The Iranian Nuclear Program

Timelines, Data, and Estimates

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Version 3.0, JUNE 2012

Current as of JUNE 01 2012 using data from IAEA report dated MAY 25 2012

Key Points

IRAN IS DEVELOPING A RAPID NUCLEAR WEAPONS BREAKOUT CAPABILITY BY REDUCING THE TIME IT NEEDS TO PRODUCE FUEL FOR AN ATOMIC WEAPON.

- Iran would need **7.8 MONTHS** to produce 25 kg of weapons-grade uranium and **2 MONTHS** to produce 15 kg of weapons-grade uranium *at the buried Fordow enrichment facility*.*

- Iran would need **1 MONTH** to produce 25 kg of weapons-grade uranium and **2 WEEKS** to produce 15 kg of weapons-grade uranium *at the larger Natanz enrichment facility*.*

- These estimates are based on data from Iran's declared operating facilities. The existence of undeclared (covert) enrichment sites, which cannot be ruled out given Iran's record of deception, would have an impact on breakout estimates.

IRAN IS EXPANDING AND HARDENING ITS URANIUM ENRICHMENT CAPACITY.

- Iran is **increasing its stockpile of 3.5% and 20% enriched uranium.** Its 3.5% enriched uranium production increased sharply in the last International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) reporting period. Its 20% enriched uranium production grew at a constant rate. It has enough low-enriched uranium to fuel five nuclear weapons after conversion to weapons-grade.

- A **growing proportion of Iran's 20% enriched uranium is being produced in the more hardened facility at Fordow**, rather than in the more vulnerable Natanz facility.

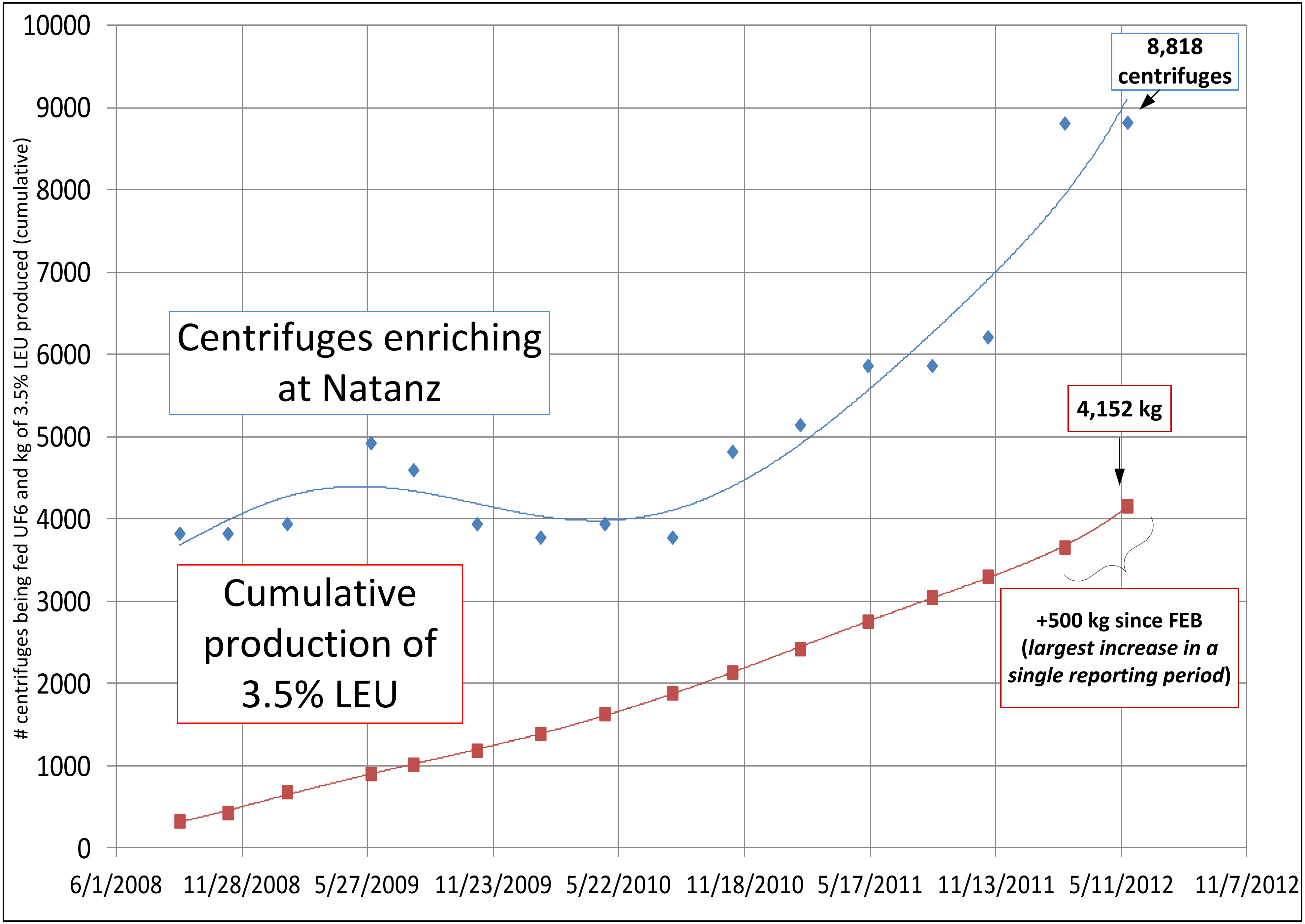
- Iran is **expanding both of its declared enrichment facilities.** It recently installed an additional 368 centrifuges at Fordow and earlier in 2012 built infrastructure to operate approximately 1,630 additional centrifuges there and several thousand more at Natanz.

IRAN IS PURSUING MULTIPLE PATHS TO OBTAINING NUCLEAR WEAPONS FUEL.

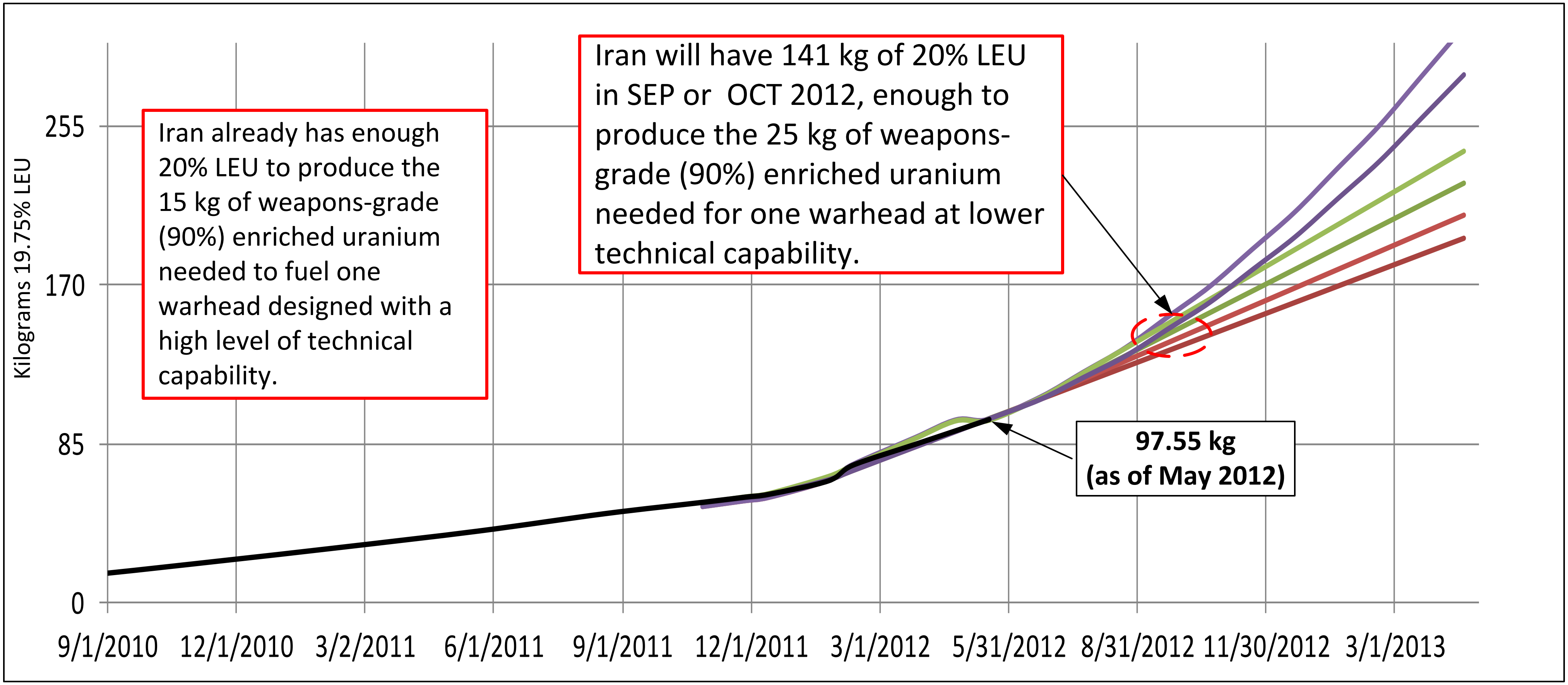
- Iran recently told the IAEA that it plans to begin operating the Arak heavy water reactor in April 2013. This reactor will be capable of producing two warheads' worth weapons-grade plutonium per year once operational.

**Estimates assume Natanz and Fordow operate with the capacity reflected in the May 2012 IAEA report. Iran may need 15-25 kg weapons-grade uranium for an implosion-type bomb design depending on its level of technical ability.*

Iran's Declared 3.5% LEU Production and IR-1 Centrifuges at Natanz



Iran's 19.75% LEU Production and Projected Growth at PFEP/FFEP



BLACK: Reported production

RED: Steady-state enrichment (a)

GREEN: Enrichment in all currently installed centrifuges (b)

PURPLE: Rapid expansion at Fordow (c)

**The two lines for each colored scenario represent a range based on different calculations of demonstrated centrifuge efficiency.*

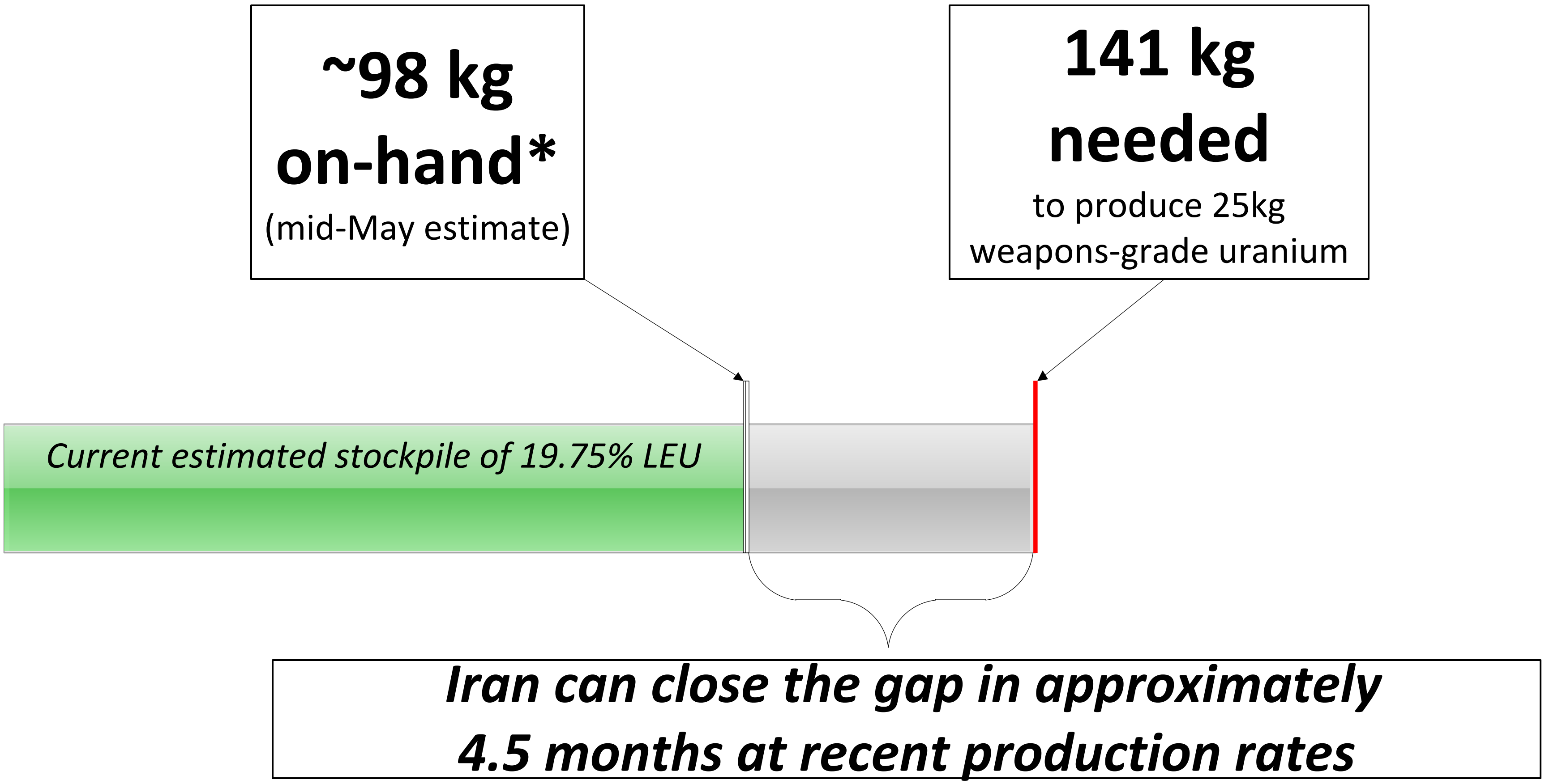
(a) 1,024 centrifuges (two cascades with 328 total IR-1 centrifuges at PFEP and four cascades with 696 total IR-1 centrifuges at FFEP)

(b) Same as (a) but Iran begins enriching in the two additional cascades at Fordow totaling 348 IR-1 centrifuges in late June 2012

(c) Same as (b) but in August 2012 Iran begins enriching in two additional cascades at Fordow totaling 348 IR-1 centrifuges every two months

19.75% LEU: APPROACHING THE THRESHOLD

Note: Amounts in elemental uranium



**Iran has converted some of this material to U_3O_8 for fuel plate production; it can be converted back to UF_6 gas in a short period of time for a breakout. See page 22 for an explanation.*

When Could Iran Produce Fuel For One Nuclear Weapon?

AEI CRITICALTHREATS.ORG — UNDERSTANDING THE CHALLENGE. TRACKING THE THREAT.

WORST-CASE BREAKOUT

15 KG REQ.

JUN 15 START*

116 kg 19.75% LEU

⇩

15 kg 90% HEU

JUN 24 COMPLETE

25 KG REQ.

JUN 15 START*

193 kg 19.75% LEU

⇩

25 kg 90% HEU

JUL 15 COMPLETE

June 12

M	T	W	T	F	S	S
				1	2	3
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	**24**
25	26	27	28	29	30	

July 12

M	T	W	T	F	S	S
						1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	**15**
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	29
30	31					

August 12

M	T	W	T	F	S	S
		1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10	**11**	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30	31		2
3						

September 12

M	T	W	T	F	S	S
					1	2
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29	30

October 12

M	T	W	T	F	S	S
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30	31				

November 12

M	T	W	T	F	S	S
			29	30	31	1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27		2
3						

December 12

M	T	W	T	F	S	S
					1	2
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29	30
31						

January 13

M	T	W	T	F	S	S
	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	**13**
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30	31			

February 13

M	T	W	T	F	S	S
				1	2	3
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28			

MOST LIKELY BREAKOUT

15 KG REQ.

JUN 15 START*

85 kg 19.75% LEU

⇩

15 kg 90% HEU

AUG 11 COMPLETE

25 KG REQ.

OCT 14 START*

141 kg 19.75% LEU

⇩

25 kg 90% HEU

JAN 13 COMPLETE

Please see slide 15 for assumptions and technical details underlying the estimates.

These dates reflect Iran's technical capabilities in various scenarios. They are NOT estimates of Iran's intentions and they are NOT predictions of when Iran WILL acquire given amounts of 90% enriched uranium.

*The JUN 15 start date for the worst-case scenario (15 kg, 25 kg) and most likely case (15 kg) assumes Iran needs two weeks to convert U_3O_8 enriched up to 20% for fuel plates back to gaseous form for breakout (see page 22). The OCT 14 start date for the most likely case (25 kg) assumes Iran breaks out after it has enough 20% enriched uranium at current production rates.

Key Upcoming Events

Bold dates are fixed; *italicized* dates are estimates.
Listed inspection windows are approximate. The IAEA may be conducting inspections outside of these windows.

6/18/2012
P5+1 and Iran meet in Moscow

6/28/2012
US sanctions on Iranian Central Bank enforcement date (can be waived)

7/1/2012
EU oil embargo takes effect

6/1/2012 | 7/1/2012 | 8/1/2012 | 9/1/2012 | 10/1/2012 | 11/1/2012 | 12/1/2012

6/4/2012
IAEA BOG meets

8/1/2012 - 8/22/2012
IAEA Inspection Window

9/10/2012
IAEA BOG meets

8/31/2012
IAEA Report

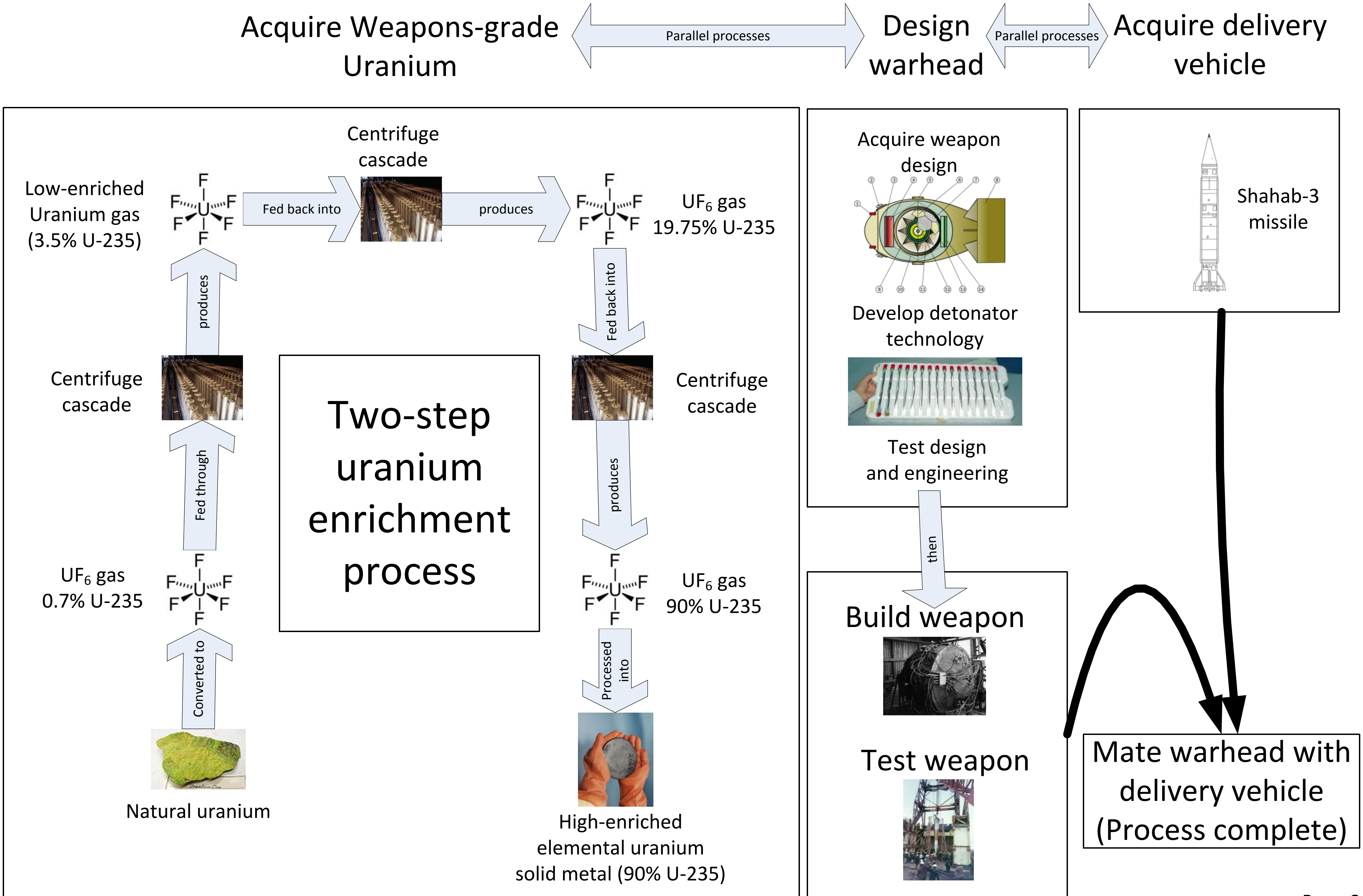
10/21/2012 - 11/11/2012
IAEA Inspection Window

11/29/2012
IAEA BOG meets

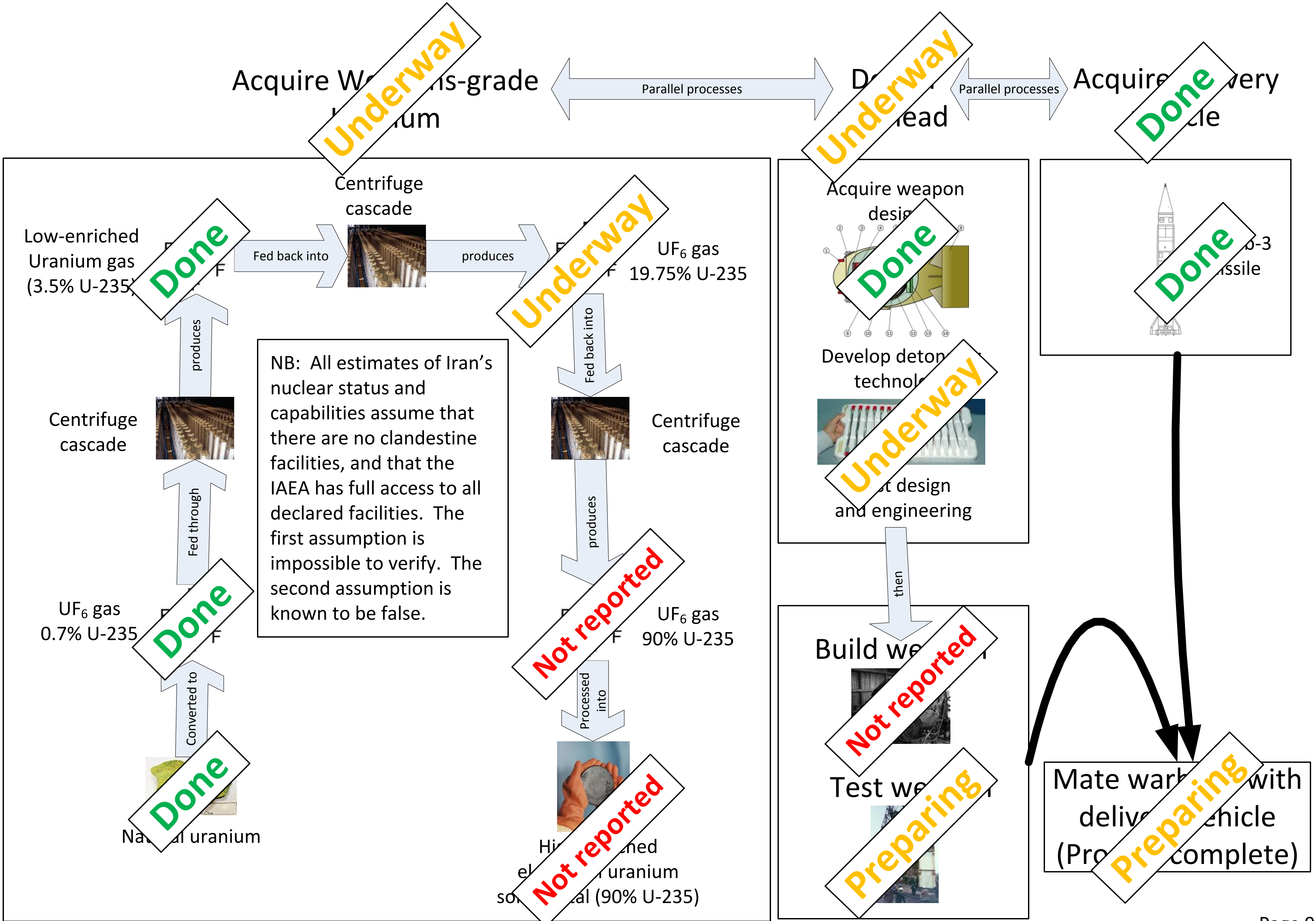
11/19/2012
IAEA Report

IAEA BOG = International Atomic Energy Agency Board of Governors

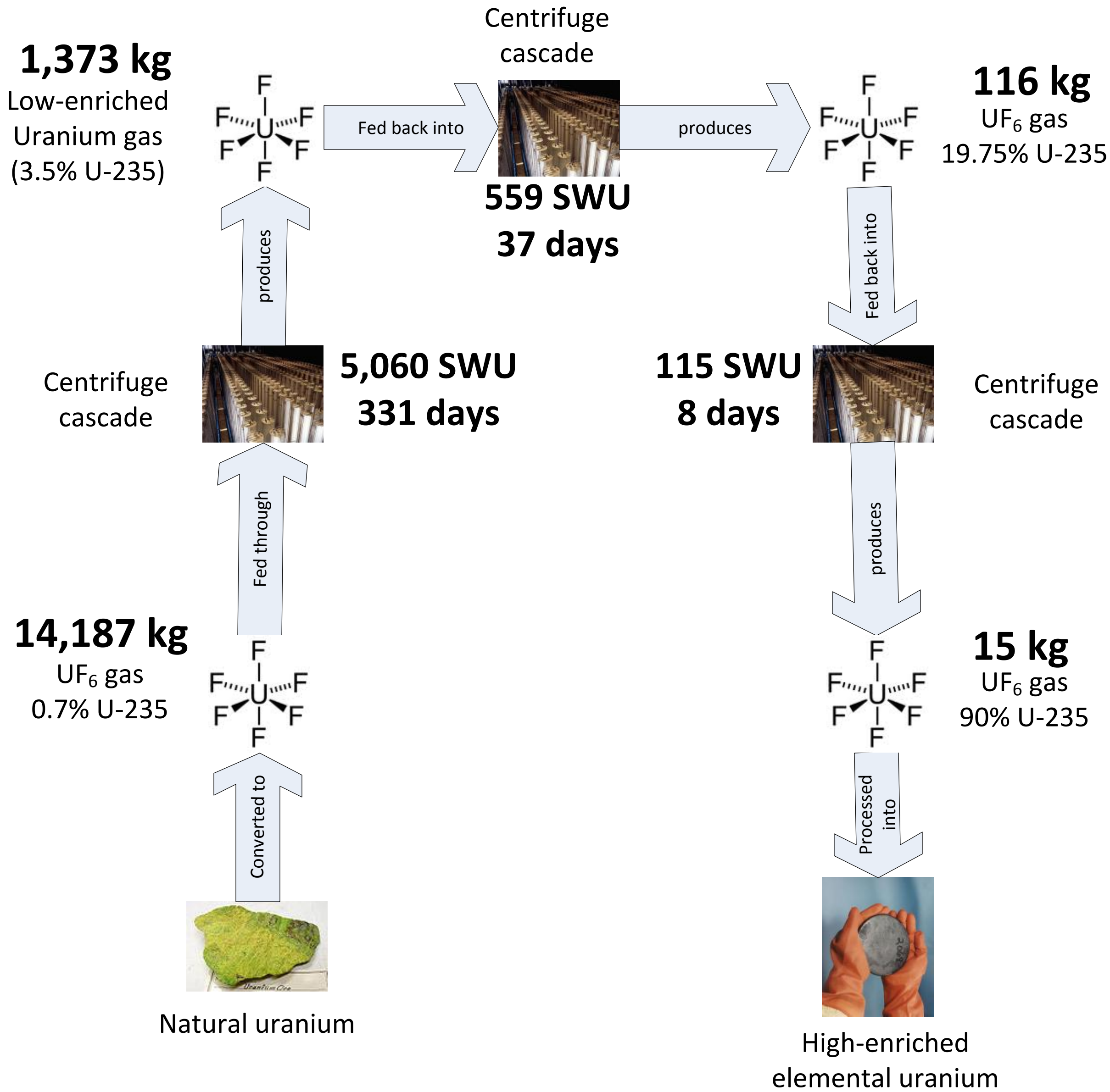
Making an Atomic Bomb (Concept)



Making an Atomic Bomb (Status as of 8 FEB 2012)



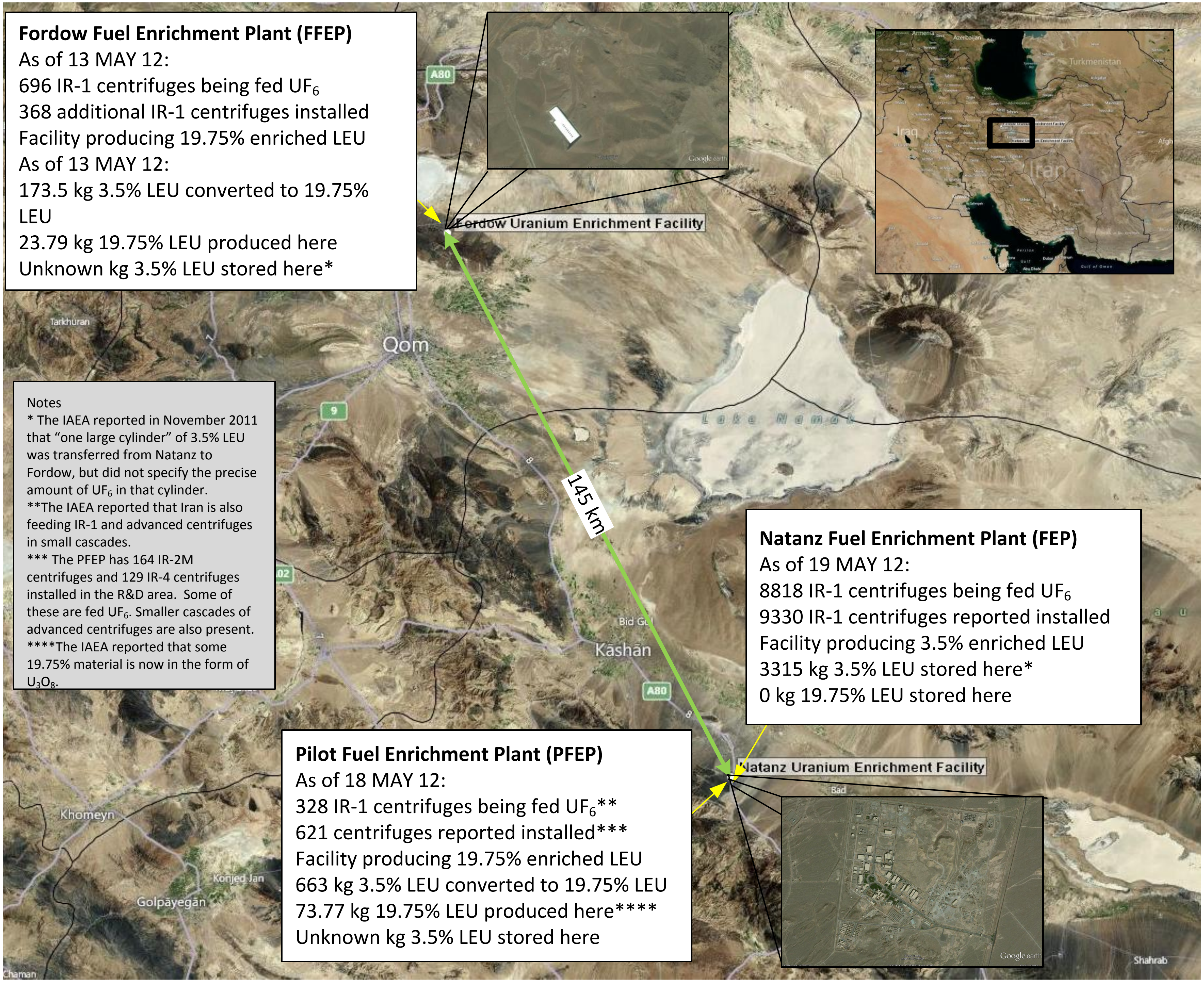
Why Enrichment Accelerates at Higher Concentration of U-235



The work and time required to enrich uranium from its natural concentration (0.7%) to 3.5% low-enriched uranium (LEU) is an order of magnitude greater than that required to enrich 20% LEU to weapons-grade concentrations (90% U-235). That is because centrifuges must spin more than 14,000 kg of uranium ore to produce 1,373 kg of 3.5% LEU, but only 116 kg of 20% LEU to produce 15 kg of weapons-grade uranium.

SWU = Separative work unit, a measure of the amount of effort required to process nuclear material. The SWU requirement is used to determine the time needed to enrich uranium with a given number of centrifuges operating at a given efficiency.

Iran's Declared Uranium Enrichment Facilities



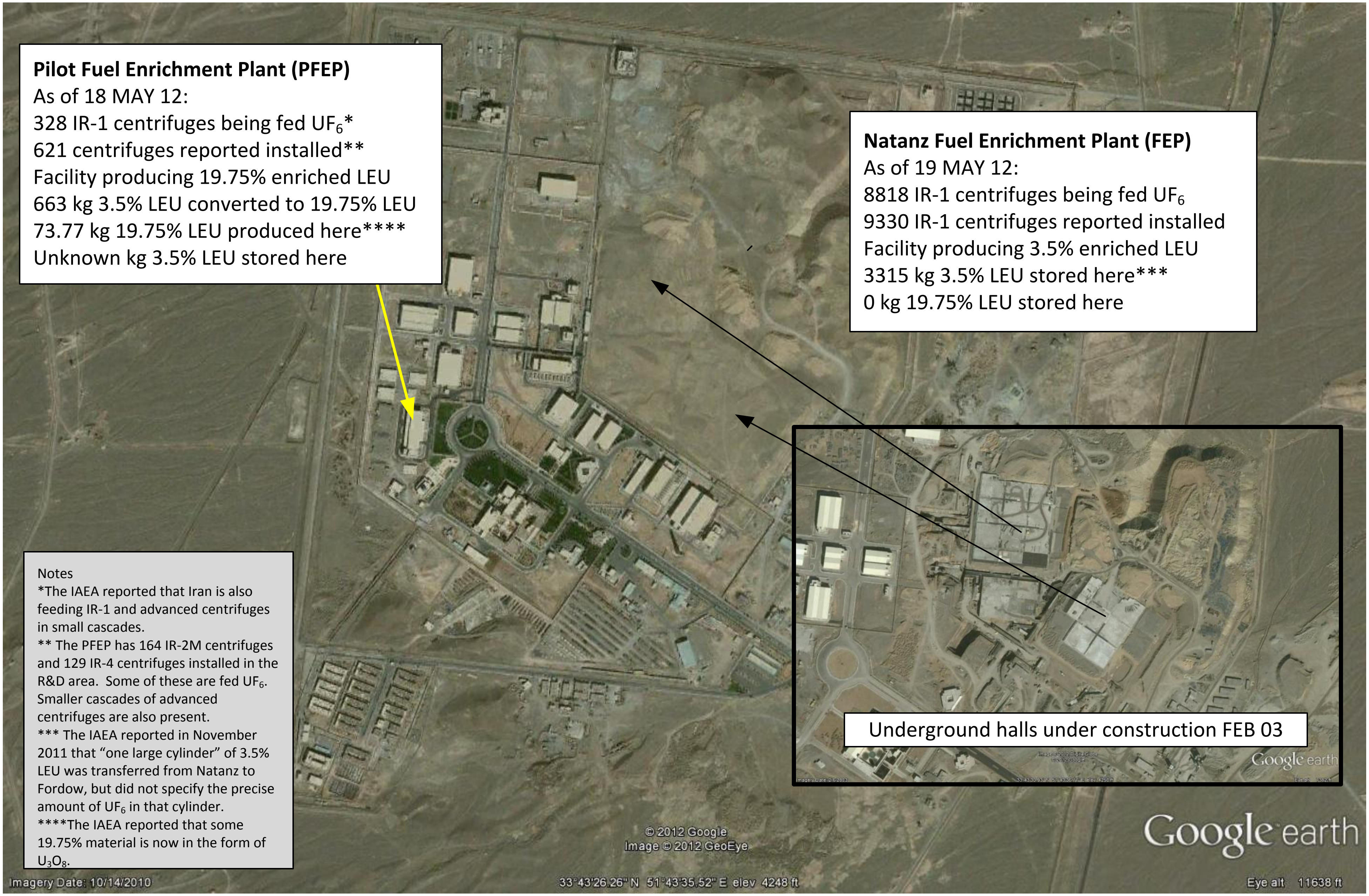
Fordow Fuel Enrichment Plant (FFEP)
As of 13 MAY 12:
696 IR-1 centrifuges being fed UF_6
368 additional IR-1 centrifuges installed
Facility producing 19.75% enriched LEU
As of 13 MAY 12:
173.5 kg 3.5% LEU converted to 19.75% LEU
23.79 kg 19.75% LEU produced here
Unknown kg 3.5% LEU stored here*

Natanz Fuel Enrichment Plant (FEP)
As of 19 MAY 12:
8818 IR-1 centrifuges being fed UF_6
9330 IR-1 centrifuges reported installed
Facility producing 3.5% enriched LEU
3315 kg 3.5% LEU stored here*
0 kg 19.75% LEU stored here

Pilot Fuel Enrichment Plant (PFEP)
As of 18 MAY 12:
328 IR-1 centrifuges being fed UF_6**
621 centrifuges reported installed***
Facility producing 19.75% enriched LEU
663 kg 3.5% LEU converted to 19.75% LEU
73.77 kg 19.75% LEU produced here****
Unknown kg 3.5% LEU stored here

Notes
* The IAEA reported in November 2011 that "one large cylinder" of 3.5% LEU was transferred from Natanz to Fordow, but did not specify the precise amount of UF_6 in that cylinder.
**The IAEA reported that Iran is also feeding IR-1 and advanced centrifuges in small cascades.
*** The PFEP has 164 IR-2M centrifuges and 129 IR-4 centrifuges installed in the R&D area. Some of these are fed UF_6. Smaller cascades of advanced centrifuges are also present.
****The IAEA reported that some 19.75% material is now in the form of U_3O_8.

Natanz Enrichment Facilities



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Construction and Capacity of Fordow Enrichment Facility

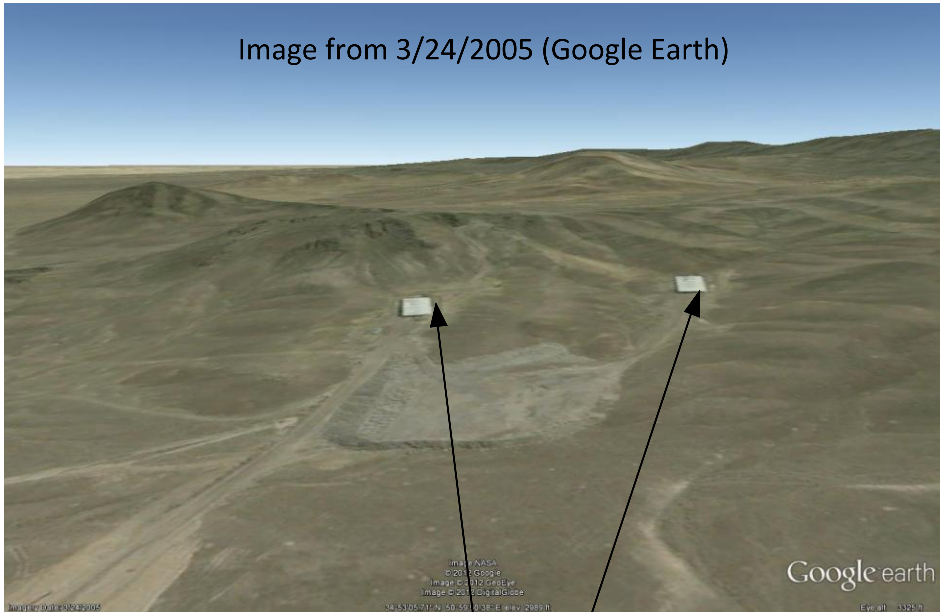

Image from 3/24/2005 (Google Earth)

Areas covered in 2005 appear as entrances to underground facilities in 2009

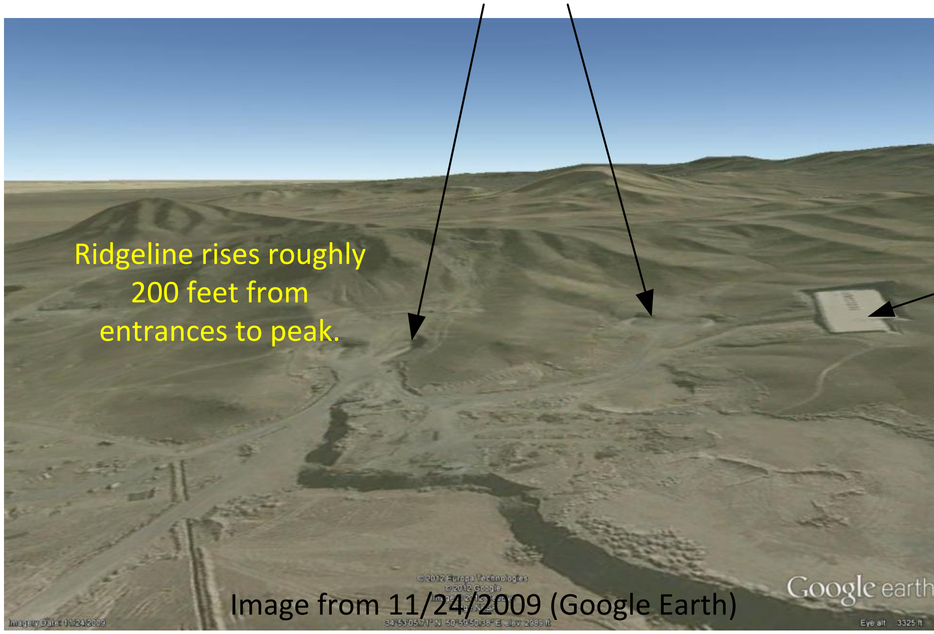

Image from 11/24/2009 (Google Earth)

New above-ground facility appears between 2005 and 2009

Fordow Fuel Enrichment Plant (FFEP)
As of 13 MAY 12:
696 IR-1 centrifuges being fed UF_6
368 additional IR-1 centrifuges installed
Facility producing 19.75% enriched LEU
As of 13 MAY 12:
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23.79 kg 19.75% LEU produced here
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Scope, Assumptions and Technical Points

Scope

This product is an exposition of the technical data contained in numerous International Atomic Energy Association (IAEA) reports informed by the discussions of experts in the field of nuclear proliferation. It is a work-in-progress in that it will be revised continuously based on new information from the IAEA and other sources and on feedback from readers.

We welcome your informed commentary on the technical considerations presented in this document. Please send your comments, with references to source-data or documentation, to INP@AEI.ORG.

This product does NOT contain policy recommendations. It is intended solely to inform the policy community and the American public about the nature and progress of the Iranian nuclear program.

This product does NOT assess Iran's intentions to weaponize or to pursue break-out scenarios. It is focused entirely on technical feasibility.

Breakout Scenarios

Worst-case

- The worst-case scenarios assume that Iran devotes all operational centrifuges at Natanz (as of 19 MAY 2012) to producing first additional 19.75% LEU and then 90% HEU, ceasing production of 3.5% LEU. Such actions would be visible to inspectors and so would most likely occur between inspections. Iranian nuclear policy and strategy does not appear to be going down this road.
- The scenarios assume 8,818 centrifuges spinning (the number being fed uranium as of 19 MAY 2011) operating with an efficiency of 0.9 separative work units (SWU)/centrifuge/year (roughly the efficiency they have demonstrated).
- 15 kg requirement: Iran begins to race to breakout by producing 116 kg total of 19.75% LEU and then enriching that material to 90% HEU.
- 25 kg requirement: Iran begins to race to breakout by producing 193 kg total of 19.75% LEU and then enriching that material to 90% HEU.
- If Iran breaks out using a three-step process, it would need to produce 243 kg total of 19.75% LEU in total, then enrich to 60% HEU and then to 90% HEU to yield 15 kg. Using this three-step process, Iran could acquire fuel for one weapon in 1.3 months. Assuming Iran needs 25 kg 90% HEU, it would need to produce 399 kg total of 19.75% LEU before it could convert to 60% and then 90% (Iran does not have enough uranium enriched to 3.5% in its declared stockpile to pursue this latter process as of MAY 2012).
- *These calculations assume tails assays of 2.0% and 9.3% for the two steps in the first process and 2.0%, 12.0%, and 41.1% for the three steps in the second process (see Sources slide). These data are derived from the Natanz facility; the Fordow installations are notably more efficient with lower tails assays.*

Most Likely

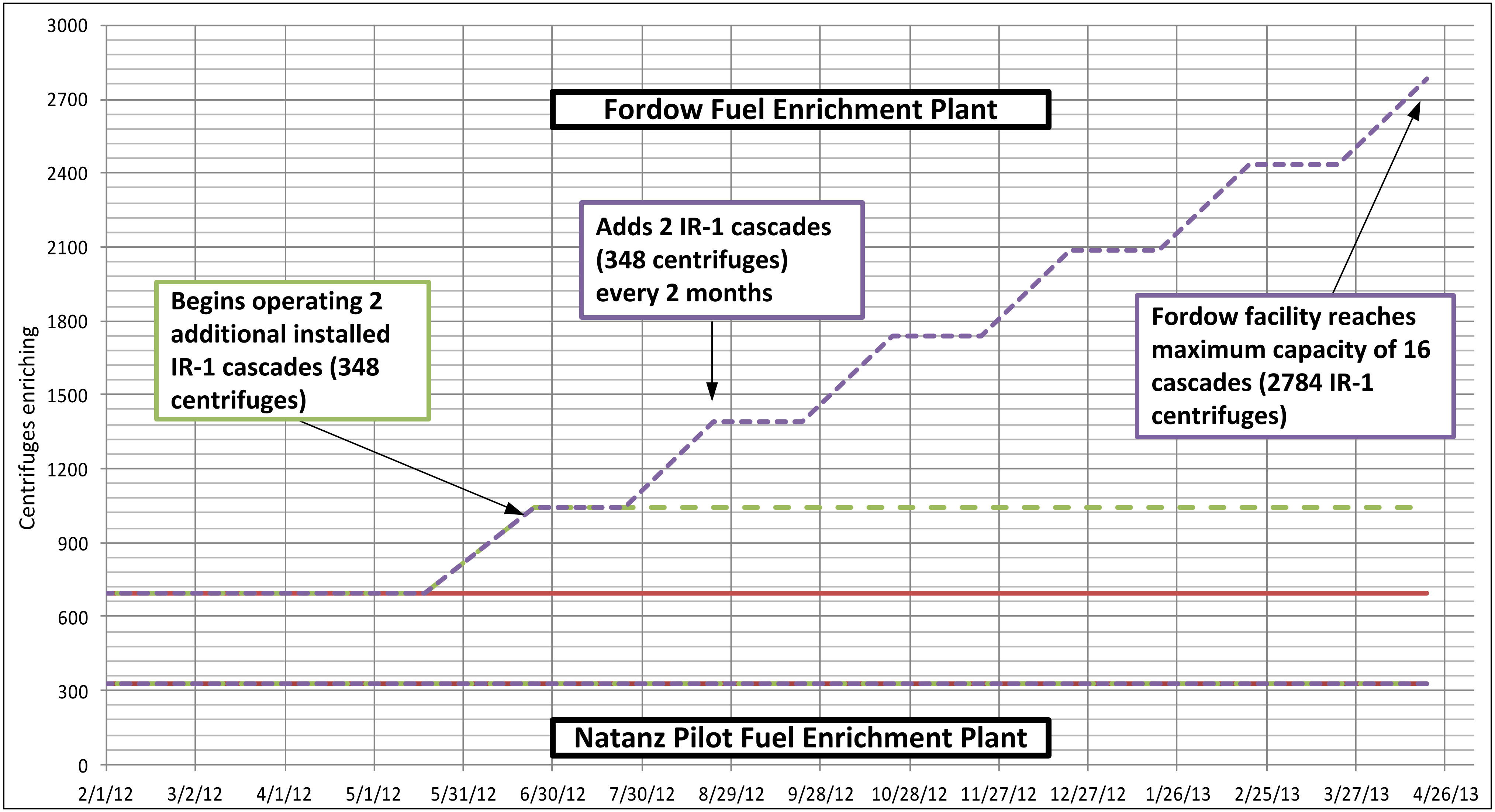
- The 8,818 centrifuges being fed in the main cascade hall at Natanz continue to produce 3.5% LEU and are not diverted to higher-level enrichment. Iran uses 85 kg 19.75% LEU to produce 15 kg 90% HEU or continues enriching to 19.75% until it has amassed approximately 141 kg 19.75% LEU, which can yield 25 kg 90% HEU.
- Enrichment to 19.75% occurs in four cascades totaling 696 IR-1 centrifuges at Fordow (2 sets of 2 interconnected cascades) and two cascades totaling 328 IR-1 centrifuges at the Natanz PFEP (all currently operational).
- Enrichment from 19.75% to 90% occurs in six cascades at Fordow in one step using a tails assay of 4.6%. *The difference in the tails between the worst-case and most likely breakout scenarios reflects the fact that the cascades at Fordow, like the ones at Natanz PFEP, are interconnected in pairs.*

Atomic Weapons Data

- Small atomic weapons can be built from cores consisting of 10-25 kg of uranium enriched to 90% U-235 (weapon-grade high-enriched uranium, or HEU). We use 15 kg and 25 kg to assess breakout timelines.
- The explosive yield of a 15 kg core is on the close order of 15 kilotons.
- Uranium can be enriched to HEU in a two-step or a three-step process.
- Both processes begin by enriching natural uranium (0.7% U-235) to 3.5% (low-enriched uranium, or LEU).
- The two-step process enriches from 3.5% LEU to 19.75% LEU, and then from 19.75% LEU directly to 90% HEU.
- The three-step process proceeds from 3.5% LEU to 19.75% LEU, from 19.75% LEU to 60% HEU, and then from 60% HEU to 90% HEU.
- The most important difference between these processes is the amount of LEU required initially—the time required to enrich from 19.75% to 90% is virtually the same for either process.
- The two-step process for producing 15 kg weapons-grade HEU requires 85 kg of 19.75% LEU using interconnected cascades (such as are at Fordow) or 116 kg using non-interconnected cascades (such as those at Natanz). Producing 25 kg weapons-grade HEU in a two-step process requires 141 kg of 19.75% LEU using interconnected cascades or 193 kg using non-interconnected cascades. The three-step process requires significantly more in non-interconnected cascades (such as at Natanz).
- There is disagreement among experts about Iran's ability to execute a two-step process with its current technology and cascade configuration.
- If Iran were forced to use a three-step process, the primary delay would result from the time required to produce the additional 19.75% LEU, a factor that Iran could affect either by bringing more centrifuge cascades online or by beginning to enrich with more efficient centrifuges, some of which are already installed but not yet producing enriched uranium.

Projected Location/Number of Centrifuges Enriching to 19.75% LEU

RED – Scenario 1 (current situation as described in May 2012 IAEA report)
GREEN – Scenario 2 (same as 1 plus operation of two installed IR-1 cascades [348 centrifuges] in late June)
PURPLE – Scenario 3 (same as 2 plus addition of two IR-1 cascades [348 centrifuges] every two months) *

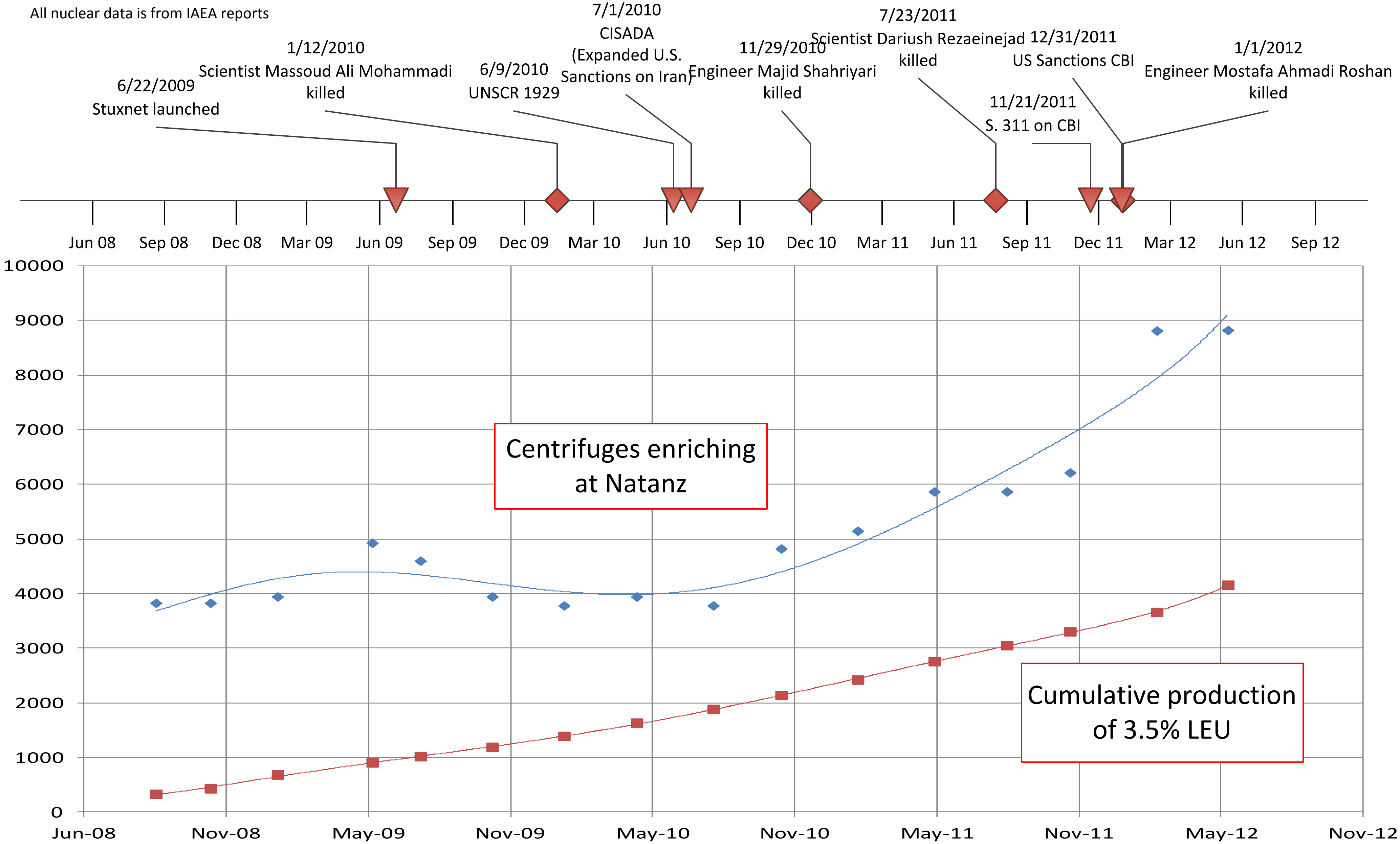


*Iran does not appear to have the capability to produce, install, and operate centrifuges fast enough for this rapid expansion. Future estimates of the time required for Iran to produce weapons-grade uranium would change dramatically if Iran demonstrates that it in fact does have that capability in the coming months.

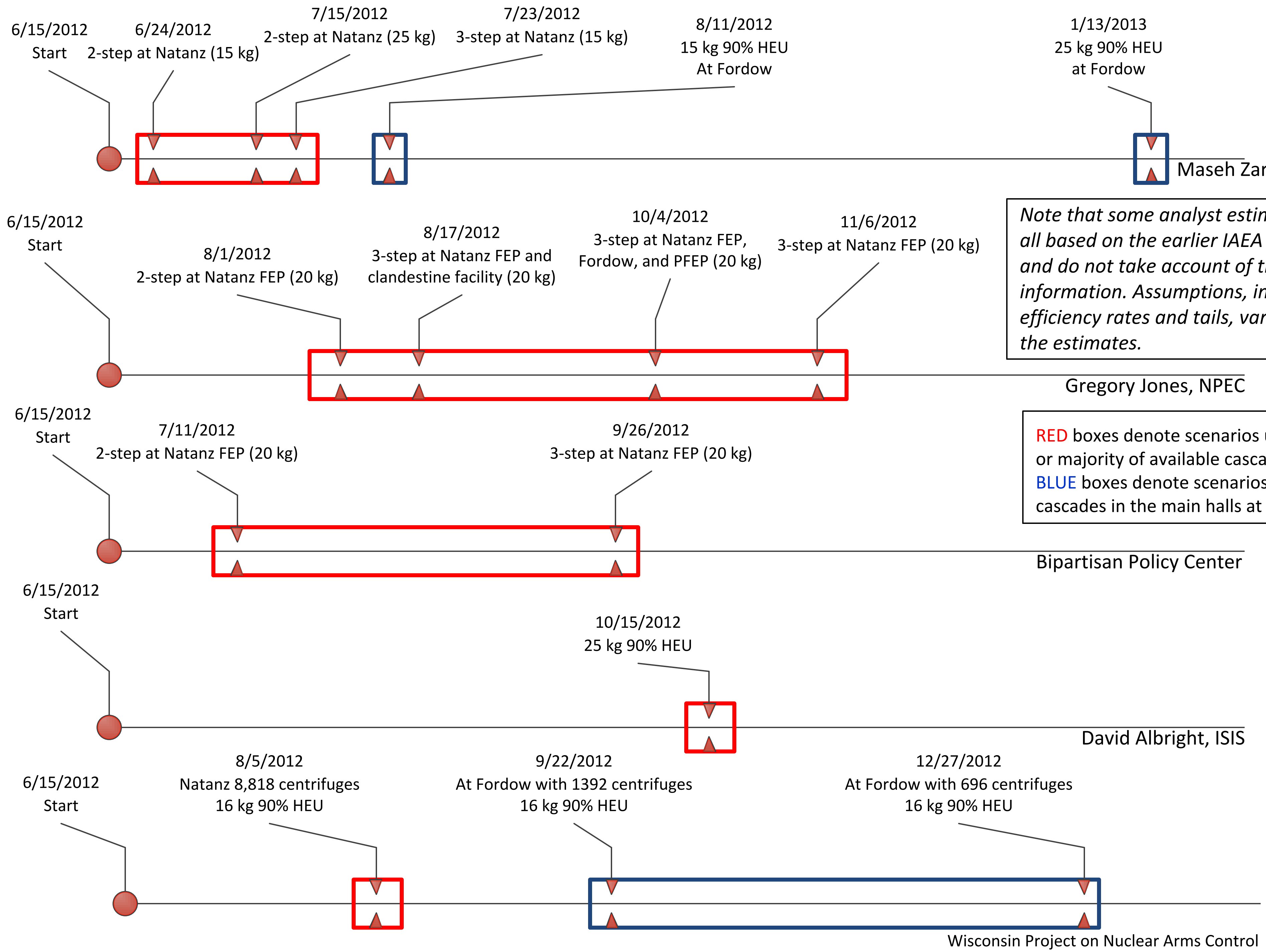
Effects of Sanctions and Direct Action on Iranian Nuclear Enrichment

Assessment: Stuxnet derailed the 2009 Iranian effort to expand enrichment capability for roughly one year, but the enrichment expansion effort recovered in mid-2010 and continues on track. Direct actions have not had a visible effect on the enrichment program. Neither have sanctions. **Even the Stuxnet success does not appear to have derailed the steady growth of the Iranian 3.5% LEU stockpile**, however.

All nuclear data is from IAEA reports



Comparison of Estimated Breakout Times



Note that some analyst estimates are all based on the earlier IAEA report and do not take account of the new information. Assumptions, including efficiency rates and tails, vary across the estimates.

RED boxes denote scenarios using all or majority of available cascades
BLUE boxes denote scenarios not using cascades in the main halls at Natanz

Projections for the August 2012 IAEA Report

IR-1 centrifuges being fed at Natanz FEP: 9,139 (*low confidence*)

Total 3.5% LEU produced at Natanz FEP: 4,476 kg assuming (*moderate confidence*)*

IR-1 centrifuges being fed for 19.75% enrichment at Natanz and Fordow: 1,372 (*moderate confidence*)

Total 19.75% LEU produced at Natanz and Fordow: 124.4 kg (*moderate confidence*)*

PREVIOUS PROJECTIONS

3.5% LEU

We previously estimated that Iran would produce an additional 322 kg of 3.5% enriched uranium at Natanz during the last reporting period. The IAEA reported that Iran produced about 500 kg 3.5% enriched uranium during the period. The difference was due to a significant increase in Iran's production (with a roughly constant number of centrifuges) and to the estimated measurement date (our estimate assumed a MAY 4 measurement whereas the actual measurement took place on May 11).

19.75% LEU

We previously estimated that Iran would produce an additional 29.4 kg of 19.75% enriched uranium at Natanz and Fordow during the last reporting period. The IAEA reported that Iran produced about 24.5 kg 19.75% enriched uranium.

*Assuming IAEA measurement on AUG 17 2012

Sources

International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) – The IAEA publishes quarterly reports on Iran's nuclear program and enrichment progress. Enriched uranium stockpile, centrifuge count, potential inspection windows, and other technical data provided by the IAEA are used in our analysis to determine historical rates of production and to serve as a basis for building projections. IAEA reports on Iran are available at http://www.iaea.org/newscenter/focus/iaeairan/iaea_reports.shtml.

World Information Service Project on Energy (WISE) – WISE provides a uranium enrichment calculator for calculating the separative work required to achieve specific levels of U-235 concentration. The calculator uses manual inputs of feed, product, and tails figures to calculate separative work units (SWU). The resultant SWU serves as the basis for calculating time requirements. This assessment uses the WISE calculator to determine the SWU required for enriching at various levels. The online calculator is accessible at http://www.wise-uranium.org/nfcue.html.

Gregory Jones, Nonproliferation Education Policy Center (NPEC) – Gregory Jones provided the estimated tails percentage figures for enriching to weapons-grade uranium levels for two-step and three-step batch recycling methods (starting with 3.5% LEU) at the Natanz FEP and two-step batch recycling (from 3.5%) at Natanz PFEP/Fordow FEP, where cascades are interconnected. Jones has written that the technical assumption underlying an Iranian attempt to break out using two-step batch recycling without reconfiguration (from 3.5%) may not be feasible. The alternative Iranian breakout approach he suggests, adding an intermediary step between 19.75% and 90% enrichment, is one that we have relied on in our analysis. Jones's analyses are available at http://www.npolicy.org/.

Jones has written that the process for Iran to convert the U_3O_8 enriched up to 20% created for fuel plates back to 20% enriched UF_6 gas for use in a breakout "involves dissolution by nitric acid, followed by purification by solvent extraction. These are standard processes in the nuclear industry and Iran uses them as part of its uranium ore processing...The time required from the removal of the fresh TRR fuel from safeguards to the time to produce 19.75% enriched uranium hexafluoride would be only 'days to weeks.' [citing Albert Wohlstetter et al, *Swords from Plowshares*, Chicago University Press, 1979]" The report is available at http://www.npolicy.org/article_file/Fueling_the_Tehran_Research_Reactor-Technical_Considerations_on_the_Risks_and_Benefits.pdf.

Further on this topic, Henry Sokolski, NPEC, has written that Iran could withdraw 19.75% enriched uranium from fuel plates in the form of UF_6 gas in 1-2 weeks. See http://www.nationalreview.com/corner/188387/fueling-around-iran-and-bomb/henry-sokolski.

Institute for Science and International Security (ISIS) – ISIS has contributed to a technical debate among experts regarding the feasibility of two-step and three-step batch recycling methods. ISIS analyses are available at http://isis-online.org/.

Alexander Glaser, "Characteristics of the Gas Centrifuge for Uranium Enrichment and Their Relevance for Nuclear Weapon Proliferation," *Science and Global Security* (16:1-25, 2008) – Glaser's analysis of the P-1 centrifuge—the foundation of Iran's IR-1 centrifuge program—is the basis for two-step batch recycling projections for enriching to weapons-grade uranium. A key aspect of Glaser's analysis in this paper was that 90% HEU can be produced in one step from 19.7% LEU without the need to reconfigure the arrangement of cascades. In October 2011, according to Gregory Jones, Glaser said he had "been made aware of certain phenomena that are not taken into account" in his 2008 analysis and that "We now find that the most credible scenarios involve some kind of cascade reconfiguration." See Greg Jones, "Earliest Date Possible for Iran's First Bomb," Nonproliferation Education Policy Center, December 6, 2011, http://npolicy.org/article.php?aid=1124&rid=4. For Glaser's original analysis, see http://www.princeton.edu/sgs/publications/sgs/archive/16-1-Glaser.pdf.

International Commission on Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament (ICCND) – The ICCND notes that a basic implosion-type nuclear weapon design with an explosive yield of 15 kilotons would require 15 kg of weapons-grade uranium. We use this figure as the minimum 90% HEU Iran would produce to fuel one bomb. See http://icnnd.org/Reference/reports/ent/part-ii-4.html.

Thomas B. Cochran and Christopher E. Paine, "The Amount of Plutonium and Highly-Enriched Uranium Needed for Pure Fission Nuclear Weapons," National Resources Defense Council, April 13, 1995. – Cochran and Paine assert that the "significant quantity" measurement of 25 kg weapons-grade HEU used by the IAEA greatly overestimates the amount of fissile material required to fuel a basic implosion-type nuclear explosive device. They estimate that a state with a low technical capability can produce a bomb with an explosive yield of 20 kilotons with 16 kg weapons-grade HEU. See: http://www.nrdc.org/nuclear/fissionw/fissionweapons.pdf.