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PREVENTING A CRISIS IN U.S.–RUSSIAN RELATIONS OVER MOSCOW'S NUCLEAR TECHNOLOGY EXPORTS

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Washington and Moscow must prevent a crisis over Moscow's assistance to Iran's nuclear weapons program. On August 1, 2002, U.S. Secretary of Energy Spencer Abraham stated in Moscow that Iran is aggressively pursuing nuclear weapons as well as other weapons of mass destruction. On February 9, 2003, Iranian President Mohammad Khatami announced that Iran was mining its own uranium and would process its own spent fuel, raising concerns of a robust Iranian nuclear weapons program.

Russian nuclear exports, if unaddressed, could overshadow the current U.S.–North Korean nuclear weapons disagreement, derail U.S.–Russian relations, and destabilize the uneasy geopolitical equilibrium in Eurasia. The White House and the Kremlin should therefore develop measures to stop Iranian attempts to acquire nuclear weapons technology. They should also find an economic substitute for Russia's exports of nuclear technology to terrorist-supporting states—a substitute of equal or greater monetary value than Russian nuclear exports to Iran—and agree on a list of countries to which Russia will not export nuclear technology.

Damning Evidence. On December 13, 2002, CNN published commercial satellite imagery of two secret Iranian uranium enrichment installations in Arak and Natanz. U.S. State Department spokesman Richard Boucher stated that "Iran is actively working to develop nuclear weapons capability"

and declared, in a December 13 CNN interview, that Iran's energy needs do not justify these nuclear facilities. He also said that Iran flares more natural gas annually than the equivalent energy its future reactor could produce.

Thus, the alleged power-generation applications of the \$800 million Bushehr nuclear plant and the two follow-up nuclear reactors seem neither economically justified nor truthful.

According to U.S. intelligence and defense officials quoted in the December 16 edition of *The New York Times*, Iran is working on a nuclear weapons program—with Russian help—and, like North Korea, seems to be pursuing both enriched uranium and plutonium options for its nuclear weapons. In a December 13 interview with CNN's Christiane Amanpour, International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Chairman Mohammed El Baradei said that the alleged uranium enrichment plant could produce highly enriched uranium for nuclear bombs and that the heavy water plant could be used in the production of weapons-grade plutonium.

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Denials, Denials. After visiting Iran in December 2002, Russian Atomic Energy Minister Alexander Rumyantsev claimed that “Iran is using nuclear energy exclusively for peaceful purposes. There are no programs to create nuclear weapons or develop sensitive nuclear technologies.” He failed, however, to explain why Iran refuses to sign an agreement to return all spent fuel to Russia for reprocessing. Meanwhile, Moscow is going ahead with construction.

At a February 20 American Enterprise Institute panel, Henry Sokolski, Deputy for Nonproliferation Policy at the Department of Defense during the first Bush Administration, suggested that IAEA safety measures are not sufficient to prevent Iran from building nuclear weapons. Iran refused to sign the Additional Protocol that, as part of IAEA’s strengthened safeguards system, would require expanded declarations of all nuclear-related activities and allow intrusive inspections by IAEA; and the Bushehr light water reactor, the designs for a heavy water reactor that Moscow has sold to Tehran, and uranium enrichment technology all have military applications.

What to Do? The North Korean crisis demonstrates how quickly a country can pull out of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and expel international inspectors. Intelligence experts have suggested that Iran may choose to follow this path. Iranian leaders have repeatedly said that they are “entitled” to nuclear weapons. They flaunt both their hostility to the U.S. and their support of international terrorism.

While President Vladimir Putin declares his support for the United States in the war on terrorism, the Ministry of Atomic Energy is receiving hundreds of millions of dollars from supplying nuclear dual-use technology to Iran. Senior Russian policymakers, however, agree that cooperating with the U.S. to prevent nuclear proliferation is in Russia’s long-term strategic interest.

The U.S. should not stand idle while the mullahs in Tehran build their nuclear arsenals, just as Washington has not acquiesced to Saddam Hussein’s buildup of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. The U.S. should:

- **Develop consultations** between senior U.S. and Russian officials to prevent a grave confrontation over Russian proliferation policies toward Iran. The U.S. side should include the National Security Council, the Defense and Energy Departments, and the State Department’s Bureau of Non-Proliferation, Office of Arms Control and International Security, and Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs.
- **Offer Russia economic incentives** in exchange for full disclosure of past nuclear assistance and ending the technology transfer to Iran. The U.S. could offer to approve the storing of spent fuel from U.S.-built reactors around the world in Russia under American technical supervision; the financing of expanded nuclear security programs, including nuclear submarine dismantlement and chemical weapons destruction, under the Nunn–Lugar Cooperative Threat Reduction Program; the purchase of Russian oil for the U.S. strategic petroleum reserve; and other high-tech non-nuclear projects, such as civilian satellite launches.
- **Sanction companies** that supply nuclear material or technology to Iran, using legislation similar to the Iran Missile Proliferation Sanctions Act of 1997 and the Iran Non-Proliferation Act of 2000. Any entity that supplies technology or materials to such states or contributes to their development of nuclear weapons should be severely sanctioned, with proliferating companies, officials, and executives being denied all U.S. funds, visas, and licenses.

Conclusion. Russia’s credibility as a U.S. strategic partner in the war on terrorism is on the line. Presidents George W. Bush and Vladimir Putin have worked diligently to improve bilateral relations between Russia and the U.S. Now they must work even harder to prevent this strategic relationship from derailing over Iran’s nuclear weapons program, which is a threat to both countries.

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