

IAEA talks with Iran break down

By Peter Symonds
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Talks between the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and Iran broke down on Friday over IAEA demands for access to a sensitive military site. The failure of the negotiations, ahead of a quarterly IAEA report expected this week on Iran's nuclear programs, has prompted new threats from Israel.

Under pressure from the US and its allies, the IAEA has insisted that its inspectors visit the Parchin military base, where it claims Iran might have carried out specialised explosive tests related to building a nuclear warhead. Tehran, which is a signatory to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), has to date rejected such an inspection, pointing out that Parchin is not a nuclear facility.

Iranian officials have hinted that they might permit access to Parchin, despite not being required to do so under the NPT. Iran's ambassador to the IAEA, Ali Asghar Soltanieh, said after the talks that it was "a very complex issue" as it involved his country's "national security." IAEA chief inspector Herman Nackaerts told the media there were no plans at present for another meeting.

The IAEA is far from being an impartial body. Allegations about the Parchin military base are just one aspect of a controversial appendix, headed "Possible Military Dimensions to Iran's Nuclear Program," contained in an IAEA report last November. Much of the appendix was not new and depended on doubtful intelligence from foreign agencies, including the US and Israel. Previous IAEA director Mohamed ElBaradei, who was replaced by Yukiya Amano in 2009, had refused to publish the document because of its doubtful character.

The Associated Press reported being told by diplomats that the IAEA had gone one step further by establishing a "dedicated team" of about 20 experts focussed entirely on Iran's nuclear programs. One diplomat likened the plan to the agency's Iraq "Action

Team" —a squad of experts that operated in the 1990s, devoted to investigating Iraq's alleged efforts to build nuclear weapons.

The failure of last Friday's talks is bound up with the virtual collapse of negotiations between Iran and the P5+1 grouping—the US, Britain, France, Russia, China and Germany. The last summit in Moscow in June ended without any agreement for a further top-level meeting. Iran rejected an ultimatum to halt uranium enrichment to 20 percent, ship its stockpile of that material out of the country and shut its Fordow enrichment plant. The US refused to concede Tehran's demands for an easing of economic sanctions or an acknowledgement of Iran's right under the NPT to enrich uranium for peaceful purposes.

The breakdown of international negotiations has been followed by escalating Israeli threats to launch an unprovoked attack on Iran's nuclear facilities. Speaking on Friday in reference to the upcoming IAEA report, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, said there was now "further proof that Iran is galloping toward obtaining nuclear capability and that it continues to ignore the demands of the international community."

Speaking to Channel 2 News on Friday, Israeli Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman again indicated that the government was prepared to attack Iran, declaring there was no way that "the State of Israel can accept a nuclear Iran." Israeli deputy parliamentary speaker Danny Danon commented to the Associated Press: "We have seen too many teams, too many summits, too much talk. It is about time to take action."

Iran has repeatedly denied US and Israeli claims that it plans to build a nuclear weapon. As a NPT signatory, its nuclear facilities, including the Fordow and Natanz enrichment plants, are monitored and inspected by the IAEA. By contrast, Israel, which has refused to sign the NPT or allow inspectors into the country, has a

substantial arsenal of nuclear bombs and the means for delivering them.

Details from this week's IAEA report have already been leaked to the media, asserting that hundreds of new centrifuges have been installed, mainly at the Fordow plant, which is built deep underground. Tehran has also been adding to its stockpile of 20 percent enriched uranium, which it insists is required to fuel a research reactor in Tehran that produces medical isotopes. Uranium enriched to 20 percent is well below the 90 percent level required to build a nuclear weapon.

At this point, the Obama administration has played down talk of any imminent attack on Iran. White House spokesman Tommy Vietor said on Friday that, while Iran "is continuing to violate its international obligations," there was "time and space" for a diplomatic solution.

A White House official told the *New York Times* that Iran's enrichment activities, as confirmed by the IAEA report, would "add to Iran's ability to produce more 20 percent low-enriched uranium." He pointed out, however, that any "breakout"—that is, production of weapons grade uranium "would not be a quiet affair: the IAEA is in the facility regularly and would detect a move" to build a weapon. He said the work at Fordow violated UN resolutions, but "it is also not a game-changer."

Nevertheless, the US is pressing for the IAEA board of governors to formally rebuke Iran over its failure to cooperate with the agency. The Obama administration, in collaboration with the European Union, has imposed draconian sanctions on Iran that block its key oil exports. At the same time, the Pentagon has built up its military forces in the Persian Gulf, including two aircraft carrier battle groups, in preparation for a potential military attack on Iran.

Iran is currently hosting a summit of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM). Opening the gathering on Sunday, Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Salehi pointedly noted that NAM had previously called for the elimination of all nuclear arsenals. "We believe that the timetable for ultimate removal of nuclear weapons by 2025, which was proposed by NAM, will only be realised if we follow it up decisively," he told delegates.

These comments underline the hypocrisy of the US-led confrontation with Iran. While Washington is threatening to launch a war against Iran over its alleged

plans to build a nuclear weapon, it is an open secret that Israel has a nuclear arsenal. The Obama administration is exploiting the nuclear issue as a means of fashioning a regime in Tehran, in line with US ambitions for dominance of the energy-rich regions of the Middle East and Central Asia.

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