

US intelligence: Iran will be able to build first nuclear bomb by February 2009

DEBKA file Exclusive Report

October 26, 2008, 11:29 AM (GMT+02:00)

US intelligence's amended estimate, that Iran will be ready to build its first bomb just one month after the next US president is sworn in, is disclosed by **DEBKA file's** Washington sources as having been relayed as a guideline to the Middle East teams of both presidential candidates, Senators John McCain and Barack Obama.

The information prompted the assertion by Democratic vice presidential nominee Joseph Biden in Seattle Sunday, Oct. 19: "It will not be six months before the world tests Barack Obama like they did John Kennedy."

McCain retorted Tuesday, Oct. 21: "America does not need a president that needs to be tested. I've been tested. I was aboard the Enterprise off the coast of Cuba. I've been there."

DEBKA file's military sources cite the new US timeline: By late January, 2009, Iran will have accumulated enough low-grade enriched uranium (up to 5%) for its "break-out" to weapons grade (90%) material within a short time. For this, the Iranians have achieved the necessary technology. In February, they can move on to start building their first nuclear bomb.

US intelligence believes Tehran has the personnel, plans and diagrams for a bomb and has been running experiments to this end for the past two years. The UN International Atomic Energy Agency in Vienna last week asked Tehran to clarify recent complex experiments they conducted in detonating nuclear materials for a weapon, but received no answer.

The same US evaluation adds that the Iranian leadership is holding off its go-ahead to start building the bomb until the last minute so as to ward off international pressure to stop at the red line.

This development together with the galloping global economic crisis will force the incoming US president to go straight into decision-making without pause on Day One in the Oval Office. He will have to determine which urgent measures can serve best for keeping a nuclear bomb out of the Islamic republic's hands - diplomatic or military – and how to proceed if those measures fail.

His knowledge of the challenge colored Sen. Biden's additional words in Seattle: "Remember I said it standing here if you don't remember anything else I said. Watch, we're gonna have an international crisis, a generated crisis, to test the mettle of this guy."

Israel's political and military leaders also face a tough dilemma that can no longer be put off of whether to strike Iran's nuclear installations militarily in the next three months between US presidencies before the last window closes, or take a chance on coordination with the next president.

Waiting for the "international community" to do the job of stopping Iran, as urged by governments headed by Ariel Sharon and Ehud Olmert - and strongly advocated Tzipi Livni, foreign minister and would-be prime minister - has been a washout. Iran stands defiantly on the threshold of a nuclear weapon.

http://www.debka.com/headline_print.php?hid=5660