

Blix: Iran's nuclear work raising Mideast tensions

November 12, 2009 -- Updated 0306 GMT (1106 HKT)



Hans Blix takes questions

STORY HIGHLIGHTS

- Former U.N. weapons inspector Hans Blix says Iran's nuclear program raising Mideast tensions
- He says Iran's uranium enrichment may lead other Mideast countries to follow suit
- Blix: Iran can't convince it doesn't want to weaponize, with major nuclear fuel production
- He says U.S. could convince Iran to halt nuclear program by offering security guarantees

(CNN) -- Iran can't convince the world it doesn't want nuclear weapons as long as it is producing nuclear fuel on an industrial scale, former U.N. weapons inspector Hans Blix said Wednesday.

Iran has defied a U.N. Security Council demand that it halt its uranium enrichment program, insisting it has a right to produce fuel for civilian power plants. But while Iran says it has no intention of producing nuclear weapons, "they could change their mind tomorrow," Blix told CNN's "Amanpour" program.

"I don't think they can convince the world about it, and only a termination or strict control of the enrichment process could calm the world," Blix said.

Industrial-scale uranium enrichment could also give the Islamic republic the capability to produce weapons-grade uranium, a more difficult task. The United States and Israel have accused Iran of working toward a nuclear bomb, and Iran has so far balked at an international proposal to send its uranium stocks to Russia and France for conversion into fuel for medical research and treatment.



Video: Iran's nuclear plans

"The fact is that that enrichment very much increases tension in the Middle East, and it may even lead to other countries in the Middle East thinking of going for enrichment," Blix said. But he said the United States "holds the key" to breaking the impasse, and could convince Iran to halt its nuclear fuel program by offering security guarantees or a resumption of diplomatic relations with Tehran.

Blix led the U.N. effort to find Iraq's suspected nuclear, chemical and biological weapons programs before the 2003 invasion of Iraq. His reports that no such weapons were turning up were discounted by the United States, which insisted those programs were being concealed. After the

invasion, Iraq was found to have dismantled its weapons programs years before.
22 November 2009

Iran war games to defend nuclear sites

Advertisement

Iran's Al-Alam TV has been showing footage of military exercises

Iran has begun five days of large-scale war games to simulate attacks on its nuclear sites, officials said, warning it will retaliate if provoked.

The head of Iran's air defence said the aim of the exercises was to thwart aerial reconnaissance and air attacks.

Another official warned Tehran would retaliate with a missile strike on Tel Aviv, if it was attacked by Israel.

Iran is under intense pressure over its nuclear programme, which critics say is intended to produce nuclear weapons.

The US and Israel have not ruled out the prospect of a military attack to prevent Iran developing nuclear bombs. Tehran insists its programme is peaceful.

Annihilation warning

The head of Iran's air defence, Brig Gen Ahmad Mighani, told state media the aim of the war games, which will cover an area of 600,000 sq km (230,000 sq miles), was "to display Iran's combat readiness and military potentials.

IRAN'S NUCLEAR SITES



Iran insists that all its nuclear facilities are for energy, not military purposes

Bushehr: Nuclear power plant

Isfahan: Uranium conversion plant

Natanz: Uranium enrichment plant, 4,592 working centrifuges, with 3,716 more installed

Second enrichment plant: Existence revealed to IAEA in Sept 2009. Separate reports say it is near Qom, and not yet operational

Arak: Heavy water plant

"Due to the threats against our nuclear facilities it is our duty to defend our nation's vital facilities," he said.

Meanwhile, Mojtaba Zolnoor, an aide to supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, warned Iran would respond to any Israeli attack.

"If the enemy attacks Iran, our missiles will strike Tel Aviv," he was quoted as saying by the official Irna news agency.

The commander of the elite Revolutionary Guards' air force wing said Iran's air defence forces would "annihilate" Israeli warplanes if they attacked.

"Their [Israeli] F-15 and F-16 fighters will be trapped by our air defence forces and will be annihilated," Amir Ali Hajizadeh told Iran's Fars news agency.

"Even if their planes escape and land at the bases from which they took off, their bases will be struck by our destructive surface-to-surface missiles."

Deal in doubt

The exercises come as the UN Security Council's permanent members - Britain, China, France, Russia and the United States - plus Germany, urge Tehran to reconsider its rejection of a proposal that would see some of its nuclear material being enriched outside Iran and returned as fuel rods.

The deal - brokered by the UN's nuclear watchdog, the International Atomic Energy Agency - envisages Iran sending about 70% of its low-enriched uranium to Russia and France, where it would be processed into fuel rods for a research reactor in Tehran.

Such a process would prevent Iran enriching uranium to the degree necessary to make a bomb, the UN says.

But Iran has rejected a key part of the deal, seeking further guarantees.

The UN Security Council has called on Iran to stop uranium enrichment and has approved three rounds of sanctions - covering trade in nuclear material, as well as financial and travel restrictions.

Iran to conduct military exercise aimed at protecting nuke sites

November 22, 2009 -- Updated 0805 GMT (1605 HKT)



Iran test-fired missiles in September amid heightened tension over the country's nuclear program.

STORY HIGHLIGHTS

- Iran to hold military exercise aimed at protecting nuclear sites, state media says
- Exercise comes after Iran's apparent rejection of part of nuclear deal
- Western powers fear Iran wants to develop nuclear weapons
- Iran has said nuclear program is used for peaceful purposes

Tehran, Iran (CNN) -- Iran plans to launch a large aerial military exercise Sunday to prepare for any possible attack, state media said. The five-day exercise was to cover a vast area in the country's northwest, west, south and southwest, Press TV said, citing Brig. Gen. Ahmad Miqani.

Iran's regular military and its elite Revolutionary Guards were to participate in the exercise against aerial attacks, especially against Iran's nuclear plants, according to Press TV.

The report did not offer further details about the scope of the exercise, but came as world powers have been strategizing about how to deal with Iran's apparent rejection of a key part of a nuclear deal.

The United States, Russia, China, Germany, France and the United Kingdom, along with the European Union, are trying to map a way forward on Tehran's controversial nuclear program. They seek to reduce international fears that Iran wants to develop nuclear weapons.

On Wednesday, Iranian Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki said his country refused a request to send its partly enriched uranium abroad to be turned into material for medical research.

However, he said, Tehran might allow the nuclear material to be reprocessed inside Iran, the semi-official ISNA news agency reported.

The nuclear deal, hammered out in October with the help of the International Atomic Energy Agency, is aimed to reduce the amount of raw material Iran has to build a nuclear bomb.

President Obama has warned of "consequences" if Iran does not accept the plan.

Iran says it intends to produce nuclear energy only for peaceful purposes, including civilian electricity and medical research.

Iranian media reported on Saturday that, according to a senior Iranian lawmaker, the country is capable of producing partly enriched uranium up to 20 percent, but had requested to buy the fuel from other countries instead. The move was described as a sign of good will.

"Given that Iran is capable of enriching uranium to a level more than 5 percent inside the country, it could well take a step to produce the fuel for its Tehran (research) reactor," said Kazem Jalali, of the parliament's national security and foreign policy commission, according to Press TV.

However, Iran sees buying the fuel as a better option, he said.

Friday, 20 November 2009

Six powers 'disappointed' as Iran rejects nuclear deal



Iran says it has misgivings about the IAEA-brokered deal

The six major powers negotiating with Iran over its nuclear programme have said they are disappointed with Iran's response to an offer of a deal.

After talks in Brussels, the six said Iran had not responded positively to the offer, which would allow it to continue to develop a nuclear reactor.

The head of the UN's nuclear watchdog, Mohammed ElBaradei, had urged Iran to accept the deal by the end of the year.

But Iran rejected a key part of the deal, seeking further guarantees.

The BBC's Tehran correspondent Jon Leyne says that, while no-one wants to say that the Iranian nuclear talks have failed, this is the latest sign that they are not looking at all promising.

Friday's meeting involved the UN Security Council's permanent members - Britain, China, France, Russia and the United States - plus Germany.

NUCLEAR FUEL CYCLE

Mined uranium ore is purified and reconstituted into solid form known as yellowcake

Yellowcake is chemically processed and converted into Uranium Hexafluoride gas

Gas is fed through centrifuges, where its isotopes separate and process is repeated until uranium is enriched

Low-level enriched uranium is used for nuclear fuel

Highly enriched uranium can be used in nuclear weapons

In depth: Nuclear fuel cycle

The powers said in a statement: "Iran has not engaged in an intensified dialogue and in particular has not accepted... a new meeting before the end of October to discuss nuclear issues."

But they said it remained their objective to engage in dialogue with Iran.

A new meeting would be held to complete the powers' assessment of the situation and decide on the next steps to be taken, they added.

Some observers believe that Iran is stalling over the talks, but there are also concerns in the West that, following his disputed election, President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad simply does not have the power to push through a compromise on the nuclear issue even if he wants one.

The West fears Iran is trying to develop a nuclear weapons capacity. Iran insists its nuclear programme is for entirely peaceful purposes.

Mr ElBaradei - who is standing down as head of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) on 1 December - spoke earlier in Berlin, saying Iran had "a unique opportunity to move from sanctions and confrontation to the process of building... trust".

"I believe frankly the ball is very much in the Iranian court," he added. "I hope they will not miss this unique but fleeting opportunity."

'Clear message'

On Wednesday, Iranian Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki said his country had misgivings about the deal brokered by the IAEA.

It envisages Iran sending about 70% of its low-enriched uranium to Russia and France, where it would be processed into fuel rods for a research reactor in Tehran.

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Gary Hay, Aberdeen/Chiba, Japan

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Mr Mottaki suggested Iran would instead agree to exchange its uranium for an equivalent amount of nuclear fuel, but only on its own territory.

Tehran wanted to guarantee it would receive fuel it had contracted for, he said.

On Thursday US President Barack Obama said Washington and its partners would discuss "a package of potential steps" they could take if Iran snubbed a uranium enrichment deal.

Mr Obama said Iran needed to get a "clear message" that, if it failed to take advantage of such opportunities, it was "making itself less secure". But Russia has said there is still "every chance" of reaching a deal with Iran on enrichment, and denied that it had been discussing further sanctions with Washington.

During Mr Obama's recent visit to China he received no assurances that Beijing would support new sanctions against Iran at the UN Security Council.

France and the UK want Iran to accept the deal.

The UN Security Council has called on Iran to stop uranium enrichment and has approved three rounds of sanctions so far - covering trade in nuclear material, as well as financial and travel restrictions.

Iran rejects key part of nuclear deal

November 18, 2009 -- Updated 2018 GMT (0418 HKT)



Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (left) greets IAEA chief Mohamed ElBaradei in Tehran in October.

STORY HIGHLIGHTS

- Iran says it won't send partially enriched uranium abroad for medical research
- Proposal was key part of deal brokered by U.N. nuclear watchdog
- U.S. says proposal "was accepted in principle by all parties including Iran"
- U.S., EU nations concerned Iran intends to develop nuclear weapons

RELATED TOPICS

- Iran
- Nuclear Energy
- International Atomic Energy Agency
- Qom

(CNN) -- Iran will not send its partially enriched uranium abroad to be turned into material for medical research, its foreign minister said Wednesday, rejecting a key plank of a deal designed to ease international fears that Tehran aims to build nuclear weapons.

Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki said Iran might allow its nuclear material to be reprocessed inside Iran, the semi-official ISNA news agency reported.

The deal hammered out last month with the help of the United Nations' nuclear watchdog agency aimed to reduce the amount of raw material Iran has to build a nuclear bomb.

Tehran denies that it wants to do so, saying its nuclear program is to produce civilian nuclear energy and do medical work.

The United Nations' International Atomic Energy Agency did not immediately react to Mottaki's remarks.

"This is the IAEA's proposal, and Iran has to give their response to the IAEA, and that's what we're waiting for," said U.S. State Department spokesman Ian Kelly. "That's what the IAEA is waiting for."

But, he said, "until the IAEA gets the response and formally says this is ... Iran's response, I don't consider a statement to the press necessarily a response."

On October 1, the IAEA proposal "was accepted in principle by all the parties including Iran," Kelly said. "And there was also an agreement that each of the parties would provide a written response to the proposal."

"Russia, France and the United States have provided a written response," he said. "We expect Iran to provide a written response. And we expect the IAEA to pronounce on that response. So we will wait for the IAEA to make a formal response to this."

In a report published Monday, the IAEA expressed concerns about Iran's nuclear program.

The Islamic republic's disclosure of a previously secret nuclear facility near Qom raised questions about the existence of other such facilities, and its delay in acknowledging the facility "does not contribute to the building of confidence" in Tehran, the IAEA said in the report.

Tehran has not convinced the agency its nuclear program isn't military, said the report, published on the Institute for Science and International Security Web site. A source with direct knowledge of the report confirmed its authenticity to CNN.

Tehran shocked the international community in September by revealing the existence of the nuclear enrichment facility.

On Monday, Kelly said in a statement the report "underscores that Iran still refuses to comply fully with its international nuclear obligations."

IAEA inspectors visited the newly revealed facility last month, according to the report.

During a meeting in Tehran, Iranian officials told the inspectors that construction of the site had begun during late 2007, the report said, and it would not be operational until 2011.

However, the IAEA inspectors told Iran "it had acquired commercially available satellite imagery of the site indicating that there had been construction at the site between 2002 and 2004, and that construction activities were resumed in 2006 and had continued to date," the report said.

IAEA member states also allege that design work on the facility, the Fordow Fuel Enrichment Plant, began in 2006, the report said.

Iranian officials told inspectors that the nation has no other undisclosed nuclear facilities either under construction or in operation, the report said, and promised that any future facilities would be disclosed. A letter sent earlier this month asks Tehran to confirm it has not decided to construct or authorized construction of any undisclosed facility, the report said.

Iran remains bound by the terms of a 2003 agreement under which it must provide information to the IAEA regarding nuclear facilities as soon as the decision to build is made or construction is authorized.

"Even if, as stated by Iran, the decision to construct the new facility at the Fordow site was taken in the second half of 2007, Iran's failure to notify the agency of the new facility until September 2009 was inconsistent with its obligations," the IAEA said.

U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has said that construction of the facility violates U.N. Security Council resolutions, Kelly said.

"Iran's delay in submitting such information to the agency does not contribute to the building of confidence," the report said. "While the agency has confirmed that the plant corresponds to the design information provided by Iran, Iran's explanation about the purpose of the facility and the

chronology of its design and construction requires further clarification."

The agency is waiting for Iran's reply to its request to meet officials in regard to those issues and others, according to the report.

"Further analysis of the information available to the agency underscores the importance of Iran engaging with the agency in a substantive and comprehensive manner, and providing the requested access, so that the remaining outstanding issues may be resolved."

The agency encouraged IAEA member states who have provided it information on Iran to share that information with Tehran as well.

16 November 2009

UN presses Iran on nuclear site



A UN team was allowed access to inspect the Qom site last month

The UN's nuclear watchdog says it needs "more clarification" about the purpose of a recently declared Iranian nuclear site near the city of Qom.

The International Atomic Energy Agency also said in a new report the delayed declaration of the plant raised concern about other possible secret sites.

A UN team was allowed access to inspect the Qom site last month.

Some Western nations fear Tehran is trying to build nuclear weapons but Iran says its programme is peaceful.

Chief Iranian nuclear negotiator Ali Asghar Soltaniyeh told Iranian media that Tehran had "provided all the information about the new facility" and called the IAEA report "repetitive".

Earlier, Russia said a nuclear power station it had been building at Bushehr in southern Iran would not be completed by the end of this year as planned.

'Inconsistent'

The IAEA report said it expected the Qom site to start enriching uranium in 2011.

ANALYSIS



Paul Reynolds, BBC world affairs correspondent

The IAEA report on the site near Qom basically confirms that it will be capable of housing some 3,000 centrifuges for uranium enrichment. Iran has said that it is building the plant to protect its technology from potential attack, and the head of the IAEA has said there is nothing to worry about at the site.

But what does worry the governments trying to negotiate with Iran is the secrecy that surrounded the plant. The report says such secrecy does not "contribute to the building of confidence".

In the wider picture, there is still stalemate over the proposal to take Iran's stockpile of low-enriched uranium and enrich it in Russia and France. Senior diplomats from the US, Russia, China and the EU will meet soon as pressure grows for further sanctions on Iran if no agreement on its uranium enrichment can be reached by the end of the year.

It said: "Iran's explanation about the purpose of the facility and the chronology of its design and construction requires further clarification."

Iran only revealed the existence of the Fordo enrichment facility, which is being built about 30km (20 miles) north of Qom, in September.

The IAEA report said this did "not contribute to the building of confidence" and "gives rise to questions about whether there were any other nuclear facilities not declared to the agency".

Iran's delay in notification was "inconsistent with its obligations", the report said.

The BBC's Iran correspondent Jon Leyne says the report raises key questions about the timing of the site's construction.

He says Iran's declaration that it began the project in 2007 does not square with the IAEA's evidence that there was work there as far back as 2002.

The report said satellite imagery showed there was work in Qom between 2002 and 2004, and that this had resumed in 2006 and "continued to date".

Mr Soltaniyeh said he was "comfortable" with the report, as it confirmed Iran was "fully cooperating" and that the activities at Qom were "in accordance with the IAEA instructions and limitations".

He told al-Alam TV: "Iran has provided all information about the new facility and the material inside it.

"We will later proceed with installing the required equipment. The facility will go online in 2011.

"Inspectors scoured the facility for two complete days. Everything was compatible with the non-proliferation treaty."

'Creative plan'

Iran has been offered a scheme whereby it would send some of its low-enriched uranium to Russia, where it would be further processed to fuel an Iranian research reactor.

However, Iran has failed to give a clear response.



Russia has delayed the launch of the Bushehr plant

US President Barack Obama has said it is unfortunate that Iran seems unable to say yes to a "creative" international plan to allay suspicions that it is secretly developing nuclear weapons.

On Sunday, Russia and the US both warned Iran that time was running out for talks over its nuclear programme.

Russia said on Monday the delay in launching the Bushehr plant was for "technical reasons".

Russian officials had said earlier this year that the plant would be completed before the end of 2010, but on Monday Russian Energy Minister Sergei Shmatko said that although progress had been made, there would be no launch.

NUCLEAR FUEL CYCLE

Mined uranium ore is purified and reconstituted into solid form known as yellowcake

Yellowcake is converted into a gas by heating it to about 64C (147F)

Gas is fed through centrifuges, where its isotopes separate and process is repeated until uranium is enriched

Low-level enriched uranium is used for nuclear fuel

Highly enriched uranium can be used in nuclear weapons

In depth: Nuclear fuel cycle

The BBC's Richard Galpin in Moscow says the decision to delay the completion is clearly political - an expression of Russia's frustration at Iran's failure to accept the offer now on the table from the international community.

Under the plan brokered by the IAEA and agreed by Russia, the US and France, Iran would send about 1,200kg (2,600lb), or 70%, of its low-enriched uranium, to Russia by the year's end for processing.

Subsequently, France would convert the uranium into fuel rods for use in a reactor in Tehran that produces medical isotopes.

This is seen as a way for Iran to get the fuel it needs, while giving guarantees to the West that it will not be used for nuclear weapons.

Iran has raised "technical and economic considerations" with the IAEA and has missed deadlines to respond.

15 November 2009

Time 'running out' on Iran talks



Russia and France would process uranium for Iran under the deal

The leaders of the US and Russia have warned Iran that time is running out for talks over its nuclear programme.

President Barack Obama said Iran had failed "so far at least" to respond positively to a deal to send enriched uranium abroad for reprocessing.

Russia and France have offered to do this. Russia's Dmitry Medvedev said he was unhappy with the pace of talks, adding "other means" could be used.

The West suspects Iran wants to build weapons, but Tehran rejects this.

It says its programme is entirely peaceful.

Guarantees

Under the plan brokered by the UN nuclear watchdog, the IAEA, and agreed by Russia, the US and France, Iran would send about 1,200kg (2,600lb), or 70%, of its low-enriched uranium, to Russia by the year's end for processing.



We are running out time

President Obama

Subsequently, France would convert the uranium into fuel rods for use in a reactor in Tehran that produces medical isotopes.

This is seen as a way for Iran to get the fuel it needs, while giving guarantees to the West that it will not be used for nuclear weapons.

Iran has raised "technical and economic considerations" with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and has missed deadlines to respond.

"Unfortunately, so far at least, Iran appears to have been unable to say yes to what everyone acknowledges is a creative and constructive approach,"

Mr Obama said after meeting Mr Medvedev on the fringes of a summit of Asia-Pacific leaders in Singapore.

"We are running out time with respect to that approach," Mr Obama warned.

Mr Medvedev said: "Thanks to joint efforts the process has not stopped but we are not completely happy about its pace. If something does not work there are other means to move the process further."

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In depth: Nuclear fuel cycle

He did not specify - but officials have previously mooted the idea of further sanctions.

"Our aim is clear - a transparent nuclear programme rather than a programme which causes others' concern," Mr Medvedev said.

Iran revealed the existence of a secret nuclear facility in September.

Iran says its nuclear programme is for purely peaceful purposes but the revelation of the existence of the new plant, near Qom, had increased fears in the West about Tehran's intentions.

Mr Obama's administration has set an end-of-year deadline for serious progress towards a comprehensive solution.

Correspondents say Russia and China are reluctant to agree to new Security Council sanctions, so a coalition of countries, including the EU, might take action themselves.

Iran is already subject to UN sanctions, including financial scrutiny and restrictions on arms imports, for keeping secret its uranium enrichment activities at its Natanz plant.

14 November 2009

Turkey 'could store Iran uranium'

By Jonathan Head
BBC News, Istanbul



The leaders of Iran and Turkey are on friendly terms

Turkey and the UN's nuclear watchdog have confirmed they are discussing a proposal to allow Iran to store some of its enriched uranium in Turkey.

Iran is under international pressure to accept a deal to send its enriched uranium abroad for reprocessing.

It has so far refused offers by France and Russia to do this and insists its nuclear programme is entirely peaceful.

But the US and Europe say the amounts of uranium Iran is enriching could be used to build a nuclear bomb.

The speed with which fences have been mended between Iran and Turkey in recent months has caused some unease among Turkey's traditional allies in the West.

Rising power

And the open display of warmth between President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan during their meeting in Tehran last month may have caused a few missed heartbeats in Washington.

But could this new axis serve a purpose?

Turkey prides itself on being a rising regional power, and a potential mediator in the Middle East.

Suddenly it is being talked about as a solution to the deadlock between Iran and the UN Security Council over Iran's nuclear programme.



Q&A: Iran and the nuclear issue

Guide: Nuclear fuel cycle

Iran has so far been lukewarm towards a proposal, made last month after six-party talks in Geneva, that it hand over its enriched uranium to Russia for eventual reprocessing in France.

Now its predominately Muslim neighbour Turkey is offering to store the fuel for Iran.

The two countries discussed the idea at an Islamic summit on Monday, and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) has taken it up too.

Turkey has no nuclear programme of its own and repeated attempts to build one have been still-born.

But the IAEA says the enriched uranium produced by Iran - the source of so much anxiety over potential nuclear weapons - is actually quite simple to handle.

Turkey could quickly build such a facility and all that would be required would be IAEA monitoring of the stock.

If this deal takes off, Turkey will already have proved the worth of its policy of "zero problems" with its neighbours.

It would also help quiet those critics who believe that Turkey's shift eastwards must inevitably mean a loss for the West.

Report: Iran will not ship uranium out of the country

November 7, 2009 -- Updated 0837 GMT (1637 HKT)



IAEA inspectors arrived at Imam Khomeini airport in Tehran early on October 25, 2009.

STORY HIGHLIGHTS

- Report: Iran would not ship low-enriched uranium out of the country
- Was a major part of a nuclear deal between Iran and international powers
- Measure had been supported by the United States, France and Russia

RELATED TOPICS

- International Atomic Energy Agency

- Iran

Tehran, Iran (CNN) -- A senior Iranian politician said Saturday the country would not ship low-enriched uranium out of the country, which is a major part of a pending nuclear deal between Iran and international powers, according to semiofficial state media.

Alaeddin Boroujerdi, chief of Iran's Parliament National Security and Foreign Policy Commission, said the proposed deal to send uranium out of the country is "called off," Iran's semiofficial news agency ISNA reported.

This issue is part of a deal being negotiated by a U.N. nuclear watchdog agency. The draft agreement has been supported by the United States, France and Russia.

It calls for Iran to ship low-enriched uranium outside the country, possibly to Russia, to be converted into fuel rods.

The material then would be shipped back to the Tehran research reactor that produces isotopes for use in medical treatments.

The U.N.'s International Atomic Energy Agency said under the deal, Iran would get the converted fuel back by the end of 2010.

But Boroujerdi, an influential member of the parliament, said he does not see the uranium shipment happening.

"Iran is not to give any of its 1,200 kilograms fuel to the other party to receive 20 percent (enriched) fuel and whether gradually or at once, this will not be done and is called off," he told ISNA.

2 November 2009

Iran urged over enrichment plan



Mr ElBaradei called the deal a "fleeting opportunity" for all sides

Iran has come under more international pressure to respond to a proposal it send uranium abroad for enrichment.

The head of the UN nuclear watchdog, Mohamed ElBaradei, said the draft deal offered last month was a "fleeting opportunity" to avoid confrontation.

Iran has raised "technical and economic considerations" with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and has missed deadlines to respond.

Britain, France and Russia have also called on Iran to promptly respond.

Under the plan brokered by the IAEA and agreed by Russia, the US and France, most of Iran's enriched uranium would be sent abroad to be turned into fuel rods for research use.

This is seen as a way for Iran to get the fuel it needs, while giving guarantees to the West that it will not be used for nuclear weapons.



This is a unique and fleeting opportunity to reverse course from confrontation to co-operation and should therefore not be missed

Mohammed ElBaradei

IAEA chief

Mr ElBaradei said that co-operation between Iran and Western powers was "primarily a matter of confidence building, which can only be achieved through dialogue."

He added: "I therefore urge Iran to be as forthcoming as possible in responding soon to my recent proposal."

The draft plan would require Iran to send about 1,200kg (2,600lb), or 70%, of its low-enriched uranium to Russia by the year's end for processing.

Subsequently, France would convert the uranium into fuel rods for use in a reactor in Tehran that produces medical isotopes.

Mr ElBaradei said the deal was a chance to "reverse course".

"The issue at stake remains that of mutual guarantees among the parties.

"I should add, however, that trust and confidence building are an incremental process that require focusing on the big picture and a willingness to take risks for peace.

"This is a unique and fleeting opportunity to reverse course from confrontation to co-operation and should therefore not be missed."

British Foreign Secretary David Miliband, speaking in Moscow after talks with his Russian counterpart, also appealed for a prompt answer from Tehran.

NUCLEAR FUEL CYCLE



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Highly enriched uranium can be used in nuclear weapons

"The Iranian government can be treated as a normal country on nuclear matters if it behaves like a normal country.

"It can have normal rights to a civilian nuclear power programme if it wins the confidence of the international community - Russia as well as Britain - that it does not have a secret nuclear weapons programme," Mr Miliband said.

Iran revealed the existence of a secret nuclear facility in September.

Iran says its nuclear programme is for purely peaceful purposes but the revelation of the existence of the new plant, near Qom, had increased fears in the West about Tehran's intentions.

French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner said the Western powers would not tolerate further delays by Iran.

"We are waiting for Iran to formally accept the proposition made by the IAEA. If the Iranian response is to stall, as it seems to be, we will not accept this," he said.

Iran has said it wants the UN's nuclear watchdog to establish a committee to review a deal.

Iranian Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki said the country had passed a request to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) two days ago to establish a commission to review the deal.

In the meantime, Mr Mottaki said, Iran would "continue enrichment" for its nuclear needs.

2 November 2009

Iran seeks review of nuclear deal



Mr Mottaki said Iran would "continue enrichment" for its nuclear needs

Iran has said it wants the UN's nuclear watchdog to establish a committee to review a deal aimed at easing Western fears over its nuclear programme.

Iranian Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki said the country had passed a request to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) two days ago.

Mr Mottaki said Tehran had "some technical and economic considerations".

Under the plan, most of Iran's enriched uranium would be sent abroad to be turned into fuel rods for research use.

This is seen as a way for Iran to get the fuel it needs, while giving guarantees to the West that it will not be used for nuclear weapons.

'Technical commission'

Speaking to reporters at a meeting of foreign ministers from eight Islamic countries in Malaysia, Mr Mottaki said Iran had considered the proposals it had agreed with the IAEA and the US, France and Russia.

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Highly enriched uranium can be used in nuclear weapons

"We have some technical and economic considerations on that," he said.

"Two days ago, we passed our views and observations to the IAEA, so it is very much possible to establish a technical commission in order to review and reconsider all these issues."

The UN-brokered plan would require Iran to send about 1,200kg (2,600lb), or 70%, of its low-enriched uranium to Russia by the year's end for processing.

Subsequently, France would convert the uranium into fuel rods for use in a reactor in Tehran that produces medical isotopes.

In the meantime, Mr Mottaki said, Iran would "continue enrichment" for its nuclear needs.

Observers in Tehran say the government may not want to ship most of its enriched uranium in one go - a condition the Western powers may not accept.

30 October 2009

Israel endorses Iran nuclear plan



The Israeli Prime Minister has begun talks with the US Middle East Envoy

Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu has praised a UN proposal to regulate Iran's uranium enrichment programme.

Speaking before talks with US Middle East envoy George Mitchell, he called it a "positive first step" in stopping Tehran developing a nuclear weapon.

Under the plan, low-enriched fuel would be further processed outside Iran.

On Thursday, the UN's nuclear watchdog confirmed it had received Iran's response to the directive, but its contents have not been released.

Mr Netanyahu said: "I think that the proposal to have Iran withdraw its enriched uranium, or a good portion of it, outside Iran is a positive first

step."

He also praised US President Barack Obama's efforts in drawing global attention to the issue of Iran's nuclear programme.

'Old tricks'

But striking a different note in Brussels, European leaders are reported to be preparing a critical draft communique expressing "grave concern" over Iranian nuclear enrichment and its "persistent failure to meet its international obligations".

Swedish Foreign Minister Carl Bildt, whose country holds the rotating presidency of the European Union, told the AP that Iran's approach of "back-and-forth talks" were reminiscent of its "same old tricks."

Tehran insists it is enriching uranium for peaceful purposes, fuel and medical research, but the US and its allies have accused it of seeking nuclear weapons.

The head of the International Atomic Energy Agency, Mohamed ElBaradei said he was hopeful of reaching an agreement with Tehran when he received Iran's response to the UN draft on Thursday.

Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad had described the IAEA proposal as a move from "confrontation to co-operation" by Western powers, but that Iran would "not retreat even an iota" over its right to develop a civilian nuclear programme.

The plan proposes exporting most of Iran's enriched uranium to Russia and France for conversion into fuel rods before being returned.

Thursday, 29 October 2009

Iran 'reply' on nuclear fuel deal



The IAEA has proposed exporting most of Iran's low-enriched uranium

Iran has delivered a response on a UN-backed proposal seen as crucial to easing diplomatic tensions over its nuclear programme, Iranian media say.

Under the plan, most of Iran's enriched uranium would be sent abroad to be turned into fuel rods for research use.

Iran's president said earlier his country was ready to co-operate with the proposal.

Iran says it is enriching uranium for fuel, but the US and its allies have accused it of seeking nuclear weapons.

A report on Al-Alam TV on Thursday said Iran had given its response on the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) plan, but gave no details.

Iran's Isna news agency quoted Iran's ambassador to the IAEA, Ali Asghar Soltanieh, as saying only that Iranian "economic and technical concerns regarding the supply of fuel for the research reactor [in Tehran] should be addressed."

Earlier, Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad described the IAEA proposal as a move from "confrontation to co-operation" by western powers. "We welcome fuel exchange, nuclear cooperation, building of power plants and reactors and we are ready to co-operate," Mr Ahmadinejad said in a televised speech in the city of Mashhad.

The IAEA has proposed exporting most of Iran's enriched uranium to Russia and France, where it would be converted into fuel before being returned to Iran.

The plan was agreed by the US, Russia and France, after talks in Vienna, but Iran missed a deadline to respond on Friday.

29 October 2009

Iran leader welcomes nuclear plan



An Iranian deal with the UN nuclear watchdog would ease tension

The president of Iran says his country is ready to co-operate with a proposal to enrich nuclear fuel abroad to ease tensions over its nuclear programme.

Mahmoud Ahmadinejad described the International Atomic Energy Agency proposal as a move from "confrontation to cooperation" by western powers.

Iran insists it is entitled to enrich uranium for fuel but the US and allies accuse it of seeking nuclear weapons.

Iran was reported intending to give an answer to the IAEA in Vienna today.

"We welcome fuel exchange, nuclear cooperation, building of power plants and reactors and we are ready to cooperate," Mr Ahmadinejad said in a televised speech in the city of Mashhad quoted by AFP news agency.

He also reiterated that Iran would not retreat on its rights for peaceful nuclear energy, adding that the provision of enriched fuel by the Western powers for research in Iran would be a chance to test the "honesty" of Iran's critics.

Correspondent in Tehran say the government is expected to accept the framework of the IAEA deal, but also demand changes to it.

Wednesday, 28 October 2009

Iran nuclear sanctions 'unlikely'



Iran is already subject to UN sanctions over its nuclear work

Further sanctions against Iran over its nuclear plans are unlikely, a senior Russian official has said.

President Dmitry Medvedev's adviser Sergei Prikhodko said sanctions on Iran "are unlikely in the near future", Russian news agencies reported.

His comments came as Iranian officials said they would respond to a proposal by the UN's nuclear watchdog about exporting uranium on Thursday. The West fears that Iran is seeking nuclear weapons, but Iran denies this.

Tehran says it wants enriched uranium only for civilian use, including energy.

Iran is already subject to UN sanctions, including financial scrutiny and restrictions on arms exports, for enriching uranium at its Natanz plant.

The UN's nuclear watchdog, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), has suggested exporting most of Iran's enriched uranium to Russia and France, where it would be converted into fuel before being returned to Iran.

The plan was agreed by the US, Russia and France, after talks in Vienna, but Iran missed a deadline on Friday to respond.

'Important changes'

Iran's Mehr news agency reported that Iran's negotiator at the IAEA, Ali Asghar Soltaniheh, would meet IAEA chief Mohamed ElBaradei on Thursday and "give Iran's response to the Vienna talks".

European Union foreign policy chief Javier Solana was expected to speak to Iranian officials on Wednesday about the deal, AFP news agency reported.

He had previously said it was "a good deal" and did not require "fundamental changes".

Iranian state media reported a day ago that Iran wanted "very important changes" made to the deal before it would be accepted.

Under the draft proposal, Iran would send its enriched uranium to Russia and France to be turned into fuel.

All the other parties have confirmed their support for the deal, which is seen as a way for Tehran to get the fuel it needs for an existing reactor, while giving guarantees to the West that its enriched uranium will not be used for nuclear weapons.

Air defence missiles

Meanwhile, Russia's deputy Prime Minister Sergei Ivanov said S-300 air defence missiles - Russia's most advanced anti-aircraft weapon - had not yet been supplied to Iran.

Iran indicated in 2007 that it would buy the S-300.

Asked by reporters in the Russian town of Fryazino when Russia would deliver the missiles to Iran, Mr Ivanov said on Wednesday: "There have been no such deliveries to date."

The S-300 missiles would be defensive, according to Russia. Israel - Iran's arch-foe - fears they will be used to defend nuclear facilities.

Washington wants all countries to stop exporting weapons to Iran, but Russia and China have opposed such a move.

Tuesday, 27 October 2009

Iran 'to accept UN nuclear deal'



Russia and France would process uranium for Iran under the deal

Iran will accept a UN deal on its nuclear programme, but only if "very important changes" are made, Iranian state media have reported.

Al Alam TV quoted "informed" sources as saying Tehran would respond to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) deal within 48 hours.

Under the draft proposal, Iran would send its enriched uranium to Russia and France to be turned into fuel.

Iran missed a Friday deadline for responding to the IAEA's proposal.

All the other parties have confirmed their support for the deal, which is seen as a way for Tehran to get the fuel it needs for an existing reactor, while giving guarantees to the West that its enriched uranium will not be used for nuclear weapons.



"We will wait until we decide that enough is enough and that the process is exhausted

Bernard Kouchner

French foreign minister

Al Alam said Iran would "accept the broad framework of the deal, but wants very important changes in it".

The station gave no further details on the changes Iran was reported to have requested be made to the draft.

On Monday, Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki said Iran was considering whether to send some of its uranium stock to other countries for enriching or to buy already enriched uranium.

Mr Mottaki said the decision would be announced within days.

ANALYSIS



Jon Leyne, BBC News Tehran correspondent

The latest hint from Al Alam TV suggests that Iran will accept a deal to supply fuel for its Tehran research reactor. But those countries dealing with Iran will wonder what "important changes" Tehran wants in response. In particular, is Iran willing to ship its own enriched uranium out of the country? On Monday the Iranian foreign minister said maybe Iran would agree, maybe it would not.

The other question observers are asking is how much this is a case of genuine indecision by Iran, and to what extent is it just playing for time? The answer could be that those in power are quite content to let a genuine debate rumble on, knowing that it also buys time, staving off new sanctions, while Iran presses ahead with its nuclear programme.

French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner said that all the other parties in the talks had shown "a great deal of patience", and he accused Tehran of wasting time.

The AFP news agency quoted Mr Kouchner as saying that Mr Mottaki "makes declarations and more declarations" which "rarely provoke enthusiasm" and are "rarely very positive".

"We have been waiting for light at the end of the tunnel for almost three years. We will wait until we decide that enough is enough and that the process is exhausted," said Mr Kouchner.

"One day it will be too late."

EU foreign ministers had hoped to have a reply from Iran by Tuesday, in time for high-level meetings in Luxembourg.

The EU's Foreign Policy Chief Javier Solana said the UN had offered "a good deal" and did not require "fundamental changes", Reuters reports. Inspection

Opposition inside Iran to the agreement is said to be growing. The BBC's Tehran correspondent, Jon Leyne, says that if it is approved, it would offer some evidence that negotiations with Iran can bear fruit.

But if Tehran rejects it, the wider talks process would face a bleak future and new sanctions would once again be on the agenda, he adds.

NUCLEAR FUEL CYCLE



Mined uranium ore is purified and reconstituted into solid form known as yellowcake

Yellowcake is converted into a gas by heating it to about 64C (147F)

Gas is fed through centrifuges, where its isotopes separate and the process is repeated until uranium is enriched

Low-level enriched uranium is used for nuclear fuel

Highly enriched uranium can be used in nuclear weapons

On Sunday, a team from the UN watchdog, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) began an inspection of an Iranian uranium plant.

The Fordo plant, built into a mountainside near the city of Qom, was previously secret.

Its existence was announced by the Iranian authorities last month, apparently because Western intelligence agencies had already discovered it, says our correspondent.

Iran agreed to open the site to monitoring at talks with the five permanent members of the UN Security Council plus Germany in Geneva on 1 October.

The inspectors are not expected to report until they leave Iran, but some Iranian officials have already said the inspection shows their country's nuclear activities are both transparent and peaceful.

Iran says its nuclear programme is for purely peaceful purposes, but the revelation of the existence of the new plant increased fears in the West about Tehran's intentions.

Sunday, 25 October 2009

Inspectors to visit Iranian plant



Four UN inspectors will check the uranium enrichment plant

UN inspectors have arrived in Iran where they are due to visit a previously secret nuclear facility.

The plant is near the city of Qom and the UN officials are expected to remain in the country for three days.

The visit comes as further difficulties are experienced by the major powers trying to agree a deal with Iran over its nuclear programme.

Under a new proposed plan, Iran would send its enriched uranium away to be turned into fuel.

The inspection will be the first time monitors from the United Nation's nuclear watchdog, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), have been allowed access to the enrichment plant.

BBC Tehran correspondent Jon Leyne says Iran announced the existence of the new facility last month, apparently because Western intelligence had already discovered it.

Our correspondent says that Iran would have had plenty of time to remove anything that might be incriminating ahead of the inspectors' visit.

'In jeopardy'

On Saturday, The White House said Barack Obama had telephoned French President Nicolas Sarkozy and Russian President Dmitry Medvedev to thank them for their countries' roles in developing the IAEA plan on Iran's enriched uranium.

Under the deal, most of Iran's uranium would be exported to the IAEA and sent to Russia for enrichment and on to France for further refinement. Iran would get the fuel it needs for its research reactor in Tehran, but this would not be sufficiently enriched to make a bomb.

NUCLEAR FUEL CYCLE



Mined uranium ore is purified and reconstituted into solid form known as yellowcake

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Gas is fed through centrifuges, where its isotopes separate and process is repeated until uranium is enriched

Low-level enriched uranium is used for nuclear fuel

Highly enriched uranium can be used in nuclear weapons

In depth: Nuclear fuel cycle

Iran has said it will respond to the offer by the middle of next week.

The White House said the US, French and Russian leaders had all "affirmed their full support" for the deal.

Iran says its nuclear programme is for purely peaceful purposes but the revelation of the existence of the new plant near Qom had increased fears in the West about Tehran's intentions.

The BBC's Jon Leyne adds that there has also been a setback in Iran to the IAEA deal. The speaker of parliament and two other senior parliamentarians have expressed opposition to Iran allowing its enriched uranium to leave the country.

He explains that if the country rejects that key element in the agreement it will place both the entire deal and the process of negotiating with Iran on its nuclear programme in jeopardy.

24 October 2009 21:31 UK

Obama rallies support over Iran



The UN will make a key inspection of a plant near Qom on Sunday

US President Barack Obama has called the French and Russian leaders to consolidate their support ahead of a key UN nuclear inspection in Iran.

The White House said Nicolas Sarkozy and Dmitry Medvedev fully backed a new UN plan on Iran's nuclear programme.

The plan would see international powers refine Iran's uranium in return for affirmation that Tehran will not produce nuclear weapons.

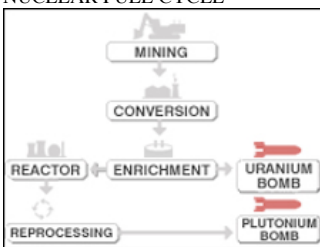
The UN will inspect a recently revealed nuclear plant near Qom on Sunday.

It will be the first time monitors from the UN's nuclear watchdog, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), have been allowed access to the plant.

New setback

The White House said Mr Obama had telephoned Mr Sarkozy and Mr Medvedev to thank them for their countries' roles in developing the IAEA plan on Iran's enriched uranium.

NUCLEAR FUEL CYCLE



Mined uranium ore is purified and reconstituted into solid form known as yellowcake

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Low-level enriched uranium is used for nuclear fuel

Highly enriched uranium can be used in nuclear weapons

In depth: Nuclear fuel cycle

Mr Obama thanked Mr Sarkozy for France's close cooperation and Mr Medvedev for Russia's leadership on the issue.

Under the deal most of Iran's uranium would be exported to the IAEA and sent to Russia for enrichment and on to France for further refinement. Iran would get the fuel it needs for its research reactor in Tehran, but this would not be sufficiently enriched to make a bomb.

Iran has said it will respond to the offer by the middle of next week.

The White House said the US, French and Russian leaders had all "affirmed their full support" for the deal.

Iran says its nuclear programme is for purely peaceful purposes but the revelation of the existence of the new plant near Qom had increased fears in the West about Tehran's intentions.

BBC Tehran correspondent Jon Leyne says Iran announced the existence of the new plant last month apparently because Western intelligence had already discovered it.

Our correspondent says that Iran would have had plenty of time to remove anything that might be incriminating.

He adds that there has also been a setback in Iran to the IAEA deal. The speaker of parliament and two other senior parliamentarians have

expressed opposition to Iran allowing its enriched uranium to leave the country. However, the head of the IAEA, Mohammed ElBaradei, has said he hopes there will be a positive answer from Iran. "Approval of this agreement will signal a new era of co-operation," he said on Friday. 23 October 2009 20:23 UK

Iran delays reply on nuclear plan



The deal would see Iran exporting its uranium for enrichment. Iran will respond to a proposed deal on its controversial nuclear programme by the middle of next week, it has told the UN's atomic energy agency. Agency chief Mohammed ElBaradei said he hoped the answer would be "positive". The UN watchdog had suggested exporting most of Iran's enriched uranium to Russia and France for further refining. The proposal followed talks between the UN, Iran, France, Russia and the US. Friday was set as the deadline for a response from Tehran. The draft deal, agreed by the US, France and Russia, was prompted by concern over Iran's nuclear programme. 'New conditions' "Iran informed the Director General today that it is considering the proposal in depth and in a favourable light, but needs time until the middle of next week to provide a response," the IAEA said in a statement.

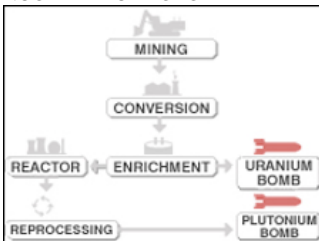
ANALYSIS



BBC Tehran correspondent Jon Leyne

Iran is giving extremely mixed messages over this important deal and has missed a deadline from the UN to give its verdict. Either Tehran is playing for time or there are genuine differences within the Iranian government. At one stage Iranian state TV said Tehran could not accept a key part of the agreement, shipping the nuclear material out of the country. Later Iran told the UN nuclear watchdog that it was considering the plan favourably but needed more time to respond. If the deal does go forward it would provide some evidence that negotiations with Iran can bear fruit, if not then the wider talks process would face a bleak future and new sanctions would once again be on the agenda. Q&A: Iran and the nuclear issue It said Mr ElBaradei hoped that Tehran's response "will equally be positive, since approval of this agreement will signal a new era of co-operation". In Washington, State Department spokesman Ian Kelly said: "We hope that they will next week provide a positive response." He added that "obviously we would have preferred to have a response today [Friday]. We approach this with a sense of urgency". Under the proposal, Iran would get the fuel it needs for its research reactor in Tehran, but this would not be sufficiently enriched to make a bomb. However, Iranian media earlier on Friday raised new conditions for the deal. State TV said Iran would prefer to buy uranium for its research reactor, rather than send its own stock abroad for enrichment, as proposed. It quoted a member of Iran's negotiating team as saying: "Iran is interested in buying fuel for the Tehran research reactor within the framework of a clear proposal... we are waiting for the other party's constructive and trust-building response". Before the IAEA statement, France said Iran was not responding positively to the deal. French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner said during a visit to Lebanon: "I cannot say that the situation regarding Iran is very positive. "Now, meetings are being held in Vienna (the IAEA headquarters). But via the indications we are receiving, matters are not very positive." Iran's rejection of the deal would come as a disappointment to the US, Russia and France, and it could make the wider negotiation with Iran much more difficult - and the threat of sanctions more likely, says the BBC's Bethany Bell in Vienna. Enrichment in Russia Russian nuclear industry insiders have told the BBC the proposed process would involve Iran sending its uranium to the IAEA, which would forward it to Russia for enriching.

NUCLEAR FUEL CYCLE



Mined uranium ore is purified and reconstituted into solid form known as yellowcake. Yellowcake is converted into a gas by heating it to about 64C (147F). Gas is fed through centrifuges, where its isotopes separate and process is repeated until uranium is enriched. Low-level enriched uranium is used for nuclear fuel. Highly enriched uranium can be used in nuclear weapons. In depth: Nuclear fuel cycle

The enriched uranium would then be returned to the IAEA and sent to France, which has the technology to add the "cell elements" needed for

Iran's reactor, they said.

This process would enable Iran to obtain enough enriched uranium for its research reactor and for medical use, but the uranium would not be sufficiently enriched to produce a weapon.

Iran insists its nuclear programme is solely for peaceful purposes and that it has the right to enrich uranium.

It revealed in September that it was building a second uranium enrichment site, in the city of Qom - much to the anger of world leaders who said Iran was building it in secret.

IAEA inspectors plan to visit the site on 25 October.

23 October 2009 09:18 UK

World awaits Iran nuclear answer



The deal would see Iran exporting its uranium for enrichment

Iran is due to respond to a UN proposal on exporting most of its enriched uranium to Russia for further refining.

The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) draft agreement is aimed at reducing international concern over Tehran's nuclear programme.

Under the deal, Iran would get the fuel it needs for its reactor but not have enough uranium to make a bomb.

The plan was handed to Iran following talks in Vienna between the UN, Iran, France, Russia and the US.

On Wednesday, IAEA director Mohamed ElBaradei said he was feeling "optimistic" after the Vienna talks, which he said had been "very constructive".

ANALYSIS



Jon Leyne, BBC Tehran correspondent

There has been no word yet from Iran on whether it accepts the key element of the deal - shipping enriched uranium out of the country.

A prominent conservative, the deputy speaker of the Iranian parliament, has said he is opposed to the idea - that shows how difficult it could be for President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad to sell this deal to hardliners in Tehran, even if he wants to.

The main Iranian negotiator has said the deal is a test of the West's commitment to using nuclear power for peaceful purposes. The West will see it exactly the opposite - a test of Iran's intentions.

If a deal is reached it would help the wider negotiations move forward, no deal would make it very hard for the talks to continue. Perhaps more likely is an ambiguous answer from Iran, and another attempt to play for time.

He said the draft agreement "reflects a balanced approach to how to move forward".

"Everybody at the meeting was trying to help, trying to look to the future and not to the past, trying to heal the wounds that existed for many years," he said.

Guarantees

Russian nuclear industry insiders have told the BBC the proposed process would involve Iran sending its uranium to the IAEA, which would forward it to Russia for enriching.

The enriched uranium would then be returned to the IAEA and sent to France, which has the technology to add the "cell elements" needed for Iran's reactor, they said.

This process would enable Iran to obtain enough enriched uranium for its research reactor, but not enough to produce a weapon.

Exporting uranium has been seen as a way for Iran to get the fuel it needs, while giving guarantees to the West that it will not be used for nuclear weapons.

Iranian chief negotiator Ali Asghar Soltanyeh talked positively about a deal, but did not mention uranium export.

Iran insists its nuclear programme is solely for peaceful purposes and that it has the right to enrich uranium.

Western states believe it is attempting to develop a nuclear weapons programme.

Draft deal agreed on Iran uranium



ElBaradei said Iran, France, Russia and the US had until Friday to approve the draft deal [AFP]

The UN's atomic watchdog says Iran has agreed to consider a deal on its nuclear programme, which could see it ship out most of its enriched uranium to Russia.

If it goes ahead the deal would strip Iran of most of the material it would need to build a nuclear weapon, diplomats said on Wednesday, a move that would help to allay Western fears over Tehran's nuclear ambitions.

Mohamed ElBaradei, director-general of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), said the draft was drawn up by the US, Russia, France and Iran at a closed conference at the agency's headquarters in Vienna, Austria.

He said the text had been sent to the nations' capitals for approval by Friday.

'Heal wounds'

"I have circulated a draft agreement that reflects, in my judgment, a balanced approach on how to move forward," ElBaradei said.

"If this arrangement holds, I think it will show that Obama's position of sitting down and talking with the Iranians is bearing some fruit. By refusing to sit down with the Iranians, we would not have got as far as this"

Joseph Nye, a foreign policy scholar and former US Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs

"Everyone in these talks was trying to look to the future, not the past, and heal the wounds existing for many years ...This [deal, if formally approved], should open space for negotiations."

Neave Barker, Al Jazeera's correspondent in Moscow, said: "There's likely, very much, to be an overwhelming show of support here in Moscow for a plan that is nothing new in terms of Russian diplomacy.

"It dates at least to about four or five years ago when Russia first aired the suggestion that it could be a middle man between the US and Iran over its controversial nuclear programme.

"I think this is very much a gesture of goodwill from the Russian side to the Americans, ever since the [US president Barack] Obama administration came into power there have been exchanges of positive words.

"There was an indication from the Russian military earlier on today that they may well U-turn on an earlier decision to sell S-300 air defence missiles to Iran, an indication that Moscow is perhaps having a rethink over its future ties with Iran".

'Good news'

Ali Asghar Soltanieh, Iran's ambassador to the IAEA, said he welcomed the development.

"We are fully co-operating. We came to this meeting with a spirit of co-operation and flexibility," he said.

Nazanine Moshiri, Al Jazeera's correspondent in Tehran, the Iranian capital, said the final decision over the deal "will be made here in Tehran. And Tehran has said it will not give up its right to develop uranium."

"Just before news of this deal came out, the deputy head of Iran's atomic agency came out with his own statement saying Iran had 'good news' about its nuclear programme, which it will reveal in the next few months.

"We don't know what that good news is but, whatever it is, I'm sure the West will not be pleased about it."

Diplomats told the Reuters news agency that ElBaradei's draft contained the powers' call for Iran to send about 75 per cent of its enriched uranium reserve abroad before the end of this year.

The reserve would be converted into fuel for a Tehran reactor producing medical isotopes.

US offer

Russia, France and the US have been pushing Iran to agree to ship 1,200kg of its own stockpiled uranium to Russia, and subsequently France, but ElBaradei did not reveal whether Iran had agreed to that key point.

Despite concern by Western powers that Iran intends to build a nuclear weapon, Tehran has maintained that its programme is aimed at peaceful purposes only.



Iran has insisted that its nuclear programme is geared towards peaceful means [EPA]

Hillary Clinton, the US secretary of state, said that if the Iranian government was open to the world on its nuclear file, it could lead to talks on a range of divisive issues between Washington and Tehran.

"If Iran is serious about taking practical steps to address the international community's deep concerns about its nuclear programme, we will continue to engage, both multilaterally and bilaterally, to discuss the full range of issues that have divided Iran and the United States for too long," Clinton said in Washington on Wednesday.

"The door is open to a better future for Iran, but the process of engagement cannot be open-ended. We are not prepared to talk just for the sake of talking."

Joseph Nye, a foreign policy scholar and former US Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs, said that while the offer for Russia to enrich Iran's uranium was a positive step, but said that it did not necessarily constitute "the end of the problem".

"If the Iranians enrich with their existing facilities for a year, they will replace what they will be sending out of the country. In addition, there is still the open question of whether there are secret facilities, where Iran could be enriching, that we do not know about," he told Al Jazeera.

"If this arrangement holds, I think it will show that Obama's position of sitting down and talking with the Iranians is bearing some fruit. By refusing to sit down with the Iranians, we would not have got as far as this."

21 October 2009 19:37 UK

Iran nuclear fuel deal 'agreed'

IAEA director: (Everyone) looked to the future, not the past
Iran and three world powers have been handed a draft agreement aimed at reducing international concerns over Tehran's nuclear programme.
The International Atomic Energy Agency, which proposed the plan after talks in Vienna, wants an answer by Friday.
Details are yet to be confirmed, but the plan is believed to involve Iran exporting uranium to be enriched in France and Russia.
Iran's chief negotiator has not commented on the uranium export plan.
The negotiations have involved the UN, Iran, France, Russia and the US.
IAEA director Mohamed ElBaradei told reporters in Vienna that he was feeling "optimistic" after the talks, which he said had been "very constructive".

ANALYSIS



Jon Leyne, BBC Tehran correspondent

Under the draft plan Iran would send around 1200kg, the majority of its stocks of enriched uranium, to Russia and then to France before it is returned to run a research reactor in Tehran.

The big advantage for the West is that the arrangement would neutralise most of Iran's stockpile of enriched uranium. At the very least this would delay Iran's ability to make a nuclear bomb.

But no Iranian official has yet publicly acknowledged that Iran's enriched uranium would be shipped out of the country.

There must be doubts whether President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's government is really willing to allow its hard-won enriched uranium out of its grasp, particularly as Mr Ahmadinejad has turned the nuclear programme into such a matter of national pride.

But for the West, that key component of the agreement would surely be the deal-breaker.

"Everybody at the meeting was trying to help, trying to look to the future and not to the past, trying to heal the wounds that existed for many years," he said.

"I have circulated a draft agreement that in my judgment reflects a balanced approach to how to move forward."

Russian nuclear industry insiders told the BBC the process proposed would involve Iran sending its uranium to the IAEA, which would forward it to Russia for enriching.

The enriched uranium would then be returned to the IAEA and sent to France, which has the technology to add the "cell elements" needed for Iran's reactor, they said.

This process would enable Iran to obtain enough enriched uranium for its research reactor, but not enough to produce a weapon.

Exporting uranium has been seen as a way for Iran to get the fuel it needs, while giving guarantees to the West that it will not be used for nuclear weapons.

Iranian chief negotiator Ali Asghar Soltaniyeh talked positively about a deal, but did not mention uranium export.

Confidence boost

Mr ElBaradei said there had been many technical, legal and policy issues to address in the Vienna talks, as well as "issues of confidence and trust".

"That is why it has taken us some time and that is why we need to send the agreement to capitals for final approval," he added.

"I very much hope that people see the big picture - that this agreement could pave the way for a complete normalisation of relations between Iran and the international community."

US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton urged Iran to act quickly, and said her country would continue "to discuss the full range of issues that have divided Iran and the United States for too long".

She added: "The door is open to a better future for Iran, but the process of engagement cannot be open-ended. We are not prepared to talk just for the sake of talking."

France said the plan was acceptable and would benefit Paris and its partners.

Foreign ministry political director Jacques Audibert told France 24 television that the plan was "to remove this (uranium) from Iran, use it to make the fuel they need and thereby improve relations and lower the tensions over Iran's civilian nuclear programme."

Iran insists its nuclear programme is solely for peaceful purposes and that it has the right to enrich uranium.

Western states believe it is attempting to develop a nuclear weapons programme.

20 October 2009 23:40 UK

Iran nuclear talks 'going slowly'



Mohamed ElBaradei said the talks will continue on Wednesday morning

Talks between Iran and world powers on a uranium enrichment deal are making slower-than-expected progress, the head of the UN's nuclear watchdog has said.

Mohamed ElBaradei said "many technical issues" had to be analysed, but insisted they were "moving forward".

The negotiations were stalled for most of Tuesday after Iran said it did not want France to be part of the deal, but briefly resumed late in the evening.

Iran is considering a proposal to send uranium abroad for further enrichment.

This is seen as a way for Iran to get the fuel it needs, while giving guarantees to the West that it will not be used for nuclear weapons.

'Complex process'

Tuesday's talks in Geneva - involving Iran and the five permanent members of the UN Security Council plus Germany - faltered after the Iranians said they would curb enrichment, something seen by the Western powers as essential, and objected to France's involvement.

“ France, based on its shortcomings to fulfil its obligations in the past, is not a trustworthy party to provide fuel for Iran

Manouchehr Mottaki
Iranian Foreign Minister

All sides eventually returned to the negotiating table for about an hour after the US and Iranian representatives met in Mr ElBaradei's office. Few details of the meetings were released.

The director general of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) said the talks would resume at 1000 (0800 GMT) on Wednesday.

"I believe we are making progress. It is maybe slower than I expected. But we are moving forward," Mr ElBaradei told reporters.

He said the process was complex, and involved "many technical issues" as well as "confidence-building guarantees".

The Iranian ambassador to the IAEA, Ali Asghar Soltanieh, meanwhile said the consultations had been "constructive".



Q&A: Iran and the nuclear issue

Guide: Nuclear fuel cycle

Earlier, Iran's Foreign Minister, Manouchehr Mottaki, objected to Paris being part of the enrichment deal because it had reneged on nuclear fuel contracts in the past.

"There is Russia, America... I believe these countries are enough," he said.

"France, based on its shortcomings to fulfil its obligations in the past, is not a trustworthy party to provide fuel for Iran."

Mr Mottaki also reiterated any agreement would not mean the suspension of Tehran's enrichment activities.

"Iran will continue its uranium enrichment. It is not linked to buying fuel from abroad," he said.

"The meetings with world powers, and their behaviour, shows that Iran's right to have peaceful nuclear technology has been accepted by them."

Compromise

The proposed scheme hinges on an arrangement in principle that Western negotiators announced after talks in Geneva earlier this month.

Under it, Russia and France would treat most of Iran's low-enriched uranium and turn it into fuel rods for a research reactor in Tehran.

Diplomats say a compromise is being considered under which Iran would sign a contract with Russia, which would then sub-contract work to France.

Correspondents say the deal would see Iran get the fuel it needs, tacit acknowledgement of its right to enrich uranium, and no new sanctions.

The West would meanwhile get a guarantee that Iran's existing stockpile will not be diverted to make nuclear bombs, they add.

Last month, the revelation of a second uranium enrichment plant in Iran further raised Western fears that Iran was trying to develop nuclear weapons. A nuclear bomb requires highly enriched uranium.

The Iranian government has said it will allow IAEA inspectors into the site, thought to be near the holy city of Qom.

Iran to join in more talks on nuclear program

- Story Highlights
- Officials from Tehran again meeting U.S., Russian and French envoys in Vienna
- In October, Iran and the West agreed in principle on deal over uranium enrichment
- Iran's low-enriched uranium would be enriched abroad, returned for medical use
- Two sides now need to work out the details of the tentative deal

October 19, 2009 -- Updated 0941 GMT (1741 HKT)

VIENNA, Austria (CNN) -- Iranian officials are expected to huddle again with their Western counterparts Wednesday to hammer out a deal about the future of Tehran's nuclear program.



Ali Asghar Soltanieh, Iran's Ambassador to the IAEA, arrives for Monday's talks in Vienna.

A day earlier, talks between the two sides ended on an optimistic note, with the director-general of the U.N.'s nuclear watchdog agency calling them constructive.

The meetings are taking place at the headquarters of the International Atomic Energy Agency in Vienna. The participants include Iran's envoy to the IAEA, Ali-Asghar Soltaniyeh, and officials from France, Russia and the United States.

At issue are Iran's uranium enrichment plans.

Tehran says its nuclear program is intended solely for peaceful purposes. But many in the international community have accused Iran of trying to develop nuclear weapons capability.

In early October, Iran and the West agreed in principle that low-enriched uranium produced in Iran would be sent abroad for further enrichment and then returned for use in medical research and treatment.

The two sides now need to work out the details of the tentative deal.

Don't Miss

- Report: Iran to enrich its uranium if talks fail
- Nuclear watchdog chief arrives in Iran

Low-enriched fuel has the potential of being further enriched into weapons-grade material.

According to the plan:

Iran will send its low-enriched uranium to Russia. Russia will then further enrich it, but keep it below weapons-grade, and send it to France.

France will prepare the uranium for use in nuclear reactors by fabricating it into metal rods and send them to Iran.

Iran will then use the rods in its nuclear reactors.

"We had, this afternoon, quite a constructive meeting," IAEA Director-General Mohamed ElBaradei said at the end of Monday's session. "We're off to a good start. Most of the technical issues has been discussed."

But even as ElBaradei expressed hope, Iran's state-run media said Tehran had ruled out France from a list of countries from which it would purchase the enriched metal rods.

The French foreign ministry refused to comment on the matter until the talks conclude.

"The meetings continue tomorrow," a ministry spokesman said Monday. "So we want to let it play itself out before we comment."

19 October 2009 19:03 UK

Iran uranium deal talks 'go well'



Mohamed ElBaradei said the talks will continue on Tuesday

Talks between Iran and world powers on a uranium enrichment deal are "off to a good start", the head of the United Nations' nuclear watchdog has said.

Russia, France and the US were at the IAEA meeting in Vienna.

Under a proposed deal, Iran would ship enriched uranium abroad to be converted for use in a research reactor.

Tehran sent a lower-level delegation led by its IAEA envoy, not its atomic agency chief, indicating a final agreement may not be reached this week.

Despite the setback, Mohamed ElBaradei, who heads the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), sounded positive.

Iranian doubts

"We had this afternoon quite a constructive meeting. We're off to a good start. Most of the technical issues have been discussed," he said after the meeting at the IAEA headquarters.

He said talks would resume on Tuesday morning.

The head of the Iranian delegation, Ali Asghar Soltanieh, said he endorsed Mr ElBaradei's comments.



Q&A: Iran and the nuclear issue

Guide: Nuclear fuel cycle

He refused to comment on Iranian media reports claiming that Tehran may be reluctant to ship out its fuel.

Before talks began, state broadcaster Press TV said Iran wanted to import highly enriched uranium for its research reactor by buying it directly from France, Russia or the US.

Also before the meeting, Iran's nuclear energy agency spokesman, Ali Shirzadian, said the deal would not mean the suspension of Tehran's enrichment activities.

He added that if the talks in Vienna failed, Iran would also enrich uranium to higher levels than it is currently doing.

The BBC Tehran correspondent, Jon Leyne, reports from London that the Iranian media reports, if true, would be a major blow to the West's hopes of a new dialogue.

Western powers say Iran is seeking a nuclear weapon, a charge Iran denies. It says its nuclear programme is for purely civilian, peaceful purposes.

No new sanctions?

The proposed deal hinges on an arrangement in principle that Western negotiators announced after talks in Geneva earlier this month.

Under the planned agreement, Russia and France would treat low-enriched Iranian uranium and turn it into fuel rods for a research reactor in Tehran.

Our correspondent says in theory this is a deal that could suit everyone.

Iran would have the fuel it needs, tacit acknowledgement of its right to enrich uranium, and no new sanctions.

The West would get a guarantee that Iran's existing stockpile will not be diverted to make nuclear bombs.

But the talks in Vienna have many details to resolve, our correspondent adds.

Last month, the revelation of a second uranium enrichment plant in Iran further raised Western fears that Iran was trying to develop nuclear weapons.

The Iranian government has said it will allow IAEA inspectors into the site, thought to be near the holy city of Qom.

19 October 2009 10:30 UK

Iran 'retreats' from nuclear deal



A second Iranian enrichment plant was revealed last month

Iran appears to be backing away from a proposed deal to resolve the crisis over its nuclear programme, Iranian media reports suggest.

A state TV channel said Iran wanted to import fuel for its research reactor, without sending its own enriched uranium out of the country.

Russia, France and the US are preparing for talks with Iran on sending its uranium abroad for enrichment.

Iran had agreed in principle to have some uranium shipped out.

Monday's meeting in Vienna, hosted by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), had been seen as a test of the diplomatic process now under way.

But BBC Tehran correspondent John Leyne reports from London that the TV report, if true, would be a major blow to the West's hopes of a new dialogue.

It appeared on Press TV, a government-run foreign news channel that often reflects government thinking.

Western powers say Iran is seeking a nuclear weapon, a charge Iran denies.

It says its nuclear programme is for purely civilian, peaceful purposes.

Deal in principle

The proposed deal hinges on an arrangement in principle western negotiators say was reached in Geneva earlier this month.

Under this arrangement, Russia and France would treat low-enriched Iranian uranium and turn it into fuel rods for a research reactor in Tehran.

Our correspondent says that in theory this is a deal that could suit everyone.

Iran would have the fuel it needs, tacit acknowledgement of its right to enrich uranium, and no new sanctions, while the West would get a guarantee that Iran's existing stockpile will not be diverted to make nuclear bombs.

But the Press TV quoted unnamed sources as saying Tehran was opposed to taking low-enriched uranium out of the country for further enrichment for reactor fuel.

Instead, the report said, it wanted to buy highly-enriched uranium directly from France, Russia or the US.

The talks in Vienna have many details to resolve, our correspondent adds.

Abolfazl Zohrehvand, an aide to Iran's lead nuclear negotiator Saeed Jalili, was quoted as saying that under the current proposal, only enrichment above 5% would be done outside Iran.

"The importance of this is that Iran will retain the techniques and technology of enrichment... and we will keep our sites and research centre," he said, according to the Iran news agency.

"It is possible that in certain circumstances we will need uranium enriched to 63%, which we will buy under the supervision of the IAEA or indeed we will do the enriching ourselves."

Last month, the revelation of a second uranium enrichment plant in Iran further raised Western fears that Iran was trying to develop nuclear weapons.

The Iranian government has said it will allow IAEA inspectors into the site, thought to be near Qom.

The Iranian media has reported that the talks in Vienna could run into Tuesday.

13 October 2009 12:30 UK

US and Russia vow unity over Iran

Advertisement

Hillary Clinton: "We are very interested in working with Russia"

Russia and the US have pledged to work together to ensure Iran's nuclear programme is for peaceful purposes.

After talks with her counterpart Sergei Lavrov in Moscow, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton praised Russia for its "extremely co-operative" work.

Mrs Clinton said Iran's programme was of "serious concern", but the US was not seeking further sanctions for now.

Mr Lavrov said Russia was "very reserved" about such a move. Iran says it is not developing nuclear weapons.

But it recently revealed it had a second uranium plant.

Mrs Clinton, in Moscow at the end of a five-day European tour, told a joint news conference with Mr Lavrov that Russia had "been extremely co-operative in the work that we have done together" on Iran.



Iran on defensive over secret site

UN sanctions against Iran

Iran and the nuclear issue

The secretary of state said the US was not seeking further sanctions pending talks between big powers and Iran - but she added that it could do so "in the absence of significant progress and assurance that Iran is not pursuing nuclear weapons".

Mr Lavrov said neither country had asked the other for anything in dealing with Iran, but that "our positions coincide".

"Threats of sanctions and threats of pressure in the current situation are, in our opinion, counterproductive," he told the news conference.

Both Mr Lavrov and Mrs Clinton also said there had been considerable progress in talks on a new treaty to reduce the two countries' nuclear arsenals.

The US secretary of state is due to meet President Dmitry Medvedev at his private residence outside Moscow later.

No quid pro quo

The visit comes at a crucial moment in relations between the United States and Russia, says the BBC's Richard Galpin in Moscow.



The US wants Russia to support the idea of further sanctions on Iran

Russia has traditionally opposed tougher sanctions but Mr Medvedev appeared to shift his stance after the revelations about Iran's second uranium enrichment facility.

He has indicated that his government may ultimately accept further sanctions as inevitable.

President Barack Obama pledged to reset relations with Russia when he came to office and a meeting with Mr Medvedev in July went some way towards that, our correspondent says.

Since then, Mr Obama has met a key Russian demand to scrap plans to deploy interceptor missiles in Poland and a radar station in the Czech Republic as part of a US missile defence system in Europe.

Although the Americans insist they do not expect anything in return, our correspondent adds, Iran will be very high on Mrs Clinton's agenda in Moscow.

US officials say their government wants Russia to support, or at least not oppose, the idea of the UN Security Council imposing tougher sanctions on Iran if it fails to live up to its international obligations.

The council wants Iran to end uranium enrichment and has approved three rounds of sanctions - including bans on Iran's arms exports and all trade in nuclear material.

During her visit, Mrs Clinton will not meet Russia's powerful Prime Minister, Vladimir Putin. He is in China for talks focusing on trade, but also expected to raise the nuclear programmes of Iran and North Korea.

Correspondents say that if Russia and China reject new sanctions on Iran, a coalition of countries, including the EU, might take action themselves. There are reports that this could cover stopping sales of refined oil products to Tehran.

Iran says it has a right to a nuclear programme, which it insists is designed to meet its energy needs.