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Articles & Other Documents:

[US To Lobby Argentina On Chavez Nuclear Move](#)

[U.S., France Warn Iran On Nuclear Program](#)

[Rice Is Rebuffed By Russia On Iran](#)

[Russians Help Iran With Missile Threat To Europe](#)

[Venezuela Seeks Nuclear Technology](#)

[Rice Cool To Idea Of One-On-One Talks With Iran](#)

[Richardson Tours N. Korea Plant](#)

[The Nuclear Campus](#)

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London Financial Times

October 13, 2005

US To Lobby Argentina On Chavez Nuclear Move

By Andy Webb-Vidal, Caracas

Argentina is likely to face heavy US pressure to block any sale of a nuclear reactor to the Venezuelan government of President Hugo Chavez, which is seeking to develop nuclear technology, possibly with the help of Iran.

Venezuelan officials have confirmed reports in Argentina that Venezuela's state-owned oil company Petroleos de Venezuela in August asked Argentina to sell it a "medium-sized" nuclear reactor. Washington maintains an uneasy relationship with Venezuela, which some US officials see as a "destabilising" influence in Latin America, and the prospect of a nuclear-empowered Mr Chavez would complicate matters.

"The US government will not be excited about the idea and would likely put pretty heavy pressure on Argentina not to follow through," said a senior US defence official familiar with Latin American policy.

Venezuelan officials said this week they were interested in nuclear technology only for "peaceful ends" and that they were planning to despatch a team of scientists to Argentina to study that country's experience.

"The important thing is that the country is informed that the government wants to advance in new areas such as nuclear and atomic energy," said Rafael Ramirez, the energy minister.

Rafael Bielsa, Argentina's foreign minister, also confirmed that Venezuela had expressed an interest. Argentina has sold nuclear technology for reactor projects to countries such as Australia and Egypt.

However, analysts are sceptical not only about Venezuela's need for nuclear technology but also its ability to carry out such a programme. Venezuela, the world's fifth-largest oil exporter, has the largest proven oil reserves in the Americas, as well as sufficient hydroelectric generation capacity.

In the mid-1950s, the military dictatorship of General Marcos Perez Jimenez acquired a small nuclear reactor from General Electric, but the technology was declared redundant in the 1980s and effectively shut down. Miguel Octavio, a stockbroker in Caracas who formerly worked as a researcher at Venezuela's scientific research institute, said Venezuela had few nuclear physicists to develop atomic energy. "Today there is very little expertise in that field, you would have to train people, and it would take a long time," he said. But the prospect of Venezuela developing atomic energy, for whatever end, is likely to continue to fuel speculation. Mr Chavez has said Venezuela supports the position of Iran in its stand-off with the US and Europe over Iran's nuclear programme.

Geologists say mineral-rich Venezuela has large deposits of uranium ore, especially in the south of the country. There have been reports in Venezuela in recent months alleging that joint ventures signed with Iran, for projects such as cement and tractor factories, may not be what they seem.

<http://news.ft.com/cms/s/c8211c2a-3b86-11da-b7bc-00000e2511c8.html>

[\(Return to Articles and Documents List\)](#)

Washington Post

October 15, 2005

Pg. 11

U.S., France Warn Iran On Nuclear Program

By Robin Wright, Washington Post Staff Writer

PARIS, Oct. 14 -- The United States and France jointly warned Iran Friday that it continues to face the danger of referral to the U.N. Security Council if it does not quickly end a boycott of negotiations on its nuclear program. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice called on Iran to return to the talks and negotiate in good faith. "But one thing that is very clear is the Security Council is an option," she said at a joint news conference with France's Foreign Minister Philippe Douste-Blazy.

Rice also met with President Jacques Chirac in Paris, then flew to Moscow for hastily organized talks with President Vladimir Putin on Saturday. Her main focus in both capitals is international attempts to ensure that Iran's peaceful nuclear energy program is not used to develop nuclear weapons.

Doust-Blazy said that foreign governments need to "stand firm and be strict" in insisting on suspension of Iranian programs to enrich uranium, which can then be used in nuclear weapons.

The meetings come as the United States, its European allies and Russia are trying to come to a common understanding on two issues concerning Iran.

The first is what specific action by Iran will constitute crossing a so-called "line in the sand," a threshold between an acceptable energy program and an illegal weapons production. Interpretations vary in technical but significant ways. The second is what punitive action Iran's international critics could take if the country fails to comply. U.S. officials have been tight-lipped about the specifics of Rice's talks.

The meetings in Russia were added at the last minute to Rice's weeklong swing through Central Asia and Europe, which will also take her to London on Sunday. Moscow has enormous leverage because Russia built Iran's first nuclear reactor for energy and is providing fuel.

France and Britain are two of the three European countries in charge of negotiating with Iran. Germany, the third, is in the throes of forming a new government after recent elections.

The International Atomic Energy Agency is due to meet in five weeks to review the Iran situation. A next step could be to take the country to the Security Council, although what punitive action it might take, if any, is not known.

President Bush is due to meet Putin next month at a summit of Asia and Pacific Rim countries in Argentina, shortly before the IAEA meets again. The United States would like to first establish basic common ground with Russia on Iran, said U.S. officials.

The new Iranian government of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad said this week that it was prepared to resume "unconditional negotiations" with the three European countries.

Iran has flip-flopped several times since agreeing in 2003 to talk with the three European governments, U.S. officials said. Negotiations collapsed again in August when the new Iranian government rejected proposals requiring it to abandon uranium enrichment.

In a sign that avian flu has become a diplomatic issue, Rice also talked in Paris about how governments might cooperate against the virus, which was detected this week in birds in Turkey and Romania. "We believe firmly that there has to be complete transparency about what is going on with avian flu," she said. "The world should not be caught unawares by a very dangerous pandemic because countries refuse to share information."

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/10/14/AR2005101401938.html>

Washington Post
October 16, 2005
Pg. 19

Rice Is Rebuffed By Russia On Iran

Moscow Rejects Tougher Line on Nuclear Program

By Robin Wright, Washington Post Staff Writer

MOSCOW, Oct. 15 -- Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice failed on Saturday to persuade Russia to take a tougher line on Iran's nuclear program, an issue the Bush administration wants to take to the U.N. Security Council if Tehran does not resume negotiations to limit its ability to produce the world's deadliest weapon.

After talks that went almost twice as long as scheduled, Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said that Russia wanted to pursue negotiations within the framework of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the U.N. nuclear watchdog, and that it was not ready to take more drastic action.

"We think that the current situation permits us to develop this issue and to do everything possible within the means of this organization without referring this issue to other organizations so far," Lavrov told reporters. Rice came to Russia on a hastily arranged stop at the end of her weeklong tour of Central Asia and Europe.

Russia, which built Iran's first nuclear reactor, and the United States have long been divided over how best to ensure Tehran's nuclear energy program is not converted into a platform for weapons production. But the issue has become more pressing since the summer, when Iran walked out of the talks with Britain, France and Germany. Tehran also recently began the first step toward resuming uranium enrichment in violation of an agreement brokered by the Europeans.

Lavrov said Moscow agreed with Washington and its European allies that Iran needs to address questions about its nuclear program. "They should be clarified," he said, because violations of the Non-Proliferation Treaty would not be tolerated "under any circumstances." But Russia's top diplomat and former U.N. ambassador also said Iran had the right, as a signatory to the treaty, to enrich uranium for energy production, a view not shared by the Bush administration.

Besides supplying Iran with nuclear technology, Russia is a key player politically. It is one of 35 members on the IAEA board, which decides whether to refer a country to the Security Council. At a meeting last month, Russia abstained on an IAEA resolution warning Iran about the consequences if it did not return to talks. The board deferred taking action, however, until the next IAEA meeting on Nov. 24. Russia is also one of the five permanent Security Council members, giving it a veto over any proposed council action.

Russia made known its differences with the Bush administration just a day after Rice and her French counterpart issued a warning to Iran about the possibility that it would be referred to the world body for possible condemnation or even punitive action if talks do not resume.

Rice said the United States had always endorsed negotiations when carried out "in good faith" and stressed that all the major parties have "common cause" in making Iran disclose the full scope and intent of its nuclear program. But in a reflection of the U.S. differences with Russia, she said that the United States still believed Iran did not need a nuclear energy program, and that a decision to pursue one entails obligations as well as rights.

En route to London, Rice said she was not disappointed with the outcome. She called the discussions with Lavrov and President Vladimir Putin "very good" and said Washington was "pleased" with efforts by Russia -- as well as Europeans and other parties -- to get Iran back into serious discussions between now and the November IAEA meeting.

Rice said it should be clear by the next meeting whether Iran will follow through on its pledge this week to return to talks and whether a renewed diplomatic effort has the potential to produce "an acceptable outcome." But she acknowledged that the Russians do not want to negotiate within a specific timetable. The administration appears to be turning up the heat on Iran. U.N. Ambassador John R. Bolton charged on Friday that Iran has spent almost two decades working on a nuclear weapons program designed to give it strategic dominance in the Middle East and "possibly to supply to terrorists."

"I think that the Iranians have been pursuing a nuclear weapons program for up to 18 years," he said in an interview with the BBC. "They have engaged in concealment and deception and they've engaged in threats before."

Rice also talked with the Russians about Syria, in advance of a U.N. report due to be released in the coming days that could point to high-level Syrian involvement in the Feb. 14 assassination of former Lebanese prime minister Rafiq Hariri. Rice signaled that the United States might press for follow-up action if Syria is linked to the attack. The Security Council will "have to be prepared to act in a way that . . . allows the chips to fall wherever they may," Rice told reporters.

Rice also briefed Putin on her travels to the former Soviet republics of Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Tajikistan, trying to alleviate concerns about the U.S. military presence along Russia's borders. That concern led Russia, China and the Central Asian countries last summer to call for a timetable for U.S. withdrawal from the region because, they said, U.S. operations in Afghanistan were winding down.

As Rice was en route to London, the State Department announced that she would host British Foreign Secretary Jack Straw in Alabama, for ceremonies commemorating the U.S. civil rights movement. Both are scheduled to give speeches on democracy.

Correspondent Peter Finn contributed to this report.

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/10/15/AR2005101501381.html>

[\(Return to Articles and Documents List\)](#)

London Sunday Telegraph

October 16, 2005

Pg. 1

Russians Help Iran With Missile Threat To Europe

By Con Coughlin

Former members of the Russian military have been secretly helping Iran to acquire technology needed to produce missiles capable of striking European capitals.

The Russians are acting as go-betweens with North Korea as part of a multi-million pound deal they negotiated between Teheran and Pyongyang in 2003. It has enabled Teheran to receive regular clandestine shipments of top secret missile technology, believed to be channelled through Russia.

Western intelligence officials believe that the technology will enable Iran to complete development of a missile with a range of 2,200 miles, capable of hitting much of Europe. It is designed to carry a 1.2-ton payload, sufficient for a basic nuclear device.

The revelation raises the stakes in the confrontation between Iran's Islamic regime and the West - led by the United States and European countries including Britain.

Condoleezza Rice, the US secretary of state, clashed with Russian officials over Iran's nuclear programme during a visit to Moscow yesterday, saying that Teheran must fulfil its obligations under the Nuclear Proliferation Treaty. She was later expected to urge President Vladimir Putin to back a referral of Iran to the United Nations Security Council.

A senior American official said Iran's programme was "sophisticated and getting larger and more accurate. They have had very much in mind the payload needed to carry a nuclear weapon.

"I think Putin knows what the Iranians are doing."

Iran is believed to be hiding its weapons development behind its nuclear power programme, for which it receives Russian support, and has refused to suspend uranium enrichment or to allow full UN inspections.

John Bolton, the US ambassador to the UN, told BBC2's Newsnight that Iran was "determined to get nuclear weapons deliverable on ballistic missiles it can then use to intimidate not only its own region but possibly to supply to terrorists".

Iran's longest-range missile is the Shahab 3, which, with an 800-mile range, could hit Israel. The North Korean deal will allow the Iranian missile to reach targets far into Europe - including Rome, Berlin, and much of France.

North Korea has developed a missile, the Taepo Dong 2, that could reach America's west coast, based on the submarine-launched Soviet SSN6. Modifications allow it to be fired from a land-based transporter and this technology is being smuggled to Teheran with Russian help.

Russians have provided production facilities, diagrams and operating instruction so the missile can be built in Iran.

Liquid propellant has been shipped to Iran. Russian specialists have also been sent to Iran to help development of its Shahab 5 missile project, which the Iranians hope to have operational by the end of the decade.

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/main.jhtml?xml=/news/2005/10/16/wiran16.xml>

[\(Return to Articles and Documents List\)](#)

Washington Times

October 17, 2005

Pg. 1

Venezuela Seeks Nuclear Technology

Ties to Iran worry White House

By Rowan Scarborough, The Washington Times

The Venezuelan government has made overtures to various countries about obtaining nuclear technology, according to U.S. officials, who worry that President Hugo Chavez might be taking the first steps in a long road to develop nuclear weaponry.

A Bush administration official monitoring Latin America said the entreaties have included communications with Iran, with whom Venezuela maintains increasingly close ties. Washington has branded Iran a state sponsor of terrorism and accuses it of pursuing nuclear weapons through its atomic industry.

Russia has sold Iran a nuclear reactor from which Iran could eventually develop nuclear-grade materials. Russia has promised the West that it will collect all nuclear waste.

"We are keeping an eye on Venezuela," said one senior official, who spoke on the condition of anonymity. "My sense is that Venezuela has not been as successful with its nuclear entreaties with other countries as it would have liked."

The administration official said there is no clear evidence that Mr. Chavez wants to develop nuclear weapons. But, the source said, there is consistent intelligence reporting that his government has discussed obtaining technology from other countries.

Mr. Chavez, a populist who has ratcheted up anti-U.S. rhetoric as he forges ties with some of America's adversaries, is in the middle of a military buildup that some analysts in the Bush administration fear is a precursor to ending elections.

"Chavez would like to have everything. He has the money to do it," said the official, noting Venezuela's vast oil reserves. "He wants new fighter jets. He wants to put a satellite in space."

He has formed an alliance with Cuban leader Fidel Castro, who has sent thousands of government officials to Venezuela. Mr. Chavez is forming what Pentagon officials say are neighborhood militias modeled after Cuba's communist apparatus to maintain iron-fisted control.

The U.S. administration official said Venezuela has begun taking delivery of more than 100,000 Russian-made AK-47s, some of which will arm the militias. It is also ramping up production of small-arms rounds that the Bush administration fears will be shipped to rebels in democratic parts of Latin America.

But more troubling to the Bush administration is Mr. Chavez's close ties to the mullahs in Iran. He visited Tehran last year and held a series of meetings with Iran's ruling mullahs. He then publicly supported Iran's quest for a huge nuclear industry.

"They are quite kissy-kissy with Iran," said the U.S. official. "There is a lot of back and forth. Iranians show up at Venezuelan things. They are both pariah states that hang out together."

During an interview on Arab-language Al Jazeera television, Mr. Chavez, who had just completed his trip to Iran, was asked about his confrontation with the United States and whether he feared being deposed as Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein was.

"I am on the offensive," Mr. Chavez responded, according to a transcript from the British Broadcasting Corp., "because attack is the best form of defense. We are waging an offensive battle. Yesterday, in Tehran, the spiritual guide [Ayatollah Ali] Khamenei told me a true statement: power, power."

Mr. Chavez called the U.S. war on terrorism "terrorism itself."

Concern in Washington over Mr. Chavez's nuclear ambitions arose this week after the Argentine newspaper Clarin reported Sunday that Venezuela had asked Buenos Aires to sell it a nuclear reactor.

Two days later, the Latin News Daily quoted Venezuelan Energy Minister Rafael Ramirez as denying the report. He said Venezuela was merely in talks with Argentina and Brazil to explore the peaceful scientific uses of the atom. Mr. Chavez periodically has expressed an interest in building a nuclear reactor to generate electric power.

The senior U.S. official said Washington is confident that Argentina would not sell Venezuela a reactor or any technology that could lead to nuclear weapons.

When asked about the issue Tuesday, State Department spokesman Adam Ereli said the U.S. expects all countries to adhere to nonproliferation treaties. Another department spokesman contacted by The Washington Times declined to discuss Venezuela beyond what Mr. Ereli said.

A person in the Venezuelan Embassy's press office in Washington said that only the ambassador talks to the press and that he was not available for comment.

<http://www.washingtontimes.com/national/20051016-112537-4689r.htm>

[\(Return to Articles and Documents List\)](#)

Rice Cool To Idea Of One-On-One Talks With Iran

By Barbara Slavin, USA Today

LONDON — An Iranian diplomat says his country is open to one-on-one talks with the United States, but Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said Sunday the Bush administration prefers European nations continue to lead the effort to stop Iran's nuclear program.

Direct discussions “at this point” would not be productive, Rice said at the end of a foreign trip that included stops in Central Asia and Moscow.

Rice said the United States has had “limited contacts with the Iranians when it is necessary” over issues such as bombs that recently killed British soldiers in southern Iraq. The State Department has said it suspects Iran of providing the explosives to the killers.

“We have tried to deliver a message about bombings in southern Iraq,” Rice told reporters.

“The Iranians know what they need to do,” she said. “They are on the wrong side of so many issues in the Middle East.” The administration has accused Iran of backing terrorist groups in the region.

Rice did not rule out direct U.S.-Iranian talks at a later date. The idea of one-on-one talks about Iran's nuclear program and other issues was discussed by Sadeq Kharrazi, Iran's ambassador to France, in an interview on Friday. “Iran is not closed to the Americans,” Kharrazi said in the interview in Paris. “Iran would be open to talks, but the condition is mutual respect.”

The Bush administration is trying to build support to bring Iran before the United Nations Security Council for its apparent efforts to develop the technology for building nuclear weapons. Iran says its program is for peaceful energy production.

In Moscow on Saturday, Rice failed to win Russian President Vladimir Putin's support for taking Iran before the Security Council for possible punishment.

Rice said Sunday that the United States reserves the right to bring Iran before the council “at a time of our choosing.”

In the meantime, she said, “intensive discussions” are going on to try to resume talks with Iran.

She said “we will know” by Nov. 24 — the date for the next meeting of the International Atomic Energy Agency board of governors — “whether the Iranians are prepared to enter negotiations that might lead to an acceptable outcome.”

The United States and Iran haven't had diplomatic relations for 25 years. Beyond Iran's nuclear program, another point of contention is Iran's support for militant groups in Iraq, Lebanon and Palestinian territories.

Kharrazi said the two countries “have a lot of common interests in the region” in terms of stabilizing Iraq, Afghanistan and Lebanon. Rice noted that Zalmay Khalilzad, the former U.S. ambassador to Afghanistan and now the U.S. ambassador to Iraq, had met with Iranian diplomats and that the U.S. envoy to Afghanistan, Ronald Neumann, would do the same.

Direct U.S.-Iranian talks could propel European negotiations over the future of Iran's nuclear program. Iran suspended the talks in August but has suggested it would be willing to resume them.

http://www.usatoday.com/printedition/news/20051017/a_rice17.art.htm

[\(Return to Articles and Documents List\)](#)

Los Angeles Times

October 20, 2005

Richardson Tours N. Korea Plant

New Mexico's governor holds a second day of talks with officials. He hopes to persuade the country to abandon its nuclear arms program.

By Associated Press

TOKYO — New Mexico Gov. Bill Richardson, a former U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, toured a North Korean nuclear facility Wednesday and held a second day of talks with government officials as part of his effort to encourage Pyongyang to dismantle its atomic weapons program.

The Democratic governor spent about two hours at North Korea's main nuclear research facility at Yongbyon, where the communist regime is known to have secretly processed plutonium for nuclear weapons, Richardson spokesman Billy Sparks said in a phone call from Pyongyang, the capital.

Sparks also said Richardson met with officials, but he provided no details.

Richardson said before his trip that he would push the North Koreans for specifics on how they planned to dismantle their weapons program and a commitment to allow outside verification of the process.

He also said he would urge North Korea to cooperate with humanitarian aid organizations and allow them to operate more freely in the country.

The governor, who has been to North Korea several times, was invited back in May but postponed his trip when Washington asked him to wait until the completion of the latest round of nuclear talks last month in Beijing.

<http://www.latimes.com/news/nationworld/world/la-fg-richardson20oct20.1.5320266.story>

[\(Return to Articles and Documents List\)](#)

Boston Globe

October 20, 2005

The Nuclear Campus

By Matthew Bunn

Four years after 9/11, most nuclear research reactors at universities across the United States are essentially undefended, with no guards on site, no fences or security cameras around the building, and few other security measures in place. Some of these facilities are fueled with highly enriched uranium, the easiest material in the world for terrorists to use to make a nuclear bomb.

With terrorist warnings and attacks clogging the airwaves, action is needed to get rid of the potential bomb uranium wherever possible and provide effective security where highly enriched uranium is still needed, both to reduce the dangers posed by these US facilities and to help the United States persuade other countries to do the same.

In 1986, the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, which oversees these facilities, recognized the danger posed by the stores of highly enriched uranium and issued a rule requiring all the reactors it regulates to convert to low-enriched uranium, which could not be used as the core of a terrorist bomb. The reactors were directed to convert the moment that usable low-enriched uranium fuels were available, and the Department of Energy came up with the money to pay for it.

Almost two decades later, the job is still not done. There are still seven NRC-regulated reactors in the United States using the highly enriched fuel that could use low-enriched uranium already developed, and three more waiting on development of higher-density fuels. Not a single reactor has converted since 9/11. Why? Because the Energy Department has failed to cough up the money to pay for conversion (though it did help to convert 11 university reactors over the years).

At a price ranging from less than \$1 million to a few million dollars to convert each reactor, the cost of getting rid of bomb uranium on campus is tiny when compared to the billions spent each year on national security. But it is big when compared to the pittance spent supporting nuclear research in the United States, which is the checkbook that has typically been drawn on for conversion.

Meanwhile, because the research reactors have so little money, the NRC has exempted them from nearly all of its security requirements. Under NRC rules, bomb uranium that would require an impressive security system and a substantial armed guard force if it were located anywhere else needs neither of those things if it is at a research reactor. A recent ABC News investigation documented the results -- reactors where no armed guards were in place, doors were left open, and visitors with large bags were allowed in without being searched.

Defenders of these lax security arrangements argue that most of the highly enriched fuel at research reactors would be too radioactively "hot" for terrorists to steal and that chemically processing the fuel to get the bomb uranium out would be beyond terrorist capabilities. Unfortunately, neither of these arguments holds water -- particularly in the post 9/11 world of sophisticated and suicidal terrorists. One government study concluded that thieves would not even get enough radiation to make them seriously ill, and one of the leaders of nuclear chemistry in the Manhattan Project warned that turning the uranium into a usable terrorist tool is "not beyond the ability of most students in introductory chemistry classes at the college level."

The Department of Defense should go beyond its recent decision to fund conversion of two university research reactors and set aside funds to convert all the remaining reactors, or simply shut down those aging facilities whose remaining scientific value does not justify the cost of conversion. Defense and other agencies should do the same with the government's own highly enriched uranium-fueled reactors not licensed by the NRC. At the same time, the NRC should phase out the research reactor exemption. Potential bomb uranium requires the same high standards of security wherever it is located.

Setting a good example has never been more important. As Mohamed ElBaradei, the latest Nobel Peace Prize winner, recently warned President Bush, similar highly enriched uranium-fueled research reactors exist in more than 40 countries. After that Bush-ElBaradei conversation, the Defense Department established a Global Threat Reduction Initiative designed to take on this problem. Bush needs to lead a fast-paced global effort to remove the potential bomb material from the world's most vulnerable sites and make sure that every remaining cache has

security sufficient to defeat terrorist threats. To credibly lead that effort, the United States has to get its own house in order.

Matthew Bunn, a senior research associate in the Managing the Atom project at Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government, is co-author of "Securing the Bomb 2005: The New Global Imperatives."

http://www.boston.com/news/globe/editorial_opinion/oped/articles/2005/10/20/the_nuclear_campus/

[\(Return to Articles and Documents List\)](#)