

U.S. lags in retrieving uranium it once lent

Written by

Monday, 08 March 2004 06:51 - Last Updated Monday, 08 March 2004 06:51

This Herald Tribune article follows up on a reference posted earlier. <https://www.pej.org/html/modules.php?op=modload&name=News&file=article&sid=124>

"Much of the uranium is in the hands of Western European or other allied nations, officials said. But the report, by the Energy Department's inspector general, says that about half of the uranium is in the hands of government agencies, universities or private companies in 12 countries that are "not expected to participate in the program" to return it.

Among those countries are Iran, Pakistan, Israel, Mexico and Jamaica. Reasons for declining to return the material vary; some of the uranium, for example, is in use at research universities that are loath to give it up." -- Space & Technology Editor **U.S. lags in retrieving uranium it once lent**
Joel Brinkley and William Broad The New York Times

Monday, March 8, 2004

<http://www.iht.com/articles/509142.html>

Fuel could produce 1,000 bombs WASHINGTON As the United States presses Iran and other countries to shut their nuclear weapons development programs, government auditors have disclosed that the United States is making little effort to recover large quantities of weapons-grade uranium - enough to make roughly 1,000 nuclear bombs - that the government dispersed to 43 countries over the last several decades.

Among the countries that received the highly enriched uranium, generally with the expectation that it would be returned, were Iran and Pakistan. The chief nuclear weapons expert in Pakistan recently made the stunning disclosure that his network had secretly sold uranium and nuclear technology to Libya, Iran and North Korea.

The auditors said they found that "large quantities of U.S.-produced highly enriched uranium were out of U.S. control."

The bomb-grade uranium was lent, leased or sold to dozens of countries starting in the 1950s under Atoms for Peace, an Eisenhower administration program that was intended to help other countries develop nuclear energy facilities or pursue scientific or medical initiatives. The dispersals continued until 1988. But the government's effort to recover the uranium was lackadaisical, the report suggests.

In the last 50 years, the report says, the government has recovered approximately 5,700 pounds, or about 2,600 kilograms, of 38,581 pounds dispersed, leaving about 33,000 pounds still in foreign hands.

That remains true even as the Bush administration warns that Al Qaeda and possibly other terrorist organizations are trying to obtain nuclear materials to make a bomb. In general, it takes about 22 pounds of weapons-grade uranium to make a bomb.

Nuclear weapons experts say most of the exported uranium was weapons grade, and Thomas Cochran, a senior scientist at the Natural Resources Defense Council in Washington, estimated that the exported uranium material could make "about a thousand" nuclear weapons.

U.S. lags in retrieving uranium it once lent

Written by

Monday, 08 March 2004 06:51 - Last Updated Monday, 08 March 2004 06:51

"It could be hundreds if the design was unsophisticated, or thousands if it was more advanced," he added.

Much of the uranium is in the hands of Western European or other allied nations, officials said. But the report, by the Energy Department's inspector general, says that about half of the uranium is in the hands of government agencies, universities or private companies in 12 countries that are "not expected to participate in the program" to return it.

Among those countries are Iran, Pakistan, Israel, Mexico and Jamaica. Reasons for declining to return the material vary; some of the uranium, for example, is in use at research universities that are loath to give it up.

Some of report's findings were first reported in The Wall Street Journal on Feb. 13.

The Energy Department is in charge of recovering the uranium. The effort is within its Environmental Management Program, an office that has been the subject of many audits and self-evaluations in recent years that have criticized it as inefficient. The recovery program was placed there in 1996 because that office seemed best suited to manage the safe transport of any nuclear material that was returned, a senior department official said.

The failure to recover most of the uranium "shows a complete loss of perspective," said Steven Aftergood, a security expert at the Federation of American Scientists, an arms control group in Washington. "The failure to vigorously pursue it is a scandal. Few things are more important than this. It's a serious matter that has not been taken seriously."

Broad from New York.

Copyright ? 2002 The International Herald Tribune