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Int'l Sanctions Reduce Pace of Developing Iranian Nuclear Program

Thursday, 23 June 2011

The pace Iran's nuclear program development has declined over the last two years due to international sanctions, despite Tehran's numerous allegations about the ineffectiveness of such restrictions, experts said. However, international bodies disagree on the restrictions' impact.



"The UN report concluding that sanctions caused Iran's nuclear program deceleration may be partially correct," the vice president for defense and foreign policy studies at the Cato Institute Ted Gallen Carpenter, told Trend via e-mail. "The overall rate of progress appears to have declined slightly over the past two years, but (as you note) Iran nevertheless continues to make significant advances."

The UN Working Group on Iran, consisting of eight people, issued a report stating that sanctions influenced the nuclear program's rate of development and the military progress of the Islamic Republic, BBC reported on June 19. The BBC mentioned that information was obtained through an information leak to the press.

Earlier on June 16, Iran's representative to the IAEA, Ali Askar Soltaniyeh, said that Iran continues to expand uranium enrichment despite UN sanctions.

"The report, presented by IAEA Director General to all member-states last week, says that its uranium enrichment activity is successfully and smoothly increasing", the Iranian representative said. "Thus, the sanctions failed to stop work on uranium enrichment."

UN assumptions about the effectiveness of the sanctions may have been based on faulty assumptions about the original pace of Iran's program, he said.

In other words, the progress may have been more modest all along. In that case the sanctions would have had just a slight impact on the pace, he said.

Professor Reza Taghizadeh thinks that unilateral sanctions against Iran imposed by the UN, U.S., and several European countries impacted the country.

"This is the most obvious influence reflected in Iran's oil and gas industry", Trend Expert Council Taghizadeh said over the phone. "Iran fails to fully use its productive potential in the oil and gas sector because of the imposed sanctions, as foreign countries have stopped investing in this region of Iran's economy. The big oil and gas companies ceased their work in the country. The oil and gas projects were partially implemented."

The U.S. and other Western countries accuse Iran of developing nuclear weapons under cover of a peaceful nuclear energy program. Tehran denies

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the accusation, saying its nuclear program is exclusively peaceful in nature.

Resolutions adopted by the UN Security Council, as well as additional unilateral sanctions approved by the U.S. Congress and the foreign ministers of all EU countries, were primarily directed against the banking, financial and energy sectors of Iran.

Restrictions imposed by the EU include a ban on the sale of equipment, technologies and services to Iran's energy sector; the same measure refers to the refining industry. New investments in Iran's energy sector have also been prohibited as a whole. Because of lack of investments due to the sanctions, production capacity is decreasing. Therefore, Iran cannot effectively increase production and develop this sector, which is the main source of income for Iran.

Taghizadeh said that additional sanctions also influenced Iran's nuclear activity.

"The amount of enriched uranium has decreased by half compared to the previous two years", Taghizadeh said. "Iran enriched uranium using 9,000 centrifuges two years earlier, whereas at present the centrifuges quantity is less than 5,000."

Taghizadeh said that a large-scale production of a new type of centrifuges has yet to be established, especially as they are still undergoing the testing phase.

Deputy Secretary General of Iran's Higher National Security Council Ali Bagiri, in charge of foreign policy, stressed in January that Iran plans to start manufacturing centrifuges using domestic technologies only.

Gas centrifuges with a rotation speed of roughly 60,000 cycles per minute are used in the field of nuclear research for uranium isotopes fission. A centrifuge consists of 180 spare parts, most of which, including cranes, rotors and pressure sensors, were purchased by Iran earlier from foreign black markets.

Iran claims it needs to manufacture centrifuges to enrich uranium to fuel a 300-megawatt light water reactor in Darhoveh, a city in southwest Iran, and for the first nuclear power plant in Bousher.

Taghizadeh said that missile production and launching satellites are Iran's major successes. But it cannot be said that the sanctions have not impacted production, even though such developments have been achieved.

"If not for the international community's imposed restrictive measures against the Islamic Republic, it could achieve much more in this area, Taghizadeh said. "Iran has not suspended its activity in this area and has moved forward slightly. However, the sanctions have no doubt influenced the oil and gas sector, and the economy as a whole, as well as the program to produce missiles and nuclear development."

Taghizadeh said that Iran is failing to obtain the necessary materials and equipment to carry out missile production programs, to increase its uranium enrichment capacity, and to increase the number of centrifuges as a result of the sanctions.

"Iran has been building a uranium enrichment plant at Natanz for 10 years," Taghizadeh said. "It is possible to install 60,000 centrifuges on this facility - but after 10 years, only 4,000 centrifuges of an old model operate at this station. All this indicates that sanctions affect the suspension of Iran's

nuclear program."

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Journal of Turkish Weekly (JTW)
USAK House,
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