Iran Developing Advanced Nuclear Capabilities, Reducing Time to Weapon

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Iran is believed to be developing advanced nuclear-related capabilities that could significantly reduce the time it needs to build a deliverable nuclear weapon, according to statements by Iranian officials that have fueled speculation among White House officials and nuclear experts that the landmark accord has heightened rather than reduced the Islamic Regime's nuclear threat.

The head of Iran's nuclear program recently announced the Islamic Republic could mass produce advanced nuclear centrifuges capable of more quickly enriching uranium, the key component in a nuclear weapon. Work of this nature appears to violate key clauses of the nuclear agreement that prohibits Iran from engaging in such activity for the next decade or so.

The mass production of this equipment "would greatly expand Iran's ability to sneak-out or breakout to nuclear weapons capability," according to nuclear verification experts who disclosed in a [recent report](http://isis-online.org/uploads/isis-reports/documents/Mass_Production_of_Centrifuges_30May2017_Final.pdf) that restrictions imposed by the Iran deal are failing to stop the Islamic Republic's nuclear pursuits.

The latest report has reignited calls for the Trump administration to increase its enforcement of the nuclear deal and pressure international nuclear inspectors to demand greater access to Iran's nuclear sites.

It remains unclear if nuclear inspectors affiliated with the International Atomic Energy Agency, or IAEA, have investigated Iran's pursuit of advanced centrifuges, according to the report, which explains that greater access to Iran's sites is needed to verify its compliance with the deal.

The report comes amid renewed concerns about Iran's adherence to the nuclear agreement and its increased efforts to construct ballistic missiles, which violate international accords barring such behavior.

"Iran could have already stockpiled many advanced centrifuge components, associated raw materials, and the equipment necessary to operate a large number of advanced centrifuges," according to a report by the Institute for Science and International Security. "The United States and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) need to determine the status of Iran's centrifuge manufacturing capabilities, including the number of key centrifuge parts Iran has made and the amount of centrifuge equipment it has procured."

Ali Akbar Salehi, the head of Iran's Atomic Energy Organization, bragged in April that Tehran is prepared to mass-produce advanced centrifuges on "short notice." Work of this nature would greatly increase the amount of nuclear fissile material produced by Iran, prompting concerns the country could assemble a functional nuclear weapon without being detected.

The issue is complicated by the lack of access international nuclear inspectors have to Iran's contested military sites, according to the report.

Salehi's declaration highlights the "profound weaknesses in the JCPOA which include lack of inspector access, highly incomplete knowledge of Iran's centrifuge manufacturing capabilities and output, and too few centrifuge components being accounted for and monitored," according to the report.

Iran already has manufactured more centrifuge parts than needed for the amount of nuclear work permitted under the agreement.

The terms of the agreement permit Iran to operate one advanced IR-8 centrifuge. However, Iran is known to have assembled more than half a dozen such centrifuges.

Iran also is working to construct IR-6 centrifuges, which also point to an increased focus on the production of enriched nuclear materials.

"These numbers are excessive and inconsistent with the JCPOA," according to the report. "Moreover, in light of Salehi's comments, the excessive production of [centrifuge] rotors may be part of a plan to lay the basis for mass production."

Iran's work on "any such plan is not included in Iran's enrichment plan under the JCPOA," according to the report.

Inspectors affiliated with the IAEA should immediately investigate the total number of centrifuge parts in Iran's possession and determine exactly how many of these parts are currently being manufactured, the report states. The IAEA also should attempt to keep tabs on any clandestine nuclear work Iran may be engaging in.

Iran may be misleading the world about its centrifuge production and it still has not declared all materials related to this work, as is obligated under the nuclear deal.

"A key question is whether Iran is secretly making centrifuge rotor tubes and bellows at unknown locations, in violation of the JCPOA, and if it takes place, what the probability is that it goes without detection," the report concludes.

Additionally, "the United States and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) need to determine the status of Iran's centrifuge manufacturing capabilities, including the number of key centrifuge parts Iran has made and the amount of centrifuge equipment it has procured," the report states.

"They need to ensure that Iran's centrifuge manufacturing is consistent with the intent of the nuclear deal as well as the deal's specific limitations on advanced centrifuges," according to the report. "Moreover, the Iranian statement illuminates significant weaknesses in the Iran deal that need to be fixed."

When asked to address the issue, a State Department official told the Washington Free Beacon that Iran's centrifuge work remains very "limited" under the nuclear agreement.

"Under the JCPOA, consistent with Iran's enrichment and enrichment and [research and development] plan, Iran can only engage in production of centrifuges, including centrifuge rotors and associated components, to meet the enrichment and R&D requirements of the JCPOA," the official said. "In other words, Iran's production of centrifuges and associated components are limited to be consistent with the small scale of R&D that is permissible under the JCPOA."

If Iran is in violation of the deal, the United States will take concrete action to address this once the Trump administration finishes its interagency review of the Iran deal.

"The Trump administration has made clear that at least until this review is completed, we will adhere to the JCPOA and will ensure that Iran is held strictly accountable to its requirements," the official said.