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Russia Says Arms Control Talks Held Up By U.S. Missile Shield Plan

Monday, February 22, 2010

A Russian diplomat said Friday that U.S. plans to locate missile interceptors in Romania as part of its program for European missile defense were hampering final negotiations on a new nuclear arms control treaty, the Associated Press reported (see *GSN*, Feb. 19).

"In the most immediate sense" planned Romanian involvement in the U.S. missile shield is "influencing" final talks on a successor agreement to the expired 1991 Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty, Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov said in an Interfax report (see *GSN*, Feb. 18).

Romania announced this month that it appeared ready to host U.S. ballistic missile interceptors on its territory. This would occur under a revised U.S. shield that envisages land- and sea-based interceptors deployed around Europe as protection from potential short- and medium-range missiles launched from Iran.

While Russia initially greeted the new plan as an improvement over a Bush-era initiative, Moscow has increasingly raised objections to the roles that Eastern European countries such as Poland would play. The Kremlin has objected to Romanian involvement on the grounds that it would negatively influence Russian security interests. It has also criticized potential Bulgarian participation, though Sofia has said it has not had any specific discussions with Washington on the matter.

U.S. Ambassador to Moscow John Beyrle said recently that Washington had accepted a Russian request to add language to the new nuclear accord that would recognize the connection between defensive programs, like the missile shield, and offensive systems. However, Washington has said the nuclear treaty would not restrict U.S. missile shield activities (Associated Press/*Washington Post*, Feb. 19).

Moscow's ambassador to NATO said Friday that the Obama administration would offer further information about its missile defense plans at a March 3 meeting in Brussels of the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council, United Press International reported.

Interfax reported that Russian envoy Dmitry Rogozin said that "questions that the Russian side plans to ask will be of interest not only to members of the Russia-NATO Council but also to neutral states and countries in the CIS (Commonwealth of Independent States)."

Moscow agrees with Washington that the two former Cold War adversaries can cooperate in specific areas like missile defense, Rogozin said (United Press International, Feb. 19).

Meanwhile, Russian Defense Minister Anatoly Serdyukov said Friday that his nation would deploy short-range Iskander tactical missiles in its Baltic Kaliningrad territory only if there is a "direct threat to Russia," Reuters reported.

"If there is some threat from Europe to Russia, then we will place them (there)," Serdyukov said. "This is a matter where the decision is made by the president."

He did not specify what possible dangers would necessitate such an action.

Moscow last year withdrew its plan to field Iskander missiles in Kaliningrad following U.S. President Barack Obama's decision to not move quickly in implementing his predecessor's plan for European missile defense. The Bush administration plan, now scrapped, involved the fielding of 10 long-range missile interceptors in Poland and a radar installation in the Czech Republic.

However, Moscow has expressed displeasure with the Obama administration's plan to deploy Patriot missile batteries in Poland, which borders Kaliningrad (Terhi Kinnunen, Reuters, Feb. 19).

http://www.globalsecuritynewswire.org/gsn/nw_20100222_7828.php

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Washington Post

Clinton Urges Russia To Finish Nuke Treaty

By MATTHEW LEE

The Associated Press

Tuesday, February 23, 2010

WASHINGTON -- Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton on Tuesday urged Russia to wrap up negotiations quickly with the Obama administration over a key nuclear arms reduction treaty that expired in December.

Clinton spoke by phone with Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov to press him on completing the talks, which began last year and are still ongoing in Geneva as soon as possible, State Department spokesman P.J. Crowley said.

"She emphasized to the foreign minister that our negotiators are close to reaching an agreement and encouraged Russia to continue to move ahead, push hard so we could reach an agreement in the next couple weeks," he told reporters. "There are some details to be worked out and we hope we can do that in the coming days."

"We are at the point where we think we can reach an agreement relatively quickly and we are encouraging the Russian side to do its part," Crowley said. He would not elaborate on what progress had been made and what sticking points remained.

President Barack Obama and Russian President Dmitry Medvedev agreed in July to cut the number of nuclear warheads each country has to between 1,500 and 1,675 under a new treaty.

Obama is hoping to have a new START agreement headed for Senate ratification by April when he has called for a White House summit on nuclear-proliferation.

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/02/23/AR2010022303732.html>

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Business Week

Medvedev, Obama May Talk On Nuclear Arms Reduction

February 23, 2010

By Viola Gienger

Feb. 23 (Bloomberg) -- Russian President Dmitry Medvedev and U.S. President Barack Obama may talk in a few days in an attempt to bridge differences holding up completion of a nuclear-arms reduction treaty, a top Russian lawmaker said.

Konstantin Kosachyov, chairman of the international affairs committee in the State Duma, Russia's lower house of parliament, told a forum in the Washington area today that the conversation may be "decisive" in resolving the issues.

"The Russian side is a bit more pessimistic and they believe the disagreement is quite serious and we will need to have much higher flexibility from the American side," Kosachyov told an audience at the Rand Corp. policy-research group in Arlington, Virginia.

The primary disagreement centers on U.S. plans for a missile-defense system in Europe and might require a separate treaty later to resolve, he said.

The two sides are seeking a new agreement to cut nuclear warheads, bombers and missiles that would replace the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty, which expired in December. Negotiators have been in on-and-off talks in Geneva for months, and U.S. officials have said major sticking points have been resolved and that they are working on "technical" issues.

Agreement 'Close'

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton told her Russian counterpart, Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, today that "our negotiators are close to reaching an agreement," department spokesman Philip J. Crowley told reporters. She "encouraged Russia to continue to move ahead, push hard so we can reach an agreement in the next couple of weeks," he said.

Kosachyov said the chance to complete the nuclear talks in the next two or three weeks "is quite real."

Russia wants stronger language in the new treaty related to U.S. plans for a missile defense system in and around Europe, Kosachyov told reporters after the forum.

The U.S., wary of being limited in its plans for defenses against missiles from potential attackers such as Iran, has said such a system should be discussed separately from offensive weapons.

While a separate treaty on defensive weapons might be an option, Russia wants to ensure language in the arms-reduction treaty refers to a link between the two issues, Kosachyov said.

President George W. Bush's administration withdrew the U.S. from the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty in 2001 that had limited such defensive systems.

Annual Exchange

Kosachyov is in Washington as part of an annual exchange between members of his panel and their counterparts on the House Foreign Affairs Committee, chaired by California Democrat Howard Berman.

The Obama administration is seeking Russia's cooperation on Iran, Afghanistan and the nuclear weapons treaty even while backing expanding NATO's membership among former Soviet republics over the objections of leaders in Moscow.

Russia also has expressed concern over the intent of the U.S. missile-defense plans, which involve placing radar and missile sites in former Soviet bloc nations that are now members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization with the U.S., Canada and other European countries.

The Obama administration, like that of Bush's, says the missile defenses are intended to protect against a potential threat from Iran.

Russia has indicated it might support United Nations sanctions against Iran in a further effort to curb the Persian Gulf nation's nuclear program.

--Editors: Don Frederick, Paul Tighe

<http://www.businessweek.com/news/2010-02-23/medvedev-obama-may-talk-on-arms-treaty-russian-lawmaker-says.html>

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New York Times
February 20, 2010

Iranian Supreme Leader Denies Nuclear Arms Push

By Robert F. Worth
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BEIRUT, Lebanon — Speaking from the deck of a newly unveiled naval destroyer, Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, derided Western claims about his country's nuclear program, saying Iran did not believe in nuclear weapons and was not seeking to develop them.

He spoke a day after United Nations nuclear inspectors issued a strongly worded report citing evidence of "past or current undisclosed activities" by Iran's military to develop a nuclear warhead.

Ayatollah Khamenei's comments seemed intended to send a dual message, repeating Iran's denials about nuclear weapons even as he showcased the country's conventional military might in the Persian Gulf and harshly criticized the American military presence in those waters. He suggested that the United States and Israel were trying to frighten Iran's neighbors with a view to selling them weapons.

"Our neighbors know that these are false claims and that America and the Zionist regime are trying to create divisions and divert the attention of the Islamic world from their real enemies, which are the U.S. and Israel," the ayatollah said, in remarks broadcast on state television.

Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton visited Saudi Arabia and Qatar this week to discuss Iran, warning of a possible nuclear arms race and a creeping military dictatorship led by Iran's Revolutionary Guards Corps. United States military officials said last month that they were deploying more ships and enhanced antimissile equipment in the region, whose predominantly Sunni Arab nations are anxious about the influence of Shiite Iran.

The United Nations report appeared to revise an American intelligence assessment published just over two years ago that suggested that Iran had suspended work on a bomb in 2003. It was the first report issued under the new director general of the International Atomic Energy Agency, Yukiya Amano.

The report seemed to have an effect among some of the world powers that have been seeking to restrain Iran's nuclear program.

"We are very alarmed," said Russia's foreign minister, Sergey V. Lavrov, in a radio interview on Friday. "We cannot accept that Iran is refusing to cooperate with the I.A.E.A."

Russia has not declared that it will unequivocally support sanctions on Iran, which are now being discussed as a possible next step following Iran's dismissal of a United Nations-sponsored plan to process its uranium abroad. But Russia — which has important commercial links with Iran, and has been reluctant to support sanctions in the past — has been more critical in recent months, and has urged Iran to comply with international regulations.

Iran's envoy to the nuclear agency, Ali Asghar Soltanieh, played down the report's claims on Friday in comments to the semiofficial ISNA news agency. He dismissed the passages about possible weapons development as "baseless," but he also said other parts of the report vindicated Iran's claims that its nuclear program was civilian. "Western countries are interpreting the report in different ways and exaggerating it," he said. "Amano's report once more confirmed all other reports over the past six years which showed that Iran's nuclear program is peaceful."

Ayatollah Khamenei spoke from the deck of Iran's first domestically manufactured destroyer, the Jamaran. It was launched from Bandar Abbas, off the Strait of Hormuz, a strategic point through which much of the world's oil and energy supplies pass.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/02/20/world/middleeast/20iran.html>

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International Business Times – U.S. Edition

French PM: New Iran Measures Needed If No Progress

By Sophie Louet, Reuters

20 February 2010

DAMASCUS - French Prime Minister Francois Fillon said world powers would have to take new action against Iran in the next few weeks if Tehran continues to reject Western proposals on its disputed nuclear programme.

Fillon said he was worried by a new report by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) this week which said Iran may be working to develop a nuclear-armed missile.

"We have read the new report (on Iran) by the IAEA ... and it is very worrying," Fillon told a news conference in Damascus alongside his Syrian counterpart Naji al-Otari.

"We proposed dialogue to Iran for several months and for the moment all the propositions have been turned down," he said. "If the situation does not change, we have no other solution but to look into new measures in the coming weeks."

The United States is leading a push for a fourth round of United Nations Security Council sanctions against Iran because of suspicions it is secretly developing a nuclear arsenal.

Washington has been supported from fellow Security Council members Britain and France, while Russia, which has been more reluctant to impose more sanctions, has said it was now "very alarmed" by the IAEA report.

China has so far resisted imposing more sanctions.

Iran denies it is trying to develop a nuclear weapon and says the accusations of Western countries are baseless.

Syria, an ally of Iran, said Tehran was developing nuclear energy towards peaceful ends.

"Nothing justifies the fear over this issue," said al-Otari. "We think that it's a right ... of all peoples to have nuclear energy for civil purposes," he said, but added that Israeli nuclear arms were a threat to world peace.

"We still hope that the international community ... will apply the same criteria to everyone," he said.

Fillon also asked Damascus for assistance in preventing Iran making decisions which were "dangerous to world peace".

"Peace in the region comes via a change in attitude of the Iranian government," Fillon said.

For several years, the IAEA has been investigating Western intelligence reports indicating Iran has coordinated efforts to process uranium, test explosives at high altitude and revamp a ballistic missile cone in a way suitable for a nuclear warhead.

(Reporting by Sophie Louet; Writing by Sophie Taylor; Editing by Jon Hemming)

<http://www.ibtimes.com/articles/20100220/french-pm-iran-measures-needed-if-no-progress.htm>

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Washington Post

Syria Dismisses IAEA Call For More Inspectors Access

By Khaled Yacoub Oweis

Reuters

Saturday, February 20, 2010

DAMASCUS (Reuters) - Syria dismissed on Saturday an International Atomic Energy Agency recommendation to allow its inspectors unrestrained access, days after the agency said a bombed Syrian complex could have been a nuclear site.

An IAEA report said on Thursday that Uranium particles found at a Syrian complex destroyed by an Israeli air raid in 2007 suggest the possibility of covert nuclear activity at the site.

The report, by new IAEA Director-General Yukiya Amano, prodded Syria to adopt the IAEA's Additional Protocol, which permits unfettered inspections beyond a declared nuclear site to check out any covert atomic activity.

"We are committed to the non-proliferation agreement between the agency and Syria and we (only) allow inspectors to come according to this agreement," Syrian Foreign Minister Walid al-Moualem said.

"We will not allow anything beyond the agreement because Syria does not have a military nuclear program. Syria is not obliged to open its other sites to inspectors," Moualem said after meeting his Austrian counterpart Michael Spindelegger.

Moualem did not address the findings of the latest IAEA report on Syria and repeated Syria's position that its nuclear activities are peaceful and related mostly to medicine.

SUSPICIONS

The United States said the site bombed by Israeli warplanes three years ago at al Kubar, around 60 km (37 miles) west of the city of Deir al-Zor, was a North Korean designed nuclear reactor geared to making weapons-grade plutonium.

The IAEA report lent public support for the first time to the U.S. assessment.

"Unlike Israel, our program is peaceful," Moualem said, referring to the Arab view that Israel has a massive nuclear arsenal that contributes to Middle East instability.

Previous IAEA reports on its investigation into Kubar said lack of Syrian cooperation impeded the investigation.

U.N. inspectors examined the site in June 2008 but Syrian authorities has barred them access since and did not let them visit three military sites.

The IAEA has also been checking whether there could be a link between the particles uncovered at Kubar and similar traces detected in swipe samples taken at a Damascus nuclear research reactor later in 2008.

The report said Syria had refused a meeting in Damascus last month to address the issue. But inspectors now planned to visit the research reactor on February 23.

Syria, is an ally of Iran, which is under IAEA investigation over its nuclear facilities. Moualem said Western proposals for fresh U.N. sanctions on Iran were counterproductive.

"We do not think sanctions will solve the issue," he said. "They will complicated the chances for a constructive dialogue between Iran and the West."

French Prime Minister Francois Fillon said on during a visit to Syria on Saturday that world powers would have to take new action against Iran if Tehran made no further gestures.

(Editing by Jon Hemming)

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/02/20/AR2010022001469.html>

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Press TV– Iran

Rafsanjani: IAEA Report 'Custom-Made' For Western Powers

Sunday, 21 February 2010

The UN nuclear watchdog's latest report on Iran was clearly tailored to suit Western interests and demands, says the Chairman of Iran's Expediency Council Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani.

Rafsanjani said Saturday that the Director-General of the International Atomic Energy Agency Yukiya Amano was "heavily influenced" by Western countries when he issued the report.

"The report was clearly custom-made for Western powers," said the former Iranian President. "There is no way an international organization with an independent approach would make such comments."

Rafsanjani criticized attempts in the West to politicize and demonize Iran's enrichment program, saying they are all aimed at creating a climate of fear and intimidation, both in the region and in the world.

“The tidal wave of threats and accusations against Iran's nuclear activity has certainly been unprecedented, but [Western powers] should come to realize that they have no chance of forcing Iranians [into giving up their enrichment program],” said Rafsanjani.

Rafsanjani went to add that one expected that "foreign enemies of Iran would not opt for "aggressive behavior" after millions of Iranians took part in rallies — held during the 31st anniversary of the victory of the Islamic Revolution — and threw their weight behind the Islamic establishment.

His comments come only three days after the UN nuclear agency released a report about Iran's nuclear program.

The UN nuclear watchdog has carried out the highest number of inspections in Iran compared to any other country throughout its history, and found nothing to indicate that the program has diverted toward weaponization.

The report, while critical of some aspects of Iran's enrichment activities, confirmed once more the non-diversion of declared nuclear material in the country.

Iran's ambassador to the IAEA Ali Asghar Soltanieh said on Thursday, and then again on Saturday, that the report shows more than ever that Tehran's nuclear activity is in fact peaceful.

But Western officials, who have long advocated stringent measures against Iran, have used the two-sided report as an opportunity to impose a new round of sanctions on the country.

The Tehran government has rejected Western concern over the report as “groundless”.

"It seems that unsubstantiated allegations that certain countries had previously made about Iran have once again been introduced in this report," ISNA quoted Soltanieh as saying.

"Issues pertaining to the alleged studies, missiles and explosives are worn-out topics, which have already been dismissed in [former IAEA chief Mohammad ElBaradei's] reports. They are not anything new," he added.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail.aspx?id=119131§ionid=351020104>

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Washington Post

The Force Needed To Contain Iran

By James M. Lindsay and Ray Takeyh

Sunday, February 21, 2010

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As Iran relentlessly moves toward acquiring a nuclear weapons capability, calls will grow for the United States to think seriously about how to contain Tehran. A preventive attack will not work, some will argue, and could unleash a wave of terrorism that would further imperil Iraq and Afghanistan. Conversely, containment will be held up as a way to deter Tehran without having to resort to military force.

But this view draws a false distinction between containment and force. A preventive attack might not end Iran's nuclear ambitions. Defense Secretary Robert Gates argues that a successful attack would delay the Iranian program by at most a few years. Yet a policy of containment will not save the White House from having to make tough choices about using force. Indeed, Iran can be contained only if Washington is prepared to use force against an emboldened adversary armed with the ultimate weapon.

The rationale for the Iranian nuclear program has changed over time. It began as part of a largely defensive strategy under the moderate presidencies of Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani and Mohammad Khatami. Nuclear weapons would provide a way to deter a range of foes while enhancing national prestige.

Today, as Iranian hawks consolidate their power and the Revolutionary Guards emerge as a key pillar of the state, Tehran views nuclear weapons as the means to regional preeminence. A nuclear shield would give Iran freedom to project its power in the Middle East. Such an Iran is unlikely to be subtle about brandishing the nuclear card.

It would take considerable American political skill and will to contain such regional pretensions. Washington would need to be explicit about its red lines: no initiation of conventional warfare against other countries; no use or transfer of nuclear weapons, material or technologies; no stepped-up support for terrorist or subversive activities.

Washington would need to be just as explicit about the consequences of crossing those lines: potential U.S. military retaliation by any and all means necessary.

Tehran would probably test U.S. resolve early on, believing that regional dynamics had shifted sharply in its favor. In that case, the United States would face a momentous credibility crisis because it had failed to stop Iran from going nuclear after persistently declaring that such an outcome was unacceptable. Even close U.S. allies would doubt Washington's security guarantees.

An emboldened Iran would test Washington in several ways. It would probably lend more support to Hezbollah and Hamas and encourage them to act more aggressively against Israel. It might step up subversive activities against the Gulf sheikdoms and demand that they evict U.S. troops from their territory.

A nuclear Iran could also be tempted to transfer nuclear materials and technologies to other countries. President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad has already declared that "Iran's nuclear achievements belong to all those countries thinking of peace and welfare, and we are prepared to provide these achievements to those who hate war and aggression." How would the United States respond to an Iran that transferred advanced centrifuges or nuclear weapon designs to its Syrian ally? Or if it gave fissile material to a terrorist group?

Such dangerous and destabilizing actions cannot be addressed by tough diplomatic talk or yet more U.N. Security Council resolutions. It can be addressed only by a willingness to respond with force. And in the curious logic that governs deterrence, a Tehran that believes Washington will retaliate will be less likely to act aggressively in the first place.

The challenges of making containment work make it far preferable that Iran stop -- or be stopped -- short of becoming a nuclear power. Efforts to negotiate limits on Iran's nuclear program must be pursued with vigor, and economic pressure on Tehran must be maintained. Military options should not be taken off the table.

If Tehran remains determined to go nuclear and preventive attacks prove too risky or unworkable to carry out, the United States will need to formulate a strategy to contain Iran. In doing so, however, it would be a mistake to assume that containment would save the United States from the need to make tough choices about retaliation. If Washington is not prepared to back up a containment strategy with force, the damage created by Iran's going nuclear could become catastrophic.

James M. Lindsay is senior vice president and Ray Takeyh is a senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations. Their article "After Iran Gets the Bomb" will be published in the March-April issue of Foreign Affairs.

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/02/19/AR2010021904255.html>

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Tehran Times – Iran

Monday, February 22, 2010

IAEA Director Should Amend Report: MP

Tehran Times Political Desk

TEHRAN - Majlis National Security and Foreign Policy Committee Chairman Alaeddin Boroujerdi has said that International Atomic Energy Agency Secretary General Yukiya Amano should amend his latest report about Iran's nuclear program before delivering it to the IAEA Board of Governors.

"The agency's approach... has become more politicized and the report has been written under pressure from the United States," Boroujerdi told the Mehr News Agency on Sunday.

Amano should correct his report before delivering it to the IAEA Board of Governors on March 1, the MP stated.

Although Iran notified the IAEA before it began enriching uranium to the 20 percent level and asked the agency to send inspectors to monitor the enrichment process, Amano said in his report that Iran started enriching nuclear fuel without informing the agency, Boroujerdi noted.

This will undermine the credibility of the agency's reports, he added.

Political analyst Morad Enadi said here on Sunday that the most important part of Amano's report is that it says there is no deviation in Iran's nuclear energy program from civilian purposes.

"Amano's report contained many positive points. For instance, he emphasized that the agency's inspectors conducted 35 snap inspections of Iran's facilities over the past three years," Enadi told the Mehr News Agency on Sunday.

Amano is moving on the same path as former IAEA secretary general Mohamed ElBaradei, but because Iran had just started the enrichment of uranium to the 20 percent level and certain Western countries politicized the issue, the end of the report was critical, he said.

In a report issued on Thursday, the UN nuclear watchdog claimed that it has concerns that Iran may be working to develop a nuclear-armed missile.

Iran says that its nuclear activities are being conducted to meet the country's growing demand for energy and the IAEA has never found evidence that its nuclear program has been diverted to weapons production.

MP Hojjatoleslam Hossein Ebrahimi said that no one should expect the IAEA to issue reports different from Amano's latest report about Iran's nuclear program because the agency is dominated by the U.S.

Thus, Iran should press ahead with its peaceful nuclear activities because the agency will never change its approach, Ebrahimi told the Mehr News Agency on Sunday.

http://www.tehrantimes.com/Index_view.asp?code=214623

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Daily Star – Lebanon

Washington To Pursue 'Pressure Track' On Iran: Petraeus

Rafsanjani slams IAEA report on Tehran's weapons drive as 'biased'

By Agence France Presse (AFP)

Compiled by Daily Star staff

Monday, February 22, 2010

The United States is raising the stakes in its bid to halt Iran's nuclear program, putting the issue on a "pressure track," top US General David Petraeus said on Sunday.

"I think that no one at the end of this time can say that the United States and the rest of the world have not given Iran every opportunity to resolve the issues diplomatically," he said.

"That puts us in a solid foundation now to go on what is termed the pressure track. That's the course on which we are embarked now," Petraeus, the head of US Central Command, told NBC television's "Meet the Press" program.

President Barack Obama's administration has talked about a dual-track approach to dealing with Iran's suspect nuclear activities, involving efforts to engage Iranian leaders backed up by the threat of further sanctions.

Petraeus also said that Iran's recent actions on its nuclear program have led US intelligence agencies to update a December 2007 estimation that seemed to downplay the threat posed by Tehran's atomic program.

"There is no question that some of the activities have advanced during that time. There is also a new national intelligence estimate being developed by our intelligence community in the United States," he said.

"We'll probably hear more on that from the International Atomic Energy Agency when it meets here in the next week or so. Clearly, its new director expressed concern about the activities," he added.

Petraeus noted that UN Security Council nations are also "expressing their concern" about Tehran's atomic aims.

In separate news, Iranian former President Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani lashed out at the UN nuclear watchdog on Saturday for presenting what he said was a biased report against Tehran's nuclear program.

"It is clearly evident that a part of this report has been presented following recommendation and under the influence of foreign elements," Rafsanjani said, referring to Thursday's release of a report by the UN body expressing "concerns" that Tehran could be developing a nuclear warhead.

"It cannot be said that this is the work of an independent international center," the official IRNA news agency quoted Rafsanjani as saying about the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

On Thursday, IAEA chief Yukiya Amano, in a blunt first report to the watchdog's board of governors, expressed concern Iran might be seeking to develop a nuclear warhead.

"The information available to the agency ... raises concerns about the possible existence in Iran of past or current undisclosed activities related to the development of a nuclear payload for a missile," he wrote.

Iranian officials have dismissed the report and the country's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei again denied on Friday that Tehran was seeking atomic weapons.

Iran maintains its nuclear program is solely for peaceful purpose, but world powers suspect the Islamic Republic is covertly aiming to develop a weapons capability.

Rafsanjani, who has been severely criticized by hardliners for backing groups inside Iran opposed to President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, said the report was a “psychological war by the United States and others” against the Islamic Republic.

“The volume of threats and biased political suggestions which seek to generate a consensus against Iran have been unprecedented. But they will not prevail,” he said.

Washington and other world powers are drumming up support for a fourth round of UN sanctions against Iran after it failed to heed repeated Security Council ultimatums to suspend uranium enrichment and failed to agree to a UN-drafted deal for the supply of nuclear fuel.

Foreign Ministry spokesman Ramin Mehmanparast also criticized the IAEA report. – AFP

http://www.dailystar.com.lb/article.asp?edition_id=10&categ_id=2&article_id=111977#

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Bloomberg.com

Iran to Build Two More Enrichment Plants In Mountains

February 22, 2010

By Ladane Nasseri

Feb. 22 (Bloomberg) -- Iran plans to build two more uranium enrichment plants at shielded mountain locations, the head of the country's atomic agency said.

“In the next Iranian year, based on the president's order, we may start the construction of two new enrichment sites,” Ali Akbar Salehi, head of Iran's Atomic Energy Organization, was quoted as saying by the Iranian Students News Agency. Iran's calendar year begins on March 21.

“From now on, all our uranium sites will be built inside the mountains,” to protect them from potential military strikes, Salehi said. He said the two new plants will be similar in size and capacity to the existing one in Natanz in central Iran, which started enriching uranium to 20 percent this month.

Iran's new phase of uranium enrichment has sharpened a conflict with Western powers that say the material may be intended for a bomb. The United Nations' atomic agency said in a report last week that Iran may be attempting to build nuclear weapons. Iran rejects the allegation and says it needs the technology for research and power production.

A new generation of centrifuges, the device that allows for the enrichment, will be used at the mountain sites, Salehi said. Details of the model will be announced by President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in April, he said.

Iran has said it needs to generate 20,000 megawatts of electricity to meet demand from its growing population. The country has plans to establish 10 sites as big as Natanz, according to the ISNA report.

Holy City

The Persian Gulf country disclosed last year that it is building another enrichment facility burrowed into a mountain near the holy city of Qom.

Iran's first nuclear plant is due to start producing power in the first half of the coming Iranian year, Salehi said last month. The 1000-megawatt plant, located in the southern port city of Bushehr, is being built by Russia.

The U.S. hasn't ruled out a military strike on Iran to curb its nuclear development. U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said on Nov. 9 that “every option is on the table.”

<http://www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=20601104&sid=ax.Ce5lh8zJk>

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Tehran Times – Iran

Tuesday, February 23, 2010

Iran To Start Building 2 New Enrichment Sites Next Year

Tehran Times Political Desk

TEHRAN – Iran announced on Monday it plans to start building two new uranium enrichment facilities next year.

Iran's Persian calendar year begins on March 21.

"Hopefully, we may begin the construction of two new enrichment sites in the next Iranian year as ordered by the president," Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) Director Ali-Akbar Salehi told the Iranian Students News Agency on Monday.

Salehi also said the AEOI intends to use more modern centrifuges at the new sites.

He added the facilities will be built inside mountains in order to protect them from any possible attack. "From now on our enrichment sites will not be open sites; (they) will be built inside mountains."

Salehi said the new enrichment sites will be equal to that of Natanz in terms of production capacity but smaller in geographical size.

He also said President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad will declare good news about the types of new centrifuges in the coming April, then it will be revealed what kind of centrifuges to be used in the new enrichment sites.

More than 8,600 centrifuges have been set up in Natanz. The facility will eventually house 54,000 centrifuges.

http://www.tehrantimes.com/index_View.asp?code=214681

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Xinhua News - China

Iran's President Calls For Unconditional Uranium Fuel Swap

February 23, 2010

TEHRAN, Feb. 23 (Xinhua) -- Iran's President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad Tuesday called for unconditional uranium fuel swap for Tehran's medical research reactor, rejecting claims that Iran attempts to gain access to nuclear weapons, the official IRNA news agency reported.

Addressing a crowd of people in Birjand, the capital of Iran's southern Khorasan province, Ahmadinejad said Iran has offered unconditional 20-percent enriched uranium fuel swap with the United States, Russia and France for Tehran's research reactor, implying that Tehran still sticks to it.

Under a draft deal brokered by the IAEA, most of Iran's existing low-grade enriched uranium should be shipped to Russia and France, where it would be processed into fuel rods with the purity of 20 percent. The higher-level enriched uranium will then be transported back to Iran.

Ahmadinejad rejected certain Western states' claim that they have evidences that Iran will be able to produce nuclear bomb within coming years, the report said.

"Once again, I strongly express that Iran is not after nuclear bomb," he was quoted as saying by IRNA.

Meanwhile, Iran's president insisted on the country's uranium enrichment program, saying "Iran is to powerfully make advances to acquire technology for enrichment of uranium for its nuclear sites, and the enemies will not be able to halt Iran's progress and development."

Ahmadinejad announced earlier this month that Iran had produced first batch of 20 percent enriched uranium under the watch of the IAEA.

The United States and its Western allies have been accusing Iran of secretly developing nuclear weapons under the disguise of a civilian program. Iran has denied the accusation and stressed its nuclear program is only for peaceful purposes.

http://news.xinhuanet.com/english2010/world/2010-02/23/c_13185261.htm

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UPI.com (United Press International)

'Options' Needed For Iran, Mullen Says

February 23, 2010

WASHINGTON, Feb. 23 (UPI) -- Washington needs "a range of options" to counter the growing nuclear ambitions of Iran, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff said.

U.S. Navy Adm. Mike Mullen said U.S. defense planners needed a variety of options to contain Iran, but emphasized the use of diplomatic and economic pressure.

"We owe the (defense) secretary and the president a range of options for this threat. We owe the American people our readiness," Mullen, who returned to Washington this week following an official tour of the Middle East, said in

a Pentagon release. "But as I've said many times, I worry a lot about the unintended consequences of any sort of military action."

Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad recently announced the first batch of uranium was enriched to 20 percent and turned over to scientists. He said Iranian scientists were capable of enriching uranium further to weapons grade but wouldn't do so.

Nuclear officials in Iran, meanwhile, announced plans to launch construction on new enrichment facilities starting at the beginning of the Iranian new year in March.

Mullen said U.S. allies in the Middle East shared a common opinion that Iranian activity in the region had a potentially destabilizing effect.

"Like us, it isn't just a nuclear-capable Iranian military our friends worry about," he said. "It's an Iran with hegemonic ambitions and a desire to dominate its neighbors."

http://www.upi.com/Top_News/Special/2010/02/23/Options-needed-for-Iran-Mullen-says/UPI-75511266942847/

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Straits Times – Singapore
February 24, 2010

Atomic Fuel Swap On Iran Soil

TEHERAN- IRAN said on Tuesday that any exchange of nuclear fuel must take place on its soil, underlining its rejection of a plan to ensure it does not amass possible atom bomb material.

In a letter to the International Atomic Energy Agency, its first official reply to an IAEA-brokered fuel swap proposal, Iran said it would prefer simply to buy the fuel but would accept a simultaneous exchange on its territory.

That would be unacceptable to the United States and European allies, which hope to get new sanctions imposed in the coming weeks after failing to reach agreement on the fuel exchange. But China expressed reservations over sanctions again, saying greater diplomatic efforts were needed. Western countries fear Iran wants to stockpile uranium to enrich it to levels that could be used for nuclear weapons.

Iran says its sole aim is to run nuclear energy plants to generate electricity and produce isotopes for medicine or agriculture. 'In order to bring about a constructive interaction, we have declared our readiness for a fuel swap, provided it is done within the country,' said Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Ramin Mehmanparast, cementing remarks by other Iranian officials. 'We are prepared for a fuel swap even though we do not regard this condition of supplying fuel to the Teheran research reactor through a swap as correct.'

Washington called Iran's response a 'red herring' that brought nothing new to the discussion. 'The Iranian counterproposal is unacceptable, as we've made clear before, and we will continue to work within the IAEA but also we will continue to consult from the international standpoint on appropriate next steps, including prospective sanctions,' said US State Department spokesman P.J. Crowley.

Earlier this month, Iran announced a start to higher-scale enrichment that would refine uranium to 20 per cent purity - the level needed for conversion into fuel plates for its Teheran research reactor, which makes isotopes for cancer patients. -- REUTERS

http://www.straitstimes.com/BreakingNews/World/Story/STIStory_494249.html

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Korea Herald – South Korea
February 22, 2010

Envoys For Six-Party Talks May Meet In Beijing

By Kim So-hyun

Chief negotiators of the six-nation talks aimed at North Korea's denuclearization are expected to meet soon in Beijing to share the outcome of recent discussions between China and North Korea, sources said.

U.S. special representative for North Korea policy Stephen Bosworth is reportedly considering visiting China next month with Sung Kim, U.S. chief envoy to the six-party talks.

Top nuclear negotiators of South Korea and Japan are also likely to fly to Beijing around that time.

"It is highly possible for Washington to send Bosworth or Kim to Beijing to be debriefed on the latest China-North Korea consultation and discuss ways to resume the six-party talks," a diplomatic source here said.

"I believe discussions between the United States and China are underway."

Pyongyang's chief nuclear envoy Kim Gye-gwan visited Beijing earlier this month and exchanged views on the six-party talks with his Chinese counterpart Wu Dawei.

As chair of the six-way talks and Pyongyang's closest ally, Beijing is anticipated to help arbitrate differences between the United States and North Korea over the conditions for restarting the multilateral nuclear negotiations.

Having grasped the North's position through Kim Gye-gwan, China is likely to present a compromise plan to the United States and seek adjustment should Bosworth or Sung Kim visit Beijing.

Washington is reportedly avoiding direct dialogue with Pyongyang.

Sources in Washington said North Korean officials' attempts to apply for U.S. visas in January were rejected.

The United States does not have immediate plans for another high-level diplomatic meeting with North Korea, the State Department said Friday, dismissing reports that the North's chief nuclear envoy will soon visit New York for meetings with his U.S. counterparts.

"There are no plans right now for North Korean officials to come to the United States, nor for U.S. officials to meet with North Koreans," spokesman Philip Crowley said.

Kim Gye-gwan said that during his trip to Beijing he discussed with Chinese officials the reopening of the six-party talks and a peace treaty to replace the armistice that ended the 1950-53 Korean War.

Pyongyang's official Korean Central News Agency said that Kim also discussed the removal of international sanctions on North Korea, another precondition Pyongyang has set prior to any revival of the six-party talks, which have been on and off since their inception in 2003.

Washington has said it is ready to discuss those issues, but only after the North returns to the six-way negotiation table and shows progress in denuclearization.

The United States is likely to talk with China in the meantime.

If Bosworth visits Beijing, he is expected to meet with Chinese Foreign Minister Yang Jieche and Wu Dawei, special representative on the Korean Peninsula affairs.

Seoul is also considering sending chief nuclear negotiator Wi Sung-lac to Beijing next month.

"It has been a year and three months since the last round of six-party talks, and the talks could lose momentum if they aren't resumed soon," a Seoul official said.

"An early resumption of the six-way talks is crucial for change, and North Korea seems to be taking careful steps to return to the multilateral talks."

South Korean Foreign Minister Yu Myung-hwan is scheduled to speak with U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton on an early resumption of six-party talks during his visit to Washington from Feb. 25-28.

North Korea has boycotted the six-nation talks in protest of the United Nations Security Council's condemnation of its rocket launch in April last year, which was seen as a long-range ballistic missile test.

http://www.koreaherald.co.kr/NEWKHSITE/data/html_dir/2010/02/22/201002220148.asp

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Yonhap News – South Korea
22 February 2010

Carter Rejected Two-Way Peace Talks With N. Korea: Document

By Byun Duk-kun

SEOUL, Feb. 22 (Yonhap) -- The United States assured South Korea in 1979 that Washington will refuse any talks with North Korea for a peace treaty on the Korean Peninsula without Seoul's participation as a full and equal member, a previously classified document released Monday showed, amid a renewed North Korean demand for talks on formally ending the 1950-53 Korean War.

In a "private" letter to then South Korean President Park Chung-hee, then U.S. President Jimmy Carter said the U.S. will also continue to assure North Korea that there will no bilateral talks with the communist North.

"The initial response of the North Koreans to our joint proposal was indeed disappointing, but they might show a more flexible attitude once they have fully assured themselves that we will not agree to meet separately," Carter said, referring to a proposal to North Korea for three-way talks with the South to replace the 1953 Korean armistice with a peace pact.

Carter also noted that he had asked then U.N. Secretary-General Kurt Waldheim "to continue his efforts to bring about a dialogue between North Korean and your (South Korean) government, while making it clear to him that the United States will not agree to any manipulative formula for a separate meeting between ourselves and North Korea which does not include the Republic of Korea as a full and equal participant."

The letter, dated Aug. 20, 1979, was made public Monday, over 30 years after it was put in a secret folder of South Korea's foreign ministry, but has contemporary implications as Pyongyang is again demanding talks on formally ending the Korean War.

North Korea last month said it will return to six-nation talks on ending its nuclear program if the "relevant countries" agreed to start discussing ways to replace the 1953 Korean armistice with a permanent peace treaty.

The communist nation has yet to clarify who the relevant countries are, but its ambassador to Beijing, Choe Jin-su, said in January that the group may only consist of the North, the U.S. and China.

Both Seoul and Washington have refused to hold any talks on a peace treaty until after the nuclear negotiations are first resumed and North Korea makes significant progress toward denuclearization, but have also made clear they will refuse any such discussions that do not involve South Korea as a full participant.

Carter's letter to the late former South Korean president was one of some 18,000 pages of diplomatic papers released Monday under the South Korean foreign ministry's declassification of documents that began in 1994.

The country has so far released over 1.4 million pages of previously classified documents to public. The documents are available at the ministry's Institute of Foreign Affairs and National Security in southern Seoul.

<http://english.yonhapnews.co.kr/northkorea/2010/02/22/84/0401000000AEN20100222006800315F.HTML>

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Japan Times – Japan
Tuesday, February 23, 2010

U.S. To Retire Nuclear Tomahawk Missiles

Japan told step won't lessen atomic arms deterrence
Kyodo News

The United States has informally told Japan it will retire its sea-based Tomahawk cruise missiles carrying nuclear warheads, in line with President Barack Obama's policy to pursue a world free of atomic weapons, government sources said Monday.

Washington said the move would not affect the nuclear umbrella, addressing concerns in Tokyo about the step's effect on U.S. deterrence against potential attacks from China, North Korea or other countries, the sources said.

The retirement will probably be stipulated in the Nuclear Posture Review, a new nuclear strategic guideline the Obama administration is slated to submit to Congress next month, they said.

U.S. subs carrying nuclear-tipped Tomahawks called in Japan during the Cold War, but the missiles were later removed for storage at bases on the U.S. mainland.

Their retirement will also likely affect debate in Japan over Tokyo's ongoing investigation into a secret pact with Washington to allow the U.S. military to bring nuclear weapons to Japan, because decommissioning will rule out the possibility of nuclear missiles coming into the country.

Past port calls and passage through Japanese waters by submarines armed with Tomahawks have raised controversy in terms of Tokyo's three nonnuclear principles of not possessing, producing or allowing nuclear arms on its territory.

Washington notified Tokyo earlier this year of its policy to gradually decommission the nuclear Tomahawks, citing the cost for maintaining the missiles, the sources said.

The U.S. side also explained that it can maintain its nuclear umbrella with other nuclear and conventional capabilities, the sources said.

Officials from both governments have already begun discussions on the future of the U.S. deterrence on the premise the Tomahawk will be retired, they said.

Last February, before the Liberal Democratic Party was ousted from power, Japanese diplomats concerned about a weakening of the U.S. deterrence asked the Congressional Commission on the Strategic Posture of the United States that Tokyo be consulted ahead of any decision on the Tomahawk missiles.

The commission urged the U.S. government in its final report in May to take steps to retain the Tomahawk.

<http://search.japantimes.co.jp/cgi-bin/nn20100223a2.html>

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Yonhap News – South Korea
23 February 2010

Seoul's Top Nuclear Negotiator Heads To China Over N.K. Nuke

By Byun Duk-kun

SEOUL, Feb. 23 (Yonhap) -- Wi Sung-lac, South Korea's top negotiator to six-nation talks on ending North Korea's nuclear program, left for China on Tuesday for talks with Chinese officials on ways to bring Pyongyang back to the negotiations.

Wi's trip to Beijing follows a visit there by North Korea's chief nuclear negotiator, Kim Kye-gwan, earlier this month for talks with Wu Dawei, China's former chief negotiator in the nuclear negotiations who retired earlier in the year as a vice foreign minister.

The Chinese diplomat was named the special representative on Korean Peninsula affairs on Feb. 10, but it was not clear whether the 57-year-old will continue to serve as China's top negotiator in the nuclear talks also attended by the United States, Japan and Russia.

"We plan to check current conditions, especially our efforts to resume the six-party talks and this will include talks on the recent North Korea-China meeting between Wu and Kim Kye-gwan," Wi told reporters of his scheduled meeting with the Chinese official.

The South Korean is the first nuclear negotiator of countries involved in the six-party talks to visit China since North Korea's Kim wrapped up his five-day trip to Beijing on Feb. 13.

Wi said he also expects to be briefed on the outcome of a visit earlier this month by Wang Jiarui, head of the international department of the Communist Party of China, to Pyongyang where the Chinese official met with North Korean leader Kim Jong-il.

Wi's trip to China marks the start of renewed efforts by the countries involved in the six-party talks, as Washington's special representative for North Korea policy, Stephen Bosworth, is set to embark on a trip to this region this week.

Bosworth will leave Washington on Tuesday (local time) to visit South Korea, Japan and China for discussions on reopening the six-party talks, the U.S. State Department said.

South Korean Foreign Minister Yu Myung-hwan will also visit Washington from Thursday for talks with his U.S. counterpart, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, that are expected to include discussions on North Korea and the stalled nuclear negotiations.

North Korea last month said it will not return to the talks unless U.N. sanctions, imposed shortly after its second nuclear test last year, are first removed and "relevant countries" agree to start discussions for a peace treaty on the Korean Peninsula.

Both Seoul and Washington, allies in the 1950-53 Korean War, have rejected the North Korean demands, saying such concessions will only become available after Pyongyang returns to the nuclear talks and makes progress toward denuclearization.

<http://english.yonhapnews.co.kr/northkorea/2010/02/23/30/0401000000AEN20100223001000315F.HTML>

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The Guardian – U.K.

Five Nato States To Urge Removal Of US Nuclear Arms In Europe

Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany, Norway and Luxembourg set to make a joint declaration 'in the next few weeks'

By Julian Borger
Monday, 22 February 2010

Five Nato states plan to call for the removal of all remaining US nuclear weapons on European soil in a move intended to spur global disarmament, officials said today.

Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany, Norway and Luxembourg will make a joint declaration "in the next few weeks", a Belgian official said, with the intention of influencing a growing debate within Nato over the usefulness of nuclear weapons in alliance strategy.

The office of the Belgian prime minister, Yves Leterme, issued a statement saying: "The Belgian government wants to seize the chance provided by the US president's call for a world without nuclear weapons."

Official figures are not published, but there are thought to be between 150 and 240 "tactical" nuclear weapons in Europe, in the form of aerial bombs. Germany, Belgium and the Netherlands have 10-20 each, but most are stockpiled at US bases in Italy (70-90) and in Turkey (50-90).

Italy and Turkey have made no public statements on the weapons on their soil since Barack Obama's call last April for the eventual abolition of nuclear arms.

Russia is estimated to have 4,000 tactical weapons in its arsenal, but many proponents of disarmament argue that the short-range weapons on both sides are militarily obsolete, since the end of the cold war. They point out that the US and Russia can reach each other with inter-continental ballistic missiles in minutes while the tactical gravity bombs take hours – if not days or weeks in Turkey's case – to be loaded on to planes and flown to their targets.

It is unclear, however, whether Rome and Ankara will fight to keep the bombs as the embodiment of America's nuclear umbrella. Some east European Nato members are opposed to their removal for the same reason.

"Denied the protection of Nato's nuclear weapons in Europe, Turkey would have additional reasons to worry about Iran's nuclear programme – and perhaps to develop nuclear weapons of its own. Newer Nato members in central Europe, who see in the nuclear weapons a symbol of US commitment to defend them, would be left feeling vulnerable," George Robertson, a former defence secretary and Nato secretary general, argued in an article he co-authored this month for the Centre for European Reform.

Nato officials are due to meet in Washington tomorrow, and in Rome next week, to discuss the future role of nuclear weapons in the alliance's "new strategic concept", which is due to be decided this year.

Des Browne, another former defence secretary who now runs a "top level group" of other ex-ministers and former generals to push for disarmament, said the five-country initiative was "a very welcome addition to the debate ... it's further evidence that senior European politicians are moving to the view that we can reduce the salience of these weapons and still retain our security."

Browne is due to take a delegation of European politicians to Washington next week to argue the cause of disarmament before Congress, which will have to approve any steps the Obama administration takes to reduce America's reliance on nuclear weapons.

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2010/feb/22/nato-states-us-nuclear-arms-europe>

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London Telegraph

Britain May Not Need Nuclear Deterrent In Five Years, Says Richard Dannatt

Britain may no longer need its independent nuclear deterrent in five or 10 years' time, a former head of the army said.

23 February 2010

Former Chief of General Staff General Sir Richard Dannatt said the judgment that the UK should press ahead with renewing the Trident deterrent was right at the present moment, but only "on a very narrow points decision". Future changes in global conditions could render it unnecessary within a matter of years, he suggested.

Gen Dannatt also called for the decision on when to hold a strategic review of national defence needs to be taken out of the Government's hands, favouring a system like the quadrennial review in the US, which automatically triggers a process every four years.

Former prime minister Tony Blair won Parliament's backing in 2007 for the £20 billion renewal of the submarine-based Trident nuclear missile system, which expires in 2024.

But Gen Dannatt - who is a defence adviser to the Conservatives, who also back Trident replacement - today said that the need for the Cold War-era deterrent may have disappeared by the time the date for its renewal comes round.

He told BBC Radio 4's Today programme: "None of the major parties seems to have an appetite for not continuing with an independent nuclear deterrent at the present moment. On balance - on a very narrow points decision - that is probably right for now.

"It might not be right in five or 10 years' time.

"We have to evaluate every major issue like that in the circumstances of the time. We can't predict where we will be in five, 10 or 15 years' time - whether the world will become more proliferated or we will have a greater move towards non-proliferation.

"At the present time, I think the judgment is right that on balance we should continue with an independent nuclear deterrent."

Both Labour and the Conservatives say that they will hold a strategic defence review soon after this year's general election if they win - 13 years after the last one in 1997.

But Gen Dannatt said that politics should be taken out of the process of planning Britain's future defence needs by making the reviews a regular event.

"One of the things that must come out of this defence review is a realisation that only having defence reviews when the government of the day says we ought to have one is probably a mistake," he said.

"The American system of a quadrennial - once every four years - defence review makes a lot of sense."

"It takes the politics out of defence, because the point about having regular reviews is, as the world circumstances and situation change, you can decide and decide again."

Gen Dannatt added: "A number of us feel that defence of the realm should stand above political, inter-service and industrial (issues)," he said.

"This debate has to focus on the character and nature of future conflict. What are the likely threats our country is going to face?

"Allied to that, what is our national ambition? Do we want to stay as we are or become more ambitious or less ambitious? That will lead us to what capabilities our defence should have, what our force structure should be and what our equipment programme should be and that will tell us where we should spend our limited resources."

Recent public comments by the heads of the Army and Royal Navy have indicated a struggle developing within the military over whether the constrained finances likely to be available in the coming period should be spent on getting "boots on the ground" in places such as Afghanistan or investing in expensive pieces of kit such as aircraft carriers.

Gen Dannatt insisted the forces chiefs were "80%-85%" in agreement on what was needed.

But he added: "(Afghanistan) has predominantly been fighting by our land forces... It is logical to say there should be an uplift in those resources we need to be successful in Afghanistan."

And he warned that the nature of fighting in Afghanistan was unlikely to be an "aberration" but a signpost to how Britain's military capabilities will be needed in the short to medium term.

That suggested that spending should concentrate on the land-based forces and helicopter lift capacity which have proved most vital to success in Afghanistan, while investing "to the maximum extent possible - but less than we would probably like - in some of those other and rather more expensive capabilities that would give us a full balance force."

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/newstopics/politics/defence/7298932/Britain-may-not-need-nuclear-deterrent-in-five-years-says-Richard-Dannatt.html>

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New York Post

OPINION

February 20, 2010

Nuclear Countdown

UN admits Iran warhead work

By Ralph Peters

The UN's International Atomic Energy Agency now not only admits that Iran's at work on nuclear warheads, but acknowledges that Tehran never stopped working on them -- despite no end of pleas, pledges and promises.

Burned by its miscalculation on Iraq's weapons of mass destruction, the US intelligence community has played it *too* safe on this one, long insisting that Iran halted warhead research in 2003.

There were plenty of dissenting voices. But President George Bush didn't want another fight, and President Obama's already punch drunk.

Now the genie's out of the bottle of isotopes. With the departure of anti-Israel IAEA chief Mohammed el Baradei, the UN's nuke monitors can finally tell the truth.

And the truth is that Iran wants nuclear warheads *badly*.

President Mahmoud Ahmedinejad and the Tehran regime never stopped declaring their intention to destroy Israel. Inconvenienced, our diplomats and the White House insisted those funny-ha-ha Iranians were just kidding. Now even the UN's taking them seriously.

Will we?

Yes, Iran's program has problems. It's a tortoise, not a hare. But that tortoise will cross the finish line eventually -- unless it's stopped by force.

My bet is that this administration will dither, delay and dissemble until Israel feels compelled to act, sometime in the next few years. And it's going to be a mess, with Israel fighting for its existence and a lame-duck Obama indignantly demanding a cease-fire before the job's half finished.

Even if Israel *doesn't* act, and even if Iran *doesn't* use its nukes, such weapons in Tehran's paws would shatter the regional balance of power. Iran would gain the upper hand in the Persian Gulf -- terrorizing Arab oil producers, dominating the Straits of Hormuz and boosting the forces of terror immeasurably. Our influence would crash.

Why would a handful of nukes give Iran such power, despite *our* nuclear arsenal? The fanatics in charge in Tehran would be willing to pull the trigger. We're not.

If Iran's nuclear-weapons program isn't stopped, we'll face one of two devastating scenarios: an Iranian-Israeli nuclear exchange that wouldn't be containable, or living with Iran's claw on the global oil tap.

Nor would taking out Iran's nuke program be easy. It wouldn't be just a dramatic night of airstrikes followed by an awards ceremony. Tehran has dispersed its nuclear facilities, burying some deep underground and locating other key sites in urban areas -- using Iran's citizens as human shields.

Adding to the complex targeting requirements just for the nuke sites, an effective attack also would need to destroy Iran's retaliatory capabilities -- from its navy and air force to key Revolutionary Guard elements.

Otherwise, Iran would respond by lobbing chemical warheads toward Israel -- while attacking Saudi and Gulf state oil facilities to spread the pain. We'd remember four-bucks-a-gallon gasoline fondly . . .

A military response to Iran's nuke program is a *terrible* idea. But, barring timely regime change in Tehran, force is the only thing that's going to work.

Unless anyone still thinks that Obama's negotiating skills will win the day.

In the midst of this infernal mess, our president's pushing *his* long-term goal of universal nuclear disarmament -- the hoary leftist insanity that refuses to accept that America's nuclear arsenal prevented a third world war and still protects us today (even though it's rotting from neglect).

And the rest of the world? This week, Brazil declared that it won't support economic sanctions against Iran. That's a bright-red flag, folks. It signals that, after Iran goes nuke and takes the heat, Brazil intends to become Latin America's first nuclear-armed power.

The looming catastrophe in Iran won't be an end, but a beginning.

Ralph Peters' new book, "Endless War," goes on sale in March.

http://www.nypost.com/p/news/opinion/opedcolumnists/nuclear_countdown_mAoh5EZJHtdBznCnDMo74H

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Global Insights: Moscow Goes Ballistic Again Over U.S. Missile Defense

By Richard Weitz

23 February 2010

Just when it looked like Russia and the United States were about to finalize the terms of a bilateral nuclear arms reduction agreement to replace the START I Treaty that expired last December, their longstanding bilateral missile defense dispute has exploded again.

The latest crisis arose after the president of Romania, apparently for domestic political reasons, gratuitously revealed that his government would allow the United States to station ground-based interceptor missiles on Romanian territory. A week later, Bulgarian officials confirmed that they, too, were contemplating hosting U.S. missile interceptors, although no formal talks had begun. Bulgarian Prime Minister Boyko Borisov justified his government's willingness to consider the deployments by framing them as a contribution to NATO's ballistic missile defense (BMD) architecture and citing alliance "solidarity."

Although U.S. officials claim they have briefed their Russian counterparts about U.S. missile defense activities, Russian government representatives insisted they were caught unawares by the recent revelations, which they argued violated Washington's commitment to keep Moscow fully informed of its plans. Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov called for "detailed explanations" from Washington, to clarify "why after the Romanian 'surprise' there is a Bulgarian 'surprise' now."

Besides the alleged lack of consultations, Russian officials' main complaint is that U.S. BMD plans for Europe remain open-ended and therefore unpredictable. Like the previous Bush administration, President Barack Obama's national security team has indicated that they are prepared to deploy additional BMD systems in Europe and elsewhere as the perceived missile threat increases. At present, the Obama administration's "phased adaptive approach" to European missile defenses would place ground-based versions of the traditionally sea-based Standard Missile 3 (SM-3) interceptors in Romania, Bulgaria, or other countries near Iran from 2015. But it also wants to be able to station more advanced interceptor missiles in Central European countries such as Poland as early as 2018, should Iran's long-range missile capabilities continue to improve.

On Feb. 6, the Russian Foreign Ministry issued a statement calling for a joint NATO-Russia assessment of ballistic missile challenges before the U.S. began deploying BMD systems in Europe. It argued that the focus should be on political and economic measures to avert a threat. "In case real threats arise, it will also be possible to consider joint military responses," the ministry observed. "But it would be politically and economically expensive to start with that." The previous day, Lavrov likewise observed that, after "we have a common understanding of possible threats, it will be possible to say what measures could be taken in response."

The problem with this approach, at least from Washington's perspective, is that it would give Moscow a de facto veto over NATO's BMD deployment plans. Indeed, the past decade shows that Russia and the West often acutely differ over their assessments of the emerging missile threat from Iran, and Pentagon planners insist that they cannot delay a deployment decision in the hopes that Moscow and Washington might eventually find common ground. They state that NATO needs to begin the planned deployments soon, so that the BMD interceptors can enter into operation by 2015 -- when Iran is expected to present a credible missile threat to southeastern Europe.

Yet, the prospect of having an increasing number of missile interceptors located in Eastern and Central European countries clearly alarms many Russian defense planners, who have traditionally held an exaggerated view of the likely effectiveness of U.S. BMD systems. Russian Deputy Prime Minister Sergey Ivanov and other Russian defense officials have argued that they cannot reduce their offensive nuclear forces as long as U.S. ballistic missile defenses in Europe remained unconstrained, since at some point the BMD systems could theoretically affect a strategic nuclear exchange between Russia and the United States. Although not spelled out, Russian strategists presumably have in mind a scenario in which the United States or NATO would attack Russian nuclear forces first and then use BMD systems to counter Russia's weakened response.

Russian officials have let it be known that they are considering all sorts of response options, from resurrecting an earlier threat to deploy Iskander missiles in Russia's Kaliningrad region to deploying defensive or offensive missile systems in Transdnestr, a separatist region in Moldova. Although the latter measure would not present any military problems for NATO, it would help solidify Moscow's influence in yet another breakaway republic in a potential conflict zone. Russian troops have been stationed in Transdnestr since it separated from Moldova in 1992.

Historically, there has been no consistent pattern in how closely Moscow and Washington have linked strategic offensive forces with strategic defenses in arms control negotiations. The connection was tightest during the first Soviet-American strategic arms control dialogue, the Strategic Arms Limitations Talks (SALT). The 1972 SALT I

agreement consisted of both an agreement to freeze the American and Soviet ICBM fleets at existing levels as well as the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty, which severely limited the location and size of each country's national ballistic missile defense systems. The Soviet Union and the United States agreed to the pairing because both countries' determination to overcome the other's missile defenses was a factor driving increases in their offensive nuclear forces.

The linkage was also evident in the mid-1980s, when Soviet officials refused to negotiate major reductions in their offensive nuclear forces as long as President Ronald Reagan insisted on pursuing his Strategic Defense Initiative, which aimed to establish a comprehensive, multi-layered shield against missile attacks.

In 2002, however, the Russian and American governments agreed to the Moscow Treaty despite the concurrent decision of the Bush administration to withdraw unilaterally from the ABM Treaty. Although the Russian government had refused to accept amendments to the treaty sought by the United States that would have permitted a wider range of BMD activities, Russian officials decided to accept the Moscow Treaty rather than allow the United States to have a completely free hand in developing strategic offensive as well as strategic defensive forces.

With respect to the current negotiations, the ideal solution would have been to defer the missile defense issue to negotiations on the next Russian-U.S. nuclear treaty, but the premature revelations about the Romanian and Bulgarian deployments have made this more difficult. As a result, the Obama administration is now faced with a tough balancing act. It must negotiate language in the current treaty talks that registers Russia's concerns about the inherent link between strategic offense and strategic defense. But it must do so without accepting binding constraints that would cause more than one-third of the U.S. Senate to oppose the new agreement.

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