
RICE WARNS IRAN

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BRUSSELS: US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice yesterday urged European negotiators to take a tough line with Iran, warning Tehran of sanctions if it refuses to renounce its suspected nuclear weapons programme. "I think a diplomatic solution is in our grasp if we have unity of message and unity of purpose," she said, after meeting her Nato counterparts.

Her remarks followed a day of confusion over Washington's policy on Iran. In an interview to a US television channel, Rice apparently scolded the Europeans for their handling of negotiations, being led by Britain, France and Germany.

"The Iranians need to hear that if they are unwilling to take the deal, really, that the Europeans are giving ... then the Security Council referral looms," she said in the interview.

"I don't know that anyone has said that as clearly as they should to the Iranians," she added.

But at Nato headquarters she appeared to back off somewhat and would not be drawn on an ultimatum, although she reiterated that Washington was monitoring the proceedings closely.

Meanwhile, Iranian President Mohammad Khatami warned European countries yesterday that Tehran could reverse commitments made on its nuclear programme, saying Iran was faced with "psychological warfare".

"If you feel that we are not respecting your engagements then we will adopt a different policy and the heavy consequences of this policy will burden those who have not respected their engagements," he said in a speech to foreign diplomats.

US President George W Bush said it was important for the world to speak with one voice against Tehran's nuclear programme.
