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UN nuclear watchdog refers Syria to Security Council



Israel bombed the remote desert site of the alleged reactor in September 2007

The UN nuclear watchdog is to report Syria to the Security Council over its alleged covert nuclear programme.

The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) voted to rebuke Syria on claims of an undeclared nuclear reactor.

The structure, which Syria has maintained was a non-nuclear military site, was destroyed by Israel in 2007.

The IAEA's move comes as international pressure mounts on the UN Security Council to censure Syria over its lethal crackdown on protests.

European nations on Wednesday presented a separate draft resolution to the Council condemning Syrian President Bashar Assad's regime.

Desert site

At the IAEA meeting at its headquarters in Vienna, 17 countries voted for and six against, including Russia and China.

Diplomats said that overall 11 countries of the 35-member board of governors abstained and one country was absent from the vote.

Israel bombed the desert site of the alleged reactor - near Deir Alzour in the country's remote north-east - in September 2007.

"The reactor there was built for the express purpose of producing plutonium for possible use in nuclear weapons"

Glyn Davies US Ambassador to IAEA

The IAEA began investigating the allegations in June 2008, but Syria has refused to co-operate and, with the exception of a one-off visit, has not allowed UN inspectors to Deir Alzour or

related sites to verify the US claims.

Thursday's motion was proposed by the US and its Western allies who had asked the IAEA's governing body to find Syria in "non-compliance" with its international obligations.

"Syria's apparent attempt at constructing a covert, undeclared plutonium production reactor, a reactor with no credible peaceful purpose, represents one of the most serious safeguards violations possible," said US Ambassador Glyn Davies.

He said the intentions of the structure at Deir Alzour were clear and that a resolution was the only responsible course of action.

"The reactor there was built for the express purpose of producing plutonium for possible use in nuclear weapons."

'Regrettable'

Syria's ambassador to the IAEA called the agency's move "regrettable" but pledged that the country would honour its obligations.

Analysis



Jonathan Marcus BBC Diplomatic Correspondent

So what has changed to bring the Syrian issue to a vote?

When the new IAEA director general was elected he was determined to resolve the Syrian issue one way or another.

Yukiya Amano set out what nuclear analyst Mark Hibbs called "a cautious but deliberate twin-track strategy".

One track was to avoid a rush to judgement, to keep asking questions, giving the Syrians sufficient time to co-operate with the agency.

At the same time, he sought to get more intelligence information from member states.

The US, says Mr Hibbs, eventually provided a large body of material to underpin the US/Israeli allegations, a lot of it highly sensitive intelligence.

- [Syria's long path to the Security Council](#)

"I think Syria has always been committed to its obligations and to its duties and I think we will continue to do so," Bassam Al-Sabbagh said after the meeting.

Syria is a signatory to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), which gives it the right to enrich its own fuel for civil nuclear power, under inspection from the IAEA.

But it has also signed a safeguards agreement with the IAEA under which it is obliged to notify

the UN's nuclear watchdog of any plans to construct a new nuclear facility.

The last country the IAEA referred to the Security Council was Iran, in February 2006.

The Security Council has the power to impose sanctions, a move it has taken in the case of Iran no less than four times.

However, diplomats are not convinced that this will happen in Syria's case due to opposition from both Russia and China.

The diplomatic move at the IAEA came a day after Britain, France, Germany and Portugal proposed a draft resolution condemning Syria's crackdown on protesters to the Security Council, despite the risk of a Russian veto.

Images of the alleged Syrian nuclear site

The United States has accused North Korea of aiding Syria in the construction of a nuclear reactor. Syria denies that it has a nuclear programme of any kind. The buildings in question were bombed by Israel in 2007. The pictures below show the recent history of the site at the heart of the dispute.





The site was bombed by Israeli jets in September 2007. The Syrians say the building was an unused military facility. The US alleges that the Syrians bulldozed the site after the air strike to hide its original purpose



This image taken in early 2008 shows evidence of rebuilding at the site. The US alleges that this work aims to discourage excavation at the original facility

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IAEA: Syria site bombed by Israel 'was likely nuclear'



The US said Syria's reactor was similar to a North Korean one

A Syrian site bombed by Israeli jets in 2007 was "very likely" a nuclear reactor, the UN's atomic watchdog says.

The International Atomic Energy Agency has been investigating US claims that Syria was building a secret nuclear reactor with North Korean help.

The strongest IAEA report yet on Syria came after several years of blocked investigations, and is likely to increase the pressure on Damascus.

Israel bombed the remote desert site of the alleged reactor in September 2007.

Syria says the site - near Deir Alzour in the country's remote north-east - was an unused military facility under construction. It also denied having any nuclear links to North Korea, which has itself denied transferring nuclear technology to Syria.

But the confidential IAEA report, obtained by the BBC, says the bombed building was similar in type and size to a reactor and that samples taken from the site indicated a connection with nuclear activities.

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Israeli air strike: Sequence of events

- 6 Sept 2007: Israel bombs site in remote north-east Syria
- 1 Oct: Syria's President Assad tells BBC site was military
- 24 Oct: New satellite images taken show site bulldozed clear
- 24 April 2008: US claims Syrian site was nuclear reactor
- 24 May 2011: IAEA report concludes site was "very likely" a nuclear reactor
- [Nuclear power in the Middle East](#)
- [In text: US accuses Syria and N Korea](#)

The report's conclusions are likely to raise international pressure on Damascus, says the BBC's Bethany Bell in Vienna.

It opens the door for Western powers to push for Syria to be referred to the UN Security council, an action last taken against Iran in 2006. That step could come at the next meeting of the IAEA's board of governors in June.

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