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Articles & Other Documents:

[U.S. Faces Choice On New Weapons For Fast Strikes](#)

[Seoul Rejects US Nuke Weapons](#)

[Iran Denounces U.S. "Nuclear Threats", To Hold Drill](#)

[U.S. Says Won't Accept Nuclear N.Korea](#)

[Iran Seeks To Persuade Security Council Not To Back Tough Nuclear Sanctions](#)

[China Military Paper Spells Out Nuclear Arms Stance](#)

[US Official: Iran Military Strike 'Off The Table'](#)

[Nuclear Strategy No Threat To Neighbors: Ex-PLA Officer](#)

[Iran Could Have Missiles For US Strike In Five Years](#)

[NATO Ministers To Discuss U.S. Nuclear Arms](#)

[Iran Says No Plan For Missile Able To Reach U.S.](#)

[U.S. Resists Push By Allies For Tactical Nuclear Cuts](#)

[Even As Momentum For Iran Sanctions Grows, Containment Seems Only Viable Option](#)

[What The New START Treaty Overlooked](#)

[Diplomats: Iran Agrees To More IAEA Overview](#)

[Nuclear Policy Shift Undermines Security](#)

[North Korea Says No Plans To Abandon Nuclear Weapons](#)

[The Ice Has Broken](#)

[RALSTON: The Next Arms-Control Agreement](#)

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New York Times
April 22, 2010

U.S. Faces Choice On New Weapons For Fast Strikes

By DAVID E. SANGER and THOM SHANKER

WASHINGTON — In coming years, President Obama will decide whether to deploy a new class of weapons capable of reaching any corner of the earth from the United States in under an hour and with such accuracy and force that they would greatly diminish America's reliance on its nuclear arsenal.

Yet even now, concerns about the technology are so strong that the Obama administration has acceded to a demand by Russia that the United States decommission one nuclear missile for every one of these conventional weapons fielded by the Pentagon. That provision, the White House said, is buried deep inside the New Start treaty that Mr. Obama and President Dmitri A. Medvedev signed in Prague two weeks ago.

Called Prompt Global Strike, the new weapon is designed to carry out tasks like picking off Osama bin Laden in a cave, if the right one could be found; taking out a North Korean missile while it is being rolled to the launch pad; or destroying an Iranian nuclear site — all without crossing the nuclear threshold. In theory, the weapon will hurl a conventional warhead of enormous weight at high speed and with pinpoint accuracy, generating the localized destructive power of a nuclear warhead.

The idea is not new: President George W. Bush and his staff promoted the technology, imagining that this new generation of conventional weapons would replace nuclear warheads on submarines.

In face-to-face meetings with President Bush, Russian leaders complained that the technology could increase the risk of a nuclear war, because Russia would not know if the missiles carried nuclear warheads or conventional ones. Mr. Bush and his aides concluded that the Russians were right.

Partly as a result, the idea “really hadn’t gone anywhere in the Bush administration,” Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates, who has served both presidents, said recently on ABC’s “This Week.” But he added that it was “embraced by the new administration.”

Mr. Obama himself alluded to the concept in a recent interview with The New York Times, saying it was part of an effort “to move towards less emphasis on nuclear weapons” while insuring “that our conventional weapons capability is an effective deterrent in all but the most extreme circumstances.”

The Obama national security team scrapped the idea of putting the new conventional weapon on submarines. Instead, the White House has asked Congress for about \$250 million next year to explore a new alternative, one that uses some of the most advanced technology in the military today as well as some not yet even invented.

The final price of the system remains unknown. Senator John McCain of Arizona, the ranking Republican on the Senate Armed Services Committee, said at a hearing on Thursday that Prompt Global Strike would be “essential and critical, but also costly.”

It would be based, at least initially, on the West Coast, probably at Vandenberg Air Force Base.

Under the Obama plan, the Prompt Global Strike warhead would be mounted on a long-range missile to start its journey toward a target. It would travel through the atmosphere at several times the speed of sound, generating so much heat that it would have to be shielded with special materials to avoid melting. (In that regard, it is akin to the problem that confronted designers of the space shuttle decades ago.)

But since the vehicle would remain within the atmosphere rather than going into space, it would be far more maneuverable than a ballistic missile, capable of avoiding the airspace of neutral countries, for example, or steering clear of hostile territory. Its designers note that it could fly straight up the middle of the Persian Gulf before making a sharp turn toward a target.

The Pentagon hopes to deploy an early version of the system by 2014 or 2015. But even under optimistic timetables, a complete array of missiles, warheads, sensors and control systems is not expected to enter the arsenal until 2017 to 2020, long after Mr. Obama will have left office, even if he is elected to a second term.

The planning for Prompt Global Strike is being headed by Gen. Kevin P. Chilton of the Air Force, the top officer of the military’s Strategic Command and the man in charge of America’s nuclear arsenal. In the Obama era — where every administration discussion of nuclear weapons takes note of Mr. Obama’s commitment to moving toward “Global Zero,” the elimination of the nuclear arsenal — the new part of General Chilton’s job is to talk about conventional alternatives.

In an interview at his headquarters at Offutt Air Force Base, General Chilton described how the conventional capability offered by the proposed system would give the president more choices.

"Today, we can present some conventional options to the president to strike a target anywhere on the globe that range from 96 hours, to several hours maybe, 4, 5, 6 hours," General Chilton said.

That would simply not be fast enough, he noted, if intelligence arrived about a movement by Al Qaeda terrorists or the imminent launching of a missile. "If the president wants to act on a particular target faster than that, the only thing we have that goes faster is a nuclear response," he said.

But the key to filling that gap is to make sure that Russia and China, among other nuclear powers, understand that the missile launching they see on their radar screens does not signal the start of a nuclear attack, officials said.

Under the administration's new concept, Russia or other nations would regularly inspect the Prompt Global Strike silos to assure themselves that the weapons were nonnuclear. And they would be placed in locations far from the strategic nuclear force.

"Who knows if we would ever deploy it?" Gary Samore, Mr. Obama's top adviser on unconventional weapons, said at a conference in Washington on Wednesday. But he noted that Russia was already so focused on the possibility that it insisted that any conventional weapon mounted on a missile that could reach it counted against the new limit on the American arsenal in the treaty.

In a follow-on treaty, he said, the Russians would certainly want to negotiate on Prompt Global Strike and ballistic missile defenses.

If Mr. Obama does decide to deploy the system, Mr. Samore said, the number of weapons would be small enough that Russia and China would not fear that they could take out their nuclear arsenals.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/04/23/world/europe/23strike.html>

[\(Return to Articles and Documents List\)](#)

The Star – Malaysia
Wednesday April 21, 2010

Iran Denounces U.S. "Nuclear Threats", To Hold Drill

By Parisa Hafezi

TEHRAN (Reuters) - Iran's supreme leader denounced on Wednesday U.S. "nuclear threats" against the Islamic Republic, and its elite military force said it would stage war games in a waterway crucial for global oil supplies.

The Revolutionary Guards' exercises in the Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz this week take place at a time of rising tension between Iran and the West, which fears Tehran's nuclear programme is aimed at developing bombs. Iran denies the charge.

Iran has also reacted angrily to what it sees as U.S. President Barack Obama's threat to attack it with nuclear arms.

Obama made clear this month that Iran and North Korea were excluded from new limits on the use of U.S. atomic weapons -- something Tehran interpreted as a threat from a long-standing adversary.

"The international community should not let Obama get away with nuclear threats," Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said on Wednesday.

"We will not allow America to renew its hellish dominance over Iran by using such threats," he told a gathering of Iranian nurses, the semi-official Fars News Agency reported. Iran was a close U.S. ally before its 1979 Islamic revolution.

Brigadier General Hossein Salami, also quoted by Fars, said three days of manoeuvres would start on Thursday and would show the Guards' naval strength.

"Maintaining security in the Persian Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz, as the world's key economic and energy routes, is the main goal of the war games," he said. "This war game is not a threat for any friendly countries."

Naval, air and ground forces from the Guards would take part, Fars said. The Islamic Republic's armed forces often hold drills in an apparent bid to show their readiness to deter any military action by Israel or the United States, its arch foes.

"PEACE AND FRIENDSHIP"

Nicole Stracke, a researcher at the Gulf Research Centre in Dubai, said that with the "current threat to Iran increasing" the Guards were showing their capability and strength.

"The Revolutionary Guard is sending a message that we are ready and able to counter the threat," Stracke said in an e-mail to Reuters. But she added the force regularly held such drills and they were unlikely to increase regional tension.

Washington is pushing for a fourth round of U.N. sanctions on Tehran over its refusal to halt sensitive nuclear activities as demanded by the U.N. Security Council, including moves against members of the Guards.

Israel, widely believed to have the Middle East's only atomic arsenal, has described Iran's nuclear programme as a threat to its existence. Although it says it wants a diplomatic solution, Washington has also not ruled out military action.

Iran, a predominantly Shi'ite Muslim state, has said it would respond to any attack by targeting U.S. interests in the region and Israel, as well as closing the Strait of Hormuz. About 40 percent of the world's traded oil leaves the Gulf region through the strategic narrows.

Salami made no reference to this in his comments, stressing Iran's "efficient and constructive role" for Gulf security.

"Peace and friendship, security, tranquillity and mutual trust are the messages of this war game for neighbouring countries in the Persian Gulf region," the general added.

Sunni-led Arab countries in the Gulf are concerned about spreading Iranian influence in the region and also share Western fears about Tehran's nuclear ambitions.

Cliff Kupchan, a director of Euroasia Group, said in a note on Wednesday that he still believed that Israel was unlikely to strike Iran, but "the risk will grow as prospects for successful sanctions diminish". China and Russia, veto-wielding Security Council members, are reluctant to back tough sanctions on Iran.

(Additional reporting by Ramin Mostafavi and Fredrik Dahl; writing by Fredrik Dahl; editing by Alison Williams)

http://thestar.com.my/news/story.asp?file=/2010/4/22/worldupdates/2010-04-21T162605Z_01_NOOTR_RTRMDNC_0_-478766-1&sec=Worldupdates

[\(Return to Articles and Documents List\)](#)

Washington Post

Iran Seeks To Persuade Security Council Not To Back Tough Nuclear Sanctions

By Thomas Erdbrink/Washington Post Foreign Service

Wednesday, April 21, 2010

Page - A11

TEHRAN -- Facing increasing momentum behind a U.S.-backed bid for new sanctions against it, Iran is launching a broad diplomatic offensive aimed at persuading as many U.N. Security Council members as possible to oppose tougher punishment for its nuclear program.

Iran wants to focus on reviving stalled talks about a nuclear fuel swap to build trust on all sides, according to politicians and diplomats in Tehran. But leaders of Western nations say that unless Iran alters its conditions for the deal, they will refuse to discuss it again. Under the arrangement, aimed at breaking an impasse over Iran's uranium-enrichment efforts, Tehran would exchange the bulk of its low-enriched uranium for more highly enriched fuel for a research reactor that produces medical isotopes.

As Iranian diplomats fly around the world to discuss the swap, they are lobbying some of the Security Council's rotating members to vote against a fourth round of sanctions proposed by the United States, officials said.

The Obama administration is seeking unanimous support for further Security Council sanctions against Iran. Three previous rounds of sanctions were accepted by all members, except in 2008, when Indonesia abstained. This time, Iran is actively working to get more Security Council members to oppose the U.S. initiative.

"In the coming 10 days, the Islamic republic's delegations will travel to the capitals of Russia, China, Lebanon and Uganda to pursue talks," Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki said. "Other countries will be visited in the near future." He said that "nuclear issues" will be on the agenda.

Iran also plans to try to rally support during an international conference to review the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). In Tehran's view, the gathering, scheduled for May in New York, is shaping up as a confrontation between nuclear powers and developing nations.

Iran's official stance is that the U.N. sanctions are not effective. But unofficially, any vote against a new sanctions resolution would be welcomed as a great diplomatic victory.

"The groups we are sending out will be focusing on the correct implementation of the NPT, the disarmament trend and fuel-swap issues," said Kazem Jalali, a member of the Iranian parliament's national security and foreign policy committee. "Naturally, our explanations during the trips will have a positive effect against the efforts by the United States in trying to impose new sanctions."

To start its diplomatic offensive, Iran held a nuclear disarmament conference last weekend that several Security Council members attended. The meeting, with its motto of "nuclear energy for all, nuclear weapons for none," focused on what Iran and other developing nations call "double standards" and "discriminatory elements" in the Non-Proliferation Treaty.

Participants in the Tehran conference shared complaints that world powers are using proliferation fears as a reason to prevent developing nations from establishing independent nuclear energy programs.

Iran's diplomatic effort seems especially aimed at developing nations such as Brazil, Nigeria and Turkey, which hold rotating seats on the 15-member Security Council. Iran is also betting that council members Lebanon -- which has a government that includes members of Iran-backed Hezbollah -- and Uganda might vote against new sanctions or abstain.

As a part of the campaign, President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad will begin a two-day state visit Friday to Uganda, where he is expected to promise help in building an oil refinery.

Brazil and Turkey already have said they are wary of imposing additional punishment on Tehran. Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu, visiting Iran on Tuesday, announced that his country is ready to mediate on the uranium swap proposal and other nuclear issues.

The U.N.-backed arrangement, proposed in October, was the subject of promising initial negotiations. But it was soon shelved after Iran repeatedly changed its conditions, saying the exchange should take place on Iranian soil and demanding more Western security guarantees.

With Western nations insisting that the swap occur outside Iran, Turkey offered last year to act as a neutral location for the exchange, but Tehran was not interested, diplomats said.

Asked Tuesday about the proposal, Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Ramin Mehmanparast told reporters, "The venue of any fuel swap will be in Iran."

Special correspondent Kay Armin Serjoie contributed to this report.

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/04/20/AR2010042004423.html>

[\(Return to Articles and Documents List\)](#)

Boston Herald

US Official: Iran Military Strike 'Off The Table'

By Associated Press

Wednesday, April 21, 2010

SINGAPORE — The U.S. has ruled out a military strike against **Iran**'s nuclear program any time soon, hoping instead negotiations and United Nations sanctions will prevent the Middle East nation from developing nuclear weapons, a top U.S. defense department official said Wednesday.

"Military force is an option of last resort," Undersecretary of Defense for Policy Michele Flournoy said during a press briefing in Singapore. "It's off the table in the near term."

The U.S. and its allies fear Tehran is using its nuclear program to build arms. Iran denies the charges, and says its program only aims to generate electricity.

"Right now the focus is a combination of engagement and pressure in the form of sanctions," Flournoy said. "We have not seen Iran engage productively in response."

Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei was quoted Wednesday by Iran's state media saying the country won't give in to U.S. pressure. Iran's elite Revolutionary Guard is preparing to hold large-scale military maneuvers in the strategic Strait of Hormuz.

"We've said time and again that we are not after weapons of mass destruction but the Iranian nation won't give in to such threats and will bring those threatening it to their knees," Khamenei said.

Iran has rejected a 2009 U.N.-backed plan that offered nuclear fuel rods to Tehran in exchange for Iran's stock of lower-level enriched uranium. The swap would curb Tehran's capacity to make a nuclear bomb.

But Iran has proposed variations on the deal, and Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki said Tuesday that a fuel agreement could be a chance to boost trust with the West.

Earlier this week, he said Iran wants direct talks about the deal with all the U.N. Security Council members, except one with which it would have indirect talks — a reference to the United States, which with Tehran has no relations.

The U.S. is lobbying heavily in the Security Council for sanctions against Iran over its nuclear program.

http://www.bostonherald.com/news/international/general/view/20100421us_official_iran_military_strike_off_the_table/

[\(Return to Articles and Documents List\)](#)

London Daily Telegraph – U.K.

Iran Could Have Missiles For US Strike In Five Years

Iran could have intercontinental missiles capable of hitting the United States within five years, according to a new security assessment.

Richard Spencer, Middle East Correspondent

21 April 2010

The country has no such weapons at present but could produce one with foreign help by 2015, a US defence department report has warned.

The finding is significant as Washington gears its foreign policy to a mixture of regional threats and the chances of it being attacked itself. It carefully watches the development of North Korea's similar long-range missiles, which is approaching a level where America's western seaboard could be directly targeted.

Iran yesterday hit back at the report, saying it had no intention of threatening the United States. "We have no such plans," its defence minister, Ahmad Vahidi, said.

Washington says its missile defence plans are now planned around perceived threats from "rogue states" such as Iran and North Korea rather than strategic rivals such as Russia and China.

President Barack Obama has come under attack from Republican congressmen who say that his plans to delay missile defence programmes, particularly as part of his nuclear arms reduction negotiations with Russia, leave a gap which such states could exploit.

James Miller, a senior Pentagon official, confirmed to a congressional committee that the latest studies showed Iran and North Korea were both advancing missile programmes.

"Both Iran and North Korea present a significant regional missile threat," he said.

"The ballistic missile threat today is increasing both quantitatively and qualitatively and is likely to continue to do so over the next decade.

Several states are also developing nuclear, chemical and/or biological warheads for their missiles."

The long-standing links between Iran and North Korea, which has included co-operation on missile development, was confirmed yesterday with the announcement of a visit to Tehran by Kim Yong-nam, the head of the North Korean parliament and notionally the regime's second-most important figure.

No details were given, but such high-level, public visits abroad by North Korean leaders are rare.

While denying that Iran intended to produce intercontinental ballistic missiles, Mr Vahidi confirmed the country was now self-sufficient in producing cruise missiles.

Iran also announced three days of war games by the navy of the Revolutionary Guard, to take place in the Gulf on Thursday.

Although the Guard denied the manoeuvres were a threat to friendly countries, they will be watched closely by Arab Gulf states.

The United Arab Emirates, Qatar and other Gulf countries are home to the highest concentration of American military forces in the world, as well as US missile defence systems.

Iran has said that they, as well as shipping in the Gulf's vital oil lanes, will be targeted in retaliation for any military strike on its nuclear programme.

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/iran/7614419/Iran-could-have-missiles-for-US-strike-in-five-years.html>

[\(Return to Articles and Documents List\)](#)

Business Week – U.S.

Bloomberg

Iran Says No Plan For Missile Able To Reach U.S.

April 21, 2010

By Ali Sheikholeslami

April 21 (Bloomberg) -- Iran doesn't have any plan to build a missile capable of reaching the U.S., Defense Minister Ahmad Vahidi said, in response to a U.S. government report saying the country may soon have the ability to do so.

"The Islamic Republic of Iran has no plans to build such a missile," Vahidi told reporters in Tehran today, the state-run Fars news agency said. He said that Iran "is capable of doing many things," without giving details.

The U.S. Defense Department said in an April 19 report that Iran may be able to build ballistic missiles capable of reaching North America by 2015. The U.S. and Israel say they won't rule out any option in dealing with Iran's nuclear program, which the U.S. and its allies say may be cover for an atomic bomb. Iran rejects the claim and says its program is purely civilian.

Iran's military will test new weapons in war games starting tomorrow, Vahidi said. The maneuvers will take place in the Strait of Hormuz and the international waters of the Persian Gulf, and will involve units of the Revolutionary Guards' naval, air and ground forces, Fars reported.

Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei today attacked the U.S. for raising the possibility of an atomic attack on Iran. In a review of nuclear policy released this month, the administration of President Barack Obama singled out Iran and North Korea as countries that have "violated non-proliferation obligations."

Defense Secretary Robert Gates said the review contained a "very strong message" to those countries should they launch an attack against the U.S. or its allies, and that "all options are on the table" for a U.S. response.

'Threat to World'

"This is a threat against world peace and security, and against humanity," Khamenei said, according to the state-run Mehr news agency. Khamenei said in February that his country deems nuclear weapons to be prohibited under Islam and isn't seeking to build them.

Iran has hailed recent military advances as proof that it remains technologically self-sufficient even while under three sets of United Nations sanctions for refusing to scale back its nuclear program.

In February and March the Persian Gulf nation fired an Iranian-built rocket into space carrying a satellite, announced plans to launch the first domestically-made naval destroyer and fighter squadron, and said it will test a new 2,000-pound bomb.

The New York Times reported Jan. 31 that Obama is accelerating the deployment of new U.S. defenses against possible Iranian missile attacks in the Persian Gulf.

--Editors: Digby Lidstone, Ben Holland.

<http://www.businessweek.com/news/2010-04-21/iran-says-no-plan-for-missile-capable-of-hitting-u-s-update1-.html>

[\(Return to Articles and Documents List\)](#)

Washington Post

Even As Momentum For Iran Sanctions Grows, Containment Seems Only Viable Option

By Glenn Kessler/Washington Post Staff Writer

Thursday, April 22, 2010

Page - A08

After months of first attempting to engage Iran and then wooing Russia and China to support new sanctions against the Islamic republic, the Obama administration appears within reach of winning a modest tightening of U.N. measures targeting Tehran. But administration officials acknowledge that even what they call "crippling" sanctions could prove ineffective in keeping Iran from developing nuclear weapons.

That stalemate, in the view of many analysts, means that a strategy of containing Iran is inevitable -- diplomatic isolation backed by defense systems supplied to Persian Gulf allies.

"I think we are in for a long cold war with Iran. It will be containment and deterrence," said Mark Fitzpatrick, a former top State Department official who is now a senior fellow at the International Institute for Strategic Studies in London. "Iran will muddle along building its stockpile but never making a nuclear bomb because it knows that crossing that line would provoke an immediate military attack."

The administration appears to have all but eliminated the military option, with top officials repeatedly warning that a military attack would only delay, not eliminate, Tehran's nuclear program -- and would engender new anger at the United States in the region. Some experts are doubtful that Iran would openly declare it has a nuclear weapon, because that would remove the last shred of ambiguity about its program, which it insists is entirely peaceful.

Administration officials say that U.N. sanctions will be followed by tougher penalties approved by the European Union and then even stronger actions by individual countries in Europe and Asia. The moves would come on top of a sustained campaign by the Treasury Department and nongovernmental organizations to persuade banks, shipping businesses and international companies to stop doing business with Iran.

A pressure strategy

Although officials say the push for new sanctions stems from Iran's failure to negotiate, they also say that it is intended to get the country to the negotiating table.

"What we believe is that if the international community will unify and make this statement, maybe then we would get the Iranians' attention in a way that would lead to the kind of good-faith negotiations that President Obama called for 15 months ago," Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton told the Financial Times last week.

Clinton acknowledged uncertainty about whether this strategy would succeed: "Can I sit here and tell you exactly what will happen, assuming we are able to get the kind of sanctions that we are looking for? No. . . [We are] trying to work toward some better outcome among some really difficult and not very satisfying choices."

Juan Zarate, a deputy national security adviser in the George W. Bush administration, said the Obama administration runs a risk if it is suggesting sanctions could change Iranian behavior. "By talking about it in maximalist terms, you are setting yourself up for failure," he said.

Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates, who has questioned how the United States would verify whether Iran had reached the threshold of a nuclear weapon, acknowledged over the weekend that he sent a memo to the White House in January urging planning for contingencies that might emerge as the administration implements the "pressure" track.

Pessimism about talks

Indeed, few experts think that any negotiations with Iran will amount to much. Iran has been engaged, off and on, with European and U.S. interlocutors since 2003 over its nuclear program. Over time, the offers from the U.S. - European side have grown sweeter, with little response from Iran. The U.N. Security Council has imposed three sets of sanctions on Tehran for failing to negotiate seriously about its program. So far, said Ray Takeyh of the Council on Foreign Relations, the pressure has "cost the Iranian economy but not affected Iranian decision-making." But he warned that containment will be "hard and difficult and may require the use of force to enforce red lines."

Karim Sadjadpour, an Iran specialist at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, said that "there is a clique in power" in Tehran that "does not respond to incentives and does not respond to disincentives." The Iranian government, under siege from the popular uprising last year after a disputed presidential election, views the nuclear program as a rallying point for national pride -- and it thrives on the perception of the United States as an implacable enemy, he said.

"The overwhelming focus of this leadership is on the narrow focus of enriching uranium," Sadjadpour said. "If the Iranian government makes the decision that Iran wants to bet the farm on the nuclear program, it will be difficult to deter them from doing so."

Sadjadpour says that the purge of moderates from the decision-making structures in Iran has made it more likely that the country will attempt "the Pakistan option." Under this scenario, Iran would declare itself a nuclear-weapons state, endure the condemnation and then watch as the world comes crawling, anxious to bring it back into the international fold.

Any military strike at that time would only temporarily set back the program and then "preserve the worst elements of the regime," Sadjadpour said. "It would buy the regime another decade or even a generation."

Shahram Chubin, director of research at the Geneva Center for Security Policy, said the accumulation of sanctions is "exacting a price on the Iranians, but it is not going to change its policies." Iran may make what he called "tactical overtures" -- such as indicating renewed interest in a proposed swap of nuclear material desperately needed for a medical research reactor in Tehran. But such overtures would not indicate a shift in its intention to acquire nuclear expertise, he said.

Chubin said the United States and its allies are gambling on the unexpected occurring. "We are trying to buy time so something can happen. But what could that something be?" he said. "One should do as much as you can do to prevent Iran from getting a nuclear weapon. But at the end of the day, this may well be the case that whatever you do makes it worse."

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/04/21/AR2010042105043.html>

[\(Return to Articles and Documents List\)](#)

Seattle Times

Friday, April 23, 2010

Diplomats: Iran Agrees To More IAEA Overview

Iran has agreed to give the U.N. nuclear monitoring agency greater inspection and monitoring rights to a sensitive site where it is enriching uranium to higher levels, diplomats said Friday.

By GEORGE JAHN Associated Press Writer

VIENNA — Iran has agreed to give the U.N. nuclear monitoring agency greater inspection and monitoring rights to a sensitive site where it is enriching uranium to higher levels, diplomats said Friday.

The move — indirectly confirmed by a senior Iranian envoy — comes as Tehran mounts a diplomatic offensive meant to stave off new U.N. sanctions for its defiance of Security Council demands that it curb nuclear activities that could be used to make weapons.

Iran began enriching uranium to near 20 percent two months ago and says it will be turned into fuel rods for research reactors that manufacture medical isotopes for cancer patients. It says it was forced to take this step because the big powers refused to meet it half way on a moribund plan that would have supplied the rods from abroad.

The International Atomic Energy Agency had pushed in vain for greater access to the enrichment operation since the start of the project, seeking to realign monitoring cameras already set up to oversee Iran's long-standing enrichment plant that is churning out much-lower-level uranium. It has also been asking for more frequent inspections, said the diplomats, who asked for anonymity because their information is confidential.

They said Iran agreed in principle about 10 days ago to some — but not all_ of the oversight the IAEA had asked for.

"They have not agreed to the full measures sought by the agency but enough so that the agency would be happy" after being stonewalled for two months, said one of three diplomats, speaking to The Associated Press.

Ali Asghar Soltanieh, the chief Iranian envoy to the IAEA, indirectly confirmed agreement, saying the two sides had "constructive talks" on the issue.

Iran last year rejected a U.N.-backed plan that offered nuclear fuel rods in exchange for Iran's stock of lower-level enriched uranium. That swap would have curbed Tehran's capacity to make a nuclear bomb.

Six world powers — the five permanent Security Council members plus Germany — endorsed the confidence-building proposal. Backed by the IAEA, the deal foresaw shipping 2,420 pounds (1,100 kilograms) of low-enriched uranium from Iran to Russia to be enriched to 20 percent, then to France for processing into fuel rods for the research reactor that makes nuclear isotopes needed for medical purposes.

Beyond meeting Iran's needs, the U.S. and its allies saw the proposal as delaying Iran's ability to make a nuclear weapon by stripping it of much of the enriched uranium it would need for such a project. Tehran denies seeking such arms, insisting it is enriching only for an envisaged network of power-generating nuclear reactors.

Though Iran initially rejected the proposal, its leaders have tried to keep the offer on the table, proposing variations without accepting the Vienna-based IAEA's terms. The main stumbling block has been Tehran's refusal to ship the bulk of its low-enriched uranium abroad — a condition insisted upon by the West as key to slowing Iran's accumulation of enriched uranium and thereby any bomb-making capacities.

In the meantime, Iran has pushed ahead with further enriching uranium to 20 percent on its own, announcing this week that it has produced five kilograms (11 pounds) of the material, though it is not clear if it is able to take the next step of turning them into fuel rods for the reactor.

Any success in enriching up to that level brings Iran closer to quickly being able to make weapons grade uranium that serves as the core of nuclear warheads.

The Iranian concession comes just before the weekend visit of Iran's foreign minister to Austria on the first stop of an international campaign aimed at weakening a U.S.-backed push for new U.N. sanctions.

Manouchehr Mottaki will meet his Austrian counterpart, Michael Spindelegger, on Sunday, Austria's Foreign Ministry said.

Austria is a non-permanent member of the U.N. Security Council, which is preparing to consider a fourth round of sanctions on Tehran for its nuclear defiance.

Before his trip, Mottaki said Iran wants to talk with all council members except the U.S about the nuclear fuel swap deal. Iranian delegations, he said, will be pushing for agreement on the proposal in visits to veto-wielding permanent council members China and Russia and rotating members, including Uganda, where President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad is expected to arrive Friday.

For months, Russia and China have blocked attempts by the U.S., Britain and France — the three other permanent Security Council members — to introduce new sanctions.

Russia has recently expressed a readiness to support "smart" sanctions that do not target the Iranian people. China also appears willing but is insisting on further watering down present drafts submitted by the West.

Only permanent council members could veto proposed sanctions, but strong opposition by non-permanent members could strengthen Iran's case.

Brazil and Turkey, also serving two-year terms on the Security Council, already have indicated a reluctance to support new sanctions, and Brazil's President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva is due in Tehran on May 15.

One of the diplomats said Mottaki would also be meeting IAEA chief Yukiya Amano but added the Iranian was bringing nothing new to the table that could unlock the impasse on the fuel swap.

http://seattletimes.nwsourc.com/html/nationworld/2011680452_apeuirannuclear.html

[\(Return to Articles and Documents List\)](#)

RIA Novosti – Russian Information Agency

North Korea Says No Plans To Abandon Nuclear Weapons

21 April 2010

North Korea said it would not abandon its nuclear weapons program, but was ready to take part in non-proliferation efforts together "with other nuclear weapons states," South Korea's Yonhap agency said on Wednesday.

"We will produce as many nuclear weapons as we think necessary, but we will neither participate in the nuclear arms race nor produce them in excess," the agency quoted a memorandum issued by the North Korean foreign ministry as saying.

The ministry said the North was ready to "take part in international efforts on nuclear disarmament on an equal footing with other nuclear weapons states."

Russia, the United States, France, China and the United Kingdom are considered to be nuclear weapons states (NWS), an internationally recognized status conferred by the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), which came into force in 1970.

North Korea claims to be a nuclear weapons state after conducting two nuclear tests in 2006 and 2009, though the status has never been internationally confirmed. It withdrew from the NPT treaty in 2003.

"Assuming equal positions of all nuclear weapons states, we are ready to join forces with the international community in nuclear non-proliferation and safe storage of nuclear materials," the memorandum reads.

The six-party talks involving the two Koreas, China, the United States, Russia and Japan came to a halt last April when North Korea walked out of negotiations in protest against the United Nations' condemnation of its missile tests.

"Regardless of whether the six-party talks resume or not, we, as ever, will make consistent efforts for the global denuclearization, including on the Korean Peninsula," the ministry said.

"The mission of Korea's nuclear forces is to contain and repel aggression and a [nuclear] strike against the country and the nation until the Korean Peninsula and the world are completely nuclear-free," the memorandum reads.

The announcement comes amid media reports that the communist state, which is banned from conducting nuclear or ballistic tests under UN Resolution 1718, was preparing to carry out its third nuclear test.

Earlier in the day, South Korean YTN quoted an unnamed diplomatic source as saying the North began preparations for a third test in February. U.S. State Department spokesman Philip Crowley told reporters that he was "skeptical of that report."

MOSCOW, April 21 (RIA Novosti)

<http://en.rian.ru/world/20100421/158686190.html>

[\(Return to Articles and Documents List\)](#)

Straits Times – Singapore
April 21, 2010

Seoul Rejects US Nuke Weapons

Agence France-Presse (AFP)

SEOUL - South Korea on Wednesday ruled out redeploying US atomic weapons on its territory in response to North Korea's nuclear arsenal. 'It can never be our option,' Foreign Minister Yu Myung Hwan said at a lecture.

'Redeployment of nuclear deterrence must be dealt with within the framework of a global security and in that regard, a policy coordination with the United States as part of its global nuclear strategy is crucial,' he said.

US tactical nuclear weapons were reportedly pulled out of South Korea in the early 1990s, although US military maintains a policy of 'neither confirm nor deny' on the existence of nuclear weapons in certain regions.

US President Barack Obama has pledged to work towards a world free of nuclear weapons, and earlier this month hosted a 47-nation summit in Washington on stopping atomic materials falling into the hands of extremists.

South Korea will host the next major nuclear summit in 2012, and Mr Yu said he hoped the occasion would be used to pressure Pyongyang.

North Korea has 'between one and six nuclear weapons,' US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said this month. The North last year stormed out of six-nation talks in which it had agreed to end its nuclear programme in return for security guarantees and aid.

http://www.straitstimes.com/BreakingNews/Asia/Story/STIStory_517266.html

[\(Return to Articles and Documents List\)](#)

SpaceWar.com

U.S. Says Won't Accept Nuclear N.Korea

By Staff Writers/Washington
Agence France-Presse (AFP)
April 21, 2010

The United States on Wednesday ruled out recognizing North Korea as a nuclear power after the communist state said it was willing to join global disarmament efforts if treated as an equal partner.

"We will not accept North Korea as a nuclear-weapon state. Its current path is a dead end," State Department spokesman Philip Crowley told reporters.

He renewed US calls on North Korea to comply with a six-nation agreement to give up its nuclear program in return for aid and security guarantees.

"If it comes constructively back to the six-party process, then there are opportunities available to North Korea for a different relationship with the United States," Crowley said.

"But they cannot expect a different relationship until they take specific actions first," he said.

North Korea's foreign ministry offered not to take part in a nuclear arms race or to produce weapons "more than it feels necessary" if Pyongyang is allowed into disarmament efforts with the status of a nuclear-weapons state.

North Korea made the pitch as US President Barack Obama intensifies his campaign for the eventual elimination of nuclear weapons.

North Korea was the only declared nuclear power which Obama did not invite last week to a major summit on nuclear security.

The Obama administration also revised the US nuclear posture to state for the first time that the United States would not threaten a nuclear attack against a country without nuclear weapons and compliant with the Non-Proliferation Treaty, no matter what the provocation.

North Korea has tested two nuclear bombs and in 2003 withdrew from the NPT in a showdown with the United States over its weapons programs.

North Korea last year agreed to return to six-nation talks -- which also include China, Japan, Russia, South Korea and the United States. But it has since said that it first wants a permanent peace treaty with Washington.

http://www.spacewar.com/reports/US_says_wont_accept_nuclear_NKorea_999.html

[\(Return to Articles and Documents List\)](#)

The Star – Malaysia
Thursday April 22, 2010

China Military Paper Spells Out Nuclear Arms Stance

By Chris Buckley

BEIJING (Reuters) - China must have a limited nuclear "second strike" force to deter foes from threatening it with atomic weapons, the nation's main military newspaper said on Thursday, in a rare account of Beijing's nuclear strategy.

The commentary in the official Liberation Army Daily comes during intensifying atomic diplomacy -- after a nuclear security summit hosted by U.S. President Barack Obama and before an international conference in May about the future of the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).

China has been gradually modernising its relatively small nuclear arsenal and some critics of proposals to cut dramatically Western nuclear forces have said uncertainty about Beijing's plans should deter such proposals.

Retired People's Liberation Army Major General Xu Guangyu said in the newspaper commentary that China wanted a minimal nuclear deterrent and would avoid any arms race.

"China resolutely adheres to a defensive nuclear strategy, and has always adhered to a policy that it will never be the first to use nuclear weapons at any time and under any circumstances," wrote Xu, now a researcher in the state-run China Arms Control and Disarmament Association.

"The most basic feature of China's nuclear strategy, in a nutshell, is to be a deterrent but present no threat."

The commentary does not suggest China is rethinking its nuclear doctrine, but spells out in uncommonly sharp terms Beijing's rationale for upgrading its atomic forces.

AUTHOR ADDRESSING DOUBT ON CHINESE STANCE

In a telephone interview, Xu told Reuters the commentary was intended to address worries about China's nuclear stance, especially in Japan, India and the United States.

The United States and Russia this month signed a pact to cut their much larger atomic arsenals, and Obama separately announced a shift in U.S. doctrine, vowing not to use atomic weapons against non-nuclear states that abide by the NPT.

Like all the nuclear weapons states, China is secretive about its arsenal, developed from a first atomic test explosion in 1964. The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute has estimated that by 2009 China possessed 186 deployed strategic nuclear warheads.

Under the new treaty, the United States and Russia will limit their deployed nuclear warheads to 1,550 each, 30 percent fewer than the limit set in a 2002 treaty.

Members of the U.S. Senate could make an issue of China when debating whether to ratify the new pact with Russia. Some U.S. opponents of deeper nuclear arms cuts have said sharp reductions could allow China to "sprint to parity".

China must have a nuclear force that is "real, reliable, effective, and keeps up with the times", Xu wrote.

That force includes a "second-strike" capability so China can retaliate if it comes under nuclear attack, he added.

This force, he wrote, "is able, should a foe launch an initial nuclear strike, to really possess, and to convince the other side that it faces, an intolerable second-strike nuclear capability, thereby deterring an enemy from using nuclear weapons against us."

"It must make them grasp, without the least ambiguity, that we possess a deterrent."

China's efforts to upgrade its nuclear forces include gradually replacing older, liquid-fuelled ballistic nuclear-capable missiles with solid-fuel missiles, which will make launching them faster and less cumbersome.

China is also building new "Jin-class" submarines, capable of launching nuclear warheads while at sea.

"International experience shows the most effective second-strike capability is submarines," Xu told Reuters. "That and the upgraded missiles are a focus."

(Editing by Benjamin Kang Lim and Ron Popeski)

http://thestar.com.my/news/story.asp?file=/2010/4/22/worldupdates/2010-04-22T121738Z_01_NOOTR_RTRMDNC_0_-479002-1&sec=Worldupdates

[\(Return to Articles and Documents List\)](#)

China Daily – China

Nuclear Strategy No Threat To Neighbors: Ex-PLA Officer

By Cheng Guangjin (China Daily)

April 23, 2010

BEIJING -- China's nuclear strategy does not pose a threat to its neighbors, a Chinese military expert wrote in an article published on Thursday.

"Anyone who says that China's nuclear strategy poses a threat to surrounding countries is misunderstanding (China's intentions) or misleading (others), or even has ulterior motives," People's Liberation Army retired major general Xu Guangyu wrote in the People's Liberation Army Daily.

Xu said China's nuclear strategy was only a deterrent, and presents no threat.

Xu wrote: "China resolutely adheres to a defensive nuclear strategy, and has always adhered to a policy that it will never be the first to use nuclear weapons at any time and under any circumstances."

"The most basic feature of China's nuclear strategy, in a nutshell, is to be a deterrent but present no threat," Xu said.

Xu explained that "deterrence" meant China's nuclear power was "real, reliable, effective, and keeps up with the time, and should be able to really convince the other party that China possesses an effective and powerful nuclear second-strike capability should a foe launch an initial nuclear strike, thereby deterring an enemy from using nuclear weapons against it and thus preventing a nuclear war."

The expression, "present no threat", Xu explained, specifically referred to non-nuclear weapons states and those nuclear weapons powers that do not use or threaten to use nuclear weapons against China. "The Chinese government has clearly declared that it will not use or threaten to use nuclear weapons on such countries," Xu pointed out.

Last November, the US-based Federation of American Scientists and the Natural Resources Defense Council said in a report that the world's approximately 23,300 nuclear weapons were stored at an estimated 111 locations in 14 countries.

On the map of the estimated locations, China lies at the axis surrounded by countries either possessing nuclear weapons or the capability to produce nuclear weapons in Eurasia, including Russia, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, the Republic of Korea, Japan, India and Pakistan.

Xu told Reuters the People's Liberation Army Daily commentary was intended to address worries about China's nuclear stance, especially in Japan, India and the United States.

The US said in its 2010 Nuclear Posture Review that "the lack of transparency surrounding its (China's) nuclear programs - their pace and scope, as well as the strategy and doctrine that guide them - raises questions about China's future strategic intentions," news agency AP reported.

Japan's Foreign Minister Katsuya Okada said earlier this month that the country needed to hold a dialogue with China over its nuclear policy, indicating his eagerness to encourage Beijing to make efforts toward nuclear disarmament, AP said in the same report.

Beijing has reiterated its stance on nuclear weapons at an international disarmament conference that Iran hosted on April 17-18.

Cheng Guoping, assistant to Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi, who represented China at the conference, said the nation has been consistently proposing that nuclear weapons should be completely banned and destroyed, and that China will not be the first to use such weapons at any time and in any circumstances, the Xinhua News Agency reported.

During the two-day Nuclear Security Summit in Washington on April 12-13 attended by over 40 countries and international organizations, President Hu Jintao put forward five proposals on ways to strengthen nuclear security.

"All countries need to honor their commitments and responsibilities by adopting effective measures to secure nuclear materials and facilities," Hu noted.

http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2010-04/23/content_9765433.htm

[\(Return to Articles and Documents List\)](#)

Washington Post

NATO Ministers To Discuss U.S. Nuclear Arms

By Mary Beth Sheridan/Washington Post Staff Writer

Thursday, April 22, 2010

TALLINN, ESTONIA -- NATO foreign ministers opened a meeting Thursday on how to reinvigorate the alliance for the 21st century, broaching for the first time in at least a decade the possibility of getting rid of the last U.S. nuclear weapons in Europe.

Approximately 200 short-range U.S. nuclear weapons remain on the continent, the legacy of a vast force that blanketed Western Europe during the Cold War and was aimed at blunting a massive Soviet tank invasion.

That threat has vanished, and some NATO members say eliminating the missiles could advance President Obama's agenda to move toward a "world without nuclear weapons."

But NATO is deeply divided, even though many regard the bombs as having mostly political, rather than military, value. The debate underlines the delicate diplomacy involved in making progress on Obama's nuclear agenda, given Washington's commitment to defend more than 30 allies.

"A lot of important progress has been made in recent months on arms control. NATO should play its part and we will discuss just that -- based on a clear principle of solidarity, shared burdens and the need to ensure deterrence in an uncertain world," NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen said as he opened the meeting.

The nuclear discussion is part of NATO's effort to rethink its role in the post-Cold War era. The alliance will establish a new direction in a "strategic concept" due out this fall, the first such document since the days of the Clinton administration.

U.S. officials are calling for the alliance to work out a common position on the nuclear bombs. "In the Nuclear Posture Review we made very clear that we thought this was an issue for the Alliance 28 to decide, that it shouldn't be unilaterally done, and single countries shouldn't be coming forward with decisions or unilateral views. And that's our going-in premise," said one senior U.S. official, speaking on condition of anonymity.

Former Warsaw Pact countries like the Czech Republic worry that removing the short-range nuclear weapons would send the wrong signal to Russia. On the other side are countries like Germany, which regard the weapons as obsolete and feel little threat from Moscow.

The Obama administration has proposed holding talks with Russia to reduce both sides' short-range atomic weapons. American officials are wary about taking any step that could shake members' faith in the alliance -- or give other countries such as Iran the impression of U.S. weakness.

Member countries are scheduled to discuss the nuclear issue at a working dinner Thursday evening, along with the related issue of whether NATO should adopt European missile defense as one of its missions. No decision on the topics is expected before a NATO summit in the fall.

The arsenal of short-range, or "tactical," nuclear weapons in Europe has shrunk from about 2,500 two decades ago. The remaining bombs are stored in Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium, Italy and Turkey, with a few possibly also in Britain, analysts say. Although the weapons are American, they would be dropped by allies in wartime, under the principle of "burden-sharing."

The nuclear issue has flared in recent months, with leading German politicians calling for a complete pullout of U.S. nukes from their country and other nations urging their removal as part of negotiations with Russia over its far-larger stock of short-range weapons.

The NATO meeting will also focus on the war in Afghanistan and efforts by Bosnia to join the alliance.

New York Times

April 22, 2010

U.S. Resists Push By Allies For Tactical Nuclear Cuts

By MARK LANDLER

TALLINN, Estonia — Fresh from signing a strategic nuclear arms agreement with Russia, the United States is parrying a push by several NATO allies to withdraw its aging stockpile of tactical nuclear weapons from Europe.

Speaking Thursday at a meeting of NATO foreign ministers here, Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton said the Obama administration was not opposed to cuts in these battlefield weapons, mostly bombs and short-range missiles locked in underground vaults on air bases in five NATO countries.

But Mrs. Clinton ruled out removing these weapons unless Russia agreed to cuts in its arsenal, which is at least 10 times the size of the American one. And she also appeared to make reductions in the American stockpile contingent on Russia's being more transparent about its weapons and willing to move them away from the borders of NATO countries.

"We should recognize that as long as nuclear weapons exist, NATO will remain a nuclear alliance," Mrs. Clinton said. "As a nuclear alliance, sharing nuclear risks and responsibilities widely is fundamental."

The push to withdraw tactical weapons from Europe has gained momentum in recent weeks, with Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands, Luxembourg and Norway jointly petitioning NATO to take up the issue. Many analysts consider these weapons a dangerous relic of the cold war, expensive to safeguard and deadly if they fell into the wrong hands.

Domestic politics has also played a part: Germany recently elected a coalition government that favors removing tactical weapons from its soil. President Obama's nuclear security summit and his successful effort to negotiate a successor to the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty with Russia have helped put disarmament back on the agenda.

"This is big progress, compared to the situation a few months ago," said Guido Westerwelle, the German foreign minister, whose Free Democratic Party calls for the weapons' removal.

But other NATO members, including Turkey and several former Soviet satellites, are reluctant to remove them, fearing it would make them vulnerable to Russia. Given the deep political divisions, officials on both sides of the Atlantic fret that this debate could splinter the alliance.

Mrs. Clinton's speech amounted to an appeal for all sides to take a deep breath. "We view tonight as the beginning of this discussion," she said, noting that any decisions should be put off until a meeting of NATO leaders this fall.

The meeting on Thursday came at a time when NATO's 28 members had been rethinking the rationale for this 61-year alliance. The United States is pushing to streamline NATO's bureaucracy and make it more responsive to combat missions in places like Afghanistan. NATO, American officials note, has 14 agencies, 6,000 employees, and an annual budget of nearly \$7 billion.

NATO's secretary general, Anders Fogh Rasmussen, took up the American cry for an overhaul. "We are not just talking about cosmetic surgery," Mr. Rasmussen said in a news conference. "Our headquarters is a paradise for people who love committees, but I have to tell you, I am not one of those."

He also lined up with Mrs. Clinton on the nuclear question, saying he believed that "the presence of American nuclear weapons in Europe is an essential part of a credible deterrent."

Even those eager to see an end to these weapons acknowledged the process would be lengthy and would require unity within NATO. "We're not in a hurry," Poland's foreign minister, Radoslaw Sikorski, said in an interview. "We don't believe in acting fast or acting unilaterally."

There are no official numbers on tactical nuclear weapons, but analysts estimate the United States has from 150 to 250 in Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands, Italy and Turkey. Russia may have 2,000 or more weapons, some stored in places like the Kaliningrad region, close to Poland.

These numbers are way down from their peak during the cold war, when the United States had some 8,000 tactical nuclear warheads and the Soviet Union had upwards of 23,000. But disarmament has slowed in recent years, partly because the success in cutting strategic nuclear warheads has made tactical weapons, however outmoded they may be as instruments of war, seem more vital to the American nuclear umbrella in Europe.

Mrs. Clinton emphasized the importance of missile-defense technology as another way to mitigate nuclear threats. She called on NATO to make missile defense a core mission, though she said she did not expect NATO allies to pay for the American system planned for Eastern Europe.

And she said the Obama administration would seek to put tactical weapons on the table in the next round of arms reduction talks with Russia, something Russia so far has refused to do.

Earlier on Thursday, Mrs. Clinton met with Estonia's foreign minister, Urmas Paet, and reiterated America's commitment to defend it and other NATO allies from Russian aggression. Estonia, which languished under Soviet domination for decades, was struck in 2007 by a sophisticated cyberattack, which it believes originated inside the Russian government.

"He's old enough to remember the Soviet occupation," Mrs. Clinton said of Mr. Paet, who turned 36 this week.

"We believe there is no sphere of influence, that there is no veto power that Russia or any country has over any country in Europe, or in this region, concerning membership in NATO," she said.

For all the talk about nuclear threats, it was an ash cloud, not a mushroom cloud, that dominated hallway chatter here. Mrs. Clinton flew here via Spain, giving Iceland's erupting volcano a wide berth. But she faced a tense moment early on Thursday when the ash drifted back over Estonia. Her pilots headed for Tallinn, unsure if they would be able to land. As dawn broke over the airport, the skies cleared.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/04/23/world/europe/23diplo.html?src=mv>

[\(Return to Articles and Documents List\)](#)

RIA Novosti – Russian Information Agency

What The New START Treaty Overlooked

21 April 2010

The new START bilateral nuclear arms reduction agreement between Russia and the United States was signed by Presidents Dmitry Medvedev and Barack Obama on April 8, 2010 in Prague, the Czech Republic.

The well-balanced document highlights the commitment of Moscow and Washington to continue resetting bilateral relations. The agreement also heeds Russian national interests.

At the same time, the treaty does not cover high-precision sea-launched cruise missiles (SLCMs), which can acquire strategic capabilities in certain conditions.

What did the parties gain from the treaty, and what did it overlook?

First of all, Moscow can deploy ground-based intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) systems with multiple independently targeted reentry vehicle (MIRV) warheads.

The deployment of RS-24 Yars (SS-X-29) ICBM systems will make it possible to compensate for the gradual reduction in the number of previously manufactured RS-20 Voyevoda (SS-18 Satan) heavy-class and RS-18 (SS-19 Stiletto) medium-class missiles.

The treaty places no curbs on the development of ground-based ICBMs and allows Russia to deploy new heavy-class and medium-class ICBMs.

Second, U.S. inspectors will finally leave Votkinsk Plant State Production Association, an engineering and ballistic missile production company based in Votkinsk, which manufactures up-to-date strategic and theater-level missiles and implements R&D projects under the RSM-56 Bulava (SS-NX-30) submarine-launched ballistic missile (SLBM) program.

Any foreign presence in Votkinsk is undesirable because the city is the mainstay of the national missile potential.

Third, both parties will exchange telemetric information on a voluntary and mutual basis. The relevant exchange mechanism is still unclear because the United States has stopped manufacturing new ground-based ICBMs long ago and conducts few ballistic-missile tests.

Although it is possible to exchange telemetric information of prototype Russian offensive systems and U.S. defensive systems, Washington is not prepared for such transparency levels yet.

Fourth, Russia would have had to reduce the number of strategic delivery vehicles, no matter what, because it is unable to extend their service life all the time. The situation was aggravated by insufficient missile procurement volumes and by several abortive Bulava-30 test launches. For a long time the Russian Defense Ministry annually bought 6-7 RT-2UTTKh Topol-M (SS-27 Sickle B) single-warhead ICBMs.

Under the new rules, Moscow has only 608 deployed strategic delivery vehicles with 1,915 nuclear warheads. Consequently, Russia already meets the treaty's launch vehicle ceilings and can easily reduce the number of warheads down to required levels. At the same time, Moscow can retain numerous operationally inactive stockpiled nuclear warheads that will give it an edge over such nuclear powers as France, the United Kingdom or China.

But we should not think that the United States is voluntarily reducing the number of its launch vehicles. This reduction is largely made possible by their adaption to conventional warheads. Notably, four refitted Ohio class nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarines already carry Tomahawk conventional SLCMs. Strategic bombers are also being refitted in a similar manner. This makes it possible to expand the tremendous U.S. non-nuclear high-precision weapons potential.

This process will continue under the new treaty because the 14 U.S. ballistic missile submarines carry 336 SLBMs. Moreover, the United States has 450 Minuteman-3 (LGM-30G) ICBMs and at least 60 nuclear-capable strategic bombers. Previously, 200 bombers were listed in this category. This makes up for 846 strategic delivery vehicles, exceeding maximum delivery vehicle ceilings.

It should be noted that America's conventional high-precision weapons have a serious destabilizing potential. For instance, conventional Tomahawk SLCMs have a maximum range of 1,300 km, whereas nuclear-tipped Tomahawks have a maximum range of 2,500 km. They can therefore be classed among medium-range missiles in terms of this parameter. Four Ohio class submarines, as well as Los Angeles nuclear-powered fast attack submarines, Seawolf class and Virginia class attack submarines, Arleigh Burke class guided missile destroyers and Ticonderoga class missile cruisers are equipped with such cruise missiles.

Although they can carry about 6,600 cruise missiles, U.S. Navy warships have between 2,800 and 3,600 Tomahawk cruise missiles of various modified versions. Tomahawk launchers are also used to fire anti-ship and surface-to-air missiles.

Vladimir Yevseyev, Ph. D. (Technology), is the Scientific Secretary of the Russian Academy of Sciences' Coordinating Council for Prognostication

The opinions expressed in this article are the author's and do not necessarily represent those of RIA Novosti.

MOSCOW. (Vladimir Yevseyev for RIA Novosti)

<http://en.rian.ru/analysis/20100421/158686175.html>

[\(Return to Articles and Documents List\)](#)

Edmond Sun – Oklahoma

OPINION

April 21, 2010

Nuclear Policy Shift Undermines Security

Rep. Tom Cole Guest Opinion

WASHINGTON — In a series of recent actions, the Obama administration has set about swiftly but steadily dismantling decades of established nuclear policy in favor of new mandates that undermine our allies and ultimately weaken our national security.

Under new policies announced on April 6 as part of the administration's Nuclear Posture Review, the option of using nuclear weapons in response to a chemical or biological attack on our country is now all but off the table. As long as a nation is in compliance with the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, they are free to launch a chemical or biological attack on the United States without fear of the deployment of our strongest deterrent: nuclear weapons.

Throughout decades of Cold War threats, presidents of both parties understood that U.S. nuclear capabilities were essential in protecting our citizens and our allies from pre-emptive attack. The doctrine of "mutually assured destruction" kept the peace by guaranteeing severe consequences for any country unwise enough to launch a mass casualty strike. By removing the threat of a nuclear response, President Obama is both eliminating America's most effective method for preventing an attack and announcing in advance our military strategy for dealing with specific acts of terror.

The new policy would also forbid our military from developing any new nuclear weapons. While countries like China and Russia modernize their arsenals, and hostile regimes in North Korea and Iran work furiously to develop nuclear weapons, the United States will be limited to maintaining our existing, aging nuclear assets — or eliminating them entirely. Under a new treaty agreement with Russia, President Obama pledged to reduce our nuclear arsenal by 30 percent with a view to an eventual complete disarmament. Even missiles intended solely for

defensive purposes may be subject to the treaty agreement, jeopardizing the nuclear shield on which more than 35 countries have long relied for protection.

The president apparently believes that volatile nations with a history of bad behavior will be inspired by our example and immediately abandon their nuclear ambitions. As if on cue, 220 members of Iran's 290-member government Assembly issued a petition denouncing the new policy and describing the United States as "warmongering" and a "threat against international peace."

Meanwhile, Iran's nuclear program continues to advance, posing an ever greater danger to regional stability and to the very existence of Israel, one of our most important and valued allies. Despite repeated promises, the Obama administration has yet to implement tough sanctions against Iran. The White House has, however, found the time to lecture Israel about its defense policies, urging that country last week to sign the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

Advising one of America's staunchest allies to give up its nuclear weapons just as Iran expands its capability to target Israel for nuclear destruction demonstrates a reckless disregard for Israel's security, not to mention its valuable partnership with the United States.

The nature of our national security threats may have changed since the Cold War, but it is possible to adjust to new dangers without undercutting our allies and compromising our national defense. America needs a security policy — and a commander in chief — that will stop Iranian nuclear development and enhance our ability to protect against devastating attacks, not impede it.

U.S. REP. TOM COLE represents Oklahoma's 4th District.

<http://www.edmondsun.com/opinion/x993508551/Nuclear-policy-shift-undermines-security>

[\(Return to Articles and Documents List\)](#)

New York Times

OPINION

April 22, 2010

I.H.T. (INTERNATIONAL HERALD TRIBUNE) OP-ED CONTRIBUTOR

The Ice Has Broken

By MIKHAIL GORBACHEV

A remarkable sequence of events in April has turned the spotlight on the subject of nuclear disarmament and global security. I am referring to the signing by Presidents Obama and Medvedev of the New START treaty, the presentation of the Obama administration's nuclear doctrine and the nuclear security summit meeting in Washington attended by leaders of several dozen countries.

The ice has broken. The situation today is dramatically different from just two years ago. But has it changed enough to say that the process now under way is irreversible?

Let's first look at the New START treaty. It has been deemed irrelevant and the reductions it calls for described as "creative accounting." Though the cuts are indeed modest compared to those made under the treaty the first President Bush and I signed in 1991, the treaty is a major breakthrough.

First, it resumes the process initiated in the second half of the 1980s, which made it possible to rid the world of thousands of nuclear warheads and hundreds of launchers.

Second, the strategic arsenals of the United States and Russia have once again been placed under a regime of mutual verification and inspections.

Third, the United States and Russia have demonstrated that they can solve the most complex problems of mutual security, which offers hope that they will work together more successfully to address global and regional issues.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, with the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty the two biggest nuclear powers say to the world that they are serious about their Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty obligation to move toward eliminating nuclear weapons.

By reviving the goal of a world free of nuclear weapons, the treaty is a powerful tool for political pressure on those countries, particularly Iran and North Korea, whose nuclear programs have caused legitimate concern within the international community. It also reminds other nuclear weapon powers that they, too, must join in the process of nuclear disarmament.

I have often been asked, in Russia and elsewhere, whether the process of nuclear disarmament could be scuttled by a build-up in the arsenals of other countries — for example China, Pakistan and India. This is a legitimate question. The least that the other members of the “nuclear club” must do now is freeze their arsenals.

Further progress along the path of disarmament and nonproliferation would be facilitated by a statement from nuclear powers saying that the sole purpose of nuclear weapons is to prevent their use. Unfortunately, the new U.S. nuclear doctrine does not go that far. Nevertheless, this document, as well as Russia’s military doctrine, signals a tendency toward reduced reliance on nuclear weapons.

The new U.S. doctrine emphasizes that Russia is no longer an adversary. It declares the Obama administration’s intent to secure ratification of the treaty banning all nuclear testing and states that the United States will not develop new nuclear weapons.

The Obama administration has proposed bilateral dialogues on strategic stability with Russia and China. Such a dialogue must include missile defense issues. After all, the interrelationship of strategic offensive arms and missile defense is recognized in the New START.

The dialogue on strategic stability is certainly in Russia’s interest. To conduct it with confidence, we in Russia need a serious debate on the problem of missile defense, involving experts, members of Parliament and the military. What kind of missile defense does Russia need? Should it be linked with the U.S. missile defense system? These are political rather than “agency” issues. Decisions on such issues will be with us for decades to come.

Yet, the proposed dialogue should not be limited to strategic weapons. More general problems must also be addressed if we are to build a relationship of partnership and trust. Foremost is the problem of military superiority.

The U.S. national security strategy, adopted in 2002 and still in effect, clearly proclaims the need for U.S. global military superiority. This principle has in effect become an integral part of America’s creed. It finds specific expression in the vast arsenals of conventional weapons, the colossal defense budget and the plans for weaponizing outer space. The proposed strategic dialogue must include all these issues. Reaching mutual understanding will take a sense of realism and long-term vision.

NATO is now discussing a new “strategic concept,” and for the first time it is consulting with Russia. I welcome this. Does it mean that NATO is ready to renounce the claim to include the entire world in its “zone of responsibility” and instead work together with others within multilateral institutions vested with real authority and powers? The recent opinion essay by George Shultz and William Perry (IHT April 12) seems to suggest that influential Americans are now seriously considering such issues.

I am sure that Russia is ready to engage in such a discussion, and not Russia alone. For whether we like it or not, the world today is multipolar.

There has been much disingenuous talk that “multipolar structures are inherently unstable,” citing examples of Europe in the 19th and early 20th centuries and blaming multipolarity for conflicts and wars, including world wars. Such talk is pointless, because multipolarity is now a reality.

We have seen in recent months that power centers like China, Russia and the European Union have responded to the global financial crisis responsibly. While defending their own interests they have taken into account the interests of other players and of the world community as a whole. This is multipolarity in action, helping to mitigate the crisis and move toward addressing longer-term measures. But it’s only a beginning.

The Middle East peace process is in a deep crisis. The world is still paying for the mistakes of U.S. strategy in Iraq and Afghanistan. Efforts to agree on a global climate policy are stalled. The mechanisms for fighting poverty and backwardness are dysfunctional. In the final analysis, it all comes down to the lack of political will and failure of leadership.

We need collective leadership. We have recently seen examples of what it can achieve. But what remains to be done is much more than what has been done. Too much time was wasted after the end of the Cold War. The legacy of mutual suspicion, narrow self-interest and domination is still very much with us. The struggle between this legacy and new thinking will define international politics in the 21st century.

Mikhail Gorbachev was the last leader of the Soviet Union. He is now president of The International Foundation for Socio-Economic and Political Studies (The Gorbachev Foundation).

<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/04/22/opinion/22iht-edgorbachev.html?pagewanted=all>

[\(Return to Articles and Documents List\)](#)

OPINION

Thursday, April 22, 2010

RALSTON: The Next Arms-Control Agreement

Joe Ralston, George Robertson, Frank Miller and Kori Schake

With the new START treaty and the Nuclear Posture Review accomplished, the Obama administration has an enormous opportunity to capitalize on its momentum. It should propose that NATO negotiate with Moscow to reduce the number of short-range nuclear weapons in Europe. Under NATO, there are only about 200 air-delivered short-range nuclear weapons. Russia has more than 5,000 short-range nuclear weapons, which pose a serious proliferation risk even inside Russia, being smaller, more easily portable and with fewer security protections than strategic nuclear forces.

NATO maintains its significantly smaller arsenal in five European countries. However, since the end of the Cold War, the NATO alliance has reduced its nuclear arsenal by around 90 percent. NATO's unilateral reductions are a good-news story that NATO countries have done too little to publicize. Russia, on the other hand, has failed to make reductions. It's time to do something about this. NATO should propose an arms-reduction negotiation with Russia on these tactical nukes in the ideally suited NATO-Russia Council.

We don't propose that NATO eliminate its European-based nuclear stockpile. On the contrary, we believe that the alliance will need to maintain some forward-deployed nuclear capabilities for the foreseeable future. Sharing the risk of nuclear stationing and participation in nuclear missions reinforces the commitment - the promise - between Europe and the United States. It tells Americans that Europeans remain involved in the dangerous and difficult work of defending freedom. It tells Europeans that Americans will not let European security be separated from America's own, even if it puts our homeland at greater risk. These commitments will be less robust without European involvement in nuclear deterrence.

We do propose instead that NATO and Russia agree to cut their short-range nuclear weapons by some mutually acceptable common percentage. The alliance will need to decide how deep its reductions could be; this undoubtedly will be tied to progress in conventional-force improvements and progress in missile defense. And, as the Nuclear Posture Review makes clear, any changes are for NATO to decide, taking account of the security needs of all of its members. But the need to work this out is not a reason for delaying an offer to begin talks with Russia on nuclear reductions in parallel.

Some in the administration may be hesitant to undertake negotiations on short-range nuclear forces, concerned it might slow START ratification or bog down over difficult verification issues. (Counting launchers won't work for short-range systems, inspectors will need access to weapons stockpiles, given the portability of these systems.) We think this logic is topsy-turvy: Russia's enormous stockpile of short-range systems is a legitimate concern when reducing strategic weapons to low levels. Seeking to constrain Russian short-range systems through negotiation should increase support for START ratification.

While dealing with reducing short-range nuclear forces will involve dealing with truly difficult issues (verification being one of the hardest), these difficulties do not need to be resolved in advance of proposing such a negotiation to the Russians. We believe the U.S. administration and the alliance should capitalize on the momentum of the START agreement to demonstrate - before the Non-Proliferation Treaty review conference this May - our continued willingness to reduce our nuclear arsenal as we have committed to doing in the NPT. Reducing Europe's exposure to more than 5,000 short-range nuclear weapons would be a genuinely important achievement, which would reinforce our alliance.

NATO foreign ministers will meet in Tallinn, Estonia, on April 24 and 25. Short-range nuclear forces are already on the agenda. We strongly recommend the administration work intensively with its NATO allies to make an offer of short-range nuclear-weapons reduction negotiations with Russia.

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<http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2010/apr/22/the-next-arms-control-agreement/>

[\(Return to Articles and Documents List\)](#)