



April 29, 2008

The Candidates' Positions—Iran and the Nuclear Fuel Cycle

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ISIS has begun a new project with grant assistance from the Carnegie Corporation to educate the media and public about Iran's development of the nuclear fuel cycle. One part of this project involves outreach to the presidential campaigns with the aim of promoting greater clarity on fuel cycle policies and transparency during a busy election season.

ISIS approached the campaigns of Senators Clinton, McCain and Obama last month with two questions about policies toward Iran and its development of the nuclear fuel cycle, in particular uranium enrichment. Their verbatim answers are contained below.

This issue has taken on special timeliness this week, as several candidates have been asked how they would address these issues. In a separate [document](#) we provide examples of several recent statements by the candidates on this important nonproliferation issue.

Questions:

1. Does the Senator have a position on whether Iran should suspend permanently or temporarily its uranium enrichment activity and development of a plutonium reprocessing capability?
2. Does the Senator have a policy or suggested proposal for controlling the nuclear fuel cycle in the case of Iran?

SENATOR HILLARY CLINTON

1. Given Iran's clandestine enrichment program and the many other violations of its nonproliferation obligations over a period of close to 20 years, the only way Iran can now

persuade the international community that it is not seeking nuclear weapons is to suspend both its uranium enrichment and its heavy water-based plutonium production programs. Iran's refusal to comply with legally binding United Nations Security Council resolutions demanding that it suspend those programs raises additional doubts about its declared intention to abide by international treaty commitments not to pursue nuclear weapons. Iran should suspend its fuel-cycle programs – its uranium enrichment program and heavy water-based plutonium production program. To seek such an outcome, the United States should engage in the kind of carrots and sticks diplomacy that has produced progress elsewhere. The United States should enter into direct talks with Iran, and continue to pursue vigorous diplomacy – using both incentives and disincentives, if Iran is prepared to address U.S. and international concerns about its nuclear program, its support for terrorist groups, and its other unacceptable activities.

2. If Iran's motives for acquiring a uranium enrichment capability are genuinely peaceful – to provide low-enriched fuel for the nuclear power reactors it hopes to build – then it has no need to build its own enrichment facility. The six countries that have offered Iran a package of incentives to resolve the nuclear issue – China, France, Germany, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States – have proposed various means of guaranteeing Iran that it would have reliable access to foreign sources of reactor fuel as long as it complies with its nonproliferation obligations.

SENATOR BARACK OBAMA:

1. Iran must verifiably abandon its nuclear weapons program. To that end, Senator Obama has made clear that he will engage in direct negotiations with Iran, with the immediate objective of a suspension of Iranian uranium enrichment activities and a commitment to refrain from reprocessing plutonium. This is in keeping with Senator Obama's support for the IAEA Director General's call for a global 5-year moratorium on any construction of new national fuel cycle facilities. He will seek an immediate, global agreement on such a moratorium.

2. Please see above. Senator Obama is concerned about the proliferation implications of national control of the fuel cycle in general and supports a moratorium on *all* new national facilities. The current Iranian regime — a state sponsor of terror and serious threat to Israel and our other allies in the Middle East — illustrates the problem with having national control over the nuclear fuel cycle. Tehran must agree on the immediate implementation of the Additional Protocol, halt any enrichment activities, and refrain from acquiring reprocessing capabilities. To assure that Iran and other states that forego national fuel cycle programs have guaranteed access to nuclear fuel for commercial use, Senator Obama introduced legislation with Senator Hagel that would authorize \$50 million for an international nuclear fuel bank.

SENATOR JOHN MCCAIN:

1. There is no circumstance under which the international community could be confident that uranium enrichment or plutonium production activities undertaken by the current government of Iran are purely for peaceful purposes. Given the Iranian regime's history of deception with regard to its nuclear program, its continuing lack of cooperation with the IAEA, its still unacknowledged work on weaponization, its defiance of international norms with regard to support for terrorism and threats toward Israel, and the lack of any serious economic justification for the program in the first place, Iran has forfeited any plausible claim to be pursuing a "peaceful" nuclear energy program. Accordingly, we must insist that the government of Iran permanently suspend its uranium enrichment activity and development of a plutonium production capability.

2. Given the Iranian government's past behavior described above, as well as the IAEA's limited ability to detect either a diversion of nuclear fuel for bomb-making purposes until after it has taken place, or the establishment of a parallel, covert production capability, there can be no such thing as an adequately controlled nuclear fuel cycle in Iran. Indeed, permitting the government of Iran to carry out any nuclear fuel cycle activities will give rise to an unacceptable risk that the Iranians will gain sufficient expertise in nuclear engineering and science to establish a covert fissile material production

capability. The simple fact is that Iran does not need to be able to produce nuclear fuel in Iran; there is no reason it cannot rely on an International Uranium Enrichment Center (IUEC) along the lines that Russia has proposed, or other foreign sources of supply. For the Iranian government to claim that it is being denied its rights under the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty completely ignores its behavior over the past two decades in violation of legally-binding obligations under its nuclear safeguards agreement with the IAEA.