

TRANSCRIPT OF "FILE ON 4" – "IRAN'S NUCLEAR STANDOFF"

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REPORTER: Rob Broomby
PRODUCER: Ian Muir-Cochrane
EDITOR: David Ross

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“FILE ON 4”

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BROOMBY: In a matter of days, the UN’s nuclear watchdog, the IAEA, meets to consider the latest report on Iran. Its nuclear programme is accelerating rapidly. Experts tell us this summer will be crucial. How quickly do you think they would have enough material for a nuclear bomb if they wanted one?

HEINONEN: It would take about one month.

BROOMBY: Just one month?

HEINONEN: Just one month.

BROOMBY: Tehran has been on collision course with the international community for more than a decade. It’s ignored numerous resolutions from the UN Security Council, and waves of economic sanctions and warnings. It’s been defiance elevated to diplomacy. Iran’s key nuclear ambassador tells us his country won’t bow to pressure.

SOLTANIEH: The language of carrot and stick, the language of sanction and dialogue, this is not right. Aiming the gun at your head and saying, ‘Come to negotiating table,’ these are absolutely not acceptable.

BROOMBY: The negotiations are getting nowhere and the mood in the US appears to be hardening. Tonight File on 4 investigates Iran's nuclear programme and asks how London and Washington will respond.

SAMORE: President Obama has said he will feel compelled to use all means necessary to stop them, so unless we change the current course, some kind of military action becomes much more likely.

SIGNATURE TUNE

ACTUALITY AT CONFERENCE

WOMAN: Mr Chairman, Excellencies, distinguished delegates, I am really grateful for this honour to address the Preparatory Committee for the ...

BROOMBY: I'm in the conference chamber at the heart of the United Nations complex here in Geneva, Switzerland. The golden UN logo stands out above the national delegations assembled around me in rows of desks. They're listening intently to the speakers through translation on their headphones. This is a key conference to preserve and strengthen the Nuclear non-Proliferation Treaty that was designed to halt the spread of nuclear weapons. But the truth is, the NPT, as it's known, is under strain as never before.

ACTUALITY AT CONFERENCE

WOMAN: We have also all witnessed in recent months a deterioration of the security situation on the Korean peninsula

BROOMBY: The conference began with North Korea's threat to use its nuclear weapons against the United States still reverberating around the globe. The fear is that Iran – no friend of the west - could soon take the same course and try to acquire the ultimate weapon of mass destruction. The US delegates are sitting towards the back of the hall. They were led on day one by Thomas Countryman – the US Under Secretary for International Security, who spelled out the dangers.

EXTRACT FROM SPEECH

COUNTRYMAN: It is clear that if Iran succeeds in the project of constructing nuclear weapons, then the possession of such weapons constitutes a threat to the entire region and an impetus for greater proliferation of weapons than we have ever seen.

BROOMBY: Now the Iranians, for their part, sit down towards the front of the hall. Iran's key ambassador on nuclear affairs used his contribution to berate his country's critics and restate what Iran sees as its nuclear rights.

EXTRACT FROM SPEECH

SOLTANIEH: I declare that the Islamic republic of Iran shall never compromise on its inalienable right for peaceful uses of nuclear energy. Hostile policies of western countries, including carrot and stick, sanctions and talks policies are doomed to failure.

BROOMBY: The sticking point has been Iran's insistence, expressed there, on the right to prepare its own nuclear fuel. The fear is simple. To generate nuclear power from uranium, the material has to be made more potent by a complex process known as enrichment. But continue enriching uranium and you get the material to make a nuclear bomb. And despite several UN Security Council resolutions ordering it to stop, Iran has refused. Alistair Burt is the UK Minister for the Middle East and Counter-Proliferation.

BURT: The practicalities of the non-proliferation treaty mean that there's a bargain between nuclear and nonnuclear powers. Nonnuclear powers know what it is they need to do to demonstrate transparency and to give reassurance that nuclear work is not going off in the wrong direction. Despite all the words from the Iranians, they know what it is they've needed to do to convince people and they haven't really taken any serious steps to do that.

BROOMBY: What's your assessment of where they are now?

BURT: They are starting to become dangerously close to the sort of area which raises real question marks in people's minds about where they're going. It's always been the case that there has been some time to go, technically, before Iran could be in a position of producing a nuclear weapon, if that is their intention. But the longer time goes on,

BURT cont: this timescale starts to get shorter and shorter. So, in the words of the International Atomic Energy Agency, there is a potential military dimension, and accordingly that's what people are worried about.

BROOMBY: So what is Iran up to?

ACTUALITY OF TRAM

BROOMBY: Well, I am on my way across Geneva by tram to meet the man who has been at the very centre of the Iranian discussions, both in Vienna, where he is the ambassador to the International Atomic Energy Agency, and here in Geneva itself. His name is Ali Asghar Soltanieh and he has agreed to meet us at the Iranian diplomatic mission, which is where we are off to now.

Can I ask you straight, does Iran want a nuclear weapon?

SOLTANIEH: We have in many occasions said we are against nuclear weapons and in this conference also, I quoted what our supreme leader has said, that a nuclear weapon, a use of nuclear weapon is unforgivable scene and we are against it and it's not in our defence doctrine and therefore, we're against it. There's no doubt that we are not for pursuing nuclear weapon. We are committed to NPT and at the same time we will never ever compromise our inalienable right for peaceful uses of nuclear energy.

BROOMBY: You said the use of one was forbidden, but would you like to develop one at a future date?

SOLTANIEH: Future date for what?

BROOMBY: If you felt threatened.

SOLTANIEH: Never, because we were threatened ...

BROOMBY: But you have the capability to have one in the future?

SOLTANIEH: We were threatened by a Sultan. Hundred thousand of Iranian were injured by chemical weapons and we didn't give up.

BROOMBY: But if you look around that region, you look at the experience in Iraq, you look at the experience in Libya, Afghanistan, I could well imagine some of the leadership in your country thinking to themselves a nuclear weapon would be very useful defence to retain your republic in the state it is.

SOLTANIEH: We consider, we consider nuclear weapon ... vulnerability. Nuclear weapons cannot guarantee the stability of a country. The stability of Iran, the Islamic Republic of Iran, as you see every day is stronger, is a popular support of the people.

BROOMBY: But Iran hasn't been widely believed. The west maintains its activities are highly suspicious. So who is right? One of the problems is, even the UN's nuclear watchdog - the international Atomic Energy Agency or IAEA - can't say for sure, because Iran is still blocking some of its work. Its latest report will be presented to the agency's Board of Governors within days. A copy of the documents seen by File on 4 says Iran is still 'not providing the necessary cooperation.'

READER IN STUDIO: The Agency is unable to provide credible assurances about the absence of undeclared nuclear material and activities in Iran, and therefore to conclude that all nuclear material in Iran is in peaceful activities.

BROOMBY: In other words, they still can't say Iran doesn't have a secret nuclear programme. It went on:

READER IN STUDIO: Unless Iran addresses the agency's requirement to conduct effective verification, it will not be possible for the Agency to resolve outstanding issues, including those relating to possible military dimensions to Iran's nuclear programme.

BROOMBY: The Iranian delegation met leaders of the IAEA earlier this month to find a way forward. The talks failed. Despite several UN Security Council resolutions ordering it to stop, Iran continues to expand the enrichment process by installing

BROOMBY cont: more powerful centrifuges - the machines to do the job. So how close are the Iranians to the point of no return? File on 4 has spoken to some of the world's leading authorities on the subject, including Olli Heinonen, who was the Deputy Director General of the IAEA until September 2010. It was his job to oversee nuclear inspections in Iran.

HEINONEN: As we speak now in May 2013, I think that there are more than sixteen thousand IR-1 centrifuges installed, and if Iran wants, it can use them all for enrichment. But what is the biggest change now which is happening is they have actually already manufactured about three thousand of these more advanced type and they are now busily installing them, and this will be a game changer. These centrifuges are much more powerful than the IR-1s.

BROOMBY: You're saying by this summer we will have a decisive moment in the development of this programme?

HEINONEN: In simple terms, their capability doubles by this summer.

BROOMBY: So, given that, how quickly do you think they would have enough material for a nuclear bomb if they wanted one?

HEINONEN: It will take about one month, I would say.

BROOMBY: Just one month?

HEINONEN: Just one month.

BROOMBY: Despite the lack of full cooperation, many of Iran's key nuclear facilities are still being inspected by the IAEA. But its latest report shows that, far from obeying the UN's call for it to stop enrichment, it's actually added five hundred of the most powerful centrifuges Olli Heinonen was talking about, in the last three months alone. They are now enriching uranium to as high as 20%, which they say is for use in a research reactor, but it is getting much closer to the level needed for bomb material. And the further Iran gets, the easier it would be to develop a bomb before the international community could

GOLDSCHMIDT: We went to visit the site in Natanz in February 2003.

BROOMBY: Pierre Goldschmidt, then the IAEA's Deputy Director General, led the inspection.

GOLDSCHMIDT: We were very surprised to discover a huge facility under construction and even a centrifuge enrichment plant almost ready to start operation.

BROOMBY: That was a shock?

GOLDSCHMIDT: That was a shock, that was a shock. Now we also discovered that Iran had imported from China in 1991 some nuclear material. This was also a breach of their safeguards agreement.

BROOMBY: How would you characterise their cooperation at that stage?

GOLDSCHMIDT: It was not good because they didn't know how much we knew, so that was difficult for them. Also a facility which had been identified to us, which was the Kalaye Electric Company, which was supposed to be a watch factory, but which was in fact a centrifuge enrichment testing facility, and when we asked in February 2003 to access that site, they refused.

BROOMBY: It wasn't the last time inspectors would be blocked. In the wake of those revelations about Natanz and another nuclear plant in 2002, the IAEA was soon unearthing more worrying evidence. That nuclear material acquired from China for secret experiments is still one of the most serious breaches of the rules to date. Mark Hibbs of the Carnegie Endowment for Peace –then a respected nuclear journalist - grasped the significance instantly and watched the process unfold.

HIBBS: The Agency went to Iran and they saw the facility and were flummoxed. They were not anticipating seeing this. During the course of the next twelve months, the IAEA then was able to confirm that over a period of eighteen years, the IAEA was systematically lied to and deceived by Iran, because Iran had imported nuclear materials from

HIBBS cont: places which it did not declare. It was processing some of this material into sensitive forms, such as uranium metal, which could be used for a nuclear weapons research. And what happened, the western powers missed an opportunity to demonstrate and support the Agency enforcing its mandate. Instead what happened was, as they got onto a diplomatic slippery slope with Iran very early in the game and over a period of several years, they lost more and more ground because Iran was able to fully develop its nuclear programme and deploy more and more assets.

BROOMBY: So what does Ambassador Soltanieh make of those claims of secrets and lies spun out over decades?
There is a history of concealment, isn't there, at the heart of everything you've been doing over the years? You didn't admit to the facility at Natanz until it was presented to the

SOLTANIEH: I am very happy to raise it, because the thing is that Natanz are not underground, they are next to the highway, everybody sees, therefore the whole thing was untrue.

BROOMBY: But you did the same thing a few years later with the facility at Fordow, didn't you, the underground enrichment facility at Fordow. You waited till someone else found out about it and then you revealed it.

SOLTANIEH: Again, again you have an advantage to listen to the mouth of the horse, because I was the one that gave the letter to inform that there is a tunnel, we are going to use it because of a threat of attack with the Israelis or so in a safe place and I ask you to send the inspectors because we are going to start.

BROOMBY: And in breach of UN resolutions.

SOLTANIEH: No, 100% is wrong because it was not a breach of resolution.

BROOMBY: Seven UN resolutions?

SOLTANIEH: No, not at all.

BROOMBY: You see, people now wonder why you want such a large amount of uranium enriched to 20%. What do you want that for?

SOLTANIEH: Prove it to me it was secret nuclear programme. No, it was a tunnel like any other tunnel and everything is over now.

BROOMBY: Why would you want to keep an enrichment programme secret?

SOLTANIEH: I said no secret. I am proud. On the contrary, Iran is the only country that we want to show more and more transparency to say that we are so capable.

BROOMBY: With respect, the Agency feels you have been playing cat and mouse with them for years.

SOLTANIEH: No, please don't use cat and mouse. Whoever say, if anybody in the Agency secretariat dare to use these words, I will complain and they have to prove it. No, this is not right.

BROOMBY: Despite international pressure, Iran is still not co-operating fully. And there's another site of interest. Iran is still refusing to supply crucial design information for a new reactor at a place called Arak, although it goes online next year. Inspectors have also been blocked from visiting the heavy water production plant connected to it for almost two years. Again, the concern is simple. The reactor - when up and running -will produce plutonium, which could give Iran access to bomb material using a different method. On this site the clock is ticking. It will be more dangerous to attack once it's switched on. On top of that the IAEA says it has 'credible' evidence that Iran had conducted experiments relevant to what it called 'the development of a nuclear explosive device' at another mystery military installation.

WOMAN: The Parchin military base, twenty miles south-west of Tehran.

FITZPATRICK: Parchin is a large military complex and part of it was apparently used for nuclear-related experiments.

BROOMBY: Mark Fitzpatrick of the International Institute for Strategic Studies.

FITZPATRICK: The IAEA believes that there is a large tank structure in which nuclear-related experiments had been taking place, and this structure is inside a building. Within one week of the IAEA asking to go there, overhead photographs show hoses cleaning up the building and a lot of construction work next to it, which might have just been innocent reconstruction of roads or something, but the timing and the close examination of the photos suggest that Iran was trying to clean it up.

BROOMBY: Two sites then where the Iranians are failing to cooperate fully with the nuclear inspectors. The Iranian ambassador, Soltanieh, denies there's been any subterfuge.

Why then is the IAEA still having to call upon you to give access to all the sites and documents they wish? Why, if you're working with them, is that necessary?

SOLTANIEH: This is the board of governors, a few members, therefore they are not international community, they are not majority. In fact, the Americans, in order to prove that they are wrong, we have taken steps even voluntary beyond our legal obligation and we have proved them wrong.

BROOMBY: It looks to the international community as if you're thumbing the nose at them, to use an English phrase, that you don't really care, you're simply going to do what you want.

SOLTANIEH: I have said it. If you wanted to do whatever you want, do you think we didn't care about the international community? Of course we don't care, a few countries like US or others. We have shown for the last ten years, on many occasions, we have taken steps voluntarily beyond our legal obligation.

BROOMBY: The powers of the IAEA are limited. Its Board of Governors can pass resolutions, but it carries no big stick of its own. It can't even compel member states to cooperate. Ultimate power lies with UN Security Council and eventually with governments to use the information provided. Pierre Goldschmidt, the former Deputy Director General of the IAEA, says the Agency needs more resources and clout to do its job.

GOLDSCHMIDT: The first thing to do to prevent further nuclear proliferation is to increase the authority and the means of the IAEA. The IAEA plays an irreplaceable role in preventing the spread of nuclear weapons. Its authority to do so effectively should be increased. The IAEA is essential.

BROOMBY: In normal times IAEA inspections are an elaborate accounting exercise. The job of an inspector is to log the nuclear materials at any given site and verify that they're not being diverted to a weapons programme. But when suspicions arise that the rules are being broken, inspectors have to become nuclear hunters and detectives almost overnight. They are very different tasks. Robert Kelley served twice as the Director of Nuclear Inspections in Iraq in the 1990s, when they found and destroyed Saddam Hussein's secret nuclear weapons programme, and again in 2001 when the hunt for WMD led nowhere. He questions whether the IAEA has enough inspectors with the right skills to judge the evidence.

KELLEY: If you start looking at how many people are involved in the analysis of weapons, I don't know how many you'd guess. What do you think, Rob? How many people do you think are analysing the weapons?

BROOMBY: I don't know. You'd imagine ten or twenty.

KELLEY: I'd say closer to two. And so you're getting into a situation where you have a small group of people who are convincing themselves of things and they don't really have the breadth that they need in this regard.

BROOMBY: That's a major weakness, isn't it, when it comes to this kind of business?

KELLEY: Absolutely. But, you see, people hear the term IAEA inspector and something comes to mind and everyone will get a different picture, because they don't really know. Probably 80% of the inspectors are from the third world or at least developing countries, countries with no nuclear activities whatsoever. Very few of the inspectors from even the weapons states have a weapons background. So when you talk IAEA inspectors and you sort the whole place and you find there are two people who come from a weapons background, doesn't that colour it a little bit differently? You'll find some excellent accountants and some excellent nuclear material analysis people. They're there. But this isn't, weapons is not their strength, and for that reason I think they're getting very much out of their depth.

BROOMBY: Despite weeks of notice, the IAEA declined to take part in the programme, but on the specific point raised by Robert Kelley, they issued a statement:

READER IN STUDIO: The Agency is confident that it has enough in-house expertise and experience, across the full range of relevant skills, for it to carry out effective verification.

BROOMBY: Meanwhile Iran is still exploring every avenue possible to improve its nuclear know-how.

ACTUALITY AT MISSILE LAUNCH

BROOMBY: A test launch for Iran's Shehab 3 missile. It was developed from a North Korean design with their help. There are now signs that Iran could be taking its relationship with the nuclear-armed pariah state one step further as part of their battle against what they say is the 'common enemy' - the United States. According to the state run media in both countries, Iran and North Korea signed a science, research and technology co-operation agreement in September 2012, accompanied by shrill anti-western messages. But it wasn't just rhetoric. Official media in both countries said those present at the welcoming ceremony included the Iranian President Ahmadinejad, and both Iran's Minister of Defence and the head of the country's Atomic Energy Organisation itself. In Washington, the Institute for Science and International Security - or ISIS - is dedicated to informing the public about security-related science issues. Its founder, the former weapons inspector David Albright, says it all fits a pattern.

ALBRIGHT: Any agreement between North Korea and Iran is going to raise a lot of troubling questions, particularly when it involves the nuclear establishments of both countries and the military industries in both countries. A similar agreement was signed between North Korea and Syria and soon after that agreement was signed, Syria started to receive assistance from North Korea in building a nuclear reactor in secret, and so there is worry that this agreement is laying the basis for exchanges on nuclear, and those exchanges could be very important for both countries. North Korea has certain advantages in its gas centrifuge programme, its programme to enrich uranium. It could transfer that kind of advantage to Iran. Iran has some knowledge and advantages on other parts of a gas centrifuge programme and it could transfer that knowledge and capability to North Korea.

BROOMBY: How much of this is speculation at this stage though?
How much solid evidence is there of these connections?

ALBRIGHT: The evidence is not there to where you could prove it in a court of law and so it largely is some evidence of cooperation, on sharing nuclear weapons information, in that case from North Korea to Iran. But right now most of this is a concern that they could become very reliable partners on cooperation involving sensitive nuclear issues.

BROOMBY: The Iranian ambassador to the IAEA in Vienna, Ali Ashgar Soltanieh, says the meetings were simply routine for leaders of the non-aligned movement. So how does he explain the reports that a scientific co-operation deal had been signed?

SOLTANIEH: This is not true. No, no the movement, when it was held the summit in Iran, the summit, it means the head of the states and officials of different countries, including North Korea were there

BROOMBY: But did you sign a scientific agreement with them?

SOLTANIEH: No, we don't need anything, we are independent

BROOMBY: But North Korean media has reported that you signed a scientific cooperation agreement with them, and the reason that's a concern is because it mirrors almost exactly an agreement with the Syrians at the time they were believed to have been developing a nuclear programme. You can see why there's concern.

SOLTANIEH: No. I said to you, I am proud to say that we have a massive amount of enrichment technology, we don't need anybody.

BROOMBY: Do your leaders or senior officials attend nuclear missile tests in North Korea?

SOLTANIEH: To the best of our knowledge this is all allegations.

BROOMBY: Definitely not the case?

SOLTANIEH: Don't waste your time to just keep making these kind of linkages.

BROOMBY: If you were talking to them, if you were getting information from them, if they were helping you with your programme in any way, that's something the world will want to know about, isn't it?

SOLTANIEH: I said that this is not true. We don't need it.

BROOMBY: No scientific agreement?

SOLTANIEH: We have no scientific agreement. We don't need at all anybody.

BROOMBY: Some experts say Iran wants to be a nuclear threshold state, having the ability to build a bomb but not doing so unless threatened. If the country were minded to compromise, it won't do so before the Iranian presidential elections in mid June. The latest talks were fruitless. Iran simply reasserted what it says is its right to enrich nuclear fuel. And that is exactly where the problem started. The west says it lost those rights when it

BROOMBY: That's quite an interesting form of words you used there. You use the negotiations as a bargaining chip, in other words the threat of developing nuclear weapons as a bargaining chip for what?

SOLTANIEH: Bargaining chip to prove to the whole world that if you stand on your principles and you not compromise on your right, including enrichment, then the others have no choice than to accept Iran as a stable country, a reliable country, a trustable country.

BROOMBY: But it is a bargaining chip, isn't it, at the end of the day?

SOLTANIEH: Whatever it is of course, we at the same time always will dialogue a negotiation. I want all rather to change the gear from confrontation, come to negotiating table in a civilised manner and discuss and talk, and if there is an area of ambiguity, we are ready to remove the ambiguity. But by language of threat, pressure, sanctions, aiming the gun at your head or your heart and say, 'Come to negotiating table,' these are absolutely not acceptable. Any problem, including nuclear orders, could be resolved by negotiation and talks and this is the only solution.

BROOMBY: Iran has played cat and mouse with the international community for years: blocking access to sites, renegeing on agreements allowing for tougher inspections and failing to provide information. Not only has it ignored Security Council resolutions, but Iran now says it plans to build another ten banned enrichment plants and four more reactors. And as one former inspector put it, if Iran doesn't have a secret nuclear programme today, it will be the first time in decades. Next year the reactor at Arak goes online, giving it access to plutonium for a different style of atomic bomb - that's another looming deadline. For Washington the next few months could be decisive. So would the UK Government support air strikes on Iran's nuclear facilities? Alistair Burt, Minister for the Middle East and Counter Proliferation.

BURT: All the time the talks have been going on, trying to urge Iran to come within the fold, but all the time the enrichment work has gone on. Sooner or later that becomes too dangerous and the United Kingdom has been very clear, there is a prevention, not a containment policy, because of the consequences of Iran having a nuclear weapon are incalculable.

BROOMBY: The talks are getting nowhere. They're just expanding their potential.

BURT: We still believe the talks have a serious point. The engagement has a serious point. But the central point that there comes a moment at which the talking can no longer be expected to produce a result is a very real one.

BROOMBY: The mood we're picking up from Washington is the time frame is closing down and they would be prepared not to give the nod to Israel but to launch a strike themselves if they felt that was the only option.

BURT: Well, let's be clear about the United Kingdom's position. It is to continue to work for the preferred solution, and that is a negotiation whereby Iran comes back within the international fold and can start proper work on a civil nuclear programme. Ultimately our position is clear – Iran should not have access to nuclear weapons and it's the United Kingdom's position that that will not happen.

BROOMBY: And if it gets to that stage and Washington decides to go ahead with a strike, will they consult you and will Britain support it?

BURT: We're dealing with hypotheticals here. Our determination now is to make sure the negotiations succeed.

BROOMBY: Question will be, in that circumstance, would Britain support it?

BURT: Well plainly there are aspects of this that I'm not going to go into at this stage, so we'll continue with the negotiations. Everything else, in terms of all options being on the table, and all parameters of that are available to us, but we want the negotiations to succeed.

BROOMBY: Not ruling out though a military strike if need be?

BURT: No.

BROOMBY: Absolutely not?

BURT: No. There is a warning here. There is a point beyond which people are not prepared to go.

SIGNATURE TUNE