

## Will Iran Go Nuclear?

- Session:** Grand Ballroom 3  
**Date/Time:** February 19, 2013 / 15:30-16:45
- Moderator:** Jang Ji-Hyang, The Asan Institute for Policy Studies
- Speakers:** Ahmet Kasim Han Kadir Has University  
Steven Miller Harvard University  
Uzi Rubin Rubicon Ltd.  
Nasser Saghafi-Ameri Center for Strategic Research
- Rapporteur:** Gordon Wyn Jones, King's College London

### *Session Sketch*

Dr Jang Ji-Hyang opened the session by highlighting perceived wisdom and debate on the Iranian nuclear issue, threat assessments regarding a nuclear Iran and resulting regional cascade, and posited two areas for panel consideration: whether Iran will go nuclear and perspectives on international responses and the impact of sanctions to date.

Dr Steven Miller outlined the current status of a largely failed “western” policy objective of ensuring “zero enrichment”, with Iran having achieved a nuclear capability, regardless of the spectrum of debate regarding Iranian “weaponization” intentions. Despite persistent refutations regarding weapons intent by the Iranian leadership, emphasizing purely peaceful nuclear development, suspicions remain high, with accumulating layers of coercive sanctions seemingly the preferred instrument for the United States to apply its continued “pressure-pain calculus”. The differing narratives reflect a high level of mutual mistrust and incomprehension between the United States and Iran. Based on current conditions, it is not likely that Iran will push for or achieve nuclear-weapon status in the near term, but rather, strive for a threshold capability.

Mr Nasser Saghafi-Ameri prefaced his comments by doubting Iranian linkage to the recent

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North Korean missile and nuclear tests, emphasizing the oft-expressed regime view that Iran is politically, morally and religiously adamantly against nuclear weapons and WMD in general. Charting Iran's nuclear course from the 1960s to date, illustrates Iran's record of restraint (despite foreign pressures and having itself been a victim of WMD) and the essentially defensive character of Iran's doctrine of asymmetric confrontation as a deterrent to foreign encroachment.

Professor Ahmet Kasim Han highlighted prestige as a currency of power, with nuclear weapon "hard power as a solid avenue" and Iran "definitely in the game". Iran is an important regional actor, playing a double game of "denial" and "nuisance", but lacking "immunity" from attack, which its nuclear program may facilitate. For Professor Han, Iran has not manifested a clear intention to go for nuclear weapons, and will likely "stop a yard short of the bomb", but contends that a nuclear-capable Iran would essentially have the same consequences for the region in terms of coercive capabilities and influence, which is "not good news for an aspiring power like Turkey". Though Turkey tends to downplay the Iranian threat, due in part to important energy relations, there is anxiety about Iran's direction. However, barring any drastic change in its NATO security environment, it is "very unlikely that Turkey would go nuclear in response to a nuclear Iran".

Retired Brigadier-General Uzi Rubin highlighted Iran's combined nuclear, missile and space programs as clear indications of Iran's progress towards developing a "viable nuclear strike force". Together with revelations of secret facilities and convoluted explanations for its nuclear and missile-related actions, the Iranian regime has prompted suspicions and raised many question marks regarding its intentions and whether the rhetoric of restraint and denial represents "policy or ploy". In Mr. Rubin's view, "Iran is not a satisfied power" and "has many axes to grind". Though a nuclear Iran is not a foregone conclusion, its military-industrial complex and advancing nuclear ambitions are a concern for Israel and should be for the wider international community. Much depends on whether "Iran can live with the world as it is, not as Iran wants it to be".

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