

WHILE OBAMA URGES CAUTION, NETANYAHU, MCCONNELL, IAEA FAN ANTI-IRAN RHETORIC, IRAN TAKES POSITIVE DIPLOMATIC STEPS

[youtube]<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UdECxrhmfbc>[/youtube]

President Obama and his administration have spent the last week trying to point out the extreme downside to an attack by Israel on Iran's nuclear sites. Unfortunately, Obama's words of caution are getting little play while Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell made appearances before the war-hungry mob at AIPAC to make the case for an attack now. In the meantime, Iran took positive diplomatic steps that are likely to be overlooked, reversing a death-sentence conviction on an accused US spy and committing to an IAEA visit to the disputed Parchin site.

As seen in the video above, IAEA Director General Yukiya Amano made public statements associated with his appearance before the Board of Governors. From his prepared remarks:

As my report on Implementation of the *NPT Safeguards Agreement and Relevant Provisions of Security Council Resolutions in the Islamic Republic of Iran* makes clear, the Agency continues to have serious concerns regarding possible military dimensions to Iran's nuclear programme.

In January and February, a senior Agency team held two rounds of talks in Tehran with Iranian officials aimed at resolving all outstanding issues in

connection with Iran's nuclear programme. Despite intensive discussions, there was no agreement on a structured approach to resolving these issues. Iran did not grant access to the Parchin site during the visits, as requested by the Agency. Iran provided an initial declaration on the issues listed in the Annex to my November 2011 report, although it did not address the Agency's concerns in a substantive manner. During the visits, the Agency also submitted questions on Parchin and the possible role of a foreign expert.

Iran's Ambassador to the UN agency Ali Asghar Soltanieh dismissed Amano's report as "only a summary of his earlier report". Today, Soltanieh announced that Iran remains prepared to define the conditions under which IAEA will be allowed access to Parchin:

Iran's Representative Office at the International Atomic Energy Agency announced on Tuesday that the country will be ready to provide the UN nuclear agency with one-time access to its Parchin military test facility once modalities of Iran-IAEA cooperation have been agreed on, reminding that the facility is a highly sensitive military site already visited by inspectors twice.

"Given the fact that Parchin is a military site and finding access to such a site is a time-consuming process and cannot be done repeatedly, and taking into account that the Agency has been asked (by Iran) to integrate all the related issues, including the hydrodynamic tests, permission will be granted for access" to Parchin (of course, only after the aforementioned demand is materialized), a statement by Iran's Representative Office at the IAEA said.

“Clearly, this process can start only when an agreement is made on the modality plan,” it said, and reminded that the two sides have already agreed that the IAEA’s demand for accessing Parchin be postponed until after the next meeting of the IAEA Board of Governors currently underway in Vienna.

News media reported last week that Iran had flatly refused the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) access to its Parchin military test facility, based on a statement to reporters by IAEA Deputy Director General, Herman Nackaerts, that “we could not get access”.

But, explicit statements later made on the issue by the Iranian Ambassador to the IAEA and the language of the new IAEA report indicate that Iran did not reject an IAEA visit to the base per se but was only refusing access as long as no agreement had been reached with the IAEA governing the modalities of cooperation.

In an unrelated move of positive diplomacy, Iran’s Supreme Court has overturned the conviction of accused spy Amir Mirza-Hekmati:

The death sentence verdict issued for Amir Mirza-Hekmati, who was arrested by Iranian intelligence agents on a charge of spying for the CIA in 2011, has been overturned.

The Intelligence Ministry announced his arrest on December 7, 2011.

He was convicted of espionage, moharebeh (enmity against God), being a ‘corrupt person on the Earth’, and attempting to implicate Iran in terrorist actions.

“To my memory, after the defendant appealed, the case was referred to the

country's Supreme Court, and finally, the verdict was overturned in the country's Supreme Court, and therefore, it (the case) was sent to an equivalent court," Judiciary spokesman Gholam Hossein Mohseni-Ejeii told a press conference on Monday.

Mohseni-Ejeii also said that the Supreme Court had found some shortcomings in the case.

Despite these positive developments from Iran, US airwaves have been dominated by the war rhetoric against Iran coming especially from Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Speaking yesterday at AIPAC, he said "We waited for diplomacy to work; we've waited for sanctions to work; none of us can afford to wait much longer." In describing Netanyahu's speech before AIPAC, the Washington Post noted that he delivered this particular line to "a cheering audience".

Displaying his continued insistence to want the opposite of what Barack Obama wants, Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell also spoke to AIPAC to call for an attack on Iran. From the Times article:

The Senate minority leader, Mitch McConnell, used his speech to lay out conditions under which he would introduce a bill in the Senate authorizing the use of military force against Iran. "We have now reached the point where the current administration's policies, however well-intentioned, are simply not enough," the Kentucky Republican said. An Aipac official noted that this idea originated with Mr. McConnell, not with Aipac.

It was very polite of AIPAC to point out that they did not formally issue this talking point to McConnell since their positions are so

difficult to distinguish from one another.

Obama, for his part, seems to be trying to point out to Israel what the horrible consequences of an attack would be and to remind Israel that there is no evidence that Iran has made the decision to actively pursue nuclear weapon development. From the Post article:

In public and private statements in recent days, Obama urged Israel to refrain from a military strike against Iran's nuclear facilities, a move that many in the administration feared would set off a regional war in the volatile Middle East. Such a conflict in the oil-rich region would send gasoline prices even higher, exacerbating an election-year threat to Obama.

For Netanyahu, McConnell and the rest of the folks at AIPAC, the time is now for an attack. Iran seems to realize that they are running out of time to head off the attack, as their most recent moves appear to be their most positive yet. It seems to be up to Obama to make the most of these diplomatic advances and to make the case that further diplomacy is the way out of this dire crisis. If he can prevail in achieving a negotiated settlement on Iran's nuclear technology with verifiable abandonment of all weapons development, Obama could even earn that Nobel Peace Prize that is moldering in the face of atrocious US policies in the rest of the Muslim world.