

NORTHEASTERN UNIVERSITY

Iran's Nuclear Program

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The analysis of Iran's current and potential nuclear weapons capabilities, from the perspective of The Haaretz newspaper of Israel.

Dr. Olli Heinonen, former IAEA Deputy Director General and Head of Safeguards spoke to the Haaretz newspaper regarding the facts and potential of Iran's nuclear weapons program. Heinonen visited Iran's nuclear facilities on multiple occasions, and also directed the inspection of the sites. The challenge facing Iran and other states that are trying to develop nuclear weapons technology is not the design of the systems, but rather the production of the fissile material. Iran has demonstrated their missile and warhead capacity (programs which were halted under the IAEA treaty), and is working towards being able to process and enrich uranium to the state necessary for High Grade Weapons. The interview with Heinonen aimed to ascertain the extent to which Iran has developed its nuclear weapons program; specifically, the uranium enrichment programs and non-compliance (and neglect) with the IAEA were the worrisome topics addressed.

There is nothing currently stopping Iran from leaving the NPT (by way of Article X), in which case the nation would be free and able to (eventually) produce the nuclear fissile material to the 90% level necessary for high grade weapons. This Highly Enriched Uranium could then be used within the ballistic and warhead missiles that the country is already capable of manufacturing. However, Heinonen claims Iran is not quite at the state where they could produce bombs with 90% enriched uranium, due to difficulty in attaining raw materials, and the inefficiencies within their centrifuges. The metals required to manufacture higher-grade centrifuges are difficult to obtain, leading to Iran's current position.

Through various modes of communication, the IAEA has a solid understanding of the progress that is being made towards HER and High Grade nuclear weapons. Iran's shifty motives and trickery have caused significant question to their true activities, however there is no evidence of a secret uranium enrichment plant, and no signs that point to Iran having the capability (materials, namely) for such a project. Heinonen also explained that while he did not feel as if the IAEA missed anything during their investigations in Iran, "...States that belong to the IAEA are obligated to report to us about nuclear

facilities, equipment and materials in their possession. Should they not do that, we cannot discover things on our own, unless information comes to our attention” (Melman). In as much, it is difficult to know the true experiments and enrichment programs that are taking place, since Iran is not cooperating with and facilitating the inspections by the IAEA.

Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad was quoted on Iran’s state-run TV network saying that “...from the very beginning we told them [UN Security Council] that they have no option but negotiating with Iran. But it should be based on justice. [We ask] on the basis of what framework are you going to negotiate? Is it based on justice and respect?” (Reuters). He has also asked the parties to declare their opinion on Israel's alleged nuclear arsenal; Israel has said it does not rule out striking Iran militarily to prevent it from becoming a nuclear state. The US, EU, and UN Security Council have been enforcing increased sanctions on Iran for their non-compliance, aiming to get Iran into negotiations; the council wants Iran to suspend enrichment programs for civil and military purposes in exchange for trade and diplomatic benefits, however Iran remains firm on the position that their nuclear ambitions are purely for peaceful purposes. They refuse to accept the UN’s demands, and will continue to process the uranium, a right the state feels it is granted under the NPT for civil and medical purposes.

SOURCES:

Melman, Yossi. “Behind the Scenes of UN Nuclear Inspection of Iran”. October 22nd, 2010. Haaretz.com. <http://www.haaretz.com/weekend/week-s-end/behind-the-scenes-of-un-nuclear-inspection-of-iran-1.320599>

Reuters. “Ahmadinejad Aide Says Iran Not Ready to Talk Nuclear With Global Powers”. October 31, 2010. Haaretz.com. <http://www.haaretz.com/news/international/ahmadinejad-aide-says-iran-not-ready-to-talk-nuclear-with-global-powers-1.322116>