

U.S. freezes assets of 5 Iranian firms involved with WMD development

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WASHINGTON — The United States has sanctioned five Iranian firms said to be helping in the assembly of an atomic bomb and ballistic missiles.

The U.S. Treasury Department said it would freeze any assets of the five Iranian companies found in the United States, Middle East Newsline reported. Under the sanctions, Americans and U.S. companies would be banned from dealing with the Iranian nuclear and missile firms.

"These five nuclear and missile entities have been used by Iran to hide its illicit conduct and further its dangerous nuclear ambitions," Treasury Undersecretary Stuart Levey said.

Treasury identified the sanctioned firms as the Nuclear Research Center for Agriculture and Medicine, also known as the Karaj Nuclear Research Center; Esfahan Nuclear Fuel Research and Production Center; Jabber Ibn Hayan; Safety Equipment Procurement Co., and Joza Industrial Co. Officials said all five entities were working with Teheran's nuclear and missile programs and acting as fronts for Iranian companies already under U.S. or United Nations sanctions.

Officials said Nuclear Research Center for Agriculture and Medicine as well as Jabber Ibn Hayan have been working for the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran. AEOL, responsible for Iran's nuclear program, including uranium enrichment, came under U.S. sanctions in 2005.

In an Aug. 12 statement, Treasury said Nuclear Research Center for Agriculture and Medicine develops nuclear fuel and participates in uranium enrichment. The center's facility at Karaj, operating since 2005, was said to be capable of producing most of the uranium compounds needed for fuel cycle activities.

Jabber Ibn Hayan was said to be involved in nuclear research and development. Officials said Jabber also provided laboratory services for AEOL's nuclear production division.

The remaining Iranian companies were said to be involved in Teheran's ballistic missile development program. Treasury said Safety Equipment Procurement was ordered to use front companies to acquire foreign technology and raw material for Iran's Shihab-3 intermediate-range ballistic missile.

Joza was identified as a front company ordered to purchase material for Iran's missile industry. Officials said Iran's Shahid Hemmat Industrial Group has employed a series of fronts to procure sensitive goods from European firms.

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