

**Interview of Ambassador John D. Negroponte
Director of National Intelligence**

With Mr. Gary Thomas of Voice of America

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Part II

MR. THOMAS: Speaking in his top floor office overlooking the Potomac River, Director of National Intelligence John Negroponte says Iran is determined to get nuclear weapons and will have them soon if not deterred from its current course.

AMB. NEGROPONTE: We don't have any fast facts that could demonstrate to you a particular date by which we're certain Iran will have a nuclear weapon. But yes, it is our judgment, based on all the information available to us, that Iran is determined to acquire nuclear weapons and, secondly, that they are on a path to achieve that within the next several years. The estimate that we have made is that somewhere between 2010 and 2015 is when we judge Iran is likely to have a nuclear weapon if it continues on its current course.

MR. THOMAS: The United States has been trying to round up support in the U.N. Security Council for sanctions on Iran. Parallel efforts are also underway for a diplomatic solution. The five permanent members of the Security Council plus Germany are offering incentives to get Iran to suspend uranium enrichment, a critical step to building nuclear weapons.

Iran denies it seeks nuclear weapons, saying it only wants atomic energy for peaceful purposes. Iran has so far refused to halt enrichment, although Tehran has floated the idea of uranium enrichment by another country on Iran's behalf.

Negroponte says that even though Iran does not yet have any nuclear weapons capability, evidence that it is moving in that direction is persuasive.

AMB. NEGROPONTE: You have to have insights into intention, you have to look at past behavior. I mean, among the factors we consider in the case of Iran is that in the past they've had a secret military program until it was revealed. We know that for 20 or 30 years Iran has been interested in acquiring nuclear capability. You can judge from their procurement practices. There's a whole variety of indicators that you can look at to get some sense of exactly what the intentions of a country are.

MR. THOMAS: However, Gary Sick, a former National Security Council staffer who worked under three presidents, says the hard intelligence on Iran's nuclear intentions is not yet there.

MR. SICK: If there was really hard evidence that Iran was building a nuclear weapon, I think that we would know about it for sure. I think there would be a lot of evidence from the

I.A.E.A. (International Atomic Energy Agency). There would be specific evidence of specific sites that need to be visited, there would be photographic evidence, and the like. We don't have any of that. That doesn't prove that they're not building a weapon or that they would not in the fullness of time decide to do that. But I think that we are talking about intentions here. And I, for one, find it not easy to read Iran's intentions.

MR. THOMAS: Asked if the intelligence failure on Iraq complicates convincing people of Iran's intentions, Negroponte admits that people do raise that issue, but adds that the intelligence system is much improved.

AMB. NEGROPONTE: We have done quite a bit of work on 'lessons learned' from the situation in Iraq, different mechanisms and procedures to improve the quality of our intelligence collection and analysis and our judgments. And, secondly, I think our principal partners and friends in the international community share with us exactly the same concern about Iran's intentions.

MR. THOMAS: Intelligence Director Negroponte says a diplomatic solution to the issue is still possible.

AMB. NEGROPONTE: This doesn't rule out the possibility that at some point in the current diplomatic context that Iran might decide to forego its nuclear enrichment program in exchange for some kind of accommodation with the United States, the Europeans, and other members of the United Nations Security Council and the international community.

MR. THOMAS: Gary Sick, who now teaches at Columbia University's School of International and Public Affairs, says the matter of Iran's nuclear intentions is not yet at the level of "crisis", as world media often label it. He describes it as a "problem", and one that is solvable if the United States and Iran would sit down for serious negotiations. But Washington says that without uranium enrichment suspension, there will be no direct U.S. participation in talks with Iran.