

MEMMO

November 20, 2008

Syria Must Be Pressed on Illicit Nuclear Program

An investigation by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) provides strong evidence that a Syrian site bombed by Israel last year was a nuclear facility. The IAEA concluded—based on hard evidence—that there is strong reason to believe Syria was nearing completion of a nuclear reactor. The international community must press Syria to fully cooperate with IAEA inspectors and come clean on its illicit nuclear activity.

The IAEA report supports the conclusion that Syria was engaged in an illicit nuclear program.

- Environmental samples taken from the Syrian site by IAEA investigators revealed a “significant” number of processed uranium particles. Uranium is a key component in nuclear weapons.
- Imagery taken prior to and immediately after the bombing indicated the presence of a containment structure similar in dimension and layout to that required for a biological shield for nuclear reactors.
- Despite Syrian claims to the contrary, IAEA inspectors found the site had adequate pumping capacity of cooling water for a nuclear reactor and sufficient electrical capacity to operate the pumping system.
- The IAEA report is in line with public statements by the U.S. intelligence community that Syria was building a gas-cooled graphite-moderated reactor capable of producing plutonium for nuclear weapons.
- Construction of such a secret nuclear facility, which would have been capable of producing bomb-grade plutonium as North Korea has done, is a clear and direct violation of the Syrians’ nuclear safeguards commitment under the Non-Proliferation Treaty.



A satellite image shows Syria’s suspected nuclear facility before it was targeted by Israel in September 2007.

Syria has long sought weapons of mass destruction with active chemical and missile programs.

- Syria possesses one of the largest ballistic missile forces in the Middle East, including Soviet and North Korean origin Scud missiles. These missiles are capable of deploying chemical as well as conventional warheads.
- Syria maintains stockpiles of the nerve agent sarin and is developing the more toxic and persistent nerve agent VX, according to a 2006 report to Congress by the Deputy Director of National Intelligence for Analysis.
- In July 2007, an explosion at a secret military facility in Aleppo reportedly killed 15 people and injured close to 50. Syrian officials acknowledged the explosion occurred while attempting to weaponize a Scud-C missile with mustard gas, a banned substance under international law.

The international community must press Syria to stop its obfuscation and fully cooperate with IAEA inspectors.

- Syria has repeatedly blocked IAEA inspectors from carrying out their responsibilities. The report outlines repeated efforts by the Syrian authorities to block and delay full access to three locations of concern.
- Satellite imagery indicates that landscaping activities and the removal of large containers took place shortly after inspectors requested access to the three sites.
- Syria has failed to provide the IAEA requested information related to efforts by Syrian entities to procure materials and equipment that could support the construction and operation of a nuclear reactor.
- The international community must press Syria to fully cooperate with IAEA inspectors and to detail all of its nuclear activity. If Syria continues to obstruct inspectors, the IAEA should refer the matter to the U.N. Security Council for further action.