**UN diplomats say China has proposed changes to US-drafted resolution for new Iran sanctions**

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China has proposed changes to a U.S.-drafted resolution that would impose tough new sanctions against Iran to pressure the Islamic Republic to start negotiations on its suspect nuclear program, U.N. diplomats said Wednesday.

The diplomats, speaking on condition of anonymity because the negotiations are private, indicated the Chinese amendments would weaken the U.S. sanctions proposal. China's U.N. Ambassador Li Baodong said last week that Beijing wants to focus on "diplomacy" rather than harsh sanctions.

China, which relies on Iran for 11 per cent of its energy needs and last year became Tehran's biggest trading partner, agreed only after several months to discuss a fourth round of sanctions with the U.S., Russia, Britain, France and Germany.

The six powers began negotiations on April 8, and since April 14 they have been holding what one diplomat described as intense meetings almost daily on the draft U.N. resolution circulated by the U.S. in January, which has incorporated some changes proposed by its European allies. The diplomat said the negotiations are progressing slowly.

According to the diplomats, Li gave Beijing's amendments to the five other powers at a meeting he hosted Tuesday at China's U.N. Mission. That was followed up Wednesday by a meeting of the U.S. and European ambassadors at the U.S. Mission, and then a meeting between U.S. Ambassador Susan Rice and Li at China's U.N. Mission, the diplomats said.

The United States and its allies are trying to rally support for new sanctions over Iran's refusal to stop uranium enrichment, fearing Tehran will use the process to build a nuclear weapon. Iran insists its nuclear program is purely peaceful, aimed only at generating electricity.

According to diplomats familiar with the talks, the Western-backed sanctions resolution would target Iran's powerful Revolutionary Guard, which controls companies and organizations that have links to weapons proliferation.

It would extend the existing arms embargo to ban the import of light weapons, curtail new investments in Iran's lucrative energy sector which diplomats said China opposes, authorize the seizure of suspect cargo at sea, and bar insurance to entities that are involved in proliferation activities to try to curtail their activities, the diplomats said.

The draft resolution would also strengthen financial measures that now call on all countries "to exercise vigilance" in entering into new trade commitments with Iran, including granting export credits, guarantees or insurance, and it would add new names of individuals and entities to a list of those subject to an asset freeze and travel ban for their proliferation-related activities, the U.N. diplomat said.

While the U.S. and its European allies are pushing for quick action on the resolution, Iran has launched a diplomatic offensive to try to get other Security Council members to vote against new sanctions.

China and Russia are still hoping that diplomacy will lead Iran to the negotiating table and have indicated they will only agree to much weaker measures if Tehran refuses.

Iran's Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki said his country wants to hold further discussions with all council members except the U.S. on a nuclear fuel deal that was originally touted as a possible way to ease the standoff but has since hit a dead end.

The talks halted after Iran last year rejected a U.N.-backed plan that offered nuclear fuel rods for Tehran's research reactor in exchange for Iran's stock of lower-level enriched uranium - a swap would have curbed Tehran's capacity to make a nuclear bomb.

The six powers endorsed the confidence-building proposal backed by the International Atomic Energy agency to ship 2,420 pounds (1,100 kilograms) of low-enriched uranium from Iran to Russia to be enriched to 20 per cent and then to France for processing into fuel rods for the research reactor that makes nuclear isotopes needed for medical purposes.

Though Iran initially rejected the proposal, its leaders have tried to keep the offer on the table, proposing variations without accepting the IAEA's terms.

Mottaki said Iranian delegations will be pushing a nuclear fuel deal in visits to veto-wielding permanent council members China and Russia and rotating members Lebanon and Uganda, where President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad is expected to arrive on Friday. Brazil and Turkey, also serving two-year terms on the Security Council, have already indicated a reluctance to support new sanctions and Brazil's President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva is due in Tehran on May 15.