

# Canada's immoral connection to nuclear Iran

By Bob Bergen

It's time Canadians began thinking about the unthinkable: A Canadian connection to a nuclear-armed Iran.

It was recently reported that a Canadian company, SRB Technologies (Canada) Inc., was given permission by the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission (CNSC) to ship 70,000 glow-in-the dark lights containing radioactive tritium gas to Iran last year.

That is lovely, just lovely.

Tritium is both a by-product of Canada's CANDU nuclear plants and an essential component in nuclear weapons.

It has been called nothing less than "the lifeblood of the nuclear arsenal."

What is deeply troubling about this is that Iran is currently in the middle of an escalating international dispute over its uranium-enrichment program, which it denies is for nuclear weapons.

You don't have to be a nuclear physicist or delve deeply into the literature to learn that tritium enabled the 1950s' transformation of large, heavy nuclear bombs into much smaller, lighter and far more devastating thermonuclear weapons that could be delivered by missiles or even artillery shells.

Now, it is true that Canadian tritium could be used for peaceful purposes like self-illuminating airport runway lights, traffic-directing light wands and exit signs.

That makes it a so-called "dual use" product, which is why commercial applications allow the CNSC to approve its export to signatories of the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty.

Iran is such a signatory, although that doesn't appear to mean much.

It is also true that the amount shipped was reportedly relatively small – about .4 grams – which is one-tenth of what it would take to make one nuclear weapon.

But, if it is a nuclear weapon Iran wants, that is one-tenth less tritium that it needs to obtain.

Worse, Canada has provided Iran with a moral argument of sorts about its intent because the CNSC respects Canada's commitment to the peaceful use of nuclear energy.

Canada would never export materials that could be used to develop a nuclear bomb, right?

Wrong.

It was Canadians who supplied a Cirrus research reactor to India in the 1950s under the "Atoms for Peace" program to share nuclear technology for peaceful purposes announced by U.S. President Dwight D. Eisenhower in 1953.

It was plutonium produced by the Canadian reactor which was used in India's first "peaceful" nuclear explosion in 1974.

India went on to develop a full-blown thermo-nuclear weapons capability that resulted in three test explosions in May 1998. By the way, India has never signed the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty.

Not to be outdone, India's long-time antagonist Pakistan detonated five nuclear test explosions a little more than two weeks later, asserting its own claim to nuclear nationhood.

What makes the stand-off between India and Pakistan different from Iran and Israel is that neither India nor Pakistan denies the other's right to exist.

That is precisely Iran's policy toward Israel – which it would wipe off the earth's map – and the Middle East's politics are becoming ever-more troublesome.

For example, Iran just offered \$50-million (U.S) in aid to the Palestinian Authority and is encouraging other Islamic countries to do the same and likewise support Jerusalem's liberation from Israel.

The Authority is wallowing in a budget crisis thanks to Western nations' – including Canada's – withdrawal of aid to Palestine's newly-elected Hamas government because it refuses to recognize or to renounce violence toward Israel.

Also, earlier this month, Iran tested a new Fajr-3 high-speed torpedo which reportedly travels 100-metres per second under water and which can avoid radar. The Iranian military claims no submarine or ship can evade it.

If it's true, that could threaten the U.S. Navy's 5th Fleet in the Persian Gulf's strategic corridor and could disrupt much of the vital world oil supplies that funnel through it.

In late 2005, a potential for pre-emptive strikes against its nuclear facilities by Israel or the United States prompted Iran to sign a contract with Russia for the purchase of 29 missile systems worth some \$700

million.

Those missile systems are capable of neutralizing cruise missiles, air craft; precision weapons and unmanned aerial vehicles.

In addition – thanks to supplies and expertise from China, North Korea and Russia – Iran is well on the way to becoming self-sufficient manufacturer of missiles capable of reaching targets in Israel, Turkey, Saudi Arabia; U.S. Forces in the Middle East; and perhaps beyond.

On March 29, the UN Security Council gave Iran 30-days to suspend its nuclear enrichment program, but gave no indication of what measures it would take should Iran fail to comply.

From a Canadian perspective, the government's foreign policies toward Iran have been consistently hard line.

It would have referred Iran and its nuclear aspirations to the Security Council long before last month.

That is why the CNSC's permission to approve the shipment of tritium-containing items to Iran is more than puzzling from a foreign-policy perspective.

In the end, it's not clear in whose hands Canadian tritium landed, but any hands in Iran are the wrong hands to hold a nuclear arsenal's lifeblood.

Someone has to say it: Allowing the export of Canadian tritium to a country that has genocide at the heart of its foreign policy may not have been illegal, but it certainly was immoral.

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