

Iran's Progress in Uranium Enrichment Represents No Casus Belli

by Muriel Mirak-Weissbach

When the Iranian government announced the “good news” on April 11, that its scientists had succeeded in enriching uranium at their Natanz facilities, predictably, the neo-con war lobby shifted into high gear, to demand “consequences for that action and that defiance” at the UN Security Council (Condi Rice), because the Iranians were “not paying attention to what the Security Council has said because they are clearly continuing in their enrichment activities” (John Bolton).

More rational responses were to be heard from quarters intent on preventing any military attack against Iran. The Russians and Chinese, although expressing concern over the news, insisted that no military action be contemplated, and that the process being followed by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), which has a new report due at the end of April, should continue.

One point cogently made by saner forces, was that, although achieving enrichment constituted a step forward scientifically for Iran, it did not indicate any capability for weapons-grade uranium production. Both Sergei Kiriyenko, head of the Russian Nuclear Power Agency, and Igor Linge, deputy director of the Russian Academy of Science's Safe Atomic Energy institute said that a weapons-grade level of industrial production would be a long way away. A similar point was made by U.S. intelligence analyst Anthony Cordesmann.

The reality is that Iran has done nothing to create a *casus belli*, noted Lyndon LaRouche. The negotiating track must continue.

Speaking a New Language

Why did Iran decide to announce the breakthrough at this time, just prior to a visit by IAEA chief Mohammad ElBaradei? Both Expediency Council head Hashemi Rafsanjani and Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad indicated the reasons, obliquely, in their announcements of the breakthrough. Rafsanjani said, “When ElBaradei arrives in Iran, he will face new circumstances”; Ahmadinejad stated that his government would now be able to “talk to the world in a different language.”

The Iranian government thinks it has established a better bargaining position, as a result of the announced success with enrichment. Ahmadinejad made a point of underlining Iran's willingness to continue cooperation with the IAEA, which has

been surveilling the activities. As one Iranian think-tanker, Saeed Laylaz, put it, “Their goal is to claim a very big victory and achievement, and say, ‘Now that we have reached our goal, and public opinion has been satisfied, we will go for compromise with the UN Security Council, and the U.S.’”

In fact, when ElBaradei held his talks in Tehran on April 13, with Ali Larijani, head of the Supreme National Security Council, and Gholam-Reza Aqazadeh, head of Iran's Atomic Energy Organization, the language was a bit different than in the past. Iran agreed to increase the level of cooperation with the IAEA, but did not make any commitments to suspend enrichment activities. IAEA spokeswoman Melissa Fleming said the Iranians had agreed to work closely with the agency to clear up any “gaps” in the history of their program. ElBaradei reportedly told the officials: “Iran should not deal with the matter emotionally. The request is that Iran suspend uranium enrichment *for a specific period* for confidence-building with the international community” (emphasis added).

In statements to the press, ElBaradei stressed that there is plenty of time to negotiate. Larijani said Iran would “announce its stance during the remaining two weeks,” before the IAEA delivers a report.

Setting the Issues Straight

What will happen now? There is no obvious answer, for the simple reason that the ostensible issue—Iran's nuclear program—is not the issue at all. As U.S. statesman Lyndon LaRouche has stressed again and again, there is no good reason for the United States and Great Britain to threaten Iran. LaRouche pointed to Vice President Dick Cheney, and his controller, George Shultz, as those driving for confrontation. It is this “international crowd of private bankers,” he explained, “who are the new fascist threat of this time. . . . They're attacking Iran, as going after Iraq, was not because of anything in Iraq; it's not because of anything in Iran.” Such an attack, he warned, could “create global chaos. And that is what this crowd is looking for. . . . It's called ‘permanent warfare/permanent revolution’; permanent regime change: that's the policy.”

Therefore, LaRouche argued: “The key thing is to shift, and say, we've got to buy time, we've got to get off this thing now. What the Russians are doing is crucial. Let it work. Buy time. Build confidence. Get rid of Cheney. Get rid of Bush.

Build confidence for the future. But then, come in with some positive proposals on cooperation and development. Nuclear power is one of them.”

Proposals on the Table

The Russian proposal to which LaRouche referred is an offer, not only to Iran, but to all countries with civilian programs, to collaborate on a joint project for uranium enrichment on Russian soil. Thus far, the Iranians have accepted the proposal in principle, but have maintained their claim to have at least a research capability on their national territory.

Another proposal on the table comes from the International Crisis Group (ICG), which launched its plan in February. (The ICG report is available at www.crisisgroup.org, under reports.) The proposal was presented to a Berlin conference on security in late March by one of its authors, Dr. Tim Guldemann, the former Swiss ambassador to Iran.

In an interview with *EIR* (April 7, 2006), Guldemann explained that he had been involved in discussions with “leading American nuclear scientists. We had discussions with Iranians and there, given the clear position on the Iranian side not to give up the enrichment, the question was, well, is there any way out: In other words, what are the dangers—or possibilities—of getting closer to the military option by an enrichment under different conditions. And the idea of a very limited enrichment scheme under very severe inspections and collateral conditions has been developed with the conclusion that such an approach would not increase the danger of military break-out, above all compared to a scenario of Iran’s confrontation with the West on the issue.”

Guldemann said the ICG formulation was a fall-back position if the best solution—no enrichment—did not work.

The ICG proposal envisages a first phase, during which Iran voluntarily suspends its uranium program for two to three years, while all outstanding questions with the IAEA are settled. The additional protocol to the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), which the Iranian government had been following, would be ratified by parliament, and Iran would receive further trade benefits. In second phase, during which IAEA inspectors seek to ascertain that no *undeclared* activities have taken place, Iran would be allowed to have a program for low enrichment; fuel thus produced would be immediately delivered to the Bushehr plant in fuel rods, under strict surveillance, to ensure no diversion.

The ICG proposal represents a hard-nosed, pragmatic response to the need to respect the country’s right, by international law, to nuclear energy, without harboring any illusions. As Guldemann put it: “My assessment—we don’t have it in the report—is the following: We have to make the distinction between the will of having the military option, and the intention to build the bomb. I am convinced that the Iranians want to achieve the military option, that is, to achieve a level in their nuclear industry, above all by mastering the enrichment technology, which would allow them—under changed condi-

tions—to develop the bomb from there. And they want to achieve this level within the NPT, and they are ready to accept all international controls which go with it. They say they have the full right to do this under the NPT. Other countries such as Japan, Brazil—have also done it.

“I think, we have only three options: First we get this development under control by engaging them into a process of mutual confidence building with a very tight framework of tough conditions, international controls and an increasing level cooperation which they do not want to jeopardize. Or second: The Iranians, by being antagonized by an increasing international pressure and sanctions, would hide their nuclear program behind a smoke screen which leaves us in the dark about what is going on. Or third: a military strike would not destroy the nuclear program, but would delay it by some years. However, for this case my assessment is, that then the Iranians—presumably with a broad nationalistic support in their own country—would shift their aim from the military option to the nuclear bomb.”

In Guldemann’s view, the situation in Washington vis-à-vis the Iran nuclear dossier, is “open.” In fact, there are various indications that the ICG approach is being actively discussed, and in some quarters, endorsed. It was explicitly embraced at the same Berlin security conference, by former National Security Advisor to President Carter, Zbigniew Brzezinski, a member of the ICG board. Recently, after the announcement of Iran’s enrichment achievement, Richard Haass, of the Council on Foreign Relations, issued recommendations that dovetailed with the ICG approach. Also, Dr. Ali Asghar Soltanieh, Permanent Representative to the IAEA in Vienna, has signalled openness to the ICG proposal.

To generate momentum for a negotiated, diplomatic solution, direct talks between the United States and Iran would be advisable. The factional brawl in Washington has merely kept it on the table. U.S. Ambassador to Iraq Zalmay Khalilzad had been tasked to be the point man for eventual talks.

Officially, the Iranian side agreed to hold talks, again only on Iraq, after the head of the largest Shi’ite political force in Iraq, Abdel Aziz Hakim of the SCIRI, publicly floated the proposal. Iranian sources confirmed to *EIR* on April 10, that the Foreign Ministry was studying the matter, and was essentially awaiting the go-ahead from Washington. Unconfirmed reports say Rafsanjani, while on tour in the Persian Gulf, may have established contacts with some American circles. Speaking to the Saudi daily *Al-Hayat* on April 13, Rafsanjani said that U.S.-Iran talks would focus exclusively on Iraq, but, if they were to go well, they could lead to talks on other issues.

In short, it is in Washington that the conflict has to be resolved, not between the United States and Iran, but between those like Dick Cheney, Donald Rumsfeld et al, who are committed to a military adventure which could blow up the region and the world, and those who wish to avoid such madness. As LaRouche has insisted, for the latter to prevail, Cheney must go.