

Big powers fail to agree on Iran sanctions

Dossier sent to UNSC

AFP, Washington

The six major powers confronting Iran over its nuclear programme failed Wednesday to agree on sanctions to impose on Tehran and sent the dossier to their ambassadors at the United Nations for further talks, senior US officials said.

Senior diplomats from the six -- Britain, China, France, Germany, Russia and the United States -- discussed the sanctions during a videoconference Wednesday morning, State Department spokesman Sean McCormack told AFP.

"I think there is broad agreement on the potential sanctions that would be included, but not yet agreement on the specific items that would be in a resolution, that has to be worked out," he said.

The six have been debating for weeks over the kinds of sanctions to slap on Iran for ignoring an August 31 UN deadline for suspending a uranium enrichment programme that Washington and others fear will

be subverted to produce fissile material for nuclear weapons.

But China and Russia, which both wield veto power on the Security Council, have balked at imposing the kind of punitive measures sought by Washington, with the backing of Britain.

Undersecretary of State Nicholas Burns, who has led the negotiations for the United States, said the process could still drag on for days, delayed in part by more urgent consultations about sanctions to impose on North Korea after it announced that it carried out its first test of the nuclear bomb on Monday.

"It's a busy schedule at the Security Council this week," Burns acknowledged in an address to the Council on Foreign Relations in New York.

He admitted that discussions of sanctions against Iran that Washington had hoped to bring to the UN at the beginning of this week might not get underway until early

next week.

Iran says its enrichment programme is designed only to provide fuel for nuclear power stations and as such is allowed under the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

The five permanent Security Council members plus Germany drew up in June a list of 15 possible punitive measures against Iran as part of a "carrots and sticks" package that also included economic and political rewards if Tehran agreed to suspend uranium enrichment.

The plan, which was never officially released but was leaked to the press, called for a graduated series of measures, firstly targeting Iran's military programmes and later, if these fail, moving to broader political and economic sanctions.

McCormack confirmed that list being sent to the UN ambassadors was a "subset" of the sanctions included in the earlier document.

The broader list included an embargo on the export of goods and

technologies linked to Iran's nuclear and ballistic missile programmes, a freeze on assets related to the programmes and travel bans on nuclear and weapons scientists.

Tougher measures would prohibit financial transactions by individuals or organisations involved in the arms programmes and a ban on investment in entities engaged in the programmes.

Washington has been arguing in favour of imposing sanctions since Iran ignored the August 31 deadline.

But under strong pressure from China and Russia, which both have important economic ties to Iran and traditionally oppose sanctions as a diplomatic weapon, the US agreed to several additional weeks of negotiations aimed at convincing the Iranians to suspend enrichment and accept the incentives package.

Iraq death toll study has mixed reaction

AP, New York

President Bush says he doesn't believe it. Some experts have a problem with it. But several others say it seems sound. Such was the varied reception for a controversial new study that estimated the Iraq war has led to the deaths of nearly 655,000 Iraqis as of July.

Researchers from Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore and the Al Mustansiriyah University in Baghdad derived that estimate from a door-to-door survey, conducted by doctors, of 1,849 households in Iraq. Taking the number of deaths reported by household residents, they extrapolated to a nationwide figure.

The researchers, reflecting the inherent uncertainties in such extrapolations, said they were 95 percent certain that the real number lay somewhere between 392,979 and 942,636 deaths.

Even the smaller figure is almost eight times the estimate some others have derived.

The new study which attributes roughly 600,000 of the deaths directly to violence and 55,000 more to other war-related causes was released Wednesday on the Web site of The Lancet, a respected medical journal. But just how good is its conclusions?



PHOTO: AFP

Smoke and flames pour out of the side of an apartment building on the east side of Manhattan after being hit by a small plane Wednesday in New York amid foggy weather killing at least two people, US authorities and media reported. Flames and a trail of smoke billowed from two floors of the building on the affluent upper east side of Manhattan. Authorities confirmed a small airplane had struck the building on East 72nd street.

Plane crash brings back awful 9/11 memories

AP, New York

Even in a place accustomed to the murmur of terror alerts, a city that has accepted its subways and skyscrapers as targets, where you can almost block out roaring jets and blaring sirens these days, the news sent adrenaline racing.

For harrowing minutes at mid-afternoon Wednesday, before the exact location and scope of what happened became clear, people turned to televisions or read text messages from friends and knew only this:

A plane crashed into a building. And then came an emotion, hard to define and distinct to the five years since Sept 11, and probably more common here than anywhere else. You could call it relief, except relief is not usually laced with guilt.

It was a small plane or helicopter, nothing bigger. The most intense fire appeared on television to be visible through two windows, just two, in an Upper East Side high-rise. And later in the day, word that two people had been killed. Just two.

Still, even after authorities ruled out terrorism and the crash emerged as, in the words of a Homeland Security Department spokesman, a "terrible accident," it was impossible not to think of Sept. 11.

It was on the mind of Beata Jankowska, who works as a housekeeper on the 33rd floor of the very building that was hit, on East 72nd Street close to the East River in Manhattan.

"Everything reminds me of Sept. 11," said Jankowska, who was preparing a dinner of chicken masala when she heard an explosion, saw flames below her out the window and then raced down 33 flights of stairs to get out, taking nothing with her.



PHOTO: AFP

Tears flow as Australians attend a ceremony at the Bali Memorial overlooking Coogee Beach yesterday to remember the 4th anniversary of the Bali bombings in which 88 Australians died.

6 killed in Israeli airstrike on Gaza

AFP, Gaza City

Six Palestinians, including a teenage boy and three Hamas militants, were killed by Israeli fire in the Gaza Strip yesterday as troops mounted a fresh incursion as part of a four-month offensive.

The violence -- at a time of increased tensions between rival Palestinian factions -- came as an armed group linked to president Mahmud Abbas's Fatah party rescued a US student abducted by rival militants in the West Bank.

Five of those killed in the southern Gaza Strip belonged to the same family -- bystanders 13-year-old Suheib Iqdah, his 40-year-old father Adel, and three militants from the armed wing of ruling Islamist movement Hamas.

They died after an Israeli aircraft fired a missile into a group of people in Abassan, near the town of Khan Yunis, medical and security sources said.

Another eight Palestinians were also wounded, including people brought in overnight during exchanges of fire with Israeli ground troops who pushed into the territory a short distance across the border from the Jewish state.

One of the wounded later died. The Israeli military confirmed the air strike and the launch overnight of a ground operation targeting "against tunnels and other terror infrastructure" in the Khan Yunis area, saying its troops had come under fire.

"During that operation overnight there were several occasions in which gunmen opened fire on the forces. The forces returned fire and in all identified hitting six gunmen," a spokesman said.

"Other than that, there was an air force attack on a group of four armed gunmen who were identified approaching the forces and we identified hitting those gunmen," the spokesman added.

'US forces to stay in Iraq until 2010'

Gunmen kill 9 during raid on Baghdad TV studio

AFP, Baghdad

Gunmen killed nine staff at a television studio and bomb attacks rocked Baghdad on Thursday as Pentagon officials said plans had been laid to allow US forces to stay in Iraq until 2010 if needed.

This latest sign that the Iraqi crisis is far from over came as a gang stormed the offices of Al-Shaabia TV and slaughtered staff, including the general manager Abdul-Rahim al-Nasrawi, a minor Shia politician.

"We came in this morning and we saw the massacre. All were killed. We think gunmen broke into the house and killed them," said a journalist from the private satellite network, who asked not to be identified.

Iraqi security officials confirmed that there had been an attack on the station's premises, a converted house in downtown Baghdad.

Nasrawi runs a small and little-known political party and his satellite channel has not yet started broadcasting. There was no word from staff or authorities as to why it should have

been attacked.

A coordinated pair of bomb attacks killed at least five people and injured 10 more in a busy square in central Baghdad, security sources said.

The blasts rattled windows a kilometre (half-a-mile) away and a plume of dust and smoke rose from the city skyline from Tayaran Square.

One police officer was killed and three wounded in the attack, security officials said, suggesting that the blasts had targeted security forces working for Iraq's US-backed government.

The attackers first triggered a car bomb then detonated a roadside booby trap in the immediate aftermath of the first blast, in a bid to maximise casualties, security officials said.

Meanwhile, police continued to collect the bodies of murder victims slain in Baghdad's sectarian dirty war between rival Sunni and Shia death squads. A US military spokeswoman said that 16 corpses had been found so far on Thursday.

South Korea seeks firm US guarantee of nuke deterrent against North

AFP, Seoul

South Korea said yesterday it would seek firm guarantees of a US nuclear deterrent to any North Korean attack after the communist state announced its first atomic weapons test.

"Due to public anxiety, I have stressed the need for a nuclear umbrella from the United States," Defence Minister Yoon Kwang-Ung told parliament after earlier ordering the military to stay vigilant against any aggression from the North.

Yoon said the South, still technically at war with the North a half-century after the Korean War ended, would also upgrade its own conventional arsenal.

"In response to North Korea's weapons of mass destruction, we have developed our conventional arsenal and we will maintain our policy," he told the special session of parliament.

Prime Minister Han Myeong-

Sook told legislators: "We believe North Korea might have developed nuclear weapons to strengthen its bargaining power. We regard them as a serious threat to our country."

Seoul gave up its drive for atomic weapons in the 1970s under strong US pressure. But security fears have been rising since the communist North's announcement Monday, which shocked the world.

Sixty-five percent of respondents in a newspaper poll this week said the South should develop its own nuclear weapons.

Defence officials said North Korea's test will top the agenda at talks between US and South Korean defence ministers in Washington starting October 20.

"The two sides will discuss the (US) nuclear umbrella issue deeply and mention it in a joint statement concretely," said a defence ministry official preparing for the annual Security Consultation Meeting.