

Embargoed until 12:01 EDT Monday, April 7th 2008

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Iranians Oppose Producing Nuclear Weapons, Saying It Is Contrary to Islam

But Most Insist on Iran Producing Nuclear Fuel

For Release: 12:01 EDT April 7, 2008

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College Park, MD—A majority of Iranians do not believe their country should produce nuclear weapons, but most still think it is “very important” for Iran to develop nuclear fuel.

A new survey by WorldPublicOpinion.org finds that three out of five Iranians (58%) think that producing nuclear weapons is contrary to Islam, while only one in four (23%) think that it is permissible.

At the same time most Iranians (81%) consider it “very important” for “Iran to have a full-fuel-cycle nuclear program” which would give Iran the capacity to produce nuclear fuel for energy production.

A nationwide random sample of 710 Iranians was surveyed from January 13 to February 9 by WorldPublicOpinion.org, an international research project managed by the Program on International Policy Attitudes at the University of Maryland, in partnership with Search for Common Ground. Parallel questions were asked to an American sample as part of a larger study comparing American and Iranian views.

A large majority of Iranians (66%) endorse their government’s position that Iran should have “a full fuel cycle nuclear energy program” but not develop nuclear weapons. Only 20 percent say Iran should develop nuclear weapons and 5 percent think Iran should not pursue a full-fuel-cycle program.

A majority of Iranians also approve of the Nuclear Non Proliferation Treaty (NPT), which prohibits Iran from developing nuclear weapons. Three out of five Iranians (59%) say it was a good idea for Iran to sign the NPT and 63 percent say Iran should continue to be part of the NPT. Nearly three out of four (72%) say they support the goal of eliminating nuclear weapons as stated in the NPT.

Because, with higher levels of enrichment such nuclear fuel could be used for nuclear weapons, the UN Security Council has called for Iran to not produce nuclear fuel. Fifty-eight percent of Iranians support the idea of making a deal with the UN Security Council that would allow Iran to have a full-cycle nuclear program while giving the International

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Atomic Energy Agency “permanent and full access throughout Iran to ensure that its nuclear program is limited to energy production” and not producing nuclear weapons.

A March 2008 poll for the BBC World Service found that publics in 17 out of 31 countries approved such a deal, including the United States (55%), Britain (71%) and France (56%).

“While it is not clear if the Iranian government would accept permanent and full UN access to ensure Iran is not developing nuclear weapons, most of the Iranian people are ready to accept it,” comments Steven Kull, director of WorldPublicOpinion.org. “Most Iranians are ready to foreclose developing nuclear weapons.”

Though Iranians support the NPT they have concerns about its long term viability. Most of those polled (75%) believe there are countries with “secret programs for developing the capacity to produce nuclear weapons.” Estimates vary from a few countries (24%), to some (28%), to many (24%). A mere 3 percent say there are no countries with secret nuclear programs.

The belief that the United States poses a threat to Iran is less widespread than it was when WorldPublicOpinion.org last surveyed the country in late 2006. Fifty-five percent say US bases in the Middle East are a threat to their country, down from 73 percent in Dec. 2006. Only 34 percent now believe the United States is likely to strike Iran’s nuclear facilities in the next year or two, down from 48 percent.

The release of a US National Intelligence Estimate concluding that Iran is not trying to develop nuclear weapons may explain this diminished sense of threat. The 55 percent of Iranians who knew about the NIE felt significantly less threatened than those who did not.

For more information about this poll, its methodology, and additional findings on Iranian views of US-Iran relations, please visit: www.WorldPublicOpinion.org

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