

January 4, 2006

Iran to Resume Its Nuclear Work; U.S. Warns of Seeking Restraints

By [ELAINE SCIOLINO](#)
The New York Times

PARIS, Jan. 3 - [Iran](#) announced Tuesday that it planned to restart nuclear research, a move that jeopardized an agreement with the Europeans, complicated a Russian initiative and prompted an American threat.

The decision, contained in a brief letter delivered Tuesday to the International Atomic Energy Agency in Vienna, declared that Iran "has decided to resume" research and development "on the peaceful nuclear energy program" that was suspended under an agreement with France, Germany and Britain in late 2004.

The letter did not define the research, but said the activities would resume Monday and be conducted "in accordance with Iran's safeguards agreement" with the I.A.E.A., the nuclear monitoring agency of the United Nations.

"Research" has been a code word for experiments in enrichment of uranium at the previously secret facility at Natanz in central Iran. There is particular concern that Iran intends to reopen that site, perhaps to conduct modest enrichment experiments or even to manufacture and assemble centrifuges for enrichment, the most sensitive part of the nuclear fuel cycle.

Iran's move complicates a Russian initiative to break the deadlock over whether Iran has the right to enrich uranium. [Russia](#) has proposed that Iran be allowed to conduct uranium enrichment activities in Russia, as a way to guarantee that Iran's nuclear program is peaceful. A delegation from Moscow is scheduled to arrive in Tehran for talks this weekend, although Iranian officials have been less than enthusiastic about the proposal.

The United States warned Iran that it could face unspecified consequences if it resumed nuclear activities. "If Iran takes any further enrichment-related steps, the international community will have to consider additional measures to restrain Iran's nuclear ambitions," said Sean McCormack, a State Department spokesman.

After receiving the letter, I.A.E.A. officials described its contents to representatives of the 35 countries that make up its board, which could censure Iran by referring its case to the United Nations Security Council.

Iran has argued consistently that its decision to enter into an agreement with the Europeans to suspend all uranium conversion and enrichment activities was temporary, not required under its international treaty obligations and dependent on receiving a broad range of economic, technological, political and security incentives which it said have not been forthcoming. It has

also insisted repeatedly that it has a sovereign right to develop the nuclear fuel cycle in its own territory.

Indeed, in defending Iran's decision, the letter said that the suspension of the country's nuclear-related activities under the European agreement had been "voluntary and non-legally binding."

But the United States, and to an increasing extent the Europeans, are convinced that Iran is determined to become a nuclear power and have taken a forceful stance in trying to ban Iran from conducting any nuclear activity that could help in a weapons program.

This most recent decision is certain to further erode foreign confidence in Iran's leadership.

The Iranian president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, has faced broad international condemnation recently for his inflammatory statements that the Holocaust is a myth and that Israel should be "wiped off the map." On Sunday, Mr. Ahmadinejad said Europe had decided to create Israel as a "Jewish camp" in the midst of Muslim countries as the best way to rid Europe of Jews.

Last August, Iran angered its European negotiating partners and the United States when it resumed the process of converting uranium at its site at Isfahan, a clear violation of the European agreement, but only a preliminary step in mastering the nuclear fuel cycle.

Criticism of Iran's decision to restart nuclear research and development activities was swift.

Besides the American threat, a statement from the British Foreign Office called Iran's letter "unhelpful and provocative," while Cristina Gallach, a spokeswoman for the European Union, branded it "a step in the wrong direction."

France called on Iran to reverse its decision. "We want Iran to abide by the suspension of all activities related to enrichment and reprocessing," a Foreign Ministry spokesman, Jean-Baptiste Mattei, told reporters.

Mohamed ElBaradei, the director of the nuclear agency, also called on Iran in a statement to maintain "its suspension of all enrichment-related activity as a key confidence-building measure" and to resolve other issues about its nuclear program.

The I.A.E.A. has repeatedly criticized Iran for failing to fully cooperate with requests to open certain facilities to its inspectors.

The agency has summoned Iranian officials to a meeting in Vienna on Wednesday to explain their intentions on research.

In a proposal presented last spring to the three European governments, Iran outlined steps that it said would advance its nuclear program, while providing assurances that its program was peaceful. Among the proposals was the installation of 3,000 centrifuges at Natanz.

On Monday, the head of the national security commission in Parliament, Alaeddin Borujerdi, said in Tehran that Iran was "determined" to reactivate the Natanz facility.

Iran could be gambling that even if it restarts nuclear research activities, it would once again avoid international sanctions. Despite threats by both the United States and the Europeans to refer Iran to the Security Council for punitive action after it resumed activities at Isfahan, the countries were forced to back down in the face of opposition from China and Russia, which each have veto power there.

In Tehran on Tuesday, Mohammad Saeedi, the deputy head of the atomic energy agency, said on state television that Iran would resume research, without providing details.

He stressed that the research "has no connection with the production of nuclear fuel," but did not specify whether that ruled out all activities related to uranium enrichment.

He also portrayed the decision as one of national self-interest, explaining that the suspension of key nuclear activities under the agreement with the Europeans had hurt Iran. "During this period our experts incurred heavy losses and many of our researchers have lost their jobs," he said.

The letter to the I.A.E.A., which was signed with a scrawl, but without a typed name identifying the official, was written on stationery of the Permanent Mission of Iran to the United Nations in Vienna.

Parts of the letter were quoted in an I.A.E.A. news release while other parts were disclosed by a European diplomat who spoke on condition of anonymity because of the fears surrounding the nuclear issue.

Copyright 2006 The New York Times Company