

The US position has shifted. After initially stressing precisely the troubling questions now being investigated by the IAEA (see for example, 'Strong leads and dead ends', *Washington Post*, 8 Feb. 2006 <tinyurl.com/bdt4e2>), the US now says these issues are irrelevant.

On 29 Oct., White House spokeswoman Dana Perino said there was no doubt about Iran's plans because: "this is a country that is enriching and reprocessing uranium and the reason that one does that is to lead towards a nuclear weapon." (AFP, 29 Oct.) What about Japan? Germany?

The US is now concentrating solely on the demand that Iran suspend enrichment of uranium in its facility at Natanz - where enrichment has not proceeded above 3.7%, according to the IAEA (30 Aug., pdf: tinyurl.com/3b55q17). To be weapons-grade, uranium needs to be at 90%.

TRUST

ElBaradei explained to the *FT*: 'If I am saying Iran today is clean, in other words, the programme is under safeguards, would that be good enough for the international community to say, well, we now trust Iran, and therefore Iran can go ahead with its enrichment programme? That frankly is the key question.. it's the risk assessment of Iran's future intention.

'The argument is that if Iran were to have that [enrichment] technology it could then go into a break-out scenario... leaving the [NPT/IAEA inspection] system altogether, develop the highly enriched [weapons-grade] uranium, which they cannot have as long as they are under [IAEA] safeguards... Whether that distrust scenario will go away, after we come clean here with regard to the past and the present, is frankly the million dollar question.'

For Iran, the million-dollar question is why, if it is proved never to have had a nuclear weapons programme, it should be distrusted more than any other member of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, and forced to give up its nuclear technology rights.

If the IAEA rules Iran clean, this question should be uppermost.

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IRAN'S LAST CHANCE?

New inspection programme offers chance of peace

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CRUCIAL WEEKS

At the time of writing, the Iran is only weeks away from a possible turning point in the drawn-out crisis over its nuclear power programme. It is possible, and increasingly likely, that by the end of the year the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) will clear Iran of the charge of having pursued a nuclear weapons programme.

This declaration, if it comes, is almost certain to be misrepresented and under-reported in the mainstream, leaving it to concerned (and prepared) citizens to seek the maximum public awareness of the IAEA's work, and to try to mobilize opinion against a US-UK military strike on Iran now 'justified' on other grounds.

The IAEA report may be Iran's last chance of avoiding military action.

THE WORK PLAN AND THE IRAQ PARALLEL

On 21 Aug. 2007, Iran and the IAEA reached a new agreement on nuclear inspections, and drew up a 'work plan' designed to clear up suspicions in all the murky areas of Iran's nuclear history.

This process is very similar to the final and decisive 'draft work programme' drawn up by UN weapons inspectors in 2003 to resolve the questions surrounding Iraq's suspected weapons of mass destruction (WMD) programmes.

In that case, the UNMOVIC inspection agency identified 'key remaining disarmament tasks' to be performed by Iraq in order to establish that there were no materials, weapons or ongoing research and



development programmes connected to chemical or biological weapons.

That 'draft work programme', which would have established that Iraq had no WMD, was presented to the UN Security Council for approval on 17 March 2003. If approved, it would have initiated several months of decisive inspections, during which time it would have been politically impossible to attack Iraq. (See *JNV Briefing 35* <tinyurl.com/yod3ww>)

President Bush avoided this nightmarish prospect by delivering his 48-hour ultimatum to Saddam Hussein on the same day the 'draft work programme' was presented (17 March), effectively starting the Iraq war.

In the present case, however, President Bush has been unable to derail the IAEA. The US has made its anger clear. The *Guardian* reports that ElBaradei 'has been increasingly at odds with Washington and London, who believe he is straying beyond his job description and freelancing as an independent statesman.' (18 September <tinyurl.com/2djp4a>)

THE KEY REMAINING ISSUES

The areas of suspicion in the work plan are (pdf: tinyurl.com/33b2k2):

- (1) Iran's plutonium experiments (an ingredient for nuclear weapons);
- (2) whether or not Iran has secretly built P2 centrifuges (it currently operates outdated P1 centrifuges) to make it easier to create weapons-grade uranium.
- (3) the contamination of some equipment at at Tehran university with Highly Enriched Uranium;
- (4) designs bought from Pakistan for shaping uranium metal into hemispheres, a key step in fashioning nuclear bombs;
- (5) Iran's experiments with Polonium-210 (which has some civilian uses, and can be used in triggering nuclear bombs);
- (6) alleged attempts by the Iranian military to create an independent, covert, supply from the uranium mine at Ghachine in Iran;
- (7) documents on a laptop apparently 'stolen' in Iran, and now in the possession of the CIA, which allegedly set out:
 - (a) designs for a secret uranium conversion facility (to produce 'Green Salt', useful in producing weapons-grade uranium);
 - (b) designs for modifying Iranian ballistic missiles to take nuclear warheads; and
 - (c) high explosive testing useful for nuclear weapon design.

A TIMETABLE FOR PEACE

The first four steps are to take place in sequence, with the IAEA satisfying itself on each question before proceeding to the next. The first topic has been dealt with. On 30 Aug, ElBaradei told the IAEA Board that the plutonium question was 'resolved'. (pdf: tinyurl.com/3b5q17)

The P2 file is close to resolution. On 28 Oct., IAEA deputy director Olli Heinonen said on his arrival in Tehran: 'Most probably, this will be the final session of talks held between Iran and the agency concerning the P1-P2 centrifuges.' (Press TV [Iran], 28 Oct. <tinyurl.com/24pm2z>)

According to reports in Iran, Heinonen also said that cooperation from Iran was "good". (Reuters, 30 Oct., <<http://tinyurl.com/y09n5b>>)

There is a tight timetable for resolution of all these outstanding questions by the end of 2007. ElBaradei will report to the IAEA Board on 22 November, which is - inaccurately - being portrayed by many in the media as the deadline for completing the work plan. For example, see this exchange with the *Financial Times*, one of the best-informed and sensible mainstream sources of information on Iran:

ELBARADEI: *I think I, I said publicly and I told them [Iran] privately obviously, this is your litmus test, because you committed yourself to come clean, and if you don't, you know, nobody will be able to come to your support. You know, I made it very clear to them that if, as I said before, if they don't, it will completely backfire.*

FT: *And that means coming clean by November 22nd?*

ELBARADEI: *Yes, absolutely, I mean, this is a work plan. Wait, the 22nd, is when we report to the board, I said before, it would take us two to three months, that's like the end of the year, I mean, 22nd is the time I have to come to report because of our board of governors.*

(*FT*, 2 Oct., <tinyurl.com/2mlmht>)

US/UK OBJECTIONS

The point of the work plan is to clear up suspicions about Iran's past nuclear activities, suspicions heightened by the fact that (a) Iran developed its known uranium enrichment programme in secret, only confirming its existence after an Iranian exile group made a detailed accusation; and (b) Iran bought much of its nuclear technology from the criminal proliferation network run by A.Q. Khan of Pakistan.