran should be subject to the extraterritorial application of American laws. Under international law, no state is bound to respect the domestic laws of another state. The U.S. [Supreme Court](#) declared "the laws of no nation can justly extend beyond its own territories except so far as regards its own citizens. They can have no force to control the sovereignty or rights of any other nation within its own jurisdiction."

The *Times* does not call for any legal or economic repercussions against the United States. The U.S. government's \$1 trillion program to upgrade its nuclear weapons is not in any way presented as a grave threat that affects the rest of the world. They don't demand controls by outside powers the U.S. must strictly adhere to, as they do for Iran. Their framing of the story and absence of any editorial condemnation makes it clear the paper views the actions of the U.S. government as unquestionably beyond reproach.

The paper's calls for the strict enforcement of the nuclear deal and application of new

sanctions on the Iranian government are not grounded in any moral or legal principles. They are a reflection of the *Times's* acceptance of the U.S. government's patronizing doctrine that threats to peace only emanate from countries outside of American control, who must be dealt with using coercion and punishment that the U.S. itself is always exempt from.

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