**Ahmadinejad coming to America?**

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Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad has requested a visa to attend a high-level conference next week at U.N. headquarters to review progress on the 1970 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, according to senior U.N. officials and diplomats.

The development raises the prospect that the Iranian leader may use the high-profile conference to challenge efforts by the Obama administration to rally international support for measures aimed at preventing Tehran and other potential proliferators from acquiring nuclear technology. U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton will lead the U.S. delegation in the nuclear talks, which begins Monday.

The move comes as the permanent five members of the Security Council --Britain, China, France, Russia, and the United States -- and Germany have been negotiating the text of a new sanctions resolution against Iran. The United States had hoped to conclude the negotiations on Iran sanctions before the start of the nuclear conference, fearing protracted discussions could undercut U.S. efforts to push for reforms on the treaty.

"I believe you will see a sanction regime coming out by the end of this month, beginning of next month," U.S. Vice President Joseph Biden said Thursday on ABC's The View talk show.

The United States and its European allies are seeking passage of a resolution that would impose a comprehensive arms embargo on Tehran, restrict investment in Iran's energy industry, and authorize the seizure of Iranian vessels suspected of transporting banned weapons.

U.N. diplomats said that Ahmadinejad wants to address the nuclear gathering on Monday, the same day that Clinton speaks. An Iranian official declined to confirm whether the Iranian president planned to come.

U.N. diplomats said it remained unclear whether Ahmadinejad would use the event to launch a political attack on the U.S. and European push for sanctions, or whether he would announce a new deal aimed at heading off council sanctions.

Iran announced earlier this week that it is willing to restart a discussion with U.N. Security Council members over a nuclear fuel-swap proposal by the International Atomic Energy Agency. The proposal would allow Iran to ship its low-enriched uranium abroad in exchange for a purer grade of uranium that could be used to fuel and Iranian research reactor that produces nuclear isotopes for medical purposes.

"There is a possibility for an exchange of views," Iran's foreign minister, Manouchehr Mottaki, said Tuesday, following a meeting with his Turkish counterpart.

Iran has repeatedly expressed interest in the fuel-swap arrangement, only to change its mind. China and Russia, who are reluctant to impose sanctions on Iran, have been pressing Tehran without success in recent months to reconsider and accept the fuel-swap deal. U.N. council diplomats said they suspect that Iran has revived the issue to stall discussion on a fourth round of U.N. sanctions.

Turkey and Brazil, both of which hold nonpermanent seats on the Security Council, have also begun talks with Iran aimed at striking a deal on the fuel swap. On Tuesday, Turkey's Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu, following his meeting with Mottaki, said Turkey would be willing to serve as a mediator in a fuel exchange.