

## Security Council Is Stalled Over Iran's Nuclear Program

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[UNITED NATIONS](#), March 21 — After nearly two weeks of haggling, a deadlocked Security Council put off full consideration of [Iran's](#) nuclear program on Tuesday, amid indications that Iran was close to taking a major step in its efforts to enrich uranium.

Britain and France had promoted a statement calling on Iran to abandon its uranium activities, which the West believes is part of a nuclear weapons program. With American support, Britain and France want a two-week deadline with threats of possible punishment, but have met resistance from China and Russia.

The Europeans said Tuesday that they would consult on possible revisions that could draw the unanimous support needed for the statement from all 15 Security Council members. The postponement followed a four-hour meeting on Monday of senior Foreign Ministry officials of Britain, China, France, Germany, Russia and the United States.

"The impact on the negotiations which we are trying to do here was not as positive as we would have wished," said Emyr Jones Parry, the British ambassador. "So we're having to maintain the momentum. That is the basis problem."

The impasse generated frustration among European and American negotiators, who said within the last week that the International Atomic Energy Agency in Vienna had briefed officials on Iran's uranium activities at its Natanz complex.

Diplomats from different countries, who declined to be identified because they were discussing sensitive classified information, said Iran appeared on the verge of assembling 164 centrifuges, the number needed to form a "cascade" mechanism that could enrich uranium for nuclear energy or, eventually, bombs.

In effect, they said the 164 centrifuges would significantly increase Iran's ability to make weapons, in defiance of demands by the United States, Britain, France, Germany and the United States that it cease its uranium activities immediately.

"What this means is that time is not on our side," a European diplomat said. "It means that while we are negotiating, Iran is not wasting its time."

Various diplomats also expressed a sense of urgency.

France's ambassador, Jean-Marc de la Sablière, said: "It seems to me we will need some time, a few days, I suppose. But we don't have much time. I guess that we will have to come to the end of discussion very soon. But I cannot tell you exactly when."

A long delay in progress could persuade the Western nations to abandon the plan for a statement and push instead toward a resolution, a much stronger action, but one that would require a vote. Resolutions need nine votes to pass but can be defeated by a veto, which China and Russia, as permanent members, each have the power to cast.

R. Nicholas Burns, under secretary of state for political affairs, turned aside such speculation, saying in a telephone interview from Washington that he had heard strong sentiment for a statement at the Monday meeting, at which he represented the United States.

"We believe that the members of the Security Council all have an interest in issuing this presidential statement, because the most important step we can now take is to send a common, united, clear message to Iran — that is, suspend your nuclear program and return to negotiations," he said. "It may take some time to achieve the final wording, but we believe that goal is attainable."

The step that the Council is trying to agree on is a relatively mild one, a nonbinding statement that would list Tehran's failures to comply with demands from the International Atomic Energy Agency, the United Nations nuclear watchdog, and urge Iran to resume the suspension of its uranium enrichment.

China, while backing Russia, has proven more conciliatory in the talks, introducing a revised draft asking the director general of the nuclear agency, [Mohamed ElBaradei](#), to report on Iran's program to his agency and the Council.

The original text, first circulated two weeks ago, called for sending the progress report to just the Council. China and Russia feared that such a move would diminish the role of the agency and put the matter in the hands of the Council, which has the power to sanction Tehran. Beijing and Moscow oppose sanctions.

China and Russia are also against a provision asking Dr. ElBaradei to submit his report in two weeks. China's ambassador, Wang Guangya, has recommended a four- to six-week time frame. Andrei Denisov, the Russian ambassador, has suggested a June deadline.

Mr. Wang said Tuesday that senior officials at the nuclear agency had told Chinese diplomats that two weeks afforded too little time. "To give them 14 days is to ask them not to do it," he said. He said the Russians were troubled by the references to Iran's activities being a threat to international peace and stability, words that he said could become a pretext for imposing sanctions. Asked whether Beijing shared this concern, he said, "I believe that the Russian concern has its logic."

The Russians also object to listing the demands on Tehran, arguing that they are included in the International Atomic Energy Agency resolution. Among the demands are that Iran suspend all enrichment-related and reprocessing activities and put into effect the "additional protocol" to the country's nuclear agreement, which gives inspectors the right to ask for exceptional access to plants.

Mr. Wang said China favored a "brief political statement" that would reinforce the authority of the nuclear agency, call on the Iranians to cooperate and put "some pressure" on them to do so.

Mr. de la Sablière, the French ambassador, voiced doubt that much of the specific language could be dropped. "We are not in favor of a too general statement," he said. "We want a precise and strong message."

Mr. Jones Parry, the British ambassador, also expressed misgivings at the idea of wholesale changes. "What France and Britain both feel is that if this text is to be amended further, it should be amended in order to come to an agreed conclusion," he said. "And if there is no prospect of an agreed conclusion, we won't be amending the text."

*Steven R. Weisman contributed reporting from Washington for this article.*

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