

BREAKING: Iran Not Building A Nuclear Weapon:

Leon Panetta

By [Common Dreams](#)

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Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta appears on CBS' Face the Nation this morning and declared, despite enormous public rhetoric among pundits and many US government officials – not to mention GOP presidential candidates, that Iran is not currently trying to build a nuclear weapon.

The Associated Press [reports today](#):

[Panetta] says Iran is laying the groundwork for making nuclear weapons someday, but is not yet building a bomb and called for continued diplomatic and economic pressure to persuade Tehran not to take that step.

As he has previously, Panetta cautioned against a unilateral strike by Israel against Iran's nuclear facilities, saying the action could trigger Iranian retaliation against U.S. forces in the region.

The comments suggest the White House's assessment of Iran's nuclear strategy has not changed in recent months, despite warnings from advocates of military action that time is running out to prevent Tehran from becoming a nuclear-armed state.

Iran says its nuclear program is only for energy and medical research, and refuses to halt uranium enrichment

And although such comments pair with Iran's insistence that its nuclear program is strictly for domestic non-military purposes, and despite renewed warnings to US-allied Israel not to strike Iran prematurely, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Martin Dempsey, who joined Panetta on Face the Nation rattled the US saber without mistake, saying:

he wanted the Iranians to believe that a U.S. military strike could wipe out their nuclear program.

"I absolutely want them to believe that's the case," he said.

Panetta did not rule out launching a pre-emptive strike.

As such threats from both Israel and the United States continue it's little wonder the Iranians would seek to put their nuclear facilities beyond the reach of incoming airstrikes. As Reuters reports:

Iran will in the “near future” start enriching uranium deep inside a mountain, a senior [Iranian] official said.

[...]

A decision by the Islamic Republic to conduct sensitive atomic activities at an underground site – offering better protection against any enemy attacks – could complicate diplomatic efforts to resolve the long-running row peacefully.

Iran has said for months that it is preparing to move its highest-grade uranium refinement work to Fordow, a facility near the Shi’ite Muslim holy city of Qom in central Iran, from its main enrichment plant at Natanz.

Responding to threats by Iran to close the Strait of Hormuz to oil shipments, Panetta did not hesitate to raise the possibility of military intervention yet again. According the Agence France-Presse:

“We made very clear that the United States will not tolerate the blocking of the Straits of Hormuz,” Panetta told CBS television. “That’s another red line for us and that we will respond to them.”

Panetta was seconded by General Martin Dempsey, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, who said Iran has the means to close the waterway, through which 20 percent of the world’s oil passes.

“But we would take action and reopen the Straits,” the general said.

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