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Wider effort to buy nuclear parts cited

Iran told a black market supplier that it was interested in "tens of thousands" of parts for its covert nuclear program, diplomats said yesterday, as the UN atomic watchdog prepared to rebuke Tehran for hindering an agency probe of its activities. The diplomats, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said the revelation about Iran's offer was made at a closed-door meeting of the International Atomic Energy Agency. An IAEA report leaked last week mentioned that Iran had acknowledged inquiring about 4,000 magnets needed for uranium enrichment equipment with a European black-market supplier and had dangled the possibility of buying a "higher number." At yesterday's preparatory meeting for Monday's IAEA board of governors' conference, an IAEA official was more precise, saying that Iran had stated it was interested in "tens of thousands" of such magnets in future contracts, according to diplomats present at the closed meeting.