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Q&A WITH JIM CLANCY

International Community Puts Iran's Nuclear Program Under the Microscope

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JIM CLANCY, CNN ANCHOR: The international community puts Iran's nuclear program under the microscope. There is mounting pressure and mounting doubts about some aspects of its nuclear program.

CLANCY: On this edition of Q&A, is Iran coming clean on its atomic secrets?

CLANCY: Hello, and welcome to Q&A. The verdict of the International Atomic Energy Agency, the IAEA, Iran has not reported all aspects of its nuclear program. Remedies have been suggested but the stakes are high.

Iran, a member of what the U.S. president calls an axis of evil, accused by the U.S. of keeping secrets from the international community. We have to ask have we been down this path before and where does this leave Iran?

With us now, Andrew Koch. He's the Washington Bureau Chief of "Jane's Defense Weekly." From London Ali Safavi, he's a member of the National Council of Resistance of Iran, an Iranian opposition organization. And, in Jerusalem, we're joined by Brenda Shaffer of the International Security Program at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government.

Brenda, when you look at this IAEA report today finding on numerous counts 1.8 tons of uranium imported in 1991, not properly reported, nuclear facilities not revealed to the IAEA at all. The IAEA inspectors read about it in the newspapers. What does this report say?

BRENDA SHAFFER, KENNEDY SCHOOL OF GOVT., HARVARD: Well, obviously this is just the tip of the iceberg. I mean basically we're seeing things that are completely confirmed but obviously there's a lot more information. But, I think the response of IAEA is that they want some sort of diplomatic response not to bring it clearly to the Security Council but to find some way to work with the European Union, Russia, the U.S., and to get a different Iranian reaction.

CLANCY: Andrew Koch.

ANDREW KOCH, "JANE'S DEFENSE WEEKLY": Yes, good to be with you.

CLANCY: When you look at this report from the IAEA and I mean there's just a long list of things that it's telling us here that have not been done, that undeclared uranium, the use of uranium metal, uranium metal that's not for peaceful purposes usually, is it?

KOCH: Well, it's hard to know exactly what Iran did with the uranium because at this point they haven't come completely clean, as you've mentioned. Typically, uranium metal is used to make the cores of a nuclear weapon, so as you suggest that would not be for peaceful purposes. But there are possibilities under which you could use uranium metal in a reactor for, for example, civilian research, so it's technically feasible although, as you say, not normally conducted that way.

CLANCY: Ali Safavi, you are an opponent of the regime in Tehran. You've already picked sides in all of this. At the same time, I believe it is members of your organization or people who have come through you to the media that have literally revealed to the International Atomic Energy Experts what evidence was out there, what Iran was really up to. This wasn't offered up by Tehran at all.

ALI SAFAVI, NATL, COUNCIL OF RESISTANCE OF IRAN: Indeed. First of all, hi Jim, it's nice to be on your show. Let me say that the information that was provided to the international community was provided to the National Council of Resistance by the Iranian mujahaddin who had highly placed sources inside Iran.

And, in fact, even the current report which the IAEA has put out by and large relies upon the information that the Iranian mujahaddin had revealed, including of course the information on the sites in Natanz and Iraq, the uranium enrichment facility, the heavy water plant, and also of course the (unintelligible) electric which for the first time revealed was being used by the Iranian regime for centrifuge testing.

So, unquestionably there's no doubt in our minds that the Iranian regime is actively involved in a nuclear weapons program and I think it's about time that the international community put an end to its policy of tolerating such behavior and act decisively because if not stopped we are convinced that the Iranian regime will have a nuclear bomb by the year 2005.

CLANCY: Brenda Shaffer, do you buy that? Do you agree with that point of view?

SHAFFER: Well, I mean, definitely. I mean that the Iranians are actually trying to show us. We see right, you know, even the war with Iraq that actually Iran and North Korea were basically trying to show off that they're a lot more down the line, have events more in their nuclear programs than many intelligence services had surmised because they want to deter the U.S. and international community from acting.

But we're really at a very, very crucial hour in terms of Iran because basically we can see by the different materials, technologies, by the reports, basically they're at the point where they can almost, you know, go nuclear on their own. It's no longer about material from outside, scientists from outside. It's really that you can see they have the materials.

They have the ability, and now it's a very, very crucial political hour where they're going to make the decision do they take all those materials, technologies, and actually go nuclear, and that's why this is really the crucial hour for the international community.

CLANCY: Well, and certainly there are, you know, many but perhaps first among equals here is Russia, because Russia has provided a lot of the technology that has been built in Iran, but at the same time the U.S. has its own clients. Arms are sold on the open market.

Let me bring in here Andrew and ask you whether - how much grounds under international law can the world turn to Iran and say stop it you can't have nuclear weapons?

KOCH: Well, that's part of the point. Now, they did sign the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty under which they abided not to get nuclear weapons; however, there is an escape clause which says if they give six months' notice that they can withdraw from the treaty and that's the real fear.

To put a little finer point on what Brenda was saying was that Iran is approaching the point at which they're going to have to make a decision whether to withdraw from the NPT and go nuclear or continue to do what they're doing now, that is develop the capability to build a nuclear weapon and were the decision to do so be made sort of sit on the fence.

In some ways they're not violating at least too strongly their international obligations at the moment, yet they're building up the ability to go nuclear sometime in the future, you know, if they see the international situation going against them.

CLANCY: Ali, what do you think the plan is by the Iranian government? Do they want to just quietly develop the technology? Well, members of your group fixed it so it can't be that quiet, but now that push comes to shove which direction will Tehran go?

SAFAVI: You have to remember that the Iranian regime is isolated at home. In a government conducted survey, 94 percent of the Iranian population demanded regime change. The Iranian regime has a viable opposition on the ground, the Iranian mujahaddin, which seeks a secular representative government that wants to have gender equality, has elected a woman to head the future transitional government.

And, of course, the (unintelligible) isolated, so for them development of nuclear weaponry is a strategic decision. In fact, former President Rafsanjani and also the current President Hatami have said that development of nuclear weaponry for them is the only means to strategic survival against their enemies.

And, as you may know, they're on record as saying that they are committed to asymmetric warfare, meaning that given that they do not have the technological

advancement of the western countries that the only way for them to create a balance of terror is for them to develop nuclear weaponry.

And so, in that context I think as one of your guests correctly pointed out it's time to make a political decision and I think, quite frankly, that the past 24 years dealing with Iran has been a faint cycle of appeasement and accommodation and it's about time that some decisive action is taken and the elected National Security Council takes up the matter and deals decisively with Tehran.

CLANCY: All right. Brenda Shaffer, the IAEA said a tougher regime of inspections, access on short notice. Already Iran has told them flat out no access on some things that they wanted to do. Can the IAEA handle this for the U.N., for the world?

SHAFFER: Basically inspection isn't enough because what are we seeing each time simply Iran gets caught? You know we should - the Iranian transfers, how do we know about this, because simply you come to Iranians with evidence confirmed by China about the transfer and then, of course, when all the evidence is there they confirm it.

But the inspections aren't enough and I think following up on a point on Ali where we haven't - where we have some options here that we didn't have with Iraq and maybe not with North Korea is that many people in Iran themselves do not want this government to have nuclear weapons.

So, wide groups of the popular they're not happy about this regime having weapons and even people that when they look at different Iranian aspects of terror they say well rogue element or this, but there are many Iranians that don't want rogue elements or government to have nuclear weapons, and I think together the international community and the same people that Ali was addressing in Iran have a common interest here.

CLANCY: Brenda Shaffer, I want to thank you for being with us. I know that we're losing our satellite there, so Brenda thank you very much for joining us this day. I know you're a long way away from home and we appreciate you spending a little bit of time and sharing your expertise.

Let me get back to Ali and just ask you, Ali, as you see that, a lot of Iranian people don't want them to have nuclear weapons but this is a bargaining point. There is a possibility of negotiating here. Conflict can be resolved. While your group would like to see the overthrow of the government there, it's not necessarily in the cards even if they intend to build nuclear weapons.

SAFAVI: Well, I think that as far as the Iranian people are concerned I think the time for negotiation has come to an end. Remember it's been 24 years that this regime has been in power. It has executed hundreds of thousands of people, massacred 30,000 mujahaddin (unintelligible) in a matter of a few months in 1988.

It is heavily involved in the export of terrorism and fundamentalism. The Khobar Tower bombing, the Jewish Community Center in Argentina, the Marine barracks explosion in Beirut, Lebanon in 1983 and, of course, currently the heavy involvement in the internal affairs of Iraq and undermining the attempts to bring a civility to that country and, of course, the (unintelligible).

CLANCY: Now, Ali.

SAFAVI: In that context, really I think that time for negotiation is up and I think that the right of Iranian people for regime change ought to be recognized and I think that's the only way that the world can be safer with a regime change in Iran.

CLANCY: Andrew Koch, what's wrong with this picture because, as Ali lays it out there, boy there's something familiar to that, they're behind international terrorism, they're behind this and that's not everything proved we suspect this.

And, a lot of things that are said there at this point in time has the Bush administration at least given up and the Blair administration for that matter given up some of that, I don't know, the moral pressure that they could bring to bear for regime change, as Ali called it in this case. So, are they going to have to negotiate their way out, that's what I'm thinking?

KOCH: Well, the basic question that's floating around Washington now, because Washington hasn't really come up with an Iran policy other than the Bush administration. The question is how to get a government that's more amenable to western interests in power and there's clearly a debate here.

There are some who believe that the conditions are ripe for a potential overthrow of the government by Iranians themselves not by external intervention necessarily. On the other hand, the more - because of the political dynamic within Iran, the more external pressure that's applied from places like the United States, the more inside of Iran the forces of hardliners are strengthened.

It allows Iranian hardliners to sort of rally the country around them saying you see, you know, the United States is trying to get us. We're next and therefore we Iranians need to sort of circle the wagons if you will. And there's clearly two schools of thought in Washington on this point at the moment and I don't think either one of them has gained the upper hand.

CLANCY: All right.

KOCH: In some ways the Bush administration over the next several weeks or month will be sorting this out and trying to come up with a coherent policy.

CLANCY: Ali, I've got about a minute left. I'd like to divide it between both of you but I want you to go first. There's no obvious link between what's going on on the nuclear side

and the demonstrations by students in the streets but do you see something that's happening there?

SAFAVI: Well, obviously the demonstrations are an indication that the Iranian people, the vast majority of the Iranian people want a regime change. This is a point that needs to be underscored.

You are talking about 95 percent majority that want this regime to go and you have a five percent minority that wants to keep its grip and power and this includes both Hatami and Khomeini.

So, I think it would be a fatal mistake in my judgment, as the experience of the past 24 years has shown, to try to distinguish between the so-called hardliners and the so-called moderates in Iran.

CLANCY: All right.

SAFAVI: All of these people, the mullahs are cut from the same cloth and I think...

CLANCY: All right, let's...

SAFAVI: ...that it's time to recognize the yearning of the Iranian people for freedom and I think that would not come with giving concessions and continuing dialog with the current (unintelligible).

CLANCY: Andrew Koch, do you think that the regime of inspections that international pressure on Iran can guarantee a nuclear-free, a nuclear weapons free Iran?

KOCH: Clearly not pressure alone. The question is with nuclear weapons and inspections, all it does is delay the inevitable which is the spread of technology, nuclear technology being part of it.

It always has to be coupled with at the end of the day with some sort of a political conciliation. Countries and nations try to gain nuclear weapons because it's in their national interest to do so under certain circumstances. You have to change those circumstances, otherwise you can inspections forever but eventually the technology is going to leak out and eventually people are going to develop them.

CLANCY: Andrew Koch, the Washington Bureau Chief of "Jane's Defense," and Ali Safavi a member of the National Council of Resistance of Iran, gentlemen thanks to both of you as well as Brenda Shaffer for joining us for this edition of Q&A.