



Latest IAEA Report on Iran: Continued Progress on Cascade Operations, No New Cooperation with IAEA

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The IAEA's latest report on Iran, issued November 14, 2006, contains no major revelations but does show that Iran is progressing in its work at the Pilot Fuel Enrichment Plant (PFEP) at Natanz, and continues to deny IAEA requests to resolve outstanding questions in a number of areas.

Natanz Operations: Significant Increase in UF6 Feed

The IAEA states that between August 13 and November 2, 2006, Iran reported that approximately 34 kg of UF₆ was fed into the centrifuges and enriched to levels below 5 percent U-235. Iran's August 31 report says that a total of 6 kg of UF₆ was fed into the then-single cascade between June 23 and July 8 (with no further UF₆ used until late August, the period covered in the latest report). This reflects close to a six-fold increase in the quantity of UF₆ Iran is feeding into its centrifuges, which the IAEA reports run continuously under vacuum and only intermittently with UF₆. This increase reflects both Iran's start-up of the second cascade in mid-October and its growing experience in cascade operations.

Though not stated in the report, ISIS has learned from a source with close knowledge of Iran's nuclear program that the low-enriched uranium (LEU) produced by the cascades is mixed with the tails (depleted uranium) from the cascade into the same collection cylinder at the end of the cascade, effectively meaning that though some LEU is produced, none is collected. ISIS also understands that Iran has not yet linked the two cascades, a step it must take in order to establish its competence in cascade operations.

No Cooperation with IAEA on Outstanding Issues

Iran continues to deny the IAEA access to information and experts that would help clarify a series of unanswered questions related to highly-enriched uranium (HEU) and plutonium contamination, and work on centrifuges. It has also not provided the IAEA with a copy of the 15 page document that Iran reportedly received from the A.Q. Khan network detailing work with uranium metal hemispheres which is relevant to nuclear weapons design. In explaining its refusal to address these issues, Iran referred to a letter of April 27, 2006 in which it expressed a willingness to resolve them "provided (Iran's) nuclear dossier is returned" to the IAEA, thereby foreclosing further consideration by the United Nations Security Council.

Plutonium and HEU Findings

Some media reports have highlighted the presence of HEU and plutonium particles found on samples taken at the Karaj Waste Storage Facility. This remains an area of concern to IAEA safeguards officials. ISIS notes however, that the HEU contamination is not a new finding—it was reported in the IAEA’s August 2006 report. Iran informed the IAEA in September that the containers were “used for the temporary storage of spent fuel from the Tehran Research Reactor” which in Iran’s view could explain the presence of HEU particles. The IAEA continues to examine this possibility. The plutonium is a new finding, reported for the first time today, and to which the response from Iran was received only today, precluding its mention in the report.