

Defense – France

The recent history of the French nuclear program is one of de-escalation and standing down. Since the conclusion of the Cold War, France has ceased all nuclear testing, in addition to all production of new nuclear weapons. In addition to this, the French government decreased its alert status a number of times throughout the 1990s.

As France decreases its own nuclear arsenal, it has a possible reason to fear nuclear weapons in other, new hands. A possible Iranian nuclear program represents a threat to a French regime with a policy of decreasing nuclear capability, due to a lack of a French deterrent.

France has an interesting role in the current Iran issue. The Iranian government has specifically sought them out as a nation that they can negotiate with. Iran has repeatedly stated that they would be willing to cooperate with France on a deal to enrich uranium for domestic nuclear purposes (for energy), even offering France the chance to essentially take control of enrichment activities.

France's response to these offers has ranged from cold to lukewarm. As to the offer to take over Iranian Uranium enrichment France stressed that these offers needed to be made through the "proper channels," in this case the official foreign affairs department of the European Union and Javier Solana, the foreign policy chief of the EU.

The French Defense Minister has, however, expressed an interest in possible cooperation with Iran. If, she says, Iran is will to make concessions and begin putting forward a more consistent position, then France is willing to abandon UN sanctions.

In consolidating these inputs into a coherent analysis of the French defense policy in relation to Iran, several important issues come to the forefront. France, like the rest of the UN Security Council, does not want Iran to develop nuclear weapons. This desire is seemingly based partially on France's own decreasing nuclear arsenal. France is willing to support United Nations sanctions on Iran in order to prevent their attainment of nuclear weapons. France is, however, generally less hard-line in their position on the Iranian regime than the United States. They will, if Iran presents a more conciliatory face to the international community on the issue, be willing to forgo sanctions. France's role as a more moderate respondent on the Iranian issue is related to Iran's relative friendliness towards them. They appear to have a closer relationship with Iran than the other Security Council members.

In the context of these negotiations, the French Defense Department will most likely wish to act as a sort of go-between, connecting Iran and the more hard-line Security Council members. They will be more willing to drop harsh measures such as sanctions if Iran shows more cooperation. In addition, if certain guarantees are made, and if the request

goes through the “proper channels” they would not completely rule out a peaceful uranium enrichment program in Iran.

Given the history and danger involved in the issue, France has no interest in an Iran that belongs to the Nuclear weapons club. A conciliatory role that does involve an Iranian nuclear energy program for peaceful purposes is within France’s realm of possibility.

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