

China deals blow to Western efforts to punish Iran

Russia also adds fuel to the Fire

By [Global Research](#)

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China has dealt a blow to Western efforts to increasediplomatic pressure on Iran over its nuclear programme by droppingout of a meeting to discuss tougher sanctions against Tehran.

Russia, which like China opposes further UN sanctions against Iran, added fuel to the fire by announcing on Friday that the UN nuclear watchdog would soon start inspecting and sealing atomic fuel boundfor an Iranian reactor.

The West fears Iran wants to develop atomic weapons but Iran deniesthis. Tehran says it wants only to generate electricity.

Political directors from Britain, France, Germany, the United States,Russia and China were due to meet on November 19 to assess reportsabout Tehran's nuclear programme from the United Nations and fromEU foreign policy chief Javier Solana.

"I think it's partly related to genuine travel difficulties, but alsolinked to resistance on the broader question of sanctions from thatquarter," a European diplomatic source said of China's decision.

Russian state-owned nuclear fuel producer TVEL said inspectors fromthe International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) will begin preparatorywork on November 26 until November 29 on a shipment of nuclear fuelbound for the Bushehr nuclear plant.

"We are ready to provide IAEA specialists with all the conditionsthey need to do their work," Konstantin Grabelnikov, deputy head ofRussia's Novosibirsk Chemical Concentrate Plant, which is preparingthe fuel, said in a statement.

Russia has given no specific date when it will send the nuclear fuelto Bushehr, but says it would be sent six months before the plant'sstart-up.

Because of payment delays, the plant's start-up has been put backto at least 2008, Russian officials have said.

The United States said on Thursday it would work with its allies fora third round of UN sanctions after the IAEA reported Iran had madeimportant strides towards clarifying past nuclear activities but alsosaid major questions remained.

But some European diplomats say it may not be possible to persuadeRussia and China - both permanent veto-wielding members of theSecurity Council like France, Britain and the

United States -to support a third round.

As a result, France is pushing for the European Union to impose its own separate US-style sanctions against Iran.

On Friday, French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner said the report had done little to clarify matters. "There remain areas of darkness in the operations which for a very long time were hidden by the Iranians in their nuclear development programme."

While Russia and China appear to be breaking away from the United States, Britain and France, the sixth country involved in negotiations -Germany - appeared to take a harder line.

"The foreign minister has made clear that if this is the case we would take up this issue in Europe and consider together what steps could be taken by Europe," spokesman Martin Jaeger told a regular news conference when asked what Germany would do if the Security Council failed to approve tougher sanctions.

Iran called on its Western enemies to apologise because the IAEA report showed Iran had been telling the truth about its atomic plans.

"The latest IAEA report confirms that Iran's nuclear activities are civilian and peaceful so what is the motive behind imposing sanctions?" President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad told Al Arabiya television.

"The Iranian nuclear file is just a pretext ... should the nuclear folder be folded, they would find another pretext."

The United States has not ruled out military action if diplomacy fails to halt Iran's atomic work.

During a joint appearance with Japanese Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda, President George W. Bush said Washington could "never tolerate" Iran developing nuclear capability.

"They should not imagine that if they wage such a war that the region alone would be set ablaze," said Ahmadinejad. "The region will be exposed to serious dangers and the first whose interests will be harmed are the Americans."

Israel, which in 1981 bombed the Osirak nuclear power plant in Iraq to cripple Saddam Hussein's secret atomic arms programme, urged world powers to be tough on Iran.

"Israel believes it is incumbent upon the international community to send a crystal clear message to the leadership in Tehran that their nuclear programme is unacceptable and must cease immediately," Foreign Ministry spokesman Mark Regev said.

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