21 April 2010 11:32 UK

US weighs Iran military option

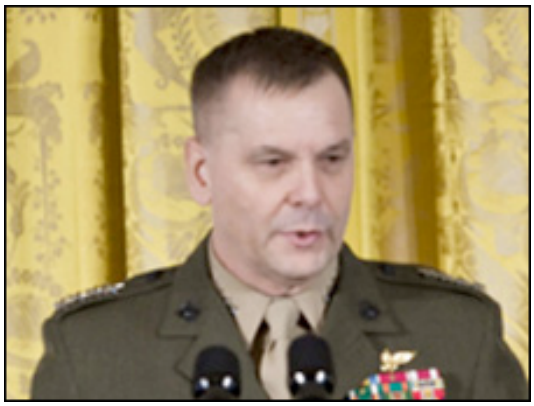
Without invading, will the US have to live with a nuclear-armed Iran?

By Kim Ghattas
BBC News, Washington

If Iran decides to go for nuclear weapons, the US may not be able to permanently stop this from happening unless it is willing to occupy the country.

This is the candid conclusion of one army general testifying in front of the Senate but one that seems to have gone mostly unnoticed amid a flurry of statements on Iran over the past few days in Washington.

Gen James Cartwright, one of America's top uniformed officers, slowly edged towards that conclusion during a Senate testimony last week, underscoring the difficult choices facing the Obama administration as it weighs what do about Iran.



Gen Cartwright agreed a military strike would only delay Iran

Since the US would probably be extremely apprehensive about even considering putting boots on the ground in Iran, the statement raises a key question - while the Obama administration publicly maintains that it will not allow Iran to acquire nuclear weapons, is it privately discussing how to live with a nuclear Iran?

The military is averse to any action against Iran and Adm Mike Mullen, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said a military strike would be 'his last option" and has warned of the unintended consequences of such a strike.

But during the Senate testimony, which also featured the state department's No 3 official, William Burns, the senators questioning the panel also established that UN sanctions would probably not be tough enough to really have an impact on Tehran.

'Nuclear virginity'

Senator Jack Reed, a Democrat from Rhode Island, then asked Gen Cartwright whether the "military approach was a magic wand".
Gen Cartwright, the vice-chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, acknowledged it was not, adding that military action alone was unlikely to be decisive.
Senator Reed prodded further, getting the general to agree that a military strike would only delay Iran obtaining a nuclear weapon if Tehran decided to go nuclear.

> We keep pointing the gun, we haven't pulled a single trigger yet, and it's about time that we did

Senator John McCain
The senator then went further, asking whether the only way to absolutely end any potential Iranian nuclear weapon programme "was to physically occupy their country and disestablish their nuclear facilities?"
The general answered: "Absent some other unknown calculus that would go on, that's a fair conclusion."
Graham Allison from the Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs at the Harvard Kennedy School said it was very difficult to stop a state determined to get the nuclear bomb if they decided they wanted it.
"Iran has lost its nuclear virginity, and it's a fact that can't be erased," said Mr Allison.
A lot of the focus in recent days has been on a leaked memo sent by Defence Secretary Robert Gates, which apparently lays out what steps to take against Iran's nuclear programme if it ignores international sanctions.
The memo was described by the New York Times as a wake up call for the administration, but Mr Gates said it was meant "to contribute to an orderly and timely decision process making".
Either way, the Obama administration is considering the options it has if sanctions do not have the intended impact. But critics say that is not enough.
'So far, no action'
"We have not done anything that would in any way be viewed effective. I didn't need a secret memo from Mr Gates to ascertain that," said Republican Senator John McCain on Fox News over the weekend.

URANIUM ENRICHED TO...
3.5%, Iran's current level, is used in nuclear power stations
20% is used in research reactors
90% and above is used in nuclear weapons
Q&A: Iran and the nuclear issue
Iran's key nuclear sites
Senator McCain was also on the Senate armed services committee questioning Gen Cartwright.
"The list goes on and on of the threats that we have made to the Iranians and so far no action" said Senator McCain.
"George Schultz, my favourite secretary of state in all the world, once said his marine drill instructor told him, never point a gun at somebody unless you're ready to pull the trigger. We keep pointing the gun. We haven't pulled a single trigger yet, and it's about time that we did."
Senator McCain was probably also speaking figuratively about crippling sanctions.
"The ripple effects in the region of a military strike against Iran would be ugly," said one senior US official speaking on the condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the issue.

But he added that the longer it took to put sanctions in place, the more the risk of a military strike increased.
"The closer you get to the end of 2010, the temptation to act gets greater," said the official, who seemed to implicitly indicate it was Israel that would mostly be tempted to act.
'Embargo'
This would still only delay any Iranian plans to pursue nuclear weapons.

> This is a regime that has survival at the top of its list

Graham Allison, Belfer Center
Ideally, the Obama administration would like to convince Tehran that a nuclear weapon will not make it more powerful or more secure.
But without a change inside Iran, that argument is unlikely to have much weight because Iran does believe that its nuclear ambitions give it added clout in the region.
"If the international community was prepared to impose crippling sanctions, embargoing imports of gasoline and exports of oil, if it strangles Iran - Iran might recalculate," said Mr Allison from the Belfer Center.
"This is a regime that has survival at the top of its list. But imposing such sanctions without the support of Russia and China is impossible."
So with the US neither able to impose crippling sanctions nor really eager to take the tough military action needed to permanently disable Iran's nuclear facilities, Washington's only options seem to be to either accept a nuclear Iran or find ways to continuously disrupt and slow down Iran's nuclear ambitions.
April 18, 2010

U.S. military plans against Iran being updated

Posted: April 18th, 2010 02:29 PM ET

From CNN Pentagon Correspondent Barbara Starr
Washington (CNN) – The Pentagon and U.S. Central Command are updating military plans to strike Iran's nuclear sites, preparing up-to-date options for the president in the event he decides to take such action, an Obama administration official told CNN Sunday.
The effort has been underway for several weeks and comes as there is growing concern across the administration's national security team that the president needs fresh options ready for his approval if he were to decide on a military strike, according to the official who is familiar with the effort.
The official did not want to be identified because of the sensitive nature of the work being conducted.
Meanwhile, Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad continued to amp up his rhetoric against the West on Sunday, claiming that Iran is so powerful today that no country would dare attack it.
"Iran's army is so mighty today that no enemy can have a foul thought of invading Iran's territory," the Iranian leader said in a speech, according to state media.

The Iranian leader has had choice words for Obama and other Western leaders, especially after not receiving an invitation to the nuclear summit hosted in Washington last week. Obama has been pressing the U.N. Security Council to slap Iran with tougher sanctions for its nuclear ambitions. Iran says that its nuclear program is intended for civilian purposes.
In January, Defense Secretary Robert Gates wrote a classified memo to the White House raising concerns about whether the administration had a sufficient policy in place, along with military options, for stopping Iran's progress in getting a nuclear weapon, the official confirmed.
The memo was first reported Sunday in the New York Times.
Gates spokesman Geoff Morrell declined to confirm the memo, but said in a written statement, "The Secretary believes the President and his national security team have spent an extraordinary amount of time and effort considering and preparing for the full range of contingencies with respect to Iran."
The planning effort for potential strikes against Iran actually has been underway for some time, the official said.
In December, Adm. Michael Mullen, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, told his planners he didn't believe they were taking "seriously enough" the need for fresh thinking about how to attack Iran's nuclear sites if the
president ordered such a strike, the official said.

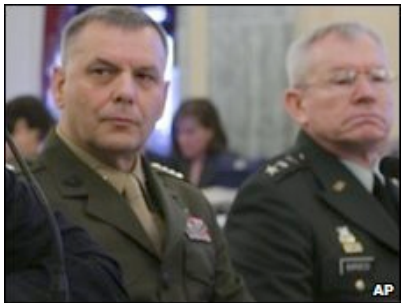
"He wanted to create a higher sense of urgency to create military options for the President," the official said. Mullen "wanted a more robust planning effort to provide the President with options, should he choose a military option," he said.
The official strongly emphasized that the U.S. military is always updating plans in order to be ready for the president. If Obama were to order a strike against Iran, he would turn to Mullen, Gates and Gen. David Petraeus, the head of Central Command, for their advice on how to proceed. The official would not discuss how any of the updated plans might differ from previously existing military strike options.
Mullen and other Pentagon officials have continuously endorsed diplomacy as the preferred option against Iran. In February Mullen publicly noted that a military strike against Iran's nuclear program would not be "decisive" and would only delay and set back Iran's efforts.
Gates recently expressed growing concern about understanding exactly what Iran's intentions may be. "How you differentiate, how far have they gone. If their policy is to go to the threshold but not assemble a nuclear weapon, how do you tell that they have not assembled? So it becomes a serious verification question. And I don't actually know how you would verify that," Gates said on NBC's "Meet the Press." "So they are continuing to make progress on these programs. It's going slow - slower than they anticipated, but they are moving in that direction," he said.
In general, the U.S. military develops what is sometimes called targeting "folders." These files detail all the known facts and intelligence about a target, include precise location, how deeply buried it might be, the civilian population surrounding the target, the geology of the land and rock around the area, and detailed options about which U.S. weapons might be best used to destroy it.
The U.S. intelligence community is also currently involved in the updated planning effort, providing the latest assessments about Iran's nuclear progress at various sites around the Islamic republic.
There have been several public hints about the new target planning. Last week, a Pentagon official told the Senate Armed Services Committee in a written statement, "Through prudent military planning we continue to refine options to protect U.S. and partner interests from Iranian aggression, deter Iran's destabilizing behavior, and prepare for contingencies."
Back in December, Mullen deliberately, the official said, made a reference to Iran in a public document called "the chairman's guidance," posted on the Internet saying, "should the President call for military options, we
must have them ready."
There have been growing signs of Iranian efforts to militarily protect their nuclear sites. The U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency notes that last year Iran established a separate air defense force, with the stated intention of defending nuclear sites with missiles and air defense radars.
17 April 2010 15:14 UK

Iran leader Khamenei brands US 'nuclear criminal'

Iran is holding its own nuclear summit after one in Washington
Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei has labelled the US an "atomic criminal" at a conference on nuclear disarmament in Tehran.
He also said that the use of nuclear weapons was prohibited by religion.

Iran's President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad said an independent body should be set up to oversee nuclear disarmament.
Iran has been angered by a recent US review of nuclear policy, which Tehran sees as a threat to use nuclear weapons against it, a BBC correspondent says.
Iran's leadership has used this conference on nuclear disarmament to underline what it says is its moral opposition to nuclear weapons, says our Tehran correspondent Jon Leyne, reporting from London.
He says it is clearly meant as an answer to those who fear Iran is itself trying to develop its own nuclear arsenal.
Nuclear arms 'prohibited'
Ayatollah Khamenei said in a message read out at the conference: "Only the US government has committed an atomic crime.
"The world's only atomic criminal lies and presents itself as being against nuclear weapons proliferation, while it has not taken any serious measures in this regard," he said.
He also told the conference that the use of nuclear weapons was "haram" - prohibited under Islam.
President Ahmadinejad called for the US and all countries who possessed nuclear weapons to be suspended from the UN nuclear watchdog, the International Atomic Energy Agency.
He said there should be an independent international body set up to oversee nuclear disarmament.
Our correspondent says the debate will no doubt intensify as a conference approaches that will review the nuclear non-proliferation treaty, just at a time when Washington rallies support for new sanctions on Iran over its nuclear programme.
The US hosted a big international conference of 47 nations last week to discuss nuclear security.
Iran was not invited as the US fears Tehran is trying to develop nuclear weapons.
Tehran says its nuclear programme is for purely peaceful purposes.
14 April 2010 00:18 UK

Iran atomic bomb possible 'within six years'



The generals said Iran could produce uranium for a bomb in one year
The US military has warned that Iran could produce enough highly-enriched uranium for a nuclear bomb in one year.
But it would take another three to five years to actually produce a "deliverable weapon that is usable," a senior general told Congress.
The warning came as Iran said it had produced its first significant batch of more highly-enriched uranium.
Meanwhile, negotiations have resumed at the UN on a possible Iran sanctions resolution over its nuclear programme.
Speaking to the US Senate Armed Services Committee, two military officials said if Iran's leadership decided to, enough highly-enriched uranium could be produced in one year to build a single atomic weapon.
Lt Gen Ronald Burgess, the director of the Defense Intelligence Agency, said the centrifuges at Iran's Natanz nuclear plant were producing low-enriched uranium and were not yet being used to produce the more highly-enriched uranium needed for weapons.
Gen James Cartwright told the committee that if Iran did move to producing the 90%-enriched uranium needed for a bomb, more time would be needed to actually build and test the weapon.

ANALYSIS

Barbara Plett, BBC News, UN in New York
Afraid of endangering its extensive oil imports from Iran, China expressed concern about targeting the energy sector at talks last week, as did Russia, say UN diplomats.
Both countries are wary of damaging trade ties with Iran, and both have doubts that a new round of sanctions will succeed where others failed.
While neither wants Iran to have nuclear weapons, their perception of the threat posed by its nuclear programme is different from that of the West.
Both are reluctant to expand beyond anything that focuses tightly on issues of proliferation, say UN diplomats.
Iran sanctions talks resume at UN
"Experience says it is going to take you three to five years" to reach the stage of having a "deliverable weapon that is usable... something that can actually create a detonation, an explosion that would be considered a nuclear weapon."
Iran's nuclear chief, Ali Akbar Salehi, said on Wednesday that 5kg (11 lbs) of uranium had been enriched at Natanz from 3.5% to the 20% needed to fuel a research reactor in Tehran.
President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad ordered the further enrichment to begin in February after talks on a UN-brokered proposal for Iran to send its uranium abroad for enrichment broke down.
Iran has defied five UN resolutions demanding that it stop enriching uranium.
Some western nations, led by the US, fear Iran may be trying to develop the capacity to produce nuclear weapons.
Iran says its nuclear programme is solely for civilian purposes.
US moves to gather support for a fourth round of sanctions against Iran over its nuclear work were bolstered by the nuclear security summit held in Washington earlier this week, says the BBC's Barbara Plett at the UN in New York.
Ambassadors from the US, Britain, France, Germany, China and Russia have resumed negotiations at the UN on possible sanctions.
Diplomats say China and Russia want something "much much weaker, much much narrower" than the other countries and China has not publicly said it would support sanctions, our correspondent reports.
The UN ambassadors are discussing a text prepared by the Americans outlining possible measures in five areas: energy, shipping, finance, an arms embargo and punishing members of Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps, which oversees the country's nuclear programme, our correspondent adds.
Talks on the sanctions are expected to run for a number of weeks yet.

Ahmadinejad: Iran has 'fully mastered' nuclear technology

By the CNN Wire Staff
April 9, 2010 6:10 p.m. EDT

Iran's President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad speaks at an event to mark Iran's National Nuclear Day.
STORY HIGHLIGHTS

- President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad gave speech National Nuclear Day
- Ahmadinejad slammed countries that tried to negotiate a halt to Iran's nuclear activity
- Calls such countries "selfish" and "arrogant"
- Ahmadinejad accused U.S. of encouraging nuclear proliferation through its policies

(CNN) -- Iran announced Friday it has advanced its nuclear technology, unveiling new, faster centrifuges and celebrating "giant steps" forward.
In a speech celebrating National Nuclear Day, President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad slammed "selfish behavior" by "arrogant" countries that have tried to negotiate a halt to Iran's nuclear activity. As he spoke, a crowd chanted "God is great" and "Death to America."
"Today, Iranian scientists and experts have fully mastered the nuclear and have been taking giant steps and moving at full pace towards meeting all domestic needs and making proper use of home-grown potential in

the field of nuclear energy," Ahmadinejad said.
Officials unveiled what they called a "third generation" of centrifuges six times faster than the ones currently being used.
Insisting Tehran's nuclear efforts are purely for energy purposes -- despite claims by many Western nations that Iran is pursuing nuclear weapons -- Ahmadinejad said he had been open to a deal, and blamed other countries for it falling apart.
Ahmadinejad also accused the United States of encouraging nuclear proliferation through its policies.
Referring to the signing of an arms deal between the United States and Russia this week -- including remarks by U.S. President Obama that the U.S. goal is a world without nuclear weapons -- Ahmadinejad called it "a show performed by the United States" and "a great lie."
At the University of Louisville in Kentucky, U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton accused Iran of "flouting the rules -- seeking to develop a nuclear weapons capability under the guise of a peaceful enrichment program."
She touted the new START Treaty with Russia as a way of pressuring Iran to curb its nuclear aspirations.
The treaty would reduce the number of strategic nuclear warheads to 1,550 on each side -- a level not seen since the 1950s.
Efforts to cut the nuclear arsenals of the United States and Russia are unlikely to persuade Iran or North Korea to change their behavior, she said. But, she added, "I believe they could" help persuade other nations to support "serious sanctions" against Iran.
She predicted the treaty will have bipartisan support in Congress. "There are times when people of good will and great intellect have diverging views on how to deal with complex issues, but I don't think this is one of those times," she said.
"The only way we think we are going to convince the Iranians to give up nuclear weapons is if they conclude they will be less safe with them than without them and that their economy and their society will suffer sufficiently that the tradeoff is no longer worth it to them," Clinton said.
Sanctions are not the only means of effecting change, she said. "We've always said all options are on the table, but clearly our preference is to create conditions that would lead to changes in the policy of the Iranian government toward the pursuit of nuclear weapons which, by the way, is their stated policy."

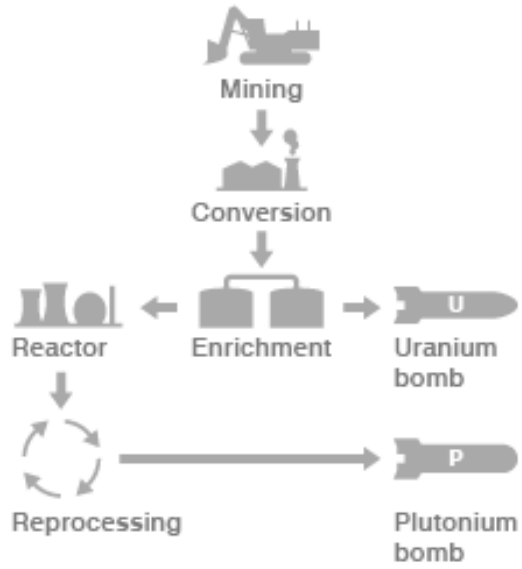
9 April 2010 19:57 UK

Iran unveils 'faster' uranium centrifuges

Advertisement
BBC's Jon Leyne: "The key is Iran's intentions"
Iran's president has unveiled new "third-generation" centrifuges that its nuclear chief says can enrich uranium much faster than current technology.
The centrifuges would have separation power six times that of the first generation, Ali Akbar Salehi said in a speech marking National Nuclear Day.
Uranium enrichment is the central concern of Western nations negotiating with Iran over its nuclear programme.
The new technology could shorten the time it takes to build a nuclear bomb.
Tehran insists its nuclear programme is solely for peaceful purposes.
Friday's announcement comes as members of the UN Security Council discuss a new round of sanctions against Iran over its refusal to halt uranium enrichment.
Ambassadors from the five permanent members of the Security Council plus Germany - the P5+1 - described the talks as worthwhile, but said their meetings would continue in the coming weeks.

Mohamed ElBaradei: "We have to be more patient"
China has been under pressure from the US and others to support new sanctions and took part in the meeting despite its public objections.
In a BBC interview, the former head of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), Mohamed ElBaradei, said Western nations were seeking harsher sanctions "out of frustration".
"I don't think Iran is developing, or we have new information that Iran is developing, a nuclear weapon

today," he said.
"There is a concern about Iran's future intentions, but even if you talk to MI6 or the CIA, they will tell you they are still four or five years away from a weapon. So, we have time to engage."
He said it was a "question of building trust between Iran and the US".
"That will not happen until the two sides sit around the negotiating table and address their grievances. Sooner or later that will happen."
'Successful tests'
In his speech to hundreds of dignitaries, Mr Salehi announced that "considerable" uranium reserves had been found in Yazd province.
URANIUM ENRICHMENT



Iran says it is increasing uranium enrichment from 3.5% needed for commercial nuclear reactors
Iran says it has started enriching to 20%, needed for a medical research reactor near Tehran
Weapons-grade uranium is at least 90% enriched
Experts say achieving 20% is a key step towards weapons grade
What the IAEA report says
In depth: Nuclear fuel cycle
Q&A: Iran nuclear issue
The production of 5%-enriched uranium was continuing using first-generation centrifuges and a second generation of machines unveiled last year were in use, he said.
He then announced that experts at the Atomic Energy Organisation of Iran (AEOI) had managed to design a third generation.
"The machines have successfully passed mechanical tests and it is expected that they will have a gas-separation power of nearly 10, which is six times more than the first generation of centrifuges," he said.
At the end of Mr Salehi's speech, President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad stepped onto the stage and pulled back a curtain to reveal one of the new centrifuges.
"Today, Iranian scientists have command over all nuclear energy fields. This does not mean that we are at the peak. But in terms of technical know-how and knowledge, there is no hurdle in their way," he said.
The centrifuges spin uranium hexafluoride (UF6) gas at high speeds to separate the fissile U-235 atoms from the denser U-238 atoms.
The new models are more advanced than the P1 centrifuge - adapted from a 1970s design, reportedly acquired by Iran on the black market in the 1980s, and prone to breakdowns - in use at the Natanz enrichment facility, in the central province of Isfahan.
BBC Tehran correspondent Jon Leyne, who is in London, says nuclear experts point out that the key question is how many of the third-generation centrifuges Iran can produce.

The IAEA says Iran has 3,772 operating centrifuges, mostly at Natanz

There have already been technical problems with the existing models, so whether it can quickly put the new one into mass production and operation remains to be seen, our correspondent says.

Most of Iran's uranium is enriched to a level of 3.5%, but it requires 20% enriched uranium for its Tehran research reactor, which produces medical isotopes. A bomb would require uranium enriched to at least 90%.

The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) said in a report in February that Iran had achieved enrichment levels of up to 19.8%, which added to its concerns about the "possible military dimensions" of its nuclear programme.

Experts say the technical leap required to get to 90% enrichment from 20% is relatively straightforward, because it becomes easier at higher levels. Going from the natural state of 0.7% enrichment to 20% takes 90% of the total energy required, they add.

The IAEA report said 8,610 centrifuges had been installed in known enrichment facilities in Iran, of which 3,772 were operating.

Iran says it will eventually install more than 50,000 centrifuges at Natanz, and build 10 more enrichment facilities at protected sites.

2 April 2010 14:33 UK

Obama to 'ratchet up' Iran pressure over nuclear plans

President Barack Obama: "The idea here is to keep on turning up the pressure"

US President Barack Obama has vowed to "ratchet up the pressure" on Iran over its controversial nuclear programme.

Mr Obama told CBS television Iran was becoming increasingly isolated and the US wanted to enlist the help of "a unified international community".

Amid talk of new sanctions, he earlier telephoned Chinese President Hu Jintao to seek China's co-operation.

Their talks came as Iran's top nuclear official, Saeed Jalili, said in China that sanctions were "not effective". "In our talks with China it was agreed that tools such as sanctions have lost their effectiveness," he told reporters in Beijing.

Have Your Say

China has too much interest in Iran and would not want to change

Anon, UK

Read your comments

In an hour-long phone call with Mr Hu, Mr Obama had stressed "the importance of working together to ensure that Iran lives up to its international obligations", the White House said.

International sanctions would not prevent Iran from pursuing its nuclear activities, he said.

Chinese officials have not commented after the talks.

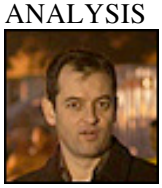
China's foreign minister has said he still hopes the nuclear issue can be resolved through negotiations.

Western powers claim Iran seeks nuclear weapons, a charge Tehran denies.

Serious talks

Speaking in an interview broadcast on Friday, Mr Obama said if Iran obtained the ability to manufacture nuclear weapons, that would both destabilize the Middle East and trigger a regional arms race.

ANALYSIS



Damian Grammaticas,
BBC News, Beijing

The Chinese have been reluctant in the past to push for sanctions on Iran, but there are signs that this position may be shifting.

There are a few small signs, largely from the UN in New York where the American delegation has said China is willing to sit down and have serious discussions about tough sanctions.

Also, there have been some small indications here in the diplomatic language China is using - nothing concrete from the Chinese side, but some signs that it could be prepared to shift its position.

"We're going to ratchet up the pressure and examine how they respond but we're going to do so with a unified international community," he said.

During the phone call, Mr Hu had called for "healthy and stable" relations with the US, US officials said.

The two leaders also discussed Taiwan and the importance of implementing G20 agreements to boost economic growth.

The exchange signaled an easing of tensions between the two big powers, who have recently had high-profile disagreements over Tibet, trade and Taiwan.

But in the brewing confrontation between the West and Iran over its nuclear programme, China is now key to what happens next, says the BBC's Damian Grammaticas, in Beijing.

Earlier this week, Mr Obama said he wanted to see new UN sanctions on Iran "within weeks".

China, a veto-wielding UN Security Council member with strong ties to Iran, has in the past expressed reluctance to see new sanctions imposed.

Iran's Saeed Jalili had two days of talks in Beijing

However, the US ambassador to the UN, Susan Rice, said on Thursday China had indicated it was ready to hold "serious" talks with Western powers on a new UN resolution.

In February, the UN's nuclear watchdog, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), said in a report that Iran's refusal to co-operate and answer questions about its nuclear programme raised concerns about the possible existence of "past or current undisclosed activities related to the development of a nuclear payload for a missile".

It also confirmed that Iran had produced 20% enriched uranium.

Tehran says it needs the more highly-enriched uranium for a research reactor producing medical isotopes, but Western powers fear it is heading towards enriching uranium to the 90% required for a weapon.

Strained ties

The US and China have disagreed recently over Tibet and Taiwan.

Mr Hu had warned Mr Obama not to antagonise Beijing on the issues, China's foreign ministry said.

"Hu stressed the Taiwan and Tibet issues concern China's sovereignty, territorial integrity, and China's core interests, and properly dealing with these issues is key to ensuring the healthy and stable development of Sino-US relations," said a ministry statement.

China was upset when Mr Obama met Tibet's spiritual leader, the Dalai Lama, in February. It was also angered by Taiwan securing a weapons deal from the US.

The US has also supported the internet search company Google in its concerns over censorship in China,

and other trade rows persist.
However, Beijing did allow the visit of the aircraft carrier USS Nimitz to Hong Kong in February.
One issue where China and the US are in agreement is the need to bring North Korea back to the negotiating table over plans to end its nuclear programmes.
1 April 2010 10:09 UK

China 'ready for talks' on new UN sanctions on Iran

Tehran says its nuclear programme is peaceful
Iran's top nuclear official is holding talks in China amid signs that Beijing has relaxed its opposition to a new round of UN sanctions against Tehran.
The US ambassador to the UN, Susan Rice, said China was ready to hold "serious" talks with Western powers on a new UN resolution.
This would mark a shift in policy for China, which has strong economic ties with Iran.
Western powers claim Iran seeks nuclear weapons, a charge Tehran denies.
China has in the past expressed reluctance to see new sanctions imposed, and as a permanent member of the UN Security Council, along with France, the US, the UK, and Russia, it has the power to veto such a move.
'Tough sanctions regime'
Beijing made the commitment to talks in a phone call on Wednesday, US officials told the Associated Press news agency.
Ms Rice said the US, the UK, France, Germany, Russia and China had agreed to begin drafting a UN resolution on Iran's nuclear programme.
She told CNN: "China has agreed to sit down and begin serious negotiations here in New York with the others in the [group of six] ... as a first step towards getting the entire Security Council on board with a tough sanctions regime against Iran.

> China strongly values the nuclear security issue and opposes nuclear proliferation and nuclear terrorism

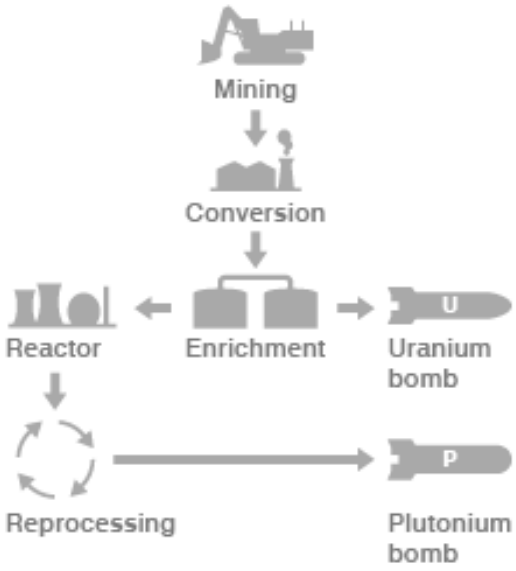
Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Qin Gang
"This is progress, but the negotiations have yet to begin in earnest."
A Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman said President Hu Jintao would attend a summit on nuclear security in Washington later in the month.
"We have always and will continue to push for a peaceful settlement of this issue," Qin Gang said, adding the standoff should be resolved by "diplomatic means".
"China strongly values the nuclear security issue and opposes nuclear proliferation and nuclear terrorism," he said.
Meanwhile Iran's chief nuclear negotiator Saeed Jalili arrived in Beijing for "bilateral talks and to discuss the nuclear issue", Iran's Irna news agency reported.
"The relationship between Iran and China is very important, and it is very important for our two countries to cooperate on all the issues," he told Iranian media.
On Wednesday, US media reported an Iranian nuclear scientist had defected.
ABC News said Shahram Amiri had been resettled in the US and was helping the CIA try to block Iran's

nuclear programme.
Iran accused the US of abducting him, but Washington has denied any knowledge of the scientist.
Tuesday, 16 March 2010

Iran nuclear programme 'solely civilian' - Turkish PM

Mr Erdogan said Iran's leaders had assured him they were not seeking nuclear weapons
The Turkish Prime Minister, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, has told the BBC that he believes Iran has no intention of developing nuclear weapons.
Mr Erdogan said he was confident Iran's nuclear programme was for civilian purposes only and described President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad as a "friend".
"I told him I don't want to see nuclear weapons in the region," he added.
Meanwhile, a top US general has said intelligence suggests Iran will not be able to build a nuclear bomb this year.
Gen David Petraeus, the head of US Central Command, said Tehran's weapon development programme appeared to have suffered delays.
"It has, thankfully, slid to the right a bit and it is not this calendar year, I don't think," he told a Senate committee hearing, according to the Reuters news agency.
Experts believe that Iran could enrich enough uranium for a bomb within a few months. However, it has apparently not yet mastered the technology of making a nuclear warhead.
'Manipulating the facts'
In an interview with the BBC's Nik Gowing, Mr Erdogan said he believed it was Iran's "most natural right" to develop a nuclear programme for civilian purposes.
It was, he added, "unfair" of nuclear-armed countries to "manipulate the facts" about Turkey's neighbour while at the same time not telling Israel to dispose of its nuclear weapons.

URANIUM ENRICHMENT



Iran says it is increasing uranium enrichment from 3.5% needed for commercial nuclear reactors
Iran says it has started enriching to 20%, needed for a research reactor near Tehran
Weapons-grade uranium is at least 90% enriched
Experts say achieving 20% is a key step towards weapons grade
In depth: Nuclear fuel cycle
Q&A: Iran nuclear issue
"Countries with nuclear weapons are not in a position to turn to another country and say: 'You are not

supposed to produce nuclear weapons,'" he said.
"Iran has consistently spoken of the fact that it is seeking to use nuclear energy for civilian purposes and that they are using uranium enrichment programmes for civilian purposes only."
"That is what Mr Ahmadinejad has told me many times before."
Mr Erdogan said he had personally warned the Iranian president about the risks of nuclear conflict in the Middle East.
"I told him I don't want to see nuclear weapons in the region, and Mr Ahmadinejad told me that they do not have an intention to produce nuclear weapons."
In February, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) said in a report that Iran's refusal to co-operate and answer questions about its nuclear programme raised concerns about the possible existence of "past or current undisclosed activities related to the development of a nuclear payload for a missile."
It also confirmed that Iran had produced 20% enriched uranium.
Tehran says it needs the more highly-enriched uranium for a research reactor producing medical isotopes, but Western powers fear it is heading towards enriching uranium to the 90% required for a weapon.
11:18 GMT, Tuesday, 2 March 2010
China firm on Iran nuclear talks

China says diplomacy should be given further time in the dispute over Iran's nuclear programme, as US officials press for new sanctions on Tehran.
China's latest statement came as a senior US diplomat, James Steinberg, arrived in Beijing on the highest level visit since a series of bilateral rows.
On Monday, Moscow signalled it would consider new sanctions against Tehran.
And Iran rejected a UN International Atomic Energy Agency claim it was not co-operating with its investigation.
World powers say Iran is enriching uranium to make nuclear weapons, but Tehran says its atomic programme is solely for civilian energy purposes.
Asked about Moscow's statement, China's Foreign Ministry spokesman Qin Gang said: "We call for a resolution of the Iranian nuclear issue through diplomatic means.

"Sanctions should be calibrated and smart... [they] should not target the civilian population"

Dmitry Medvedev
Russian President

"We believe there is still room for diplomatic efforts and the parties concerned should intensify those efforts."
Speaking in Paris on Monday, Russian President Dmitry Medvedev said he was open to the idea of sanctions - as a last resort.
"Russia is ready, together with our other partners, to consider introducing sanctions" if there is no breakthrough in the negotiations, he told a news conference after talks with French President Nicolas Sarkozy.
"These sanctions should be calibrated and smart. These sanctions should not target the civilian population," the Russian leader was quoted as saying by AFP news agency.
Washington and other Western powers want the backing of China - a veto-wielding member of the UN Security Council - for a proposed resolution slapping new sanctions on Tehran.
Washington hopes the visit by Mr Steinberg and the National Security Council Senior Director for Asian Affairs, Jeffrey Bader, will help ease Sino-US tensions.
"We've gone through a bit of a bumpy path here, and I think there's an interest both within the United States and China to get back to business as usual as quickly as possible," State Department spokesman Philip

Crowley told reporters in Washington.
Beijing and Washington are at odds over a Taiwan arms deal, trade matters, internet censorship, and US policy towards Tibet.

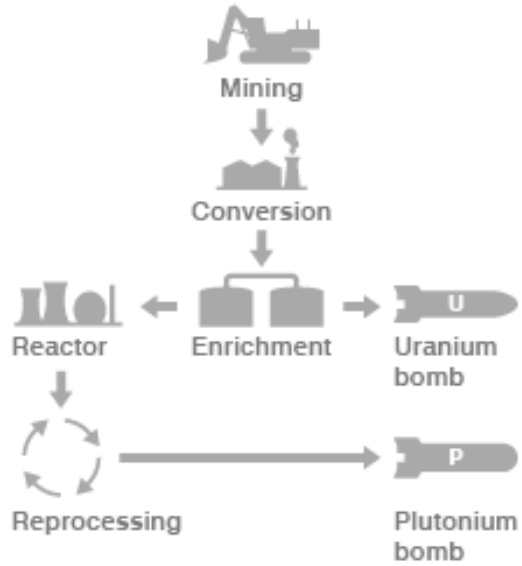
14:41 GMT, Monday, 1 March 2010
Iran 'not co-operating' says IAEA

Iran is not co-operating with the UN nuclear watchdog's investigation into the country's nuclear programme, the new head of the agency has said.
Iran's insistence its nuclear programme was peaceful could not be confirmed, Yukiya Amano told the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in Vienna.
Mr Amano is taking a more critical line than his predecessor, analysts say.
The news is likely to strengthen calls for sanctions on Iran. Iran's foreign minister has rejected Mr Amano's claim.
"The agency continues to verify the non-diversion of declared nuclear material in Iran, but we cannot confirm that all nuclear material in Iran is in peaceful activities because Iran has not provided the agency with the necessary co-operation," Mr Amano said.
He was speaking at a 35-nation board meeting of the IAEA in Vienna, the first since he took over as the head of the organisation in December.
Iranian Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki rejected Mr Amano's statement.
"We have fully co-operated with the agency. This co-operation will continue," he told journalists.
Sanctions call
The BBC's Bethany Bell in Vienna says Mr Amano's address, and a report leaked earlier this month, are much more critical of Iran than the IAEA had been under its former head, Mohamed ElBaradei.
This could strengthen calls for tough sanctions on Iran, which have so far been resisted by UN Security Council members Russia and China, our correspondent says.
Iran insists its nuclear enrichment programme is for peaceful civilian use. It says it wants to increase the enrichment of uranium it has for power generation and for medical use.
It accuses the IAEA of being influenced by the US.
But critics say that Iran's attempts to enrich uranium to 20% are the first step to creating weapons-grade nuclear material.
Last year, Iran revealed a previously unknown nuclear facility in the mountains near the city of Qom.
Tehran has said it is planning 10 further sites to enrich uranium.
18 February 2010

Iran nuclear missile fear raised by UN report

Iran has denied it intends to make a nuclear weapon
The UN nuclear watchdog has expressed concern that Iran may currently be trying to develop a nuclear

payload for a missile.
The information is carried in a leaked confidential report by the Vienna-based International Atomic Energy Agency.
It also confirmed that Iran had begun enriching uranium to higher levels.
Iran has denied it is trying to build a nuclear weapon but the US and other nations have been pressing to extend UN sanctions on the issue.
This is the first IAEA report on Iran compiled under its new director-general, Yukiya Amano, and will be put to the governing body at a 1-5 March meeting.
Isotopes
The BBC's Bethany Bell, in Vienna, says the confidential report is likely to intensify the row over Iran's controversial nuclear programme.
She says this appears to be the first time the IAEA has questioned the current as well as past activities in Iran that opponents fear could be related to the development of a nuclear missile.
URANIUM ENRICHMENT



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The report says its information was "consistent and credible in terms of the technical detail, the timeframe in which the activities were conducted and the people and organisations involved".
It added: "Altogether this raises concerns about the possible existence in Iran of past or current undisclosed activities related to the development of a nuclear payload for a missile."
The report says it is vital Iran co-operates with IAEA investigators "without further delay" as its resistance added to concerns "about possible military dimensions to Iran's nuclear programme".
The report also confirmed Iran had produced a small batch of uranium enriched to the higher 20% level.
Until now, Iran has produced uranium enriched to 3.5% for power stations.
It says it needs the more highly enriched uranium for a reactor producing medical isotopes.
Western powers fear Iran is heading towards enriching uranium to 90% - to produce a nuclear weapon.
The UN Security Council has already imposed three rounds of sanctions on Iran in an effort to make it cease all uranium enrichment activities and heavy water projects, which could produce weapons-grade plutonium.
Last October it was thought a deal had been struck to allow Iran to send about 70% of its low-enriched uranium to Russia and France, where it would be processed into fuel for a research reactor.
After many delays Iran told the IAEA in January that it did not accept the terms of the deal and has pressed on with enrichment.
The US has since pushed for a new round of "strong" sanctions and has the support of the UK and France.
Russia has urged Iran to abide by its earlier agreements.

The other permanent UN Security Council member, China, would still have to be persuaded not to stand in the way of a fourth round of sanctions.
16 February 2010

Iran hits back at Clinton 'dictatorship' warning

Manouchehr Mottaki hit back at Hillary Clinton's suggestion

Iran has attacked US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton over her suggestion that the country is becoming a "military dictatorship".

Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki called Monday's statement in Qatar a "new deception".

Mrs Clinton had said the government of Tehran was being "supplanted" by the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps.

Meanwhile the Russian government has warned Iran that they might yet agree to further sanctions.

Iran should improve its co-operation with the UN nuclear body the International Atomic Energy Agency and allay fears that its nuclear programme is for military use, a Kremlin spokeswoman said.

"The international community must be sure that Iran's nuclear programme is peaceful. But if these obligations are not fulfilled then nobody can rule out the use of sanctions," said Natalya Timakova.

Speaking earlier on Tuesday in Iran, Mr Mottaki said "America itself is trapped in a kind of military dictatorship, fuelling tension in the region."

His remarks were reported by the semi-official Iranian Students News Agency.

"America has a wrong attitude toward the issues in the Middle East and it is a continuation of their past wrong policies," he said.

Saudi concern

On Monday Saudi Arabia's Foreign Minister said imposing more sanctions on Iran over its nuclear programme would not be a quick enough solution.

ANALYSIS

Kim Ghattas,
BBC News, Riyadh

The Saudi foreign minister did not openly back Washington's call for sanctions, but neither did he say Saudi Arabia was opposed to it. He made clear the kingdom wanted a more immediate resolution to the problem rather than a gradual one.

He also said China, a top importer of Saudi oil, did not need to be prodded by Saudi Arabia to know what it ought to do about sanctions against Iran.

Saudi officials are known for using very careful, often opaque, diplomatic language. It sounded as though he was saying the kingdom would not use oil as an incentive to prod China to back UN sanctions against Iran.

But the statement could also be read as a veiled warning - if China failed to back UN sanctions, it risked upsetting its top oil supplier.

US and Saudis close gap on Iran

Prince Saud al-Faisal said the threat posed by Iran demanded a "more immediate solution" than sanctions.

He spoke in Riyadh alongside US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, who earlier said Iran was "becoming a military dictatorship".
On Tuesday, Turkey's foreign minister is due in Iran aiming to mediate.
Turkey is a Nato member, and Ahmet Davutoglu is expected to try to promote a deal on Tehran's nuclear programme between Turkey's western allies and Iran's Islamic government.
Speaking at a joint Riyadh news conference with Mrs Clinton, Prince Saud said: "Sanctions are a long-term solution. They may work, we can't judge.
"But we see the issue in the shorter term maybe because we are closer to the threat... So we need an immediate resolution rather than a gradual resolution."
While the Saudi minister did not detail his vision of a quick solution in public, it is likely that options were discussed behind closed doors in the meeting between Mrs Clinton and King Abdullah, says the BBC's Kim Ghattas, who is travelling with the top US diplomat.
Clinton's warning
Some regional experts believe neither sanctions nor engagement will work with Iran and have suggested a multi-pronged approach involving intense economic pressure from Iran's neighbours, our correspondent adds.

Hillary Clinton: "Iran is moving toward a military dictatorship"
Speaking to students at a Qatar university earlier on Monday, Mrs Clinton said Iran's elite army corps, the Revolutionary Guard, had gained so much power they had effectively supplanted the government.
"We see that the government of Iran, the supreme leader, the president, the parliament, is being supplanted and that Iran is moving toward a military dictatorship. That is our view," Mrs Clinton said on her maiden visit to the kingdom.
The US and its allies fear Iran is attempting to develop a nuclear weapon. Iran insists its nuclear programme is entirely peaceful.
Turkey has already offered to store Iran's nuclear material as part of a swap arrangement agreed last year. Under terms of that deal, Iran would get medical isotopes from France in return for handing over its own enriched uranium.
Turkey's government hopes its offer to act as a nuclear repository will appeal more to Iran than storing its uranium elsewhere, says the BBC's Jonathan Head in Istanbul.
But Iran is still insisting that any nuclear swap must take place on its own soil.
16 February 2010

Saudi FM al-Faisal doubts Iran sanctions plans

The trip is Mrs Clinton's first official visit to Saudi Arabia
Imposing more sanctions on Iran over its nuclear programme would not be a quick enough solution, Saudi Arabia's foreign minister has said.
Prince Saud al-Faisal said the threat posed by Iran demanded a "more immediate solution" than sanctions.
He spoke in Riyadh alongside US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, who earlier said Iran was "becoming a military dictatorship".
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Turkey is a Nato member, and Ahmet Davutoglu is expected to try and promote a deal on Tehran's nuclear programme between Turkey's western allies and Iran's Islamic government.
More sanctions?
Speaking at a joint Riyadh news conference with Mrs Clinton, Prince Saud said: "Sanctions are a long-term solution. They may work, we can't judge.

> We don't want to be engaging while they are building their bomb

Hillary Clinton
US Secretary of State

More sanctions on way for Iran?

Q&A: Iran and the nuclear issue

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While the Saudi minister did not detail his vision of a quick solution in public, it is likely that options were discussed behind closed doors in the meeting between Mrs Clinton and King Abdullah, says the BBC's Kim Ghattas, who is travelling with the top US diplomat.

Earlier, aides to Mrs Clinton - who is on a tour of the Gulf to try to build support for more sanctions on Iran - revealed she would press Saudi Arabia to help persuade China to support a tougher stand against Iran's nuclear ambitions.

China, which can wield a veto on the UN Security Council as a permanent member, is against imposing more sanctions.

Beijing fears a major loss of revenue from investments in Iran, and disruption of oil supplies from a country providing it with 400,000 barrels a day, our correspondent says.

The Saudi foreign minister said that China, also a top importer of Saudi oil, did not need to be prodded by the kingdom to know what it ought to do about sanctions against Iran.

He added that efforts to rid the Middle East of nuclear weapons must also apply to Israel.

'Dictatorship'

Hillary Clinton: "Iran is moving toward a military dictatorship"

Speaking to students at a Qatar university earlier on Monday, she said Iran's elite army corps, the Revolutionary Guard, had gained so much power they had effectively supplanted the government.

"We see that the government of Iran, the supreme leader, the president, the parliament, is being supplanted and that Iran is moving toward a military dictatorship. That is our view," Mrs Clinton said on her maiden visit to the kingdom.

On Sunday, she urged Iran to reconsider its "dangerous policy decisions".

Mrs Clinton told a conference in Qatar it was leaving the international community little choice but to impose further sanctions.

The US and its allies fear Iran is attempting to develop a nuclear weapon. Iran insists its nuclear programme is entirely peaceful.

Turkish mediation

Turkey has already offered to store Iran's nuclear material as part of a swap arrangement agreed last year. Under terms of that deal, Iran would get medical isotopes from France in return for handing over its own enriched uranium.

Davutoglu is due in Iran to try and mediate in the crisis

Turkey's government hopes its offer to act as a nuclear repository will appeal more to Iran than storing its uranium elsewhere, says the BBC's Jonathan Head in Istanbul.

But Iran is still insisting that any nuclear swap must take place on its own soil.

If no deal can be done with Iran, Turkey will soon be forced to choose its historically strong alliance with the US and Europe, and its desire for closer friendship with its eastern neighbour, our correspondent adds.

Iran, meanwhile, rejected criticism from the West about its human rights record.

"Iran is becoming one of the predominant democratic states in the region," said Javad Larijani, secretary general of the Iranian High Council for Human Rights.
14 February 2010

Clinton warns Iran not to 'build their bomb'

The three-day tour will include Hillary Clinton's first trip to Saudi Arabia

US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton has said the US would welcome peaceful engagement with Iran but not "while they are building their bomb".

She spoke at the US-Islamic World forum in Qatar during a trip to rally Arab support for tougher sanctions against Iran over its nuclear programme.

She said the West was "encouraging Iran to reconsider its dangerous policy decisions."

The three-day Gulf tour will include her first trip to Saudi Arabia.

The Obama administration is stepping up pressure on Iran by launching a diplomatic offensive in the Gulf.

Iran says its nuclear programme is to generate electricity so it can export more of its valuable oil and gas, but the West suspects it of trying to develop atomic weapons.

"The evidence is accumulating that that's exactly what they are trying to do," Mrs Clinton said.

"I would like to figure out a way to handle it in as peaceful an approach possible, and I certainly welcome any meaningful engagement, but... we don't want to be engaging while they are building their bomb."

Washington wants the UN Security Council to impose a fourth round of sanctions on Tehran.

Mrs Clinton is due to meet Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan, whose country opposes such sanctions.

> We would expect [the Saudis] to use their relationships [with China] in ways that can help increase the pressure that Iran would feel

Jeffrey Feltman
Assistant secretary of state

More sanctions on way for Iran?

The Big Picture: Rally

Efforts to revive the Arab-Israeli peace process are also expected to be on the agenda during Mrs Clinton's tour.

The secretary of state delayed her trip by one day after her husband, former President Bill Clinton, underwent a heart procedure at a New York hospital.

In Qatar, she will hold talks with Prime Minister Sheikh Hamad bin Jasim al-Thani.

And in Saudi Arabia, Mrs Clinton will meet King Abdullah, as well as foreign minister Prince Saud al-Faisal.

A state department official travelling with Mrs Clinton said the US expected Saudi Arabia, which has growing trade relations with China, to persuade Beijing to abandon opposition to tougher sanctions against Iran.

"We would expect them [the Saudis] to use these visits, to use their relationships in ways that can help increase the pressure that Iran would feel," Jeffrey Feltman, assistant secretary of state, told reporters as Mrs Clinton began her trip.

Loss of revenue

China, which wields a veto on the UN Security Council, is still opposed to a fourth round of sanctions.

The BBC's Kim Ghattas, who is travelling with Mrs Clinton, says Beijing fears major loss of revenue from investments in Iran and disruption in oil supplies from the country.
The secretary of state is expected to press the Saudis to reassure the Chinese that the kingdom can offset any disruption.
Missile defence is also expected to be on the agenda - the US is beefing up the missile deterrent of its Arab allies to assure them that their security is key to Washington.
Mrs Clinton's two deputies will head to the region in the coming days, travelling to Israel, Jordan and Egypt.
And on Monday, William Burns, the under-secretary for political affairs, will travel to Lebanon and Syria.
Our correspondent says Washington is still hoping it can loosen the links between Damascus and Tehran.
She adds Lebanon currently holds a seat on the Security Council and its ties with Iran may prevent it from backing new sanctions.
12:41 GMT, Thursday, 11 February 2010
Iran claims uranium 20% milestone
Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad has said his country has produced its first batch of uranium enriched to 20%.
The statement, made at a rally marking Iran's revolution, comes days after Tehran revealed it was starting the new phase at its Natanz plant.
The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) said in a report on Wednesday that Iran would start producing 20% enriched uranium "within a few days".
Until now, Iran has produced uranium enriched to 3.5% for power stations.
It says it needs the more highly enriched uranium for a reactor producing medical isotopes.
But Western experts say that even if Iran produces more highly enriched uranium, it lacks the capability of turning the material into fuel rods needed by the reactor.
Western powers fear Iran is heading towards enriching uranium to 90% - to produce a nuclear weapon.
Iran says its nuclear programme is peaceful.
URANIUM ENRICHMENT

- Iran says it is increasing uranium enrichment from 3.5% needed for commercial nuclear reactors
- Iran says it has started enriching to 20%, needed for a research reactor near Tehran
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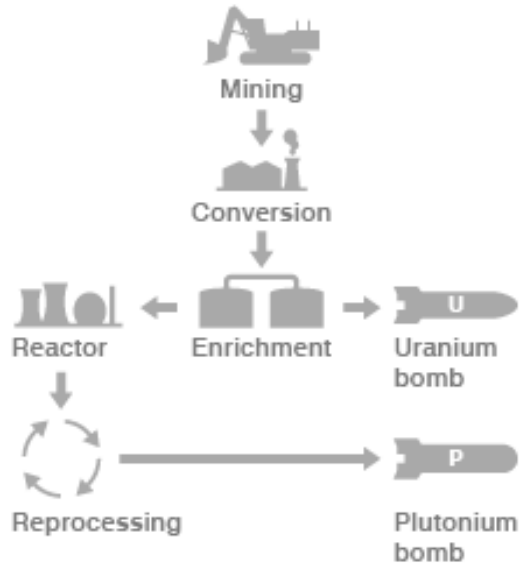
In depth: Nuclear fuel cycle
Iran confuses West again
Iranians rally to mark revolution



"I would like to say to you that the day before yesterday the enrichment of fuel at 20% started," President Ahmadinejad told huge crowds marking the 31st anniversary of Iran's revolution, in Tehran on Thursday.
"I would like to notify you and announce with a loud voice that - thank God - our chief nuclear negotiator

announced that the produce of fuel at 20% started under the watchful eye of our scientists."
He added: "They all know that right now in Natanz, we have the capacity to enrich uranium at high levels. "We have the capacity to enrich above 20, even 80%. But because we have no need, we won't do that."
In a confidential report to member states, seen by news agencies, IAEA chief Yukiya Amano said Iran's output of up to 20% enriched uranium would remain modest.
But experts say Iran could convert a stockpile of 20% enriched uranium to weapons grade material within six months.
The nation is already subject to UN sanctions because of its nuclear programme.
Tougher sanctions
On Wednesday the US stepped up pressure on Tehran by imposing further sanctions against companies connected with the Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guards.
The companies' profits helped fund Iran's nuclear and missile programmes, the US Treasury said.
Earlier, President Barack Obama said the US and its allies were moving "fairly quickly" towards imposing additional fresh sanctions on Iran.
On Thursday UK Prime Minister Gordon Brown also said Iran would face tougher sanctions if it continued with its uranium enrichment programme and crackdown on opposition groups.

U.S. ready to offer Iran alternative to nuclear plan

From Jill Dougherty, CNN Foreign Affairs Correspondent
February 9, 2010 8:48 p.m. EST

STORY HIGHLIGHTS

- Iran says it needs to enrich uranium to create cancer-fighting isotopes
- United States says it can arrange for Iran to get those isotopes
- That would eliminate Iran's need for enriched uranium
- Many countries think Iran wants uranium for nuclear weapons

RELATED TOPICS

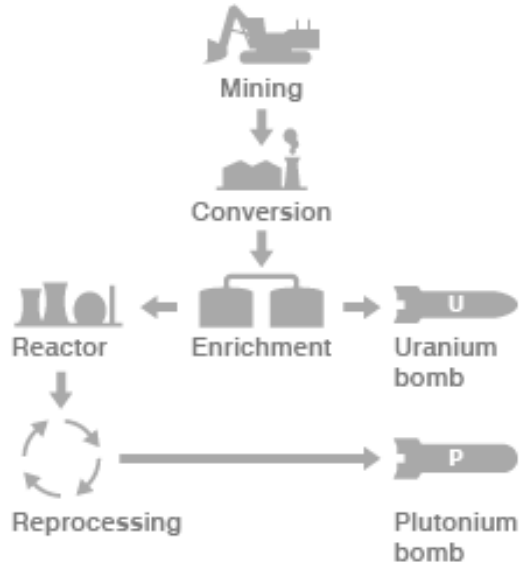
- Iran
- U.S. Department of State
- Nuclear Medicine

Washington (CNN) -- In what appears to be an attempt to call Iran's bluff on its nuclear program, the United States is poised to offer Tehran a way to obtain medical isotopes that Iran says it desperately needs to treat cancer patients, according to the State Department.
The United States, along with "other countries," will present a new proposal to the International Atomic Energy Agency to provide Iran with those isotopes, State Department spokesman P.J. Crowley said Tuesday.
"Our point is, if Iran feels it has a specific need, we are willing to engage constructively and try to identify ways in which the international community and potentially the United States can meet that need," Crowley said.
The move appeared to be a response to Iran's announcement Monday that it will carry out its own uranium enrichment to 20 percent to provide fuel to make the isotopes. The United States, along with other countries, questioned Iran's motives for that enrichment, saying it increases Iran's ability to produce fuel for a nuclear weapon.
Crowley told reporters that under the new proposal, the international community would "facilitate Iran's procurement of medical isotopes from third countries."
"There are alternatives," Crowley said. "The Iranian decision to improve their processing to 20 percent is an unnecessary step." Providing the opportunity to buy the isotopes directly, Crowley said, would be the "fastest and cheapest" way for Iran to avoid running out of isotopes and could help "build confidence."
Iran uranium enrichment course 'not acceptable,' Obama says
Tehran separately has rejected an IAEA proposal under which it would ship most of its low-enriched uranium out of the country for further enrichment by Russia. France would process that uranium into fuel rods that would then be returned to Iran.
The new offer from the United States comes as Washington and other major countries move closer to imposing harsh new sanctions on Iran over its nuclear program, which those countries say is designed to develop a nuclear weapon. Iran says its nuclear program is exclusively for peaceful purposes.

President Obama told reporters on Tuesday that the international community will try to pressure Iran more if Iran is not willing to cooperate.
"What we are going to be working on over the next several weeks is developing a significant regime of sanctions that will indicate to them how isolated they are from the international community as a whole," Obama said.
Presenting details of the latest proposal, the State Department spokesman said, "We stand ready to work with Iran, we stand ready to address its legitimate needs, but we need to see Iran come to the table prepared to address our concerns and the concerns of the international community regarding its nuclear ambitions."
9 February 2010

Obama vows 'significant' sanctions against Iran

US President Obama: "The next step is sanctions"
US President Barack Obama has said the US and its allies are developing a "significant regime of sanctions" against Iran for its nuclear programme.
He said the international community was unified over Iran's "misbehaviour".
Speaking in Washington, he said despite Tehran's denials, it was clear Iran was working to build nuclear weapons.
His remarks came after Iranian state media reported that Iran had started the process of enriching uranium to 20% for use in a medical research reactor.
Russian disapproval
In an unexpected appearance in the White House briefing room, Mr Obama said the US was confident the international community was "unified around Iran's misbehaviour in this area".
He said the new push for sanctions on Iran was "moving along fairly quickly" and should be completed in the next few weeks.
URANIUM ENRICHMENT



Iran says it is increasing uranium enrichment from 3.5% needed for commercial nuclear reactors
Says it will enrich to 20%, needed for a research reactor near Tehran
Weapons-grade uranium is at least 90% enriched
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In depth: Nuclear fuel cycle
Iran confuses West again
Send us your comments
Mr Obama also said he was pleased at Russia's quick disapproval of Iran's latest move.
But he said it was unclear how China would respond to a new push at the UN Security Council for another round of sanctions against Iran.

China, a UN Security Council member, has called for further talks over the issue.
China and Russia have been reluctant in the past to support international sanctions against Iran.
"How China operates at the Security Council as we pursue sanctions is something we're going to have to see," Mr Obama said.
The five permanent members of the Security Council - the US, Russia, China, France and Britain - have a veto over resolutions, including sanctions.
Iran currently enriches uranium to a level of 3.5% but requires 20% enriched uranium for its research reactor, which is meant to produce medical isotopes. A bomb would require uranium enriched to at least 90%.
The US and its Western allies say Iran is trying to develop a nuclear weapon - a charge Iran denies.
In October, a deal brokered by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) was thought to have been struck for Iran to send its uranium to Russia and France for enrichment.
But last month, diplomats said Iran had told the IAEA that it did not accept the terms of the deal - though there have since been other, conflicting messages.
Also on Tuesday, US state department spokesman PJ Crowley said the international community was willing to help Iran secure medical isotopes from abroad.
The offer would help to "build some confidence" and show Iran that enriching uranium to 20% purity was "unnecessary", Reuters news agency quoted him saying.

9 February 2010

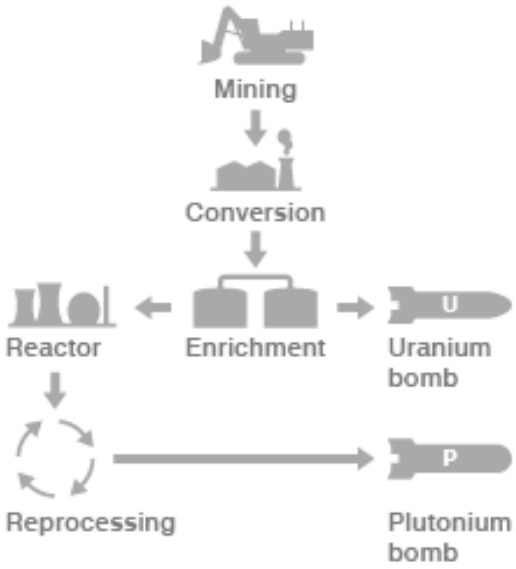
Iran 'ups nuclear fuel enriching'

Western powers have urged further sanctions over Iran's nuclear activity
Iran has started the process of enriching uranium to 20% in defiance of the West, Iranian state media says.
The process was begun at the Natanz plant in the presence of International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) inspectors, al-Alam state television reported.
The move came after Western powers stepped up pressure for international sanctions against Iran.
China, a UN Security Council member, has called for further talks over Iran's nuclear programme.
The US and its Western allies say Iran is trying to develop a nuclear weapon - a charge Iran denies.
Iran's top nuclear official, Ali Akbar Salehi, was quoted by state news agency Irna as saying Iran "had started the 20% enrichment in a separate cascade in Natanz".
The BBC's John Leyne says Tuesday's announcement is designed to stress Iran's view that it is only acting within its rights.
ANALYSIS

Jon Leyne, BBC News
Technically, anything up to 20% enrichment still qualifies as low-enriched uranium. So Iran could argue that it is still keeping within the letter of the law.
But the fear is this move brings Iran closer to the capability to make a nuclear bomb. Experts say that once Iran has a stockpile of 20% enriched uranium, it could take as little as six months to convert it to weapons grade.
It's hotly disputed whether Iran has yet made a conscious decision to make a bomb. But as it builds up, at least the capability, the situation becomes increasingly dangerous.

As international pressure grows on Iran, there will surely be those within the Islamic Republic who will argue that Tehran should build a bomb - if only to protect against an attack designed to prevent just such a danger.

Experts are still divided over whether Iran has taken the decision to actually build a bomb, he says.
Iran currently enriches uranium to a level of 3.5% but requires 20% enriched uranium for its Tehran research reactor, which is meant to produce medical isotopes. A bomb would require uranium enriched to at least 90%.
Enriching to 20% would take about one year, using the 2,000 centrifuges at the underground Natanz facility, experts say.
But moving from 20% to 90% would take only six months and only require between 500 and 1,000 centrifuges.
Iran insists its nuclear programme is entirely peaceful and designed to provide civilian power.
It had already announced on Sunday that it aimed to start producing uranium enriched to 20%.
Mr Salehi also said the government would build 10 new enrichment plants next year, despite the fact that it still had problems with its first one.
URANIUM ENRICHMENT



Iran says it is increasing uranium enrichment from 3.5% needed for commercial nuclear reactors
Says it will enrich to 20%, needed for a research reactor near Tehran
Weapons-grade uranium is at least 90% enriched
Experts say achieving 20% is a key step towards weapons grade
In depth: Nuclear fuel cycle
Iran confuses West again
Send us your comments
The US and France reacted by saying that the time had come "for the adoption of strong sanctions", while the British government described Iran's new position as deeply worrying.

The UN Security Council has already imposed three rounds of sanctions against Iran in an effort to make it cease all uranium enrichment activities and heavy-water projects, which could produce plutonium suitable for use in weapons.
Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Ma Zhaoxu refused to comment directly on sanctions at a press conference on Tuesday, the Associated Press news agency reported.
"I hope the relevant parties will step up efforts and push for progress in the dialogue and negotiations," he was quoted as saying.
In October, a deal brokered by the IAEA was thought to have been struck for Iran to send its uranium to Russia and France for enrichment.
But last month, diplomats said Iran had told the IAEA that it did not accept the terms of the deal - though there have since been other, conflicting messages.
Mr Salehi has said that enriched uranium production would be halted if Iran received fuel enriched to 20% from abroad.

Fresh calls for Iran sanctions

Soltanieh said the fuel would supply a Tehran research reactor which produces medical isotopes [AP]

The United States and France have said new sanctions against Iran are the only option after Tehran informed the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) that it will begin enriching higher-grade nuclear fuel to a level of 20 per cent.

Nicolas Sarkozy, the French president, and Robert Gates, the US defence secretary, said that Iran should face "strong sanctions" over its nuclear programme, a French official said following a meeting between the two men in Paris.
Earlier on Monday, Ali-Asghar Soltanieh, Iran's envoy to the IAEA, said that Tehran had handed an official letter to the UN's atomic agency saying that his country would begin enriching the fuel from Tuesday.
Soltanieh said that Iran would use its nuclear stockpile to enrich uranium to supply its Tehran research reactor which produces medical isotopes.
Earlier, speaking to al-Alam, Iran's Arabic-language state television station, Ali Akbar Salehi, the head of the country's atomic energy organisation, said Tehran planned to build 10 new facilities over the next year where the enrichment could be carried out.

Iran had said in November that it planned to build the enrichment plants but had not given a timescale.
Sanctions call
Bernard Kouchner, the French foreign minister, said on Monday that he did not believe Iran had the ability to raise the enrichment level of its uranium and that the move by Tehran was "blackmail".

Uranium enrichment

- Process that leads to the making of a nuclear bomb

"One could call it diplomacy, but if that is what is then it is truly negative," said Kouchner.
"That is not serious and we, alas cannot apply anything other than sanctions since negotiation is not possible."
Gates also said more pressure had to be applied to the Iranian government.
"We must still try and find a peaceful way to resolve this issue," Gates said.
"The only path that is left to us at this point, it seems to me, is that pressure track but it will require all of the international community to work together."
Asked about the possibility of an Israeli strike on Iran over its nuclear programme, Gates said:
"Everybody's interest is in seeing this issue resolved without a resort to conflict."
Kouchner said all the major powers apart from China were in favour of a fourth round of UN-backed sanctions.
However, he said there was no deadline for reaching an agreement and added that he did not fear that any Israeli action was imminent.
Western powers accuse Iran of attempting to build nuclear weapons but Tehran says its nuclear programme is for purely civilian purposes.
Difficult change
Alireza Ronaghi, Al Jazeera's correspondent in Tehran, said: "It's a new phase in Iran's nuclear achievement, but it is not going to happen overnight.
"A very difficult design process will have to take place. They'll need to change the existing capacity that consists of 4,000 - 5,000 centrifugal machines.
"It will also infringe upon Iran's current capacity for enriching uranium to a level of 3.5 - 4 per cent, which is necessary for its current nuclear programme.

IN DEPTH

Timeline: Iran's nuclear programme

Video: Iran changes tack on uranium

Inside Story: Sanctioning Iran

Fears grow over Iran's nuclear sites
"Regardless, these are the things that many conservatives in Iran think will make the country's hand stronger in negotiations with the West."

Salehi and Soltanieh's statements follow instructions from Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, Iran's president, on Sunday that he start the production of higher-grade nuclear reactor fuel.
But Salehi has also suggested that production would be halted if Iran received fuel enriched to 20 per cent from abroad.
Iran has expressed its readiness to exchange its low-enriched uranium for higher-grade fuel, but has demanded amendments to the UN-drafted IAEA plan, under which Iran would export its low-enriched uranium abroad for enrichment.
"Iran would halt its enrichment process for the Tehran research reactor any time it receives the necessary fuel for it," Salehi said.

Draft proposal
The UN plan was drawn up in early October in a meeting in Geneva, Switzerland, between Iran and six world powers - the UK, China, France, Russia, the US and Germany - and later refined at a meeting in Vienna.
The talks in the Austrian capital came up with a draft proposal that would take 70 per cent of Iran's low-enriched uranium to reduce its stockpile of material that could be enriched to a higher level, and possibly be used to make nuclear weapons.

That uranium would be returned about a year later as refined fuel rods, which can power reactors but cannot be readily turned into weapons-grade material.
Ahmadinejad had last week appeared to support the deal in an interview on state television, but on Sunday he blamed the West for the stalemate over the deal.

Source:
Al Jazeera and agencies
8 February 2010

New Iran nuclear sanctions 'only path', says US

Iran's nuclear programme has alarmed Western powers

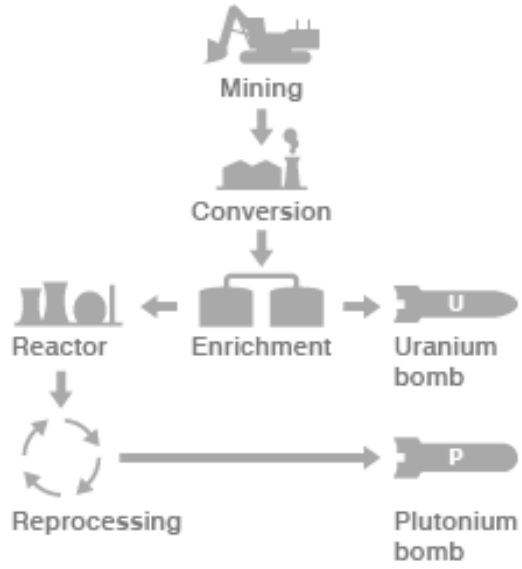
The US has said new sanctions against Iran are the "only path" after Tehran announced it was stepping up its uranium enrichment programme.
Iran's nuclear chief, Ali Akbar Salehi, earlier said Tehran had told the UN's nuclear watchdog it would start enriching uranium to 20% from Tuesday.
The move heightens fears that Iran is moving closer to weapons-grade uranium.
The US called on the international community to take new action and France called Iran's latest move "blackmail".
US Defence Secretary Robert Gates and French Defence Minister Herve Morin, after talks in Paris, said their position on Iran was one of "complete agreement".

ANALYSIS

Jon Leyne, BBC News

Iran is stepping up the pace of its nuclear confrontation with the West.
If the aim is to have all 10 new enrichment plants running in a year, then it is almost laughably ambitious - it has taken many years to get the first plant at Natanz running and it still has problems.
But this flurry of announcements reflects the turmoil faced by President Ahmadinejad's government, as they square up for a major day of pro- and anti-government demonstrations on the anniversary of the revolution.
Although Mr Gates said he still wanted to "try and find a peaceful way to resolve this issue", he added: "The only path that is left to us at this point, it seems to me, is that pressure track, but it will require all of the international community to work together."
He said the international community had given Iran "multiple opportunities to provide reassurance about its intentions with respect to its nuclear programme".
Mr Morin said: "It will unfortunately be necessary to launch a dialogue with the international community that will lead to new sanctions if Iran does not stop its programmes."
French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner was even more forceful in his comments, saying: "This is real blackmail. The only thing that we can do, alas, is apply sanctions given that negotiations are not possible."
French President Nicolas Sarkozy later added his voice, saying Iran should face "strong sanctions" over its nuclear programme.
The UN Security Council has already imposed three rounds of sanctions against Iran in an effort to make it stop all uranium enrichment activities and heavy-water projects.

Robert Gates: "My hope is that we can keep this within economic and diplomatic channels"
The Russian foreign ministry on Monday again called on Iran to abide by its earlier agreements to send uranium abroad for enrichment.
A deal struck in October between Iran, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and the so-called P5+1 - the US, Russia, China, UK, France plus Germany - envisaged Iran sending about 70% of its low-enriched uranium to Russia and France where it would be processed into fuel for a research reactor.
Last month, diplomats said Iran had told the IAEA that it did not accept the terms of the deal, although there have since been other, conflicting messages.
Speaking on Sunday evening, Mr Salehi said that enriched uranium production would be halted if Iran received fuel enriched to 20% from abroad.
But on Monday he said: "Iran's official letter about commencing the 20% enrichment activity in order to provide fuel for the Tehran reactor has been handed over to the IAEA."
The enrichment would be at Natanz, Iran's main uranium plant.
URANIUM ENRICHMENT



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Iran currently enriches uranium to a level of 3.5% but requires 20% enriched uranium for its Tehran research reactor, which is meant to produce medical isotopes. A bomb would require uranium enriched to at least 90%.
To achieve 20% enrichment would be such a major step for Iran, David Albright of Washington's Institute for Science and International Security told the Associated Press news agency, it "would be going most of the rest of the way to weapon-grade uranium".
Mr Salehi said that 10 new uranium enrichment plants would be built.
However, experts poured scorn on that announcement, pointing to the cost of such an undertaking and Iran's problems obtaining components because of UN sanctions.
Mark Fitzpatrick, a proliferation expert at London's International Institute for Strategic Studies, described the proposal as a "farcical bluff".
"Iran presumably could start construction by pushing dirt around for 10 new facilities, but there is no way it could begin to construct and equip that many more plants," he told Reuters news agency.
"It is hard-pressed today even to keep the centrifuges installed at Natanz running smoothly."
The latest developments come days before Iran celebrates the 31st anniversary of the Islamic Revolution on Thursday.
The event is expected to see pro- and anti-government demonstrations.
Witnesses say the situation in Tehran is increasingly tense, with a series of checkpoints already set up

across the city.
8 February 2010

Iran to enrich uranium to 20% as nuclear fears grow

Iran's nuclear programme has alarmed Western powers

Iran has announced immediate plans to step up its nuclear programme, which Western nations fear could be used to make a bomb.

Its nuclear chief said Iran would start enriching uranium to 20% from Tuesday, and that 10 new uranium enrichment plants would be built in the next year.

Ali Akbar Salehi said the enrichment would take place at Natanz, Iran's main uranium enrichment plant.

The move heightens fears Iran is moving closer to weapons-grade uranium.

It comes amid growing tension with the West, which has criticised Iran for stalling on a deal over its enrichment programme.

The latest development comes days before Iran celebrates the 31st anniversary of the Islamic revolution, which is expected to see pro- and anti-government demonstrations.

Almost by the day, Iran is stepping up the pace of its nuclear confrontation with the West, says the BBC's Tehran correspondent, Jon Leyne.

But if the aim is to have all 10 new plants running in a year, then it is almost laughably ambitious as it has taken many years to get Natanz, the first plant, running and it still has problems, he adds.

This flurry of announcements reflects the turmoil faced by President Ahmadinejad's government ahead of the anniversary, our correspondent says.

Witnesses say the situation in the Iranian capital Tehran is increasingly tense, with a series of checkpoints already set up across the city.

'Very disappointing'

Speaking on Sunday evening, Mr Salehi said he would inform the UN's nuclear watchdog, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), of the enrichment plan in a formal letter on Monday.

However, he added that production would be halted if Iran received fuel enriched to 20% from abroad.

The country earlier appeared ready to exchange its low-enriched uranium for higher-grade foreign fuel but wanted changes to a UN-drafted plan.

"Iran would halt its enrichment process for the Tehran research reactor any time it receives the necessary fuel for it," Mr Salehi said.

No time frame was given for the 10 new plants, but the Iranian new year begins on 21 March.

Iran currently enriches uranium to a level of 3.5%. The kind of uranium needed for a bomb would have to be enriched to at least 80%.

News of the enrichment move, which was ordered by President Ahmadinejad on Sunday, alarmed diplomats in London and Washington.

A UK Foreign Office spokeswoman said the report was "clearly a matter of serious concern", while US Defence Secretary Robert Gates called for further "international pressure" on Iran.

"The international community has offered the Iranian government multiple opportunities to provide reassurance of its intentions," he said on a visit to Rome.

"The results have been very disappointing."

He added that he believed there was "still time for sanctions and pressure to work" if the international community united on the issue.

7 February 2010

Iran makes new uranium enrichment challenge

Iran's nuclear programme has alarmed Western powers

Iran's President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad has asked the country's nuclear chief to begin enriching uranium to 20%.

He made the announcement a day after Western scepticism at Iran's earlier claim that a deal to swap enriched uranium for nuclear fuel was close.

The US and European Union said they were unconvinced and Iran must make a meaningful offer or face new sanctions.

Western countries fear Iran is trying to develop nuclear weapons. But Tehran insists its programme is peaceful.

Civilian nuclear power requires uranium enriched to about 3%, but weapons grade uranium needs to be enriched to 90%.

Challenge

Mr Ahmadinejad made the announcement on Iranian state television.

"I had said let us give them [Western powers] two to three months, and if they don't agree, we would start ourselves," he said in a speech broadcast live.

"Now Dr [Ali Akbar] Salehi, start to make the 20% with the centrifuges," the president said, addressing Iran's nuclear chief who was sitting in the audience at a laser technology plant in Tehran.

But he added: "The doors for interaction are still open."

The BBC Tehran correspondent Jon Leyne, reporting from London, says Mr Ahmadinejad's announcement crosses a significant red line.

Iranians want to supply a research reactor with highly enriched uranium following the breakdown of the international deal to provide fuel for it.

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

Q&A: Iran and the nuclear issue

But some Western analysts say Iran does not possess the technical know-how to make fuel rods for the reactor, our correspondent says, and Western countries fear this could be a stepping stone towards the manufacture of weapons-grade material.

At the very least, this is a provocative act which will make negotiations more difficult, our correspondent says.

On Friday, Iran's Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki told a security conference in Munich, Germany, that an agreement could be reached in a "not too distant future".

But US Defence Secretary Robert Gates said: "I don't have the sense that we're close to an agreement."

If Iran was prepared to take up the proposal put forward by the so-called P5+1 - the US, Russia, China, UK and France plus Germany - on handing over its low-enriched uranium then it should take that message to the UN's nuclear watchdog, the IAEA, he said.

He suggested that Western powers needed to think about whether it was now time to take a "different tack" on Iran.

In January, diplomats said Iran had informed the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) that it did

not accept the terms of the deal agreed in October by Iran, the IAEA and the P5+1.
In response, the US, Britain and France have been pressing for more sanctions and earlier this week circulated a discussion paper on further possible measures against the country.
But China's Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi told the Munich conference that the P5+1 should remain patient and keep pursuing a diplomatic solution to the issue.
Existing UN sanctions are meant to prevent the flow of any items or technology which might aid Iran in enriching uranium or developing nuclear weapon delivery systems.
The sanctions range from actual sales or supplies to dealings with named individuals.
6 February 2010

West greets Iran nuclear claim with scepticism

Manouchehr Mottaki said "conducive ground" had been reached in talks
Western powers have responded with scepticism to a claim by Iran that a deal to swap enriched uranium for nuclear fuel could now be close.
Iran's Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki told a security conference in Germany that an agreement could be reached in a "not too distant future".
But the US and European Union said they were unconvinced and Iran must make a meaningful offer or face new sanctions.
China, which opposes further sanctions, said talks were at a "crucial stage".
The US and its allies fear Iran is attempting to develop nuclear weapons. Iran insists its nuclear programme is peaceful in purpose.
US Defence Secretary Robert Gates, in Ankara, is quoted by Reuters news agency as saying that Western powers needed to think about whether it was now time for a "different tack".

> Our hand is still reaching out towards them [Iran]. But so far it's reaching out into nothingness
>
> Guido Westerwelle
> German foreign minister

German Foreign Minister Guido Westerwelle told the annual Munich security conference: "Our hand is still reaching out towards them [Iran]. But so far it's reaching out into nothingness.
"And I've seen nothing since yesterday [Friday] that makes me want to change that view."
The US National Security Adviser, General James Jones, warned of tighter sanctions and deeper international isolation for Iran.
And EU foreign affairs chief Catherine Ashton told the conference that Iran must respond to the head of the UN's nuclear watchdog, the IAEA, over its nuclear programme.
"There is a need to restore confidence in the peaceful nature of Iran's programme," she said, according to Reuters.
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
Q&A: Iran and the nuclear issue

"This must be done by dialogue. But dialogue takes two, and I'm ready to engage in meaningful and productive talks that deal directly with the issues that trouble us."

The BBC Tehran correspondent Jon Leyne, reporting from London, says the strong suspicion is that the Iranian remarks are just another attempt to fend off new sanctions being proposed by the United States.

Mr Mottaki made his comments on Friday after deciding to join the Munich conference - a major international gathering of security officials - at the last minute.

He said "conducive ground" on a nuclear fuel deal had been reached and that Iran had demonstrated it was serious.

"Under the present conditions that we have reached, I think that we are approaching a final agreement that can be accepted by all parties," he said.

But Mr Mottaki did not mention the key issue of timing and insisted that the quantity of fuel involved should be up to Iran.

Diplomatic manoeuvring

In January, diplomats said Iran had informed the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) that it did not accept the terms of a deal agreed in October by Iran, the IAEA and the so-called P5+1 - the US, Russia, China, UK and France plus Germany.

In response, the US, Britain and France have been pressing for more sanctions and earlier this week circulated a discussion paper on further possible measures against the country.

The move came despite recent comments by Iran's President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad indicating that the country would have "no problem" sending much of its low-enriched uranium abroad so it could be processed into fuel - an arrangement envisaged by the October agreement.

Western diplomats reacted warily to Mr Ahmedinejad's comments.

But China's Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi told the Munich conference that the P5+1 should remain patient and keep pursuing a diplomatic solution to the issue.