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Bush Remarks on Iran Set the Stage for Visit to Europe

By CHRISTINE HAUSER

President Bush said today that Iran faces the prospect of action in the United Nations Security Council and stronger political and economic sanctions if it rejects incentives by the United States and the European Union to curtail its nuclear program.

Mr. Bush's remarks about Iran, delivered in the commencement address at the United States Merchant Marine Academy at Kings Point, N.Y., were intended to prepare the ground for the annual summit meeting this week between the United States and the European Union. European countries are trying to negotiate with Iran on halting its uranium enrichment program.

"If Iran's leaders want peace and prosperity and a more hopeful future for their people, they should accept our offer, abandon any ambitions to obtain nuclear weapons, and come into compliance with their international obligations," Mr. Bush said.

"Iran's leaders have a clear choice," Mr. Bush said. "We hope they will accept our offer and voluntarily suspend these activities, so we can work out an agreement that will bring Iran real benefits. If Iran's leaders reject our offer, it will result in action before the Security Council, further isolation from the world, and progressively stronger political and economic sanctions."

A proposal of economic and political incentives was put forth this month by the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council, plus Germany, and offers Iran incentives to freeze its nuclear activities. Iran's president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, said Friday that his country was seriously considering the proposal.

The potential negotiating partners — the United States, China, Russia, Britain, France and Germany — have demanded that Iran suspend its uranium-enrichment and reprocessing activities before they meet formally to discuss the package. Mr. Bush said the United States would join European talks with Iran if it agreed to verifiably suspend its nuclear enrichment program.

The White House press secretary, Tony Snow, told reporters before Mr. Bush spoke that the president was "reiterating" the American position on Iran as a way of "teeing up what is going to be a topic of conversation" at the wide-ranging meeting in Vienna with the European leaders.

Washington says Iran is using the technology to eventually develop a nuclear weapons capability, while Iran says it is seeking enrichment for industrial purposes and that it will not give up its right to pursue a nuclear program.

Mr. Bush, who flew into John F. Kennedy International Airport this morning, said he believes that the Iranian people have a "legitimate desire" for a program to use nuclear reactors to generate electric power.

"So America supports the Iranian people's rights to develop nuclear energy peacefully, with proper international safeguards," he said.

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