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New York Times
November 27, 2009

IAEA Votes To Censure Iran Over Nuclear Cover - Up

VIENNA (Reuters) - U.N. nuclear watchdog governors voted on Friday to rebuke Iran for building a uranium enrichment plant in secret but Tehran dismissed the move as "intimidation" which would poison its negotiations with world powers.

The resolution was the first by the 35-nation board of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) against Iran in almost four years, and a sign of growing alarm over Tehran's failure to dispel fears it has clandestine plans to build nuclear bombs.

It passed by a 25-3 margin with six abstentions, smoothed by rare backing from Russia and China, which have blocked global attempts to isolate Iran, a trade partner for both, in the past.

Russia called on Iran to "react with full seriousness to the signal contained in the resolution ... and to ensure full cooperation with the agency." Moscow and Beijing's support is seen as vital to the success of international pressure on Iran.

The vote reflected exasperation with Iran's retreat from an IAEA-brokered draft deal to provide it with fuel for a medical nuclear reactor if it agreed to part with its enriched uranium, which could be turned into bomb material if further refined.

British Prime Minister Gordon Brown said major powers would have to pursue harsher sanctions against Iran if it ignored the vote. This, he said during a visit to Trinidad, sent "the clearest possible signal to Iran that they should desist from their nuclear plans, that the world knows what they are doing."

U.S. IAEA envoy Glyn Davies called the resolution "a signal that patience is running out."

"We can't have round after round of fruitless negotiations, circular negotiations that don't get us where we want to get," he said, referring to perceptions Iran is stringing out inconclusive talks to buy time to stockpile enriched uranium.

Davies said it was imperative for Iran to "live up to its international obligations and offer transparency in its nuclear programme, rather than carry out more evasions and unilateral re-interpretations of its obligations."

The measure won blanket Western backing. Cuba, Malaysia and Venezuela, prominent in a developing nation bloc that includes Iran, voted "no," while Afghanistan, Brazil, Egypt, Pakistan, South Africa and Turkey abstained. Azerbaijan missed the ballot.

Iran denies seeking nuclear weapons, saying its atomic energy programme is purely for peaceful purposes. But its record of clandestine nuclear work and curbs on IAEA inspections have stoked suspicions and a seven-year standoff with world powers.

Iranian Ambassador Ali Asghar Soltanieh called the resolution, which also urged Iran to immediately freeze the Fordow enrichment project hidden inside a mountain bunker, a "hasty and undue" step devoid of legal basis.

IRAN SAYS WILL IGNORE RESOLUTION

"The great nation of Iran will never bow to pressure and intimidation vis a vis its inalienable right to peaceful uses of nuclear energy," he said.

"We will not implement any word of it because this is a politically motivated gesture against the Iranian nation."

He said Iran would continue to allow basic inspections at its nuclear sites but stop making "voluntary gestures" of extra cooperation such as when it allowed widened surveillance at its rapidly expanding main enrichment complex at Natanz.

Soltanieh said the resolution would also poison the atmosphere for further talks with the United States, France, Britain, Germany, Russia and China launched on October 1 in Geneva, where the reactor fuel plan was agreed in principle.

"Such gestures ... are certainly destructive. They spoil the existing cooperative environment. But neither sanctions nor the threat of military attacks can interrupt our peaceful nuclear activities even for a second," he said.

Iran admitted Fordow's existence in September, at least two years into its construction, shocking IAEA inspectors. Western diplomats said Iran was forced to come clean after learning the site had been detected by their spy services.

Fordow's emergence fanned suspicions there are more secret sites intended to produce atom bombs, since experts said the plant's capacity was too small to feed a civilian nuclear power plant, but big enough to make weapons material.

The resolution urged Iran to document the timeline and original purpose of Fordow and confirm it has no more hidden atomic facilities or clandestine plans for any. Soltanieh said those demands were beyond Iran's legal obligations.

Iran has told the IAEA it developed the Fordow site in secret as a backup for other, known facilities in case they were bombed by Israel, which deems the Islamic Republic's expanding nuclear programme "an existential threat."

The last IAEA board resolution slapped on Iran was in February 2006, when governors referred Tehran's dossier to the U.N. Security Council over its refusal to suspend enrichment and open up completely to IAEA inspections and investigations.

Iran had assured the IAEA last year it was not hiding any nuclear-related activities in violation of transparency rules.

Friday's resolution voiced "serious concern" at the Fordow cover-up and said this blatantly defied U.N. Security Council demands dating from 2006 for a suspension of sensitive nuclear activity to foster good-faith negotiations.

(Additional reporting by Sylvia Westall in Vienna and Adrian Croft in Trinidad; editing by Andrew Roche)

<http://www.nytimes.com/reuters/2009/11/27/world/international-uk-nuclear-iaea-vote.html>

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Washington Post
November 27, 2009

IAEA Chief Says Iran Has Brought Nuclear Probe To A Standstill

By George Jahn

VIENNA -- The International Atomic Energy Agency probe of Iran's nuclear program is at a dead end because Tehran is not cooperating, the chief of the U.N. nuclear watchdog said Thursday in an unusually blunt expression of frustration four days before he leaves office.

Mohamed ElBaradei also warned that international confidence in Iran's assertions of purely peaceful intent shrank after its belated revelation of a previously secret nuclear facility. And he criticized Iran for not accepting an internationally endorsed plan meant to delay its achieving the ability to make nuclear weapons.

"There has been no movement on remaining issues of concern which need to be clarified for the agency to verify the exclusively peaceful nature of Iran's nuclear program," ElBaradei said at the opening session of the IAEA's 35-nation board of governors. "We have effectively reached a dead end, unless Iran engages fully with us."

"Issues of concern" is the IAEA term for indications that Iran has experimented with nuclear weapons programs, including missile-delivery systems and tests of explosives that could serve as nuclear-bomb detonators.

ElBaradei has emphasized the need for talks instead of threats in engaging Iran. He has criticized the United States for invading Iraq on the pretext that Saddam Hussein had a nuclear weapons program, which has never been proved. That criticism -- and perceived softness on the Iran issue -- has drawn complaints from the United States and its allies that he was overstepping his mandate.

But ElBaradei's comments Thursday left little doubt that he was most unhappy with Iran.

"I am disappointed that Iran has not so far agreed to the original proposal" involving removal of most of Iran's stockpile of enriched uranium, ElBaradei said at the meeting.

The plan, approved by the six world powers negotiating with Iran over the past few months, would commit Tehran to shipping out 70 percent of its enriched uranium for processing into fuel rods for its medical research reactor in Tehran. The arrangement would help allay international fears by removing most of the material that Iran could use to make a nuclear weapon.

It would take more than a year for Tehran to replace the enriched material, meaning it would not be able to make a weapon for at least that long.

Iran says it is enriching only to power a future network of nuclear reactors. But enrichment can also produce fissile warhead material. Iran continues enriching, despite three sets of U.N. Security Council sanctions meant to make it freeze that activity and has built an enriched stockpile that could arm two nuclear warheads.

-- Associated Press

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/11/26/AR2009112601000.html>

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Reuters

Friday, November 27, 2009

Iran Says IAEA Resolution Jeopardizes Nuclear Talks

VIENNA (Reuters) - A U.N. nuclear watchdog resolution passed against Iran on Friday will jeopardize talks between Tehran and six world powers on its atomic program and harm its cooperation with the agency, an Iranian official said.

The International Atomic Energy Agency's governing body approved the measures sponsored by the powers to censure Tehran for developing a uranium enrichment site in secret and they demanded it freeze the project immediately.

"Adoption of this resolution is not only unhelpful in improving the current situation, but it will jeopardize the conducive environment vitally needed for success in the process of Geneva and Vienna negotiations expected to lead to a common understanding," Ambassador Ali Asghar Soltanieh said.

In a statement, he said the resolution, adopted by a 25-3 margin with six abstentions, was a "hasty and undue" step imposed by a small number of IAEA board members.

"This resolution will of course damage the existing environment of cooperation with the IAEA," Soltanieh later told reporters on the sidelines of the meeting.

He said Iran would end its "voluntary gestures" of cooperation to the IAEA, but did not specify details.

(Reporting by Sylvia Westall)

<http://www.reuters.com/article/GCA-Iran/idUSTRE5AQ1SH20091127>

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Washington Post

November 28, 2009

Latest U.N. Censure Of Iran May Start More Confrontational Phase

China, Russia support rebuke of Tehran for ignoring resolutions

By Glenn Kessler and Joby Warrick

The resounding censure of Iran on Friday by the board of the International Atomic Energy Agency, the U.N. nuclear watchdog, signals the start of a potentially more confrontational phase in the Obama administration's dealings with the Islamic republic, including the prospect of strengthened U.S.-led efforts to cut off Iran's economic links to the world.

Iran will face a "package of consequences" if it does not soon become a "willing partner" in talks on its nuclear ambitions, a senior U.S. official warned, speaking on the condition of anonymity. "We hope Iran takes note of that clear message."

The 35-nation board approved by 25 to 3 a resolution rebuking Iran for its continued defiance of U.N. resolutions that demand a halt to uranium enrichment and other activities U.S. officials think are aimed at developing nuclear weapons. The declaration is particularly critical of Iran's secret construction of a second enrichment plant inside mountain bunkers near the ancient city of Qom, southwest of Tehran.

The resolution, which was supported by China and Russia, two longtime skeptics of taking a hard line against Iran, said the government's failure to notify the IAEA of the project was a "breach of its obligation" under U.N. treaties.

The resolution will be referred to the U.N. Security Council, which has the authority to enact sanctions against the country. During the Bush administration, China and Russia worked to soften sanctions against Iran during negotiations in the Security Council.

Iranian officials called the IAEA resolution "a historic mistake" and threatened to curtail its cooperation with the agency. Tehran has said the nuclear program is intended only to produce electricity.

In devising additional means of pressuring Iran, U.S. officials are focused on making it difficult for Iranian companies to ship goods. They are thus targeting insurance and reinsurance companies that underwrite the risk of such transactions, especially businesses that help support Iran's military elite. Such measures would build on an approach initiated by the Bush administration and by three sets of existing U.N. sanctions against Iran.

"Nothing that we contemplate or that we would consider is aimed at causing greater harm for the Iranian people, who have suffered enough," the U.S. official said.

When President Obama took office, he said that he would seek to engage Iran -- and that Tehran would have until the end of this year to demonstrate it would respond seriously.

Obama reached out in speeches and issued a video message to the Iranian people. He sent two private letters to Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, the country's supreme leader and key decision-maker in matters of security and foreign policy, and joined with Russia and France in offering to help supply new fuel for an aging medical reactor in Tehran. But the missives have gone largely unanswered -- apart from public scorn from Iranian leaders -- and the reactor deal has not won government approval.

After months of effort, one of the few tangible achievements the administration can point to is the willingness of China and Russia to support Friday's resolution. Cuba, Malaysia and Venezuela opposed the measure, six countries abstained, and one was not present.

White House spokesman Robert Gibbs said the vote underscored a commitment by the international community "to enforce the rules of the road and to hold Iran accountable to those rules." U.S. officials had lobbied other countries intensively to support the resolution.

"If Iran refuses to meet its obligations, then it will be responsible for its own growing isolation and the consequences," Gibbs said.

Administration officials emphasized that they are not ending engagement and that they have not withdrawn any proposals. But there is a palpable sense of disappointment within the administration that Iran has not responded more affirmatively.

At a meeting in Geneva on Oct. 1, Undersecretary of State William J. Burns met at length with a top Iranian official, and Iran signaled tentative agreement to the reactor deal and to begin further talks on its nuclear program. Deputy Secretary of Energy Daniel Poneman later that month held talks in Vienna on the reactor proposal. Under the proposal, Russia would convert much of Iran's enriched uranium into reactor fuel, and France would take that material and fashion it into the metal plates used in the facility, which produces isotopes to detect and treat diseases.

But Iran has since refused to commit to the agreement or even agree to further talks. "So far, we haven't gotten positive or constructive answers from the Iranians," the U.S. official said. "And it's difficult to sustain that kind of engagement when you're not getting any kind of constructive responses."

Russia lately has shown some impatience with Iran, slowing cooperation on a nuclear facility it is building in Bushehr and delaying missile deliveries, but China continues to build economic links with the country. Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao declared this year that his government would seek "close coordination in international affairs" with Iran and that "cooperation in trade and energy has widened and deepened."

Still, China decided to back the IAEA resolution -- and helped draft it -- after two senior White House officials recently traveled to Beijing and warned that Israel could bomb Iran, leading to a crisis in the Persian Gulf region and almost inevitably problems over the very oil China needs to fuel its economic juggernaut.

Ray Takeyh, a Council on Foreign Relations scholar who until recently was a senior adviser on Iran policy in the State Department, said, "There is a certain degree of impatience in American diplomacy. We have elevated Iran to a level of extreme danger, which it is not, and created a crisis atmosphere, which is unwise." When President Richard M. Nixon first reached out to China, it took that country a year and half to respond positively, he noted.

"The Iranians may come back in March with a counterproposal," he said. "No deal ever dies in Tehran. The Iranians never say yes or no."

Iran's representative to the IAEA, Ali Asghar Soltanieh, suggested that Tehran would stop some of its voluntary cooperation with the agency, according to a report by the semi-official Fars News Agency. "This resolution is a historic mistake by those who designed it," Soltanieh was quoted as saying.

It was unclear what specific steps, if any, the government would take in response. Iranian analysts said it would probably not withdraw completely from the Non-Proliferation Treaty, which requires states to submit to international inspections, or shut down cameras that allow the IAEA to monitor activities at nuclear facilities in Iran. The analysts said Iran might stop providing certain technical information about plans for new nuclear sites or make it more difficult for IAEA inspectors to obtain visas.

"I don't believe they will go as far as taking down the cameras. It is not in our interest to stop cooperation on critical trust-building issues," said an Iranian analyst who is close to former nuclear negotiators, speaking on the condition of anonymity.

Correspondent Thomas Erdbrink in Tehran contributed to this report.

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/11/27/AR2009112700892.html>

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Tehran Times

November 29, 2009

Iran To Halt Voluntary Cooperation With IAEA

TEHRAN - Iran officially announced that it will cease its voluntary cooperation with the IAEA after the agency's Board of Governors adopted a resolution against Iran on Friday under pressure by Western countries.

Iran said the drafters of the anti-Iran resolution made a historic mistake and advised the West to discard its policy of confrontation with Tehran.

"To show its goodwill, the Islamic Republic of Iran has so far taken steps beyond its commitments, but this resolution will cause Iran to cooperate with the agency only within the framework of the NPT (nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty)," Ali Asghar Soltanieh, Iran's ambassador to the International Atomic Energy Agency, said on Friday.

"The Board of Governors' resolution will disrupt the current atmosphere of cooperation and will cause Iran to discontinue its voluntary cooperation which went beyond its commitments," Soltanieh told the Mehr News Agency.

Twenty-five members of the 35-nation board, including Russia and China, voted in favor of the resolution. The resolution criticized Iran for beginning construction of a new uranium enrichment facility at Fordo, which is near Qom, and demanded that it immediately halt its construction. It also criticized Iran for defying a UN Security Council call for it to suspend uranium enrichment.

The Iranian Foreign Ministry also issued a statement on Friday saying Iran sees no need to commit itself to voluntary cooperation with the agency since its fundamental rights as an NPT signatory are not being observed.

The Foreign Ministry called the adoption of the resolution a futile attempt to impose pressure on the Islamic Republic.

Whereas the peaceful nature of Iran's nuclear activities has been proven time and again by IAEA inspections, the resolution was a proving ground for independent countries seeking their legitimate rights, the statement added.

Iran's ambassador to the Vienna-based agency also said such an approach caused a rift among the countries currently on the IAEA Board of Governors.

However, the Western countries failed in their attempt to get the resolution approved by a consensus vote, he added.

Malaysia, which is the current president of the IAEA Board, Venezuela, and Cuba voted against the resolution, and Afghanistan, Brazil, Egypt, Pakistan, South Africa and Turkey abstained. Azerbaijan Republic missed the vote.

"Nine countries did not vote for the resolution. In addition, Malaysia, Venezuela, and Cuba voted against the resolution, which we view as a political failure for the West because they hoped to approve the resolution against Iran through a consensus."

Pointing out that Iran has repeatedly declared that it will continue to cooperate with the IAEA according to the obligations defined in the nuclear safeguards agreement, the envoy said, "So far, no resolution by the Security

Council or the Board of Governors has succeeded in preventing the continuation of Iran's peaceful nuclear activities, and the recent resolution will have no effect on these activities, and we will continue our activities under the agency's supervision."

In the ratification of this resolution, Iran's transparent cooperation with the IAEA in regard to "the Fordo nuclear site was ignored, which is regretful," the ambassador added.

"The adoption of this resolution is not only unhelpful for improving the current situation, but it will jeopardize the conducive environment vitally needed for success in the process of the Geneva and Vienna negotiations, expected to lead to a common understanding," Soltanieh told the IAEA meeting.

Differences will undermine IAEA

The Egyptian ambassador to the IAEA said there is no justification for the resolution since it will damage the quality of Iran's cooperation with the UN body.

Soltanieh said the resolution has caused a rift among countries, which will undermine the future activities of the UN nuclear watchdog as a technical body.

"In Vienna, while studying the Iran issue at the Board of Governors meeting, one bloc supported Iran and another bloc pushed for (ratification of) the resolution, and this trend is dangerous for the long-term activities of the International Atomic Energy Agency as a technical organization."

He added, "We are sure that the authors of the anti-Iran resolution made a historic mistake and will soon discover their mistake."

The ambassador said, "The Westerners must have learned (something) from their previous behavior toward Iran, and they must know that they will receive a negative response if they use aggressive language with Iran."

http://www.tehrantimes.com/index_View.asp?code=208850
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Hindustan Times – India
November 29, 2009, Cairo

Egypt Terms IAEA Resolution On Iran As 'Unbalanced'

Egypt on Sunday described as "unbalanced" and "inappropriate" the IAEA resolution censuring Iran over its nuclear programme, saying that the UN nuclear watchdog "failed" to take into account the regional dimension.

The resolution, demanding Iran immediately suspend construction of its newly-revealed uranium enrichment plant at Qom -- a site kept secret until recently, was adopted at a meeting of the 35-member board of governors of International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) on Friday.

"The resolution - which Egypt refused to vote for - did not take into consideration the regional dimension while dealing with the Iranian file," an Egyptian Foreign Ministry spokesman said.

It should have clearly referred to the Israeli nuclear capabilities and stressed the importance of rendering the entire Middle East free from weapons of mass destruction, the spokesman said.

The resolution was referred to the IAEA Board of Governors without offering enough time for consultations on it, the spokesman charged.

"In addition, the timing of the resolution was inappropriate, thus contributing to the lack of confidence between the parties concerned with settling the Iranian nuclear crisis," he said.

25 countries, including India, voted in favour of the resolution spearheaded by the US while Egypt abstained from voting.

<http://www.hindustantimes.com/Egypt-terms-IAEA-resolution-on-Iran-as-unbalanced/H1-Article1-481242.aspx>
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Tehran Times
November 30, 2009

Iran Won't Be Bullied By Threatening Language

Commander of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC), Mohammad-Ali Jafari says threats and military action against Iran are the language of a bygone era.

"The era of threatening Iran with force is over, especially at a time when the majority of Iranians are willing to defend the Revolution and their country," the Major General told a gathering in the southwestern city of Shiraz.

These intimidation techniques, Jafari continued, "even failed at the height of the nuclear issue, and now Iran is standing firm despite economic, political and cultural pressures."

U.S. President Barack Obama recently warned the Islamic Republic of "consequences," should Tehran refuse to accept the IAEA-backed proposal on a nuclear fuel deal

The mid-October nuclear draft discussed in Vienna envisages Iran shipping out its low-enriched uranium (LEU) for further refinement and returned to the country for the Tehran medical research reactor, which produces radioisotopes used in cancer treatment by over 200 hospitals in Iran.

The idea was first floated by the Obama administration, and was later presented as a proposal by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

Iran has called for modifications to the deal, reiterating that its "economic and technical" concerns have to be reserved regarding the proposal.

The U.S. says no alteration will be made to the draft deal, insisting that Iran should accept the proposal in its current form.

This is while the UN nuclear watchdog on Friday censured Iran over the construction of its Fordo enrichment plant.

The resolution, which was drafted by the P5+1 — the five permanent members of the UN Security Council plus Germany — and was passed in a 25-3 vote with six abstentions, calls on Iran to immediately halt the construction of its second enrichment facility.

Tehran has rejected the IAEA resolution, the first one passed against Iran since 2006, as a 'politically motivated' measure aimed at depriving Iran of its basic rights.

(Source: Press TV)

http://www.tehrantimes.com/index_View.asp?code=208945

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London Times
November 30, 2009

Iran Threatens To Pull Out Of Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty

By Catherine Philp, Diplomatic Correspondent

Iran lashed out at international attempts to curb its nuclear ambitions today, threatening to pull out of the Non-Proliferation Treaty and insisting that it would forge ahead with plans to step up uranium enrichment.

The chorus of fury came as world powers reacted with renewed concern at Iran's announcement of plans to build ten new nuclear sites and Western leaders warned of imminent new sanctions to punish Tehran's defiance.

Russia and China joined the United States, Britain, France and Germany in backing a rare official rebuke to Tehran at the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) on Friday over its concealment of the recently revealed Fordo enrichment plant on a heavily bunkered military base near the city of Qom.

Iran's nuclear chief, Ali Akbar Salehi, said that the announcement of a vast new enrichment construction programme was meant as direct retaliation for its censure at the United Nations body, which also ordered it to cease construction work at Fordo. His remarks were to be the opening salvo in a hail of official invective against the atomic watchdog, ordinarily reserved for Western adversaries.

Manouchehr Mottaki, the Iranian Foreign Minister, accused the IAEA of implementing "the law of the jungle" by passing the resolution calling on Iran once again to halt enrichment. "This is an act of bullying," Mr Mottaki told a

joint press conference with Sergie Shmatko, the visiting Russian Energy Minister. "Today, we call it the law of the jungle. Such measures will destroy the very foundation of the UN Security Council and the IAEA."

Iran has been ordered five times by the UN Security Council to suspend enrichment until it has satisfactorily answered questions about a suspected nuclear weapons programme.

Mr Mottaki said that enriching uranium was Iran's right as it has been a member of the Non-Proliferation Treaty for close to four decades. Ali Larijani, the influential conservative parliament speaker, went further, questioning Iran's continued membership of the protocol, raising fears that it may be preparing to withdraw as North Korea did shortly before developing a bomb.

"I think they have completely made NPT useless," he told a press conference in Tehran. "What is this NPT which has become a one-sided tool ... to create a political atmosphere? We say that we want to carry out our activities under NPT and they must guarantee this ... that NPT regulations be properly applied and that they do not do indulge in any political interference."

Mr Salehi blamed Western powers for raising tensions after Iran's announcement of plans to build ten new enrichment plants, far beyond its current capabilities or needs — civilian or military.

"We had no intention of building so many sites ... but apparently the West does not want to understand Iran's message of peace and the way they behaved persuaded the Government to pass a decree to build ten sites like Natanz." Natanz is the industrial-scale enrichment plant currently monitored by inspectors.

Britain, France and Germany warned that Tehran would face more sanctions if it continued to defy world powers. "The priority always is to get the talks to work," said a spokesman for the Prime Minister in London.

"We would then review at the right moment, and maybe it's towards the end of this year, whether we pursue the second route of a dual-track policy which is obviously, you think about things like sanctions."

Guido Westerwelle, the German Foreign Minister, warned that "if Iran rejects the hand that has reached out, it must expect heavier sanctions."

But Mr Shmatko, on an official visit to Tehran to discuss the Russian-built civilian reactor there, sought to cool tempers and refocus attention on the diplomatic track.

"A constructive agreement between Tehran and five-plus-one [the permanent members of the UN Security Council plus Germany] is of high importance and we do not want the thing to escalate at all," said Mr Shmatko. "I think there is still good scope to continue negotiations."

http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/middle_east/article6937739.ece

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New York Times
November 30, 2009

A Defiant Iran Details Plan For 10 Enrichment Plants

By David E. Sanger and William J. Broad

WASHINGTON — Iran angrily refused Sunday to comply with a demand by the United Nations nuclear agency to cease work on a once-secret nuclear fuel enrichment plant, and escalated the confrontation by declaring it would construct 10 more such plants.

The response to the demand came as Iran's president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, said his cabinet would also order a study of what it would take for Iran to further enrich its existing stockpile of nuclear fuel for use in a medical reactor — rather than rely on Russia or another nation, as agreed to in an earlier tentative deal.

It is unclear how long it would take Iran to enrich the fuel to the levels needed for the medical reactor, or whether it has the technology to fabricate that fuel into a form that could be put into the reactor. But the declaration appeared intended to convince the West that Iran was prepared to move closer to bomb-grade quality, while stopping short of crossing that threshold.

Even if Iran proceeded with a plan to build 10 enrichment plants, it is doubtful Iran could execute that plan for years, maybe decades. But the announcement drew immediate condemnation from the White House, which hoped Iran's defiant tone would help persuade Russia and China that imposing harsh sanctions was justified.

Both countries, historically opposed to sanctions, had voted in favor of a resolution by the International Atomic Energy Agency, the United Nations nuclear watchdog, demanding that Iran stop work on a formerly secret enrichment plant. By refusing to accept that resolution, one senior administration official said, “Ahmadinejad may be doing more to assemble a sanctions coalition than we could do in months of work.”

The White House spokesman, Robert Gibbs, said of Iran’s declaration: “If true, this would be yet another serious violation of Iran’s clear obligations under multiple U.N. Security Council resolutions, and another example of Iran choosing to isolate itself.”

According to Iranian state television, Mr. Ahmadinejad’s cabinet voted to begin construction at five new sites designated for uranium enrichment plants — it did not specify where — and to determine locations for another five in the next few months.

In Europe, diplomats called the Iranian plan for a giant expansion of enrichment closer to a national aspiration than an imminent threat. Iran’s main enrichment facility, at Natanz, began early this decade and today the country has installed fewer than a tenth of the 50,000 centrifuges it is designed to handle. A second, once-secret plant — revealed two months ago — has been under construction for more than three years, and it is still at least a year from completion.

“It’s preposterous,” a diplomat in Vienna who collaborates with the International Atomic Energy Agency said of the plan for the 10 plants. The diplomat added: “It would be way, way more than they need no matter what their nuclear aspirations.” He noted that the United States had just one enrichment plant, in Paducah, Ky.

But the threat appeared to represent Iran’s decision to find a way to strike back politically at the West for the Security Council’s three resolutions demanding that it stop all enrichment activity. The atomic agency’s board built on those Security Council resolutions on Friday, when it demanded that Iran halt work on building its second enrichment plant. It was the first time the agency had told Iran to halt construction of a plant.

What American and atomic agency officials fear is that the steady drumbeat of defiant declarations from Iran could lead to the one act that would truly touch off a crisis: Iran’s withdrawal from the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty. That would terminate the already limited presence of the West’s atomic inspectors in Iran. North Korea took that step in early 2003, and soon produced the fuel for eight or more nuclear weapons; it has since tested two.

More than 200 members of the Iranian Parliament signed a letter on Sunday, according to Iranian press accounts, urging that the atomic agency’s presence in Iran be further restricted, and individual political leaders have called for withdrawal from the nonproliferation treaty.

But Iran may be hesitant to follow North Korea’s lead. Such a declaration would signal to the world that Iran was heading for “nuclear breakout,” a rush to produce a bomb. It also would almost certainly build pressure for sanctions, and could lead to pre-emptive military action by Israel. “You have to think,” one of President Obama’s top national security advisers said recently, “that they would think twice before denouncing their treaty obligations.”

Instead, the speaker of Iran’s Parliament, Ali Larijani warned Sunday that Iran’s cooperation with the agency could “seriously decrease” in the near future.

Tehran says its nuclear program is peaceful, and to date has enriched uranium to a relatively low grade, consistent with making fuel for a civilian nuclear power plant. But so far, there are no civilian nuclear plants under construction to receive that fuel; the two plants Iran is getting ready to open, at Bushehr, receive fuel from Russia. The absence of civilian reactors is one reason Western analysts suspect that Iran’s real intentions are to make atom bombs.

Iran has long talked of building as many as 19 more nuclear plants in addition to the complex at Bushehr. In the past, the plan for a total of 20 power plants resulted in a large gap between Iran’s declared ambitions and its envisioned needs for enrichment, and Sunday’s announcement sought to end that contradiction, at least in theory.

Western nuclear experts said that taking the declaration of the 10-plant goal at face value was akin to believing in the tooth fairy. “They’re hyping it,” said David Albright, president of the Institute for Science and International Security, a private group in Washington that tracks nuclear proliferation. “They couldn’t build that number of centrifuges. They don’t have the infrastructure.” Mr. Albright added that Iran’s supplies of uranium were dwindling, casting more doubt on the vastly expanded commercial fuel goal. The result, he said, is that the new push for enrichment will probably end up producing “one small plant somewhere that they’re not going to tell us about” and be military in nature.

David E. Sanger reported from Washington, and William J. Broad from New York. Nazila Fathi contributed reporting from Toronto.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2009/11/30/world/middleeast/30iran.html>
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Seattle Pilot
November 30, 2009

Iran Nuke Plans Largely Bluster, Experts Say

By Ali Akbar Dareini and Jason Keyser

TEHRAN, Iran -- Iran's announcement of plans to build 10 more uranium enrichment facilities is largely bluster after a strong rebuke from the U.N.'s nuclear agency, analysts said Monday. Nonetheless, the defiance is fueling calls among Western allies for new punitive sanctions to freeze Iran's nuclear program.

U.S. and European officials were swift to condemn the plans, warning that Iran risked sinking ever deeper into isolation. Iran responded that it felt forced to move forward with the plans after the International Atomic Energy Agency passed a resolution Friday demanding that it halt all enrichment activities.

Iran's bold announcement Sunday appears to be largely impossible to achieve as long as sanctions continue to throw up roadblocks and force Iran to turn to black markets and smuggling for nuclear equipment, said nuclear expert David Albright.

"They can't build those plants. There's no way," he said. "They have sanctions to overcome, they have technical problems. They have to buy things overseas ... and increasingly it's all illegal."

A more worrisome escalation in the standoff would be if Iran reduced its cooperation with the IAEA, as some Iranian officials have threatened to do if the West continues its pressure. The U.N. inspectors and monitoring are the world's only eyes on Tehran's program. The head of Iran's nuclear agency on Monday ruled out an even more drastic move, saying Tehran does not intend to withdraw from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

Enrichment is at the center of the standoff between Iran and the West because it can be used both to produce material needed for atomic weapons as well as fuel for nuclear power plants. Iran insists it only wants the latter.

New enrichment plants, on the scale of the one Iran already operates in the town of Natanz, would be extremely expensive, take years to build and would be difficult to stock with centrifuges and other necessary equipment while sanctions are in place, Albright said.

Further dimming the credibility of the plan, 10 new facilities on the scale of Natanz would put Iran in league with the production levels of any of Europe's major commercial enrichment suppliers, said Albright, president of the Washington-based Institute for Science and International Security.

"And also they don't have enough uranium. They would need a massive amount of uranium," he said.

A diplomat from one of the six world powers attempting to engage Iran on its nuclear program described the Iranian announcement as a "political move" with little immediate significance beyond demonstrating Tehran's defiance.

The diplomat, who follows the nuclear dossier the IAEA has gathered on Iran, noted that Tehran appears to have significant problems with its present enrichment program, to the point that it cannot even keep the centrifuges it has set up at Natanz running without breakdowns.

The diplomat demanded anonymity because he was not authorized to comment on the issue.

Still, the announcement is of major concern because it could signal an intention to put up numerous decoy sites to deceive the outside world, while building perhaps a few secret military enrichment sites on a small scale that could be put to use in weapons production if Tehran decides to do go down that path, Albright said.

Such concerns were heightened with the recent discovery that Iran had a second, previously unknown enrichment facility burrowed partway into a mountain near the holy city of Qom.

"I tend to think that this Qom site was probably meant to be a clandestine facility for breakout that they wanted built for nuclear weapons," said Albright. "And now that it's been exposed they may want to replace it."

Iran's announcement triggered calls for new penalties that Albright said could evolve into a "mini-cold war strategy" to further isolate and contain Iran while holding out a hand for negotiations.

The United States' ambassador to the U.N., Susan Rice, said Iran's plans would be "completely inappropriate" and would further isolate it from the world.

In Paris, French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner called Iran's decision "a bit childish."

"Iran is playing an extremely dangerous game," Kouchner said on France's RTL radio Monday. "There's no coherence in all this, other than a gut reaction."

The French defense minister, Herve Morin, said the international community should "probably commit toward new economic sanctions against Iran."

Iran and the top powers at the U.N. are deadlocked over a U.N.-drafted proposal for Iran to send much of its enriched uranium abroad, which the West seeks because it would at least temporarily leave Tehran unable to develop a nuclear bomb. So far Iran has balked at the offer. The unusually strong IAEA censure of Iran over enrichment was a sign of the West's growing impatience with its defiance.

Iranian Vice President Ali Akbar Salehi, who heads the nuclear program, told state radio that the decision to build the new uranium enrichment facilities was necessary to respond to the resolution.

"We had no intention of building many facilities like the Natanz site, but apparently the West doesn't want to understand Iran's peaceful message," Salehi said.

Salehi said Iran would not go so far as to withdraw from the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty, under which Iran is subject to oversight by the U.N. nuclear agency.

"If we wanted to obtain nuclear weapons, we would have pulled out of NPT ... Iran doesn't want to withdraw from the treaty," the official IRNA news agency quoted him as saying Monday.

Iran's parliament speaker Ali Larijani insisted "a diplomatic opportunity" was still possible "under which Iran will continue its (nuclear) work under international surveillance."

But a day earlier, Larijani warned that Iran could reduce its cooperation with the IAEA if the West continues its pressure and doesn't compromise.

Keyser reported from Cairo. Associated Press Writers George Jahn in Vienna and Ingrid Rousseau in Paris contributed to this report.

http://www.seattlepi.com/national/1110ap_iran_nuclear.html?source=mypi
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Reuters

December 1, 2009

IAEA Wants Iran To Clarify Nuclear Expansion Plan

VIENNA (Reuters) - The U.N. nuclear agency said on Tuesday it wants Iran to clarify its plan to build 10 more uranium enrichment plants and said Tehran had not yet informed it of the decision.

The Iranian announcement, made through state media on Sunday, was a gesture of defiance after an International Atomic Energy Agency resolution rebuking Tehran for its nuclear secrecy.

Iran has said the expansion would start within the next two months and that five sites had already been chosen for the plants, which will be the same size as its main enrichment complex at Natanz.

"Iran has not yet informed the agency directly of its decision. The agency will be seeking clarification from Iran on its announcement," the IAEA said in a statement.

Earlier on Tuesday Japan's Yukiya Amano took charge of the IAEA.

"The situation surrounding the agency is stormy now. We have a lot of difficult challenges," he said in brief remarks to reporters without commenting on Iran.

Analysts believe Iran's stated plan to expand enrichment may be largely bluster for now as it would take many years if not decades to execute.

They said U.N. sanctions would make it hard for Iran to amass the needed equipment, Iran probably lacks sufficient uranium reserves, and technical problems appear to be hampering its existing, single enrichment plant.

(Reporting by Sylvia Westall; Editing by Angus MacSwan)

<http://www.reuters.com/article/gc08/idUSTRE5B03AA20091201>
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RIA Novosti – Russian Information Agency
01 December 2009

Russia To Back Iran Sanctions If International Consensus Reached

Russia will back sanctions against Iran over its controversial nuclear program if an international consensus is reached, a diplomatic source said on Tuesday.

"If there is a consensus on sanctions, Russia will not remain in isolation," the source said, commenting on Tehran's plans to build 10 new uranium enrichment facilities.

Iran's government instructed the country's nuclear organization on Sunday to start building five new plants and outline locations for another five within two months.

The diplomatic source said, however, that in line with Russia's position on the issue outlined by President Dmitry Medvedev, Russia would prefer Iranian "open and consistent cooperation" with the UN nuclear watchdog to allay concerns that Tehran was looking to build nuclear weapons.

"That is why we will not add any additional complications to the negotiations with threats of sanctions ... but we are obliged to bear in mind this possibility," the diplomatic source said.

MOSCOW, December 1 (RIA Novosti)

<http://en.rian.ru/russia/20091201/157057773.html>
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New York Times
November 27, 2009

Russia, U.S. To Sign Arms Pact, May Miss Deadline

By REUTERS

MINSK (Reuters) - The U.S. and Russian presidents will sign a new deal to cut Cold War arsenals of nuclear weapons by the year end, but may miss an early December deadline by several days, a Kremlin source told Reuters on Friday.

Diplomats from the world's two biggest nuclear powers are preparing a new agreement on cutting atomic weapons before the 1991 Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START-1) expires on December 5.

The new accord will be signed "in a European country" in December, the Kremlin source told Reuters in Minsk, where President Dmitry Medvedev was meeting regional leaders.

"We may not be able to do it by December 5," said the Kremlin source, who did not give a reason for the delay.

Presidents Barack Obama and Medvedev are both due to make visits in Europe in the next few weeks and diplomats say the two sides are trying to find a time when the leaders can meet to sign the deal.

Finding a replacement for START-1, which was signed a few months before the Soviet Union broke up, is seen by the Kremlin and the White House as a way to "reset" relations after the friction and rows of recent years.

"This treaty is a great move ahead and will improve relations between the United States and Russia," said Roland Timerbayev, a former Soviet ambassador and nuclear arms negotiator. It was too early to make any conclusions about the significance of missing the December 5 deadline, he added.

Obama and Medvedev, who had promised to find a replacement for the deal by the time START-1 expired, agreed in July to cut the number of deployed nuclear weapons by around a third from current levels to 1,500-1,675 each.

But negotiators in Geneva have been battling a myriad of complex technical questions to thrash out a deal. Russia has pushed for big cuts in the number of operational missiles or bombers -- known by experts as "delivery vehicles" -- although the negotiators have argued over how to define nuclear weapons.

Diplomats on both sides have hailed the talks as evidence that relations between the Obama administration and Moscow are improving, though some analysts have warned that the negotiations are being rushed to ensure a deal by the year-end.

The currently announced cuts would take the United States and Russia only 25 operationally deployed warheads below a range of 1,700-2,200 which both sides had already committed to reach by 2012 under a 2002 treaty.

After the cuts -- which have to be made within seven years of a new treaty taking force -- the United States and Russia will still have enough firepower to destroy the world several times over.

(Reporting by Denis Dyomkin in Minsk and Conor Sweeney in Moscow; writing by Guy Faulconbridge; editing by David Stamp)

<http://www.nytimes.com/reuters/2009/11/27/world/international-uk-russia-usa-treaty.html>

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Washington Times

December 1, 2009

Exclusive

U.S. To Stop Counting New Missiles In Russia

Critics point fingers at Bush and Obama

By Nicholas Kralev, The Washington Times

The United States is about to lose a key arms-control tool from the closing days of the Cold War - the right to station American observers in Russia to count the long-range missiles leaving its assembly line.

The end of full-time, on-site access will likely ignite complaints in Congress, with insiders from both parties arguing over whether the George W. Bush or the Obama administration is responsible.

Republicans are worried by the previously undisclosed agreement between the Obama administration and the Kremlin in October, which formalizes the inspectors' departure this Saturday. This, they warn, would cripple Washington's ability to police Moscow's compliance with agreed reductions in its nuclear arsenal.

Democrats, on the other hand, insist they were "stuck" with an agreement reached late last year between the Bush administration and Moscow but not made public. This, they said, left the Obama team no choice.

The U.S.-staffed Votkinsk Portal Monitoring Facility operates under the terms of the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) at the Votkinsk Machine Building Plant, about 600 miles east of Moscow - the site where all Russian intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) are built.

The monitoring facility's present mandate ends with START's expiration Saturday, and the Obama administration has decided not to seek another agreement allowing Americans to remain, administration and congressional officials said.

"U.S. and Russian officials signed on Oct. 20 a series of documents, which establish the procedures to be followed for the completion of U.S. monitoring activities at the Russian ICBM production facility at Votkinsk," a State Department official said.

The two countries first agreed to "continuous monitoring" under the 1987 Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty, signed by President Reagan and Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev.

The reciprocal site to Votkinsk in the United States was the former Hercules Aerospace missile production facility in Magna, Utah, which the Russians left more than eight years ago.

Although the United States does not produce new long-range missiles, Russia continues to do so and has built dozens of missiles since the monitoring started 15 years ago. START banned certain types of missiles, which Americans at Votkinsk verified by counting and inspecting every missile that left the facility, analysts said.

However, the head of Russia's strategic missile forces, Nikolai Solovtsov, was recently quoted by Russian news agencies as saying that the assembly and deployment of next-generation RS-24 missiles would start once the treaty expires.

Analysts said that could happen, because Moscow was not banned from developing new missiles.

During a visit to Moscow by President Obama in July, both countries agreed to draft a new arms-control treaty that would replace START. They also set a goal of cutting the number of strategic nuclear warheads to between 1,500 and 1,675 within seven years.

It now appears unlikely that the two countries will meet a self-imposed Dec. 5 deadline, but State Department spokesman Ian Kelly said Monday the U.S. hopes to have a draft treaty by the end of the month.

"Two main priorities here are reductions in nuclear arsenals and also preserving the verifications and monitoring mechanisms that are at the heart of the START treaty," Mr. Kelly said.

Congressional officials said they were told by the Obama administration that it "got stuck" with a deal made by the Bush administration to close the monitoring facility at Votkinsk. They also said the Bush administration did not want to extend START at all.

Paula A. DeSutter, assistant secretary of state for verification, compliance and implementation in the Bush administration, said she sent the Russians a post-START proposal in November 2008, but it was not a negotiated agreement.

She confirmed that it did not include continuing the Votkinsk mission, but attributed that to the Bush team's decision "not to limit delivery vehicles," so it did not need to count every missile Russia produced. "We didn't need the entire verification regime from START," she said.

In contrast, the Obama team "accepted the START approach to limit both warheads and missiles," so it made sense for them to keep Votkinsk, she said.

"There was nothing in our proposal that precluded the Obama administration from adding Votkinsk or any other verification measure, had they decided to take that approach," Ms. DeSutter said.

However, Daryl Kimball, executive director of the Arms Control Association, said the Obama team could not have gone back to renegotiate last year's accord.

Obama administration officials said they take Moscow's missile program seriously, and they are negotiating other verification measures to replace the permanent U.S. presence at Votkinsk. They declined to be more specific.

Mr. Kimball said that other ways to find out how many missiles Russia produces include regular inspections, data exchanges and intelligence gathering, such as tracking missile test flights.

"How significant [the loss of Votkinsk] is depends on what other monitoring mechanisms will be worked out," he said.

Some Republican members of Congress, however, have warned of major negative consequences, saying that nothing can replace everyday on-site monitoring, and that the administration should have sought to extend it under a new agreement.

U.S. officials are trying to complete a "bridging" agreement in Geneva this week, so some verification measures can remain in effect until a START replacement is finalized. The Votkinsk monitoring team, however, will leave, officials said.

"When Votkinsk goes away, Russia could deploy hundreds of missiles," said one senior Republican Senate aide.

"Russia is a big country with many satellites passing overhead," so it will not be easy to count missiles based on test flights. "We are worried about what Russia will do that we are not going to know."

Another Republican aide said the "whole point of arms control" was to allow the United States to learn more about Russia's force strength than it could by just estimating it.

"We were radically bad about estimating, but we became better at understanding our adversary" after START and other treaties, he said. "You can't count mobile missiles from space."

The Obama administration points out that the two countries are no longer enemies and that it has gone out of its way to improve relations with Russia.

"The nature of our relationship has changed, and we have a pretty good idea about where Russia's missile program is headed," one U.S. official said.

Still, critics say ties are not at a level where Washington can fully trust Moscow.

"For the first time in 15 years, an extensive set of verification, notification, elimination and other confidence-building measures will expire" on Saturday, Sen. Jon Kyl, Arizona Republican, said on the Senate floor late last month, suggesting that START should have been extended.

Mr. Kimball said another reason the Bush administration should take at least some responsibility for losing access to Votkinsk is that it "did not object to Russia's development of the RS-24 and did not favor the continuation of other types of legally binding verification provisions based on those in START."

"Senator Kyl was not on the floor of Senate railing against the Bush administration's decision not to continue essential START monitoring and verification provisions back in 2008, but now he's complaining that the Obama administration is not doing enough to maintain effective monitoring of U.S. and Russian strategic nuclear weapons," Mr. Kimball said. "He was against it before he was for it."

A senior aide to Mr. Kyl said the senator always cared about verification, but he is more vocal now because Mr. Obama wants to cut the two countries' nuclear arsenals well below Mr. Bush's target level of 1,700 to 2,200 warheads.

"If you are going to predicate the prudence of the cuts on the Russians' [compliance], you have to make sure you have high degree of confidence" that they are abiding by the limits, he said.

<http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2009/dec/01/us-to-stop-counting-new-missiles-in-russia/>
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Washington Post
November 29, 2009

Pakistani PM Takes Charge Of Nuclear Weapons

By Augustine Anthony

ISLAMABAD (Reuters) - Pakistan's president has transferred authority over the nation's nuclear weapons to the prime ministership, as the unpopular leader tries to deflect growing criticism he has too much power.

President Asif Ali Zardari, beset by corruption allegations, has been under pressure to give up sweeping powers that his predecessor Pervez Musharraf accumulated for the presidency.

The transfer of the chairmanship of the National Command Authority (NCA), which oversees Pakistan's nuclear arsenal, came as Zardari could face pressure after the lapse of an amnesty opened several of his top aides to prosecution on graft charges.

That amnesty, and growing criticism that Zardari has too much power, may herald more political instability in Pakistan, worrying the United States and its allies as the government also gets increasingly embroiled in a war against Islamist militants.

Key cabinet ministers and the army, navy and air force heads are also members of the NCA, which controls the country's nuclear program, including deployment and the use of the weapons.

However, the military manages and controls the nuclear weapons on behalf of the NCA.

Prime Minister Yusuf Raza Gilani told reporters the transfer of the chairmanship was a "a true litmus test" of relations between him and Zardari.

"He who himself was chairman of the NCA has given that authority to the prime minister. What more powers can there be than this, which a prime minister should have?" Gilani asked reporters late on Saturday.

Pakistan set up the NCA in 2000, two years after it conducted nuclear tests. Musharraf introduced the ordinance in 2007.

Zardari took over as president last year after the assassination of his wife, former prime minister Benazir Bhutto, in late 2007.

Dogged by accusations of graft during Bhutto's two terms as prime minister in the 1990s, Zardari has never enjoyed the popularity of his charismatic wife and has been facing a barrage of attacks from hostile sections of the media.

"RIGHT DIRECTION"

The opposition to Zardari has been building as the army has been battling Islamist militants in the northwest who have responded with a wave of bomb attacks.

The powerful military, which has ruled the country for more than half its history, has had differences with Zardari over a U.S. aid package which critics said imposed conditions on Pakistan that undermined its sovereignty.

Analysts say while there is a degree of distrust between the military and Zardari, the military is led by a general who has vowed to stay out of politics and there is little chance of it directly intervening at the moment.

Gilani, a top member of Zardari's Pakistan People's Party, dismissed talk of any threat to the government.

"We are moving straight and in the right direction. God willing, there is no threat to this government," he said.

A Musharraf ordinance that lapsed on Saturday was an amnesty that covered about 8,000 people facing various charges, including Zardari and four cabinet ministers.

Zardari cannot be prosecuted because of presidential immunity, although the re-opening of corruption cases involving people close to him could further weaken him.

(Writing by Robert Birsell; Editing by Alistair Scrutton and Paul Tait)

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/11/29/AR2009112900590.html>

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Korea Herald – South Korea

November 27, 2009

N.K. Renews Claim To Nuclear State Status

North Korea reasserted Friday it is an internationally recognized nuclear-armed state, citing a U.S. science magazine, a claim denied by the outside world, Yonhap News reported.

"The Federation of American Scientists of the United States has confirmed (North) Korea as a nuclear weapon state," the Korean Central News Agency said in a brief dispatch. The report said the non-profit organization's November issue listed the North among the nine countries that possess atomic weapons.

The United States and other countries have refused to recognize North Korea as nuclear state to avoid lending legitimacy to its atomic weapons program.

Pyongyang conducted its second nuclear test in May, and is set to hold its first bilateral talks with the Barack Obama administration when U.S. special representative for North Korea policy Stephen Bosworth visits North Korea on Dec. 8.

Bosworth is widely expected to meet with Kang Sok-ju, the North's first vice foreign minister and de-facto orchestrator of the country's negotiations over its nuclear weapons program.

Earlier this month, North Korea claimed it has completed extracting plutonium from 8,000 spent fuel rods it has at its main nuclear facility. Experts say the amount would be enough to make one nuclear bomb.

North Korea withdrew from a six-nation disarmament talks in April in protest of punitive U.N. resolutions adopted after its long-range rocket test.

http://www.koreaherald.co.kr/NEWKHSITE/data/html_dir/2009/11/27/200911270084.asp

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Japan Times

November 28, 2009

Pyongyang Hinges Six-Party Return To U.S. Talks Progress

By Masami Ito, Staff writer

Pyongyang may return to the six-party talks to denuclearize the hermit state if bilateral talks with the United States turn out favorable for Pyongyang, a top Chinese defense official said Friday in Tokyo.

Liang Guanglie was in Tokyo to meet Prime Minister Yukio Hatoyama and Defense Minister Toshimi Kitazawa separately Friday to discuss bilateral military exchanges and the North's denuclearization.

"It seems like (Pyongyang) is attaching importance on bilateral ties with the U.S.," Kitazawa said after the meeting, adding, "North Korea is ready to take part in the six-party talks anytime if the (expected) talks with the U.S. go well."

Liang, who came to Tokyo right after his trip to North Korea, where he met Kim Jong Il, told Kitazawa that he raised the nuclear issue with Kim.

Pyongyang told the Chinese delegation that "North Korea supports the denuclearization of the peninsula," Liang was quoted as saying Friday.

Pyongyang said, "the key to solving the denuclearization of the peninsula also lies in the U.S. . . . if the U.S. were to sign a peace treaty with North Korea, it would denuclearize the state."

Separately Kitazawa told reporters Liang's claim that the situation in Pyongyang was politically and economically stable was a bit puzzling.

But "I think he made such a statement with deep consideration" toward North Korea.

Kitazawa also pushed China, once again, to up transparency over its military expenditures, which have been logging a double-digit increase for the past 21 years.

[http://search.japantimes.co.jp/cgi-bin/nn20091128a6.html?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+japantimes+\(The+Japan+Times%3A+All+Stories\)](http://search.japantimes.co.jp/cgi-bin/nn20091128a6.html?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+japantimes+(The+Japan+Times%3A+All+Stories))

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London Times

November 29, 2009

President Ahmadinejad Uses Attack As The Best Form Of Defence

By Richard Beeston: Analysis

We are now moving into the endgame of Iran's decade-long drive to acquire the hardware and technology to build a nuclear bomb. What happens next could determine whether Iran becomes a nuclear-armed state, whether the region is plunged into another war, or whether Iran and the Arab world embark on a nuclear arms race.

Yesterday's announcement showed that President Ahmadinejad has once again calculated that attack is the best form of defence. After being censured by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) last week, which referred Tehran to the UN Security Council, the Iranians have decided to call the bluff of the international community.

They believe that the world is unwilling or unable to take serious steps to prevent it from building its own uranium enrichment industry. Enriched uranium can be used as nuclear fuel or, in its highly enriched form, provide the fissile material to build an atomic warhead.

In the past, meaningful action by the UN Security Council in the form of economic sanctions has been blocked by Russia and China, which have major commercial ties with Iran. The Iranians have also been working hard to bolster their position in the international community. Although regarded as a pariah in the West — particularly after the contested presidential election results this summer — Mr Ahmadinejad is still welcome in many capitals around the world, most recently Brasilia and Caracas.

The Iranian strategy is clear: defy the West, woo Moscow and Beijing and build up support in the developing world.

Iran has calculated that the Obama Administration, which offered this year to end three decades of hostility, is distracted by the domestic problems and the war in Afghanistan. Europe still fails to speak with one voice on this matter. As for the rest of the world, an increasing number of states believe that Iran will now build the bomb and is prepared to live with this fact.

However, it would be a huge miscalculation to believe that the problems will stop there. Israel regards the issue as an existential threat and has warned that it is prepared to launch a pre-emptive strike to destroy Iran's nuclear facilities — even if this means starting a new war in the Middle East. The Arab states are caught in the middle. Many have decided that their best option is to start their own nuclear programmes, as Egypt and the Gulf states are already doing.

The crisis is likely to feed into the escalating tensions in the region between Sunni and Shia Muslims. Already at odds in Lebanon, Yemen, Iraq and the Gulf states, further hostilities could break out with Iran, the main Shia power in the region, as it supports its brethren against the Arab states.

The only move that could stop an escalation would be concerted action by the UN Security Council. Iran's economy remains vulnerable to outside pressure; this is where American, British and other Western diplomats will hope to squeeze Tehran into backing down.

http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/middle_east/article6936924.ece

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New York Times

December 1, 2009

Obama Vow, Iran's Stance And The Options

By John Vinocur

NEW YORK — The place was a small auditorium on Manhattan's Upper East Side, and three panelists were on stage to discuss the topic of "what now for the United States and Iran?"

Charles S. Robb, a former Democratic senator and former member of a presidential advisory board on foreign intelligence, summed up the evening's tone: "We want to support what would seem to be a more hawkish approach as a viable alternative to an approach that hasn't worked."

Sure, it is important to the Atlantic Alliance that the United States demonstrate that it is interested in diplomacy, added Daniel R. Coats, a former Republican senator and ambassador to Germany.

"But sanctions as a next step, and sanctions working?" he asked — then answered, "That's a stretch. And that's why we want to leverage the sanctions."

How? Through the consideration of U.S. military action.

"We have the capacity, and Iran is vulnerable," insisted Charles F. Wald, a retired U.S. Air Force general who served as deputy commander of the U.S. European Command. "It's totally false that we cannot attack Iran's nuclear sites."

The three men were the authors of a report on Iran for the Bipartisan Policy Center released in September and titled "Meeting the Challenge: Time Is Running Out." Their appearance in New York last week, in light of Iran's rejection of diplomatic attempts to halt its drive toward nuclear weapons, was an update on their call for President Barack Obama to show that the use of force is "a feasible option of last resort."

The undertaking is hardly a Gen. Buck Turgidson/Dr. Strangelove operation. The Bipartisan Policy Center was founded by the former Senate majority leaders Howard H. Baker Jr., Tom Daschle, Robert J. Dole and George J. Mitchell with the intent to create discussion and position-taking across party lines.

Although American policy continues to state that all options remain open to the president to stop Iran from producing an atomic weapon, discussion of the possible use of military means is surrounded by deep tension and awkwardness.

At an international conference on security issues sponsored by the German Marshall Fund of the United States two weeks ago, Ruprecht Polenz, chairman of the foreign relations commission of the German Bundestag, was asked whether Chancellor Angela Merkel's statement defining Iranian production of a nuclear weapon as "unacceptable" meant, in effect, that "this must not stand."

His response was remarkably direct. Germany, Mr. Polenz said, would not be involved in military action.

This is while new sanctions, probably the next turn in efforts to bring pressure on Iran, encounter continued indications of their limited potential for success.

Last week, German press reports said a decision by Daimler to stop delivery of vehicles with three axles to Iran resulted in their immediate replacement with similar vehicles by Volvo, the Swedish carmaker.

Exactly what is credible and what might work in blocking Iran was at the heart of the panel discussion here. "One of the big problems is the believability of our using force," Mr. Wald said. "Iran just doesn't believe it."

The retired general, who was air commander during the initial stages of Operation Enduring Freedom, the official U.S. government name for the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, said he did not think there was any current consideration of American strikes on Iran.

Still, he stressed: "If we do it, we can succeed. The worst-case scenario is Iran getting the bomb."

Many more than one than one strike would be needed, and operations could carry on for weeks or months, Mr. Wald said, explaining that the United States had the capacity to carry out much more extensive attacks than Israel.

And the results and ramifications of such U.S. strikes? “Better than a pinprick,” Mr. Wald said in a reference to the limited possibilities of Israeli missions. He also noted that “the U.S. will be blamed anyway and take the blow-back.”

Mr. Robb said he thought that “Iran’s response would be by proxy — Hezbollah, Hamas,” while Mr. Wald described “the region having to get ready for a lot of happenings.” At the same time, he said, Israel has reconstituted its ground forces and could handle sustained rocket attacks.

But suppose, in the end, you didn’t believe in the wisdom of an attack, or just considered that the United States, with its engagements in Afghanistan and Iraq, couldn’t handle it?

Mr. Wald was dismissive, saying, “If you believe Iran is manageable with nukes, then O.K.”

With that remark, Mr. Wald appeared to hold tight to the position stated by Mr. Obama that an Iran with the capacity to produce a nuclear weapon was “unacceptable” to the United States (whatever other countries’ mollifying interpretation of the word may be).

In fact, a more likely response than a U.S. assault, assuming the eventual failure of sanctions to make the Iranians bend, might be an American mix of containment (cynics’ definition: we’ll live with a nuclear Iran) and deterrence (military muscle flexing outside an attack mode).

To that, add direct support for regime change in Iran — although the opposition leaders who would be counted on to alter Tehran’s nuclear policy have actually supported the mullahs’ refusal to export their low enriched uranium for conversion, theoretically limited to medical use.

All the same, the three men from the Bipartisan Policy Center, through Mr. Coats, emphasized their literal reading of the president’s will to stop Iran’s nuclear drive.

Back on the campaign trail in 2008, when Afghanistan was becoming the Democratic candidate’s right and winnable war, and American voters were guessing (favorably) about the future president’s toughness, Mr. Obama stated unequivocally:

“We will use all elements of American power to pressure Iran. I will do everything in my power to prevent Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon. Everything in my power. Everything.”

http://www.nytimes.com/2009/12/01/world/middleeast/01iht-politicus.html?_r=2

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Iran Set For Confrontation, Or Is It?

Iran has again shocked the world by sanctioning the construction of ten more uranium enrichment plants, five of them immediately.

The decision confirmed the general fear that Iran is carrying out secret nuclear development programs. If not, it would have needed more time to select construction sites and prepare project documents.

Iran made the fateful decision after the Board of Governors of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) approved a resolution on November 27, 2009 according to which Iran violated several crucial provisions by starting the construction of a second uranium enrichment plant at Qom.

The resolution reads, in part: "Iran's declaration of the new facility (...) gives rise to questions about whether there are any other nuclear facilities under construction in Iran which have not been declared to the Agency."

It further reads that "Iran has neither implemented the Additional Protocol (1997) nor cooperated with the Agency in connection with the remaining issues of concern," such as the Green Salt Project involving uranium processing and the designing of a ballistic missile warhead, as well as the testing of high explosives and high-voltage equipment for activation of HE detonators.

The IAEA resolution is not a binding document, but its approval is evidence of Iran's growing political isolation. It was supported by 25 of the 35 countries represented on the Board of Governors. Cuba, Venezuela and Malaysia voted against it, while Turkey, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Brazil, South Africa and Egypt abstained.

Tehran's reaction to the resolution was clearly exaggerated for several reasons.

First, Iran thought it could act with impunity because the lead countries do not have a majority on the IAEA Board of Governors. This is why in the past Iran insisted that its nuclear file be returned to the IAEA, thinking that this would protect it from "Western pressure."

Second, Iran has been stealthily working for several years to complement its uranium enrichment facility at Natanz with several other such plants, including the nuclear facility near Qom. The IAEA inspectors who visited it wondered if its construction began earlier than Iran claims it had, and suggested that Iran likely has other such facilities.

Now Tehran has deliberately decided to aggravate its relations with the IAEA. While formally agreeing in October to remove 80% of its low-enriched uranium (LEU) in exchange for fuel for its nuclear research center in Tehran, Iran started impeding the implementation of that presumably advantageous deal.

The IAEA did its best to take Iran's interests into account and proposed compromise solutions. Therefore, only a deterioration in relations with the Agency could allow Iran to keep the accumulated LEU reserves. The resolution was a good excuse for doing this.

Tehran is clearly working consistently to develop a full nuclear cycle as the technological basis for producing nuclear weapons. It so far wants only to have the ability to create nuclear weapons, but will it stop when it gets it? This is a question of fundamental importance for the neighboring countries, including Russia.

Unfortunately, there is no guarantee that Tehran will stop at the red line. In the past, it did not create nuclear weapons because the United States and/or Israel threatened to physically liquidate its nuclear facilities. But now the U.S. is busy planning its gradual withdrawal from Iraq and trying to stabilize the situation in Afghanistan. As for Israel, external political influence has become unfavorable in terms of using military force against Iran.

Therefore, the international community can only encourage the UN Security Council and other groups of countries and individual states to approve sanctions against Iran.

There is still hope that Iran will not sever relations with the IAEA because it does not have enough natural uranium for its projects, it is badly short of modern technology (especially in the gas sector), its aircraft and physical plant have long become obsolete, and social problems are growing in scale.

Given these conditions, the international community should demonstrate flexibility with the right timing and start to gradually integrate Iran into the international economic system and subsequently into international political relations.

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The opinions expressed in this article are the author's and do not necessarily represent those of RIA Novosti.

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<http://en.rian.ru/analysis/20091201/157057096.html>

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