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Ambassador Sanders on Iran's Choice Regarding Nuclear Weapons**Says Iran should halt weapons program or face political isolation**

Iran's Choice

(The following article by Ambassador Jackie W. Sanders, President Bush's Special Envoy for Nuclear Nonproliferation and the U.S. Representative to the Conference on Disarmament, appeared in The Wall Street Journal on January 28. There are no republication restrictions.)

(begin byliner)

Iran's Choice

By Ambassador Jackie W. Sanders

Special Envoy for Nuclear Nonproliferation

On Nov. 29, 2004, the International Atomic Energy Agency's Board of Governors adopted a resolution that once again deferred reporting Iran to the U.N. Security Council for violations of its IAEA nuclear safeguards agreements. Following the IAEA's certification that Iran had finally begun adhering to the terms of an agreement it struck with Britain, France, and Germany (the "EU-3") to suspend all activities related to uranium enrichment and reprocessing, the U.S. accepted consensus on the adoption of the resolution. We have, however, substantial reservations and doubts about Iran's good faith. The IAEA director general has described Iran as facing a "confidence deficit." This is quite right. Iran has repeatedly demonstrated bad faith, and the U.S. has long lost any illusions that Iran's ultimate intentions are peaceful.

Iran's first suspension promise was made under similar circumstances in October 2003, when Iran committed to stop all enrichment-related activities if the Europeans would block U.S. efforts to report Iran to the Security Council for its violations of its IAEA nuclear safeguards agreement. These violations included clandestine efforts, over two decades, to develop a uranium conversion and enrichment capability using equipment and nuclear technology, equipment and designs procured from the A.Q. Khan network -- the same network that supplied equipment and nuclear weapons designs to Libya.

A subsequent IAEA Board of Governors resolution in November 2003 confirmed that Iran had committed multiple "breaches" and "failures" of its safeguards agreement, which, under to the IAEA statute, required the Board to report this to the Security Council. The Board decided, however, to defer such action in order to give an EU-3 diplomatic initiative a chance. This decision was predicated upon Iran's commitment to suspend all enrichment-related activities and upon Iran's statement that it had provided a complete picture of its nuclear activities to the IAEA in October 2003.

Unfortunately, Iran's October 2003 declaration was not a complete picture: It omitted, for example, its secret work with sophisticated P-2 centrifuges supplied by A.Q. Khan. Over the succeeding year, Iran also proved unwilling to honor its suspension commitments. Iran never stopped producing centrifuge components, and continued to challenge the definition of suspension, adopting new positions diverging from those of its EU-3 negotiating partners and the IAEA. Finally, last summer, Iran repudiated its promises altogether and resumed full-scale work on uranium conversion to produce feedstock for enrichment in the very same centrifuges Iran had pledged (but refused) to stop building.

In November 2004 -- again faced with the prospect of a Security Council referral -- Iran again promised to suspend all enrichment-related activities. Even as Iran notified the IAEA of the agreement, however, it used a different definition of

suspension than that contained in the agreement it had just signed with the EU-3. Iran further eroded international confidence by rushing to produce as much uranium feedstock as possible before the suspension deadline.

Delaying proceedings of the IAEA Board, the Iranians then attempted further to revisit the terms of the suspension commitment, by pretending that the agreement's prohibition of "all assembly, installation, testing, or operation" of centrifuges did not in fact prohibit using a number of centrifuges for "research and development" purposes. This ploy was overcome by a last-minute compromise in which the IAEA agreed to use video surveillance of the disputed machines instead of physical seals. Iran's success in negotiating a departure from the IAEA's normal safeguards standards may have implications as a precedent for future IAEA monitoring of suspect sites and equipment -- in Iran and elsewhere.

Iran has committed not to undertake "testing" of its centrifuges, but senior Iranian officials have disputed the meaning of "testing," and Iran may attempt to continue research and development work. Iran has stated that suspension is merely "temporary" and that it will never give up its "right" to enrich uranium.

The U.S. believes Iran is engaged in a clandestine effort to develop nuclear weapons. The portions of Iran's previously secret nuclear program which dissident disclosures and IAEA investigations have revealed represent part, but not all, of Iran's secret nuclear-related activity. So far, Iran has refused to make the sort of strategic choice we saw Libya make last year: a clear decision to relinquish the pursuit of nuclear weapons.

How can the world help bring Iran to that point? First, the IAEA should not allow Iran a moment's rest until all outstanding questions about Iran's activities are answered. Iran's safeguards violations should be reported to the Security Council as required by the IAEA Statute. If Iran breaks its suspension pledge, the IAEA Board must also report this as a threat to international peace and security. There is no need to remove the issue of Iran from the IAEA, and we do not wish to do so. But there is every reason to involve the Security Council, which has the international legal and political authority that will be necessary to address this situation. Only the Council has the power to require Iran to take all necessary measures to restore international confidence, and to reinforce the IAEA's authority to ensure that we all get the necessary assurances of its peaceful intentions.

Quite apart from how the IAEA chooses to handle the Iran situation, the U.S. reserves all of its options with respect to Security Council consideration of the Iranian nuclear weapons program. After all, under the U.N. Charter, any member may bring to the Council's attention any situation that might endanger international peace and security.

If we take controlling the proliferation of nuclear weapons seriously, we must all work to ensure that non-compliance becomes more costly than compliance. The EU-3 and other Board members must make clear to Iran that it faces a stark choice. The choice is between continued noncompliance with its NPT (Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty) obligations -- which will only put Iran under greater diplomatic, political, and economic isolation -- or verifiably and irreversibly abandoning its nuclear weapons program and ending its destabilizing pursuit of uranium enrichment and plutonium reprocessing capabilities, a significant step that would help restore confidence that Iran can once again be a constructive member of the international community.

The choice is Iran's, but all nations are obliged to persuade Iran to make the right choice by escalating these issues in their own relations with it. Nations should also increase cooperation in efforts to fight proliferation, including interdictions of shipments under the Proliferation Security Initiative -- which exposed the A.Q. Khan network -- and the imposition of sanctions on entities involved in WMD- or missile-related shipments to Iran. The U.S. hopes that Iran will comply with its most recent promises to suspend enrichment-related activity. But even if Iran does finally honor its commitments, for those who take international peace and security seriously, suspension is just a first step.

(Amb. Sanders led the U.S. delegations to the September and November 2004 IAEA Board of Governor meetings in Vienna.)

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