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### Sorting through more official statements on Iran's nuclear capability:



In a [post](#) last week on the [ISISNuclearIran](#) website, we addressed the perceived inconsistency in statements made by Secretary of Defense Robert Gates and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Michael Mullen. Director of National Intelligence Dennis Blair sought to clarify the issue when [he told the Senate Armed Services Committee](#) on March 10 that “Iran has not decided to press forward...to have a nuclear weapon on top of a ballistic missile” and that the “current estimate is that the minimum time at which Iran could technically produce the amount of highly enriched uranium for a single weapon is 2010 to 2015.” He added, as reported in the [Washington Post on Wednesday](#) by Peter Finn, that the

five-year spread “is a result of differences in the intelligence community about how quickly Iran could develop a weapon if it rekindled a weapons program it suspended in 2003.”

In discussions with ISIS officials, and as reported by the [Post on March 8](#), Israel has concluded that Iran has already “crossed the threshold” and has both the expertise and materials needed to produce a nuclear weapon. Israel’s view emphasizes Iran’s technical nuclear weapons capabilities and the fact that 2010 is not far away, whereas Blair’s comments concerned whether Iran has actually decided to build nuclear weapons. Essentially, Israel believes that Iran is biding its time waiting for the right moment to build nuclear weapons.

ISIS’s own [conclusion remains](#) that Iran has not made the political decision to build a nuclear arsenal, though the technical and material impediments to developing a weapons capability are quickly falling away.

The Arms Control Association has sought to address some of these issues in a [statement released March 2](#). ACA correctly noted that the questions put to senior officials by the

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media regarding Iran's nuclear capabilities confused the issue of weapon-grade uranium and the low enriched uranium that Iran is currently producing, although not as much as ACA asserted. In addition, Iran would have to make the decision to divert and further enrich the LEU, which is currently under IAEA safeguards. ISIS also agrees that Iran's failure to adhere to the Additional Protocol and measures requiring Iran to declare new facilities before starting construction has created one of the most significant blind spots for the International Atomic Energy Agency, in particular its ability to understand Iran's centrifuge manufacturing capabilities and plans. The current safeguards inspections are unable to determine whether Iran is operating gas centrifuges in secret. But it is also important not to downplay Iran's steadily accumulating stockpile of low enriched uranium. This material is now sufficient to provide Iran with the means to relatively rapidly (less than a year; perhaps a few months) produce a nuclear weapon that it did not previously have.

This raises the stakes for the diplomatic process, which shows no signs yet of being reenergized (though it is still early in the Obama administration, and we recognize that a policy review is underway). The United States is in a strong position to chart a new relationship with Iran that is less confrontational and begins to address the nuclear issue in a broader context, including Iran's concerns about regional security and economic development. For its part, Iran must also be willing to examine anew its own domestic, regional and global objectives and question how its nuclear ambitions help to achieve those goals. ISIS examines these issues and offers a series of recommendations in a paper issued in January 2009, [Nuclear Iran: Not Inevitable](#).