**U.S. Tries Restart of Talks With Iran**

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WASHINGTON—The Obama administration is pushing to revive a failed deal for Iran to send some of its nuclear stockpile overseas in exchange for assistance with peaceful nuclear technology, according to senior U.S. officials. The aim is to try to reduce Tehran's ability to quickly produce an atomic weapon.

Washington and other Western capitals are hoping Tehran will return to the negotiating table because they believe a fresh round of international economic sanctions against Iran—put in place after the previous fuel-swap deal fell apart last year—has begun to bite hard.

The U.S. is accelerating its efforts to present Iran with a new offer as part of broader talks on Iran's nuclear program planned for Vienna next month, according to three officials briefed on the diplomacy. Such a meeting would mark the first direct negotiation between U.S. and Iranian officials on the nuclear issue in more than a year.

On Tuesday, Tehran began loading Russian-supplied fuel rods into the core of its Bushehr nuclear plant. Iranian officials said they hoped the Bushehr plant, which the U.S had lobbied Russia to delay, could begin producing power in two to three months. Tehran continues to maintain its nuclear intentions are peaceful, and Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad has remained publicly defiant toward the international community about Iran's program.

U.S. officials have been talking with allies about ways to expand the original fuel-swap deal to remove more of the stockpile, because Iran has been enriching more uranium since the previous talks broke down. Instead of 1,200 kilograms discussed then, Iran would need to agree to release or secure at least 50% more, or 1,800 kilograms, to stay below bomb-making levels, according to nuclear experts.

One idea the U.S. raised would send some of the stockpile overseas for eventual use in the Bushehr plant. But France rejected that idea because it risked legitimizing Iran's right to produce nuclear fuel, which the United Nations Security Council has opposed, spurring the sanctions. "We have to keep a focus on whether we're going to increase or diminish the pressure on Iran," said a European official briefed on the discussions.

Since the sanctions took effect, scores of international corporations and banks have severed their business ties to Iran, and Iranian businesses have said they've faced shortages of fuel and foreign exchange. Still, Western diplomats don't know what reception Tehran would give a new fuel-swap plan. During the most recent U.N. General Assembly in New York in September, U.S. officials indicated they thought Mr. Ahmadinejad was open to pursuing friendlier contact with the West, only to be disappointed when he gave a vitriolic anti-U.S. speech.

The original fuel-swap deal sought to ship more than half of Iran's low-enriched uranium stockpile to other countries in exchange for nuclear fuel usable in developing medical applications, but not enriched enough to make a nuclear bomb. Washington and its allies believe that if Iran's nuclear program is peaceful, it should be willing to have the fuel for civilian uses provided from overseas, reducing the potential for military diversion.

Talks on a new proposal among the U.S. and the five permanent U.N. Security Council members plus Germany picked up at the U.N. last month and are continuing, according to officials briefed on the diplomacy. But they have been complicated by differences among the allies over the timing and terms.

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The attraction of the initial deal, U.S. officials said, was that Iran wouldn't have been left with enough nuclear material to produce an atomic weapon.

Iran has grown its supply of low-enriched uranium over the past year to roughly 2,800 kilograms from around 1,800 kilograms as of September, according to the U.N.'s nuclear watchdog body, the International Atomic Energy Agency. Iran has also begun producing low-enriched uranium at levels closer to weapons-grade.

U.S. officials said the current talks are focused on securing a much larger amount of Iran's nuclear-fuel stockpile. The U.S. also is seeking to build on the fuel-swap arrangement that Iran reached with Turkey and Brazil in May. That called for Iran to ship out 1,200 kilograms of low-enriched uranium for conversion into fuel rods for the Tehran reactor, but didn't address U.S. fears about Iran enriching uranium further. "Any revised approach would have to address the deficiencies that the U.S. and other P5+1 countries have pointed out in the proposal made by Iran, Turkey, and Brazil in May," said a senior U.S. official involved in the diplomacy.

Other formulas continue to be discussed to secure a larger amount of Iran's stockpile of low-enriched uranium, according to the three officials briefed on the diplomacy. One would see a portion of Iran's low-enriched uranium stock, which is stored as a gas, converted into uranium oxide, a powder. Such a procedure could delay by months any Iranian effort to produce weapons-grade fuel, as the uranium oxide would have to be converted back into a gas.

The U.S. and its negotiating partners have also discussed allowing Iran to store its stockpile of low-enriched uranium in another country, such as Turkey. Tehran signed on to this provision in its May agreement with Turkey and Brazil. But the U.S. objected to Iran's ability to bring the nuclear fuel home without the approval of the IAEA or the international community.

The U.S. and its allies hope to meet with Iranian officials November 15-17 to discuss both the fuel-swap arrangement and broader international concerns over Iran's nuclear program.

"A revised arrangement cannot be a substitute for addressing our core concerns or the requirements of U.N. Security Council and IAEA resolutions," the U.S. official said. "It's a modest step to improve confidence."

Iranian officials on Tuesday said there hasn't been any agreement yet on a formal agenda for the talks. "Discussions are under way about the date of the negotiations, the venue and content of the negotiations," Foreign Ministry spokesman Ramin Mehmanparast told reporters in Tehran.

Mr. Ahmadinejad has said that in any future talks the international community must acknowledge Iran's rights to develop nuclear fuel and address the issue of Israel's assumed nuclear-weapons arsenal.