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Wall Street Journal
SEPTEMBER 25, 2009

The Iran Attack Plan

By ANTHONY H. CORDESMAN

When the Israeli army's then-Deputy Chief of Staff Dan Halutz was asked in 2004 how far Israel would go to stop Iran's nuclear program, he replied: "2,000 kilometers," roughly the distance between the two countries.

Israel's political and military leaders have long made it clear that they are considering taking decisive military action if Iran continues to develop its nuclear program. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu warned at the United Nations this week that "the most urgent challenge facing this body is to prevent the tyrants of Tehran from acquiring nuclear weapons."

Reporting by the International Atomic Energy Agency and other sources has made it clear that whether or not Iran ties all of its efforts into a formal nuclear weapons program, it has acquired all of the elements necessary to make and deliver such weapons. Just Friday, Iran confirmed that it has been developing a second uranium-enrichment facility on a military base near Qom, doing little to dispel the long-standing concerns of Britain, China, France, Germany, Russia, and the U.S. that Iran is developing nuclear weapons.

Iran has acquired North Korean and other nuclear weapons design data through sources like the sales network once led by the former head of Pakistan's nuclear program, A. Q. Khan. Iran has all of the technology and production and manufacturing capabilities needed for fission weapons. It has acquired the technology to make the explosives needed for a gun or implosion device, the triggering components, and the neutron initiator and reflectors. It has experimented with machine uranium and plutonium processing. It has put massive resources into a medium-range missile program that has the range payload to carry nuclear weapons and that makes no sense with conventional warheads. It has also worked on nuclear weapons designs for missile warheads. These capabilities are dispersed in many facilities in many cities and remote areas, and often into many buildings in each facility—each of which would have to be a target in an Israeli military strike.

It is far from certain that such action would be met with success. An Israeli strike on Iran would be far more challenging than the Israeli strike that destroyed Iraq's Osirak reactor in 1981. An effective Israeli nuclear strike may not be possible, yet a regional nuclear arms race is a game that Iran can start, but cannot possibly win. Anyone who meets regularly with senior Israeli officials, officers and experts knows that Israel is considering military options, but considering them carefully and with an understanding that they pose serious problems and risks.

One of the fundamental problems dogging Israel, especially concerning short-ranged fighters and fighter-bombers, is distance. Iran's potential targets are between 950 and 1,400 miles from Israel, the far margin of the ranges Israeli fighters can reach, even with aerial refueling. Israel would be hard-pressed to destroy all of Iran's best-known targets. What's more, Iran has had years in which to build up covert facilities, disperse elements of its nuclear and missile programs, and develop options for recovering from such an attack.

At best, such action would delay Iran's nuclear buildup. It is more likely to provoke the country into accelerating its plans. Either way, Israel would have to contend with the fact that it has consistently had a "red light" from both the

Bush and Obama administrations opposing such strikes. Any strike that overflowed Arab territory or attacked a fellow Islamic state would stir the ire of neighboring Arab states, as well as Russia, China and several European states.

This might not stop Israel. Hardly a week goes by without another warning from senior Israeli officials that a military strike is possible, and that Israel cannot tolerate a nuclear-armed Iran, even though no nation has indicated it would support such action. President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad continues to threaten Israel and to deny its right to exist. At the same time, President Barack Obama is clearly committed to pursuing diplomatic options, his new initiatives and a U.N. resolution on nuclear arms control and counterproliferation, and working with our European allies, China and Russia to impose sanctions as a substitute for the use of force.

Mr. Ahmadinejad keeps denying that Iran is seeking nuclear weapons, and tries to defend Iran from both support for sanctions and any form of attack by saying that Iran will negotiate over its peaceful use of nuclear power. He offered some form of dialogue with the U.S. during his visit to the U.N. this week. While French President Nicolas Sarkozy denounced Iran's continued lack of response to the Security Council this week, and said its statements would "wipe a U.N. member state off the map," no nation has yet indicated it would support Israeli military action.

Most analyses of a possible Israeli attack focus on only three of Iran's most visible facilities: its centrifuge facilities at Natanz, its light water nuclear power reactor near Bushehr, and a heavy water reactor at Arak it could use to produce plutonium. They are all some 950 to 1,000 miles from Israel. Each of these three targets differs sharply in terms of the near-term risk it poses to Israel and its vulnerability.

The Arak facility is partially sheltered, but it does not yet have a reactor vessel and evidently will not have one until 2011. Arak will not pose a tangible threat for at least several years. The key problem Israel would face is that it would virtually have to strike it as part of any strike on the other targets, because it cannot risk waiting and being unable to carry out another set of strikes for political reasons. It also could then face an Iran with much better air defenses, much better long-range missile forces, and at least some uranium weapons.

Bushehr is a nuclear power reactor along Iran's southwestern coast in the Gulf. It is not yet operational, although it may be fueled late this year. It would take some time before it could be used to produce plutonium, and any Iranian effort to use its fuel rods for such a purpose would be easy to detect and lead Iran into an immediate political confrontation with the United Nations and other states. Bushehr also is being built and fueled by Russia—which so far has been anything but supportive of an Israeli strike and which might react to any attack by making major new arms shipments to Iran.

The centrifuge facility at Natanz is a different story. It is underground and deeply sheltered, and is defended by modern short-range Russian TOR-M surface-to-air missiles. It also, however, is the most important target Israel can fully characterize. Both Israeli and outside experts estimate that it will produce enough low enriched uranium for Iran to be able to be used in building two fission nuclear weapons by some point in 2010—although such material would have to be enriched far more to provide weapons-grade U-235.

Israel has fighters, refueling tankers and precision-guided air-to-ground weapons to strike at all of these targets—even if it flies the long-distance routes needed to avoid the most critical air defenses in neighboring Arab states. It is also far from clear that any Arab air force would risk engaging Israeli fighters. Syria, after all, did not attempt to engage Israeli fighters when they attacked the reactor being built in Syria.

In August 2003, the Israeli Air Force demonstrated the strategic capability to strike far-off targets such as Iran by flying three F-15 jets to Poland, 1,600 nautical miles away. Israel can launch and refuel two to three full squadrons of combat aircraft for a single set of strikes against Iran, and provide suitable refueling. Israel could also provide fighter escorts and has considerable electronic-warfare capability to suppress Iran's aging air defenses. It might take losses to Iran's fighters and surface-to-air missiles, but such losses would probably be limited.

Israel would, however, still face two critical problems. The first would be whether it can destroy a hardened underground facility like Natanz. The second is that a truly successful strike might have to hit far more targets over a much larger area than the three best-known sites. Iran has had years to build up covert and dispersed facilities, and is known to have dozens of other facilities associated with some aspect of its nuclear programs. Moreover, Israel would have to successfully strike at dozens of additional targets to do substantial damage to another key Iranian threat: its long-range missiles.

Experts sharply disagree as to whether the Israeli air force could do more than limited damage to the key Iranian facility at Natanz. Some feel it is too deeply underground and too hardened for Israel to have much impact. Others believe that it is more vulnerable than conventional wisdom has it, and Israel could use weapons like the GBU-28

earth-penetrating bombs it has received from the U.S. or its own penetrators, which may include a nuclear-armed variant, to permanently collapse the underground chambers.

No one knows what specialized weapons Israel may have developed on its own, but Israeli intelligence has probably given Israel good access to U.S., European, and Russian designs for more advanced weapons than the GBU-28. Therefore, the odds are that Israel can have a serious impact on Iran's three most visible nuclear targets and possibly delay Iran's efforts for several years.

The story is very different, however, when it comes to destroying the full range of Iranian capabilities. There are no meaningful unclassified estimates of Iran's total mix of nuclear facilities, but known unclassified research, reactor, and centrifuge facilities number in the dozens. It became clear just this week that Iran managed to conceal the fact it was building a second underground facility for uranium enrichment near Qom, 100 miles southwest of Tehran, and that was designed to hold 3,000 centrifuges. Iran is developing at least four variants of its centrifuges, and the more recent designs have far more capacity than most of the ones installed at Natanz.

This makes it easier to conceal chains of centrifuges in a number of small, dispersed facilities and move material from one facility to another. Iran's known centrifuge production facilities are scattered over large areas of Iran, and at least some are in Mashad in the far northeast of the country—far harder to reach than Arak, Bushehr and Natanz.

Many of Iran's known facilities present the added problem that they are located among civilian facilities and peaceful nuclear-research activities—although Israel's precision-strike capabilities may well be good enough to allow it to limit damage to nearby civilian facilities.

It is not clear that Israel can win this kind of "shell game." It is doubtful that even the U.S. knows all the potential targets, and even more doubtful that any outside power can know what each detected Iranian facility currently does—and the extent to which each can hold dispersed centrifuge facilities that Iran could use instead of Natanz to produce weapons-grade uranium. As for the other elements of Iran's nuclear programs, it has scattered throughout the country the technical and industrial facilities it could use to make the rest of fission nuclear weapons. The facilities can now be in too many places for an Israeli strike to destroy Iran's capabilities.

Israel also faces limits on its military capabilities. Strong as Israeli forces are, they lack the scale, range and other capabilities to carry out the kind of massive strike the U.S. could launch. Israel does not have the density and quality of intelligence assets necessary to reliably assess the damage done to a wide range of small and dispersed targets and to detect new Iranian efforts.

Israel has enough strike-attack aircraft and fighters in inventory to carry out a series of restrikes if Iran persisted in rebuilding, but it could not refuel a large-enough force, or provide enough intelligence and electronic warfare capabilities, to keep striking Iran at anything like the necessary scale. Moreover, Israel does not have enough forces to carry out a series of restrikes if Iran persisted in creating and rebuilding new facilities, and Arab states could not repeatedly standby and let Israel penetrate their air space. Israel might also have to deal with a Russia that would be far more willing to sell Iran advanced fighters and surface-to-air missiles if Israel attacked the Russian-built reactor at Bushehr.

These problems are why a number of senior Israeli intelligence experts and military officers feel that Israel should not strike Iran, although few would recommend that Israel avoid using the threat of such strikes to help U.S. and other diplomatic efforts to persuade Iran to halt. For example, retired Brigadier General Shlomo Brom advocates, like a number of other Israeli experts, reliance on deterrence and Israel's steadily improving missile defenses.

Any Israeli attack on an Iranian nuclear target would be a very complex operation in which a relatively large number of attack aircraft and support aircraft would participate. The conclusion is that Israel could attack only a few Iranian targets—not as part of a sustainable operation over time, but as a one-time surprise operation.

The alternatives, however, are not good for Israel, the U.S., Iran's neighbors or Arab neighbors. Of course being attacked is not good for Iran. Israel could still strike, if only to try to buy a few added years of time. Iranian persistence in developing nuclear weapons could push the U.S. into launching its own strike on Iran—although either an Israeli or U.S. strike might be used by Iran's hardliners to justify an all-out nuclear arms race. Further, it is far from clear that friendly Arab Gulf states would allow the U.S. to use bases on their soil for the kind of massive strike and follow-on restrikes that the U.S. would need to suppress Iran's efforts on a lasting basis.

The broader problem for Iran, however, is that Israel will not wait passively as Iran develops a nuclear capability. Like several Arab states, Israel already is developing better missile and air defenses, and more-advanced forms of its Arrow ballistic missile defenses. There are reports that Israel is increasing the range-payload of its nuclear-armed missiles and is developing sea-based nuclear-armed cruise missiles for its submarines.

While Iran is larger than Israel, its population centers are so vulnerable to Israeli thermonuclear weapons that Israel already is a major "existential" threat to Iran. Moreover, provoking its Arab neighbors and Turkey into developing their nuclear capabilities, or the U.S. into offering them a nuclear umbrella targeted on Iran, could create additional threats, as well as make Iran's neighbors even more dependent on the U.S. for their security. Iran's search for nuclear-armed missiles may well unite its neighbors against it as well as create a major new nuclear threat to its survival.

http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052970204518504574418813806271306.html?mod=rss_com_mostcomm_entart

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New York Times
September 26, 2009

U.S. And Allies Warn Iran Over Nuclear 'Deception'

By David E. Sanger and William J. Broad

PITTSBURGH — President Obama and his allies raced Friday to use their revelation of a secret Iranian nuclear enrichment plant as long-sought leverage against Tehran, demanding that the country allow highly intrusive international inspections and propelling the confrontation with Tehran to a new and volatile pitch.

In a day of high drama at an economic summit meeting, American, British and French officials declassified some of their most closely held intelligence and scrambled to describe a multiyear Iranian effort, tracked by spies on the ground and satellites above, to build a secret uranium enrichment plant deep inside a mountain.

The new plant, which Iran strongly denied was intended to be kept secret or used for making weapons, is months away from completion and does nothing to shorten intelligence estimates of how long it would take Iran to produce a bomb. American intelligence officials say it will take at least a year, perhaps five, for Iran to develop the full ability to make a nuclear weapon.

But the finding so cemented a sense of what Prime Minister Gordon Brown of Britain called “the serial deception of many years” that it led to a rare Russian rebuke of Iran, and a milder warning from China, two countries crucial to Mr. Obama’s efforts to back up diplomacy with far tougher sanctions.

Mr. Obama’s aides and a raft of intelligence officials argued that the small, hidden plant was unsuitable for producing reactor fuel that might be used in a peaceful nuclear program. Moreover, its location, deep inside an Iranian Revolutionary Guards base about 20 miles from the religious center of Qum, strongly suggested it was designed for covert use in weapons, they said.

Late Friday afternoon, preparing to return to Washington, Mr. Obama issued a stark warning about the nuclear negotiations that are to begin next week, the first direct talks between the two countries in 30 years.

“Iran is on notice that when we meet with them on Oct. 1 they are going to have to come clean and they will have to make a choice,” he said. The alternative to giving up their program, he warned, is to “continue down a path that is going to lead to confrontation.”

It seemed unlikely that by “confrontation” Mr. Obama meant military action. While the president said that option was still on the table, Secretary of Defense Robert M. Gates said on CNN on Friday that “the reality is that there is no military option that does anything more than buy time — the estimates are three years or so.”

Mr. Obama said he had withheld making the intelligence public for months because it “is very important in these kind of high-stakes situations to make sure the intelligence is right”— a clear allusion to former President George W. Bush’s release of intelligence on Iraq seven years ago this month that proved baseless. Mr. Obama’s hand was forced, however, after Iran, apparently learning that the site had been discovered by Western intelligence, delivered a vague, terse letter to the International Atomic Energy Agency on Monday disclosing that it was building a second plant, one that it had never mentioned during years of inspections.

By today the Iranians were aggressively arguing that the plant was a “semi-industrial fuel enrichment facility” and that they had voluntarily made its existence public. President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, on his annual visit to he United Nations, insisted that the effort was entirely legal, even if Iran had failed to declare its existence to international inspectors until days ago.

“We have no fears,” he said. “What we did was completely legal. The agency will come and take a look and produce a report and it is nothing new.” He added: “What business is it of yours to tell us what to do or not?”

But to the West, there was a sense that Iran had stumbled. “They have cheated three times,” one senior administration official said of the Iranians. “And they have now been caught three times.” The official was referring to information unearthed by an Iranian dissident group that led to the discovery of the underground plant at Natanz in 2002, and evidence developed two years ago — after Iran’s computer networks were infiltrated by American intelligence agencies — that the country had sought to design a nuclear warhead. American officials believe that effort was halted in late 2003.

Mr. Obama said the secret plant “represents a direct challenge to the basic foundation of the nonproliferation regime.” President Nicolas Sarkozy of France was more blunt, giving Iran two months to meet international demands, and Mr. Brown said, “The international community has no choice today but to draw a line in the sand.”

By all indications, that line will be drawn Thursday, when the members of the United Nations Security Council and Germany meet with Iranian officials, the long-awaited “engagement” that Mr. Obama promised in his campaign. But American officials said that they would seize the moment to impose “crippling sanctions” if Iran blocked inspectors or refused to halt its nuclear program.

For years, American intelligence agencies have been searching Iran for evidence of the kind of plant that Iran was accused on Friday of building: an enrichment unit big enough to make enough material for one bomb a year, but small enough to hide. At its much larger enrichment complex at Natanz, the country already has produced enough low-enriched fuel to build one or two weapons, though it would need to be further enriched to weapons-grade material.

But diverting any of the fuel produced at Natanz for weapons would be difficult: International inspectors would almost certainly detect a diversion, and throwing those inspectors out of the country — as North Korea did in 2003 — would set off an alarm that Iran was headed to what experts call “nuclear breakout.”

“They needed another place to enrich, and we were looking for it,” one of Mr. Obama’s top advisers said Thursday evening. “And this time, we found it.”

Senior administration officials said their break came this spring. They saw equipment being placed into the underground plant, which they said was evidence that Iran was planning to build a secret complex filled with 3,000 centrifuges — old, slow but reliable centrifuges, called “P-1” because of their Pakistani heritage.

A senior intelligence official said Friday that Western spy agencies had “excellent access” to the site, suggesting human spies had penetrated it. The official said that “multiple independent sources” had confirmed that it was intended for nuclear use. The intelligence official and other officials declined to be named because they were discussing intelligence matters.

The plant’s size, secrecy and location on a Revolutionary Guards base all point to a covert plant for making weapon fuel, analysts said Friday. They called it too small for any commercial use, but a good size for the much easier task of making bomb fuel.

By contrast, Iran’s sprawling enrichment plant in the desert at Natanz currently houses more than 8,000 centrifuges and is designed to hold at least 54,000 of the spinning machines. The plant’s underground bunkers, ringed by barbed wire and anti-aircraft guns, are roughly half the size of the Pentagon.

Iran says Natanz is meant to produce the large volumes of low-enriched fuel that are needed for commercial nuclear reactors and making electricity.

While a large reactor needs tons of uranium fuel, a small nuclear bomb, by the most conservative estimates, requires just 55 pounds of highly enriched uranium. That big difference helps explain the inherent menace of a small enrichment plant.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2009/09/26/world/middleeast/26nuke.html>

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Washington Post
September 26, 2009

U.S., Allies Say Iran Has Secret Nuclear Facility

By Karen DeYoung and Michael D. Shear, Washington Post Staff Writers

President Obama's charge that Iran is constructing a secret nuclear fuel facility brought years of confrontation over the country's alleged nuclear weapons program to a new crisis point Friday, as he joined with the leaders of Britain and France to warn that international patience is waning fast.

"Iran is breaking rules that all nations must follow," Obama said, condemning what he described as a "covert uranium enrichment facility" that Western intelligence discovered years ago and has since been covertly monitoring. He called for Iran to allow international inspectors to "immediately investigate" the facility, located beneath the mountains near the city of Qom.

In a hastily arranged appearance outside the Group of 20 conference in Pittsburgh, Obama, British Prime Minister Gordon Brown and French President Nicolas Sarkozy outlined intelligence that Brown said would "shock and anger the whole international community, and it will harden our resolve" to force Iran to change its path.

Iran's stubborn and charismatic president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, offered no contrition, asserting that the facility is a legal and proper attempt to provide nuclear energy for his people. "We have no fears," he said at a New York news conference in which he welcomed inspections by the International Atomic Energy Agency. In response to Obama's description of the facility as designed to produce weapons-grade uranium, Ahmadinejad said, "I don't think Mr. Obama is a nuclear expert."

Friday's announcement capped a week of behind-the-scenes action in which Iran and the United States each maneuvered to reveal the information on its own terms. U.S. intelligence officials briefing reporters in Washington declined to be precise, but they said they had learned about the facility by early 2007. They said it is not yet operational but may be capable in 2010 of producing enough material for at least one bomb per year.

The CIA, along with its British and French counterparts, spent the summer compiling a dossier of information that administration officials said they had not yet decided how and when to reveal. Their hand was forced, they said, by a letter the Iranian government sent to the IAEA in Vienna on Monday.

U.S. officials said they thought the letter came after the Iranians learned of the Western intelligence and decided to preempt disclosures about the site. The letter vaguely described construction of a "pilot" plant to enrich uranium up to 5 percent, enough for power production but far less than the 90 percent required for weapons material. "Further complementary information will be provided in an appropriate and due time," the letter said.

The revelations came in the run-up to the first international talks about Iran's nuclear program in more than a year. On Thursday, a senior Iranian diplomat is scheduled to meet in Geneva with counterparts from the five permanent members of the U.N. Security Council plus Germany, a group known as the P5-plus-one. U.S. officials described the upcoming meeting as a key moment in the long nuclear standoff, saying the Qom facility will be at the top of the agenda.

The U.S., British and French leaders apparently hope that new evidence of Iran's deception will diminish reservations among the two other Security Council members -- Russia and China -- about tightening economic sanctions. Administration officials pointed with satisfaction at a sharply worded Russian statement Friday that Iran "must cooperate with this investigation."

Obama's words Friday were less dramatic than Brown's or Sarkozy's. "We have offered Iran a clear path toward greater international integration if it lives up to its obligations, and that offer stands," the U.S. president said, "but the Iranian government must now demonstrate through deeds its peaceful intentions or be held accountable to international standards and international law."

But Obama was stern-faced and grim, and the rapidly escalating confrontation provided him with a fresh opportunity to project toughness and success on the world stage.

Obama's detractors have long called him naive for his willingness to engage diplomatically the nation's adversaries, including Iran. Republicans say his decision to change the deployment of a missile shield for Eastern Europe demonstrates weakness, and critics have chastised him for taking time to weigh a decision on sending additional troops to Afghanistan.

The announcement also provided a boost for the CIA at a time when the agency is facing harsh attacks -- and possible prosecution -- for detainee interrogations. In a statement on the Iranian revelations, CIA Director Leon Panetta said, "We gave our government the information and insights it needed. . . . Most intelligence successes never become public." He added: "This one has."

As Obama and Ahmadinejad continued to trade challenges and barbs in public appearances, senior administration and intelligence officials, authorized to speak only on the condition of anonymity, told a tale that mixed elements of high-stakes diplomacy and a spy novel.

It began in 2002 with revelations that Iran was building an underground enrichment facility in Natanz. The United States said the site was designed to provide fuel for nuclear weapons, which Iran denied. Years of sparring over IAEA inspections of the facility and Iran's insistence that its output would be used only for nuclear power led finally to the establishment of international safeguards over the plant. The world's established nuclear powers, with varying degrees of commitment, continued to push Iran to provide more access and information.

The United States, even as it acknowledged in a December 2007 intelligence estimate that Iran had stopped a separate program to build a nuclear device, insisted that Tehran was continuing efforts to produce highly enriched, weapons-grade uranium. According to intelligence officials who briefed reporters Friday, they finally found signs of additional enrichment efforts on a base belonging to the elite Revolutionary Guard Corp outside Qom, a city in north-central Iran and a center of Shiite Muslim scholarship and education.

As construction in deep tunnels continued, U.S. intelligence agencies began to exchange information with their French and British counterparts, and "we all became increasingly confident that the purpose of the facility was uranium enrichment," one official said. The officials provided few details about how they gathered information, saying only that "we have excellent access and multiple, independent sources of information that allow us to corroborate."

Their determination of its purpose was largely inductive, officials explained, based on what one called a "detailed understanding of the design of the facility," and because its 3,000 centrifuges were too few to supply "regular fuel reloads" for a nuclear power plant. Iranian officials have pointed to the Natanz facility's size -- it is designed to accommodate 54,000 centrifuges -- as evidence that the facility is intended to produce fuel for power generation.

Most significant, U.S. officials said, were Iranian efforts to conceal the site near Qom. "During the course of this year, the confidence of our team and the intelligence services increased with respect to the precise purposes of this site," a senior administration official said.

By summer, they concluded that the facility would become operational in 2010. An offer by the P5-plus-one negotiators to discuss nuclear and other issues with Iran remained on the table, along with a threat to impose more severe economic sanctions. In July, Obama and other leaders agreed to "take stock" of the situation by the end of September. The United States, Britain and France did not share their information on the enrichment facility with Russia and China.

Against this backdrop, Obama directed intelligence officials to compile what they knew about the facility into a detailed briefing. "He had in mind the possibility that we would be talking to the Iranians," a senior official said, "and it was important that the talks be real. In the context of negotiations, we would present it to them directly. If there were no negotiations . . . it would have further cemented" an international consensus to take stronger action against Iran.

Officials said they also thought that years of harsh rhetoric and charges against Iran by the Bush administration had lacked specificity and engendered doubts, particularly among allies in Europe. "We wanted to be in a position where we got it right," an official said.

In early September, Iran suddenly announced its acceptance of the offer to negotiate, and the Oct. 1 meeting was set. Around the same time, U.S. officials learned that Iran was aware that its security had been breached. That knowledge, U.S. officials said, led directly to Iran's Monday letter to the IAEA, accompanied by an Iranian assertion that it was complying with IAEA rules requiring notification six months before the plant becomes operational.

The administration received word of the letter on Tuesday in New York, along with the IAEA's assurance that Iran's notification had been due years earlier, before construction started.

In quick succession, senior intelligence officials were dispatched to Vienna to "fill in the blanks" for the IAEA between Iran's missive and the evidence they had compiled, an official said. On Wednesday, Obama briefed Russian President Dmitry Medvedev. Detailed intelligence reports were delivered to the Russian and Chinese governments on Thursday, as administration officials in Washington briefed House and Senate leaders.

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/09/25/AR2009092500289.html>

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London Daily Telegraph
26 September 2009

Iran Defies Obama and Vows to Switch on 'Secret' Nuclear Facility

By agencies in Tehran and Telegraph reporter

"This new plant, God willing, will soon become operational," said Mohammad Mohammadi-Golpayegani, who heads the office of supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, according to the semi-official Fars News Agency.

The facility, buried in a mountain outside the city of Qom, is still under construction. It is designed to enrich uranium and could be used to produce the essential material for a nuclear weapon.

On Friday the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), said that Tehran wrote to the agency on September 21, disclosing that it is building a new uranium enrichment facility.

The revelation has heightened fears that Iran is determined to develop the capacity to build an atomic weapon, although Tehran insists that it wants a nuclear programme to generate energy for a rapidly growing population.

The programme presents the West with a thorny challenge. World leaders meeting this week in the United States have been considering a response. Their options include diplomatic pressure, tougher sanctions, and in the last resort military action. One scenario is that Israel, which feels threatened by Iran, could bomb the plants.

Israel said on Saturday that this week's disclosure proved the country was seeking nuclear weapons, and demanded an "unequivocal" Western response.

"The revelations of this second nuclear enrichment site in Iran prove beyond any doubt that this country wants to equip itself with nuclear weapons," Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman said.

"We hope that an unequivocal answer is given on October 1," he added, referring to next week's meeting between Iran and six major world powers involved in negotiating over the the nuclear dispute.

Israel, the region's sole if undeclared nuclear-armed state, has long accused Iran of pursuing atomic weapons under the guise of a peaceful energy programme.

Britain, the US and France have insisted that Iran must allow visits to the nuclear site.

"Iran is breaking rules that all nations must follow," said Mr Obama, He added that Iran was endangering the global non-proliferation regime and threatening the stability and security of the world.

Gordon Brown said: "The level of deception by the Iranian government and the scale of what we believe is the breach of international commitments will shock and anger the entire international community." He added that there was "no choice but to draw a line in the sand."

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/iran/6234038/Iran-defies-Obama-and-vows-to-switch-on-secret-nuclear-facility.html>

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New York Times
September 26, 2009

Cryptic Iranian Note Ignited An Urgent Nuclear Strategy Debate

By Helene Cooper and Mark Mazzetti

PITTSBURGH — On Tuesday evening in New York, top officials of the world nuclear watchdog agency approached two of President Obama's senior advisers to deliver the news: Iran had just sent a cryptic letter describing a small "pilot" nuclear facility that the country had never before declared.

The Americans were surprised by the letter, but they were angry about what it did not say. American intelligence had come across the hidden tunnel complex years earlier, and the advisers believed the situation was far more ominous than the Iranians were letting on.

That night, huddled in a hotel room in the Waldorf-Astoria until well into the early hours, five of Mr. Obama's closest national security advisers, in New York for the administration's first United Nations General Assembly, went

back and forth on what they would advise their boss when they took him the news in the morning. A few hours later, in a different hotel room, they met with Mr. Obama and his senior national security adviser, Gen. James L. Jones, to talk strategy.

The White House essentially decided to outflank the Iranians, to present to their allies and the public what they believed was powerful evidence that there was more to the Iranian site than just some pilot program. They saw it as a chance to use this evidence to persuade other countries to support the case for stronger sanctions by showing that the Iranians were still working on a secret nuclear plan.

It was three dramatic days of highly sensitive diplomacy and political maneuvering, from an ornate room at the Waldorf, where Mr. Obama pressed President Dimitri A. Medvedev of Russia for support, to the United Nations Security Council chamber, where General Jones at one point hustled his Russian counterpart from the room in the middle of a rare meeting of Council leaders.

General Jones told his counterpart, Sergei Prikhodko, that the United States was going to go public with the intelligence. Meanwhile, in the hallways of the United Nations and over the phone, American and European officials debated when, and how, to present their case against Iran to the world.

European officials urged speed, saying that Mr. Obama should accuse Iran of developing the secret facility first thing Thursday morning, when he presided over the Security Council for the very first time. It would have been a stirring and confrontational moment. But White House officials countered that it was too soon; they would not have time to brief allies and the nuclear watchdog, the International Atomic Energy Agency, and Mr. Obama did not want to dilute the nuclear nonproliferation resolution he was pushing through the Security Council by diverting to Iran.

In the end, Mr. Obama stood on the floor of the Pittsburgh Convention Center on Friday morning, flanked by President Nicolas Sarkozy of France and Prime Minister Gordon Brown of Britain, and called the Iranian facility “a direct challenge to the basic foundation of the nonproliferation regime.”

Added Mr. Brown, “The international community has no choice today but to draw a line in the sand.”

This account of the days leading up to the announcement on Friday is based on interviews with administration officials and American allies, all of whom want the story known to help support their case against Iran.

The Iranians have continued to assert that their nuclear program has peaceful intentions. And while American officials say the secretive nature of the program lends support to the view that it is truly an expanding weapons program, even United States intelligence officials acknowledge that there is no evidence that Iran has taken the final steps toward creating a bomb.

There was “a fair amount of anger” within the administration over Iran’s disclosure, a senior administration official said. But there was also some satisfaction. A second senior official said: “Everybody’s been asking, ‘Where’s our leverage?’ Well, now we just got that leverage.”

Administration officials said that Mr. Obama had two goals in going public: to directly confront Iran with the evidence, and to persuade wavering nations to take a hard line on Iran.

In fact, the makings of the administration’s strategy was hatched months before, when the White House first came to believe that the complex, built into a mountain on property near Qum controlled by Iran’s powerful Revolutionary Guards, might be a part of the nuclear program. Over time, the file that intelligence officials accumulated on the facility developed as a cudgel, a way to win over wary allies and test if the Iranians were being truthful in their disclosures.

Senior intelligence officials said Friday that several years ago American intelligence agencies under the administration of George W. Bush discovered the suspicious site. The site was one of Iran’s most closely guarded secrets, the officials said, known only by senior members of Iran’s nuclear establishment. The officials said that housing the complex on the base gave it an extra layer of security.

Mr. Obama was first told about the existence of the covert site during his transition period in late 2008, White House officials said, after he had been elected but before he was inaugurated. But it was not until earlier this year that American spy agencies detected the movement of sensitive equipment into the facility — a sign, they believed, that whatever work was involved was nearing its final stages.

American officials said Friday that the facility could have been fully operational by next year, with up to 3,000 centrifuges capable of producing one weapon’s worth of highly enriched nuclear material per year.

“Over the course of early this year, the intelligence community and our liaison partners became increasingly confident that the site was indeed a uranium enrichment facility,” a senior administration official said. He said that Mr. Obama received regular intelligence updates on the progress of the site.

The officials said that they developed a detailed picture about work on the facility from multiple human intelligence sources, as well as satellite imagery. A senior official said that intelligence was regularly shared among American, British and French spy agencies, and that Israeli officials were told about the complex years ago. They were not more specific about when they first learned about it.

At some point in late spring, American officials became aware that Iranian operatives had learned that the site was being monitored, the officials said.

As the administration reviewed its Iran policy in April, Mr. Obama told aides at one point that if the United States entered into talks with Iran, he wanted to make sure “all the facts were on the table early, including information on this site — so that negotiations would be meaningful and transparent,” a senior administration official said.

As the summer progressed, British, French and American officials grew more worried about what Iran might do now that it was aware that security at the complex had been breached.

In late July, after the mass protests over Iran’s disputed election had died down, Mr. Obama told his national security team to have American intelligence officials work with their British and French counterparts to secretly put together a detailed presentation on the complex.

“That brief would be deployed in the case of a number of contingencies,” the administration official said. “If Iran refused to negotiate, in the case of a leak of the information, and even an Iranian disclosure.” Mr. Obama asked his aides to have the presentation ready by the General Assembly meeting.

“We could not have negotiations of any meaning if we were only going to talk about overt sites and not covert sites,” a senior administration official said.

As late as last weekend, American officials were still uncertain about when to publicly present the intelligence about the secret enrichment facility. The game plan changed Tuesday, when officials from the nuclear watchdog agency informed the Americans that Iran had sent the letter describing the “pilot” facility.

At his meeting at the Waldorf the next morning, Mr. Obama decided that he would personally tell Mr. Medvedev, the Russian president, when they met Wednesday afternoon for a previously scheduled meeting. Mr. Obama also spoke with Mr. Sarkozy and Mr. Brown. Meanwhile, Jeff Bader, a senior White House adviser for China, informed his Chinese counterparts.

On Thursday, while Mr. Obama was leading the Security Council meeting, General Jones left his seat behind Mr. Obama, walked over to Mr. Prikhodko, the Russian national security adviser, and whispered in his ear. Mr. Prikhodko got up and followed General Jones out of the room. Minutes later, General Jones sent an aide back to get his Chinese counterpart as well.

Administration officials said they were gratified with Russia’s reaction — Mr. Medvedev signaled he would be amenable to tougher sanctions on Iran. The Chinese, one administration official said, were more skeptical, and said they wanted to look at the intelligence, and to see what international inspectors said when they investigated.

The lessons of the Iraq war still lingered.

“They don’t want to buy a pig in a poke,” the senior administration official said.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2009/09/26/world/middleeast/26intel.html>

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Washington Post
September 26, 2009

Angry Reaction 'Shocked' Head of Iran's Nuclear Program

By Thomas Erdbrink

Washington Post Foreign Service

TEHRAN, Sept. 26 -- The head of Iran's nuclear program said he was "shocked" by the West's angry reaction to news that his country is opening a second uranium enrichment facility, which he said was disclosed a year earlier than required by the U.N. nuclear watchdog, state television reported Saturday.

Ali Akbar Salehi, the head of Iran's Atomic Energy Organization, said the facility 60 miles south of Tehran would be completed within "a year and a half to two years," the Arabic language state news channel Al Alam quoted him as saying.

He stressed that the facility, like other declared nuclear sites in the country, would be open to inspections by the International Atomic Energy Agency.

The United States, France and Britain denounced Iran's plans Friday at the Group of 20 conference in Pittsburgh. "Iran is breaking rules that all nations must follow," President Obama said, condemning the site as a "covert uranium enrichment facility" that Western intelligence discovered years ago and has since been monitoring.

National Security Council spokesman Mike Hammer said Saturday: "We call on Iran to cooperate fully and immediately with the IAEA. As our partners in Russia and China made clear Friday, we all support the authority of the IAEA to conduct a full investigation. After hiding this site from the international community for years, full transparency is essential, and it is time for Iran to play by the rules like everyone else."

Iran's President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad has called the facility a legal and proper attempt to provide nuclear energy for his people.

Salehi said the Western leaders' "embarrassing reaction and their unbalanced response has shocked us" and that Iran had acted within the framework of IAEA laws. "We have to inform the agency of the building of nuclear facilities 180 days before insertion of nuclear fuel, but we informed them even sooner," he said.

Salehi said the Western reactions were planned and accused the United States, France and Britain of hatching a conspiracy against Iran. "The plot was that the three big Western countries were to speak against Iran at the G-20 summit and spin the story to make the world opinion united against Iran," he said.

Another Iranian official, Hassan Ghashghavi, said Iran's declaration of the new site was on time and a sign of goodwill. "But unfortunately, some Western governments resorted to propaganda and incorrectly created a biased atmosphere," he said, according to the state news agency IRNA.

Other Iranian officials reacted more defiantly. "This new plant, God willing, will soon become operational," said Mohammad Mohammadi-Golpayegani, the semi-official Fars News Agency reported. Mohammadi-Golpayegani heads the office of Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

Salehi told state television on Friday that the new site was built to protect the country's nuclear program. "We built a new installation that could guarantee the continuation of our nuclear activities. Iran's nuclear activities will not be stopped under any circumstances," he said.

Israel has repeatedly threatened to destroy Iran's nuclear facilities.

Friday's announcement came in the run-up to the first international talks about Iran's nuclear program in more than a year. On Thursday, a senior Iranian diplomat is scheduled to meet in Geneva with counterparts from the five permanent members of the U.N. Security Council plus Germany, a group known as the P5 plus one. U.S. officials have described the meeting as a key moment in the long nuclear standoff.

Meanwhile, Iran's revolutionary Guards Corp, which is celebrating armed forces week, announced plans for large-scale missile drills on Sunday. Code-named Great Prophet-4, the aim of the maneuvers is to "carry out annual defense missions and maintain and enhance the deterrent capabilities of the Islamic Republic of Iran's armed forces," the Guards Corps' public relations said, according to Fars news.

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/09/26/AR2009092601359.html>

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Wall Street Journal
September 26, 2009

Israelis Say Iran Report Boosts Case For Hard Line

By Charles Levinson

JERUSALEM -- Israeli officials and analysts said the disclosure that their country's No. 1 foe was covertly building a uranium-enrichment plant strengthened its claim that Tehran seeks nuclear weapons and bolstered the case for tough action.

Israel has insisted that past reports by the International Atomic Energy Agency and Western intelligence agencies didn't disclose all of Iran's known nuclear sites. With the U.S. and Iran about to start face-to-face talks, Friday's public revelation tilted the negotiating dynamics against Iran, analysts said.

"For Israel, this bodes well because this revelation can now be used as serious leverage to force the Iranians to bring the nuclear program into the agenda of talks between Iran and America," said Meir Javedanfar, an Israeli-Iranian analyst based in Tel Aviv.

"If the Iranians refuse to do so the fact that they were hiding this facility makes it easier to increase consensus against them for tougher sanctions," he said. "Iran's hand has been significantly weakened at the negotiating table."

A senior Israeli defense official said after the public revelation of the facility Friday, "There is the beginning of an understanding in the West and in Russia" that Iran's nuclear program is advancing to a place they don't want it to reach.

The Israeli government had no official comment on Friday's revelation. After Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu returned to Israel Friday afternoon from New York, where he had addressed the U.N. General Assembly on Thursday, he told government representatives not to comment on the site, a spokesman said.

The American, French, and British leaders were already forcefully pressing the case against Iran Friday morning, as Mr. Netanyahu had done in his speech the previous day.

The defense official, who spoke before Mr. Netanyahu told his representatives not to comment, declined to say whether Israel knew about the specific installation disclosed this week. The official predicted there would be more revelations about the Iranian nuclear program in the future.

Uzi Dayan, who was chairman of Israel's National Security Council until September 2002, said that at that time, "We tried very hard to convince our colleagues and partners that Iran is going nuclear."

Mr. Dayan, who is close to Mr. Netanyahu, said Israel "has fair knowledge about the Iranian plants and the deployments," but wouldn't speak to the specifics of the plant revealed Friday. "We know what's going on," he said.

The defense official said the IAEA hasn't been making enough of an effort to expose the extent of Iran's nuclear program. The official said that what the agency does know about the program is sometimes kept from the public.

"We know the direction that Iran is going and we think it's a problem for the whole world," the official added. "Nothing surprises us."

Israeli analysts said the revelation of a secret nuclear site belied Iran's claim that it has nothing to hide and is pursuing its nuclear program with purely peaceful motives.

"If they don't have military intentions with their nuclear program, then why do they need a secret plant?" asked Dan Schueftan, the director of the National Security Studies Center at the University of Haifa, articulating a point of view that prevailed Friday in Israel, where a nuclear-armed Iran is considered the foremost threat to national security. "Any sensible person cannot possibly doubt now that they have a military program and everything they are doing is directed at a military program."

<http://online.wsj.com/article/SB125390047284341479.html>

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Financial Times – United Kingdom
September 26, 2009

Moscow Hardens Stance Towards Tehran

By James Blitz and Geoff Dyer

President Dmitry Medvedev hardened Russia's stance on Iran's nuclear programme yesterday after the US, Britain and France revealed that Tehran possesses a hitherto secret uranium enrichment facility.

As the world powers that negotiate with Iran over its nuclear programme prepared to confront the Tehran regime at a meeting on Thursday, Moscow's apparent change of approach will be analysed closely by western diplomats.

The key issue for the US and its allies will be the reaction from Russia and China to the news, amid hopes that the international community will present a united front at next week's meeting in Geneva. Moscow and Beijing have tried to block the west from imposing sanctions on Tehran.

It emerged yesterday that President Barack Obama briefed Mr Medvedev on Thursday at the UN General Assembly in New York about the uranium enrichment site. Mr Medvedev said immediately after: "I don't consider sanctions the best way to achieve results on Iran . . . but all the same, if all possibilities to influence the situation are exhausted, then we can use international sanctions."

A statement from Mr Medvedev yesterday said the revelations on the second site "seriously concern" the Kremlin. He urged Iran to make clear in the next few days that its nuclear programme is peaceful.

China responded more neutrally. "We hope that Iran will co-operate with the IAEA [International Atomic Energy Agency, the UN watchdog] on this matter," said a spokesman for China's foreign ministry at the G20 summit in Pittsburgh. He Yafei, a viceforeign minister, said: "The standoff with Iran over its nuclear programme can only be resolved through dialogue."

Western diplomats have long believed that if Russia throws its weight behind sanctions China will follow, wishing to avoid isolation in the UN Security Council.

The revelation of the second site comes at a key moment in international talks on Iran's programme. Mr Obama has made clear for months that he will give Iran until the end of the year to enter talks over its programme, which many western states believe is designed to create a bomb.

If Iran fails to negotiate, the US, Britain and France will seek to have harsh new economic sanctions agreed at the UN.

Iran's response to international demands that it suspend its uranium enrichment activities has been stubborn. Tehran sent a five-page letter to world powers two weeks ago, making little mention of the nuclear issue. Many western diplomats remain pessimistic of the chance of concessions from Iran at Thursday's meeting, which will involve diplomats from the US, UK, Russia, China, France and Germany.

However, a shift in the position of Russia and China in favour of tough sanctions would apply huge pressure on the Iranians. Tehran has used divisions between the six leading powers to ignore international warnings on its nuclear programme.

"A more united stance by the six powers meeting Iran next week will make it far harder for Iran to wriggle out of making concessions," said a European diplomat. Some European diplomats warned last night that Russia's position needed to be tested. They believe that while Mr Medvedev has proved more accommodating to the US on the Iran issue, it is unclear if Vladimir Putin, Russia's prime minister, sees things the same way.

Mr Medvedev's remarks followed Mr Obama's decision last week to ditch Bush-era plans to site missile defence bases in Poland and the Czech Republic, which Moscow had opposed. Mr Obama said last week if Russia increased co-operation with the US on Iran as a "byproduct" of his decision, it would be a "bonus". China has reason to resist sanctions. Iran has become one of its biggest oil suppliers, accounting for 12 per cent of imports last year.

Some diplomats believe Beijing might eventually be persuaded to adopt a different position on Iran because China will want to maintain good relations with both the US and Saudi Arabia, which is also one of its main oil suppliers.

China will also be wary of the impact on its energy security of an arms race and increased instability in the Middle East that could result from Iran's nuclear programme.

<http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/08aa47ca-a9fc-11de-a3ce-00144feabdc0.html>

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Reuters of India
September 26, 2009

No Doubt Iran Seeks Nuclear Arms--Israeli Minister

JERUSALEM (Reuters) - Israel's foreign minister said on Saturday the newly disclosed nuclear facility in Iran was proof the Islamic Republic was seeking nuclear weapons, and called on the world for an "unequivocal" response.

"I spoke this weekend with experts from the East and West. No one has any doubt, according to the technical data that was published, it's a military core," right-winger Avigdor Lieberman told Israel Radio.

"The disagreement (on whether Iran is developing military nuclear capability) has been done away with," he said.

Israeli leaders have repeatedly expressed alarm over Iran's nuclear ambitions and refused to rule out pre-emptive military action to stop Iran developing an atomic weapon.

Tehran says its nuclear plans are peaceful and has resisted U.S.-led diplomatic pressure to curb its uranium enrichment, which can be used to generate electricity or make bombs.

U.S. President Barack Obama demanded on Friday that Iran come clean about its nuclear programme or risk "sanctions that bite", after the disclosure that a new plant was under construction southwest of Tehran.

Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad said the facility was legal and open for inspection by the U.N. International Atomic Energy Agency. Iran is set to meet the United States and five other powers in October to discuss its nuclear programme.

Ahmadinejad has called more than once for Israel's destruction.

Asked whether the strong words from Obama and other Western leaders came too late, Lieberman said: "No one wanted to admit the truth. Everyone tried, like always, to placate this mad regime."

"I hope that after this latest revelation, at the discussion to open on October 1 ... the message passed from the start will be unequivocal," he said.

Israel, widely assumed to be the Middle East's sole nuclear power, has described Iran's uranium enrichment as a threat to its existence. It says "all options" are on the table in preventing Tehran from building nuclear missiles.

<http://in.reuters.com/article/worldNews/idINIndia-42728020090926?sp=true>

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London Daily Telegraph
26 September 2009

Iran Nuclear Plant: Miliband Refuses To Rule Out Military Action

Julian Borger in New York, Patrick Wintour in Pittsburgh and Mark Oliver

David Miliband today refused to rule out the prospect of military action against Iran over its nuclear ambitions but insisted the international focus was on a diplomatic solution after Tehran's admission it is building a second uranium enrichment plant.

The foreign secretary's comments were followed tonight by remarks from Iran's chief nuclear negotiator, Ali Akbar Salehi, who said inspectors from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) would be allowed into the plant situated near the holy city of Qom, which he insisted had not been secret.

Ali Akbar Salehi told Iranian television: "Inspection will be within the framework of the regulations ... we have no problem with inspection. We will work out this issue with the agency and will announce the date of the inspection later after reaching an agreement with IAEA."

The US president, Barack Obama, the UK prime minister, Gordon Brown, and the French president, Nicolas Sarkozy accused Iran yesterday of constructing a secret underground uranium enrichment facility and of hiding its existence from international inspectors for years, although Obama said western intelligence had known of it for more than two years.

The disclosures have paved the way for a showdown on Thursday in Geneva, where Iranian officials are due to meet representatives of six major powers, the E3+3 group. Failure to reach a resolution there would usher in a wave of wide-ranging economic sanctions.

An aide to the Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said the newly disclosed uranium enrichment plant buried deep inside a mountain in the arid centre of Iran would soon become operational.

But Salehi said: "Under [non-proliferation] rules, we are required to inform the IAEA of the existence of such a facility 180 days before introducing materials but we are announcing it more than a year earlier. Still, we see there is controversy. We are astonished," he said.

Iran says the new facility won't be operational for 18 months so Iran has not violated any IAEA requirements.

Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, Iran's president, had told journalists in New York yesterday had remained defiant on his country's nuclear ambitions, claiming the plant was legal and open for scrutiny.

Yesterday however Obama - who earlier this year offered Tehran a chance of a "new beginning" – called on Iran to allow UN inspectors to visit the plant, which is south of Tehran near the holy city of Qom, a seat of Shia learning, or face sanctions "that bite" against the Islamic republic. Brown said that the discovery of the covert site had "shocked and angered" the international community.

The statement by western leaders appears timed to give a push to waverers to back sanctions against Iran, especially China and Russia.

Yesterday Moscow issued a separate statement describing the plant as a "violation" of UN security council decisions, and offering to support an investigation.

In other developments today, there were reports from semi-official state media that Iran's Revolutionary Guard will stage missile defence simulation exercises tomorrow – a move sure to be seen as provocative to the west with mounting tension over the nuclear issue.

The guards said the exercises would be to "maintain and improve" the country's deterrent capabilities, AFP reported citing an Iranian news agency.

Miliband said there was a "100%" commitment to diplomacy but, speaking to BBC Radio 4's Today programme, he repeatedly declined invitations to describe military intervention as inconceivable.

Miliband said that during the meeting of the E3+3 group of Britain, France, Germany, the US, Russia and China, Iran had to take "practical and concrete steps to address the outstanding questions and the outstanding offer that's on the table for them and that's what we are waiting to see".

Questioned about the likelihood of military force against Iran, Miliband said: "No sane person looks at the military question of engagement with Iran with anything other than real concern. That's why we always say we are 100% committed to the diplomatic track.

"I think it's very important we stick to that because the diplomatic track of engagement on the one hand and pressure on the other is only now really being tried with the engagement of America."

But Miliband declined to describe military action as inconceivable, the word used by Jack Straw when he was foreign secretary.

"I always say to people look at what I do say, not at what I don't say and what I do say is that we are 100% focused on a diplomatic resolution of this question," Miliband said.

The Iranians acknowledged the existence of the plant in a letter to the International Atomic Energy Agency on Monday after learning that its existence had been discovered by the CIA, MI6 and the French DGSE intelligence agency.

"We don't have any problems with inspections of the facility. We have no fears," Ahmadinejad said yesterday.

The Iranian president said the three western leaders would "regret this announcement", claiming it had been made to disrupt the Geneva talks.

Ahmadinejad dodged a question about whether Iran had sufficient enriched uranium to manufacture a nuclear weapon but said Tehran rejects such armaments as "inhumane".

Western officials claim the plant is big enough to accommodate 3,000 centrifuges. They said that was far too big to be a pilot plant, as Iran claims, but far too small to produce enough low-enriched uranium for electrical power generation.

Nuclear experts say that 3,000 centrifuges can produce enough enriched uranium each year to make a bomb, if it is further refined to weapons grade purity. There are more than 8,000 such machines at Natanz, Iran's known industrial-scale enrichment facility.

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2009/sep/26/miliband-iran-nuclear-plant>

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Sunday Times of London
September 27, 2009

Unlocking Iran's Secret Nuclear Plans

Christina Lamb in Washington and Uzi Mahnaimi in Tel Aviv

It sounds like a scene from a James Bond movie. Western intelligence agents scouring Iran for a secret nuclear site, big enough to make a bomb but small enough to hide, identified some suspicious tunnels in a mountain complex outside the holy city of Qom.

The complex was on a military base controlled by Iran's powerful Revolutionary Guard, making access highly dangerous. But through information from satellite imagery, Iranian dissidents and other human intelligence, a sufficiently detailed picture was built up to convince investigators that Iran was preparing to make nuclear fuel there.

When Barack Obama was elected US president late last year he was briefed about the covert site in a nuclear programme that would inevitably become one of the toughest issues facing him. Instead of confrontation, he proposed engagement, arguing that the previous policy of isolating Iran had got the West nowhere. But as he was offering his olive branch to Tehran, intelligence was coming in all the time from Qom.

By spring, when officials spotted movements of sensitive material into the underground complex, it seemed the work was nearing completion.

The Iranians were preparing to operate as many as 3,000 centrifuges, cylindrical devices that spin at high speed to enrich uranium. They were of a type called P1 because they come from Pakistan and could produce enough fuel each year for one small nuclear bomb.

Western intelligence officers declined to say whether the key intelligence had come from spies, signal intercepts, overhead surveillance or a combination. Leon Panetta, the CIA director, attributed the revelation to "inputs from multiple intelligence disciplines" as well as assistance from Britain and France, and the Israelis are said to have known about the plant for years.

By late spring, US officials realised the Iranians knew security had been breached. Obama ordered a detailed dossier that he could use in negotiations or, if need be, in enlisting the co-operation of other nations in sanctions against Iran.

So began an elaborate game of poker between Washington and Tehran. Would Iran blink first and disclose Qom to inspectors from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) tasked with monitoring the programme or would Obama confront them with the evidence?

US officials acknowledge there is no proof that Iran is on the verge of creating a bomb and Tehran insists its programme is to provide nuclear energy. But the regime's failure to mention the Qom plant to weapons inspectors regularly visiting the country looked on the shady side of neglectful, to say the least.

Nor was it the first time the Iranians had been caught. In 2002, information from a dissident group led to the exposure of its main uranium enrichment site, an underground plant at Natanz. The same group, the National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI), announced in December 2005 that tunnelling work was being carried out to build an underground nuclear facility at Qom.

Mohammad Mohaddessin, the NCRI foreign affairs spokesman, said construction work had been started in 2000 by a specialist engineering division of the Revolutionary Guard. He claimed two Russian scientists were involved in assisting Iran to hide the nuclear facilities.

The suspicion now is that Iran may have been hiding other nuclear facilities. Apart from Natanz, it is known that there are research facilities at Isfahan, the country's first nuclear power plant at Bushehr, which began testing this year, and a heavy water reactor at Arak, which could be used to produce plutonium.

Mark Fitzpatrick, of the International Institute for Strategic Studies, said yesterday that Iran may also have built a facility to produce the gasified uranium that the Qom plant would enrich.

“The most logical scenario is that Iran has a completely clandestine way of producing the highly enriched uranium and that would require, at a minimum, a uranium conversion plant,” he said.

The NCRI even claimed to have evidence of a weaponisation programme. A research body known by the acronym Metfaz and based on 180th Western Avenue in the Pars district of eastern Tehran was working on trigger systems using computerised simulation, it alleged.

THE showdown between Washington and Tehran began last week in New York, where the American and Iranian presidents were staying just a few blocks apart — Obama at the Waldorf-Astoria and Ahmadinejad at the Barclay — for the opening session of the UN general assembly.

With the first direct negotiations between US and Iranian officials in 30 years due to start in Geneva this Thursday, the question for the Obama administration was when and how to deploy the Qom discovery.

Discussions were still under way when Obama’s advisers were contacted by the IAEA in Vienna. The agency had received a cryptic letter from the Iranians informing it in vague terms that they were building another plant, one they had never disclosed during years of international inspections.

The letter forced Obama’s hand. After late-night discussions on Tuesday, he went to a scheduled meeting the next day with Dmitry Medvedev, the Russian president, and spent half an hour briefing him. He informed Gordon Brown and Nicolas Sarkozy, the French president.

Jeff Bader, the senior White House official for Asia, told his Chinese counterparts, whose support would be critical — along with Russia’s — if it came to imposing sanctions on Iran. Both countries have a veto on the UN security council.

Russia signalled its potential support, believed by many to be a quid pro quo for Obama’s decision to scrap plans for a missile defence system based in eastern Europe. US officials say China was sceptical.

The action then shifted to Pittsburgh, where G20 leaders had moved from New York. Friday morning began with a dramatic press conference revealing Iran’s nuclear plant to the world. Obama appeared, flanked by Sarkozy and Brown, to denounce the plant as “a direct challenge to the basic foundation of the non-proliferation regime”.

He said he had withheld the intelligence because “it is very important in these kind of high-stake situations to make sure the intelligence is right” — a clear reference to Iraq, where the US-led coalition went to war on the basis of faulty intelligence. Sarkozy set a deadline of two months for Iran to meet international demands to give up their programme.

Back in New York, Ahmadinejad responded to the outcry by claiming the Qom plant was a “semi-industrial fuel enrichment facility”. He insisted: “We have no fears. What we did was completely legal.”

Brown described Iran’s attitude as “the serial deception of many years”, adding that “the international community has no choice today but to draw a line in the sand”. The question is: what will that line be?

The European Union is considering stopping all petrol exports to Iran and further restricting shipping and air traffic to and from the country. Possible measures include banning ships and aircraft from docking or landing in the EU, according to German diplomats quoted in Der Spiegel. Although it exports oil, Iran imports up to 40% of its petrol.

“Iran is on notice that when we meet them on October 1 they are going to have to come clean and they will have to make a choice,” Obama said.

The alternative, he warned, was to “continue down a path that is going to lead to confrontation”.

It seems unlikely that by “confrontation” the president meant military action. Although he said that was still on the table, Robert Gates, the defence secretary, told CNN: “The reality is there is no military option that does anything more than buy time — the estimates are three years or so.”

Having been so badly burnt in Iraq, and with troops bogged down in Afghanistan, hardly anyone in the West wants military action in Iran. Tehran could cause huge problems with retaliatory action in both countries.

The view is different in Israel where Iran is viewed as a mortal threat. Israeli defence chiefs emphasised to Air Chief Marshal Sir Jock Stirrup, chief of the defence staff, on an unpublicised visit to Israel last week, that they had detailed plans to attack Iran if all else failed.

Yesterday Tehran was sending mixed signals. Ali Akbar Salehi, its nuclear chief, announced that IAEA inspectors would be allowed to inspect the Qom site.

It was also announced that the Revolutionary Guard's air force would start "missile defensive war games" today and a hostile tone was struck by the office of Ayatollah Khamenei, the supreme leader. Mohammad Mohammadi-Golpayegani, his chief of staff, said: "This new plant, God willing, will soon become operational and will make the enemies blind."

http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/middle_east/article6850883.ece

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Tehran Times
September 27, 2009

Ahmadinejad: Iran Informed IAEA 18 Months before Operating New Facility

NEW YORK (Agencies)- President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad said Friday that Iran has complied with UN rules that require it to inform the world body's nuclear agency six months before a uranium enrichment facility becomes operational, NPR reported.

Ahmadinejad said the new facility won't be operational for 18 months so Iran has not violated any requirements of the International Atomic Energy Agency.

"What we did was completely legal, according to the law. We have informed the agency, the agency will come and take a look and produce a report and it's nothing new," he told a news conference in New York.

Ali Akbar Salehi, the director of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran, announced on Friday that the Islamic Republic is building a new nuclear fuel production plant. Salehi said the activities of the new facility, like the activities of the other Iranian nuclear facilities, are within the framework of the IAEA safeguards.

President Barack Obama, British Prime Minister Gordon Brown and French President Nicolas Sarkozy claimed on Friday that Iran has constructed a secret uranium enrichment facility and hid its existence from international inspectors for years.

"We thought that in the discussions with the 5-plus-1 group, we'll be able to lay the foundations for a long-term cooperation. I don't think what happened was good. I hope they can make up for it," Ahmadinejad said, referring to the Oct. 1 talks that will include the five permanent members of the UN Security Council — the U.S., Russia, China, Britain and France — plus Germany.

Iran's Majlis National Security and Foreign Policy Committee Chairman Alaeddin Boroujerdi said on Saturday that the West should not make Iran regret cooperating with the IAEA beyond the country's legal obligations.

In a letter to the Vienna-based IAEA on Monday Iran informed of the UN nuclear watchdog of the facility's existence.

Ahmadinejad said enrichment facilities need not be disclosed until six months "before it is infused with gas" and operations begin.

"We actually informed the agency 18 months ahead of time," the president explained, adding that Obama would regret the statement.

"I'm sure they'll definitely feel sorry about it. I think they probably already regret it and will be regretting it more down the road," Ahmadinejad said. "At the end of the day, this is a very ordinary facility that has been set up, and it's only in the beginning stages."

http://www.tehrantimes.com/Index_view.asp?code=204014

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New York Times
September 27, 2009

U.S. To Demand Inspection Of New Iran Plant 'Within Weeks'

By David E. Sanger and William J. Broad

WASHINGTON — The Obama administration plans to tell Iran this week that it must open a newly revealed nuclear enrichment site to international inspectors “within weeks,” according to senior administration officials. The administration will also tell Tehran that inspectors must have full access to the key personnel who put together the clandestine plant and to the documents surrounding its construction, the officials said Saturday.

The demands, following the revelation Friday of the secret facility at a military base near the holy city of Qum, set the stage for the next chapter of a diplomatic drama that has toughened the West’s posture and heightened tensions with Iran. The first direct negotiations between the United States and Iran in 30 years are scheduled to open in Geneva on Thursday.

American and European officials say they will also press Iran to open what they suspect are nuclear-related sites to international inspectors, and to turn over notebooks and computers that they think may document efforts to design weapons.

President Obama has repeatedly said that Iran must show significant cooperation by the end of the year, establishing what officials say is effectively a three-month deadline. Interviews with American and European officials, however, suggest differences of opinion about how much time Iran should be given to show full compliance.

On Saturday, Iran’s nuclear chief, Ali Akbar Salehi, said the International Atomic Energy Agency would be invited to visit the site near Qum that American intelligence agencies estimate was designed to house 3,000 centrifuges, enough to produce about one bomb’s worth of material a year. But he did not say when, nor did he say whether Iran would meet any of the other American and European demands.

Mr. Salehi, who spoke on Iranian state television, added that Mr. Obama’s dramatic release of the information about the site at a global economic summit meeting was a “plot” meant to “unite the whole world against us.”

Iranian officials have long maintained that their nuclear program is designed to produce energy, not weapons, and they said the facility near Qum is for peaceful purposes. They have not explained why it was located inside a heavily guarded base of the Revolutionary Guards.

From the White House to Europe, senior officials were pushing to exploit the disclosure of the covert facility as a turning point in negotiations to try to get Iran to halt its nuclear program.

“This is the most important development in the three and a half years since the U.S. has offered negotiations with Iran,” said R. Nicholas Burns, a Harvard professor who served as the Bush administration’s chief strategist on Iran. Mr. Burns said Mr. Obama “now has much greater leverage to organize an international coalition to confront” the country’s leaders with sanctions should the negotiating effort fail.

David A. Kay, a nuclear specialist who led the fruitless American search for unconventional weapons in Iraq, said the discovery “reopens the whole question of the military’s involvement in the Iranian nuclear program.”

For now, the most urgent issue, current and former officials agree, is gaining immediate access to the hidden tunnel complex that Iran now acknowledges is a uranium enrichment plant still under construction. Quick access to the facility is considered crucial because of fears that Iran would move incriminating equipment or documents.

It is still unclear what kind of incentives the United States and its allies might offer Iran if it completely opened, and ultimately dismantled, its nuclear program. On Saturday, Mr. Obama, in his weekly radio address, said he remained committed to building a relationship with Tehran.

“My offer of a serious, meaningful dialogue to resolve this issue remains open,” he said. “But Iran must now cooperate fully with the International Atomic Energy Agency, and take action to demonstrate its peaceful intentions.”

Now that the clandestine site has been revealed, however, American and European officials say they see an opportunity to press for broader disclosures. Iran will be told that to avoid sanctions, it must adhere to an I.A.E.A. agreement that would allow inspectors to go virtually anywhere in the country to follow suspicions of nuclear work.

Iran would also have to turn over documents that the agency has sought for more than three years, including some that intelligence agencies obtained that they say appear to suggest work was done on the design of warheads and technologies for detonating a nuclear core.

The negotiators would also insist, officials say, that Iran abide by I.A.E.A. rules, which Iran agreed to and then renounced, requiring it to announce in advance any plans to build nuclear facilities. Iran says it will adhere only to an older rule, requiring notification when a plant is about to become operational.

For several years, Iran has deflected I.A.E.A requests to interview key scientists, presumably including those who ran the highly secret Projects 110 and 111. American intelligence officials, after piercing Iran's computer networks in 2007, said they believe that those projects are at the center of nuclear design work. Iran has denied that the projects exist and has denounced as fabrications the documents the United States has shared with the agency, and with other nations.

Administration officials acknowledge that it is unlikely that Iran will accede to all of their demands. But they say this is their best chance to move the seven-year standoff over Iran's nuclear program sharply in their favor.

In interviews and public comments, the administration's tone has clearly changed in recent days, becoming tougher and more confrontational.

In an interview to be broadcast Sunday on ABC, Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates said the hidden facility was "part of a pattern of deception and lies on the part of the Iranians from the very beginning with respect to their nuclear program."

But he deflected a question that has been circulating inside the government: Is the Qum facility one of a kind, or just one of several hidden facilities that were intended to give Iran a covert means of enriching uranium, far from the inspectors who regularly visit a far larger enrichment facility, also once kept secret, at Natanz.

"My personal opinion is that the Iranians have the intention of having nuclear weapons," Mr. Gates concluded, though he said it was still an open question "whether they have made a formal decision" to manufacture weapons.

In recent years, Tehran has slowly and systematically cut back on the access of atomic sleuths. Early in 2006, for instance, it unilaterally began redirecting the international inspectors from dozens of sites, programs and personnel all over the Islamic republic to a single point: Natanz, where Iran is enriching uranium.

Pierre Goldschmidt, a former I.A.E.A. official who is now a senior associate at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, said the revelation of the secret enrichment plant drove home the urgent need for enhanced legal authority for tough inspections. "It's proof that, without additional verification authority, the agency cannot find undeclared nuclear activities," he said.

Beneath the dry language of reports issued every three months by the international agency lies the story of an intense cat-and-mouse game in which inspectors seek documents or interviews with key scientists.

The I.A.E.A.'s agenda of inspection is already huge, as is its record of failing to get the Iranians to address the most serious clues and charges, inconsistencies and suspicions.

The departing chief of the agency, Mohamed ElBaradei, recently argued that the case for urgent action against Iran was "hyped," even as he acknowledged that the country has refused, for two years, to answer his inspectors' questions about evidence suggesting that the country has worked on weapons design.

In May 2008, the atomic agency in Vienna issued an uncharacteristically blunt demand for more information from Tehran and, even more uncharacteristically, disclosed the existence of 18 secretly obtained documents suggesting Iran's high level of interest in atom bombs.

But the wording of the public portion of the 2007 United States National Intelligence Estimate had already frozen the effort to force Iran to reveal more. Its conclusion that weapons design work was halted in 2003 was a surprise that ended talk of sanctions.

President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad has called the report an exoneration.

In fact, the classified portion of the intelligence estimate listed more than a dozen suspect locations, though officials last week would not say whether the list included the site that was revealed Friday. It is also unclear if Washington and its allies believe they have enough evidence to justify demanding access to those sites.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2009/09/27/world/middleeast/27nuke.html>

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Al Jazeera
September 27, 2009

US Welcomes Iran Inspection Offer

Hillary Clinton, the US secretary of state, has welcomed Iran's decision to allow International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) inspectors into a newly disclosed uranium enrichment plant.

Clinton told reporters in New York on Saturday that "It is always welcome when Iran makes a decision to comply with the international rules and regulations, and particularly with respect to the IAEA".

She was reacting to comments from Ali Akbar Salehi, Iran's atomic energy chief, who said on Iranian state television on Saturday, "we have no problem for inspection within the framework of the agency regulations."

"This site will be under the supervision of the IAEA and will have a maximum of five per cent [uranium] enrichment capacity," Salehi said.

'Urgent talks'

The announcement of the new facility came just days before an October 1 meeting in Geneva between Iran and six world powers to discuss Tehran's disputed atomic programme.

The US, Russia, China, Britain, France and Germany are sending diplomats to meet their Iranian counterpart in Geneva in order to test how serious Iran is about coming clean on its uranium enrichment programme.

Clinton said the disclosure of a second uranium enrichment plant near the city of Qom adds urgency to the talks next week.

Obama and other Western leaders have threatened Tehran with new sanctions if it does not "come clean" during the Geneva talks.

"They are going to have to make a choice," Obama said at a G20 summit in Pittsburgh, US, on Friday.

"Are they going to go down the path of giving up the acquisition of nuclear weapons and abide by international standards in their pursuit of peaceful nuclear energy, or continue going down a path that will lead to confrontation?" he said.

Uranium enrichment lies at the heart of the nuclear controversy, as the process can be used to make an atomic bomb as well as producing fuel for nuclear reactors.

<http://english.aljazeera.net/news/americas/2009/09/2009926215539982171.html>

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Daily Express – United Kingdom
September 27, 2009

SAUDIS WILL LET ISRAEL BOMB IRAN NUCLEAR SITE

By Gordon Thomas and Camilla Tominey

INTELLIGENCE chief Sir John Scarlett has been told that Saudi Arabia is ready to allow Israel to bomb Iran's new nuclear site.

The head of MI6 discussed the issue in London with Mossad chief Meir Dagan and Saudi officials after British intelligence officers helped to uncover the plant, in the side of a mountain near the ancient city of Qom.

The site is seen as a major threat by Tel Aviv and Riyadh. Details of the talks emerged after John Bolton, America's former UN ambassador, told a meeting of intelligence analysts that "Riyadh certainly approves" of Israel's use of Saudi airspace.

Foreign Secretary David Miliband acknowledged that the danger of a nuclear arms race in the Middle East was "particularly potent" and refused to rule out military action altogether but he insisted: "We are 100 per cent focused on a diplomatic solution."

Gordon Brown, US President Barack Obama and French President Nicolas Sarkozy have warned Iran's leader Mahmoud Ahmadinejad that he must allow in weapons inspectors or face more sanctions.

The scene is set for a showdown next Thursday when Iranian officials meet representatives of the E3+3 group of Britain, France, Germany, the US, Russia and China in Geneva.

Significantly, Russia, which has previously resisted pressure for sanctions, said it also found the latest disclosures "disturbing".

The site near Qom was detected three years ago by British, US and French intelligence agencies.

Diplomatic sources said it could hold 3,000 centrifuges, capable of making enough enriched uranium to build a nuclear bomb each year.

<http://www.express.co.uk/posts/view/130251/Saudis-will-let-Israel-bomb-Iran-nuclear-site>

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Sunday Times of London
September 27, 2009

The Perils Of An Israeli Airstrike On Iran

By Tony Allen-Mills, in New York

American and Israeli military planners have been examining options for an attack on Iran for almost three decades. There is no shortage of possible targets: Iran has dozens of nuclear-related sites that are known to western officials.

Yet military experts in Washington and Tel Aviv acknowledge that a surprise airstrike would be likely to succeed only in delaying Iran's development of nuclear weapons. It would also present daunting logistical and political challenges with no guarantee that even a sustained assault on known facilities would eradicate Tehran's nuclear threat.

With President Barack Obama committed to diplomatic pressure, the most likely military scenarios involve Israeli airstrikes that would require mid-air refuelling and long flights through potentially hostile Arab air space. "Anyone who meets regularly with senior Israeli officials knows that Israel is considering military options ... with an understanding that they pose serious problems and risks," said Anthony Cordesman, a former Pentagon planner.

The three likeliest targets for an Israeli attack are reactors at Bushehr and Arak and a centrifuge production facility at Natanz. All are 1,000 miles or more from Israel, at the outer operating margins of Israeli air force bombers.

The Bushehr light water reactor is being built and fuelled by Russia and is not yet operational. Any attack on it would be certain to infuriate Moscow and might provoke the Russians into supplying Iran with more advanced anti-aircraft defences.

The heavy water reactor at Arak has been at least partially sheltered from air attack and is not expected to be completed for several years.

The Natanz facilities have also been sheltered underground and are defended by short-range Russian TOR-M surfaceto-air missiles.

The Israeli air force is equipped with US-supplied GBU-28 earth-penetrating bombs designed to destroy underground targets. Israel may also have developed its own variant of a nuclear-tipped bunker-busting bomb.

Yet the real problem for military planners is that no outside agency has a clear idea of where else Iran may have hidden its weapons-related technologies, notably the long-range missiles that might one day deliver nuclear warheads.

"It is doubtful that even the US knows all the potential targets," said Cordesman. "They may now be in too many places for an Israeli strike to destroy Iran's capabilities."

US experts believe that while Israel unquestionably has the military capability — and may have the political will — to mount a long-range attack, it could not sustain the kind of long-term barrage that Washington launched against Baghdad in the early phases of two Gulf wars.

The diplomatic uproar that would be certain to follow any Israeli attack might limit Tel Aviv to a one-off operation that it could never hope to repeat. "That would not be on the scale required to do more than delay parts of the Iranian programme," said Cordesman.

Only if America joined in would Iran have reason to worry. There is no immediate likelihood of a US military strike; but there are still some in Tel Aviv who believe that an Israeli raid might force Obama's hand and persuade the Pentagon to join the attack.

http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/middle_east/article6850890.ece

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London Daily Telegraph
27 September 2009

China 'May Support' UN Sanctions Against Iran

By Malcolm Moore in Shanghai

Beijing has come under increasing pressure from Washington to take a tough line against Iran. In private talks, Barack Obama, US president, has stressed to Hu Jintao, the Chinese president, "the centrality of the Iran nuclear issue to US national security interests", according to a White House aide.

Until now, Chinese diplomats have been tight-lipped over their stance, reiterating Beijing's policy of non-interference in foreign affairs. He Yafei, the Chinese deputy foreign minister, said on Friday: "Personally, I don't like the word punishment. I think all issues can only be solved through dialogue and negotiation."

China also relies on Iran for roughly 12 per cent of its oil imports and several Chinese firms have active business interests in Tehran. An online poll in the Global Times, a state-owned Chinese newspaper, showed that 80 per cent of Chinese opposed sanctions against Iran.

If this week's meetings with Iranian negotiators break down without a diplomatic solution, China would be likely to support sanctions, predicted Shen Dingli, a professor at the Centre for American Studies at Shanghai's Fudan University. "China has voted in favour of sanctions against Iran in the past," said Mr Shen. "The situation is similar now, so it is logical to assume China will vote in favour again."

China voted in favour of UN resolution 1737 in 2006, threatening sanctions against Iran for failing to halt uranium enrichment. That resolution halted the trade in nuclear technology with Iran and froze the assets of anyone involved in "sensitive nuclear activities". China also supported resolution 1747 in 2007, which added an arms embargo, and resolution 1803 in 2008 which imposed bank checks and cargo inspections.

Jin Canrong, vice director of the School of International Studies at Renmin University of China, said China's support for sanctions would "depend on the content of the sanctions". In addition, he said Chinese diplomats would be watching closely how Russia and its Middle Eastern allies, such as Saudi Arabia, reacted. "Currently it appears that Russia may vote for the sanctions," said Mr Jin. "In that case, China may well follow suit."

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/iran/6236887/China-may-support-UN-sanctions-against-Iran.html>

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Arutz Sheva _ Israel
September 28, 2009

US: Too Late to Stop Iran

By Hana Levi Julian

(IsraelNN.com) A top official in the Obama Administration has at last admitted what intelligence agents and Israeli government officials have been warning about for years: Iran intends to build a nuclear arsenal.

In media interviews with American television news networks scheduled to air Sunday, Defense Secretary Robert Gates said bluntly, "The Iranians have the intention of having nuclear weapons."

The statement was made just days after the discovery of a covert uranium enrichment site in Iran.

Even as the world expressed its outrage, however, Gates pointed out that there was little left to be done about it. "The reality is there is no military option that does anything more than buy time," he told *CNN*. "The estimates are three years or so."

In a separate interview with *ABC News*, he noted that Iran had engaged in "a pattern of deception and lies... from the very beginning," even as it claimed it was developing nuclear power for peaceful domestic energy purposes.

"If this were a peaceful nuclear program, why didn't they announce this site when they began to construct it?" Gates asked. "Why didn't they allow IAEA inspectors in from the very beginning?"

International Outrage, Demand for Disclosure

International leaders demanded the Islamic Republic immediately disclose all its nuclear efforts, including any programs involving weapons development, or face the consequences.

"The Iranian government must now demonstrate through deeds its peaceful intentions, or be held accountable to international standards and international law," said U.S. President Barack Obama following the discovery.

In a statement made at the G-20 meeting in Europe, French President Nicolas Sarkozy, British Prime Minister Gordon Brown and Obama ordered Iran to allow the United Nations International Atomic Energy Agency to inspect the newly revealed site.

"We will not let this matter rest," Brown said. Sarkozy noted that the G-6 had given Iran until December to comply or face additional, intensified economic sanctions.

Iranian War Games on Yom Kippur

While Iran is to meet with the U.S. and others next week to discuss its nuclear program, however, it is planning to conduct war games on Yom Kippur, the holiest day of the Jewish calendar.

The [announcement of the drill](#), which will include firing missiles that can hit Israel, was made at the same time the covert uranium enrichment site was revealed.

"Allah willing, this plant will be put into operation soon and will blind the eyes of the enemies," boasted Hojjatoleslam Mohammad Mohammadi Golpayegani, the head of the office of the Supreme Leader.

The Revolutionary Guards website said over the weekend that military exercises, including the simultaneous firing of missiles at targets, will begin Sunday and last for several days.

IDF: 'All Options Open'

Israeli officials do not necessarily agree that the military option would be ineffective.

IDF Chief of Staff Gabi Ashkenazi last week politely [warned the Islamic Republic](#) that the Jewish State is prepared to defend itself against any nuclear or other attack it might launch.

"We all understand that the best way of coping [with the Iranian nuclear threat] is through international sanctions," Ashkenazi told an interviewer on *IDF Army Radio*. However, he added, "Israel has the right to defend itself, and all options are open. The IDF's working premise is that we have to be prepared for that possibility, and that is exactly what we are doing."

<http://www.israelnationalnews.com/News/News.aspx/133615>

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Washington Post
September 28, 2009

Iran Tests Missiles On Eve Of Talks

By Walter Pincus and Karen DeYoung, Washington Post Staff Writers

Amid growing international pressure in advance of highly anticipated talks this week, Iran displayed its defiance of Western threats against its nuclear program by announcing Sunday that it had test-fired at least two short-range missiles. Senior Obama administration officials, meanwhile, said they had the international support necessary to impose crippling sanctions if Tehran does not stop construction on a new uranium-enrichment plant and allow immediate inspections.

"There is obviously the opportunity for severe additional sanctions" after disclosures two days ago by the United States, Britain and France of the secret Iranian facility beneath the mountains near the city of Qom, Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates said as reports emerged of the Iranian test launches.

The missile firings are not directly related to Iran's nuclear weapons program, and the tests apparently were planned before Friday's disclosures by President Obama and the European leaders. But Tehran used what it said was a military drill in the central Iranian desert to underscore its rejection of international efforts to halt its nuclear program, which it contends is intended for the peaceful production of electricity.

"We are going to respond to any military action in a crushing manner, and it doesn't make any difference which country or regime has launched the aggression," Gen. Hossein Salami, head of the Revolutionary Guard Air Force, said, according to Iranian state media.

Gates said all options remained on the table for dealing with Iran. But, he said, "the reality is, there is no military option that does nothing more than buy time" in preventing what the United States has said is Iran's determination to acquire nuclear weapons capability. "The only way you end up not having a nuclear-capable Iran is for the Iranian government to decide that their security is diminished by having those weapons, as opposed to strengthened."

Revelations about the new facility, which officials have said could be ready in 2010 to produce enough weapons-grade material for one nuclear bomb a year, did not change the overall U.S. assessment that Iran could produce a warhead within one to three years, he said.

"I think there is still room left for diplomacy," Gates said in an interview on CNN's "State of the Union," referring to a meeting scheduled for Thursday between Iran and members of the negotiating group, comprising the five permanent members of the U.N. Security Council and Germany. "The Iranians are in a very bad spot now because of this deception, in terms of all the great powers."

In a separate interview broadcast on CBS's "Face the Nation," Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton said the administration believed that Russia, which previously objected to harsher sanctions against Iran, was now moving in Washington's direction. "I think Russia has begun to see many more indications that Iran is engaging in threatening behavior," Clinton said in the interview, which was taped Friday.

"The Iranians keep insisting, no, no, this is just for peaceful purposes," she said. "Well, I think, as the Russians said in their statement, and as we believe, and what this meeting on October 1st is to test, is, fine, prove it, don't assert it, prove it."

Russia has also expressed satisfaction with the Obama administration's decision, announced early this month, to revise its missile defense program and cancel plans to install interceptors and radars in Poland and the Czech Republic. The administration said new intelligence indicated that Iran's program to produce the long-range missiles the system was designed to combat was less advanced than believed. A new system outlined by the administration would protect against medium- and short-range missiles.

Iran's strategy for almost a decade has been to publicize its short- and medium-range missile development programs while covertly pursuing a capability to produce a nuclear weapon, according intelligence analysts. Sunday's test announcement fit into that pattern.

"Missiles are for [Iranians] what both tactical and strategic air power are for the West," said Uzi Rubin, an Israeli engineer considered by U.S. intelligence analysts to be an expert on Middle East missile programs. The Iranians "are transparent. They want to deter any U.S. or Israeli attack [and] Iranian leaders openly wish for U.S. satellites to take pictures of their weapons sites and to see their capability," Rubin said in an interview Sept. 17 with Iran Watch, a Web site maintained by the Wisconsin Project on Nuclear Arms Control.

For years, U.S. intelligence has viewed Iran's military programs as directed primarily to meet what Tehran considers regional threats from neighbors such as Saddam Hussein's Iraq and Israel, aided by the United States. Nine years ago, the CIA's Robert Walpole, an expert on missiles, said what has remained the primary intelligence community view: "Tehran sees its short- and medium-range missiles not only as deterrents but also as force-multiplying weapons of war."

"Militarily, Iran continues to strengthen the three pillars of its strategic deterrence: surface-to-surface missiles, long-range rockets and aircraft for retaliation," Director of National Intelligence Dennis C. Blair told the Senate Armed Services Committee in March. But Blair went on to describe as "exaggerations" Iran's public statements about its ballistic missile capabilities.

A new U.S. intelligence community assessment completed in May and disclosed Sept. 17 said that Iran's development of an intercontinental ballistic missile has slowed but that its short-range, medium-range and intermediate-range ballistic missile programs have grown more rapidly than previously projected.

"What we have seen with the Iranians is that they're producing and deploying significant numbers of short and intermediate missiles," Gates said at the time of the new assessment.

Rubin, who was in charge of Israel's successful Arrow missile defense system, said that "the Iranians believe in conventional missiles" and that the country "will use its missiles if it is attacked." He noted Iran has developed

"bomblet warheads," ones that carry smaller explosives that are spread over an area. The United States has a variety of such weapons.

Although Iran has slowed down its ICBM program, the large, liquid-fueled rocket that launched Iran's first satellite in space in February was what Rubin called a "souped-up" version of its medium-range Shahab-3 missile. He said that two-stage missile could carry the weight of a nuclear device but that Iran's newest warhead, because of its shape and the volume it can carry, "is not a move toward accommodating a nuclear warhead."

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/09/27/AR2009092703295.html>

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RIA Novosti – Russia
28 September 2009

Iran Test-Fires Medium Range Missiles with Multiple Warheads

TEHRAN, September 28 (RIA Novosti) - Iran has conducted night-time test launches of the Shahab class medium range ballistic missiles with multiple warheads as part of large-scale missile drills which started on Sunday, local media reported.

The missile defense drills, dubbed the Great Prophet IV, are being held amid growing tension with the West over Iran's controversial nuclear program, after the Islamic Republic revealed last week that it was building a second uranium enrichment plant.

The Fars news agency reported that the night-time launches involved the Shahab-1 and Shahab-2 missiles with ranges of 350 km (217 miles) and 750 km (466 miles), respectively.

During the first stage of the Great Prophet IV exercises, Iran successfully tested short-range ground-to-ground Fateh-110, Tondar-69, and Zelzal-type missiles.

The third stage later on Monday will involve the launch of Iran's most powerful Shahab-3 ballistic missile with the operational range of 2,100 km (1,300 miles).

Iran is believed to possess one of the largest ballistic missile forces in the developing world, and is reportedly running an ambitious missile development program.

Revolutionary Guards Air Force chief Hossein Salami announced on Sunday that IRGC has acquired the capability to fire missiles from mobile launchers.

Washington recently said it had made a new assessment of Iran's missile capability and would now focus on protection of the increasing threat from Iran's short- and medium-range ballistic missiles.

http://en.rian.ru/military_news/20090928/156271478.html

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Xinhua News – China
September 28, 2009

Russia Urges Restraint over Iran Missile, Nuclear Reports

MOSCOW, Sept. 28 (Xinhua) -- Moscow has called for restraint over the recent missile and nuclear events in Iran, the Interfax news agency reported Monday citing an unnamed source from the Foreign Ministry.

"It is important not to yield to emotions. We must calm down and, what is the most important, start efficient negotiations," said the source when commenting on the Iranian test launches of intermediate-range missiles.

The unnamed source also said that Russia is "waiting for results of the Geneva meeting of the Sextet political directors and expect Iran to make some proposals."

Concerning Tehran's claim about its second uranium enrichment plant, the source said the information "must be verified and analyzed objectively."

"Only then can steps be taken," he added, noting the importance of commonsense prevailing over emotions.

Meanwhile a senior member of the Russian parliament said on Monday that it is possible for the international community to tighten sanctions against Iran, the RIA Novosti news agency reported.

"If one has to choose between war and tighter sanctions, the latter is preferable," said Mikhail Margelov, head of the upper house's international affairs committee.

Moscow has been calling for diplomatic approach over further sanctions concerning Iran's nuclear program.

However, Russian President Dmitry Medvedev said during his last week's trip to the United States that "sanctions are not the best way to deal successfully with Iran, but if we run out of all other options, we could launch sanctions based on international law."

Some media reports have interpreted such sayings as a sign that brings Moscow closer to the West in assessing the Iranian nuclear threat.

Iranian local English-language Press TV reported Monday that the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) has successfully test-fired several missiles including Sejil and Shahab-3 in recent two days, as part of a war game dubbed The Great Prophet IV that started on Sunday.

Iran earlier informed the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) of the existence of a second uranium enrichment facility, deepening concerns that it has a secret program to produce nuclear weapons.

The United Nations Security Council has so far levied three sets of sanctions on Iran. Officials from five permanent U.N. Security Council members -- the United States, Russia, China, Britain and France -- plus Germany are to discuss with Iran its latest package of proposals on global issues in Geneva on Oct. 1.

The United States and other Western powers suspect the program aims to produce nuclear-weapon material, but Tehran contends that the program has no military component and has steadfastly rejected calls to halt the effort.

http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2009-09/28/content_12122806.htm

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New York Times
September 29, 2009

Nuclear Debate Brews: Is Iran Designing Warheads?

By WILLIAM J. BROAD, MARK MAZZETTI and DAVID E. SANGER

This article is by William J. Broad, Mark Mazzetti and David E. Sanger.

WASHINGTON — When President Obama stood last week with the leaders of Britain and France to denounce Iran's construction of a secret nuclear plant, the Western powers all appeared to be on the same page.

Behind their show of unity about Iran's clandestine efforts to manufacture nuclear fuel, however, is a continuing debate among American, European and Israeli spies about a separate component of Iran's nuclear program: its clandestine efforts to design a nuclear warhead.

The Israelis, who have delivered veiled threats of a military strike, say they believe that Iran has restarted these "weaponization" efforts, which would mark a final step in building a nuclear weapon. The Germans say they believe that the weapons work was never halted. The French have strongly suggested that independent international inspectors have more information about the weapons work than they have made public.

Meanwhile, in closed-door discussions, American spy agencies have stood firm in their conclusion that while Iran may ultimately want a bomb, the country halted work on weapons design in 2003 and probably has not restarted that effort — a judgment first made public in a 2007 National Intelligence Estimate.

The debate, in essence, is a mirror image of the intelligence dispute on the eve of the Iraq war.

This time, United States spy agencies are delivering more cautious assessments about Iran's clandestine programs than their Western European counterparts.

The differing views color how each country perceives the imminence of the Iranian threat and how to deal with it in the coming months, including this week's negotiations in Geneva — the first direct talks between the United States and Iran in nearly 30 years.

In the case of the plant outside Qum, designed for uranium enrichment, some nuclear experts speculate that it is only part of something larger. But a senior American official with access to intelligence about it said he believed the secret plant was itself “the big one,” but cautioned that “it’s a big country.”

This distinction has huge political consequences. If Mr. Obama can convince Israel that the exposure of the Qum plant has dealt a significant setback to the Iranian effort, he may buy some time from the Israelis.

The officials spoke on the condition of anonymity because they were discussing classified intelligence assessments.

Uranium enrichment — the process of turning raw uranium into reactor or bomb fuel — is only one part of building a nuclear weapon, though it is the most difficult step. The two remaining steps are designing and building a warhead, and building a reliable delivery system, like a ballistic missile.

American officials said that Iran halted warhead design efforts in 2003, a conclusion they reached after penetrating Iran’s computer networks and gaining access to internal government communications. This judgment became the cornerstone of the 2007 intelligence report, which drew sharp criticism from Europe and Israel, and remains the subject of intense debate.

Disagreeing with the Americans, Israeli intelligence officials say they believe that Iran restarted weapons design work in 2005 on the orders of Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, the supreme leader. The Americans counter that the Israeli case is flimsy and circumstantial, and that the Israelis cannot document their claim.

German intelligence officials take an even harder line against Iran. They say the weapons work never stopped, a judgment made public last year in a German court case involving shipments of banned technology to Tehran. In recent interviews, German intelligence agencies declined to comment further.

Rolf Mowatt-Larssen, the former head of intelligence at the Department of Energy and a nuclear expert who worked for the C.I.A., said that the apparent differences of opinion among the world’s intelligence agencies might boil down to differences of interpretative style, or what he called “tradedcraft.”

“It’s often tradedcraft that gets us bollixed up,” he said in an interview. “It comes down to interpreting the same data in different ways, in looking at the same information and coming up with different conclusions.”

Some Israeli and European officials say the Americans are being overly cautious, having been stung by the Iraq intelligence debacle. The Americans deny this, insisting they are open-minded. One American intelligence official said the view of Iran’s weapons design program, “like every analytic judgment, is constantly checked and reassessed in light of new information, which comes in all the time.”

Each country bases its view on a combination of satellite imagery, human spies and electronic eavesdropping. And they do not necessarily share it all with one another or with the International Atomic Energy Agency, an investigative arm of the United Nations.

This has created plenty of bad blood with the United Nations agency. The departing chief of the I.A.E.A., Mohamed ElBaradei, recently argued that the case for urgent action against Iran was “hyped.” He acknowledged, however, that Iran has refused, for two years, to answer his inspectors’ questions about evidence suggesting that it was working on weapons design.

Now some European powers who fought with President George W. Bush over the evidence on Iraq — and were later vindicated by the failure to find unconventional weapons — are pressing Dr. ElBaradei to reveal what his agency has collected on its own, through regular inspections in Iran.

“Why doesn’t he provide us with the annexes of his report?” Bernard Kouchner, France’s foreign minister, asked last month, referring to material United Nations inspectors are believed to have compiled for internal discussions. Mr. Kouchner said those annexes contained “elements which enable us to ask questions about the reality of an atomic bomb. There are issues of warheads, of transport.”

Western intelligence officials now want to determine whether there are even more secret enrichment sites. Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates dodged the question of whether there were additional sites during a television appearance over the weekend. Washington has said there may be more than a dozen sites involved in the nuclear program, though there have been no public indications as to what they are used for.

Graham Allison, the author of “Nuclear Terrorism” and a Harvard professor who focuses on proliferation, said he could not conceive of Iran’s building only one such site.

"How likely is it that the Qum facility is all there is? Zero. A prudent manager of a serious program would certainly have a number of sites," he said.

After all, Mr. Allison said, the lesson Iran took away from Israel's destruction of an Iraqi reactor more than 25 years ago is to spread facilities around the country.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2009/09/29/world/middleeast/29nuke.html>

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Mirror – United Kingdom

September 29, 2009

' ALL OUR TARGETS ARE IN RANGE '

By Greig Box Turnbull; Jason Beattie

Iran ramped up international tension yesterday by testfiring long-range missiles capable of striking Israeli and US bases.

The Shahab-3 and Sajjil rockets were launched just days before worried world leaders meet in Geneva to discuss the rogue state's nuclear ambitions.

Iranian government officials insisted there was no link between the missile manoeuvres and the country's nuclear activities.

But Revolutionary Guard commander Gen Hossein Salami "All targets within the region, no matter where they are, will be within the range of these missiles."

He added: "For all those who might harbour dreams about undertaking military invasion against us, the message of this manoeuvre is firmness, destructiveness - real and endless resistance." The missiles are said to have a range of up to 1,250 miles - which would include parts of Europe.

Tv footage showed them soaring into the sky in desertlike terrain, to shouts of "Allahu Akbar" - God is Greatest.

The tests brought immediate condemnation around the world after last week's disclosure that Iran is building a second unadmitted: uranium enrichment plant at Fordo near the holy city of Qom.

British Foreign Secretary David Miliband said the missile testing was "part of an annual provocation" by Iran.

But he said it should not detract from Thursday's meeting between Iranian officials and representatives of six major powers, including America, China and Russia.

The UN has given President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad until then to come clean about how far Iran has gone towards developing nuclear weapons.

Failing that, Iran has been warned it will face international isolation and economic sanctions.

President Barack Obama said the discovery of the secret nuclear plant showed a "disturbing pattern" of evasion by Tehran.

And neither the US nor Israel have ruled out military action if diplomacy fails to resolve the nuclear stand-off.

Iran has threatened to respond to any attack by targeting US interests in the region and Israel, as well as closing the Strait of Hormuz - a vital route for world oil supplies.

Middle East expert Alex Vatanka said the missile tests were a deliberate show of strength.

He added: "It's to demonstrate some military muscle and say that the game is not yet over for Iran."

IRAN'S MISSILE ARSENAL

Fateh Known as the Conqueror, range 100miles. Could be used on allied targets in Afghanistan

Zelzal Shorter-range missile, used on militant training camps in Iraq in early 2000s and believed to have been supplied to Hezbollah in Lebanon. Range approximately 250 miles

Shahab-1 & SHAHAB-2 Predecessors to Shahab-3, Iran has around 450 of these Scud-type missiles. First used in Iran's 1980s war with Iraq, they have a range of 300 miles

Sajjil-1 & SAJJIL-2 Surface-to-surface missiles with a range of 1,200 miles. Run on solid fuel, which gives more accuracy than liquid fuel. Several can be fired quickly. After testing a Sajjil-2 in May, President Ahmadinejad said the missile had "landed exactly" on its target

Shahab-3 Based on North Korea's No Dong missiles. US claims range is 800 miles, Iran claims 1,500 miles. That would put both Israel and US bases in the Gulf in range. Experts say it could take less than 5 years to develop them to carry nuclear warheads

Safir In February, President Ahmadinejad claimed Iran had used a Safir-2 to put its first satellite, Omid, into space. Experts say it is basically the same as the Shahab-3

<http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/top-stories/2009/09/29/all-our-targets-are-in-range-115875-21708755/>

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Washington Post
September 29, 2009

U.S. Aims To Isolate Iran If Talks Fail

By Glenn Kessler, Washington Post Staff Writer

The Obama administration is laying plans to cut Iran's economic links to the rest of the world if talks this week over the country's nuclear ambitions founder, according to officials and outside experts familiar with the plans.

While officials stress that they hope Iran will agree to open its nuclear program to inspection, they are prepared by year's end to make it increasingly difficult for Iranian companies to ship goods around the world. The administration is targeting, in particular, the insurance and reinsurance companies that underwrite the risk of such transactions.

Officials are also looking at ways to keep goods from reaching Iran by targeting companies that get around trading restrictions by sending shipments there through third parties in Dubai, United Arab Emirates; Hong Kong; and other trading hubs.

The administration has limited options in unilaterally targeting Iran, largely because it wants to avoid measures so severe that they would undermine consensus among countries pressing the Iranian government. A military strike is also increasingly unpalatable because, officials said, it probably would only briefly delay any attempt by Iran to produce a nuclear weapon.

Whatever steps are taken, officials said, their goal would be to disrupt the Iranian economy across many sectors, particularly businesses that help support Iran's military and elite.

As a practical matter, the effort would build on efforts during the Bush administration that targeted leading Iranian banks and the key Iranian shipping line. In many cases, officials said that rather than impose new sanctions, they would need only to tighten enforcement of existing rules and regulations. Indeed, the key architect of President George W. Bush's effort, Treasury Undersecretary Stuart Levey, was retained by President Obama to ensure continuity in a possible squeeze on Iran.

In the case of the insurance industry, the administration would extend a prohibition against providing the "transfer of financial resources or services" to aid Iran's nuclear and missile programs, currently enshrined in U.N. Security Council Resolution 1737, to include insurance companies, export credits and the like.

Iran has raised tensions in the region with two days of missile tests, which were previously scheduled but came just days ahead of Thursday's meeting in Geneva between Iranian diplomats and representatives of major powers, including the United States. The administration is pressing for Iran to provide international inspectors immediate access to a second uranium-enrichment facility that was made public last week and to agree to serious talks to rein in its nuclear ambitions.

"Towards the end of the year, we'll be able to calculate how much progress" has been made in those talks, State Department spokesman P.J. Crowley said Monday. "If they continue to fail to answer the questions, then obviously there will be implications and consequences to that, as well."

The administration has sought to display a united front with its partners in the talks -- Britain, France, Germany, Russia and China. But Russia and China are especially wary of imposing more sanctions beyond those contained in three U.N. Security Council resolutions aiming at deterring Iran. Russian officials on Monday began backing off

from statements made last week by President Dmitry Medvedev suggesting that Russian resistance to sanctions was weakening.

Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov told Russian news agencies that the missile launches were "worrisome" but added, "I am convinced restraint is needed." Similarly, a Foreign Ministry source told Russian news agencies that Western powers needed to restrain themselves.

Both Russia and China have veto power on the U.N. Security Council, and reluctance by either to support additional sanctions would make it extremely difficult and time-consuming to erect additional international measures. But many European and Asian countries demand the cover of a U.N. resolution before taking economic action against another country. As a result, administration officials are focused on measures that they can argue are already authorized under existing resolutions.

"Ninety percent is enforcement," said Patrick Clawson, deputy director for research at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy. "Ten percent is new rules. They have the mechanisms in place."

Already, Levey has pressured more than 80 banks around the world to cut their ties to Iran, saying that any cost-benefit analysis would show that the business is not worth the risk of unwittingly assisting groups such as the Revolutionary Guard Corps. The U.S. government has also backed the message with tough fines against some foreign banks. The Dutch bank ABN Amro in 2005 agreed to pay \$80 million for violating U.S. sanctions against Iran and Libya, and Lloyds this year paid a \$350 million fine for secretly channeling Iranian and Sudanese money into the American banking system.

Insurance is the lifeblood of the shipping industry, but often insuring cargo consists of several layers. One critical aspect is reinsurance, in which an insurance company spreads the risk of a deal to dozens of other companies around the world. If the pool of potential reinsurers for Iranian goods shrinks because of international pressure, shipping would become increasingly difficult and costly for Iran.

Last year, as an example of the emerging strategy, the Treasury Department designated Iran's national maritime carrier, Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Lines (IRISL), as engaging in deceptive activities such as repeatedly changing its ships' names in an effort to shroud its involvement in illicit commerce and proliferation activities. The action essentially warned U.S. financial firms not to engage in any business with it or its subsidiaries. Officials expect the European Union to follow suit if talks with Iran fail to make progress this year, which would make it difficult for such companies as Lloyds or Munich Re to continue providing re-insurance for Iranian business.

Early this year, an IRISL-chartered ship, the Monchegorsk, was stopped at Cyprus carrying weaponry allegedly headed for Hezbollah -- an incident that U.S. officials said highlights the dangers of reputable financial firms dealing with Iranian entities.

Even so, the effort is not likely to produce instantaneous results.

"The idea of targeting insurance and reinsurance is a good one," said David F. Gordon, a former State Department official who is director of research at Eurasia Group, a political risk and consulting firm. "It is the only potential game-changer around. But I am not sure it will be enough to move the Iranians and do it in a timely fashion. The Iranians are very committed to the program."

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/09/28/AR2009092803931.html>

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San Francisco Chronicle
September 29, 2009

Iran Put Nuclear Site Near Base In Case of Attack

By ALI AKBAR DAREINI, Associated Press Writer

TEHRAN, Iran (AP) -- Iran's nuclear chief said Tuesday his country built its newly revealed uranium enrichment facility inside a mountain and next to a military site to ensure continuity of its nuclear activities in case of an attack.

Vice President Ali Akbar Salehi, who also heads the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran, reiterated that Iran is in talks with the International Atomic Energy Agency to set a timetable "soon" for an inspection of the site near the holy city of Qom.

He said the nuclear facility is next to a military compound of the Revolutionary Guard, Iran's most powerful military force, equipped with an air defense system. Salehi also said President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad told him Tuesday he named the enrichment plant "Meshkat," which means Lantern.

"This site is at the base of a mountain and was selected on purpose in a place that would be protected against aerial attack. That's why the site was chosen adjacent to a military site," Salehi told a news conference. "It was intended to safeguard our nuclear facilities and reduce the cost of active defense system. If we had chosen another site, we would have had to set up another aerial defense system."

Details about the newly revealed site and the fact that Iran kept its construction secret for years have raised more suspicion among experts and Western governments that Iran's nuclear program is aimed at producing weapons — something Tehran has long denied. The U.S. and its allies have strongly condemned Iran over the site and demanded it immediately come clean on its nuclear activities or face harsher international sanctions.

Salehi's disclosures came two days before the permanent members of the U.N. Security Council and Germany will meet with Iran in Geneva over the direction of its nuclear program.

President Barack Obama's administration is planning to push for new sanctions against Iran, targeting its energy, financial and telecommunications sectors if it does not comply with international demands to come clean about its nuclear program, according to U.S. officials.

Israel, which has attacked nuclear sites in Iraq and Syria previously, considers Iran's nuclear and missile development a strategic threat and Ahmadinejad has made repeated references to Israel's destruction. Israel has not ruled out a pre-emptive military strike on Iranian nuclear facilities.

But Israeli officials have been instructed not to comment on the newly revealed nuclear site or Iran's missile tests on Sunday and Monday.

Salehi said Iran will officially inform the IAEA of details about the site at a later date.

He said the Qom facility was a "contingency" facility to make sure that Iran's nuclear activities won't stop even for a moment.

"This is a contingency plan. It is one of pre-emptive measures aimed at protecting our nuclear technology and human work force. It is a small version of Natanz," he said. "This is to show that the Islamic Republic of Iran won't allow its nuclear activities stop under any circumstances even for a moment."

Natanz is an industrial-scale enrichment plant in central Iran while the Qom facility, according to Salehi, is a semi-industrial facility."

He gave the location of the site as about 60 miles (100 kilometers) south of capital Tehran on the road leading to Qom. That is about 20 miles (30 kilometers) north of Qom. He dismissed a statement by Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesman on Monday that the facility was near the village of Fordo, which is about 30 miles south of Qom.

A satellite image provided by DigitalGlobe and GeoEye shows a well-fortified facility built into a mountain about 20 miles northeast of Qom, with ventilation shafts and a nearby surface-to-air missile site, according to defense consultancy IHS Jane's, which did the analysis of the imagery. The image was taken in September.

GlobalSecurity.org analyzed images from 2005 and January 2009 when the site was in an earlier phase of construction and believes the facility is not underground but was instead cut into a mountain. It is constructed of heavily reinforced concrete and is about the size of a football field — large enough to house 3,000 centrifuges used to refine uranium.

Salehi said the site was selected after a careful study by the authorities. He said it was a formerly an ammunition depot before his agency took control of it a year ago and started construction that will eventually house a uranium enrichment plant.

He said the only connection between the Qom nuclear facility and the Guard is the Guard would protect it against possible attacks.

<http://sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/n/a/2009/09/26/international/i234739D22.DTL>

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September 29, 2009

Iran's Secret Site is the Missing Piece in Its Nuclear Puzzle

By Peter Grier - Staff writer of The Christian Science Monitor
WASHINGTON

Iran's newly revealed second centrifuge plant hidden in a mountainside fits neatly into Tehran's nuclear program, as if it were a long-missing piece to a jigsaw puzzle that's almost complete.

That is because Western intelligence analysts and experts outside government have long suspected that if Iran wanted to produce fissile material for a nuclear weapon, it would have to do so at a hidden facility. Known Iranian nuclear sites are too closely watched to serve that purpose.

Two years ago, in its 2007 National Intelligence Estimate of Iran's nuclear intentions and capabilities, the US intelligence community concluded that "we assess with moderate confidence that Iran probably would use covert facilities – rather than its declared nuclear sites – for the production of highly enriched uranium for weapon."

Information made public so far makes it appear the new site has all the attributes this predicted covert facility would have.

1. It's hidden

First of all, it may be dug into the side of a mountain. The US government has not said exactly where the suspect plant is located, noting only that it is near the city of Qom. But outside experts have already produced satellite imagery (see a pdf of the pictures here) of a likely location that appears to be a tunnel dug into the side of a ridge on a military facility 30 miles north east of Qom.

2. It's small

A US official who briefed reporters last week said it is designed to hold about 3,000 uranium-enriching centrifuges. That is too few to produce low-enriched uranium for a nuclear power reactor.

"But if you want to use the facility in order to produce a small amount of weapons-grade uranium, enough for a bomb or two a year, it's the right size," said the US official.

3. The timing fits

In 2003, an Iranian dissident group revealed the existence of Iran's first clandestine enrichment site, at Natanz. Shortly thereafter, Tehran agreed to submit to tougher International Atomic Energy Agency scrutiny.

Then, in 2005, tunneling began at the secret site near Qom, imagery suggest. Caught once, Iran may have been trying its luck at a second attempt at concealment.

Iran's other nuclear facilities

The site at Qom is just one of Iran's network of nuclear facilities. Nonproliferation experts have concerns about each in varying degrees.

NATANZ was Iran's first centrifuge enrichment facility – far larger than the newly-discovered plant. Plans call for it to eventually hold 47,000 centrifuges, which Iran says will produce low-enriched uranium for civilian power reactors.

Iran began producing uranium at this facility in mid-April, 2007, according to a recent Congressional Research Service update on the status of the Iranian nuclear program.

As of May 31, 2009, Iran had produced an estimated 1,430 kilograms of low-enriched uranium at this site, according to CRS.

"This quantity of [low-enriched uranium], if further enriched, could theoretically produce enough [highly-enriched uranium] for a nuclear weapon," concludes CRS.

ARAK will be home to a heavy-water nuclear-energy reactor and a facility that produces the heavy water needed to moderate the nuclear chain reaction in such a reactor.

This plant is a proliferation concern because its spent fuel will contain plutonium that is better suited for use in nuclear weapons than the spent fuel from light-water reactors.

Iran says the Arak plant is intended to replace an outdated research reactor in Tehran that is fueled with low-enriched uranium. It will produce medical isotopes when it becomes operational, according to Iranian officials. According to CRS, the Arak reactor is likely to come on-line in 2013.

BUSHEHR is the site of a long-planned 1,000-megawatt light-water nuclear power plant. Begun in 1975 under the Shah, it was abandoned after the 1979 revolution. In 1995, Iran signed a contract with Russia to complete the facility, but the work has often been delayed.

US officials worry that plutonium could be separated from Bushehr's spent fuel, although, as previously noted, light-water reactors are generally considered to be more proliferation-resistant than heavy-water models.

Fuel loading at Bushehr is scheduled to take place this fall. Russia has argued that the project should not be a concern because it will be under close IAEA inspection.

<http://www.csmonitor.com/2009/0929/p02s05-usfp.html>

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Bloomberg.com

September 29, 2009

Iran May Quit Nuclear Treaty If Geneva Talks Fail

By Ali Sheikholeslami

Sept. 29 (Bloomberg) -- Iran may end its participation in the global nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty if talks this week fail to resolve the international dispute over the country's atomic development, a member of the parliament's National Security and Foreign Policy Committee said.

The West has always had a "carrots and sticks" approach to Iran, said lawmaker Mohammad Karami-Rad, who urged the powers to "end their excuses and negotiate on significant issues," the state-run Islamic Republic News Agency reported. "If Iran remains under Zionist pressures and U.S. bullying and if the 5+1 talks fail, the parliament will take clear stands, such as quitting the NPT," he said, referring to Israel and the five permanent members of the UN Security Council plus Germany

A delegation from Iran will meet in Geneva on Oct. 1 with representatives of the world powers to discuss the Iranian uranium-enrichment program, a project that has prompted three sets of United Nations sanctions. Iran told the UN atomic agency on Sept. 21 that it's building a second enrichment plant. The U.S., the U.K. and France on Sept. 25 demanded immediate access to the site by UN inspectors.

Uranium enrichment is at the center of Western concerns about Iran's nuclear program. The process isolates a uranium isotope needed to generate fuel for a nuclear power reactor; in higher concentrations it can be used to make a bomb. Iran denies it is developing a nuclear weapon and insists the enrichment is needed for civilian uses, such as the production of electricity.

Further Sanctions

Iran's construction of the underground plant may prompt additional economic sanctions, including restrictions on banking and on oil and gas technology, U.S. Defense Secretary **Robert Gates** told CNN Sept. 27. Iran denies it violated the rules of the UN's International Atomic Energy Agency, saying it complied with a requirement to notify the IAEA of the facility's existence at least 18 months before uranium enters the plant.

Iran tested several missiles this week, including its two-stage, solid-fuel Sejil and the liquid-fuel Shahab-3, which both put Israel within reach. In May, Iran launched a Sejil-2, which it said has a range of 2,000 kilometers (1,240 miles).

The Obama administration said yesterday Iran's missile test was typical of the "provocative" acts by the country.

The Iranian parliament urged the leading UN powers to use the "historic opportunity" at the Geneva talks. In a statement, 239 lawmakers today warned that the country may adopt other alternatives if the powers "repeat their mistakes," IRNA reported.

<http://www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=20601087&sid=a7ooM3EDGdyE>

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New York Times
September 30, 2009

Iran Insists on Its 'Rights' to Nuclear Program

By ALAN COWELL and NAZILA FATHI

PARIS — One day after it said it test-fired missiles capable of striking targets 1,250 miles from its soil, Iran said Tuesday it would soon offer a timetable for international inspectors to visit a hitherto secret nuclear enrichment facility, but was not prepared to renounce its nuclear program or debate its “rights” to operate the previously undeclared plant.

The existence of the facility near the holy city of Qum was revealed last Friday by President Obama and the leaders of France and Britain, at the same time as the United Nations International Atomic Energy Agency’s announced that Tehran had informed it of the plant’s existence earlier in the week.

Coming only days before the first direct contact between the United States and Iran at international talks in Geneva on Thursday, the disclosure sharply raised tensions between Tehran and Washington, fueling suspicions that Iran is secretly seeking a nuclear weapons capacity — a charge it has long denied.

Alluding to the talks on Thursday, Ali Akbar Salehi, the head of Iran’s Atomic Energy Organization, told reporters in Tehran on Tuesday: “We are not going to discuss anything related to our nuclear rights, but we can discuss about disarmament, we can discuss about non-proliferation and other general issues.”

“The new site is part of our rights and there is no need to discuss it,” he said, adding Tehran would not abandon its nuclear activities “even for a second,” Reuters reported. Western concerns over the nuclear program and its hostile potential deepened on Monday when Iran said that its Revolutionary Guards had test-fired missiles with sufficient range to strike Israel, parts of Europe and American bases in the Persian Gulf.

“Iranian missiles are able to target any place that threatens Iran,” a senior Revolutionary Guards official, Abdullah Araqi, was quoted as saying by the semiofficial Fars news agency.

The reported tests were of the liquid-fueled Shahab-3 and the solid-fueled Sejil-2 missiles, which can travel up to 1,250 miles. The test-firings recalled a debate among spy agencies in the United States, Germany and Israel over whether Iran planned to build not only a nuclear weapon but also the means to launch it.

Press TV, Iran’s English-language satellite broadcaster, also quoted Mr. Salehi on Tuesday, as saying the government was preparing a “timetable for inspection of its recently-announced nuclear facility.” Mr. Salehi was speaking in an interview late Monday, Press TV said. It did not say when the international weapons inspectors would be permitted to view the plant, which is not yet in operation, according to Iranian accounts.

Mr. Salehi repeated Iranian assurances that the new plant will “produce enriched uranium of up to 5 percent, consistent with its nuclear energy program.” That level of enrichment is far less than required for nuclear weapons.

“Salehi noted that the plant is under construction within the framework of the I.A.E.A. regulations,” Press TV said. It quoted the official as saying, “Iran has taken all the precautionary steps to safeguard its nuclear facilities.”

Mr. Salehi accused Western leaders of politicizing Iran’s nuclear activities but promised that Iran would seek to resolve the dispute over the newly disclosed plant “both politically and technically” with the I.A.E.A. and with the outside powers that deal with the issue — the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council plus Germany.

Mr. Salehi described as “baseless” accusations that Iran was planning to use the hitherto secret plant to make weapons-grade material. According to Press TV, he said it was “against our ethics and religion” to build nuclear weapons.

“It is against our tenets, it is against our religion to produce, use, hold or have nuclear weapons or arsenal, how can we more clearly state our position? Since 1974 we have been saying this,” Mr. Salehi was quoted as saying.

Despite such protestations, the Obama administration is now working to assemble a package of tougher sanctions, which could include a cutoff of investments to the country’s oil and gas industry as well as restrictions on many more Iranian banks, senior administration officials said Sunday.

A spokesman for the Iranian Foreign Ministry said at a news conference Monday that Iran’s missile tests had been planned for some time and were not linked to the nuclear dispute, Press TV reported.

Less than two weeks ago Mr. Obama canceled a plan from the administration of George W. Bush to station a radar facility in the Czech Republic and 10 ground-based interceptors in Poland as part of what had been described as a shield against potential missile attacks from Iran.

The Obama administration now plans to deploy smaller SM-3 interceptors by 2011, first aboard ships and later in Europe, possibly in Poland or the Czech Republic.

The military exercise and escalating tensions with the West coincide with a period of political uncertainty in Iran, in the aftermath of Iran's disputed June 12 election.

On Monday a protest erupted at Tehran University, the first of the new school year and the first since the demonstrations that had followed the vote, when opponents accused President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad of falsifying results.

The Revolutionary Guards were essential to safeguarding the president's victory and led the violent crackdown after the election that opposition leaders say killed at least 72 people.

The force, which also runs the country's missile program, remains close to Mr. Ahmadinejad and accountable only to the supreme religious leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

The Revolutionary Guards, in addition to being part of Iran's military, has in recent years become one of the largest conglomerates in the country. It has been awarded more than 750 construction, oil and gas contracts and has its own ports.

On Sunday, in a deal that underlined its expanding economic and political power, the Revolutionary Guards purchased just over 50 percent of Iran's Telecommunication Company in a \$7.8 billion deal.

The organization's political influence has also increased, with many of its members elected to Parliament in 2003 or appointed as cabinet ministers in 2004.

Now, the Revolutionary Guards' hold on the country's telecommunications systems will give it further control over land-line, Internet and cellphone services. On election day, the country's text messaging service was cut off; the cellphone network was disconnected during the unrest that followed. Opposition leaders accused the government of misusing state-run services.

The deal announced Sunday was part of the government's plan to privatize business sectors. But critics have complained that the government is awarding institutions close to it while the real private sector is excluded. The Revolutionary Guards' unit involved in the deal competed only with a company affiliated with the Basij, a paramilitary organization that assisted the Revolutionary Guards in putting down the postelection protests.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2009/09/30/world/middleeast/30tehran.html>

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Reuters

September 28, 2009

N Korea Promises UN to Combat Nuclear Proliferation

UNITED NATIONS, Sept 28 (Reuters) - North Korea's atomic weapons were for deterrent purposes only and will be handled "in a responsible manner" to ensure there was no nuclear proliferation, a senior official said on Monday.

But in a speech to the U.N. General Assembly, Vice Foreign Minister Pak Kil-yon said the Korean peninsula could only be denuclearized if the United States abandoned a policy of "confrontation" with Pyongyang.

Pak's speech came less than four weeks after the isolated communist state said it was in the final stage of enriching uranium, a process that would give it a second path to making a nuclear weapon. Hitherto it has mostly used plutonium.

In May, North Korea conducted a second nuclear test. Before that, U.S. officials said it had produced about 50 kg (110 pounds) of plutonium, which experts say would be enough for six to eight weapons.

North Korea has not shown, however, that it has a working nuclear bomb.

Charging that Washington had made nuclear threats against North Korea, Pak said Pyongyang had concluded it had no choice but to "rely on our dependable nuclear possession to ensure nuclear balance of the region."

But, he said, "The mission of our nuclear weapon is to deter a war. We will only possess nuclear deterrent to such an extent as to deter military attack and its threat against our country."

North Korea, he said, "while in possession of nuclear weapons, will act in a responsible manner in management, use and non-proliferation of nuclear weapons as well as in nuclear disarmament."

North Korea joined the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty in 1985 but left in 2003 after the United States confronted it with evidence Washington said pointed to a covert uranium enrichment program. The United States suspects the impoverished North has sought to sell its nuclear know-how abroad.

Pak said Pyongyang had always sought denuclearization of the Korean peninsula, but for that, "the U.S. administration must discard (its) old concept of confrontation and show the 'change' in practice, as it recently stated on several occasions."

The minister said it was North Korea's policy to react to dialogue with dialogue but he made no direct reference to nuclear talks among the two Koreas, China, Japan, Russia and the United States, which halted about a year ago.

China said on Monday its prime minister, Wen Jiabao, would visit North Korea next week, raising speculation the trip could help revive the stalled talks.

Pak launched a stinging attack on the U.N. Security Council, which approved expanded sanctions in June against North Korea after its nuclear test. He said the 15-nation body had "become more arrogant, resulting in further inequality and prevalent double standards in international relations."

Pak proposed that Security Council decisions should be submitted to the 192-nation General Assembly for approval. (Editing by Philip Barbara)

<http://www.reuters.com/article/latestCrisis/idUSN28201110>

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Financial Times – United Kingdom
September 28, 2009

India Raises Nuclear Stakes

By James Lamont in New Delhi and James Blitz in London

India can now build nuclear weapons with the same destructive power as those in the arsenals of the world's major nuclear powers, according to New Delhi's senior atomic officials.

They said India had built weapons with yields of up to 200 kilotons, which would be considered a "proper strategic deterrent" by the global community. A nuclear weapon above 50 kilotons is considered high yield. India's enhanced capability gives it a considerable edge over Pakistan, its nuclear-armed arch-rival.

India's declaration came as Iran launched war games on Sunday, testing short-range missiles, just days after announcing it had been building a second uranium enrichment plant. Western governments seized upon this as further evidence that Tehran was in breach of UN obligations.

India's move follows heated domestic debate about whether its last nuclear tests in 1998 were successful. K Santhanam, a senior scientist at the Defence Research and Development Organisation, had disputed the thermonuclear test at the Pokhran range in Rajasthan, claiming the yield was lower than had been expected.

The debate has fuelled speculation that India might be getting ready for another nuclear test, a proposition that some in the international security community consider seriously.

A test would also raise tensions with Pakistan and jeopardise a newly signed civilian nuclear deal between New Delhi and Washington.

India, which has refused to sign the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, started developing its nuclear arsenal in 1974. New Delhi is estimated to have manufactured weapons-grade plutonium for at least 100 warheads. Senior Indian officials have insisted that the 1998 tests were successful and deny the need for anything more than computer simulations to gauge the yield of nuclear weapons.

“The May 1998 tests were fully successful in terms of achieving their scientific objectives and the capability to build fission and thermonuclear weapons with yields up to 200 kilotons,” said R Chidambaram, the government’s principal scientific adviser and former chief of the Atomic Energy Commission.

Military experts expressed scepticism about whether such a powerful weapon could be successfully deployed without greater testing.

Pakistani analysts, meanwhile, were sanguine in the face of Indian claims. “The bottom line is that Pakistan benefits from the knowledge that it has enough nuclear assets to ward off the threat of a nuclear attack,” said Shahid ur Rehman, author of a book on the lead-up to Pakistan’s own nuclear test in 1998.

Barack Obama, the US president, appealed at the UN General Assembly for more countries to embrace the NPT. He has proposed that countries, such as India, join as non-nuclear weapons states. India vigorously rejected his proposal in a letter to the president of the UN Security Council.

<http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/d63f3a70-ab90-11de-9be4-00144feabdc0.html>

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Press Trust of India
September 29, 2009

Ind Will Wipe Off Pak, But At Cost Of 500 mn People

By Lalit K Jha

New York, Sept 29 (PTI) In the event of Indo-Pak nuclear war, India will emerge as the ultimate winner after wiping off Pakistan, but lose up to 500 million of its own people, a book on former US President Bill Clinton's presidential years has claimed.

Pulitzer Prize-Winning author and historian Taylor Branch claimed that the Indian leaders had portrayed such a scenario in the event of an Indo-Pak nuclear war (during Kargil conflict in 1999) to the then US President Clinton.

The portion on nuclear warfare appears in the chapter titled 'Eight Missiles in Baghdad', in which the author of the book claims that Clinton told him that New Delhi would nuke Pakistan annihilating the entire country, if anyone in Islamabad triggered the nuclear bombs against it.

http://www.ptinews.com/news/304990_Ind-will-wipe-off-Pak--but-at-cost-of-500-mn-people

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New York Times
September 26, 2009

Venezuela Says Iran Is Helping It Look For Uranium

By Simon Romero

A senior aide to Venezuela’s president, Hugo Chávez, said Friday that Iran was assisting Venezuela in the detection and testing of uranium deposits found in remote areas of Venezuela. The disclosure points to the importance Mr. Chávez has placed on the development of a nuclear energy program.

“Iran is helping us with geophysical aerial probes and geochemical analyses,” Rodolfo Sanz, Venezuela’s minister of basic industries and mining, told reporters outside a meeting of Latin American and African leaders in Porlamar, Venezuela.

“We could have important reserves of uranium,” Mr. Sanz said, adding that preliminary tests “indicate the existence of uranium in western parts of the country and in Santa Elena de Uairén,” near the border with Brazil. He also rejected any suggestion that Venezuela might be involved in helping supply uranium for Iran’s nuclear program.

President Obama and British and French leaders on Friday accused Iran of building a secret underground plant to manufacture nuclear fuel.

Iran is Venezuela’s top ally outside Latin America, working with Mr. Chávez’s government on projects, including car manufacturing and military training. Mr. Chávez has defended the alliance, contending that it is built around cooperation between two top oil-exporting nations.

Mr. Chávez has denied that Venezuela wants to develop nuclear weapons. Venezuelan scientists say significant obstacles remain in advancing the country's nuclear ambitions, notably a scarcity of qualified scientific personnel, potentially delaying for years the start of feasible nuclear-energy projects.

Still, Mr. Chávez has moved ahead in seeking the help of other countries. This month, he said he had reached an agreement with Russia, the top weapons supplier to Venezuela, for assistance in creating a nuclear energy program.

Mr. Chávez also referred this month to a plan to create what he called a "nuclear village" in Venezuela with technological assistance from Iran. This announcement raised concern in some countries, including the United States and France, over the possibility that Venezuela could help Iran bypass a 2006 ban on exporting materials related to its nuclear program to United Nations countries.

"We are not calling into question Venezuela's right to the peaceful use of nuclear energy, but any transfer from Iran in the nuclear field, including to Venezuela, would be a violation of the resolutions of the Security Council," Christine Fages, a French Foreign Ministry spokeswoman, said this month.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2009/09/26/world/americas/26venez.html>

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New York Times
September 27, 2009

Venezuelan Minister Denies Iran Is Helping It

PORLAMAR, Venezuela (AP) — Venezuela's minister of science and technology denied Saturday that Iran was helping his country seek uranium, saying Venezuela was working only with Russia to detect deposits of the radioactive metal.

Skip to next paragraph Related U.S. to Demand Inspection of New Iran Plant 'Within Weeks' (September 27, 2009)
Times Topics: Venezuela

The official, Jesse Chacón, said Venezuela, which has vast deposits of various minerals and precious stones including gold, diamonds and nickel, was also seeking deposits of other natural resources and was taking aerial photos to determine what it should exploit.

"All the minerals in the world are here," Mr. Chacón told reporters.

The country's minister of mining, Rodolfo Sanz, said Friday that Iran was helping Venezuela detect uranium deposits and that initial evaluations suggested reserves were significant.

His announcement was made the same day world leaders criticized the Islamic republic for secretly building a uranium enrichment plant that could be used to make an atomic bomb.

Mr. Sanz declined to respond to reporters when questioned Saturday about the conflicting statements.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2009/09/27/world/americas/27venez.html>

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Washington Post
OPINION
September 26, 2009

Dealing With Iran's Deception

By Howard L. Berman

Tehran could soon have humankind's most frightening weapon if substantial diplomatic progress is not made in the coming days.

The United States, along with its partners Russia, China, Britain, France and Germany (known as the "P5 plus one"), will sit down on Thursday with a representative of Iran. From the American perspective, the principal item on the agenda is Iran's illicit nuclear program. Iran's leaders have said they are prepared to talk about virtually anything but that. If diplomacy does not rapidly deliver results, the United States will have to adopt tough measures to stop Iran from obtaining nuclear arms.

For years Iran spurned diplomatic overtures to address the threat posed by its nuclear program. Meanwhile, its efforts have progressed to the point that it already has enough low-enriched uranium to produce fuel for at least one nuclear bomb.

Tehran's admission this week that it has secretly constructed a second enrichment plant suggests that its program may be further along than we had imagined. We do not have much time to wait.

I support President Obama's efforts to engage Iran. Thanks to these efforts, no one will be able to say that we failed to do everything possible to give Iran a diplomatic way out. But there is more than ample reason to be skeptical that the regime in Tehran intends to come clean about its nuclear program.

Friday's revelations about the second uranium enrichment plant cast a particularly dark shadow over Iranian intentions, and they come after more than 20 years of deception and stonewalling by Tehran.

It is critical that we set clear timelines and benchmarks by which to judge Iranian intentions as well as unambiguous consequences if Iran fails to meet the criteria. The window for Iran to demonstrate seriousness of purpose should start with the Oct. 1 meeting and, as Obama has indicated, should close by the end of the year.

If Tehran is serious about engagement, it should agree early on to meaningful steps, such as a "freeze for freeze" in which Iran does not add to its enrichment capabilities -- including halting construction on the second enrichment facility, as verified by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) -- in exchange for an agreement that no additional international sanctions would be imposed during this period. Iran must also agree to verifiably suspend nuclear enrichment by year's end. Were that to happen, the international community could enter into detailed negotiations with Iran about all issues of concern and the incentives that could be offered in exchange for a satisfactory understanding of Iran's nuclear intentions and assurance that Iran would not be able to acquire a nuclear weapons capability.

But if, as I expect, that scenario does not come to pass, we should be ready immediately to impose what Secretary of State Hillary Clinton has called "crippling sanctions." Iran's economy is in terrible shape, and the regime no longer can take for granted the support of its citizens. The best conduit for such sanctions would be a mandatory U.N. Security Council resolution. That would require the difficult-to-obtain acquiescence of Russia and China. Failing that, multilateral agreement by the Europeans, Japan, Australia and Canada to impose coordinated financial, trade and investment sanctions would be a serious alternative. If even that proves impossible, I believe the threat posed to our national security by the possibility of a nuclear-armed Iran obligates the United States to impose sanctions unilaterally.

The Iran Refined Petroleum Sanctions Act, which I, along with Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, the ranking Republican on the House Foreign Affairs Committee, introduced, provides such authority to act. The bill, which has more than 300 co-sponsors (its companion in the Senate has 75 co-sponsors), provides President Obama with a mandate to increase the level of financial penalties against Iran and would prevent companies that facilitate the provision of gasoline and other refined petroleum products to Iran from doing business in the United States. Much of the world's trade is conducted through international financial transactions in dollars that must be cleared through American banks. So if the United States were to prevent any bank doing business with Iranian banks from clearing dollar transactions, the Iranian banking system would collapse. And because Iran has to import 25 percent or more of its daily demand for refined petroleum, its economy would be seriously impaired if it were denied those imports. Indeed, a credible threat of both these sanctions might provide the best chance to persuade the Iranian regime to agree to suspend its nuclear enrichment.

To have a sanctions bill ready for the president's signature by early next year, we must start the process for passing it now. I intend to bring our bill to committee for consideration next month. Should negotiations with Iran not succeed and should multilateral sanctions not get off the ground, we must be prepared to do what we can on our own.

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/09/25/AR2009092503279.html>

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Wall Street Journal
OPINION
September 27, 2009

There Are Only Two Choices Left on Iran

By ELIOT A. COHEN

Unless you are a connoisseur of small pictures of bearded, brooding fanatical clerics there is not much reason to collect Iranian currency. But I kept one bill on my desk at the State Department because of its watermark—an atom superimposed on the map of that country that harbors the Natanz nuclear site. Only the terminally innocent should have been surprised to learn that there is at least one other covert site, whose only purpose could be the production of highly enriched uranium for atom bombs.

Pressure, be it gentle or severe, will not erase that nuclear program. The choices are now what they ever were: an American or an Israeli strike, which would probably cause a substantial war, or living in a world with Iranian nuclear weapons, which may also result in war, perhaps nuclear, over a longer period of time.

Understandably, the U.S. government has hoped for a middle course of sanctions, negotiations and bargaining that would remove the problem without the ugly consequences. This is self-delusion. Yes, British Prime Minister Gordon Brown and French President Nicolas Sarkozy stood side by side with President Barack Obama in Pittsburgh and talked sternly about lines in the sand; and yes, Russian President Dimitry Medvedev hinted that some kind of sanctions might, conceivably, be needed. They said the same things to, and with, President George W. Bush.

Though you would not know it to listen to Sunday talk shows, a large sanctions effort against Iran has been underway for some time. It has not worked to curb Tehran's nuclear appetite, and it will not. Sooner or later the administration, whose main diplomatic initiatives thus far have been a program of apologies and a few sharp kicks to small allies' shins, will have to recognize that fact.

The Iranian regime wants nuclear weapons and has invested vast sums to get both the devices and the means to deliver them. The Russians and Chinese have made soothing murmurs of disapproval but have repeatedly made it clear that they will not go along with measures that would cripple the Iranian economy (and deprive them of markets). German and Swiss businessmen will happily sell Iran whatever goods their not very exacting governments will permit, and our terrified Arab allies have nothing like the military capability to match their own understandable fears. So let's be serious about the choice, because we have less than a year to make it.

An Israeli strike may set back the Iranian program by some short period of time. What the Israelis can do is unclear: They play their tactical cards close to their vest, and they would take different approaches, and accept different risks, than the U.S. Air Force would. No surprise there, given that they believe, with reason, that the looming issues are existential.

But even if they achieved temporary success, it would be just that, because the Iranian program is very different from the Iraqi Osirak reactor that the Israelis nailed so precisely in 1981. It is far more dispersed and protected, and is based on thousands of centrifuges rather than a single nuclear reactor. Moreover, the chances are that it would evoke outrage throughout the Middle East (although Arab governments would privately rejoice at the event), and probably provoke an Iranian reaction that could involve a very large war as the Israelis are attacked by, and retaliate against, Iran's proxies in the Levant and throughout the world.

An American attack would be more effective, but it would take longer and probably lead to real warfare in the Persian Gulf, disrupting oil supplies and producing global responses. More to the point, it is difficult to believe that the Obama administration has the stomach for war. Its appalling public case of nerves over the war in Afghanistan—a "war of necessity," as of only a few months ago—is indicative of its true temper. And if President Obama does not have the courage to accept hazards and ugly surprises, and if he cannot bring himself to deploy his rhetorical skills to the mobilization of opinion at home and abroad, he should not start a shooting war, even if the Iranians are already waging one against us.

That leaves living with an Iranian bomb. But this too has enormous hazards. It will engender—it has already quietly engendered—a nuclear arms race in the region. It will embolden the Iranian regime to make much more lethal mischief than it has even now. In a region that respects strength, it will enhance, not diminish, Iranian prestige. And it may yield the first nuclear attack since 1945 some time down the road.

At the heart of the problem is not simply the nuclear program. It is the Iranian regime, a regime that has, since 1979, relentlessly waged war against the U.S. and its allies. From Buenos Aires to Herat, from Beirut to Cairo, from Baghdad to, now, Caracas, Iranian agents have done their best to disrupt and kill. Iran is militarily weak, but it is masterful at subversive war, and at the kind of high-tech guerrilla, roadside-bomb and rocket fight that Hezbollah conducted in 2006. American military cemeteries contain the bodies of hundreds, maybe thousands, of American servicemen and servicewomen slain by Iranian technology, Iranian tactics, and in some cases, Iranian operatives.

The brutality without is more than matched by the brutality within—the rape, torture and summary execution of civilians by the tens of thousands, down, quite literally, to the present day. This is a corrupt, fanatical, ruthless and

unprincipled regime—unpopular, to be sure, but willing to do whatever it takes to stay in power. With such a regime, no real negotiation, based on understandings of mutual interest and respect for undertakings is possible.

It is, therefore, in the American interest to break with past policy and actively seek the overthrow of the Islamic Republic. Not by invasion, which this administration would not contemplate and could not execute, but through every instrument of U.S. power, soft more than hard. And if, as is most likely, President Obama presides over the emergence of a nuclear Iran, he had best prepare for storms that will make the squawks of protest against his health-care plans look like the merest showers on a sunny day.

<http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052970204518504574420641457091318.html>

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Tel Aviv Ha'aretz - Jerusalem

ANALYSIS

September 27, 2009

How Many More Secret Nuke Sites Does Iran Have?

By Yossi Melman

Intelligence experts in the West and in Israel assumed for some time that a country that is seeking to acquire nuclear weapons would also develop a secret installation for enriching uranium so that it could hide its activities from the international community.

At such an installation, it would then be able to enrich uranium to a sufficiently high level that it would be usable as fissile material in a nuclear bomb. Indeed, what has taken place over the past few days has been the realization of those estimates, with Iran announcing that it had in place an additional installation for uranium enrichment, beyond the one the inspectors of the International Atomic Energy Agency were aware of in Natanz.

Iran's announcement was made so as to preempt the news first being released by the media or foreign governments. However, Iran made no real gain with its admission. On the contrary, it has only aroused additional suspicions regarding its plans, incensed the international community, and embarrassed its few supporters. Even Russia, which has to date backed Iran and prevented the imposition of harsh sanctions against Tehran, appears to be losing patience.

Iran's timing was especially bad, with the announcement about the Qom facility coming only days before the scheduled October 1 start of talks in Geneva with the permanent members of the Security Council and Germany. Those talks are intended to resolve the issue of Tehran's nuclear program. The announcement also came a short while after the IAEA's annual meeting, just after the UN General Assembly gathering, and on the day the G-8 met in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. In all settings, Iran was topped the agenda.

The announcement resulted in a demand from the leaders of the U.S., France and the United Kingdom that Iran allow international inspectors to enter the site at Qom. Iran confirmed that it intends to do just that and is trying to calm things by saying that only low-level enrichment took place at the facility, just like at Natanz - intended for the peaceful purpose of producing electricity.

But the world is now finding it difficult to believe a regime that has in the past been caught lying more than once. According to Tehran, the newly publicized installation is small, and can house only 3,000 centrifuges, which are too few for industrial production. This, coupled with Iran's efforts to highlight the activities at Natanz while constructing a secret facility, leads to only one conclusion: that they were planning to use the installation to produce highly enriched uranium for military use.

If Iran does agree to let IAEA inspectors into the site, it will have to build a third enrichment facility - although there may already be one in place. Which raises a major question: How many other secret sites does Iran have for the production of the essential elements for its nuclear program? This is a question of particular importance to the military planners who are considering a military option against Iran.

Some analysts have said that the installation at Qom is the "smoking gun" that proves, beyond doubt, that Iran is seeking to develop nuclear weapons.

Nonetheless, global political interests do not seem to be any closer to converging on how to deal with Iran and its nuclear program. Meanwhile, Iran is getting closer to its goal of being in a position to produce nuclear weapons.

<http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/pages/1117289.html>

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Washington Post
OPINION
September 27, 2009

Nuclear Pushback

By Jim Hoagland

President Obama's dream of a world without nuclear weapons seems more like a nightmare to Russia and other nations that possess doomsday arms. Obama is pushing on a door that is closed, barred from inside and locked with a key that has been thrown away as far as the Kremlin is concerned.

This harsh reality does not mean that the president should abandon his effort, which is a useful tool in his broader, more urgent campaign to change America's image abroad. It does mean that Obama should temper his rhetoric and avoid adding atomic abolition to the growing list of subjects that he oversells and then seems to struggle to control. See: health care, bankers' bonuses and the Middle East.

Stirring nuclear anxiety carries its own risks. Public opinion has proved an unreliable guide for nuclear policy, as George Kennan predicted six decades ago. Atomic weapons "will impede understanding of the things that are important" to the nation's security, he wrote in 1949. Their very existence "tends to carry the public mind ultimately toward a dim 'no man's land' of total confusion."

Kennan's words are cited in Nicholas Thompson's brilliant new book, "The Hawk and the Dove," a joint biography of Kennan and his friend and policy rival Paul Nitze. The book is also a penetrating, amazingly accessible study of the origins and conduct of the Cold War.

Listening to Obama's call at the United Nations for zero nuclear weapons took my thoughts back to Kennan's writing and, more improbably, to Yakutsk, a hardscrabble Siberian mining town that lies 14 time zones east of the U.N. assembly hall where Obama spoke for the first time last week.

Most visitors go to Yakutsk, where winter temperatures hover around 70 below zero, to learn about permafrost or diamonds. But a group of foreign academics and journalists went there this month to engage in two days of discussions with Russian policy experts who revealed that their country is becoming more dependent -- not less -- on nuclear weapons for its security.

As the country slashes its bloated and expensive conventional forces, we were told, the only way to maintain influence in world affairs (and presumably to guard against a Chinese invasion of mineral-rich but thinly populated Siberia) is to have a smaller but more effective, permanent nuclear arsenal.

Obama's calls for the United States and Russia to lead the way toward global denuclearization are "idiotic," said one tart-tongued Russian defense analyst. "They strengthen those in Russia who said you can't believe him -- that he is laying traps for us." However paranoid such words sound to foreign ears, this attitude strikes at the heart of Obama's attempt to "reset" U.S.-Russian relations, beginning with the resumption of strategic arms negotiations. The Russians happily pocketed the prestige of being back on equal footing with the United States in nuclear affairs. But they seem to place a low priority on the actual results that will come out of the talks.

"Internal struggles over how we will restructure our forces will be much more important than any negotiations," said an authoritative Russian military man, who stated that Russian strategic arms divisions are being consolidated from 54 to 12 while the role of tactical nuclear arms is being significantly upgraded. "Our goal is reasonable, not minimal, deterrence."

They would use other words -- or in Israel's case, no words at all -- but China, India, Pakistan, and even Britain and France share the underlying sentiment. The nuclear "haves" will applaud Obama's effort to make the Non-Proliferation Treaty more effective in curbing the spread of weapons of mass destruction. But they betray no interest in giving up their own arsenals of "equalizers," as the treaty and Obama's dream require.

Obama's appeals, if more carefully calibrated, can be useful beyond public relations. They challenge the U.S. military to think through the nation's future nuclear needs and make more credible the cases against Iran and North Korea. If the denuclearization proposals are realistically framed, the United States may be able to influence the still-sketchy new Russian nuclear doctrine.

The Obama White House has made the president's personal popularity and the need to change America's image the driving forces of its foreign policy. It needs to show some substantive results for that effort. Otherwise more Americans will join foreign analysts in asking the question that politicians and PR practitioners most fear: "Where's the beef?"

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/09/25/AR2009092502472.html>

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Boston Globe
GLOBE EDITORIAL
September 27, 2009

Talk to Iran, but Keep a Plan B

IRAN'S apparent pursuit of nuclear weapons is the gravest security challenge facing the Obama administration, and a turning point is fast approaching. Earlier this month, the US envoy to the International Atomic Energy Agency said that Iran's uranium enrichment activities are nearing "breakout capacity." The same week, Iran coyly offered to negotiate about everything except its nuclear program.

President Obama is running out of time to persuade Iran's leaders to accept safeguards such as outside inspections of nuclear sites and tight controls on enrichment that can keep the country's nuclear program from being used to build weapons. Obama's offer to negotiate with Iran is the right first step, but he also needs a backup plan if Iran refuses to budge.

Two outcomes must be avoided: an Iran with nuclear weapons, and a military attack on Iran's nuclear facilities by the United States, Israel, or both. A nuclear-armed Iran would make the Middle East far more volatile. Apart from the risk that Iran might use or transfer nuclear weapons, some of its neighbors would likely seek their own nuclear weapons - multiplying the chance that a device will fall into the wrong hands.

Bombing nuclear sites in Iran is no solution. It would lead to retaliation against Americans by Iran's terrorist proxies in Iraq and elsewhere, and to attacks on oil tankers off Iran's coast, causing a worldwide shortage with serious economic repercussions. And Iran would almost surely revive its nuclear program in covert sites.

Given the stakes, the administration made the right move earlier this month by declaring it would take part in multilateral talks with Iran even if the nuclear program is ostensibly off the table. But Obama must be prepared to impose more stringent sanctions if Iran's leaders continue to refuse to curb their nuclear ambitions. In canceling the Bush administration's flawed missile defense plan for Europe last week, Obama improved the chances of obtaining Russia's assent to tough new UN sanctions on Iran.

But if Russia refuses to cooperate, the United States has other options. Obama should be ready to hit Iran with serious banking sanctions. Companies that trade with Iran would have to cut off that trade or be blacklisted by Western banks. The effect on Iran's investment-starved economy would be severe. And Revolutionary Guard commanders who have taken control of many of the most lucrative enterprises in Iran would suffer a direct economic blow.

Obama has no illusions about the nature of the Iranian regime; he billed his own new version of missile defense as a way to counter threats from Iran. He should put two options before Iran's truculent leaders: isolation if Iran pursues nuclear weapons, or security, peaceful nuclear energy, and international acceptance if Iran forgoes them. ■

http://www.boston.com/bostonglobe/editorial_opinion/editorials/articles/2009/09/27/talk_to_iran_but_keep_a_plan_b/

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New York Times
September 28, 2009
OP-ED COLUMNIST

The U.S.-Iranian Triangle

By ROGER COHEN

NEW YORK — France and Germany fought three wars in 70 years before the bright idea dawned of enfolded their problem into something larger: the European Union. The United States and Iran have not gone to war but have a relationship of psychotic mistrust. The answer can only be the same: Broaden the context.

The revelation that Iran has built a second uranium enrichment plant in secrecy did not change the nuclear equation if that's measured by the country's ability to produce a bomb. No uranium has entered the facility. Iran's eventual capacity to produce weapons-grade fissile material, let alone deliver it, is unaffected.

What has changed is the psychology of the Iranian nuclear program. Mistrust, already deep, is now fathomless.

With an enrichment facility at Natanz able to accommodate 54,000 centrifuges (just over 8,000 are installed), and its single nuclear power plant still in stop-go mode, there do not appear to be 54,000 reasons for Iran to burrow into a mountain near the holy city of Qum to install 3,000 more.

Tehran wants a military nuclear option even if it's nervous — and hesitant — about the reality.

The Qum-nuclear twinning reveals the Iranian mindset: The enrichment program has attained sacred status as a symbol of Iranian independence — comparable to oil's nationalization in the 1950s.

(Iran will argue its obligations to the International Atomic Energy Agency only required it to give notification of the new facility 180 days before introducing nuclear material. Western nations will contest that. The technicalities are debatable — and irrelevant. This is about trust betrayed by Tehran.)

The effect of Natanz-Qum was to make new sanctions more likely sooner. President Nicolas Sarkozy of France spoke of imposing them in December, absent an “in-depth change.” President Obama — who likes to leave hawkishness to Europeans — avoided the “s” word but did his best resolute thing.

More significant than the words, however, were the no-shows. Iran would have sat bolt upright had Obama been flanked by the leaders of Germany, Russia and China. Those three countries are principal sources of Iran's trade.

Chancellor Angela Merkel could not find time (although she “associated” herself with Obama.) Russia expressed “serious concern.” China mumbled about “dialogue.” This was less a line in the sand than a faint squiggle.

I've said this before: Sanctions won't work. Ray Takeyh, who worked on Iran with Dennis Ross at the State Department before losing his job last month and returning to the Council on Foreign Relations, told me that “sanctions are the feel-good option.”

Yes, it feels good to do something, but it doesn't necessarily help. In this case, sanctions won't for four reasons.

One: Iran is inured to sanctions after years of living with them and has in Dubai a sure-fire conduit for goods at a manageable surtax. Two: Russia and China will never pay more than lip-service to sanctions. Three: You don't bring down a quasi-holy symbol — nuclear power — by cutting off gasoline sales. Four: sanctions feed the persecution complex on which the Iranian regime thrives.

A senior German Foreign Ministry official last week told an American Council on Germany delegation: “The efficiency of sanctions is not really discussed because if you do, you are left with only two options — a military strike or living with a nuclear Iran — and nobody wants to go there. So the answer is: Let's impose further sanctions! It's a dishonest debate.”

Dishonesty is a staple of Iran's nuclear program. Tehran has dissembled. Israel, which introduced nuclear ambiguity in the region, has — repetitively — predicted an Iranian bomb is just a few years away since the early 1990s. It still is some years off in the view of U.S. intelligence.

The choice is indeed between a military strike and living with a nuclear Iran. But what is a “nuclear Iran?” Is it an Iran that's nuclear-armed — a very dangerous development — or an Iran with an I.A.E.A.-monitored enrichment facility?

I believe monitored enrichment on Iranian soil in the name of what Obama called Iran's “right to peaceful nuclear power” remains a possible basis for an agreement that blocks weaponization. Zero enrichment is by now a non-starter.

For fruitless sanctions to be avoided, the mantra of William Burns, the U.S. under secretary for political affairs who will attend multilateral talks with Iran starting Thursday, must be: “Widen the canvas.”

The Iranian regime is weak. Its disarray was again evident last week; it actually feels threatened by George Soros. Significant factions now view an American breakthrough as needed. They have a favorable view of Burns.

Burns must seek to open a parallel bilateral U.S.-Iran negotiation covering at least these areas: Afghanistan and Iraq (where interests often converge); Hezbollah and Hamas (where they do not); human rights; blocked Iranian assets; diplomatic relations; regional security arrangements; drugs; the fight against Al Qaeda; visas and travel.

Isolated, nuclear negotiations will fail. Integrated, they may not. Iran's sense of humiliation is rooted in its America complex; its nuclear program is above all about the restoration of pride. Settle the complex to contain the program. Triangulate. Think broad. Think E.U., not Versailles.

http://www.nytimes.com/2009/09/28/opinion/28iht-edcohen.html?_r=1&em

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The World Cannot Accept A Nuclear Iran

A ROGUE state announces it has secretly developed a capacity to create weapons of mass destruction and demands the world leave it alone- now where we have heard that before? With Iran admitting it has a second, hitherto hidden nuclear enrichment plan, the world faces a new crisis of a North Korean kind. For years, North Korea has bluffed and blustered, denying it was creating a nuclear weapons program and then threatening to use them, depending on which approach suited. Iran watched how Pyongyang has played world powers off against each other and has used the same approach. The world learned of Iran's nuclear development facility at Natanz only in 2002 when Iranian dissidents revealed it. And now Tehran admits to a second plant. Oil-rich Iran always argues that the centrifuges in its public plant are processing uranium to fuel nuclear-powered electricity generators, and will doubtless say the same about the new one. But it is easy to adapt this process to create the highly enriched uranium that nuclear weapons require. Nor does the Iranian argument that they are being treated unfairly by demands they stop their program stack up against their refusal of an international offer to supply nuclear fuel for power plants. That Tehran is also building medium- range missiles, capable of hitting targets all over the Middle East, demonstrates Iran's aspirations to have both WMDs and the means to deliver them.

News of a second plant will especially worry Israel, the target of consistent threats from Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, and it will terrify the Sunni states of the Arab world who know they have as much to fear from the Persian Shi'ites of Iran as does the Jewish state. As the June elections demonstrated, Mr Ahmadinejad's authority comes less from the electorate than from fundamentalist clerics and the armed forces, especially the religious militia that he uses to suppress dissent. The prospect of such an unstable state possessing WMDs is a risk to world peace that equals the danger from North Korea.

The world community will need to improve on its performance in attempting to contain North Korea if it is to convince Iran to give up on building a bomb. For years, the North Koreans have relied on China to reduce pressure from the UN and regional powers. Similarly, the Chinese, who import oil from Iran, have spoken against sanctions on Tehran. The Russians, who have supplied nuclear technology to Iran, have also opposed stringent sanctions and the Europeans have dithered in the UN, as they did for years over attempts to investigate Saddam Hussein's arsenal. Until now, pressure on Tehran has come from the US and Israel, which undoubtedly has plans to attack Iran's facilities if it believes its cities are at risk of nuclear attack - the Israelis mounted a successful surprise attack on a Syrian nuclear facility in 2007. But there are signs the world is now united in thinking Iran has gone too far. French President Nicolas Sarkozy says there must be sanctions by December if Iran does not halt its enrichment program. And at the G20 meeting in Pittsburgh, Russia called for an immediate investigation by the International Atomic Energy Agency. It is a start, but only that. The main reason North Korea has kept its weapons program in place is diplomatic divisions between Russia and the Chinese and the US and its allies. This must not happen with Iran. The only way to make Tehran end its armaments program is for the world to speak for peace with one voice.

<http://www.theaustralian.news.com.au/story/0,25197,26132906-16741,00.html>

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