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Rabat Speech: Iran's Nuclear Ambitions: Two Paths to the Bomb, Another Path to Peace

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at the Moroccan Center for Strategic Studies, Rabat, Morocco**

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The United Nations Security Council, by unanimous vote, last month imposed a first set of international sanctions on Iran. The Security Council imposed these sanctions after Iran's leaders repeatedly defied the international community and violated their international obligations. Iran has now joined those countries, like North Korea and Sudan, under Chapter VII sanctions.

The Security Council's action was based on two concerns: First, Iran's continued failure to cooperate with the International Atomic Energy Agency. Second, Iran's determined pursuit of capabilities to produce highly-enriched uranium and plutonium.

These capabilities are not necessary for peaceful nuclear uses -- but they are two primary paths to building nuclear weapons. The rest of the world wants Iran to pursue a different path -- a path to peaceful engagement and peaceful benefit from nuclear power.

Today I would like to explain:

- Why the nuclear ambitions of Iran's leadership constitute a grave threat to us all.
- How we must act together to convince Iran's leaders to give up their dangerous pursuits.

Iran's Failure to Cooperate

Mohammad ElBaradei, the Director General of the International Atomic Energy Agency, has submitted report after report on Iran's nuclear program.

Last November's report, like previous reports, highlighted Iran's failure to provide full transparency to the Agency and to meet the Agency's specific requests for information, sampling, and access to facilities and individuals.

Iran has limited where inspectors can go, denied entry to senior inspectors, declined interviews with key individuals, and refused Agency requests to upgrade monitoring capabilities.

By refusing full cooperation, Iran has failed to answer troubling questions. Let me give three examples:

First, Iran has failed to satisfy IAEA concerns about ties to the A.Q. Khan network.

This illicit trafficking network was not a purveyor of peaceful technology. Rather it was the most sinister of black markets, selling nuclear weapons technology -- from blueprints to manufacturing equipment -- to countries like North Korea and Libya when it was seeking nuclear weapons.

Second, Iran has failed to meet the IAEA's request to turn over a document from the A.Q. Khan network on machining uranium metal into hemispheres. The IAEA reports that such a document is only relevant to fabricating components for nuclear weapons.

Iranian authorities refused to hand over even a copy of this document. Instead, they confiscated and destroyed an IAEA inspector's notes on its contents.

Third, Iran has failed to explain apparent connections between undeclared uranium conversion activities, the testing of high explosives -- a critical element of any nuclear weapon program -- and the design of a missile warhead.

These apparent connections, together with other ties to Iran's military, suggest what the Director General has called a "military-nuclear dimension" to Iran's nuclear program.

The many troubling questions and Iran's failure to help answer them are why the Director General has reported again that, after three years of intensive investigation, he still cannot verify the peaceful nature of Iran's nuclear program.

Iran's Two Paths to the Bomb

The main technical hurdle standing between a leadership bent on acquiring nuclear weapons and assembly of those weapons is acquisition of the necessary fissile material: highly-enriched uranium or plutonium. Iran is developing the capability to produce both.

Uranium Enrichment

At a pilot plant in Natanz, Iran is working to master the technology to enrich uranium and preparing to start large-scale operations.

Natanz is not a normal commercial enterprise. Until revealed to the world by Iranian dissidents, Iran's authorities tried to disguise it as an agricultural research center. The large, underground enrichment halls were hidden from overhead observation. The entrance to these underground halls and their power supply were cleverly masked. The blueprints for the centrifuges being installed there were procured illicitly through the A.Q. Kahn network.

Once the complex at Natanz was exposed to the world, Iran's leaders claimed it was needed to enrich uranium for nuclear power reactors. But Iran has no nuclear power reactors. The one power reactor under construction at Bushehr will receive fuel from Russia. And Iran has yet to present a credible program for any follow-on reactors.

Seventeen countries with nuclear power purchase their fuel on the international market rather than making the expensive and unnecessary investment in uranium enrichment. These include technologically-advanced countries like Sweden and Finland. Iran could do the same, especially now that three major European countries have offered legally-binding assurances of fuel supply.

Instead, Iran is defiantly pushing ahead with uranium enrichment. President Ahmadinejad has announced that Iran will start operation of a 3,000-centrifuge capability in the big underground halls at Natanz by March 20, the end of the Persian year.

Three thousand centrifuges, once operating successfully, could produce enough highly-enriched uranium for a nuclear weapon in less than a year. Alternatively, and perhaps more worrisome, the operation of these centrifuges could help Iran develop and hide a covert enrichment capability at a location unknown to the international community.

Plutonium Production

Meanwhile near Arak, a city south of Tehran, Iran has inaugurated a heavy water production plant and is building a 40-megawatt heavy water reactor.

Iran claims that the heavy water reactor at Arak will be used to produce medical isotopes. Experts dismiss this claim. Light water reactors are the global standard for medical isotope production. Moreover, an existing research reactor in Tehran is already underutilized for this purpose.

What worries the UN and the IAEA are that heavy water reactors are well suited to produce plutonium for nuclear weapons. In fact, a 40-megawatt reactor, like the one Iran is building at Arak, could produce enough plutonium for one or more nuclear weapons a year.

Because of this concern, country after country has turned down Iran's request for assistance in building the heavy water reactor at Arak. In November, the IAEA Board refused to approve Iran's request for assistance in building the reactor. In December, the UN Security Council mandated that Iran suspend this dangerous project.

The Threat Posed by Iran's Nuclear Ambitions

Iran's nuclear activities are not consistent with a program that is peaceful, and more and more countries are convinced it is not. More and more governments have come to the same conclusion: That Iran's nuclear program -- with its history of secrecy and violations, its ties to the A.Q. Kahn network, its connections to Iran's military -- is actually a cover for developing a nuclear weapons capability.

The pursuit of a nuclear weapons capability by the leaders in Tehran threatens Iran's neighbors and threatens the wider world community.

Iran's leaders are the world's most active sponsors of terror. Iran's leaders actively oppose Middle East peace. Iran's leaders support violence in Gaza, Lebanon, Iraq. Imagine those same leaders armed with nuclear weapons.

- A nuclear-armed Iran could embolden its leaders to advance their ambitions across the Middle East.
- A nuclear-armed Iran could pose an even greater threat to Middle East peace.
- A nuclear-armed Iran could cause neighboring countries to re-evaluate their nonproliferation commitments. This could destroy the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, a cornerstone of international peace and security. This could spark a nuclear arms race in one of the world's most volatile regions.

A Path to Peace

Our goal is to prevent this scenario through diplomacy that is resolute, sustained, and global.

We have worked with Europe, Russia, China, and other like-minded countries to present Iran's leaders with a clear choice. The negative choice is for Iran's leaders to maintain their present course, ignoring international concerns and their international obligations.

The positive choice, the constructive choice, the choice that would most benefit the Iranian people, is for Iran's leaders to cooperate and to take credible steps to assure the world that their nuclear activities are solely peaceful. This must start by Iran meeting IAEA and Security Council requirements to suspend activities related to uranium enrichment and plutonium production.

Iran suspending these dangerous activities would allow negotiations to begin on a package of incentives offered last June by six Foreign Ministers from Europe, Russia, China, and the United States.

The package offers substantial economic, political, and technological opportunities for Iran. In the nuclear field, these include:

- reaffirmation of Iran's right to nuclear energy in conformity with its NPT obligations;
- support for building new light-water reactors, using state-of-the-art technology;
- participation in a joint uranium enrichment venture in Russia; and
- legally-binding assurances of fuel supply for future reactors.

The package also opens the prospect for political dialogue and economic cooperation beyond the nuclear field.

To show our full commitment to diplomacy, the United States offered to join in the negotiations, but only if Iran suspends the activities of concern.

Backing Diplomacy with Sanctions

Unfortunately, Iran's leaders have spurned this six-country offer and ignored previous requirements of the Security Council. As a result, the Security Council has acted to back diplomacy with sanctions.

On December 23, the Security Council unanimously adopted Resolution 1737. The resolution requires Iran to cooperate fully with the IAEA in resolving the many outstanding questions about its activities. The resolution also reconfirms the Council's earlier mandatory suspension of Iran's activities related to uranium enrichment and extends that requirement to heavy water reactors. These suspensions are to be verified by the IAEA.

Since Iran failed to comply with the Council's previous requirements, this resolution imposes an initial set of sanctions designed to hinder Iran's pursuit of nuclear weapon capabilities, including delivery systems.

These initial sanctions include:

- prohibitions on trade in equipment and technology associated with enrichment, reprocessing, and heavy water projects;
- prohibitions on trade in equipment and technology associated with nuclear delivery systems; prohibitions on technical or financial assistance associated with these prohibited items;
- freezes on financial assets of key individuals and entities associated with sensitive activities;
- a requirement that governments report on the travel of these individuals; and
- limitations on IAEA technical cooperation with Iran's nuclear program.

The new resolution is significant for three reasons.

First, after many months of hard work, the resolution was adopted unanimously. Russia and China voted affirmatively. "Non-Aligned" countries like Congo, Ghana, Peru, and Tanzania voted "yes." So did Qatar, the Council's Arab member.

Second, the resolution places Iran among the small number of countries under Chapter VII sanctions. Iran's leaders, have further isolated themselves and the Islamic Republic from the international community. They have put their country in the same class as North Korea -- certainly not a place of envy.

Third, the sanctions are limited -- but real. They target equipment, training, and technology, including dual-use equipment. They target specific civil and defense entities involved in Iran's nuclear and ballistic missile programs. They target specific individuals like General Safavi, commander of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps and an active proponent of Iran's nuclear program.

Next Steps

The Security Council asked the IAEA Director General to report in sixty days -- by February 21. In the meantime, and until Iran's leaders meet the Council's requirements, the world community must take three courses of action.

First, UN member states must take immediate action to implement the initial sanctions imposed by Resolution 1737.

Second, the UN Security Council must stand ready to consider additional measures once it receives the Director General's report.

Third, like-minded countries must impose measures beyond Resolution 1737 to reinforce the pressure on Iran's leadership to comply with the resolution.

In fact, pressure is already mounting. Governments, companies, and the market are imposing "de facto sanctions" penalizing Iran's government for its bad behavior and bad economics. European banks are limiting their transactions with Iran. Multinational corporations are holding back investments. Japan has limited its investment in Iran's oil field development.

Oil production is critical to Iran's economy, but foreign cooperation is critical to Iran's oil production -- and Iran's oil minister recently admitted that overseas banks and financiers have decreased their cooperation.

The Choice for Iran's Leaders

Iran's leaders have a choice.

They can continue to move to large-scale enrichment, as Iran's president has defiantly proclaimed. This will only lead Iran deeper into isolation and sanction.

Or Iran's leaders can celebrate their country's nuclear achievements -- then suspend those of international concern. This would allow the Security Council to suspend further action and Iran to pursue a negotiated outcome, one that would provide peaceful benefits and address global concerns.

We hope that Iran's leaders will make the right choice:

- serious negotiation over continued confrontation;
- international engagement over international sanction;
- peaceful nuclear benefits over the two paths to the bomb.

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