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New York Times
October 24, 2009

Iran Delays Its Decision on Shipping Nuclear Fuel

By David E. Sanger

WASHINGTON — Iran missed its deadline on Friday to declare whether it would accept a nuclear deal that would ship much of its uranium to Russia for processing, but said a decision would be announced next week.

In a statement, the International Atomic Energy Agency said that Iran had suggested in discussions with the agency's director general, Mohamed ElBaradei, that "it is considering the proposal in depth and in a favorable light."

But all day Iranian state television beamed the opposite message to its domestic audience, insisting that Iran was waiting for Russia and France to sell it new nuclear fuel for a reactor in Tehran that makes medical isotopes.

Iran's eventual answer may well determine the course of the Obama administration's effort — first through negotiations, and perhaps ultimately through harsh sanctions — to force the country to give up the material it would need to produce a nuclear weapon.

Under a plan put forth this week by the agency, Iran would ship about three-quarters of its known stockpile of nuclear fuel, about 2,600 pounds, to Russia for further processing so that it could refuel the Tehran reactor.

President Obama and Dr. ElBaradei say they have a common objective of making sure that Iran does not have the fuel on hand to threaten to manufacture a nuclear weapon. But the deal would offer only a temporary solution because Iran has the capacity to replace the 2,600 pounds of nuclear fuel within a year.

Negotiations concluded in Vienna on Wednesday between Ali Asghar Soltanieh, Iran's permanent envoy to the atomic energy agency, and officials from the United States, France and Russia. Mr. Soltanieh cautioned on Wednesday that although he had finished negotiations, the deal was subject to approval by Iran's leadership.

Dr. ElBaradei set a deadline of Friday for the responses, and by that time Washington, Paris and Moscow all said they had approved the deal.

The Obama administration set up the issue as a test of Iran's intentions. If Iran ships the fuel out of the country, administration officials said, it will restore some confidence that it is not seeking a "breakout capability," the ability to expel inspectors and then rapidly produce a nuclear weapon. The White House said forestalling Iran would allow time to negotiate a more comprehensive and difficult agreement, one intended to end all of Iran's production of new nuclear material.

"We think we've created a debate within Iran," one senior administration official said. "And that's what some of these negotiations are all about: making the Iranian people decide whether their nuclear ambitions are worth the price."

So far the administration has consistently refused to talk publicly about the deal it struck with Mr. Soltanieh. Officials say they do not want to prejudice the Iranian government against the deal by talking openly about its provisions. Iran, in its comments, has described the United States as backing down in the negotiations.

"We don't want to give them a reason to say no," the senior official said.

In many ways, the negotiations under way are reminiscent of those with North Korea in recent years, each set of talks aimed at tying up a country's nuclear fuel and preventing the production of a weapon. In North Korea's case, that effort failed. A series of agreements for Pyongyang to give up vast parts of its nuclear infrastructure were signed and never executed. The chief negotiator for the United States in Vienna, Daniel B. Poneman, the deputy secretary of energy, is a veteran of those North Korea talks.

"There's every possibility that the Iranian strategy here is to follow the North Korean playbook," another senior administration official said Friday. "Drag it out. Reach partial agreements. Find reasons not to ship out the fuel."

The question, the official said, is "how long the White House and the Israelis would put up with those tactics."

One problem the Iranian officials face is the concern that at home, any agreement to give up nuclear stockpiles would be regarded as a concession to Washington. Mr. Soltanieh, the Iranian envoy, was clearly cautious about that, taking care in Vienna not to make decisions on behalf of the government he represents.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2009/10/24/world/middleeast/24nuke.html>

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Wall Street Journal
OCTOBER 24, 2009

Iran Says It Can't Meet Deadline on Nuclear Proposal

By CHIP CUMMINS, JAY SOLOMON and DAVID CRAWFORD

IAEA Director General Mohamed ElBaradei (left) and Iran's IAEA ambassador Ali Asghar Soltaniyeh (right) attend a meeting with EU and U.S. diplomats on the Iranian nuclear issue in Vienna's U.N. headquarters October 19, 2009.

Iran told the International Atomic Energy Agency it will respond by the middle of next week to a proposal to ship its nuclear fuel abroad for reprocessing, pushing back a deadline and raising concerns about Iranian intentions in the negotiations.

The United Nations nuclear watchdog had given all parties until Friday to sign off formally on the deal, which was tentatively agreed to by Iranian negotiators on Wednesday in Vienna, after several days of talks with the U.S., France, Russia and IAEA representatives.

Under the proposed deal hammered out earlier in the week, Iran would ship most of its nuclear fuel to Russia, where it would be processed for use in a medical-research reactor. The amount would be enough to prevent Iran from having the required fuel to make a nuclear weapon, based on estimates of its stockpile. Iran could restock, but Western officials see any deal that would delay Iran's ability to make a bomb as a first step toward reining in Tehran's nuclear ambitions.

France, Russia and the U.S. accepted the deal in letters to the United Nations nuclear watchdog early Friday. In a statement late Friday, the IAEA said Iran informed the agency it was considering the proposal in a favorable light, but needed more time to respond.

Washington signaled it was willing to wait a few more days. "We hope there will be a positive response," said State Department spokesman Ian Kelly. "Obviously, we would have preferred to have a response today."

Anything other than a clearly stated agreement from Tehran will raise new worries over its intentions in further talks over its nuclear ambitions.

"We need a formal response," said a senior European official.

Ali Asghar Soltaniyeh, Iran's envoy to the IAEA, told Iranian state media that officials were still going through the proposed agreement. He said he will announce a decision next week.

"Iran is working and elaborating on all details of the IAEA proposal," Mr. Soltaniyeh was quoted as saying.

Earlier in the day, Iran appeared to pull away from the deal. Iranian state media widely reported an unidentified official, close to the Iranian negotiating team's thinking, suggesting that Iran now wanted to buy enriched uranium from overseas for the research reactor, instead of shipping its own uranium for reprocessing.

"We are waiting for a positive and constructive response on Iran's proposal from the other party on providing nuclear fuel for Tehran's reactor," the official was quoted as saying.

U.S. and European officials are clear that the West can't accept a deal to send more fissile material to Iran without it shipping out a sizable portion of its low-enriched uranium.

This is at the heart of the Obama administration's strategy of testing Tehran's willingness to negotiate seriously on the nuclear issue. U.S. and European officials say such a deal would effectively deny Iran the necessary fissile material to build an atomic weapon in the near term.

Many Iran analysts said President Barack Obama will find himself in a difficult position if Tehran decides to pull back from the agreement. The White House has framed its nonproliferation strategy largely through the pursuit of diplomacy. And Mr. Obama has yet to clearly define the coercive steps he is willing to pursue to deny Iran nuclear technologies.

"If Iran fails to agree to ship out their uranium ... it would be a direct rejection of an offer from not just the U.S. but the whole international community," said Michael Adler, an expert on Iran's nuclear program at the Woodrow

Wilson International Center for Scholars in Washington. "This would put President Obama in a tight spot, because he will have to make a very tough decision: namely, how tough to be if it's clear that engagement is going nowhere."

In Iran on Friday, the battle between the government and its opponents continued when opposition leader Mehdi Karroubi and his supporters were confronted by hard-liners at a media exhibition in the capital, an Iranian news agency reported.

Karroubi supporters chanted slogans in his favor when he arrived, but hard-liners confronted them, forcing the reformist cleric to leave as fistfights broke out between the two groups.

http://online.wsj.com/article/SB125630502899403881.html?mod=WSJ_hpp_LEFTTopStories

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United Press International (UPI)

October 24, 2009

Suspicious Said Mounting on Iran Plant

WASHINGTON, Oct. 24 (UPI) -- U.S. and European officials are becoming convinced a newly revealed Iranian facility was meant to produce nuclear weapons, intelligence sources say.

Citing two unnamed former senior U.S. officials involved in high-level discussions about Iran, The Washington Post reported Saturday the site at Qom has altered previously accepted theories that Iran had given up efforts to enrich uranium in secret.

The sources said U.S. and European officials are reassessing a 2007 National Intelligence Estimate that concluded any secret uranium processing activities "probably were halted" by Tehran in 2003 and had not been restarted.

"Qom changed a lot of people's thinking, especially about the possibility of secret military enrichment" of uranium, one of the former officials told the Post. The newspaper intelligence officials have determined Iran planned to place only 3,000 centrifuges in the plant -- too few to furnish fuel for a civilian power plant but enough to produce weapons-grade material for three nuclear bombs per year.

U.N. nuclear inspectors will travel to the Qom plant Sunday for their first look at the facility, officials say.

http://www.upi.com/Top_News/US/2009/10/24/Suspicious-said-mounting-on-Iran-plant/UPI-40421256396306/

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Washington Post

October 24, 2009

Iranian Site Prompts U.S. To Rethink Assessment

By Joby Warrick, Washington Post Staff Writer

VIENNA -- Early Sunday, if all goes as planned, U.N. nuclear inspectors will travel to a military base near Qom, Iran, for a first look at one of the country's most closely guarded nuclear secrets. Inside bunkers dug into the side of a mountain, the visitors will be escorted through a nearly completed uranium plant that Iran's president has termed "very ordinary."

But less than a month after its existence was publicly revealed, many U.S. and European intelligence officials say they are increasingly convinced that the site was intended explicitly for making highly enriched uranium for nuclear weapons.

The Qom site has undermined one of the U.S. intelligence community's key assessments of Iran's nuclear program: the assumption that Tehran had abandoned plans to enrich uranium in secret, according to two former senior U.S. officials involved in high-level discussions about Iran.

A landmark U.S. intelligence assessment in 2007 concluded that any secret uranium-processing activities "probably were halted" in 2003 and had not been restarted. Other key judgments of the 2007 National Intelligence Estimate, including the view that Iran has suspended research on nuclear-warhead design, are also being reevaluated in light of new evidence, the two former officials said.

"Qom changed a lot of people's thinking, especially about the possibility of secret military enrichment" of uranium, said one of the former officials, who spoke on the condition of anonymity because the assessments remain classified.

In interviews, intelligence officials from the United States and allied nations said their scrutiny of the Qom site was longer and deeper than previously acknowledged, and included acquiring detailed plans on how the facility would be outfitted and operated.

Intercepted communications revealed a key piece of data: Iranian plans to place only 3,000 centrifuge machines in the plant. That number is too small to furnish fuel for a civilian power plant, but just big enough to supply Iran annually with up to three bombs' worth of weapons-grade fuel, the former officials said.

Insights into the spy community's evolving views about Qom were provided by current and former intelligence and government officials in interviews in the United States, Central Europe and several Middle Eastern countries. In nearly all cases, the officials spoke on the condition that their names and nationalities not be revealed, citing the secrecy of the ongoing assessments of Iran's nuclear program.

The officials acknowledged that the Qom complex is not yet operational and that no uranium had been enriched at the time the site was revealed last month. They also acknowledged there is no "smoking-gun" evidence that Iran plans to make bomb-grade uranium. But the officials said the Qom site was structurally suited for that purpose, and they concluded that there is no plausible role for the plant in Iran's civilian nuclear power infrastructure.

Iran officially notified the Vienna-based International Atomic Energy Agency about the existence of the Qom site in a letter on Sept. 21. U.S. and European officials say Iranian officials learned that the United States was aware of the site and rushed to disclose the facility's existence to head off accusations that it was running a covert nuclear program.

Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad has said the Qom site is part of Iran's legitimate, civilian nuclear power program, contending that he planned all along to disclose the facility to the U.N. nuclear watchdog and to allow international oversight.

Ali Akbar Salehi, who heads Iran's civilian Atomic Energy Organization, said the facility was built underground at a military installation to shield it from foreign attack, and also to save money. The intention was "to safeguard our nuclear facilities and reduce the cost of an active defense system," Salehi told reporters in Tehran.

Chipping away at a secret

For at least the past five years, the complex at Qom has been both a closely guarded secret and one of the heavily scrutinized pieces of real estate on Earth.

It is, in some ways, a perfect spot for a hidden nuclear facility. The nearby city of Qom has been known since medieval times as a Shiite religious center; it contains notable religious schools and shrines but no known nuclear facilities. The country's other uranium-enrichment plant, near Natanz, is 60 miles away. Two military bases for medium-range Shahab missiles and anti-aircraft batteries lie just beyond the outskirts, and one of these, in a mountainous area about 10 miles north of town, is pocked with tunnels and bunkers used for storing rockets.

Exactly when the order was issued to build the Qom facility is unclear, but intelligence officials say they have studied the site at least since 2004.

An exiled opposition group, the National Council of Resistance of Iran, first publicly revealed the existence of Iran's much larger uranium facility at Natanz in 2002. It highlighted Qom's tunnels at a December 2005 news conference and later supplied details to U.N. officials, according to a spokesman for the group. Iran said the site was a closed military property, and no nuclear inspections were permitted.

But from the air and ground, Western satellites and spies scoured its every portal and ventilator shaft, collecting terabytes of data about the facility, including communications intercepts. The CIA teamed up with intelligence operatives from U.S.-allied countries for sophisticated eavesdropping operations, officials confirmed. By last year, a series of breakthroughs confirmed that the Iran was building a secret uranium-enrichment plant, and also yielded precise details about how it would be operated, including the number of centrifuges Iran planned to use and how much electricity the facility would consume.

A retired senior U.S. intelligence official who followed the case closely said the evidence was unusually good, with many "verified sources" providing data "beyond the visible light spectrum," or beyond satellite images and spy-plane photos. "It was truly a multi-discipline effort, and it went on for a long period of time," the retired official said. "The more we learned, the more confident we became."

CIA Director Leon Panetta, in response to questions from The Washington Post, said in a statement that the agency was able over time to "draw a clear picture of Iran's activities and intentions at this site."

Better centrifuges

Iran has revealed that it planned to use a more sophisticated centrifuge machine at Qom -- one that can produce enriched uranium at twice the rate as the older-model machines it uses at the Natanz plant. Even so, the amount of uranium eked out annually by Qom's 3,000 centrifuges would be far short of the quantity needed to fuel a commercial nuclear reactor.

Intelligence analysts calculated that it would take Qom's high-end centrifuges at least 20 years to produce enough low-enriched uranium to meet the needs of a typical 1,000 megawatt nuclear power reactor for a year.

If configured for weapons, however, Qom could produce enough bomb-grade fuel for two to three bombs annually, intelligence officials said.

"There is no Iranian document saying the facility is designed for a military program, but what else can it be good for?" said a senior Middle East-based intelligence official involved in Iran analysis.

The official, and other intelligence officers interviewed, said they rejected the possibility that the Qom site was intended as a pilot plant or testing facility for new types of centrifuges. Iran already has two such facilities, at Natanz and in Tehran, and neither runs at anything close to capacity, they said.

Intelligence officials say it is unlikely that Iran will try to manufacture weapons-grade uranium at Qom, now that the site has been revealed. But Western spy agencies say they do not know where Qom's supply of uranium feedstock -- uranium hexafluoride, or UF₆ -- was supposed to come from. If Iran were to try to divert UF₆ from its existing stockpile to a secret facility, U.N. inspectors would almost certainly detect the change.

"Is there another secret facility somewhere?" said the senior Middle East-based intelligence officer. "I'd now have to say yes, almost certainly."

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/10/23/AR2009102303757.html>

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Tehran Times -- Iran
October 25, 2009

West Trying to Trick Iran in Nuclear Deal: Larijani

Tehran Times Political Desk

TEHRAN -- Majlis Speaker Ali Larijani has said the West is trying to trick Iran into giving away its supply of 4.5 percent enriched uranium.

My guess is that the Americans have made a secret deal with certain countries to take 4.5 percent enriched uranium away from us under the pretext of providing nuclear fuel (to us)... (and) we hope Iranian officials will pay due attention to this issue," he told ISNA on Saturday.

Giving away enriched uranium in return for nuclear fuel cannot be logically or legally justified, he added.

According to International Atomic Energy Agency regulations, the supply of nuclear fuel for the Tehran research reactor should be guaranteed, and the Western powers should not try to make any deceptive moves, Larijani said.

He made the remarks one day after diplomats from Russia, France, and the United States submitted their formal approvals of a deal to process Iran's nuclear fuel abroad.

Iran's response to the IAEA proposal was due on Friday, but Iran's ambassador to the IAEA, Ali Asghar Soltanieh, said Tehran is still studying the deal and will formulate a response next week.

The nuclear fuel talks in Vienna concluded on Wednesday without a final agreement, but IAEA Director General Mohamed ElBaradei presented a proposal for the four countries to study, saying he hoped that all parties would make a firm response to his draft deal by Friday October 23.

Under the draft deal, a large consignment of Iran's enriched uranium would be shipped out of the country for processing into fuel rods with a purity of 20 percent, which would be used by a research reactor in Tehran that manufactures medical radioisotopes.

“We are still working and elaborating on all the details of this proposal, from technical and all other aspects,” Ambassador Soltanieh told ISNA on Saturday.

“After the final evaluation, I will inform ElBaradei next week, as soon as I return to Vienna, about the results (of our evaluation),” he said.

He called the three-day meeting of representatives from Iran, the United States, Russia, France, and the IAEA “positive and constructive”, and said, “Therefore we are also waiting for the other parties to study our proposals and to reflect the results of the evaluation.”

Soltanieh did not reveal any details of the Iranian proposals, but Press TV earlier quoted a senior member of the Iranian negotiating team as saying that Iran prefers to buy the fuel from an international seller.

Iran can produce 20 percent enriched nuclear fuel

Soltanieh also said that Iran is able to domestically produce 20 percent enriched nuclear fuel for the Tehran research reactor.

However, Iran prefers to purchase the needed fuel for the reactor, which is part of a peaceful project for the production of medical isotopes, from foreign countries.

Iran insists its nuclear program is completely peaceful and that it has the right to enrich uranium.

Western states believe it is attempting to develop a nuclear weapons program, although the IAEA has never found evidence that Iran’s civilian nuclear program has been diverted to weapons production.

The five permanent members of the UN Security Council (Britain, China, France, Russia, and the U.S.) and Germany -- which are collectively known as the 5+1 group -- plan to hold a new round of wider-ranging nuclear talks with Iran in Geneva next week

http://www.tehrantimes.com/Index_view.asp?code=206305

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Kuwait Times
October 25, 2009

Influential Iranian MPs Criticize Nuclear Deal

TEHRAN: Influential Iranian lawmakers yesterday criticized a UN-drafted agreement that requires Tehran to send its atomic stockpile abroad for further processing, the student news agency ISNA reported. Their comments were reported a day after Iran missed a deadline for responding to the International Atomic Energy Agency on the deal, which requires it to cut an atomic stockpile the West fears could be used to make weapons.

Iran said its answer would be given next week. "Iran needs its 3.5 percent enriched uranium for use in our power stations. Consequently it is in Iran's interest to buy nuclear fuel," said Alaeddin Boroujerdi, head of parliament's National Security and Foreign Affairs committee, quoted by ISNA. Iran, which says its nuclear energy program is only for producing electricity, is years away from having any nuclear power plants that would use low enriched uranium (LEU). The agreement requires Iran to send 1.2 tonnes of its known 1.5-tonne stockpile of low-enriched uranium (LEU) to Russia and France by the end of the year, Western diplomats say.

There it would be further processed, in a way that would make it hard to use for warheads, and returned to Iran as fuel plates to power a Tehran reactor that makes radioactive medical isotopes but is due to run out of its imported fuel in a year. Boroujerdi echoed some officials who suggested on Friday that instead of accepting the draft, Iran should buy nuclear fuel from abroad. He said Iran should be cautious in its dealings with world powers. Russia, France and the United States, the other parties to the deal, have endorsed the plan.

'SCRAP SANCTIONS'

Another leading lawmaker said any nuclear deal with world powers should be accompanied by the scrapping of UN Security Council sanctions against Iran. "Any nuclear fuel deal with the West...should come with relinquishment of sanctions on Iran, particularly a lifting of sanctions on raw uranium imports," said lawmaker Heshmatollah Falahatpisheh, the semi-official ILNA news agency reported. Buying enriched uranium abroad would not only fail to reduce the domestic stockpile worrying the international community, but also require sanctions imposed on Iran since 2006 to be waived to allow it to import such sensitive nuclear material.

Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who has the last say on all state matters, including nuclear issue, has so far remained silent over the deal. Iran's IAEA representative said a team of UN nuclear monitors was scheduled to visit for the first time Iran's newly disclosed second uranium enrichment plant on Sunday, state television reported. "Inspectors of the IAEA will arrive in Tehran on Sunday for a routine visit of the site," state television quoted Soltanieh as saying. Iran added to concerns over its nuclear intentions in September by revealing the existence of the site in central Iran.

Meanwhile, Israel is concerned that Iran will use the current climate of international goodwill as a cover to pursue its goal of becoming a nuclear power, an Israeli minister said yesterday. Vice Prime Minister Silvan Shalom made the comment after Iran announced it was still studying a UN-drafted plan to ship much of its uranium to Russia and France for further enrichment, a move seen as a way to delay the country's ability to build a nuclear weapon.

Israel is widely believed to possess nuclear weapons though the government has never confirmed it is a nuclear power, and Shalom was asked whether Israel would agree to making the Middle East a nuclear weapon-free zone. "We are in a situation where we have to protect ourselves from those who are trying to kill us," he replied. "If Iran will abandon its dream to have ... nuclear power, it will bring more stability to the region because first and foremost those who are very, very concerned are Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and Turkey," he added. Shalom accused the Iranians of "trying to undermine the regimes of the moderate Arab countries," citing the discovery of "a terrorist cell" of Hezbollah militants, backed by Iran, in Egypt a few months ago.

http://www.kuwaittimes.net/read_news.php?newsid=OTg3MDc5Mjc3

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Bloomberg.com
October 25, 2009

UN Nuclear Team in Iran Visits Newly Revealed Site

By Ladane Nasseri

Oct. 25 (Bloomberg) -- United Nations inspectors entered Iran's newly revealed uranium enrichment plant today, two days after the country postponed its response to a proposal for Russia to process nuclear fuel for a Tehran reactor.

Inspectors of the UN nuclear watchdog arrived in Iran late yesterday and will make several visits to the site, the state-run Mehr news agency reported. The team of experts, which is scheduled to leave Oct. 27, will compare information provided by Iran with data collected at the site, Mehr said in an earlier report, citing an unidentified Vienna-based official.

The plant, which was revealed by Iran on Sept. 21, is its second to enrich uranium and isolate isotopes of the metal to generate fuel used in a nuclear reactor. The facility is about 100 miles south of Tehran on the way to the holy city of Qom, according to state-run Press TV.

The disclosure of the site, known as "Fordo," has raised concerns among world powers about Iran's nuclear goals. Enriched uranium can be used in higher concentrations to make a nuclear bomb and the U.S. suspects Iran is trying to build one. Iran rejects the allegation, saying its program is peaceful and meant for research and electricity generation.

The inspection comes after Iran on Oct. 23 postponed its response to a proposal by the UN watchdog to ship most of its stock of low-enriched uranium to Russia, which would return it as metal rods that can only be used in a reactor for power.

Favorable Light

The proposal, brokered last week by International Atomic Energy Agency chief Mohamed ElBaradei at talks between Iran and Russia, the U.S. and France, may slow any attempt by Iran to make a weapon from its 1,500-kilogram (3,300-pound) stockpile of low-enriched uranium. Acceptance of the deal by Iran would improve prospects for further talks over its nuclear program.

Iran told ElBaradei it is considering the proposal "in depth and in a favorable light" but needs until the middle of this week to reply, according to an IAEA statement. The IAEA chief "hopes that Iran's response will equally be positive, since approval of this agreement will signal a new era of cooperation," the statement added.

Iran says the Fordo plant, burrowed into a mountain as protection against any attacks by the U.S. or Israel, is about 18 months away from beginning operations.

<http://www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=20601085&sid=aZf0nSs0CDno>

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New York Times

October 26, 2009

News Analysis

Both Iran And West Fear A Trap On Uranium Deal

By David E. Sanger

WASHINGTON — Just before international inspectors on Sunday were guided for the first time into an Iranian nuclear enrichment plant whose existence was a state secret until recently, the speaker of Iran's Parliament warned his countrymen to beware of American efforts to "cheat" Iran out of the nuclear fuel that has become the country's currency in reasserting its power.

In Washington, the concern is precisely the reverse. Here, even some of President Obama's aides are wary that Iran is setting a trap, trying to turn the administration's signature offer of engagement into a process of endless negotiations. They are acutely aware of the fact that the clock is ticking: While talks continue, Iran is steadily enriching more uranium, the fuel it would need if it ever decided to sprint for the bomb, much as Israel and India did 30 years ago, followed by Pakistan and North Korea.

That struggle — pitting Iran's fears of falling for a Western conspiracy to neutralize its "strategic reserve" against the West's fears of being lured into an Iranian plot to buy time for a secret nuclear bomb program — lies at the heart of the complex set of moves and countermoves now being played out around the globe.

It will probably be several weeks before the results of the inspection of the newly revealed Qum nuclear enrichment plant are known. Iran has said it will give a definitive answer before then about whether it will go along with a deal to turn over much of its current stockpile of enriched uranium to Russia for further processing, so that it can be returned to Iran for use in a reactor that makes medical isotopes.

For days now, Iran's leadership has been fighting over whether to take that deal, with political opponents of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad all but declaring that he is being duped.

Among them is the speaker of Parliament, Ali Larijani, who is Iran's former nuclear negotiator. On Saturday, he was widely quoted in the Iranian press as saying that the West was trying to deceive Iran and might never return its enriched uranium. He argued that other nations were obliged under the rules of the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty to sell Iran new fuel. Mr. Obama tried to head off that possibility this weekend with calls to allies and to President Dmitri A. Medvedev of Russia, urging them to press Iran to give up its stockpile.

The rare public argument under way in Iran about how to deal with the demands suggests that Mr. Obama has already achieved one of the major objectives of his engagement strategy: to force out into the open the splits in the Iranian leadership. As R. Nicholas Burns, the lead State Department strategist on Iran during the Bush administration, told Congress over the summer, President George W. Bush's refusal to negotiate with Iran for eight years meant that the United States never forced the country's ruling mullahs to justify their actions to their own people, who have suffered from sanctions and may be less interested in the nuclear program than in better relations with the world.

"I think that for the first time, the Iranians are really on the defensive," Mr. Burns said recently.

Iran's leaders may find themselves playing a more complex game of defense in the coming weeks. They appear to have been forced into revealing the existence of the Qum enrichment complex after learning that Western intelligence agencies had discovered it.

Now, they have to contain the damage. In interviews last week in Vienna, the headquarters of the International Atomic Energy Agency, diplomats preparing for the inspection of the site near the holy city of Qum made it clear that the West would insist on far more than just visits to the heavily bunkered plant, hard up against a base for the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps. The inspectors view Qum as an outer layer of a ball of string — and they plan on pulling at the strands to discover other secret sites, if there are any.

“How many times have the Iranians told us, ‘We’ve revealed everything,’ only to come back and admit that there is much, much more?” a senior European diplomat, who has been deeply involved in developing the strategy to confront Tehran, said last week.

The Iranians contend that they have been under no legal obligation to report the construction of the enrichment plant until it was ready to operate, an argument that the atomic energy agency dismisses as a self-interested misreading of the rules. That is just one example of Iran’s central argument, that it is abiding by the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty, but that it has often been driven to covert efforts because the West is plotting to deprive the country of its right to develop its own nuclear technology.

But White House officials are extremely aware of their own political and practical vulnerabilities in dealing with Iran. The Iranian nuclear program flowered in recent years. The country possessed only minute amounts of nuclear fuel when the United States invaded Iraq in March 2003, and by the time the Bush administration left office, it had the fuel for roughly one weapon. There is a dispute among the allies over whether it halted or continued its efforts to design a nuclear weapon.

But few in the White House doubt how the narrative will be written if the Iranians actually gain a weapons ability on Mr. Obama’s watch. That is why Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton, who as a presidential candidate dismissed Mr. Obama’s engagement policy with Iran as naïve, last week warned anew that “the process of engagement cannot be open-ended.” The strategy behind the negotiations that unfolded in Vienna last week was pretty straightforward. If Iran was truly interested in peaceful uses for its nuclear fuel, it should accept the West’s help in using its own stockpile to fuel the reactor in Tehran that makes medical isotopes. If they rejected the deal, it should be easier, in theory, to get Russia and China to join sanctions.

Many people at the negotiating table expect Iran to try to drag out the process. Yet even if Iran took the deal, it would only buy time; it would not solve the nuclear standoff. If 2,600 pounds of enriched uranium leaves the country, as the plan calls for, it would take Tehran roughly a year to replace it. That is not much time, but since American intelligence estimates say that Iran could produce a weapon between 2010 and 2015, even a year’s delay helps. The Iranians say time is on their side in this dispute, and as long as their government holds together in the face of rising protests, they may be right.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2009/10/26/world/middleeast/26iran.html?em>

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London Daily Telegraph
26 October 2009

Iran may Offer Compromise on UN Nuclear Deal

By Richard Spencer in Dubai

His comments raise the prospect of further rounds of time-delaying negotiations.

Senior Iranian politicians poured cold water at the weekend on the deal offered by the International Atomic Energy Agency in Vienna. The United States, Russia and France all supported the proposal, under which Iran would send most of its low-enriched uranium to Moscow for further processing.

But the foreign minister, Manouchehr Mottaki, said on Monday that a partial agreement to the deal was still being considered.

"For the supply of fuel, we may buy it like in the past or we may deliver a part of our fuel that we don't need now," he said, according to state media.

A senior MP gave more details of what might be included in Iran's reply, which the government has promised it will give later this week. The deadline was supposed to have been last Friday.

"Because the West has repeatedly violated agreements in the past, Iran should send its low enriched uranium abroad gradually and in several phases and necessary guarantees should be taken," said Alaeddin Boroujerdi, head of parliament's foreign affairs committee.

It is unclear whether this would satisfy the IAEA and Iran's negotiating partners, and may well be designed both to split the United Nations security council and draw out negotiations even further.

The IAEA deal would see about 1.2 tons of low-enriched uranium sent to Moscow and returned as fuel plates for a research reactor, about three-quarters of Iran's stocks.

About a ton of low-enriched uranium would be needed for further processing to build a nuclear weapon if Iran decided to go ahead with one, meaning that the deal would ensure a delay.

Iran denies it wants to build a nuclear weapon, insisting it only wants fuel for the research reactor and a proposed power plant.

The Iranian counter offer will raise suspicions that it only wants to send as much low-enriched uranium abroad as it can replace with its current enrichment programme, which it has pledged not to give up whatever the outcome of talks.

That would leave it with the ability to stage a "break-out" to fast development of a weapon in future, which is what the West and the Israelis in particular fear.

Mohsen Rezai, the conservative secretary of another government body, the Expediency Council, did little to assuage these fears on Sunday when he demanded that Iran had to "keep 1,100 kilogrammes" of low-enriched uranium, just over a ton.

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/iran/6439102/Iran-may-offer-compromise-on-UN-nuclear-deal.html#>

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Washington Post
October 27, 2009

Iran Officials Appear Split On Nuclear Plan

By Thomas Erdbrink

TEHRAN -- High-ranking Iranian officials appear divided over a draft proposal with the United States and other countries that would transfer the bulk of the Islamic republic's enriched uranium stockpile out of the country.

The divergent views have emerged in a string of reports in the official press and other media outlets over the past several days. On Friday, Iran missed a deadline to respond to the proposal, which would allow the country to acquire fuel for its medical reactor.

In what may mark a possible compromise position, Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki said Monday that Iran could either send part of its low-enriched uranium stockpile abroad for specialized processing into fuel or buy the material from foreign suppliers.

"In order to obtain this fuel, we might spend money as in the past or we might present part of the fuel that we have right now, and currently do not need, for further processing," he was quoted as saying by the official Islamic Republic News Agency.

But several influential lawmakers, the leading pro-government newspaper and the former top nuclear negotiator have all spoken out against the deal. They say the West is trying to deceive the country and keep the nuclear material in order to sabotage Iran's atomic progress.

"Iran's response is that it will not give even one milligram of its enriched uranium to be changed into 20 percent enriched uranium by foreigners," according to a column Monday in the pro-government newspaper Kayhan, which often reflects the views of decision-makers within Iran's leadership. "America, Europe and Israel, these American cowboys, old British foxes and Zionist child murderers, want to use this ploy to take Iran's uranium and not give it back."

France's foreign minister, Bernard Kouchner, called for an urgent deal with Tehran, saying it was the only way to avoid an Israeli strike against Iran. Israel "will not tolerate an Iranian bomb. We know that, all of us. So that is an additional risk, and that is why we must decrease the tension and solve the problem. Hopefully we are going to stop this race to a confrontation," Kouchner told London's Daily Telegraph.

In a remark possibly related to the current negotiations, the deputy head of parliament, a known critic of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, said Monday that Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, the country's supreme leader, was opposed to negotiations with the United States.

"At the present time, the leader and the Supreme National Security Council stress that our strategic policies are not to negotiate with the U.S.," said Mohammad Reza Bahonar, according to the semiofficial Iranian Labor News Agency. "Therefore we will not have direct negotiations with America."

Khamenei officially sets out Iran's foreign policies, which are implemented by the Supreme National Security Council.

Ahmadinejad has often said he is ready for talks with the United States, and last month during negotiations between Iran and world powers over the Islamic republic's nuclear program, representatives of both countries had a private discussion. There has been no government reaction to Bahonar's remarks.

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/10/26/AR2009102602468.html?hpid=topnews>

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Xinhua News - China
27 October 2009

China Eyes Consensus on Iran's Nuclear-fuel Supply Issue

BEIJING, Oct. 27 (Xinhua) -- China hoped relevant parties could reach consensus through consultations on the issue of Iran's nuclear-fuel supply at an early date.

IAEA director general Mohamed El Baradei proposed a draft agreement over nuclear-fuel needed for a research reactor in Iran. "We hope relevant parties could reach consensus through consultations on this issue at an early date," said Foreign Ministry spokesman Ma Zhaoxu.

Representatives from Iran, the United States, Russia, France and the IAEA met in Vienna from Monday to Wednesday to discuss the nuclear-fuel supply for a research reactor in the Iranian capital of Tehran. The four countries agreed to conduct a feasibility review of proposals advanced by El Baradei.

http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2009-10/27/content_12342052.htm

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Bloomberg.com
October 27, 2009

Iran Wants 'Important' Changes to Nuclear Fuel Plan

By Ali Sheikholeslami and Maher Chmaytelli

Oct. 27 (Bloomberg) -- Iran will ask for "important" changes to a proposal from the United Nations nuclear agency that would provide fuel for a research reactor in Tehran, state-run Al Alam television said.

The Persian Gulf country will give its response to the plan in the next 48 hours, the Arabic-language station said on its Web site, citing what it described as an informed person. It didn't elaborate on the changes.

Iran on Oct. 23 missed a deadline for its response to a proposal by the UN International Atomic Energy Agency to ship most of its stock of low-enriched uranium to Russia for further processing. The country said it would reply to the IAEA this week about the plan, under which the material would be returned as metal rods that could only be used in a reactor and not in a nuclear weapon. Uranium enriched to higher concentrations can be used to form the core of a bomb.

"Our opinion is to buy nuclear fuel without sending any of our stockpile abroad," Alaeddin Borujerdi, head of the parliament's national security and foreign policy committee, was cited as saying by the state-run Iranian Students News Agency.

If Iran decides to export its uranium stockpile for further processing into reactor fuel, the better solution is for the shipments to be made in stages and not all at once, he said.

Not 'Encouraging'

Any changes by Iran to proposals for the processing of its nuclear fuel wouldn't send a "very encouraging sign," French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner said.

“Don’t think the Iranians are gaining time,” Kouchner told reporters after a meeting of European Union foreign ministers in Luxembourg today. “Time is working against the Iranians.”

A continued standoff could lead to “completely unforeseeable” consequences, Kouchner said.

Iranian officials have said they would continue to enrich uranium as part of a peaceful nuclear program, even if some of its supply is sent to Russia for further enrichment.

Acceptance of the Tehran reactor deal by Iran would improve prospects for further talks over its atomic program, which the U.S. and its allies say is a cover for weapons development. Iran rejects the accusations, saying its program is solely for civilian purposes.

<http://www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=20601082&sid=aG6lWdPVXyaY>

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RIA Novosti –Russia

27 October 2009

Ahmadinejad Links Iran's Nuclear Program to Israel

MOSCOW, October 27 (RIA Novosti) - Iran will move forward with its nuclear program as long as Israel possesses nuclear weapons, the Jewish Telegraphic Agency reported Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad as saying on Tuesday.

Ahmadinejad's comment came during a meeting with Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

"When an illegal regime possesses nuclear weapons, the other countries' rights for peaceful nuclear energy cannot be denied," he said.

Israel does not admit having nuclear weapons.

Four UN nuclear inspectors arrived in Iran on Sunday to inspect the country's second uranium enrichment facility, currently under construction.

Iran is under three sets of UN Security Council sanctions over its refusal to halt uranium enrichment.

"The Zionist regime is a threat to all nations and it wants the region to be free of strong countries," Ahmadinejad reportedly told Erdogan. "Today we see that applying force in Gaza was not enough for them so they are attacking holy Jerusalem."

Israeli authorities on Tuesday demolished two Palestinian homes on the outskirts of Arab East Jerusalem.

The Islamic Republic has consistently denied it is seeking to make nuclear weapons, but has insisted on its right to a peaceful program aimed at generating electricity.

Iran does not recognize Israel as a sovereign country.

<http://en.rian.ru/world/20091027/156606677.html>

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Boston Globe

October 24, 2009

Czechs, NATO Back New US Missile Defense Plan

By Karel Janicek, Associated Press

PRAGUE - The Czech Republic and NATO said yesterday that they backed a reworked US missile defense plan meant to defend against threats from Iran and other nations.

The endorsements came as Vice President Joe Biden wrapped up a tour of Central Europe aimed at shoring up support for the new system, which is focused on short- and medium-range interceptors.

The Czech Republic is “ready to participate in the building of such a new architecture,” Czech Prime Minister Jan Fischer told reporters after a meeting with Biden in Prague.

The United States was “very appreciative of the prime minister’s statement today,” Biden responded, adding that Washington would send a high-level defense team to Prague next month to “discuss the terms this participation will take.”

In neighboring Slovakia, NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen said the system envisioned by the Obama administration would provide Europeans and Americans with protection against a “real threat.”

Speaking to reporters in Bratislava after Secretary Robert Gates briefed NATO defense ministers there, Fogh Rasmussen added that NATO will work with the United States to incorporate the system fully into the alliance.

“Ministers welcomed the fact the new approach puts European missile defense more into a NATO context,” he said, adding: “It is good for solidarity.”

Biden’s visit to Central Europe - he was in Poland and Romania earlier this week - comes a month after the Obama administration scrapped George W. Bush-era blueprints to base a missile defense shield in Eastern Europe designed to shoot down long-range missiles. Russia had strongly objected that the system jeopardized its own security.

The decision sparked fears in formerly communist Eastern Europe that Washington was sacrificing its interests in order to improve ties with Russia.

On Wednesday, Poland eagerly signed on to the revamped US missile shield.

But in the Czech Republic not everyone was pleased by yesterday’s developments.

“We are outraged,” said Jan Tamas, spokesman for the Nonviolence Movement and organizer of past anti-missile defense protests in the country.

“It’s alarming that a government without a proper mandate is negotiating about it and claims it wants to participate,” Tamas said.

Analysts had predicted it was unlikely Biden would leave with a clear commitment from Prague, since the country’s weak caretaker government lacks a mandate to move forward on any strategic defense issues, including missile defense deals. A new government will be formed only after general elections in May.

The country has been in political limbo since Topolanek’s government lost a parliamentary no-confidence vote in March.

[http://www.boston.com/news/nation/washington/articles/2009/10/24/czechs_nato_back_new_us_missile_defense_pl
an/](http://www.boston.com/news/nation/washington/articles/2009/10/24/czechs_nato_back_new_us_missile_defense_plan/)

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Deutsche Welle – Germany
25 October 2009

New German Government to Seek Removal of US Nuclear Weapons

Foreign Minister-designate Guido Westerwelle has renewed calls for a withdrawal of US nuclear weapons based in Germany, saying he would hold talks with the Obama administration on the issue.

Speaking at a meeting of his business-friendly FDP party in Berlin on Sunday, Westerwelle said the new German government would support the vision of US President Barack Obama for a world free of nuclear weapons.

"We will take President Obama at his word and enter talks with our allies so that the last of the nuclear weapons still stationed in Germany, relics of the Cold War, can finally be removed," Westerwelle said.

"Germany must be free of nuclear weapons," he said, adding that he would personally make efforts towards that purpose.

No unilateral move to remove nuclear arms

His comments came a day after his FDP party reached agreement with Chancellor Angela Merkel's conservatives for a new center-right government scheduled to take office on October 28.

The coalition agreement reached by the two sides calls specifically for talks with NATO and the US to remove the weapons.

Chancellor Angela Merkel confirmed this goal, but emphasized no unilateral action would be taken to remove the nuclear warheads. "We do not want any independent action here," Merkel said on Saturday in Berlin.

The US, which deployed nuclear weapons in various European countries in the 1950s, is estimated to have 20 atomic warheads in Germany.

No official or publicly accessible information is available on where the weapons were stored. But some of the missiles are believed to be stationed at the Buechel airbase in the western German state of Rhineland- Palatinate.

Controversial issue in Germany

Westerwelle, 47, has little direct foreign policy experience. But the removal of US nuclear weapons from German soil is an issue he has regularly emphasized.

His FDP party is pro-American and has long campaigned for disarmament.

The nuclear issue, including nuclear power, is highly unpopular in Germany, with shipments of nuclear waste regularly triggering angry protests. The country has no permanent storage site for the waste.

The new German government recently agreed to reverse plans to abandon nuclear power. Berlin is eager to reduce dependency on gas and oil imports, but environmentalists have already vowed to fight the decision.

<http://www.dw-world.de/dw/article/0,,4824174,00.html>

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London Guardian
25 October 2009

Trident Replacement Plan No Longer Credible, says Former Foreign Secretary

Richard Norton-Taylor

The decision to replace an unaffordable Trident missile system calls into question Gordon Brown's stated commitment to nuclear disarmament, a former Labour foreign secretary says.

In a sweeping attack on the government's defence policy, Lord Owen describes the estimated £15bn-£20bn cost of replacing Trident in its 2006 white paper as "no longer credible".

Abandoning Trident and instead having a number of cruise missiles equipped with nuclear warheads would be cheaper and more flexible, making it easier for the UK to contribute to disarmament measures over the coming decades, Owen said. The option is favoured in some quarters of the Ministry of Defence and is being considered by the Liberal Democrats.

Owen, a former minister for the navy, was appointed foreign secretary in 1977. In 1983 he left Labour to help set up the Social Democratic party. His book, Nuclear Papers, is published by Liverpool University Press.

"If we are to start, in 2010, the process of genuinely contributing to the elimination of nuclear weapons, it will not be credible if the British government commits to a new UK ballistic deterrent similar to Trident," he writes.

He adds: "Unless we learn to focus our defence budget far better than in the last decade Britain will look increasingly like a toothless lion. That will diminish our influence and power in the UN security council far more than moving to a non-ballistic cruise missile minimum nuclear deterrent."

Owen also claims the MoD recently withdrew documents on British nuclear weapons policy of the late 70s that were previously available at the National Archive. The ministry did so after Owen alerted it to their existence when asking for comments on them.

Sir Bill Jeffrey, the top civil servant at the MoD, has admitted the papers were available until recently. "They were recalled for re-review because we believed they might contain sensitive material which had been released in error," he told Owen.

One significant report on nuclear weapons policy drawn up by senior officials in 1978 is still withheld – though a commentary on it for the chiefs of staff has been published, albeit with passages redacted.

Owen accuses the government of imposing an arbitrary and illogical policy towards the disclosure of official documents. Those that have been released show that Britain's nuclear deterrent, the pre-Trident Polaris system, did not have the capability that ministers were told that it had. They also show that crucial information about the costs of the system was withheld from the then chancellor, Denis Healey.

Papers the MoD are holding back concern arguments in Whitehall over Owen's proposal that nuclear warheads could be put on cruise missiles and deployed on smaller submarines rather than on a more expensive Trident fleet equipped with long-range ballistic missiles.

Owen challenges the government's repeated claims that money spent on Trident has no impact on the defence budget. "The nuclear deterrent has never been ringfenced within overall government expenditure: its extra costs have always come out of the overall defence budget," he writes.

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2009/oct/25/trident-defence-policy-david-owen>

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Yonhap News – South Korea
October 24, 2009

S. Korea Vows Efforts for Stronger NPT Regime

SEOUL, Oct. 23 (Yonhap) -- South Korea said Friday it will do its best to help global non-proliferation efforts as a country directly facing a nuclear threat from communist North Korea.

"Non-proliferation is a prerequisite for peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula," Vice Foreign Minister Shin Kak-soo said in his speech at a meeting of the U.N. Association of Republic of Korea (South Korea).

Shin stressed Seoul's role in empowering the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) system.

"In a bid to join efforts toward a nuclear-free world, Korea will do its utmost to make next year's NPT Review Conference a turning point for the future of the NPT regime," Shin said. The conference is scheduled in New York in May following a summit of major countries the previous month.

"Moreover, the Nuclear Security Summit to be held next April prior to the NPT Review Conference will serve to further strengthen nuclear non-proliferation and security of nuclear materials in the world."

He said Seoul will pursue the denuclearization of North Korea in line with President Lee Myung-bak's recent "grand bargain" proposal through the six-party talks also involving the U.S., China, Russia, and Japan.

Under Lee's offer, the North would be given security assurances and various other incentives if it dismantles core parts of its nuclear program.

"The realistic way to resolve this thorny issue is that through the six-party talks. North Korea should carry out complete, verifiable, and irreversible dismantlement of its nuclear weapons program in return for security assurance and international assistance by the other five parties," Shin said.

<http://english.yonhapnews.co.kr/northkorea/2009/10/23/45/0401000000AEN20091023006500315F.HTML>

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Joong Ang Daily – South Korea
October 26, 2009

U.S., North Hold Rare Nuclear Talks in New York City

By Yoo Jee-ho

In a rare occasion that could help advance the Washington-Pyongyang bilateral talks on ending a nuclear standoff, senior North Korean and American nuclear officials held a face-to-face meeting in New York early Sunday, Korean time (Saturday, EST).

The U.S. State Department said that Ri Gun, deputy North Korean negotiator to the six-party talks, met with Sung Kim, chief U.S. nuclear representative and special U.S. envoy on the North's nuclear disarmament.

The statement said the meeting took place in New York and added Kim took the opportunity "to convey our position on denuclearization and the six-party talks." No further details of their one-hour talk were available.

After emerging from the meeting, Ri told reporters, "I met with Sung Kim and discussed issues of mutual interest." Ri, who is also director general of American affairs at Pyongyang's Foreign Ministry, is in the United States to attend a forum called the Northeast Asia Cooperative Dialogue in San Diego, California, starting this week. He was in New York for seminars, and he is to return to New York Friday for more seminars set up by the Korea Society and the National Committee on American Foreign Policy.

The Ri-Kim talks came as North Korea continues to seek a direct, exclusive meeting with the United States. North Korean leader Kim Jong-il said earlier this month that the North would be willing to return to the six-party talks depending on the progress made at the Pyongyang-Washington bilateral meeting. The six-party dialogue, which involves the two Koreas, the United States, Russia, Japan and China, has been stalled since last December. The North declared it would never return to the six-party table and called the framework "dead." It followed by conducting its second nuclear test and has test-fired a barrage of missiles in defiance of the international community. The United States, which doesn't have diplomatic ties with Pyongyang, still hasn't decided on the time and place for its meeting with North Korea. The two sides have other differences.

The North wants to deal with the nuclear issue one-on-one with the United States. But Washington considers any possible bilateral meeting a chance to persuade the North to return to the six-party table and has insisted that any nuclear discussions must be carried out within the multilateral setting. Kurt Campbell, the U.S. assistant secretary of state for East Asian and Pacific affairs, last week became the latest American official to claim that Washington would not sit down with Pyongyang unless the meeting helped resume the six-party talks.

"We would be prepared for, in the right circumstances at some point, some initial interaction [with North Korea] that would lead rapidly to a six-party framework," he told a think tank forum in Washington. He also said "patience and caution" were necessary in taking up the North's call for the bilateral meeting.

Even as it mulls over a possible meeting, the United States has said it has no intention of easing restrictions on North Korea just to secure that country's return to the nuclear talks.

<http://joongdaily.joins.com/article/view.asp?aid=2911734>

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Yonhap News
26 October 2009

N. Korea Completes Construction of Top Missile Base: Officials

By Sam Kim

SEOUL, Oct. 26 (Yonhap) -- North Korea has completed the construction of its largest and most sophisticated missile base on the west coast, laying the groundwork for improved intercontinental ballistic missiles, senior officials here said Monday.

The Dongchang-ri base has been under construction for several years, deepening outside concerns that North Korea is continuing to develop its capability to deliver weapons of mass destruction.

"The construction is as good as finished," one South Korean official said, asking for anonymity because he was speaking on matters of intelligence. "The necessary facilities are all there"

Another official said North Korea has been testing missile parts such as boosters at the site about 200km northwest of Pyongyang and only 70km west of the main nuclear complex in Yongbyon.

"It's a leap in North Korea's ballistic missile development," the official said, also speaking on condition of anonymity and adding the construction ended "only recently."

Analysts say the Dongchang-ri base is about three times larger than the Musudan-ri site where North Korea launched a long-range rocket in April, claiming that it put a satellite into space.

The launch on the east coast drew condemnations worldwide. The U.S. and South Korea denounced it as a thinly veiled test of a Taepodong-2 missile technically capable of reaching the western U.S.

Less than a month later, North Korea went ahead with its second nuclear test, triggering U.N. sanctions tougher than those imposed after the first one in 2006.

In June, South Korean officials said North Korea transported an intercontinental ballistic missile, or ICBM, by train to the Dongchang-ri site from a munitions factory near Pyongyang, fueling tensions already high from the nuclear blast.

Nam Sung-wook, who heads a research institute affiliated with South Korea's spy agency, said in July that the Dongchang-ri site would allow for testing of missiles with a range of over 3,000km.

The officials said the newest base is for ICBMs, which can fly at least 5,000km. The long-range rocket which the North fired in April is believed to have flown at least 3,000km.

North Korea has test-fired a range of short-range and mid-range missiles this year. The country, which has in recent months shown willingness to return to talks on its nuclear program, is believed to have up to 1,000 ballistic missiles, including 700 Scuds.

<http://english.yonhapnews.co.kr/northkorea/2009/10/26/45/0401000000AEN20091026006500315F.HTML>

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Thaindian News – Thailand

25 October 2009

US Spying on Pak Nuclear Programs for Years: Report

By ANI

Islamabad, Oct.25 (ANI): A website report has revealed that there are sufficient evidence to prove that the US is secretly keeping a close watch on Pakistan's nuclear programme, and confirmed that American diplomats and officials were spying on Kahuta, one of the major nuclear establishments of the country, for years.

A report by the International Analyst Network, said American officials were spying on Pakistan's nuclear course, and that several elements of the Pakistani Government were assisting them.

The report also raised questions over the role of Interior Minister Rehman Malik and his ministry for allowing the US authorities to perform dubious activities inside the country's territory.

“A trail of internal ministry documents sharply bring Mr. Malik's role into focus, especially in a case where his ministry appears to have permitted US defense contractors to conduct suspicious activities on Pakistani soil without informing Pakistani intelligence agencies,” the report said.

Days ago it was reported that the US officials have been keeping an eye on the Kahuta nuclear site since 2003 through its Police College Training College in Sihala, which is situated close to the site.

According to sources, the American base, which is situated on a vast piece of land, is surrounded with high rise walls from all sides, so much so, that no one even from the senior college management is allowed to enter the prohibited zone.

Officials said US authorities have also installed a large signboard prohibiting foreigners from entering the region.

“The Americans have also placed containers as makeshift facility inside the said compound within the college boundaries,” officials said.

Senior Pak officials have been continuously raising questions over US' interference, however, their concerns have gone unnoticed, the report said.

They argue that even if this Americans training center was necessary, why such a sensitive area had been chosen, risking the secrecy and sensitivity of nuclear installations in the country. (ANI)

http://www.thaindian.com/newsportal/south-asia/us-spying-on-pak-nuclear-programs-for-years-report_100265411.html

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Wall Street Journal

OPINION

October 24, 2009

Dickering Over Uranium

One sign that an adversary isn't serious about negotiating is when it rejects even your concessions. That seemed to be the case yesterday when Iran gave signs it may turn down an offer from Russia, Europe and the U.S. to let Tehran enrich its uranium under foreign supervision outside the country. The mullahs so far won't take yes for an answer.

Tehran had previously looked set to accept the deal, which is hardly an obstacle to its nuclear program. A Democratic foreign policy shop called the National Security Network heralded the expected pact in a blast email this week as "Engagement Paying Dividends on Iran." But now Tehran may be holding out for even more concessions, as Iranian news reports suggest Iran wants to be able to buy more enriched uranium from a third country to use in a research reactor for medical use—as opposed to shipping its uranium to Russia for a roundtrip.

This may merely be the equivalent of last-minute haggling over the price of a Persian carpet, because the West's enrichment offer is already a good one for Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. Iran would give up one bomb's worth—about 2,600 pounds—of uranium enriched at its facility in Natanz to the low level of 3.5%. Russia would then enrich the uranium further to 19.75% and someone, most likely France, would put the uranium into fuel rods for transfer back to Iran for ostensible use in a civilian nuclear reactor. Western officials say this would delay Iran's efforts to get a bomb.

There are a couple problems with this theory. With the exception of the regime, no one knows for sure how much uranium Iran possesses. Given Iran's long history of lying to the world and the discovery of covert enrichment facilities (most recently in Qom) that need uranium from somewhere, a fair guess would be that Iran has more than the 3,500 pounds it has declared to U.N. inspectors.

Meanwhile, Iran insists it won't stop enriching uranium on its own, in violation of Security Council resolutions. Aside from rewarding Iran for past misbehavior by letting it use illegally enriched uranium, this deal fails to solve the problem it is intended to solve. That's because as long as the Natanz facility continues to enrich uranium at its current rate of about 132 pounds a month, Iran will produce enough low-enriched uranium within the year for a bomb. Make Natanz more efficient and the time could be cut in half.

Claims by Western officials that Iran can't convert the uranium enriched abroad for military use are less than reassuring. Though encased in a fuel rod in France, the more highly-enriched uranium returned to Iran would be simple to extract, using something as basic as a tin snipper to force open the fuel cladding, and enrich further.

"With 19.75 enriched feed"—as opposed to the 3.5% that Iran now manages—"the level of effort or time Iran would need to make weapons grade uranium would drop very significantly," from roughly five months today "down to something slightly less than four weeks," says Henry Sokolski of the Nonproliferation Policy Education Center.

Iran may also welcome the Russian-enriched uranium because its own technology is less advanced. The October 8 edition of the trade journal *Nucleonics Week* reports that Iran's low-enriched uranium appears to have "impurities" that "could cause centrifuges to fail" if Iran itself tried to enrich uranium to weapons-grade—which would mean above 20% and ideally up to 90%. In this scenario, the West would be decontaminating the uranium for Iran. Along the way, Iranian scientists may also pick up clues on how to do better themselves.

The mullahs know that President Obama is eager to show diplomatic gains from his engagement strategy, and they are going to exploit that eagerness to get every possible concession. The one thing Iran has shown no desire to bargain over is its intention to become a nuclear power.

http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748703298004574457702047409962.html?mod=WSJ_hpp_sections_opinion

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Philadelphia Inquirer
OPINION
October 26, 2009

To Succeed With Iran, Push A Nuke-Free Zone

By Hans Blix

Several years were wasted in encouraging Iran to suspend its uranium-enrichment program by making this a precondition for talks. We should give President Obama credit for dropping this futile condition and for the recent start of negotiations. Only direct contact can determine if agreement is possible.

The signals are mixed. After the recent suicide bombing in southeast Iran, outside countries were blamed for supporting groups responsible for the attack. However, meetings last week in Vienna may show if Iran is willing to go through with an apparent readiness to send most of the uranium it has so far enriched to a low level for further enrichment in Russia. Such a development would mean a drastic reduction in Iran's stock of enriched uranium. However, it would not tell us if there is an Iranian readiness to negotiate about the original program.

Some are convinced that Iran seeks to develop a nuclear weapon. The issue is not really dispositive of the current negotiations. Even if Iran were to have no such intention today, it could change its mind tomorrow. The issue, then, is persuading Iran to abandon its enrichment program.

Both incentives and disincentives have been tried. To justify harsh punitive measures, some wish to show that the Iranian government is lying. However, trying to shame Iran will not improve the chances of agreement - which should be the most important objective. Moreover, sharp economic sanctions and military measures could have dire consequences and rally nationalist-minded Iranians to support a government the majority otherwise opposes.

Earlier European messages to Iran have pointed to possible rewards, such as support for civilian nuclear power construction and membership in the World Trade Organization. These incentives have evidently not been enough. It does not mean that diplomacy is exhausted. After 30 years of no diplomatic relations with the United States and recurrent U.S. reminders that all options "are on the table" - including military options - perhaps assurances against attack and of diplomatic relations could carry some weight in the negotiation.

A broadening of the agenda for discussion has been suggested. Iran has said it is ready to take up the subjects of nonproliferation and disarmament. These items could offer new openings. Even the subject of a Mideast free of weapons of mass destruction could be broached. That idea could be expanded to an area free of uranium enrichment and plutonium production. All countries in the region have supported the concept, but for Israel it has always been a very remote possibility.

Israel may look at its nuclear weapons capability as insurance against a possible existential threat. However, this perception could change if one or more states in the region were to develop nuclear weapons or move close to weapons capability by enriching uranium or producing plutonium. To avoid such a situation, perhaps Israel would consider an agreement under which all countries in the region would renounce and eliminate nuclear weapons as well as nuclear fuel cycle installations.

Such thinking may be far from the mind of current Israeli leaders, but isn't it preferable to its usual response to nuclear activities? Bombing Iraq's Osirak reactor in 1981 and, in 2007, attacking Syrian installations claimed to be a North Korean-designed research reactor? Or more recent threats to bomb Iranian installations?

Today, with Iran and other states in the Middle East moving into nuclear activities, the zone idea has new appeal. For Iran, giving up enrichment within the framework of a zone would be different from acting unilaterally. It could contribute to a broader goal of regional disarmament and nonproliferation.

I do not underestimate the problems, such as verification or of outside assurances of security and supply of uranium fuel. Yet, if the Obama administration is serious about nonproliferation and disarmament, a bold, broad approach is needed. The problem is difficult, but by no means insoluble.

http://www.philly.com/inquirer/opinion/20091026_To_succeed_with_Iran_push_a_nuke-free_zone.html

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Biden's Missile-Defense Missteps

By Peter Brookes

Vice President Joe Biden's trip last week to Poland and the Czech Republic may have helped soothe rattled allies after Team Obama pitched overboard the W-era, anti-Iran missile shield that was to be deployed in both countries. But the new missile-defense plan he pitched has problems.

A lot of them.

In pulling the plug on the Bush missile-defense plan in Eastern Europe last month, the White House came up with a new architecture based on a new evaluation of existing intelligence on the Iranian ballistic-missile threat.

The Pentagon now insists Iran is moving faster on its short- and medium-range ballistic-missile programs than on its long-range ICBM effort, against which the Czech and Polish sites were aimed. (Of course, many experts think progress in one missile program supports another.)

So the Pentagon is proposing to place Navy ships equipped with SM-3 missiles around Europe to intercept and protect the continent from Iran's short- and medium-range missiles. This is a solid move to defend Europe.

But while Iran may be a threat to Europe, it's a much *bigger* threat to us (and Israel). So while it's appropriate to defend Europe as part of NATO, the new plan doesn't do enough to protect the good ol' US of A from the Iranian ICBM threat.

Supposedly, there's a plan for that, though, which includes developing a land-based SM-3 for Europe by 2020 and using missile-defense interceptors that the Bush administration placed in Alaska and California.

Unfortunately, the US Air Force estimates that Tehran could have an ICBM by 2015 -- an assessment the Pentagon is now hoping may be on the early side. Of course, intelligence estimates can be wrong; an Iranian ICBM could be here *sooner* than 2015.

But the Obama administration thinks that if the Iranian ICBM comes online before the land-based SM-3s are developed and in place, the West Coast, Bush-era missile-defense sites give us some breathing room.

Not really.

The West Coast missile-defense architecture was designed to protect us against North Korea's nuke and missile threat, not Iran's -- hence the development of a similar system in Eastern Europe.

The Alaska and California sites *could* take out an Iranian ICBM targeted at much of the United States, but there are serious questions about coverage -- including New York and Washington -- because of the missiles' trajectory and range.

Worse yet, President Obama decided to reduce the number of West Coast interceptors from 40 to 30, which would limit the capability to take out incoming ICBMs, because several interceptors would be fired at each missile to ensure a kill.

That means there's a gap in our defenses against an Iranian ICBM strike until the land-based SM-3s are operational, which, by the way, will almost certainly face funding and engineering-development challenges.

In the end, the Biden proposal not only lags the Bush plan's deployment time frame, it's possibly more expensive and probably only equally as capable. Plus, the Russians (and Chinese) may try to get us to stand down on the new, "juiced" land-based SM-3, arguing that they're a counterspace weapon in the arms-control talks many think the Obama administration is interested in opening on the weaponization of space.

In other words, some experts think there's a chance there'll never be a land-based SM-3 system.

So unless you're living in a fantasy world, brace yourself for the fact we'll be facing an Iranian nuclear-capable ICBM threat soon -- perhaps sooner than we thought -- without an effective defense.

It's also a good time to remind ourselves that the purpose of defense is to be technologically ahead of the threat, not behind it -- which is where we'll be if we're not careful.

http://www.nypost.com/p/news/opinion/opedcolumnists/biden_missile_defense_missteps_WHII9AVd2dbBpIq8rdM8NP

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