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RIA Novosti – Russian Information Agency
23 January 2010

Russian, U.S. Experts To Continue Arms Dialogue In Geneva In Feb

A Russian Defense Ministry spokesman confirmed on Saturday that Moscow and Washington would continue their dialogue on a new strategic arms deal in Geneva in February.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov announced on Friday that the two nations would resume their arms talks "at the start of February."

The spokesman said the agreement was reached in Brussels on Friday between Russian Chief of the General Staff Nikolai Makarov and U.S. Admiral Michael Mullen, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

The two defense officials discussed arrangements for a new document to replace the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START 1), which expired on December 5, and major fields of bilateral cooperation for 2010.

An outline for a new treaty, as agreed by the Russian and U.S. presidents, includes cutting nuclear arsenals to 1,500-1,675 operational warheads and delivery vehicles to 500-1,000. It has yet to be finalized over disagreements on verification and control arrangements.

MOSCOW, January 23 (RIA Novosti)

<http://en.rian.ru/russia/20100123/157660084.html>

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Reuters
January 24, 2010

U.S.-Russia Nuclear Deal "95 Percent" Agreed Upon

MOSCOW (Reuters) - Russian President Dmitry Medvedev said Sunday that a deal with the United States on a landmark nuclear arms reduction treaty was "95 percent" agreed, news agencies reported Sunday.

"Everything in negotiations is going fine, 95 percent of the new deal's issues have been agreed upon," Interfax quoted him as telling reporters in the Black Sea town of Sochi.

"I am pretty optimistic in my expectations," he added, but said that U.S. plans for a missile defense system in Europe remained an issue.

Medvedev's spokeswoman Natalya Timakova declined to comment.

U.S. President Barack Obama and Medvedev laid out plans last year to forge a successor to the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty, called START, and reduce the arsenals of the two largest nuclear powers.

It is an important element of efforts to mend relations between Washington and Moscow, which plunged to post-Cold War lows after Russia's brief war with pro-Western Georgia in 2008.

Negotiators were unable to reach agreement by December 5, when START I expired, and official negotiations in Geneva have not resumed after a break over the holiday period.

A top U.S. official indicated earlier this month that they would resume on January 25, and Russia's Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said Friday he expected an agreement would be reached soon once negotiations resume at the beginning of February.

Prime Minister Vladimir Putin said in late December that U.S. plans for a missile defense system were the main obstacle to reaching a new deal, causing the U.S. State Department to reject any attempt to broaden START talks to cover defensive weapons systems.

Sunday, Medvedev said the Kremlin "will definitely raise the issue" of the missile shield with its U.S. negotiators once START talks resume.

"It is crafty to speak of strategic nuclear forces without touching upon missile defense," Itar-Tass quoted him as saying. "If nuclear missiles are launched, anti-missiles are too."

Russia's leaders have remained wary about Obama's revised missile defense plans, which are based on sea- and land-based missile interceptors in Europe.

Any START agreement must be ratified by lawmakers in both countries to take effect.

In July, Obama and Medvedev agreed that the new treaty should cut the number of nuclear warheads on each side to between 1,500 and 1,675, and the number of delivery vehicles to between 500 and 1,100.

Analysts say negotiators are at least closer to agreement on more specific numerical limits within those ranges.

Officials recently have said that issues still being negotiated included monitoring and verification measures.

(Reporting by Amie Ferris-Rotman, additional reporting by Denis Dyomkin)

<http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSTRE60N1FJ20100124>

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Press TV – Iran

23 January 2010

'Western Honesty Key To Resolving Iran Nuclear Issue'

Iranian Parliament Speaker Ali Larijani says a comprehensive and optimal solution to the Iranian nuclear issue could be worked out provided that the West, and the United States in particular, negotiates sincerely in the talks with the Islamic Republic.

“The Islamic Republic of Iran has always closely cooperated with the [International Atomic Energy] Agency. An appropriate and effective way out of Iran's nuclear impasse could be devised should the West, and especially the United States, truthfully engage in negotiations with Tehran,” Larijani said at a meeting with South African National Assembly Speaker Max Sisulu in Tehran on Saturday.

Sisulu criticized the United States for following a double-standard policy toward Iran's nuclear energy program while turning a blind eye toward Israel's nuclear activities.

The South African parliament speaker also said Pretoria supports Tehran's legitimate right to access civilian nuclear energy.

Experts estimate that Israel has between 100 and 200 nuclear warheads, largely based on information leaked to the Sunday Times newspaper in the 1980s by Mordechai Vanunu, a former worker at the country's Dimona nuclear reactor, who was imprisoned for 18 years for the disclosure.

In May 2008, former US President Jimmy Carter said Israel has at least 150 nuclear weapons.

Iran says that as a signatory to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, it has the right to develop and acquire nuclear technology meant for peaceful purposes.

Iran plans to generate 17.5 percent of the country's electricity needs — about 20,000 megawatts — through nuclear energy over the next two decades.

However, Washington and its allies accuse the Islamic Republic of pursuing a military nuclear program, although they have never produced conclusive evidence to back up their claims.

In addition, the International Atomic Energy Agency has conducted numerous inspections of Iran's nuclear facilities but has never found any evidence showing that Iran's civilian nuclear program has been diverted to nuclear weapons production.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail.aspx?id=116886§ionid=351020104>

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Israel Today – Israel

January 24, 2010

Israel Today Staff

France's Sarkozy: Israel Could Attack Iran Soon

French President Nicolas Sarkozy at the weekend joined a growing number of world leaders convinced that Israel will soon attack Iran if diplomatic efforts continue to fail to bring the Islamic Republic's nuclear program to an end.

That according to a report in the London-based Arabic newspaper *Al Hayat*, which cited Sarkozy as telling visiting Lebanese Prime Minister Saad Hariri that Israel "would not stand by while Iran develops nuclear weapons."

Sarkozy reportedly told Hariri that France has evidence that Iran is developing nuclear weapons, contrary to Tehran's claims that its nuclear program is purely for civilian purposes.

The report came just one day after Sarkozy called on the UN Security Council to impose harsher sanctions against Iran for violating previous resolutions. He noted that US President Barack Obama and the rest of the international community had made great efforts to work together with Iran, only to be slapped in the face repeatedly.

<http://www.israeltoday.co.il/default.aspx?tabid=178&nid=20434>

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Time.com

January 25, 2010

To Obama's Pile Of Woes, Add A Failing Iran Policy

By Massimo Calabresi / Washington

As if President Barack Obama didn't have his hands full at home with his party's loss of Ted Kennedy's seat in Massachusetts, the collapse of health care reform and a disorganized war against the banks, he now faces a major foreign policy setback. Since the 2008 presidential campaign, Obama has promised to curtail Iran's nuclear program by simultaneously offering talks and threatening sanctions. After a year of trying, both approaches appear on the verge of failure.

The President has given Iran two deadlines to demonstrate good faith. Last spring, his Administration told reporters that if Iran didn't show willingness to engage in talks by September, sanctions would follow. Then, in September, when Iran hinted that it might possibly talk, Obama delivered another deadline, this time the end of 2009.

Iran's response to these deadlines has been repeated delays and obfuscation. First, in the spring it delivered a lengthy manifesto about global peace irrelevant to the issues at hand. The summer months were taken up with Iran's election turmoil, but following talks with the U.S. and its international partners in the fall, Iran hinted that it might be willing to accept a deal under which it would export most of its enriched-uranium stockpile to be converted into reactor fuel — and then quickly backpedaled as the proposed deal came under a hail of criticism from across Iran's political spectrum. In recent weeks, Iran has made a counteroffer to export its uranium in small parcels over a longer time period that State Department spokesman P.J. Crowley described as "clearly an inadequate response."

The idea behind Obama's engagement effort, though, was that if Iran kept stalling, countries previously opposed to sanctions, such as Russia, China and Germany, could be persuaded to support new punitive measures aimed at forcing Iran to cooperate. "We actually believe that by following the diplomatic path we are on, we gain credibility and influence with a number of nations who would have to participate in order to make the sanctions regime as tight and as crippling as we would want it to be," Secretary of State Hillary Clinton told the House Foreign Affairs Committee in last April.

So, how's that working? Not very well, by all indications.

True, with Iran stalling, the Germans seem to be playing along, although earlier in the year they said they'd only support sanctions if approved by the U.N. And while senior American officials and European diplomats say Russia has come around to supporting sanctions, nothing that has happened publicly has confirmed that claim — and the signals from Moscow remain mixed.

But where Russia had previously taken the lead in blocking sanctions efforts, that role has now fallen to China, which has a rapidly growing stake in Iran's energy sector. Beijing believes that while Iran must be brought into compliance with the international nonproliferation regime, its nuclear program does not represent an imminent danger of producing nuclear weapons and diplomacy should therefore be given a lot more time.

Beijing has bluntly opposed any effort to introduce new punitive measures against Iran, and last weekend China's Deputy Foreign Minister snubbed his counterparts from the U.S., Britain, France, Russia and Germany and sent only a low-level official to a meeting called to discuss new efforts to pressure Tehran. "The meeting we had last weekend was not great," says a European diplomat. "The Chinese sent someone along who said, 'I can't make any decisions.'" Worse, the Chinese have become allergic to the very mention of sanctions. After last weekend's meeting, a senior European diplomat speaking on background with reporters declined even to utter the word *sanctions* for fear of upsetting Beijing.

Without China, which holds a Security Council veto, there is no prospect of meaningful sanctions at the U.N. That in turn means difficulty getting tough sanctions from all the European countries, some of whom can't act without U.N. approval.

Now Obama faces the unpleasant reality that neither the engagement track nor the sanctions track appear to be going anywhere. His defenders at home and abroad say it was the right way to proceed, but skeptics of Obama's policy are emerging, even in his own party. "What exactly did your year of engagement get you?" asks a Hill Democrat.

So what options does Obama have left? Some European and American diplomats hold out hope that they will be able to bring China around. But privately they say the U.S. and its allies may need to move ahead on their own, without China. "No one wants to go there," says the European diplomat, but "what we're saying to the Chinese now explicitly is there's no point in going forward together" if the current approach isn't changing Iran's behavior.

Splitting the international community has been Iran's goal from the start, and unilateral sanctions could be fatally undermined if a bloc of countries that trade with Iran, such as China, Russia, Turkey and India, don't comply. The very fact that the U.S. and its allies are even thinking of going it alone is a sign of just how much trouble Obama's policy is in.

<http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1956075,00.html?xid=rss-topstories>

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Press TV – Iran
25 January 2010

Iran's Unspoken Nuclear Victory

By Anoush Maleki

President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad on Sunday announced that he would have "good news" regarding the country's nuclear drive in the next two weeks.

The news, more specifically, is likely to include updates on the fuel needed for a medical research reactor in Tehran. The prospects of Iran enriching its uranium to a level of 20 percent have improved drastically due to the West's stonewalling of an exchange proposal.

"The news is so sweet that every Iranian will be cheerful," President Ahmadinejad told reporters after presenting his budget bill to Parliament.

The so-called international community, however, will not revel in his announcement. Under a UN-brokered proposal, the United States, France and Russia had planned to sell the much needed fuel to Iran under their own conditions.

Tehran had welcomed the gist of the proposal, but asked for guarantees that the fuel would be delivered in a timely manner, citing previous failures by global powers in their nuclear deals with the country.

They, however, did not deem necessary further assurances.

Iran then moved to update the proposal when in mid-December it offered to exchange 400 kilos of uranium with fuel, under the supervision of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), on its Kish Island in the Persian Gulf.

World powers were not fond of the new counter proposal either. They insisted that the original draft should be the base of any likely deal.

Britain, France, Germany and the United States — influenced by perpetual warnings coming out of Israel — have long accused the country of developing covert military projects under the guise of its nuclear energy program.

For the deal to go through they all advocate the full departure of Iran's 1,763 kilos of low enriched uranium — according to the latest report by the UN nuclear agency on Iran — in exchange for the fuel, on fears that the stockpile, even though under the surveillance of agency inspectors, could be used to build at least one atomic bomb.

As the powers dragged on the diplomatic tug-of-war over the exchange, Tehran moved to make it clear that should the deal fail, it would opt to produce the fuel itself.

The indigenous production would enable Iran to practice, for the first time, enriching its uranium to a level of above 5 percent. The further enriched uranium would then be turned into metal rods to be used in the reactor.

The stonewalling of the deal has no source in disagreements over its details. World powers have hoped to pull off two objectives.

Forcing Iran into accepting the deal would demonstrate that the country will finally budge under pressure, not to mention the ludicrous financial benefit they would be entitled to under the original proposal.

And, if the government in Tehran does not accept the fixed conditions, they would freely fuel an ongoing campaign that Iran does not welcome diplomacy over its nuclear program, allowing them to instead threaten the country with fresh United Nations Security Council sanctions resolutions, or even military action.

President Ahmadinejad's announcement on Sunday, however, seems to have changed the formula they had been working on. The news was the harbinger that the country is given the West enough time to think over the deal and now it is time to make a decision.

The sanction threats, meanwhile, have hit a brick wall after China sent a low-level official to the latest meeting of the so called P5+1, which is comprised of Britain, France, China, Russia and the United States — the five permanent members of the UNSC — plus Germany in New York on January 16.

Russia — which, like the Chinese, has close diplomatic and economic relations with Tehran — has also spoken out against the latest threats, with its foreign minister, Sergei Lavrov, issuing a warning that any fresh sanction against Iran would be counterproductive.

If Iran has finally decided to produce the fuel itself, its people will welcome it as the latest nuclear 'victory.'

But what should not be overlooked here is that, under the rule of former President George W. Bush, the United States, along with its allies in Tel Aviv, for years pushed an agenda to terminate Iran's enrichment activities altogether — even though the country is entitled to enrich uranium for civilian purposes.

In an infamous press conference on October 2007, President Bush suggested that Iran's enrichment technology plus the know-how to build a bomb would allow the country to pave the road to "World War III."

"If you're interested in avoiding World War III, it seems like you ought to be interested in preventing them from having the knowledge necessary to make a nuclear weapon," he said.

President Bush, however, failed to bully Iran into abandoning its enrichment work, as the man in charge of the White House backed his words with a series of unilateral sanctions and UNSC sanctions, flavored with threats of military action against the country.

Realizing that his predecessor's logic was not completely sound, President Obama has slyly stepped away from the warning of an imminent world war in the making should Iran continue its nuclear work.

However, President Obama has chosen an illogical approach himself. He has pushed for fresh UNSC sanctions against Tehran twice.

The first time was when Iran informed the UN nuclear body of a nascent enrichment plant in southwest of the capital. The second time being the recent P5+1 meeting over the delayed nuclear deal.

Nonetheless, the Iranian nation can rejoice over their latest nuclear victories. Thanks to the robust stance of the government, the West has finally, but quietly, accepted that Iran is entitled to enrich uranium on its soil.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail.aspx?id=116955§ionid=3510303>

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Ha'aretz Daily – Israel
January 25, 2010

EU Wary Of Slapping Iran With New Nuclear Sanctions

Europeans doubt more restrictions can halt nuclear project and bring Iran to the negotiating table.

European Union foreign ministers on Monday backed away from threatening Iran with fresh sanctions over its controversial nuclear program, saying that the bloc should only bring in new restrictions if the United Nations Security Council asked.

The EU has already hit Iran with a range of sanctions, but these have not been enough to stop Iran's nuclear program, leading some member states to question whether further punishment would have any effect.

"The sanction instrument is a very blunt one, so it should be used with extreme care," Sweden's Foreign Minister Carl Bildt said as he arrived for talks in Brussels with EU counterparts.

"Our aim is to get the Iranians to the negotiating table and have a political solution, and if there are any sanctions which can reinforce that possibility, I'm ready to look at them," Bildt said.

The EU has targeted Iran with a series of sanctions since the country stopped cooperating with the UN's nuclear watchdog. They range from asset freezes on banks and key figures linked to the nuclear program, to embargoes on exports of arms and equipment.

The revelation at the end of 2009 that Iran had built a further nuclear enrichment plant near Qom led to calls for further sanctions.

But EU foreign ministers insisted that the bloc should not move on the matter without the support of the world's greatest powers.

"With Iran, (sanctions) will work out only if all the UN Security Council permanent members agree. ... The EU is ready to do it, but to get really functioning sanctions, we need all big players in the world to be united behind this decision," stressed Estonian Foreign Minister Urmas Paet.

Monday's debate came six weeks after EU leaders called on Iran to shut down its controversial uranium-enrichment program.

"Iran's persistent failure to meet its international obligations and Iran's apparent lack of interest in pursuing negotiations require a clear response, including through appropriate measures," their joint statement said.

The leaders ordered their foreign ministers to "consider options for next steps" at Monday's meeting.

<http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/1144986.html>

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Der Spiegel - Germany
25 January 2010

The Secret Nuclear Dossier

Intelligence from Tehran Elevates Concern in the West
By Dieter Bednarz, Erich Follath and Holger Stark

The West has long been suspicious of Iran's nuclear program. SPIEGEL has obtained new documents on secret tests and leadership structures that call into question Tehran's claims to be exclusively interested in the peaceful use of the technology.

It was probably the last attempt to defuse the nuclear dispute with Tehran without having to turn to dramatic new sanctions or military action. The plan, devised at the White House in October, had Russian and Chinese support and came with the seal of approval of the US president. It was clearly a Barack Obama operation.

Under the plan, Iran would send a large share of its low enriched uranium abroad, all at once, for a period of one year, receiving internationally monitored quantities of nuclear fuel elements in return. It was a deal that provided benefits for all sides. The Iranians would have enough material for what they claim is their civilian nuclear program, as well as for scientific experiments, and the world could be assured that Tehran would not be left with enough fissile material for its secret domestic uranium enrichment program -- and for what the West assumes is the building of a nuclear bomb.

Tehran's leaders initially agreed to the proposal "in principle." But for weeks they put off the international community with vague allusions to a "final response," and when that response finally materialized, it came in the form of a "counter-proposal." Under this proposal, Tehran insisted that the exchange could not take place all at once, but only in stages, and that the material would not be sent abroad. Instead, Tehran wanted the exchange to take place in Iran.

Once again, the Iranian leadership has rebuffed the West with phony promises of its willingness to compromise. The government in Tehran officially rejected the nuclear exchange plan last Tuesday. To make matters worse, after the West's discovery of a secret uranium enrichment plant near Qom, President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad defiantly announced that he would never give in, and in fact would build 10 more enrichment plants instead.

Highly Volatile Material

But officials in Washington and European capitals are currently not as concerned about these cocky, unrealistic announcements as they are about intelligence reports based on sources within Iran and information from high-ranking defectors. The new information, say American experts, will likely prompt the US government to reassess the risks coming from the mullah-controlled country in the coming days and raise the alarm level from yellow to red. Skeptics who in the past, sometimes justifiably so, treated alarmist reports as Israeli propaganda, are also extremely worried. They include the experts from the United Nations International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), whose goal is prevent the spread of nuclear weapons.

After an extensive internal investigation, IAEA officials concluded that a computer obtained from Iran years ago contains highly volatile material. The laptop reached the Americans through Germany's foreign intelligence agency, the Bundesnachrichtendienst (BND), and was then passed on to the IAEA in Vienna.

Reports by Ali Reza Asgari, Iran's former deputy defense minister who managed to defect to the United States, where he was given a new identity, proved to be just as informative. Nuclear scientist Shahram Amiri, who "disappeared" during a pilgrimage to Mecca in June 2009, is also believed to have particularly valuable information. The Iranian authorities accused Saudi Arabia and the United States of kidnapping the expert, but it is more likely that he defected.

Iran's government has come under pressure as a result of the new charges. They center on the question of who exactly is responsible for the country's nuclear program -- and what this says about its true nature. The government has consistently told the IAEA that the only agency involved in uranium enrichment is the National Energy Council, and that its work was exclusively dedicated to the peaceful use of the technology.

But if the claims are true that have been made in an intelligence dossier currently under review in diplomatic circles in Washington, Vienna, Tel Aviv and Berlin, portions of which SPIEGEL has obtained, this is a half-truth at best.

According to the classified document, there is a secret military branch of Iran's nuclear research program that answers to the Defense Ministry and has clandestine structures. The officials who have read the dossier conclude that the government in Tehran is serious about developing a bomb, and that its plans are well advanced. There are two names that appear again and again in the documents, particularly in connection with the secret weapons program: Kamran Daneshjoo and Mohsen Fakhrizadeh.

Secret Heart of Iran's Nuclear Weapons Program

Daneshjoo, 52, Iran's new minister of science, research and technology, is also responsible for the country's nuclear energy agency, and he is seen as a close ally of Ahmadinejad. Opposition leaders say he is a hardliner who was partly responsible for the apparently rigged presidential election in June. Daneshjoo's biography includes only marginal references to his possible nuclear expertise. In describing himself, the man with the steely-gray beard writes that he studied engineering in the British city of Manchester, and then spent several years working at a Tehran "Center for Aviation Technology." Western experts believe that this center developed into a sub-organization of the Defense Ministry known as the FEDAT, an acronym for the "Department for Expanded High-Technology Applications" -- the secret heart of Iran's nuclear weapons program. The head of that organization is Mohsen Fakhrizadeh, 48, an officer in the Revolutionary Guard and a professor at Tehran's Imam Hossein University.

Western intelligence agencies believe that although the nuclear energy agency and the FEDAT compete in some areas, they have agreed to a division of labor on the central issue of nuclear weapons research, with the nuclear agency primarily supervising uranium enrichment while the FEDAT is involved in the construction of a nuclear warhead to be used in Iran's Shahab missiles. Experts believe that Iran's scientists could produce a primitive, truck-sized version of the bomb this year, but that it would have to be compressed to a size that would fit into a nuclear warhead to yield the strategic threat potential that has Israel and the West so alarmed -- and that they could reach that stage by sometime between 2012 and 2014.

The Iranians are believed to have conducted non-nuclear tests of a detonating mechanism for a nuclear bomb more than six years ago. The challenge in the technology is to uniformly ignite the conventional explosives surrounding the uranium core -- which is needed to produce the desired chain reaction. It is believed that the test series was conducted with a warhead encased in aluminum. In other words, everything but the core was "real." According to the reports, the Tehran engineers used thin fibers and a measuring circuit board in place of the fissile material. This enabled them to measure the shock waves and photograph flashes that simulate the detonation of a nuclear bomb with some degree of accuracy. The results were apparently so encouraging that the Iranian government has since classified the technology as "feasible."

SPIEGEL obtained access to a FEDAT organizational chart and a list of the names of scientists working for the agency. The Vienna-based IAEA also has these documents, but the Iranian president claims that they are forged and are being used to discredit his country. After reporting two years ago that the Iranians had frozen their nuclear weapons research in 2003, the CIA and other intelligence agencies will probably paint a significantly more sobering scenario just as the UN Security Council is considering tougher sanctions against Iran.

Mulling Sanctions

When France assumes the Council's rotating chairmanship in February, Washington could push for a showdown. While Moscow is not ruling out additional punitive measures, China, which has negotiated billions in energy deals with Iran, is more likely to block such measures.

China could, however, approve "smart" sanctions, such as travel restrictions for senior members of the Revolutionary Guard and nuclear scientists. Fakhrizadeh is already on a list of officials subject to such restrictions, and Daneshjoo could well be added in the future.

But the West would presumably be on its own when enforcing sanctions that would be truly harmful to Iran -- and to its own, profitable trade relations with Tehran. The most effective trade weapon would be a fuel embargo. Because of a lack of refinery capacity Iran, which has the world's second-largest oil reserves, imports almost half of the gasoline it uses. Sanctions would trigger a sharp rise in the price of gasoline, inevitably leading to social unrest. Experts are divided over whether it would be directed against the unpopular regime or if the country's leaders could once again inflame the Iranian people against the "evil West."

This leaves the military option. Apart from the political consequences and the possibility of counter-attacks, bombing Iran's nuclear facilities would be extremely difficult. The nuclear experts have literally buried themselves and their facilities underground, in locations that would be virtually impossible to reach with conventional weapons.

While even Israeli experts are skeptical over how much damage bombing the facilities could do to the nuclear program, the normally levelheaded US General David Petraeus sounded downright belligerent when asked whether the Iranian nuclear facilities could be attacked militarily. "Well, they certainly can be bombed," he said just two weeks ago in Washington.

Translated from the German by Christopher Sultan

<http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/0,1518,673802,00.html>

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Jerusalem Post – Israel
January 26, 2010

'Iran To Unveil New Missiles In Feb.'

BY JPOST.COM STAFF

Just one day after a *Der Spiegel* report claimed that new intelligence acquired by Germany's BND offered conclusive proof that Iran's nuclear program had a military angle, a Revolutionary Guards commander on Tuesday declared that the country planned to inaugurate "several new missiles and arms projects" in February, Reuters reported.

"Iran's Defense Ministry will inaugurate several missiles and arms projects during the Fajr (Dawn) 10-day period, marking the victory of the 1979 Islamic revolution," Massoud Jazayeri said during a news conference, which was quoted by Reuters. Jazayeri was also quoted as saying that new satellite projects would be unveiled at the same time.

The 31st anniversary of its 1979 Islamic Revolution begins on February 1, and will continue until the 10th of the month.

The announcement will likely only stoke the latest furor which has followed *Der Spiegel's* revelation of the damning German intelligence showing the Iranian nuclear program's military side.

Such documents, as well as information passed on to Western intelligence agencies by Iranian defectors and sources within Iran, are causing growing alarm among US and European leaders. In its report, *Der Spiegel* assessed that the White House may consequently raise threat levels from yellow to red. World leaders and even the UN's International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), said the magazine, are beginning to understand that rumors of Iranian defiance, noncompliance and warmongering are neither Israeli propaganda nor a figment of the imagination.

Reports which have surfaced in recent years hint that Iran's National Energy Council may not be the only body to which its nuclear scientists answer. In fact, according to *Der Spiegel*, Iranian Science, Research and Technology Minister Kamran Daneshjoo - a close ally of the country's hard-line president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad - worked for several years at a Teheran research and development center devoted to military technology. This government-sponsored scientific body is believed by Western intelligence agencies to have become subservient to Iran's defense ministry. Vague estimates state that the body, headed by 48-year-old Revolutionary Guard officer Mohsen Fahrizadeh, now deals in "high technology" in a manner that differs greatly from that of the country's energy council.

Der Spiegel suggested that the two bodies divide the labor of nuclear research and development between them, with the energy council focusing on uranium enrichment - the production of what could potentially evolve into fissile warhead material - and the defense ministry responsible for research on warheads compatible with Iran's North Korean-developed Shahab ballistic missile line.

<http://www.jpost.com/servlet/Satellite?cid=1263147982091&pagename=JPost%2FJPostArticle%2FShowFull>

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Straits Times – Singapore
January 26, 2010

Iran Nuke Talks Still Possible

BEIJING- CHINA said on Tuesday there was still time to reach a diplomatic resolution to the standoff over Iran's nuclear programme after France urged its European partners to ready new sanctions against Teheran.

'Negotiations and dialogue are the best way to resolve the Iranian nuclear issue,' Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Ma Zhaoxu told reporters. 'At present, relevant parties are still engaged in diplomatic efforts and there is still room for diplomatic efforts.'

France's European Affairs Minister Pierre Lellouche on Monday urged European Union nations to prepare new sanctions against Teheran, saying they were needed because of 'Iran's refusal of all offers of a solution' made by the West.

Washington and its Western allies fear Iran is secretly developing fissile material for nuclear weapons under the cover of its uranium enrichment programme - a charge denied by Teheran.

China, a close ally of Iran and a permanent member of the UN Security Council, has always favoured diplomacy over sanctions.

The current priority is that all parties concerned should proceed from the larger interest, step up diplomatic efforts, and adopt more flexibility and pragmatism to push forward the negotiations,' Mr Ma said. -- AFP

http://www.straitstimes.com/BreakingNews/Asia/Story/STIStory_482336.html

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Global Security Newswire
January 26, 2010

Iran Runs Military Nuclear Office, Intel Report Alleges

An intelligence document being studied by diplomats in Israel and Western powers alleges that a secret Iranian office is charged with overseeing military elements of the nation's nuclear program, *Der Spiegel* reported yesterday (see *GSN*, Jan. 25).

The United States and its allies have expressed concern that Iran could tap its uranium enrichment program to generate nuclear-weapon material. Tehran has insisted its atomic ambitions are strictly peaceful, and the government has repeatedly informed the International Atomic Energy Agency that it has only one, nonmilitary organization involved in the country's uranium enrichment work.

The dossier, though, describes an Iranian Defense Ministry entity responsible for coordinating secret nuclear weapons development efforts. Referred to as the Expanded High-Technology Applications Department, or FEDAT, the office is said to be run by 48-year-old Mohsen Fakhrizadeh, a ranking member of Iran's Revolutionary Guard and a professor at Imam Hossein University in Tehran.

Seemingly adapted from the earlier Center for Aviation Technology in Tehran, the department is believed to split nuclear weapons development work with Iran's Atomic Energy Agency while competing with the agency in other respects. While the energy agency has generally concentrated on Iran's uranium enrichment program, the Defense Ministry department is assessed to have focused on efforts to develop a nuclear-capable warhead that could fit onto the nation's Shahab ballistic missiles, according to the report.

Such a weapon could be ready between 2012 and 2014, experts say.

The intelligence document indicates that Iran's nuclear weapons work is highly developed, according to officials familiar with the report.

The U.N. nuclear watchdog and *Der Spiegel* have both obtained documents detailing the office's scientific staff and purported organizational structure, but Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad has dismissed the papers as forgeries aimed at incriminating his country.

The United States could begin a push for new U.N. Security Council sanctions against Iran once France begins its turn chairing the council next month, *Der Spiegel* reported. China is likely to maintain its opposition to tough economic penalties on the Middle Eastern state, though, a move that could force the United States and European nations to target Tehran independently of the international body (*Der Spiegel*, Jan. 25).

France yesterday called on other EU nations to move toward imposing additional sanctions on Iran, Agence France-Presse reported.

"The Europeans have to prepare the sanctions process," said Pierre Lellouche, European affairs minister for France. He said that Iran was prompting the new measures with its "refusal of all offers of a solution" to disputes over its nuclear activities.

"We have been in talks for six years," Lellouche said. "All the West's proposals have been rejected and now if we listen to the Iranian spokesman they are reaching 20 percent enrichment" of Iranian uranium, a development he said would place the country on the "threshold to [nuclear] militarization."

He added, though, that the European Union would not pursue its own penalties against Iran if the Security Council failed to agree on new sanctions (Agence France-Presse I/Spacewar.com, Jan. 26).

"We need to see what comes out of the Security Council discussions and the role the members play and then return to the subject," EU foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton said after conferring with European foreign ministers, according to Deutsche Presse-Agentur.

"The sanction instrument is a very blunt one, so it should be used with extreme care," added Swedish Foreign Minister Carl Bildt (Deutsche Presse Agentur/Monsters and Critics, Jan. 25).

Italy yesterday called for more participation by Arab states in addressing the nuclear dispute, AFP reported.

"We together have to prevent Iran from going nuclear. This is a concern for all of us -- for Western democracies, the United States and Europe, but for Arab states as well," Italian Foreign Minister Franco Frattini said in Washington during a press conference with U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton.

"We are in perfect agreement in broadening the consultation of a number of states in the region that can be interested and are interested in talking about what to do," Frattini said (Agence France-Presse II/Spacewar.com, Jan. 25).

Meanwhile, Iranian nuclear negotiator Saeed Jalili's planned appearance in Moscow this week was delayed and no new date for the trip has been set, RIA Novosti reported.

The scheduled three-day visit was pushed back to permit further preparatory work, according to Iranian state media (RIA Novosti, Jan. 25).

Jalili had been expected to meet with Russian President Dmitry Medvedev and Prime Minister Vladimir Putin, AFP reported (Agence France-Presse III/Google News, Jan. 26).

Elsewhere, Tehran today demanded the extradition of U.S.-based members of an opposition group it blamed for the bombing death this month of Iranian nuclear physics professor Massoud Ali Mohammadi, Reuters reported.

The Swiss ambassador to Iran, whose embassy serves as a point of contact to Washington by Tehran, was called to the Foreign Ministry.

"Regarding the assassination which was claimed by [the pro-Iranian monarchy organization] Tondar, we asked the Swiss Embassy for an explanation on how the U.S. accepted to have this terrorist group in their country," said

Foreign Ministry spokesman Ramin Mehmanparast. "They should be answerable about this and we want the criminals to be extradited to Iran," he said (Hossein Jaseb, Reuters, Jan. 26).

http://www.globalsecuritynewswire.org/gsn/nw_20100126_4579.php

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Yonhap News – South Korea
January 23, 2010

U.S. Urges N. Korea To Return To 6-Way Talks To Discuss Lifting Sanctions: White House

By Hwang Doo-hyong

WASHINGTON, Jan. 22 (Yonhap) -- The United States Friday reiterated that it will discuss the removal of sanctions or any other issues with North Korea only after the reclusive communist state returns to the six-nation talks on its denuclearization.

"Our focus with our partners in the six-party talks is denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula and, once that happens, we can start looking at other things," Mike Hammer, spokesman for the National Security Council, said in a news briefing at the Foreign Press Center here to mark the first anniversary of U.S. President Barack Obama's inauguration.

Before it resumes negotiations, North Korea has called for the removal of U.N. sanctions imposed after its nuclear and missile tests last year and also a peace treaty to replace the fragile armistice that ended the 1950-53 Korean War.

South Korean Foreign Minister Yu Myung-hwan said earlier in the day he expects North Korea to come back to the nuclear talks in mid-February, a couple of months before a nuclear summit is to be held in Washington to follow up on Obama's pledge last April in Prague to seek non-proliferation and eventual global disarmament.

Otherwise, Yu said, the North will face continued sanctions and deteriorating relations with China, its biggest benefactor, and other countries.

Hammer praised international efforts to curb the spread of North Korean nuclear technology.

"I won't outline all the events that have taken place that have put a stop to North Korea's efforts to proliferate," he said.

Hammer was referring to a series of incidents in which Thailand, India and several other countries joined forces in recent months to intercept North Korean vessels and air cargo carrying weapons, including missiles and their parts.

"As a result of that, North Korea's mind is very much focused, and hopefully they will understand that the only way to avoid isolation is to return to the six-party talks," Hammer said. "So the message has been clear."

The spokesman, however, said conflicting messages from the North leave him unsure if the six-party talks will resume.

"We don't know yet if they are ready to go down that path," he said. "They sometimes say things that are encouraging and then only to say other things that seem to indicate that they're not prepared to do so. We also understand it takes time to help encourage another country to change its behavior."

A visit to Pyongyang last month by Stephen Bosworth, special representative for North Korea policy -- the Obama administration's first high-level official contact with the North -- failed to lure Pyongyang back to the multilateral table.

U.S. officials have said they are ready to have another face-to-face meeting to facilitate the reopening of the negotiations.

Bosworth met Thursday with Wi Sung-lac, South Korea's chief nuclear negotiator.

"We've discussed the situation where we are now and ways to cope with developments in the future," said Wi. "We've agreed that we will continue to work closely to persuade North Korea back to the six-party talks."

Earlier in the day, Wi met with Kurt Campbell, assistant secretary of state for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, here to discuss the six-party talks.

Campbell is embarking on a tour of Seoul and Tokyo on Feb. 1 or 2 to meet with officials on issues of mutual and multilateral concern.

A senior visiting South Korean official said that Wi discussed with U.S. officials ways to handle North Korea's demands for a peace treaty and the removal of sanctions as preconditions for the resumption of six-party talks.

"At the moment, I don't see any special reason for optimism," the official said, requesting anonymity. "Rather, the reality of where we are at (in this process) is complicated and confusing."

The official would not predict when Pyongyang might return to the six-party talks, saying, "We are continuing with a two-track policy of imposing sanctions and concurrently seeking dialogue."

He said that North Korea will eventually come back to the nuclear talks due to the effective implementation of the international sanctions.

"Chances are high that North Korea will eventually think that coming back to the six-party talks is much better than staying outside of them," he said. "North Korea is currently trying to drive a wedge between the five other parties to the six-party talks while presenting its new demand for the removal of sanctions and a peace treaty."

The official also forecast a tough road ahead if and when the nuclear talks reopen. The negotiations have been on and off since their inception in 2003.

<http://english.yonhapnews.co.kr/national/2010/01/23/95/0301000000AEN20100123001500315F.HTML>

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London Times – U.K.
January 24, 2010

North Korea Accuses Seoul Of 'Open Declaration Of War'

North Korea has reacted with familiar bellicosity at South Korea's suggestion last week that it might launch a "pre-emptive strike" to thwart a possible nuclear attack from Pyongyang, labelling Seoul's announcement as an "open declaration of war" and threatening immediate reprisals.

The North's General Staff of the Korean People's Army said that remarks by the South Korean Defence Minister Kim Tae-young had created a "grave situation" that could lead to war "at any moment."

"They [the armed forces] will take prompt and decisive military actions against any attempt of the South Korean puppet authorities... and blow up the major targets including the commanding centre," it said, according to the Korean Central News Agency.

Pyongyang's warning came days after Mr Kim reiterated that Seoul would launch a pre-emptive strike to frustrate any nuclear attacks by the North.

"We would have to strike right away if we detected a clear intention to attack [South Korea] with nuclear weapons," Mr Kim told a Seoul forum last week.

"It would be too late and the damage would be too big if, in the case of a North Korean nuclear attack, we had to cope with the attack."

Two years ago, when Mr Kim, who was then chairman of the South's Joint Chiefs of Staff, made similar comments, Pyongyang temporarily expelled South Korean officials from a Seoul-funded industrial park at Kaesong, just north of the heavily fortified border.

In the last six months the North has made a number of gestures of reconciliation, although international efforts to bring Pyongyang back to six-party disarmament talks have made little headway.

Last year, just weeks after former US President Bill Clinton took home two American journalists who had been convicted of illegally crossing into North Korea from China, Pyongyang relaxed border restrictions for travel to and from Kaesong.

It also said that it would resume tourist travel to the North's Kumgang mountain holiday resort and Kaesong, and allow South Korean visitors to visit the country's holiest mountain, Mount Paektu in the north of the country.

The December visit by Stephen Bosworth, the US special representative on North Korea, who was the highest-level American visitor in nine years, also led to hopes that Pyongyang would soon return to the talks that it abandoned in April, shortly before trialling a nuclear bomb.

However North Korea's foreign ministry repeated last week that it would not return to the talks with the United States, China, South Korea, Russia and Japan until the sanctions are lifted.

The ministry also renewed a demand for early discussions on a peace pact aimed at formally ending the 1950-1953 war.

The United States and South Korea have rejected the demands, saying that the North must first come back to the disarmament talks and show that it is serious about scrapping its atomic programmes.

US Assistant Secretary of State Kurt Campbell will visit Japan and South Korea early next month to discuss regional security issues including ways to revive the six-party talks.

South Korean Foreign Minister Yu Myung-Hwan said on Friday that he hopes talks on North Korea's nuclear disarmament can resume next month, but reaffirmed that sanctions would remain in force until progress is made.

He said that China and other participants were making efforts to restart the six-nation talks last held in December 2008.

"I hope the six-party talks may resume before or after the Lunar New Year [February 13-15]," Mr Yu told journalists.

<http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/asia/article7000336.ece>

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Xinhua News – China
24 January 2010

Talks For Peace Treaty, Lifting Of Sanctions Should Be Based On Progress In Denuclearization: S Korean Official

SEOUL, Jan. 24 (Xinhua) -- Talks for a peace treaty on the Korean Peninsula and lifting of sanctions on the Democratic People 's Republic of Korea (DPRK) should be based on achieving progress in the process of the DPRK's denuclearization, Wi Sung-lac, Special Representative for Korean Peninsula Peace and Security Affairs, said on Sunday.

The remark came after Wi, also Seoul's top negotiator in the six party talks over DPRK's nuclear program, returned from a four- day trip in the United States.

Wi told South Korea's Yonhap News Agency that the nuclear negotiations and talks for a peace treaty "do not clash with each other, but can be held in parallel", however, he noted that the two issues only can be discussed simultaneously after the process of the DPRK's denuclearization gains driving force.

As for the sanctions imposed on the DPRK, Wi said the United Nations Security Council has its consistent stance that the sanctions can only be removed after the DPRK makes progress in its denuclearization process, and both Seoul and Washington remained a clear position on this issue.

"The international community imposed the sanctions on North Korea (DPRK) due to its nuclear test, so the UN Security Council will only consider removing the sanctions after the North (DPRK) makes essential change in its stance on the denuclearization," Wi said.

Wi paid a visit to the United States on Jan. 20-23. During his four-day stay, the South Korean top nuclear envoy met with his U.S. counterpart Sung Kim and several other officials, including Deputy Secretary of State James Steinberg and Special Representative for the DPRK Policy Stephen Bosworth, to coordinate stance on the nuclear issue and latest remarks mad by the DPRK.

The DPRK on Jan. 18 demanded negotiating a peace treaty and lifting sanctions before it returns to the six-party nuclear disarmament talks.

http://news.xinhuanet.com/english2010/world/2010-01/24/c_13149149.htm

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Times of India
25 January 2010

Pak Tunnels Near Border Worry Government

By Sachin Parashar, TNN

NEW DELHI: As the war of words between India and Pakistan reaches a crescendo, New Delhi has cause for fresh alarm, due to some of the activities being carried out across the border. Intelligence agencies in India have brought to the notice of the government that Pakistan has been frantically building up tunnels in areas not far from the border with India.

According to these inputs, the tunnels have been dug up in the Sargodha district of Pakistani Punjab and can even be noticed by, as a top intelligence officer put it, a discerning eye on Google satellite imagery. "An attempt is being made to establish the purpose of digging up such tunnels which are really big in size. These clearly can't be meant for transport as is obvious from the images available; unlike ordinary tunnels they don't lead on to roads," said the official who is involved in analysing the information.

Pakistan is well within its rights to carry out any construction work on its territory and Islamabad is known to have constructed storage sheds for missiles and weapons in Sargodha, a known nuclear installation, in the past. However, the sheer size of the tunnels and the fact that these don't seem to be leading on to roads have raised suspicion that these could be used to store nuclear weapons or missiles which are battle ready.

The official said Pakistan has been known to store some of its deadliest, but unassembled, missiles like the Chinese M-11 in a sub-depot near the central ammunition depot in Sargodha. It is also the place where Pakistan's nuclear capable F-16 aircraft are said to be stationed. Located on the west of Lahore, Sargodha has always been the hub of Pakistan air force and, in fact, is home to its central air command.

If what Pakistan is doing is just a precautionary measure, considering Sargodha is a sensitive nuclear facility under threat from the Taliban and other terrorists, this has not been communicated to India either by Islamabad or the US which is fast taking it upon itself to safeguard all nuclear facilities in the country. In fact, the first attack on a nuclear installation by terrorists in Pakistan took place in Sargodha in November 2007.

According to Indian officials, Pakistan in the past has used Sargodha to store M-11 missiles which had been delivered unassembled to it by China. However, the pace at which these tunnels are coming up suggests that, as the official put it, Pakistan is up to something. Sargodha is also the place which the Chinese are said to regularly visit to train the Pakistanis in handling weapons and missiles.

<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Pak-tunnels-near-border-worry-government/articleshow/5496241.cms>

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New York Times
January 25, 2010

Pakistan Rejects Atom Bomb Material Cut - Off Talks

By REUTERS

GENEVA (Reuters) - Pakistan, citing a "clear and present danger" from its nuclear-armed rival India, ruled out on Monday global negotiations to ban the future production of material to make atomic bombs.

Confirming a Reuters report from January 22, Pakistan's ambassador to the United Nations in Geneva, Zamir Akram, said such a treaty would leave Pakistan -- the most recent member of the nuclear club -- at a permanent disadvantage.

Pakistan's stance, triggered by nuclear and arms deals between India and the United States as well as with other nuclear powers, is a blow to the Obama administration's efforts to revive global disarmament.

It also raises a stumbling block to the U.N.-sponsored Conference on Disarmament, where members had proposed starting work on talks to halt production of the highly enriched uranium and plutonium used to make nuclear weapons in what would be known as a fissile material cut-off treaty (FMCT).

"A fissile material cut-off treaty that only bans future production of fissile material is unacceptable to Pakistan," Akram told reporters. "It would only accentuate the disparity and imbalance that exists and that simply is not acceptable."

DISAPPOINTED OPTIMISM

Akram said Pakistan was willing to negotiate a fissile treaty that encompassed reductions of existing stocks of material.

It also was ready to discuss other areas proposed at the 65-member conference: nuclear disarmament, limiting the militarisation of outer space, and "negative security assurances" -- promises by nuclear powers not to use atomic weapons on non-nuclear states.

The conference broke a 12-year deadlock last May when all members, including Pakistan, agreed on a programme of work, including talks on a fissile treaty.

But Pakistan subsequently refused to allow the talks to start.

Akram said Islamabad's initial optimism about the Obama administration's disarmament intentions, which had led it to back the conference programme, had quickly evaporated.

Other countries were selling India weapons, he said, and under the terms of a civilian nuclear agreement Washington signed with India in 2005, India was negotiating deals with the U.S. and elsewhere to acquire nuclear technology and material.

Akram neither disputed nor confirmed estimates that India already has twice as many nuclear weapons as Pakistan.

A civilian deal signed with France would provide India with fissile material for its reactors for 60 years, allowing it to use its own stocks for weapons, he said.

India's nuclear and other arms plans were complicating the environment for disarmament talks, he said, saying it was unclear why the United States was helping India build up its nuclear potential.

"But for us it presents us with a clear and present danger arising out of the asymmetry in strategic capabilities in South Asia," he said.

Pakistan would not block the conference but needed more than vague promises that the talks could also cover fissile stocks.

"I want to be clear before we start negotiations what are we talking about," he said.

But Akram said he did not believe states with nuclear weapons would agree to include stocks in the negotiations.

And he condemned nuclear powers for signing civilian deals with India that undermine the nuclear non-proliferation regime.

"Their motivation is greed.. They want to make money. But for us it's life and death," he said.

(Editing by Michael Roddy)

<http://www.nytimes.com/reuters/2010/01/25/world/international-uk-arms-nuclear-pakistan.html>

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Washington Post
January 26, 2010

Report Says Al-Qaeda Still Aims To Use Weapons Of Mass Destruction Against U.S.

By Joby Warrick, Washington Post Staff Writer
Page - A02

When al-Qaeda's No. 2 leader, Ayman al-Zawahiri, called off a planned chemical attack on New York's subway system in 2003, he offered a chilling explanation: The plot to unleash poison gas on New Yorkers was being dropped for "something better," Zawahiri said in a message intercepted by U.S. eavesdroppers.

The meaning of Zawahiri's cryptic threat remains unclear more than six years later, but a new report warns that al-Qaeda has not abandoned its goal of attacking the United States with a chemical, biological or even nuclear weapon.

The report, by a former senior CIA official who led the agency's hunt for weapons of mass destruction, portrays al-Qaeda's leaders as determined and patient, willing to wait for years to acquire the kind of weapons that could inflict widespread casualties.

The former official, Rolf Mowatt-Larssen, draws on his knowledge of classified case files to argue that al-Qaeda has been far more sophisticated in its pursuit of weapons of mass destruction than is commonly believed, pursuing parallel paths to acquiring weapons and forging alliances with groups that can offer resources and expertise.

"If Osama bin Laden and his lieutenants had been interested in . . . small-scale attacks, there is little doubt they could have done so now," Mowatt-Larssen writes in a report released Monday by the Harvard Kennedy School of Government's Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs.

The report comes as a panel on weapons of mass destruction appointed by Congress prepares to release a new assessment of the federal government's preparedness for such an attack. The review by the bipartisan Commission on the Prevention of Weapons of Mass Destruction Proliferation and Terrorism is particularly critical of the Obama administration's actions so far in hardening the country's defenses against bioterrorism, according to two former government officials who have seen drafts of the report.

The commission's initial report in December 2008 warned that a terrorist attack using weapons of mass destruction was likely by 2013.

Mowatt-Larssen, a 23-year CIA veteran, led the agency's internal task force on al-Qaeda and weapons of mass destruction after the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks and later was named director of intelligence and counterintelligence for the Energy Department. His report warns that bin Laden's threat to attack the West with weapons of mass destruction is not "empty rhetoric" but a top strategic goal for an organization that seeks the economic ruin of the United States and its allies to hasten the overthrow of pro-Western governments in the Islamic world.

He cites patterns in al-Qaeda's 15-year pursuit of weapons of mass destruction that reflect a deliberateness and sophistication in assembling the needed expertise and equipment. He describes how Zawahiri hired two scientists -- a Pakistani microbiologist sympathetic to al-Qaeda and a Malaysian army captain trained in the United States -- to work separately on efforts to build a biological weapons lab and acquire deadly strains of anthrax bacteria. Al-Qaeda achieved both goals before September 2001 but apparently had not successfully weaponized the anthrax spores when the U.S.-led invasion of Afghanistan forced the scientists to flee, Mowatt-Larssen said.

"This was far from run-of-the-mill terrorism," he said in an interview. "The program was highly compartmentalized, at the highest level of the organization. It was methodical, and it was professional."

Mowatt-Larssen said he has seen no evidence linking al-Qaeda's program with the anthrax attacks on U.S. politicians and news outlets in 2001. Zawahiri's plan was aimed at mass casualties and "not just trying to scare people with a few letters," he said.

Evidence from al-Qaeda documents and interrogations suggests that terrorists leaders had settled on anthrax as the weapon of choice and believed that the tools for a major biological attack were within their grasp, the former CIA official said. Al-Qaeda remained interested in nuclear weapons as well but understood that the odds of success were much longer.

"They realized they needed a lucky break," Mowatt-Larssen said. "That meant buying or stealing fissile material or acquiring a stolen bomb."

Bush administration officials feared that bin Laden was close to obtaining nuclear weapons in 2003 after U.S. spies picked up a cryptic message by a Saudi affiliate of al-Qaeda referring to plans to obtain three stolen Russian nuclear devices. The intercepts prompted the U.S. and Saudi governments to go on alert and later led to an aggressive Saudi crackdown that resulted in the arrest or killing of dozens of suspected al-Qaeda associates.

After that, terrorists' chatter about a possible nuclear acquisition halted abruptly, but U.S. officials were never certain whether the plot was dismantled or simply pushed deeper underground.

"The crackdown was so successful," Mowatt-Larssen said, "that intelligence about the program basically dried up."

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/01/25/AR2010012502598.html>

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New York Times
January 26, 2010

Panel: US Not Ready For Bioterrorist Attack

By THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON (AP) -- The United States isn't prepared for a biological terrorist attack, a congressionally mandated panel said in a report released Tuesday.

The Commission on the Prevention of Weapons of Mass Destruction Proliferation gave the Obama administration a failing grade for its efforts to prepare for and respond to a biological attack, such as the release of deadly viruses or bacteria.

"Nearly a decade after Sept. 11, 2001 ... and one month after the Christmas Day bombing attempt, the United States is failing to address several urgent threats, especially bioterrorism," said former Sen. Bob Graham, chairman of the commission. "Each of the last three administrations has been slow to recognize and respond to the biothreat. But we no longer have the luxury of a slow learning curve, when we know al-Qaida is interested in bioweapons."

Retired Air Force Col. Randy Larsen, the commission's executive director, said the poor preparation for the swine flu epidemic in 2009 is proof that the country is not positioned to respond to something more serious. Larsen pointed to the early shortage of H1N1 vaccine despite a six-month warning from health officials that the disease would be potentially deadly.

No one in the Obama administration has taken the lead for protecting the country against bioterrorism, Larsen said.

"Especially troubling is the lack of priority given to the development of medical countermeasures -- the vaccines and medicines that would be required to mitigate the consequences of an attack," the report said.

The report recommended five steps the government should take to deal with the threat of bioterrorism:

- Conduct a comprehensive review of the domestic program to secure dangerous pathogens.
- Develop a national strategy for advancing the ability to conduct forensic analyses of bioterror attacks.
- Tighten government oversight of laboratories that deal with dangerous pathogens.
- Promote a culture of security awareness among scientists.
- Enhance the nation's rapid response plan to prevent biological attacks from inflicting mass casualties.

The commission was formed by Congress to evaluate the government's readiness for a terror attack involving weapons of mass destruction. Its report follows a study released Monday that warned that al-Qaida is still pursuing technology to conduct a biological, chemical or even nuclear attack against the United States.

That study, released by Harvard University's Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, said al-Qaida's "top WMD priority has been to acquire nuclear and strategic biological weapons."

<http://www.nytimes.com/aponline/2010/01/26/us/politics/AP-US-Terror-Report.html>

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RIA Novosti – Russian Information Agency
23 January 2010

Brazilian Police Discover 450 kg Of Contraband Uranium Ore

Police in the north Brazilian state of Amapa have unearthed a cache with 450 kg of enriched uranium ore, a dangerous mineral used for nuclear arms production.

The operation to seize radioactive material was a result of four-month work by investigators, who found a bag of pitchblende on Friday in a remote area of tropical rainforest.

Pitchblende, or uraninite, is an extremely radioactive mineral used as a major component for the production of fuel for nuclear power plants and nuclear arms.

An investigation is underway.

Brazil's nuclear capabilities are considered the most advanced in Latin America. The country runs its sole nuclear power plant, Angra, with two reactors, and a third is under construction.

RIO DE JANEIRO, January 23 (RIA Novosti)

<http://en.rian.ru/world/20100123/157658954.html>

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RIA Novosti – Russian Information Agency
OPINION & ANALYSIS
25 January 2010

Russian-American START Treaty Hinges On Simultaneous Ratification

MOSCOW. (RIA Novosti military commentator Ilya Kramnik) - Russia and the United States have agreed to resume talks on a new strategic arms reduction treaty. A U.S. delegation led by National Security Advisor General James Jones and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral Mike Mullen, is expected in Moscow soon.

U.S. President Barack Obama and his Russian counterpart, Dmitry Medvedev, agreed last year to reduce the nuclear warhead stockpile to between 1,500 and 1,675 for each country.

A higher level of the negotiators shows that the sides have made progress toward signing a new START treaty, which was at the top of their agenda last year. The new treaty is to replace the 1991 agreement, which expired on December 5, 2009.

Russia and the U.S. failed to finalize a new treaty late last year, but hope to sign it soon.

President Medvedev said commenting on the work to draft a new fundamental treaty on nuclear disarmament: "The way it was done in Soviet times is unacceptable - when the Soviet Union ratified the documents and the U.S. did not."

"We must prepare a document that has been well thought out, that reflects our understanding about strategic armaments, and ratify it together. Or this process is impossible," Medvedev said.

The issue of simultaneous ratification of a new treaty is key to the ongoing talks. There have been many cases in Russian-American relations when the ratification of such agreements was put off for far-fetched reasons. For example, the U.S. Senate has not ratified the SALT-2 strategic arms limitation treaty signed in 1979.

Russia cannot accept this in the current situation because in conditions of a sharp quantitative reduction of strategic nuclear forces any change in the balance of forces in favor of either side or failure by one of the sides to implement an agreement slashing strategic nuclear arms could disrupt the Russian-American nuclear parity. Therefore, "simultaneous ratification of the relevant documents must be our guiding principle," President Medvedev said.

By now, Russia and the United States have coordinated a number of disputed issues, such as the limitation of delivery vehicles to 700-750 systems, no limits on the deployment sites for silo-based missiles and for the patrolling areas of mobile systems, as well as a method of calculating delivery vehicles that will preclude the creation of the so-called return potential (stockpiled warheads).

The main disputed issue is the planned worldwide deployment of U.S. ballistic missile defense systems. Russia insists that a new treaty must limit a potential deployment of such ABM systems, while the United States has so far refused to make the commitment.

The U.S. has made concessions to Russia with regard to the return potential and control of mobile missile systems, which means that Russia should agree to concessions on the ABM deployment sites, the limitation of which could render it almost useless.

In future, intercontinental ballistic missiles could be intercepted, with a minor degree of probability, in the absence of effective ABM systems based on new physical principles only if the defending side knows the tentative location of the launching sites. But the probability of intercepting ICBMs plummets dramatically if the area of potential launching sites is large.

When speaking about the reasons for Washington's readiness to make concessions to Russia on a new START treaty, we should bear in mind a dissenting view that says Moscow should reciprocate by changing its stance on the Afghan war and the potential Iranian conflict.

The American politicians and public should thoroughly consider which is more important for the U.S., a new treaty or Russia's assistance.

As for Russia, it has already decided that even a signed and ratified START treaty is not worth its involvement in a war. Therefore, the best achievement for Russian diplomats will be the signing of the treaty against the promise of "moral support" to the United States in armed conflicts and more practical assistance in the form of transit corridors.

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OPINION

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Three Steps To Reducing Nuclear Terrorism

America's nuclear weapons and the threat of nuclear terrorism are interconnected. How the US handles its arsenal must change.

Micah Zenko and Michael Levi

Washington — The United States is on the cusp of making a needed shift on policy related to nuclear weapons.

The last time the US had a congressionally mandated review of its nuclear status was in 2002. In that Nuclear Posture Review, declassified portions contained no mention of "preventing nuclear terrorism." The latest review, slated to be finished in March, appears to indicate that America's nuclear arsenal and the threat of nuclear terrorism are interconnected issues. That means that how the US handles its nuclear weapons will have to change.

Such a shift, one long advocated by experts and practitioners, would recognize two key principles:

First, the threat from terrorists acquiring a nuclear weapon (or the material to make one) is greater than that of a nuclear strike against the US.

As a National Intelligence Estimate warned in December 2001: "The Intelligence Community judge[s] that US territory is more likely to be attacked with WMD [weapons of mass destruction] using nonmissile means – most likely from terrorists – than by missiles."

Second, the routine maintenance and deployment of nuclear weapons throughout the world increases the likelihood of nuclear terrorism. In short, the bomb does not necessarily make us safer.

The Nuclear Posture Review is intended to provide strategic guidance for the US on how to handle nuclear weapons for the next five to 10 years. If the following steps are implemented, loose nuclear material – and thus the threat of nuclear terrorism – around the world could be secured within a few years:

1. Washington must recognize that the only role for US nuclear weapons is deterrence. Currently, the US has a more expansive approach. In particular, it retains the threat of preventive offensive strikes against adversaries' weapons of mass destruction.

This encourages others to disperse their weapons widely, to adopt weaker command and control, to employ weapons on mobile systems, and to avoid transparency and cooperation with US or international efforts to better secure their nuclear weapons. All these steps put their arsenals at greater risk to theft.

Since each weapon is vulnerable to theft during transport for maintenance, refurbishment, or deployment, reducing the number of weapons in every nuclear weapons nation is an important component of preventing nuclear terrorism. US restraint on each front can help encourage similar restraint from others.

2. The US currently deploys some 2,700 operational nuclear warheads: 2,200 "strategic" weapons mounted on intercontinental missiles or long-range bombers and 500 "tactical" weapons for short-range weapons systems. (Another 600 strategic weapons will be cut when the forthcoming US-Russia nuclear reduction agreement is implemented.)

America's arsenal is deployed at various states of readiness on bases across the US, on 14 Trident submarines, and in allied countries.

The US should consolidate the sites where warheads and bomb-grade fissile materials are stored, convert Trident submarines for conventional missions to threaten an adversary's WMD programs, and, in consultation with European allies, remove all forward-deployed tactical nuclear weapons in storage vaults at air bases in Britain, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, and Turkey.

3. Finally, sustained diplomacy with countries that have the bomb or bomb-grade fissile materials is an essential ingredient for implementing the review's new guidance.

Years after the revelations of Al Qaeda's efforts to obtain a bomb, there remain foreign leaders unwilling to remove unneeded fissile material, bureaucratic hurdles to implementing or sustaining threat reduction programs, and complacency about the threat. Diplomatic initiatives to reduce the likelihood of loose nukes could be more accepted if conducted parallel to a strategy that reduces the use of US nuclear materials.

In his April 2009 speech in Prague, Czech Republic, President Obama announced "a new international effort to secure all vulnerable nuclear material around the world within four years."

If the forthcoming Nuclear Posture Review acknowledges that America's nuclear arsenal and the threat of nuclear terrorism are interconnected issues, and carefully translates that into practice, it will improve the administration's odds at meeting its deadline.

Micah Zenko is a fellow in the Center for Preventive Action at the Council on Foreign Relations, and Michael Levi a senior fellow at the council and author of the book "On Nuclear Terrorism."

<http://www.csmonitor.com/Commentary/Opinion/2010/0125/Three-steps-to-reducing-nuclear-terrorism>

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