

## **Iranian Leader Sounds Conciliatory Note on Offer**

**By HOWARD W. FRENCH**

SHANGHAI, June 16 — Iran's president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad said today his country was seriously considering an international proposal to resolve an ongoing dispute over Iran's uranium enrichment program.

Mr. Ahmadinejad's vague but conciliatory statements about diplomatic efforts to ward off the country's emergence as a nuclear weapons producer came in a wide-ranging news conference at the conclusion of a summit of Asian leaders here.

"My colleagues are carefully considering the package of proposals of the six countries, and in due time they will give them a response," the Iranian leader said. But he gave no hint of when Iran would present a formal response.

At another point in the news conference, he said, "generally we regard the offering of this package as a step forward," adding that his country "supports constructive talks on the basis of equality."

The proposal before Iran was put forth by the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council, plus Germany, and Mr. Ahmadinejad's visit here has put the spotlight on the diplomacy of China and Russia — both Security Council members — which have resisted the idea of sanctions as a means of resolving the enrichment crisis.

Although the details of their talks are not known and Mr. Ahmadinejad pointedly refused to discuss them when asked, the leaders of both China and Russia are thought to have urged Iran to embrace the six-party international proposal. Both China, as the host, and of Russia, a co-founder of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, have appeared eager for a successful summit that would boost the prestige of the five year old body.

This may help explain the restrained, even studied language of a leader whose country is a candidate for membership in the organization, but has become known for blunt rhetoric and inflammatory commentary.

Although his repeated references to the United States were unmistakable, he never named his designated nemesis. "Some countries create problems for other countries and make the impression that these are problems for the entire international community," Mr. Ahmadinejad said. "Actually they are making problems for themselves."

As he has done before, the Iranian leader also denied that Iran is developing nuclear weapons, referring repeatedly to the "Islamic Republic of Iran's peaceful nuclear program."

Mr. Ahmadinejad also maintained his skepticism about the the authenticity of the Holocaust. He declined an opportunity to withdraw his Holocaust denial, saying that this

history should be "investigated by impartial and independent experts," and adding that the Palestinians should not be made victims because of events in European history. He concluded his remarks on this subject, however, saying "there are no differences between Jews, Christians and Muslims."

Asked if he were concerned about the possibility of an Israeli attack on his country's uranium enrichment plants, similar to the 1981 Israeli aerial attack on the Osirak nuclear plant near Baghdad, Mr. Ahmadinejad brushed the question off with a quick "No." But moments he said that his country had the means to defend itself.

Iran's status as an observer and candidate for membership poses delicate questions for the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, a six-member body that includes China, Russia and a number of central Asian republics that were formerly part of the Soviet Union. China is in the midst of a carefully measured bid to increase its diplomatic clout without alarming the United States or others, from Europe to India.

At times, Mr. Ahmadinejad's language flirted with formulations that Beijing has studiously avoided, which would cast the Shanghai grouping as a rival or counterweight to the West and to alliances like NATO.

Mr. Ahmadinejad said pointedly that if all the observer states became members, the organization would represent more than half of the world's population, and he urged the group to "ward off the threats of domineering powers to use their force against and interfere in the affairs of other states." Moments later, he added, "I believe we should remove the word sanctions from the political literature of the world."

China, too, has consistently opposed sanctions as a tool of international relations, and helped engineer a joint declaration at the end of the regional summit which said "Differences in cultural traditions, political and social systems, values and models of development formed in the course of history should not be taken as pretexts to interfere in other countries' internal affairs,"

But if the Shanghai organization's membership swells without addressing the problem of nuclear proliferation, analysts it could face problems on two fronts.

On the one hand, the credibility of an approach that renounces sanctions and the use of force will be severely weakened, along with China's diplomatic prestige. On the other, if the Shanghai Cooperation Organization emerges as a group whose highest principle is the right of states to do whatever they wish within their borders without outside interference, China and Russia could both eventually both have to face the prospects of other central Asian countries acquiring nuclear technology.

"One example of our being a responsible stakeholder is speaking to Iran and asking Iran to respect IAEA commitments, to make sure that it meets its obligations," said Shen Dingli, a specialist in international relations at Fudan University, in Shanghai.

Elsewhere, while Mr. Ahmadinejad repeatedly stressed the convergence of his country's views and diplomatic closeness with China and Russia, calling China's leader Hu Jintao "my very good friend," he also repeatedly invoked the importance of religion, or what he called "spirituality." China and Russia have a history of problems with Muslim minorities and would be loathe to see the spread of militant Islam in the region.

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