

FORTY YEARS OF DEADLINES

Benjamin Netanyahu on Iran's Nuclear Timeline, 1992–2026

Annex JR0002.A

A reference companion to the series "Death to America: The History Behind the Chant." Compiled October 7, 2026.

This is Revision A. If a later revision exists (JR0002.B and onward) it supersedes this one and is listed in the Annex at jonrodebaugh.com.

This document does one thing: it lists, with dates and sources, what Benjamin Netanyahu has said in public about how close Iran is to a nuclear weapon, and what the intelligence record said at the same moments.

It is not a claim that he lied. It is not a claim that Iran is harmless. The objections to reading it that way are set out in full before the conclusion, because several of them are good.

The Record

1992 — Knesset. As a member of the Israeli parliament, [Netanyahu said Iran was three to five years from nuclear weapons capability.](#)

1995 — *Fighting Terrorism*. [In his book, the same estimate: three to five years.](#)

1996 — Joint meeting of the United States Congress. [If Iran acquired nuclear weapons it "could presage catastrophic consequences," and "the deadline for attaining this goal is getting extremely close."](#)

September 12, 2002 — House Committee on Government Reform. Testifying at a hearing titled *Conflict with Iraq: An Israeli Perspective*, on Iraq rather than Iran: ["There is no question whatsoever that Saddam is seeking and is working and is advancing toward the development of nuclear weapons." In the same testimony he described Iran and Iraq as "racing to develop nuclear weapons," and recommended Iraq first as "the linchpin."](#)

Saddam had no nuclear weapons program. The hearing transcript is public and is linked above; it is worth reading in the original.

2009 — American delegations, per State Department cables. [Iran was "probably one or two years away." In a later cable the same year, Iran "has the capability now to make one bomb," or could "make several bombs in a year or two."](#)

September 27, 2012 — UN General Assembly. The cartoon bomb and the red marker. [Iran had finished the first stage of enrichment and was "70 per cent of the way there"; it would complete medium enrichment "by next spring, at most by next summer"; after that "a few months, possibly a few weeks" to enough enriched uranium for a first bomb.](#)

March 3, 2015 — Joint meeting of Congress. Arranged by Speaker John Boehner without consulting the White House, while the agreement was being negotiated. The deal, he said, would not stop Iran from getting a weapon.

April 30, 2018 — Tel Aviv. ["Iran lied," presenting the archive Mossad had removed from Tehran.](#)

March 1, 2026 — after the opening strikes. [The coalition of forces "allows us to do what I have yearned to do for 40 years."](#)

June 2025 — on Iraq, in retrospect. [He said Israel had no evidence at the time, and that he had told Donald Rumsfeld the primary goal was the Iranian regime.](#)

No question whatsoever, in 2002. No evidence, in 2025.

What the Record Said at the Same Time

December 2007 — US National Intelligence Estimate. [The intelligence community judged with high confidence that Iran halted its nuclear weapons program in the autumn of 2003.](#)

2011 — IAEA. The Agency published its documentation of Iran's pre-2003 weapons work — more than a thousand pages, in full, seven years before the Mossad archive was presented.

Late 2012 — Mossad, in writing. [Weeks after the cartoon bomb speech, Mossad gave South African intelligence an assessment that Iran was "not performing the activity necessary to produce weapons." An Israeli official told the *Guardian* there was no contradiction.](#)

March 2025 — Director of National Intelligence. [Tulsi Gabbard testified that the intelligence community "continues to assess that Iran is not building a nuclear weapon and Supreme Leader Khamenei has not authorized the nuclear weapons program that he suspended in 2003."](#)

March 2026 — the same office. Her written testimony to the Senate Intelligence Committee said Iran's enrichment program had been obliterated in 2025 and that there had been no effort since to rebuild it. She declined to say the community assessed an imminent nuclear threat.

The Objections, at Full Strength

The Mossad cable may not contradict anything. This is the strongest objection and it deserves to be stated properly. [Jonathan Tobin argued in *Commentary* that the cable addressed whether Iran was *producing*](#)

[weapons at that moment, while Netanyahu was describing enrichment progress toward capability. Those are different claims and both can be true at once.](#) A reader who takes the cable as a straightforward refutation is overreading it.

Iran did have a weapons program. Until 2003, documented by the IAEA and corroborated in far greater volume by the 2018 archive. Anyone citing this table as proof that the threat was invented is misusing it.

Capability and weapon are not the same word. Several of the entries above are claims about how long until Iran *could* build one, not assertions that it had. Collapsing the two is the error this series spends seven installments criticizing, and it does not become acceptable when done in the other direction.

The 2018 archive was real. [What is fair to say about it is narrower, and the clearest version came from an Israeli outlet: the material concerned the pre-2003 AMAD program, did not show a violation of the 2015 agreement, and was not new — the IAEA had published the substance in 2011. One nuclear-deal critic, Emily Landau, said: "We didn't really get any new information per se."](#) The difference was scale: a thousand pages in 2011, a hundred thousand in 2018.

Iran's present conduct is not in dispute. It enriches to 60 percent, the only non-nuclear-weapon state doing so; it violated safeguards; it has refused access. None of that is softened by anything on this page.

What It Establishes

Narrowly, and only this.

A single political figure has told the public that Iran was close to a nuclear weapon, in terms implying urgency, across thirty-four years and at least seven distinct occasions. Over that period the deadline did not arrive. In 2002 the same figure applied the same certainty to Iraq's nuclear program, using the words *no question whatsoever*, and that program did not exist — a judgment he himself revisited in 2025.

That is not evidence Iran is harmless, and it is not proof of bad faith. It is a reason to ask, each time the claim is made again, what is behind it — which is the only question this series has ever been asking.

Sources: the hearing transcript at [govinfo.gov](#); the Congressional Research Service; the International Atomic Energy Agency; The Intercept's 2015 compilation; ABC News (Australia) on the leaked cable; Commentary; The Times of Israel; CBS News; Al Jazeera. Every claim above links to its source. Where a quotation is reported rather than transcribed, the reporting outlet is named in the link.

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