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Briefing on Iran, the International Atomic Energy Agency Report, and Other Matters

Ambassador John R. Bolton, U.S. Permanent Representative to the United Nations

Remarks to the media following a Security Council Stakeout

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Ambassador Bolton: I wanted to just have a word about the report issued by the International Atomic Energy Agency, requested by the Security Council in Resolution 1696. President Bush spoke earlier today of Iran's defiance of its international obligations. And today, the latest report by the IAEA provides ample evidence of that defiance.

The report -- short and to the point -- concludes that after all these years of trying, the IAEA is still unable to confirm the peaceful nature of Iran's nuclear program. Now, in the language of the IAEA and the international system, that's a red flag. That says that the Iranian program contains much that should be worried about here in New York, and that I think underlies our concern that Iran is pursuing nuclear weapons. There's simply no explanation for the range of Iranian behavior which we've seen over the years, other than, that they're pursuing a weapons capability. And that's not based on intelligence, that's based on the public record. That's based on reading report after report by the IAEA, as this most recent report is yet another example. The report makes clear that not only has Iran not suspended uranium-enrichment activities, as required by Resolution 1696, it's accelerating them; it's building another 164 centrifuge cascade which will begin operations within the next month. And that all of these research activities, including the introduction of uranium hexafluoride into the centrifuge cascades, has continued as recently as this past week.

Now, this is an example of why the idea that Iran should be allowed to conduct research and development activities doesn't work. Once Iran perfects the uranium enrichment technique at the level they're doing it now, it's just like a cookie cutter to go from one cascade to two cascades to a hundred cascades to a thousand to ten thousand, at locations unknown to the IAEA or the international community, where industrial scope enrichment activities can take place.

But beyond that, the IAEA report shows a continuing pattern of lack of cooperation by Iran, of obstructionism by Iran, of not allowing the IAEA inspectors to do the basic work that they need to do to prove that the Iranian program is peaceful --

the activities that Iran undertakes that are simply inexplicable if their real purpose is a peaceful nuclear power program. And I'll must mention one: The continued refusal of Iran to explain why it is dealing with uranium metal and the fabricating -- first, the creation of uranium metal from uranium hexafluoride; and second, the casting and forming of uranium metal.

Why is this important? Apart from a few very sophisticated uses for uranium metal by the most advanced nuclear programs in the world, the only real use for uranium metal is a nuclear weapon. So why is Iran experimenting admittedly with small quantities of uranium metal? Why are they reluctant to allow the IAEA to make copies of the document referred to? Why have they taken the notes back from the IAEA inspectors that they wrote on a first examination of the document? What is the reason that Iran is looking at the subject of uranium metal? Now, that's just one example, and I won't go back over the long list of reports and similar examples that the IAEA has reported earlier.

But let's be clear what the bottom-line conclusion is here today: Iran is defying the international community. Iran is not suspending its uranium enrichment activity, and from all that we can see in this report, it continues to pursue a nuclear weapons capability in violation of its obligations under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. I'll take a few questions.

Reporter: Yes, Ambassador, the report also says that Iran is not as successful as people feared in enriching that uranium. So does that make action less urgent? Is that why Russia , France and China are dragging their heels on their July commitments?

Ambassador Bolton: Well, I don't -- I wouldn't draw that conclusion. Let me see if I can try and explain this again. This is a lawyer trying to explain sophisticated nuclear technology here, but the --

Reporter: (Inaudible) I'm sure the general public will follow with great interest. But it's -- because it is important. What the Iranians are trying to do is perfect the technology that will allow them to take the uranium U-235 isotope from its natural levels of occurrence, which is 0.7 percent in all uranium, and enrich it to levels -- they say they're going to stop at reactor-grade levels, which are between 3 and 5 percent U-235 isotope or go up to weapons-grade, highly-enriched uranium containing 90 percent or more of the U-235 isotope. This is a very complex and technologically difficult process to do, and the method that they're using is a complex technology with a lot of ways that it can breakdown before you achieve a capability to produce at a mass production level. But what the Iranians are doing are continuing to work through the difficulties, continuing to perfect, continuing to learn what their problems are and continuing to correct those problems. Now there will come a time -- because we know this technology works. It's used by -- to enrich uranium; probably the highest percent of enriched uranium in the world comes from this technology. We know it is workable, and the only issue is, if the Iranians are allowed to continue, when they will perfect it.

And once it's perfected, then, as I say, you take what you've learned and not just do it in one centrifuge cascade or two centrifuge cascades, but in hundreds or thousands of cascades. Because if it works in one, it will work in all of them. That's what the issue is. Yes, sir.

Reporter: Ambassador, how will the West convince Russia and China to support sanctions?

Ambassador Bolton: I don't really think it's a question of us persuading Russia and China . Russia and China, through their foreign ministers, committed to seeking sanctions when the Perm-5 plus Germany foreign ministers met about two months ago. And they issued a statement, which I was, I think, very clear that said that if Iran continued to reject the

very generous offer that the EU-3 were making on behalf of the six countries and if Iran failed to suspend its uranium enrichment activities, now as called for both by the International Atomic Energy Agency and by the Security Council, then the Perm-5 plus Germany would come to the Security Council and seek sanctions. Now, that's what they said. That's what they all said. And I don't think we should necessarily jump to the conclusion that they won't follow through on the word that they have given. Yes, sir.

Reporter: Ambassador, in the backdrop of President Bush's speech that he still is calling for diplomacy to work -- I mean, he still believes that diplomacy will work -- and in view of this IAEA report, which is still inconclusive and it suggests that it needs a little more time in determining how far has Iran violated its agreement, do you believe that this technology that it is perfecting is only meant for the nuclear arms, or it can't be used for any peaceful purposes?

Ambassador Bolton: Well, let me say first, one of the reasons -- in fact, the principal reason that the IAEA cannot make a conclusion about the nature of the Iranian program is because the Iranians are not being forthcoming. They're not providing all of the information they're obligated to provide. They're obstructing the work of the IAEA, and so it's not surprising that the IAEA can't draw a conclusion. So if over a three or four year period now, you look at the pattern of obstructionism and lack of cooperation by Iran, I think after a certain period of time you're permitted to draw the logical conclusions that maybe there's something they don't want the IAEA to see. And I think on that basis alone, the Security Council was fully warranted in passing a binding resolution calling on Iran to suspend its uranium enrichment activities, which they have not done. Yes, sir.

Reporter: Mr. Ambassador, Nick Burns gave an interview that appeared this morning, spelling out some of the steps that might be next in terms of specifics on sanctions. Can you give us a sense of what you're talking about now, the type of sanctions you'd be looking to impose on Iran, how far along are those discussions and when are you going to be discussing them further here in the Council?

Ambassador Bolton: Well, there are a range of issues that we've been considering. I don't think there will be discussions here until after Javier Solana meets with Mr. Larijani next week in Europe, which the Europeans have asked be undertaken, and that meeting is scheduled, I think, in the middle of next week at the European Initiative. So we'll see what happens after that meeting, but the United States has been considering this for quite some time, and we've got a lot of thoughts on it.

Reporter: (Inaudible) sanctions, though, or the details --

Ambassador Bolton: I'm not going to get into the specifics at this point because we do want to have further consultations with the other EU-3 countries, and that will occur in due course.

Reporter: Mr. Ambassador, what we heard from your conclusions, referring to public statement by Iranian officials, are there any credible intelligence that the United States has to prove that the Iranians intentions are dishonorable?

Ambassador Bolton: Well, there's a lot that we know that we can't talk about, and one of the reasons that I stress that you can build a case about what the Iranians are doing entirely from what's in the public domain is not to say that there aren't things in the public domain that we don't know that don't fully corroborate the idea that Iran is pursuing nuclear weapons and the capability to deliver them. But when you look at the range of things that the IAEA itself has said,

not the United States, not the EU-3, but the international agency charged with enforcement of safeguards agreement and the Non-Proliferation Treaty, that evidence alone is extremely compelling and sufficiently compelling to get a nearly unanimous Security Council decision compelling Iran to suspend its uranium enrichment activity, which Iran is obviously not doing. And that's why I think President Bush's characterization of their posture as one of defiance is absolutely right.

Reporter: There is some concern about the unanimity of the Council, especially in today's vote, Sudan, and that with Iran you won't get strong sanctions. Is there a certain line of sanctions that the U.S. won't go below what they want to punish Iran for their --

Ambassador Bolton: Well, it's a question that we really can't answer at this point. But I want to say, that while the unanimity of the Council is desirable from an obvious political point of view, we do not regard Council unanimity as a requirement. This is not the League of Nations. This is not the League of Nations, and the difficulties that the league had because of the unanimity requirement were expressly rejected by the drafters of the UN Charter in San Francisco. We don't need unanimity. We don't need unanimity.

As we demonstrated today in Sudan , while we're certainly prepared to try and seek the broadest possible support, we do not need a 15 to nothing vote for the Security Council to act.

Reporter: What's the message that you're seeking sanctions on Iran , perhaps even sanctions on Iranian officials, while allowing President Khatami to come here, giving him a visa? And do you expect to meet with him?

Ambassador Bolton: No, I do not expect to meet with him. And you know, the circumstances of the visa, I think, have been addressed by the State Department spokesman in Washington. I don't have anything to add to that. I deal with nuclear weapons programs. Yeah?

Reporter: Obviously, two countries or five countries have a veto. If you are facing a veto, are you prepared to go outside the Security Council to get some kinds of sanctions against Iran?

Ambassador Bolton: Well, first, I'm not sure that you need to go immediately to speculation about a veto. Let me return to the statement agreed to by the foreign ministers of the five permanent members. And if you read it, it's pretty unambiguous about the commitment they make -- all of them, all of them -- to seek sanctions. And the condition that they laid down, that they agreed to in Resolution 1696 has now come to pass. So it is a -- it may happen that there's disagreement about the sanctions. But remember also that when a permanent member abstains, it is acquiescing in a resolution being adopted, so that as long as we have nine other votes, abstentions by permanent members still allow us to bring a resolution into force. So there's not -- it's not just a question of vote yes or veto.

Reporter: What do you say to -- I mean, even if you get the vote for sanctions, what do you say to officials like the Russian Defense minister, who says it's too early to get the sanctions, it's not urgent, and even if you get them, they won't work?

Ambassador Bolton: Well, I have a great deal of respect for Sergey Ivanov, having had the privilege of negotiating the withdrawal of one treaty and the entry into force of another. But I would say that his foreign minister has really

answered that question in the joint declaration that the Perm 5 foreign ministers, along with Germany , came up with, where they said expressly they were going to go down the sanctions route if the circumstances we now face came to pass.

Reporter: (Inaudible)

Ambassador Bolton: I think that the question of the workability of sanctions obviously depends on what they are and how they're adopted. But I think there's a substantial history that sanctions can have a dramatic effect on national policy, and that would be our hope here as well.

Reporter: There's a UN report on the resources of the Congo that's relevant to this, that reports on 200 kilograms of uranium that were stopped in Tanzania, and recent -newspapers have said they were bound for Bander Abbas in Iran. Some people think that's out of a spy novel. Some people think that the Bush administration is relying on that intelligence. Are you aware of that report? And how does it play into your views here?

Ambassador Bolton: I don't think I'm aware of the report, so I don't think it plays into my views here. Yes, sir?

Reporter: Ambassador, Kofi Annan's going to be in Iran shortly. Any --

Ambassador Bolton: Sorry. Say that again.

Reporter: Kofi Annan, the Secretary General, is going to be in Iran shortly. Is there anything he can usefully do? Is there actually a danger he could do more harm than good on this situation? What would you encourage the UN's message to be?

Ambassador Bolton: He should tell the Iranian government to comply with Resolution 1696 and suspend all uranium-enrichment activity, unambiguously, period, close quote.

Reporter: Any sanctions timeline (Inaudible)? Let me put it another way because you hate the word "timeline." We have at the end of September --

Ambassador Bolton: You could guess I'm probably not going to answer this question, right?

Reporter: In the last week of September, we have heads of state and foreign ministers coming here. Do you think that they will be dealing with that by a vote at that time?

Ambassador Bolton: You know, I'm sure that if we were able to reach agreement and the ministers could adopt the resolution, that would be a very positive way to send a signal to Iran. Knowing how negotiations take place in the Security Council, and following my general pattern of not predicting the timing, I will duck the question. But we intend to let this meeting between Mr. Solana and Mr. Larijani take place next week, and then we'll be consulting here and in capitals about where to go from there. And we're certainly ready to proceed here in New York , when we're given the instruction to do so. Okay, thanks very much.

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