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Deal Reached With Ukraine on Uranium at Nuclear Talks

By [MARK LANDLER](#), [ELISABETH BUMILLER](#) and [BRIAN KNOWLTON](#)
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WASHINGTON — In a first concrete achievement from the nuclear security summit meeting here, the government of Ukraine said on Monday that it would eliminate its stockpile of highly enriched uranium.

Moments later, [President Obama](#) met with his Chinese counterpart, [Hu Jintao](#), to try to build support for sanctions against Iran over its nuclear program. During the meeting, Mr. Obama also urged the Chinese leader to push his nation toward a more market-oriented exchange rate, a source of major friction between the two countries.

In the deal with Ukraine, Mr. Obama could claim some progress toward his ultimate goal of securing global supplies of enriched uranium and plutonium, which leaders of the more than 40 countries assembled here fear could fall into terrorists' hands.

"This is something that the United States has tried to make happen for more than 10 years," said the White House spokesman, [Robert Gibbs](#), referring to the Ukrainian announcement. "The material is enough to construct several [nuclear weapons](#)."

Ukraine agreed in 1994 to return the former Soviet nuclear warheads on its territory to Russia. Under that agreement, Russia extracted uranium from those weapons and returned it to Ukraine.

On Monday the country vowed to eliminate its highly enriched stockpiles by 2012, the date of the next nuclear security summit, with "substantial" progress toward that goal promised for this year. Ukraine will instead use low-enriched uranium in its civilian nuclear research facilities.

The president's counterterrorism adviser, [John O. Brennan](#), who joined Mr. Gibbs in making the announcement, said, "Over the past two decades, there has been indisputable evidence that dozens of terrorist groups have actively sought some type of weapon of mass effect."

Mr. Brennan said that [Al Qaeda](#) was looking for "vulnerabilities, in facilities, in stockpiles in different countries, that would allow them to obtain the byproducts of nuclear reactors and materials that they can use, but also to go after those individuals that might have access to the materials, as well as individuals who have the expertise that they need to actually fabricate and improvise nuclear devices."

He said that Al Qaeda had been taken in by scams organized by criminal groups — for example, passing off red mercury as fissile material. Mr. Brennan said that the terrorist group, undeterred, had "tried to develop within the organization the expertise that would allow them to distinguish between that which is a scam and that which isn't."

Pressed to say where the Ukrainian uranium might be sent, Mr. Gibbs said several countries might be able to accept it and that no decision had yet been made.

The announcement followed a meeting in Washington between Mr. Obama and President Viktor Yanukovich of Ukraine, held hours before the formal opening of the nuclear security conference at the Walter E. Washington Convention Center in the center of the city.

That came shortly before President Obama, trying to put a tense period behind them, met with President Hu of China. In addition to the question of new sanctions against Iran, the two were expected to address China's currency policy, a perennial source of friction

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between Beijing and Washington.

China recently signaled that it would loosen its control of the value of the currency, [the renminbi](#), easing a confrontation with the United States, which was threatening to formally cite China for manipulating the exchange rate. The administration told China that it would delay a report on the issue for now, clearing the way for Mr. Hu to visit Washington for Mr. Obama's nuclear security summit.

China has also agreed to begin negotiating the wording of a [United Nations](#) resolution that would impose additional sanctions on Iran for defying the international community on its nuclear ambitions. But administration officials cautioned that China's agreement to start talking about the resolution did not imply that it would support robust sanctions against Tehran — a step it has historically resisted.

Leaders of 47 countries converged on Washington for the nuclear summit on Monday, the largest such assemblage since [Franklin D. Roosevelt](#) organized a meeting in 1945 that created the United Nations.

In the hours before the formal start of the event on Monday, Mr. Obama is holding one-on-one meetings with leaders from Jordan, Malaysia, Ukraine, and Armenia as well as China. But the spotlight was squarely on his meeting with Mr. Hu, which follows a turbulent period in Chinese-American relations, with China assailing American military aid for Taiwan and Mr. Obama's decision to meet the [Dalai Lama](#), the Tibetan spiritual leader.

In a bilateral meeting on Sunday, meanwhile, Kazakhstan agreed to let the United States fly troops and weapons over its territory, a deal which opens a faster and more direct air route over the North Pole for American forces headed to Afghanistan.

Right now, troops and materiel are typically flown from the United States to Ramstein Air Base in Germany, and then on a flight path south and east over the Arabian Gulf and then north to Afghanistan by way of Pakistan — avoiding a more direct route over Iran, because Iran does not allow American military overflights. The new route over the North Pole, Russia and Central Asia to [Bagram](#) Air Base, the military's main air hub in Afghanistan, will allow troops to fly direct from the United States in a little more than 12 hours.

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