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Israel warns Iran to co-operate or pay price

Con Coughlin and David Sanger
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ISRAEL has warned Iran to either co-operate with the West over its uranium enrichment program or face military action.

Ron Prozor, Israel's newly appointed ambassador to Britain and one of his country's leading experts on Iran's nuclear program, said that Tehran could enrich enough uranium to make an atomic bomb by 2009.

"At the current rate of progress, Iran will reach the technical threshold for producing fissile material by 2009," he said.

"This is a global threat and it requires a global response.

"It should be made clear that if Iran does not co-operate, then military confrontation is inevitable. It is either co-operation or confrontation."

Mr Prozor, who served Ehud Olmert, the Israeli Prime Minister, as his senior adviser on Iran, said that time for resolving the nuclear issue was rapidly running out. But he was non-committal about the possibility of Israel launching military action.

"There needs to be full verification of what is happening in Iran," Mr Prozor said. "In Israel, there is a belief that the Iranians are continuing with their nuclear weapons program."

Mr Prozor spoke after Washington published its latest National Intelligence Assessment, compiled by the main US security agencies, which concluded that Iran had frozen its nuclear weapons program four years ago.

US intelligence agencies reversed their view about the status of Iran's nuclear weapons program after they obtained notes several months ago from the deliberations of Iranian

military officials involved in the weapons development program, senior intelligence and government officials said.

The notes included conversations and deliberations in which some of the military officials complained bitterly about what they termed a decision by their superiors in late 2003 to shut down a complex engineering effort to design nuclear weapons, including a warhead that could fit atop Iranian missiles.

The newly obtained notes contradicted public assertions by US intelligence officials that the nuclear weapons design effort was still active.

But according to the intelligence and government officials, they give no hint of why Iran's leadership decided to halt the covert effort. Ultimately, the notes and deliberations were corroborated by other intelligence, the officials said, including intercepted conversations among Iranian officials, collected in recent months.

It is not clear if those conversations involved the same officers and others whose deliberations were recounted in the notes, or if they included their superiors.

The US officials who described the highly classified operation, which led to one of the biggest reversals in the history of US nuclear intelligence, declined to describe how the notes were obtained.

But they said the CIA and other agencies had organised a "red team" to determine if the new information might have been part of an elaborate disinformation campaign mounted by Iran to derail the effort to impose sanctions against it.

Ultimately, US intelligence officials rejected that theory, though they were challenged to defend that conclusion in a meeting two weeks ago in the White House situation room.

AN ISRAELI cabinet minister has cancelled a trip to Britain out of concern he could be arrested on war crimes charges, an aide said yesterday.

Internal Security Minister Avi Dichter, a former head of the Shin Bet domestic intelligence service, was to have taken part in a conference on Middle East peacemaking but backed out on the advice of Israel's Foreign Ministry, the aide said. Mr Dichter was among the planners of the 2002 assassination of Hamas commander Salah Shehadeh in an Israeli air strike on the Gaza Strip.