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Washington Post
January 31, 2007
Pg. 12

N. Korea May Accept Deal In Nuclear Talks

By Glenn Kessler, Washington Post Staff Writer

North Korea appears increasingly willing to bargain over the terms of ending its nuclear programs, prompting cautious optimism that some sort of agreement may be reached when the six-nation disarmament talks reconvene next week in Beijing, U.S. and Asian officials close to the talks said.

With just two years left in President Bush's term, State Department officials appear to have been given new freedom to explore different outcomes and proposals with their North Korean counterparts, most recently during unusual bilateral talks held in Berlin. North Korean officials have responded in kind, for the first time moving beyond quibbles about the wording in communique and actually talking specifically about what they might do to end their nuclear programs, the officials said.

Officials cautioned that intensive bargaining will be necessary for any deal in a process that has generally yielded little but disappointment, most recently during a round of talks in December. In September 2005, North Korea

agreed to a joint communique in which it said it would abandon its nuclear programs in exchange for economic and security incentives. But then it boycotted the talks for 13 months in anger over a Treasury Department action against a Macau bank allegedly acting as a conduit for North Korean counterfeiting.

North Korea tested a nuclear weapon in October, which put it at odds with longtime ally China. But other nations at the talks -- such as Russia -- recently put pressure on the United States to end the financial crackdown against Banco Delta Asia. The talks also include China, South Korea and Japan.

Sources close to the talks who spoke on the condition of anonymity said the United States, backed by China, is seeking some sort of disablement of the North Korean nuclear facility at Yongbyon, but Pyongyang has thus far proposed only to allow the return of inspectors from the International Atomic Energy Agency. North Korea in the past four years has obtained from spent fuel rods at the facility enough plutonium for an estimated 10 nuclear weapons, and it might consider freezing the facility. But that would be problematic for the Bush administration because that would result in a deal similar to the one obtained by then-President Bill Clinton -- which Bush has said was a bad bargain.

Any agreement is likely to include some sort of resolution of the Banco Delta Asia issue. Pyongyang officials have demanded that \$24 million in frozen North Korean accounts be returned, but U.S. officials have indicated a willingness to discuss only the return of some funds that have no clear connection to illicit activity.

Assistant Secretary of State Christopher R. Hill, the chief U.S. negotiator, declined yesterday to discuss specifics or to predict success. "We go there thinking our team has worked as hard as we can, and we have a basis for calling a meeting and a basis for moving forward," he said.

Michael J. Green, the top White House official for Asia policy until a year ago, said the administration will have to balance its interest in winning an agreement against the possibility that North Korea will agree only to a partial solution -- and will ultimately keep its nuclear weapons -- to relieve the pressure from U.N. sanctions. "The devil is in the details," he said.

Green, a Japan expert, added that there is increasing nervousness among Japanese officials that the Bush administration is getting soft on North Korea because of the turmoil in Iraq.

That nervousness extends to U.S. officials deeply skeptical of North Korea. "Any deal that they would agree to now is no good," said John R. Bolton, until recently U.S. ambassador to the United Nations and the top arms-control official during Bush's first term. "It is inconceivable that they will agree to the intrusive inspections regime that we need to have any confidence they would live up to the terms of the deal."

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/01/30/AR2007013000109.html>

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GovExec.com

DAILY BRIEFING

January 30, 2007

Lawmakers weigh cutting nuclear security agency

By Jonathan Marino

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Lawmakers on Tuesday proposed eliminating the agency created seven years ago to oversee the country's nuclear weapons stockpile, citing continued security failures at the Los Alamos laboratory in New Mexico.

Members of the House Energy and Commerce Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations said at a hearing that the National Nuclear Security Administration, a semi-autonomous agency within the Energy Department, has not performed adequately. They cited an October incident at Los Alamos, N.M., in which local police responding to a domestic disturbance call discovered that a laboratory employee had classified data on nuclear weapons stored on small, portable hard drives.

The incident was the latest in a string of breaches that have prompted lawmakers to reconsider NNSA. The oversight agency was created in 2000 as part of Congress' response to the mishandling of classified information - again at Los Alamos - by Wen Ho Lee.

"NNSA was a management experiment gone wrong," said ranking member Rep. Joe Barton, R-Texas.

Lawmakers introduced a bill Tuesday they said will give Energy Secretary Samuel Bodman more authority over energy security. They also discussed the possibility of closing the Los Alamos laboratory entirely.

The Energy Department's inspector general testified at the hearing that mismanagement and security gaps -- some of which department officials say have been repaired -- caused the most recent Los Alamos incident. IG Gregory Friedman criticized management for "a lack of follow-through" on policy guidelines and a failure to conduct frequent enough oversight.

The IG said policies to improve the physical security of classified files need immediate implementation to prevent data theft. Policies for cybersecurity must be implemented universally throughout the Energy Department, he said. Linda Wilbanks, NNSA's information chief, testified that all data ports, which are what the Los Alamos employee is believed to have used to download classified data in the October incident, have been sealed.

Energy Department Deputy Secretary Clay Sell told lawmakers that, following the security breach, the department took steps to secure its data quickly. Reviews of security are ongoing, Sell said, but will be completed for Bodman in February. Subcommittee members said they will seek Bodman's testimony after the reports are finished.

http://govexec.com/story_page.cfm?articleid=35989&dcn=todaysnews

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(Editor's Note: To view complete report, please click on hyperlink following introduction.)

Ready or Not?

PROTECTING THE PUBLIC'S HEALTH FROM DISEASES, DISASTERS, AND BIOTERRORISM 2006

Introduction: 5 YEARS AFTER 9/11

2006 marks the fifth anniversary of the September 11, 2001 and anthrax tragedies. Since 2001, the nation has experienced many additional threats to the public's health, ranging from Hurricane Katrina to a life-threatening E. coli outbreak to rising concerns about a potential flu pandemic.

America's public health system and the healthcare delivery system are among the most important components of the nation's preparedness against terrorism and natural disasters. They are charged with the unique responsibility of protecting the health of all citizens. Public health and healthcare professionals act as first responders, investigators, strategists, medical care providers, and advisors to public officials and decision makers. They must diagnose and contain the spread of disease, and treat individuals who are injured or may have been exposed to infectious or harmful materials. Intentional acts of terror and naturally occurring crises have the potential to cause serious harm to large portions of the American public. Decisions and actions taken by the public health system can greatly mitigate the negative impact of these threats and help protect the health and lives of the American people. Many health emergencies can also have serious global consequences, particularly infectious threats. Germs know no boundaries, so the U.S. must also remain vigilant and support the prevention and control of health threats around the world. . . . (Click link below to read complete report.)

<http://healthyamericans.org/reports/bioterror06/BioTerrorReport2006.pdf>

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New York Times

February 1, 2007

Chirac Strays From Assailing a Nuclear Iran

By Elaine Sciolino and Katrin Bennhold

PARIS, Jan. 31 — President Jacques Chirac said this week that if Iran had one or two nuclear weapons, it would not pose a big danger, and that if Iran were to launch a nuclear weapon against a country like Israel, it would lead to the immediate destruction of Tehran.

The remarks, made in an interview on Monday with The New York Times, The International Herald Tribune and Le Nouvel Observateur, a weekly magazine, were vastly different from stated French policy and what Mr. Chirac has often said.

On Tuesday, Mr. Chirac summoned the same journalists back to Élysée Palace to retract many of his remarks.

Mr. Chirac said repeatedly during the second interview that he had spoken casually and quickly the day before because he believed he had been talking about Iran off the record.

"I should rather have paid attention to what I was saying and understood that perhaps I was on the record," he said.

The tape-recorded, on-the-record interview was conducted under an agreement that it would not be published until Thursday, when Le Nouvel Observateur appears on newsstands.

On Monday, Mr. Chirac began by describing as "very dangerous" Iran's refusal to stop producing enriched uranium, which can be used to produce electricity or to make nuclear weapons. Then he made his remarks about a nuclear-armed Iran.

"I would say that what is dangerous about this situation is not the fact of having a nuclear bomb," he said. "Having one or perhaps a second bomb a little later, well, that's not very dangerous."

“But what is very dangerous is proliferation. This means that if Iran continues in the direction it has taken and totally masters nuclear-generated electricity, the danger does not lie in the bomb it will have, and which will be of no use to it.”

Mr. Chirac said it would be an act of self-destruction for Iran to use a nuclear weapon against another country. “Where will it drop it, this bomb? On Israel?” Mr. Chirac asked. “It would not have gone 200 meters into the atmosphere before Tehran would be razed.”

It was unclear whether Mr. Chirac’s initial remarks reflected what he truly believes. If so, it suggests a growing divide with American policy, which places the highest priority on stopping Iran from gaining the capacity to produce nuclear weapons.

Mr. Chirac has privately expressed the view occasionally in the past year that a nuclear-armed Iran might be inevitable and that it could try to sell the technology to other countries. But publicly the policy has been very different. In fact, Élysée Palace prepared a heavily edited 19-page transcript of the Monday interview that excluded Mr. Chirac’s assessment of a nuclear-armed Iran.

The transcript even inserted a line that Mr. Chirac had not said that read, “I do not see what type of scenario could justify Iran’s recourse to an atomic bomb.”

There are divisions within the French government — and between Europe and the United States — about how much Iran should be punished for behavior that the outside world might not be able to change. Some French officials worry that the more aggressive course of action by the United States toward Iran will lead to a confrontation like the Iraq war, which France opposed.

In noting the sanctions against Iran that were imposed last month by the Security Council, Mr. Chirac warned Tuesday that escalation of the conflict by both sides was unwise. “Of course we can go further and further, or higher and higher up the scale in the reactions from both sides,” he said. “This is certainly not our thinking nor our intention.”

In the Monday interview, Mr. Chirac argued that Iran’s possession of a nuclear weapon was less important than the arms race that would ensue.

“It is really very tempting for other countries in the region that have large financial resources to say: ‘Well, we too are going to do that; we’re going to help others do it,’ ” he said. “Why wouldn’t Saudi Arabia do it? Why wouldn’t it help Egypt to do so as well? That is the real danger.”

Earlier this month, Mr. Chirac had planned to send his foreign minister to Iran to help resolve the crisis in Lebanon. The venture collapsed after Saudi Arabia and Egypt opposed the trip and members of his own government said it would fail.

Mr. Chirac, who is 74 and months away from ending his second term as president, suffered a neurological episode in 2005 and is said by French officials to have become much less precise in conversation.

Mr. Chirac spent much of the second interview refining his remarks of the previous day.

He retracted, for example, his comment that Tehran would be destroyed if Iran launched a nuclear weapon. “I retract it, of course, when I said, ‘One is going to raze Tehran,’ ” he said.

He added that any number of third countries would stop an Iranian bomb from ever reaching its target. “It is obvious that this bomb, at the moment it was launched, obviously would be destroyed immediately,” Mr. Chirac said. “We have the means — several countries have the means to destroy a bomb.”

Mr. Chirac also retracted his prediction that a nuclear Iran could encourage Saudi Arabia and Egypt to follow suit. “I drifted — because I thought we were off the record — to say that, for example, Saudi Arabia or Egypt could be tempted to follow this example,” he said. “I retract it, of course, since neither Saudi Arabia nor Egypt has made the slightest declaration on these subjects, so it is not up to me to make them.”

As for his suggestion in the first interview that Israel could be a target of an Iranian attack and could retaliate, Mr. Chirac said: “I don’t think I spoke about Israel yesterday. Maybe I did so but I don’t think so. I have no recollection of that.”

There were other clarifications. In the initial interview, for example, Mr. Chirac referred to the Iranian Islamic Republic as “a bit fragile.” In the subsequent interview, he called Iran “a great country” with a “very old culture” that “has an important role to play in the region” as a force for stability.

Mr. Chirac’s initial comments contradicted the long-held French policy of deterrence, which holds that Iran must not go nuclear. The thinking is that a nuclear-armed Iran would give Iran the ability to project power throughout the region and threaten its neighbors — as well as encourage others in the region to seek the bomb.

Under Mr. Chirac’s presidency, France has joined the United States and other countries in moving to punish Iran for refusing to stop enriching uranium, as demanded by the International Atomic Energy Agency and the United Nations Security Council.

Iran insists that the purpose of its uranium enrichment program is to produce energy; France, along with many other countries, including the United States, is convinced that the program is part of a nuclear weapons project.

The purpose of the initial interview was for Mr. Chirac to talk about climate change and an international conference in Paris later this week that parallels a United Nations conference on the global environment.

The question about Iran followed a comment by Mr. Chirac on the importance of developing nuclear energy programs that are transparent, safe and secure.

In the midst of his initial remarks on Iran, Mr. Chirac's spokesman passed him a handwritten note, which Mr. Chirac read aloud. "Yes, he's telling me that we have to go back to the environment," Mr. Chirac said. He then continued a discussion of Shiite Muslims, who are by far the majority in Iran but a minority in the Muslim world.

"Shiites do not have the reaction of the Sunnis or of Europeans," said Mr. Chirac, who over the years in private meetings has expressed distrust of Shiite Muslims.

The president had a different demeanor during the two encounters.

In the first interview, which took place in the late morning, he appeared distracted at times, grasping for names and dates and relying on advisers to fill in the blanks. His hands shook slightly. When he spoke about climate change, he read from prepared talking points printed in large letters and highlighted in yellow and pink.

By contrast, in the second interview, which came just after lunch, he appeared both confident and comfortable with the subject matter.

The attempt by Élysée Palace to change the president's remarks in a formal text is not unusual. It is a long-held tradition in French journalism for interview subjects — from the president to business and cultural figures — to be given the opportunity to edit the texts of question-and-answer interviews before publication.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2007/02/01/world/europe/01france.html>

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New York Times

February 2, 2007

Pg. 10

Iran Leader Calls Nuclear Sanctions Ineffective

By Nazila Fathi

TEHRAN, Feb. 1 — President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad of Iran, under increasing criticism at home, said Thursday that his nation was becoming a superpower and that the United Nations sanctions would not deter it from pursuing its nuclear program.

"We are rapidly becoming a superpower," Mr. Ahmadinejad told reporters after laying flowers on the tomb of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini on the 28th anniversary of the revolution he led in 1979.

"Our strength does not come from military weapons or an economic capability," the ISNA news agency quoted him as saying. "Our power comes from our capability to influence the hearts and souls of people, and this scares them," he added, referring to the West.

"That's why they are using psychological warfare and impose sanctions. But the language of sanctions belongs to the past."

He made no reference to contradictory remarks this week by President Jacques Chirac of France about whether it would be acceptable for Iran to have a nuclear program.

Mr. Ahmadinejad spoke as some conservatives in Iran joined moderates to warn that his dismissiveness toward sanctions by the United Nations Security Council over Iran's nuclear program could have dangerous consequences.

The Security Council resolution, passed on Dec. 23, prohibits trade in goods and technology related to Iran's nuclear program. The measure is aimed at curbing Iran's uranium enrichment program, which Iran says is for peaceful purposes but the United States and some European countries contend is for making nuclear weapons.

The recent criticism of Mr. Ahmadinejad has led to speculation that Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, the supreme religious leader who has the ultimate authority on all state matters, is allowing such talk in an effort to contain him.

In his only reference to the resolution, Ayatollah Khamenei said Iran would not give up its right to a nuclear program.

Dozens of moderate politicians and several conservatives gathered last week at the office of Mehdi Karroubi, a former speaker of Parliament, to discuss their concerns over the future of Iran.

"Those who don't worry are either unaware of what is happening" or showing that they lack wisdom, said Ismail Gerami Moghadam, a member of Parliament who was at the meeting, the independent daily Etamad Melli reported.

The state-run daily Keyhan joined critics of Mr. Ahmadinejad last week and said "any threat should be taken seriously." The newspaper, which had repeatedly suggested that Iran withdraw from the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty and proceed with its nuclear program, would be expected to support the president's position.

On Thursday in Vienna, headquarters of the International Atomic Energy Agency, diplomats said Iran had begun installing centrifuges at its uranium enrichment plant at Natanz, Agence France-Presse reported. Iran has said that it plans to install 3,000 of the machines at Natanz soon.

Mr. Ahmadinejad has promised an announcement on the nuclear program during the 10-day anniversary celebration. <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/02/02/world/middleeast/02iran.html>

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New York Times

February 3, 2007

Pg. 8

Iran Installs Equipment For Large-Scale Uranium Enrichment

By David E. Sanger

WASHINGTON, Feb. 2 — International nuclear investigators have confirmed that Iran is beginning to install equipment in the large underground chamber in Natanz, the center where Iranian officials have said they will move to industrial-scale enrichment of uranium, according to foreign diplomats and American officials.

Iran said last year that it planned to install 3,000 centrifuges by this spring at Natanz, as a first step toward putting more than 50,000 of the devices in operation to produce nuclear fuel. But the program has been behind schedule, and based on reports from investigators from the International Atomic Energy Agency, the centrifuges are just now beginning to be assembled.

Nonetheless, the move signals a continued defiance of the United Nations Security Council, which demanded last summer that Iran suspend all uranium enrichment. At the White House on Friday, the spokesman for the National Security Council said, “This clearly demonstrates that Iran is not moving to meet the U.N.’s mandate.”

This weekend, ambassadors from several countries are invited by the Iranians to visit the plant at Isfahan, where Iran produces the uranium gas that is fed into centrifuges for enrichment. American officials dismissed the invitation as a diplomatic stunt, meant to create a false sense of openness about the program.

“Instead of inviting I.A.E.A. ambassadors, Iran should invite I.A.E.A. inspectors,” said Gregory L. Schulte, the American ambassador to the atomic agency. “Iran should give them access to all the documents, nuclear facilities and individuals that it has refused to provide access to in the last three years.”

He added that a United Nations resolution requires Iran to suspend its nuclear activities. “Suspending them would build confidence,” he said. “Showcasing them does not.”

In Tehran, Iranian officials said on Friday that President Jacques Chirac of France was speculating when he first said this week that Iran would not pose a big danger if it had one or two nuclear weapons. Mr. Chirac, who later retracted his remarks, also said that if Iran were to launch a nuclear weapon against a country like Israel, it would lead to the immediate destruction of Tehran.

“This is more like a fantasy by Mr. Chirac because the International Atomic Energy Organization and its director have repeatedly said that Iran is not moving in that direction,” said a Foreign Ministry spokesman, Mohammad Ali Hosseini, referring to the agency’s declarations that it has developed no evidence that Iran is enriching uranium for bomb production. But the agency has also said that Iran never answered a series of questions about suspicious activities that could indicate work on a weapons project. “We have also said that the Islamic Republic of Iran has no plans to have nuclear weapons and that nuclear weapons are religiously banned,” he added. “We really hope they talk realistically.”

Mr. Hosseini said that Iran was surprised that European leaders had ignored comments by Israel’s prime minister, Ehud Olmert, recently that seemed to confirm that Israel possessed nuclear weapons. In a television interview, Mr. Olmert suggested that Iran was “aspiring to have nuclear weapons, as America, France, Israel, Russia.”

The Israelis, clearly embarrassed by Mr. Olmert’s statement, immediately said his remark was not intended as a confirmation or denial of whether his country possesses the weapons. But Iran has seized on it as evidence of a double standard, saying that European nations should be pressing the Israelis, not the Iranians.

If Iran is preparing to take its enrichment program to the next level, it may be rushing. It currently has a pilot program under way to determine if it can master the process. But so far that project is small and has run into numerous technical problems, according to foreign diplomats who have reviewed reports on its progress.

Iran’s president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, had promised an announcement about Iran’s latest advances during celebrations that began Thursday for the 28th anniversary of the Islamic Revolution.

Diplomats in Vienna told The Associated Press that hundreds of technicians and laborers were “working feverishly” at the Natanz facility, near Tehran, over the past week. The news agency said that by Thursday, pipes, wiring, control panels and air-conditioning had been installed — setting the stage for hooking up the centrifuges that spin uranium into enriched levels.

The process can lead to making nuclear fuel for power plants, or for nuclear weapons if the uranium is enriched to higher levels. The United States and some European countries have accused Iran of having a clandestine weapons program, though Iran contends that its program is peaceful.

The United Nations Security Council passed a resolution on Dec. 23 banning the trade of goods and technology related to Iran's nuclear program. Mr. Ahmadinejad has repeatedly scoffed at the measure, but in recent weeks he has faced internal public criticism for fanning a confrontation with the West.

William J. Broad contributed reporting from New York, and Nazila Fathi from Tehran.

http://www.nytimes.com/2007/02/03/world/middleeast/03iran.html?_r=1&oref=slogin

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Washington Times

February 3, 2007

Pg. 7

Iran

Cameras Not Allowed For Nuclear Inspection

TEHRAN -- A senior Iranian official said yesterday Iran had refused to let U.N. inspectors set up cameras at the underground section of the Natanz complex, where Iran plans to enrich uranium.

He also denied some reports abroad that Iran had begun installing 3,000 centrifuges to step up uranium enrichment.

"It has not started yet," the official said. Enriched uranium can be used to run power plants or to detonate atomic bombs. The United Nations has slapped sanctions on Iran's nuclear program for defying demands to stop enriching uranium, a process Tehran insists is aimed only at generating electricity.

<http://www.washtimes.com/world/20070202-100150-1770r.htm>

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New York Times

February 3, 2007

Pg. 8

News Analysis

Chirac's Iran Gaffe Reveals A Strategy: Containment

By Elaine Sciolino

PARIS, Feb. 2 — When President Jacques Chirac said this week that he would not be overly worried if Iran obtained a nuclear weapon, he inadvertently said aloud what some policy makers and arms control experts have been whispering: that the world may have to learn to live with a nuclear Iran.

Mr. Chirac quickly retracted his words, and Élysée Palace reaffirmed France's commitment to preventing Iran from becoming a nuclear-weapons state. But in veering from the prepared script and letting the veil of caution fall, he became the first Western leader to imply that containment of a nuclear Iran is preferable to other options, especially war.

"Jacques Chirac said things that many experts are saying around the world, even in the United States," Hubert Védrine, foreign minister from 1997 to 2002, said on LCI television on Friday. "That is to say, that a country that possesses the bomb does not use it and automatically enters the system of deterrence and doesn't take absurd risks." The logic of the argument goes this way: Iran is making enriched uranium, which can be used either for making electricity or, with additional enrichment, nuclear weapons. If Iran masters that process for military purposes, it may be able to build a bomb or two in the next few years.

Under that thinking, the only realistic goal is to slow down the process as long as possible. But even if Iran has the bomb, it will be subject to the same classic doctrine of nuclear deterrence that restrained the nuclear powers during the cold war.

"There is a growing realization that the international community is failing to stop Iran from acquiring a uranium enrichment capability," said Mark Fitzpatrick, a senior fellow at the International Institute for Strategic Studies in London. "The U.S. government wouldn't accept it, but it's becoming a fait accompli. Can the next step — a nuclear weapon — be prevented? Chirac skipped over that question and cut to the chase in saying, 'We can live with a nuclear-armed Iran.' "

The Bush administration has made stopping an Iranian bomb the object of an increasingly aggressive policy. But administration officials are concerned that the Iranians have learned from North Korea — which ignored Washington's warnings and detonated a nuclear device last year. Iran, they fear, is on the same path.

So the administration is pressing reluctant European governments to curtail support for exports to Iran and to block transactions and freeze the assets of some Iranian companies. In Iraq, the administration has pursued Iranian agents it believes to be involved in attacks against American and allied forces.

Among the Europeans, there is an overwhelming consensus that the American-led war in Iraq has been a disaster and that Washington's Iran strategy could end in an even more destabilizing military confrontation.

It was Mr. Chirac who led Europe's opposition to the war in Iraq, and in an I-told-you-so speech last month he said that his predictions that the war would spread more chaos, regional instability and terrorism had come true.

In his remarks this week, he could have been speaking for most of Europe when he said that what he called "the Iraq affair" had "shifted red lines" and made the region dangerous.

Even inside the Bush administration, some officials have acknowledged over the past year that Iran eventually may get a nuclear weapon — or at least the technology and components to assemble one quickly. In the United States, the view that the world might have to coexist with a nuclear Iran was laid out in an ambitious study by two government-financed scholars at the National Defense University in 2005.

"Can the United States live with a nuclear-armed Iran?" the report asked. "Despite its rhetoric, it may have no choice." The report added that the costs of rolling back Iran's nuclear program "may be higher than the costs of deterring and containing a nuclear Iran."

In a sense, Mr. Chirac was trying to make just that point when he said in an interview with three publications, including The New York Times, that a bomb would do Iran little good because it would never be able to use it without facing swift retaliation.

Mr. Chirac also stressed his belief that Iran should not be completely humiliated and isolated, but encouraged to become a positive regional player. "How can we impose sufficiently strong constraints on Iran?" he asked in the Monday interview. Calling the Islamic Republic "a bit fragile," he said, "One has to know what Iran can withstand or not."

The following day, in retracting his statements about a nuclear Iran, he stressed the importance of having a "dialogue" with Iran, which he said had an important role to play in helping to stabilize the region.

In the past several years, Mr. Chirac has tried to navigate a middle course between the United States and Iran.

It was France, in the months after the invasion of Iraq in 2003, that conceived a diplomatic initiative joined by Britain and Germany in which Tehran would freeze its uranium enrichment activities in exchange for political, economic and technological incentives.

The European trio suspected that the United States was moving toward an open confrontation with Iran, much the way it did with Iraq.

But the initiative failed, even after the United States, Russia and China joined in. Sanctions, even in the unlikely eventuality that they can be tightened substantially, are not likely to be tough enough to change Iran's behavior.

Tehran insists that its nuclear program is for peaceful energy purposes. It views United Nations sanctions to punish it for enriching uranium as unjust and a violation of its rights as a signatory to the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty. It justifies its presence in Shiite-controlled Iraq as necessary to preserve its own national security interests and to protect itself should Iraq dissolve into chaos.

On Thursday, Iran's president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, said that his nation was becoming a "superpower" and that the United Nations sanctions would not deter it from pursuing its nuclear program.

Indeed, the Iranians are well aware that possession of the bomb would immediately transform the country into the dominant power in the Middle East, give it even greater influence over Iraq and allow it to threaten and blackmail its enemies.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2007/02/03/world/europe/03france.html>

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New York Times

February 4, 2007

News Analysis

Iran's Boast Is Put To Test

By William J. Broad and David E. Sanger

After decades of largely clandestine efforts, Iran is expected to declare in coming days that it has made a huge leap toward industrial-scale production of enriched uranium — a defiant act that the country's leaders will herald as a major technical stride and its neighbors will denounce as a looming threat. But for now, many nuclear experts say, the frenetic activity at the desert enrichment plant in Natanz may be mostly about political showmanship.

The many setbacks and outright failures of Tehran's experimental program suggest that its bluster may outstrip its technical expertise. And the problems help explain American intelligence estimates that Iran is at least four years away from producing a nuclear weapon.

After weeks of limited access inside Iran, inspectors from the International Atomic Energy Agency have reported that Tehran has succeeded in manufacturing parts for about 3,000 centrifuges, the devices that can spin uranium into reactor fuel — or bomb fuel. In recent days, the Iranians have begun installing the machines and supporting gear in a cavernous plant at Natanz, which would be a potential target if the United States or one of its allies decided that diplomacy would never keep Iran from getting the bomb.

What the Iranians are not talking about, experts with access to the atomic agency's information say, is that their experimental effort to make centrifuges work has struggled to achieve even limited success and appears to have been put on the back burner so the country's leaders can declare that they are moving to the next stage.

To enrich uranium on an industrial scale, the machines must spin at very high speeds for months on end. But the latest report of the atomic agency, issued in November, said the primitive machines of the Iran's pilot plant ran only intermittently, to enrich small amounts of uranium. And the Iranians succeeded in setting up just two of the planned six groupings of 164 centrifuges at the pilot plant.

"It looks political unless they've made progress that we don't know about," said Mark Fitzpatrick, a senior fellow at the International Institute for Strategic Studies, a weapons analysis group in London.

Iran's nuclear boasts come in the midst of an increasingly rancorous chess game between Tehran's mullahs and the Bush administration over the aims of Iran's nuclear programs, its role in Iraq and its ambitions to become the dominant power in the Middle East. The speculation about imminent conflict has grown so strong that President Bush's new secretary of defense, Robert M. Gates, who is intimately familiar with Tehran's nuclear ambitions from his days as director of the Central Intelligence Agency, declared on Friday, "We are not planning for a war with Iran."

Nuclear experts outside the United States government say that if Iran is successful in its latest move and carries out the enrichment, in open defiance of a United Nations demand that it suspend such activity, it could potentially yield fuel for an atom bomb in two or three years, faster than American intelligence has suggested.

Even so, Iran's very public declarations appear to contain large doses of domestic political posturing and outright bluffing.

President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, who has become the face of Iranian defiance, is under growing pressure at home because of unemployment and the squeeze of economic sanctions — and President Bush's advisers have said he may view a nuclear standoff with the United States as a way to help his standing. That, combined with evidence of problems at the pilot plant, suggest that the industrial push may be aimed as much at enriching Iran's political leverage as enriching uranium.

The Iranians insist their effort is solely to fuel nuclear reactors, a statement that in the recent words of R. Nicholas Burns, the under secretary of state for political affairs, "no country that has seriously looked at the evidence believes."

At Natanz, where Iranian crews are installing the centrifuges, the desert south of Tehran gives way to barbed wire, anti-aircraft guns and a maze of buildings. Two of those buildings are cavernous halls that, together, are roughly half the size of the Pentagon. They are buried deep underground to withstand attack.

The crews are installing pipes, wiring and control panels and are now stringing together the centrifuges into a "cascade" of connected machines, which spin in parallel to achieve enrichment. "They're working on the first cascade," a European diplomat said Friday.

The diplomat, who spoke on the condition of anonymity as protocol, added that international inspectors who had just emerged from Tehran saw parts for 3,000 centrifuges. However, all of them are of the most elementary type, known as a P-1. The "P" stands for Pakistan, a legacy of the fact that Iran obtained the design from Abdul Qadeer Khan, the Pakistani rogue nuclear pioneer.

Mr. Ahmadinejad claimed last year that the Iranians were also working on a more sophisticated centrifuge, called the P-2, which would enrich uranium far faster. But inspectors have yet to be shown any of those — leading to speculation in Washington and Vienna about whether Iran has another, hidden facility.

In the underground halls at Natanz, Iranian officials say, the country plans to expand the number of centrifuges from 3,000 to 54,000 eventually, in theory letting it enrich uranium by the ton and giving it the capability to make many reactor fuel rods or nuclear weapons.

However, Mr. Fitzpatrick, a former State Department official in the field of nuclear nonproliferation, said the industrial push made little sense given Iran's problems, as reported the I.A.E.A., in getting its experimental centrifuges to run smoothly at the pilot plant near the cavernous halls of Natanz.

"From a technical point of view," he said, "it's illogical to stand up 3,000 centrifuges before you know how to do it."

The dimensions of Iran's technical woes are suggested by its delayed schedules. Tehran originally planned to have all six cascades of its experimental plant operating by 2003, and to begin installing centrifuges in the industrial halls in 2005.

Mr. Fitzpatrick added that the industrial push made little strategic sense because the thousands of centrifuges would present a tempting target to an adversary. "You might as well draw a big bull's eye around them," he said of the cavernous halls.

Diplomats say they believe Iran plans to unveil its industrial push on Feb. 11, the anniversary of the Islamic revolution. Yesterday, as part of the anniversary celebrations, Iran took diplomats and journalists on a tour of another nuclear facility, at Isfahan.

Mr. Fitzpatrick said Iran would need this year to install the 3,000 machines at Natanz, next year to get them running smoothly, and 9 to 11 months of spinning to have them produce the fuel for a single bomb. He cautioned, however, that such an accomplishment would require all the machinery working more or less perfectly and the Iranians moving "as quickly as they can."

Iran's enrichment program, begun in 1985, was born in great secrecy and built on centrifuge plans obtained from the black market of Dr. Khan. In 2002, the covert program was exposed when an Iranian opposition group revealed the construction of the plant at Natanz.

At first, inspectors from the international atomic agency in Vienna had wide latitude to travel through Iran in an effort to comprehend the depth and breadth of the enrichment project — and assess its true nature, whether for war or peace. They toured centrifuge factories, found a hidden centrifuge factory behind a false wall in a small electric facility in downtown Tehran and hunted for signs of weapons-grade enrichment. They visited the cavernous hall at Natanz, until recently a huge, empty basement.

By the atomic agency's estimates, Iran could produce upwards of 100 centrifuges a month, and was stockpiling them.

Then, last February, after three years of unusual openness, Iran reacted to the growing pressure from Washington and Europe to suspend its enrichment — or face sanctions — by drastically reducing the access of international inspectors to Natanz and dozens of other atomic sites, programs and personnel.

No longer could the inspectors swab machines, scoop up bits of soil, study invoices, peek behind doors and gather seemingly innocuous clues. No longer would the Iranians let the inspectors investigate the origins of traces of highly enriched uranium or examine important documents from the Khan network. Now, the inspectors are limited to a narrow range of operations, leaving them partially blind.

The Iranians appear to have sped ahead. In interviews, diplomats and nuclear officials said recent inspector reports of rapid centrifuge mobilization and installation at Natanz show that Tehran had worked hard for the past year, even as it engaged in increasingly harsh language that some experts took as a cover for technical failings.

Mohamed ElBaradei, director general of the International Atomic Energy Agency, recently suggested that the Iranian strides amounted to something of a bargaining chip that might be traded away to head off a larger confrontation.

The West, he proposed at Davos, Switzerland, on Jan. 26, might suspend its economic sanctions against Iran while Tehran simultaneously suspended its enrichment of uranium. He floated the idea for what he called a "time-out" after saying that Iranian officials had told him they planned to begin installing centrifuges this month at their Natanz industrial-scale plant.

"Enough flexing muscles, enough calling names," Dr. ElBaradei told reporters at the World Economic Forum conference. "It's time to engage."

<http://www.nytimes.com/2007/02/04/world/middleeast/04natanz.html>

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New York Times

February 4, 2007

Pg. 6

Iran Has Guests In To See, But Not Inspect, Nuclear Site

By Nazila Fathi

ISFAHAN, Iran, Feb. 3 — Iran opened one of its nuclear sites to a large number of local and international reporters and a delegation of foreign ambassadors on Saturday in an effort to show the transparency of its program before a United Nations Security Council deadline this month.

Delegations from the Non-Aligned Movement, Group of 77 and League of Arab States arrived at the Isfahan Uranium Conversion Facility in central Iran with nearly 100 reporters. The delegation included representatives from the United Nations nuclear agency from Algeria, Cuba, Egypt and Malaysia, though none were official inspectors.

Iran has kept up efforts to give the Isfahan facility more publicity, and a senior tourism official said late last year that Iran planned to open it and other nuclear sites to foreign tourists.

Iran's ambassador to the International Atomic Energy Agency, Ali Asghar Soltanieh, said Saturday that the purpose of the tour was to assure the world that Iran's program was peaceful.

"In fact we have representatives from all over the world," Mr. Soltanieh said. "We decided to have them come here and see for themselves." He emphasized that surveillance cameras of the United Nations' International Atomic Energy Agency were in place there.

Photographers and video camera operators were not allowed to take pictures in the outside area of the compound. But the visitors were given special clothes, gloves and masks to protect them from radiation and toured the main facility for nearly an hour.

The Isfahan site is where uranium ore is converted into yellowcake and gas. The gas is then transferred to a more sophisticated facility in Natanz, where it could be enriched with centrifuges.

Reporters on Saturday passed the Natanz enrichment facility but were not permitted to tour the site, where Iran recently said it was installing 3,000 centrifuges. The facility is near the main road, and like Isfahan, it was surrounded by anti-aircraft artillery. The Isfahan site also had air-raid bunkers.

Iran insists that its program is for electricity production, but the United States and European countries contend that it is part of an effort that eventually could produce enough highly enriched uranium to make nuclear weapons.

The tour occurred as a United Nations deadline neared this month for Iran to suspend its uranium enrichment program or face tougher economic sanctions. The United Nations Security Council passed a resolution on Dec. 23 banning the trade of goods and technology related to Iran's nuclear program.

President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad has brushed off the sanctions as insignificant and has vowed to continue with the program.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2007/02/04/world/middleeast/04iran.html>

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Los Angeles Times

February 5, 2007

Iran Says It Won't Stop Enrichment

By Reuters

TEHRAN — Iran will not suspend its uranium enrichment work as demanded by a United Nations resolution, the country's top nuclear official said Sunday as a deadline loomed.

On Dec. 23, the Security Council imposed limited sanctions on Iran after it refused to suspend its atomic program, which Western powers worry will be used to produce nuclear weapons.

It gave Iran 60 days to halt enrichment, a process that can produce fuel for nuclear reactors, which Tehran says is its aim, or material for warheads.

"We believe that the resolution has serious legal and executive problems. We have said from the beginning that Iran will not implement it," said Gholamreza Aghazadeh, the head of Iran's Atomic Energy Organization, according to the official Islamic Republic News Agency.

Asked about Iran's plans to expand enrichment capacity at its Natanz site by installing 3,000 more centrifuges, Aghazadeh said: "Be patient, it will not take long. We will inform you about this issue."

Washington said it would be a "miscalculation" if Iran thought it could install the centrifuges and avoid another resolution.

<http://www.latimes.com/news/nationworld/world/la-fg-iran5feb05,1,3367949.story?coll=la-headlines-world>

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