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## Obama says Iran a year or more from nuclear weapon capability

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The United States believes Iran is a year or a more away from being able to produce a nuclear weapon, President Barack Obama said in an interview with the Associated Press released on Saturday, although he described the estimate as "conservative."

"Our assessment continues to be a year or more away, and in fact, actually our estimate is probably more conservative than the estimates of Israeli intelligence services," Obama said in reply to a question about the U.S. intelligence assessment of Iran's ability to produce nuclear weapons.

Obama has directed U.S. officials to try to work out an agreement with Iran to allay international concerns about its nuclear program, an opportunity he has said is worth exploring after the election of the relatively moderate Iranian President Hassan Rouhani.

The United States, Israel and other countries accuse Iran of using its nuclear program to try to develop the capability to produce weapons. Iran says the program is for peaceful energy purposes only.

Obama and Rouhani spoke by telephone a week ago, the highest-level contact between the two countries in three decades.

"I think Rouhani has staked his position on the idea that he can improve relations with the rest of the world," Obama said in the AP interview.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has dismissed Rouhani's overtures as a ruse. Israel has warned that new Iranian uranium centrifuges could give Tehran the ability to rapidly produce bomb fuel.

"If Iran decides to complete uranium enrichment, it would be able to do so within a few weeks from the moment of decision," an Israeli official said, speaking on condition of anonymity.

"Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and President Obama see eye-to-eye on the need to prevent Iran obtaining nuclear weapons," the official said.

Obama said he understands why Israel is skeptical about Iran's diplomatic overtures, but said he wants to test whether Rouhani can "follow through."

"The way the Iranian system works, he's not the only decision maker. He's not even the ultimate decision maker," Obama said.

Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said on Saturday he supported Rouhani's diplomatic opening at the U.N. General Assembly last week.

But Khamenei, who would make final decisions on any nuclear deal, said that some of what occurred at the U.N. was "not proper" - a hint at some disagreement over Rouhani's phone conversation with Obama.