



USAF COUNTERPROLIFERATION CENTER

CPC OUTREACH JOURNAL

Maxwell AFB, Alabama

Issue No. 803, 27 April 2010

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People's Daily – China

Moscow May Ratify New START Next Month: Senior Lawmaker

April 26, 2010

The Russian parliament may ratify the new Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) by mid-May, said a senior Russian lawmaker on Monday.

"I suppose that our parliament will ratify this document in the first half of May," said Mikhail Margelov, Chairman of the International Affairs Committee of the Federation Council, or the upper house of the Russian parliament.

Margelov said simultaneous ratification of the new START, which was signed by Russian President Dmitry Medvedev and his U.S. counterpart Barack Obama in the Czech capital of Prague on April 8, was currently being worked on by a working group of the Federation Council and the U.S. Senate.

Margelov said he had visited Washington for several meetings of the working group, which primarily focused on simultaneous ratification.

"We met with a dozen Senators, representatives of the Department of State, the Pentagon and Barack Obama's administration," the Interfax news agency quoted him as saying.

Under the new START treaty, the warheads held by the two nuclear superpowers will be reduced to 1,500, about 30 percent lower than the previous treaty's limitation. Strategic offensive weapons will be based solely on the national territories of Russia and the United States.

The widely hailed new pact is conducive to easing frustrated U.S.-Russian ties and pushing forward nuclear disarmament and the non-proliferation process on a global scale.

Source: Xinhua

<http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/90001/90777/90853/6963805.html>

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Global Security Newswire

Lawmakers Warn Of NPT Review Conference Failure

Friday, April 23, 2010

By Martin Matishak

Global Security Newswire

WASHINGTON -- The upcoming Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty review conference will be a failure unless the United States convinces the international community to take a stronger stand against the Iranian and North Korean nuclear programs, a bipartisan group of lawmakers said this week (see *GSN*, April 19).

"A successful conference, particularly one united in its condemnation of Iran's nuclear program, is absolutely essential," House Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman Howard Berman (D-Calif.) said Wednesday. "To accomplish this requires leadership, especially from the United States."

Review conferences are held every five years to assess the operation and strengthen the execution of the treaty intended to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons. The 2005 summit ended badly as the 189 member nations failed to reach consensus on any substantive issues (see *GSN*, May 26, 2005).

Berman said the Obama administration is approaching the monthlong May summit in New York from a position of strength since it recently signed a new nuclear arms control agreement with Russia, released a new national nuclear strategy that reduced the role atomic bombs play in national defense, and persuaded a host of other nations to commit to securing loose nuclear material within four years.

Thanks to those actions, member states will not be able to "duck their own responsibilities in sustaining the nonproliferation regime by claiming that the United States has not done enough to reduce its own nuclear weapons arsenal to fulfill its commitment under the NPT toward disarmament."

Other lawmakers on the panel were less optimistic in their appraisal of the situation.

"The nuclear dam is giving way before our eyes," said ranking member Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-Fla.). "Iran's leaders are getting away with this stunning assault on U.S. and global security while we and our allies appear to be doing nothing but huffing and puffing. And the world is watching."

Iran has insisted that its atomic aspirations are strictly for civilian energy purposes but the United States and other world powers have viewed that assertion with overt skepticism.

The Florida lawmaker urged the administration to endorse the Iran Refined Petroleum Sanctions Act, which would punish foreign companies that sell gasoline to Tehran or assist it with its domestic refining ability.

The full House passed the measure last December by a vote of 412 to 2. The Senate has adopted its own version of the legislation. A conference bill is expected to be produced in a matter of weeks.

Foreign policy efforts by the last three administrations can only be viewed as a "megaton of failure when it comes to preventing irresponsible states from developing nuclear weapons," according to Representative Brad Sherman (D-Calif.), who chairs the panel's Terrorism, Nonproliferation and Trade Subcommittee.

The Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty has come under stress since the dysfunctional 2005 summit due to the growing availability of technology that could be used to produce nuclear weapons, Ambassador Susan Burk, who will represent Washington at the review conference, told lawmakers.

The strength of the regime has also been called into question as North Korea and Iran continue to work on their nuclear programs in defiance of international sanctions, she said.

Pyongyang withdrew from the nuclear pact in 2003; it has since conducted two nuclear tests and might be planning a third (see *GSN*, April 21). The regime is also suspected of providing aid to suspected illicit nuclear programs in Myanmar and Syria.

Iran has shrugged off attempts to curb its uranium enrichment activities that could be used to produce weapon-grade material. There are persistent fears that Iranian acquisition of a nuclear weapon could spark a strategic arms race throughout the Middle East, where many nations are already establishing atomic energy programs.

The potential for a rogue actor such as al-Qaeda to obtain a nuclear weapon remains another cause of worry.

There is also widespread opposition by NPT member states to signing the Additional Protocol to their safeguards agreements with the International Atomic Energy Agency. The protocol is intended to strengthen IAEA nonproliferation operations by permitting inspectors to conduct more intrusive inspections of nuclear activities in member nations, according to Burk.

It is because of those pressures that the United States is not approaching the upcoming summit in "any business as usual spirit," the ambassador told the committee.

She said the administration is looking for a "broad affirmation" of support for the treaty by most, if not all, of the 189 members to the decades-old compact.

"What we're seeking is consensus on the importance of compliance and the need to deal seriously with noncompliance," Burk said. "I think the difficulty in getting consensus on Iran per se is that this is a consensus body, as a meeting rule operates by consensus, and Iran is in the room."

"If we can get Iran to agree to language like that, we'll have consensus," she added.

Burk said it is unclear if next month's review conference will produce a "final document" laying out steps for promoting the nonproliferation regime. The 2005 conference ended without such a report.

The White House also wants a "discussion" that will identify commitments states are prepared to make to constrain the spread of dual-use enrichment and reprocessing technologies. It is important to ensure that any pursuit of such equipment for ostensibly peaceful activities is performed under strict safeguards, according to Burk.

On North Korea and Iran, the U.S. delegation will "continue to draw attention to the very debilitating efforts of noncompliance on the regime and to encourage the parties to see it for what it is and to make a strong commitment to deal with noncompliance," the ambassador said.

Burk's assessment of the White House's goals did little to assuage the committee's skepticism.

"You are absolutely assured that we are going to fail to achieve all our important objectives at this conference" because the administration has not told NPT member states that failure to fully embrace U.S. positions on Iran and North Korea could affect their access to U.S. aid and trade, according to Sherman.

He also warned the administration against trying to pressure Israel to sign the nonproliferation treaty. Jerusalem is widely presumed to be the only nuclear-armed Middle Eastern state, but maintains a policy of ambiguity regarding its arsenal.

"I would just say that friends don't ask friends to commit suicide. And so I hope you're not doing so," the California lawmaker said.

"The NPT review conference operates on consensus, which assures lowest common denominator results. [Nearly 200] countries will be there, including Iran," Representative Ed Royce (R-Calif.) said. "That makes the 15-member [U.N.] Security Council look efficient and virtuous."

Experts Weigh In

Arms control experts also stressed the importance of the upcoming summit, pointing to the developments of the last five years.

"Iran's and North Korea's nuclear programs, if not reversed, could severely damage this treaty," said David Albright, head of the Washington-based Institute for Science and International Security.

He said the United States should continue to promote adoption of the Additional Protocol.

The unlikelihood that all participating states would sign onto that effort has been a "great disappointment," Albright told lawmakers. "The IAEA actually made a huge mistake by making the Additional Protocol a voluntary endeavor and I think we're going to suffer consequences because of that."

The review conference should also explore agreements to thwart illicit nuclear trade, according to the Albright.

In addition, the United States should "elevate" the importance of this treaty, he said, noting that President Barack Obama does not plan to visit or address the summit.

Obama "could really work the crowd in a sense and to try to build a better consensus for the United States. He should also be ready to call on other leaders," the ISIS chief said. "Much of the negotiations happens behind the scenes; there's a lot of land mines in this conference and lot of that can be addressed by calling on other leaders, many of whom he met at the nuclear security summit to convince them on a need to make strong commitments."

Albright predicted global nonproliferation efforts would gain momentum if the meeting produces a final document. If it does not, the same issues will continue to crop up, he said.

Next month's review conference "needs to be seen against the backdrop of a general failure of nonproliferation compliance enforcement," Christopher Ford, director of the Center for Technology and Global Security at the Hudson Institute, told the committee.

The international community's response to moves by Tehran and Pyongyang has not been "terribly impressive," he added.

With respect to the utility of the review conference, "sometimes negative information is good to have as well," Ford said.

"It is fundamentally about building support in a political sense," he continued. "But it's also sometimes very nice to know when there isn't support."

"If we come together after all of this preparation to make a big pitch that everyone should now cooperate, because we make a big show of acting like we're disarming faster and they still don't cooperate, that may actually give us some very useful information about where the shared values really aren't," Ford added.

He said he suspected that the Obama administration would have a hard time capitalizing on the disarmament-friendly position it has staked out in recent months, in part due to high expectations.

"I doubt that the Obama administration's gamble that our disarmament movement will produce some kind of a nonproliferation revolution in international diplomacy will get many results," Ford told the panel. "I would, however, be very happy to be proven wrong."

http://www.globalsecuritynewswire.org/gsn/nw_20100423_6205.php

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Zimbabwe Guardian – Zimbabwe

Iran Strikes Secret Nuclear Mining Deal With Zimbabwe

Written by Editor

24 April 2010

The agreement was sealed last month during a visit to Tehran by a close aide to Robert Mugabe, the Zimbabwean president who last weekend celebrated 30 years in power, The Sunday Telegraph has learned.

In return for supplying oil, which Zimbabwe desperately needs to keep its faltering economy moving, Iran has been promised access to potentially huge deposits of uranium ore – which can be converted into the basic fuel for nuclear power or enriched to make a nuclear bomb.

"Iran secured the exclusive uranium rights last month when minister of state for Presidential affairs, Didymus Mutasa visited Tehran," said a Zimbabwean government source. "That is when the formal signing of the deal was made, away from the glare of the media."

Mr Mutasa is the former lands minister in the Zanu-PF administration and one of Mr Mugabe's most senior aides.

The revelation came after Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, the Iranian president, visited Zimbabwe last week to show his support for Mr Mugabe. At a lavish official dinner in his honour on Thursday evening, Mr Ahmadinejad blasted what he termed "expansionist countries" for exerting "satanic pressures on the people of Zimbabwe", adding: "We believe victory is ours, and humiliation and defeat is for our enemies."

Mr Mugabe said both Zimbabwe and Iran were targeted by the West because they wanted to manage their own natural resources.

"We remain resolute in defending Zimbabwe's right to exercise its sovereignty over its natural resources. We have equally supported Iran's right to peaceful use of nuclear energy as enshrined in the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty," he said.

The uranium deal will heighten fears in the West that Iran is stepping up its nuclear programme, which intelligence agencies believe is intended to lead to the development of nuclear weapons in the near future.

Iran maintains that its efforts are aimed solely at providing energy but the United Nations Security Council is considering imposing harsher sanctions against it because of its refusal to allow proper monitoring of its nuclear sites. Mr Ahmadinejad has boasted of his country's plans to step up construction and use of the special centrifuges needed to enrich uranium to ever higher levels – putting a nuclear weapon within reach.

Most of Iran's uranium came from South Africa during the 1970s, but its stockpiles are running low, The Sunday Telegraph has learnt, so its access to Zimbabwe's reserves has been granted at a crucial moment.

The government source added: "The uranium deal is the culmination of a lot of work dating back to 2007, when Mr Mugabe visited Tehran in search of fuel. Now Iran is beginning to reap the benefits.

"Iranian geologists have been conducting feasibility studies of the mineral for over a year now and we expect them to go ahead with mining once they are ready."

A senior official at the Iranian embassy in Harare confirmed Tehran had been offered the uranium rights, after negotiations over many years. "After a lot of diplomatic work and understanding, we have received reports of a deal having been made for Iran to mine not only uranium but also other metals," he said.

The pact seems certain to place Iran under even greater scrutiny by the United Nations nuclear watchdog, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

"If Zimbabwe and Iran were to announce a deal, then I am sure it is something the IAEA would be very interested in," said an IAEA source.

Any deal to supply Iran is likely to put Zimbabwe in breach of current UN sanctions on Iran. Under Security Council Resolution 1737, passed in December 2006, all countries are ordered to "prevent the supply, sale or transfer ... of all items, materials, equipment, goods and technology which could contribute to Iran's enrichment-related, reprocessing or heavy water-related activities."

The UN Sanctions Committee which deals with Resolution 1737 said that if the issue of uranium mining in Zimbabwe was raised, it would investigate.

Mr Mugabe's spokesman George Charamba insisted that mining rights had not yet been finalised, but he defended Iran's right to apply for them.

"The Iranians have a peaceful nuclear program. This cannot be said about the Americans who mined uranium in the Democratic Republic of Congo, and went on to produce a nuclear bomb used to attack Japan," he said. "We have our uranium and no one is mining it, until we decide otherwise," he said.

Uranium was first discovered in the Kanyemba district, about 150 miles north of the capital Harare by German prospectors in the 1980s but were not exploited due to low world prices.

Russia, Australia, South Africa and Namibia are among nations that have also expressed a desire to tap into the mineral wealth.

The extent of Zimbabwe's uranium reserves is uncertain, although some metallurgists believe that they may be very large. Initial exploration has indicated that there are an estimated 450,000 tonnes of uranium ore with some 20,000 tonnes of extractable uranium.

David Albright, founder of the Washington-based think tank Institute for Science and International Security, said that Iran was certainly looking for ways to access uranium but they risked serious consequences if they sought to import the materials.

"It would definitely anger Russia and China, as the more they are seen to be evading sanctions, the worse it is for Iran," he said.

"There is a great deal of nervousness about Iran's secrecy, and if they are secretly seeking uranium, is this to run a parallel nuclear programme to its declared one? Iran's underhand dealings helps line up support for stronger sanctions."

<http://www.zimguardian.com/?p=2600>

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Washington Post

Iranian Technocrats, Disillusioned With Government, Offer Wealth Of Intelligence To U.S.

By Joby Warrick and Greg Miller

Washington Post Staff Writers

Sunday, April 25, 2010

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Iran's political turmoil has prompted a growing number of the country's officials to defect or leak information to the West, creating a new flow of intelligence about its secretive nuclear program, U.S. officials said.

The gains have complicated work on a long-awaited assessment of Iran's nuclear activities, a report that will represent the combined judgment of more than a dozen U.S. spy agencies. The National Intelligence Estimate was due last fall but has been delayed at least twice amid efforts to incorporate information from sources who are still being vetted.

Director of National Intelligence Dennis C. Blair said in a brief interview last week that the delay in the completion of the NIE "has to do with the information coming in and the pace of developments."

Some of the most significant new material has come from informants, including scientists and others with access to Iran's military programs, who are motivated by antipathy toward the government and its suppression of the opposition movement after a disputed presidential election in June, according to current and former officials in the United States and Europe who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss the intelligence gains.

"There is a wealth of information-sharing going on, and it reflects enormous discontent among Iranian technocrats," said a former U.S. government official who until recently was privy to classified reports about intelligence-gathering inside Iran. He said that among senior technocrats in the nuclear program and other fields, "the morale is very low."

In recent weeks, U.S. officials have acknowledged that an Iranian nuclear scientist defected to the West in June. Shahram Amiri, 32, vanished while on a religious pilgrimage in Saudi Arabia and has provided spy agencies with details about sensitive programs, including a long-hidden uranium-enrichment plant near the city of Qom, intelligence officials and Europe-based diplomats said.

Amiri is described by some as the most significant Iranian defector since Brig. Gen. Ali Reza Asgari, a former deputy defense minister and Revolutionary Guard Corps commander who switched sides during a 2007 trip to Turkey.

But sources said there has been a spate of other recent defections by diplomatic and military officials, some of which have not been made public. Among the defectors was a top diplomat at the Iranian mission in Oslo, who said he was pressured to falsify election returns for Iranian nationals who had cast votes at the embassy.

The revisions to the NIE underscore the pressure on the U.S. intelligence community to produce an accurate assessment of Iran's nuclear ambitions as President Obama pursues a policy aimed at preventing the country from acquiring an atomic bomb. The community's 2007 assessment presented the startling conclusion that Iran had halted its work on developing a nuclear warhead, provoking enduring criticism that the report had underestimated the Iranian threat.

Officials briefed on the new version, which is technically being called a "memo to holders" of the first, say it will take a harder tone. One official who has seen a draft said that the study asserts that Iran is making steady progress toward nuclear weapons capability but that it stops short of concluding that the Islamic republic's top leaders have decided to build and test a nuclear device. Iran says its nuclear program is entirely peaceful.

CIA 'brain drain' program

The Iranian diplomat who defected, Mohammed Reza Heydari, said in a telephone interview from Norway that he represents thousands of young, educated Iranians who are increasingly discouraged by developments in their country.

"I personally had a good situation, both in Iran and as a diplomat, but my conscience would no longer allow me to work for the regime," Heydari said. "I was upset that the regime was repressing and killing people, simply for asking the question 'Where is my vote?'"

The departures of Amiri and others have given new momentum to a "brain drain" program set up by the CIA in recent years as part of a broader effort to slow Iran's nuclear progress by sabotaging equipment being shipped into the country and enticing key scientists to defect.

Art Keller, a retired CIA officer, said the agency's goal in recruiting agents is almost always to "run them in place." But in Iran -- where the government uncovered a network of CIA informants and executed its members more than a decade ago -- recruiting spies is regarded as extremely dangerous. "Particularly when it comes to clandestine weapons programs," Keller said, "where the scientists are watched like a hawk."

The CIA declined to discuss the brain-drain program or characterize the information provided by defectors such as Amiri. It also declined to comment on an ABC News report that Amiri has been resettled in the United States.

But Iranian news reports have identified Amiri as a researcher for the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran. The National Council of Resistance in Iran (NCRI), an opposition group that publicly revealed the existence of a secret uranium-enrichment program in 2003, said Amiri had been associated with sensitive nuclear programs for at least a decade. Iran contends that Amiri was kidnapped.

Some observers say the Tehran government has been unnerved by the defections and point to the death of an Iranian physics professor more than three months ago as a sign that it has begun a crackdown designed to frighten would-be spies.

The professor, Masoud Ali Mohammadi, was killed Jan. 12 when a bomb planted on a motorcycle exploded as he passed nearby. Iranian officials accused Israeli and Western intelligence operatives in the killing, but news accounts indicated that Mohammadi had been sympathetic to the opposition movement and had attended anti-government demonstrations. The day before his death, Iranian intelligence agents had searched his home and confiscated documents and notes, according to a report by the NCRI.

Learning from mistakes

In public testimony over the past three years, senior U.S. intelligence officials have avoided contradicting the language used in the 2007 NIE, despite privately asserting that Iran is seeking a nuclear weapon. An unclassified U.S. military report submitted to Congress this month concluded: "Iran is developing technological capabilities applicable to nuclear weapons and, at a minimum, is keeping open the option to develop nuclear weapons."

The 2007 report stressed that Iran was still taking other steps that could help it acquire nuclear arms, but any nuance was lost in the fierce debate that followed. Like the new version, the 2007 estimate was revised repeatedly as its release date neared.

Indeed, it was essentially scrapped and rewritten after the United States obtained secret computer records that described a decision by Iranian leaders to cancel work on a warhead around the time U.S.-led forces invaded Iraq in 2003.

Critics blamed the document -- a version of which was released to the public -- for creating the impression that the Iranian threat had subsided and for derailing the George W. Bush administration's hard-line approach.

The report's authors subsequently acknowledged that it was poorly written for a public audience and, as a result, was widely misunderstood.

A U.S. official briefed on the progress of the new NIE said analysts are under pressure to avoid their predecessors' mistakes. The document is now scheduled to be delivered by August, the official said, adding that "there is an expectation that the previous one will be corrected."

U.S. officials said there will be a major difference in how the new estimate is presented. The previous document triggered headlines that Iran had backed away from its pursuit of the bomb largely because officials decided to release a version to the public. The officials said they now see that decision as a mistake and have no plans this time to make portions of the estimate public.

Staff researcher Julie Tate contributed to this report.

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/04/24/AR2010042402710.html>

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The Star – Malaysia
Sunday April 25, 2010

No Headway On Nuclear Deal As Iran Meets IAEA Chief

By Sylvia Westall

VIENNA (Reuters) - Iran's foreign minister and the U.N. atomic watchdog chief made no headway on Sunday when they met to discuss a stalled nuclear fuel offer designed to ease tensions with the West, diplomats said.

The months-old plan calls for Iran to ship 1,200 kg (2,646 lb) of low-enriched uranium -- enough for a single bomb if purified to a high enough level -- to Russia and France to make into fuel for a medical research reactor.

Iran agreed to the offer in principle last October but balked at it later, saying it wanted instead a simultaneous swap on Iranian soil, a change which other parties to the deal said they could not accept because it would fail to build trust.

The West believes Iran's atomic programme is ultimately aimed at making weapons. Tehran denies this.

"The meeting was held in a business-like atmosphere," the International Atomic Energy Agency said in a statement after the 2-1/2 hour meeting, which was requested by Iran.

Iran's Manouchehr Mottaki and IAEA's Yukiya Amano discussed the agency's inspections in Iran and exchanged views on possible ways to implement the fuel proposal, the IAEA said. It gave no indication of a breakthrough.

"The agency is not in a negotiation process. It is listening to all sides," a diplomat close to the IAEA said.

Mottaki said he discussed with Amano ways to find a deal that would be acceptable to all participants. But it was not clear that any new proposals had been discussed.

"I see very good chances that we will find ways for a fuel swap," Mottaki said. "Now is the time for a new beginning, for new talks." He said successful negotiations would lead to further diplomatic discussions and said sanctions would be the wrong move.

SANCTIONS AHEAD, AUSTRIA WARNS

Mottaki is also visiting Vienna and other capitals to lobby Security Council members to oppose any new U.N. sanctions as closed-door negotiations continue on a draft Iran resolution.

Austria, which is on the council until the end of this year, said Iran had to start cooperating with the international community on its nuclear programme or face punitive measures.

"This will be the consequence if something does not change on the Iranian side," Foreign Minister Michael Spindelegger told a joint news conference with Mottaki. "The clock is ticking, time is running out for Iran," he said.

Spindelegger, who also criticised Iran's human rights record, said he had received new information from Iran on the fuel proposal which he would communicate to his European counterparts on Monday.

But he said this did not seem substantial enough to stop the sanctions drive. "Iran should be aware that we want to see actions not just hear words," he added.

Mottaki, who called the sanctions talk "unjust" said his discussions with Spindelegger had nevertheless been "very friendly". He urged Austria and other countries to be "independent" at the Security Council.

Moscow and Beijing have made clear that their decision to join negotiations with the United States, Britain, France and Germany on a fourth round of U.N. sanctions against Tehran was partly due to Iran's refusal to accept the IAEA fuel offer.

U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov spoke by telephone on Saturday, Russia's Foreign Ministry said.

"The ministers held a detailed discussion of the situation around Iran's nuclear programme, having stated that further steps towards its settlement should be taken on the basis of consensus, taking into account the opinions of all members of the 'six'," it said. It gave no further details.

(Editing by Louise Ireland)

http://thestar.com.my/news/story.asp?file=/2010/4/26/worldupdates/2010-04-25T235209Z_01_NOOTR_RTRMDNC_0_-479785-5&sec=Worldupdates

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Al Jazeera Magazine

25 April 2010

Russia Remains Vague On Iran Sanctions

Washington and Moscow have discussed Tehran's nuclear program over the phone, amid mixed signals from Russia over the US-led efforts to impose sanctions on Iran.

The Russian Foreign Ministry said Sunday that US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton held a detailed telephone discussion on Saturday with her Russian counterpart, Sergei Lavrov.

The two "discussed in detail the current situation with the Iranian nuclear program, establishing that further steps should be taken on the agreed basis, taking into account the opinions of each of the six powers," Reuters cited a Foreign Ministry statement.

The statement did not offer any details.

Despite recent hints that it may join the sanctions, Russia has stressed that it would not join any measures that are harshly punitive.

"There is no evidence that Iran has made a decision to produce nuclear weapons ... We don't want the non-proliferation regime to be used for strangling Iran, or taking some steps to deteriorate the situation and the living standards of people in Iran, " Lavrov said in a recent interview with RIA Novosti.

The nuclear impasse has seen the United States and its allies accuse Iran of a clandestine agenda to develop nuclear weapons, stressing that its current efforts for a civilian nuclear technology is a smokescreen.

Iran, a member of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and signatory to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), says its program is aimed at the civilian applications of the technology, denying the charges.

Iranian Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki announced last week that Iran intends to hold talks with all 15 members of the UNSC.

The developments come as the White House claims it has moved closer to a fresh UN Security Council sanctions regime against Tehran over its enrichment program.

Source: Press TV

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/articles/34/Russia-remains-vague-on-Iran-sanctions.html>

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Vancouver Sun – Canada

Zimbabwe Says No Uranium Deal With Iran

By MacDonald Dzirutwe, Reuters

April 26, 2010

HARARE -- Zimbabwe's government on Monday denied reports that it had signed an agreement allowing Iran to mine uranium, saying there was no certainty that the southern African state had commercial uranium reserves.

President Robert Mugabe told Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in Harare last week that Zimbabwe backed Iran's controversial nuclear programme and accused the West of seeking to punish the two countries for asserting their independence.

But Industry and Commerce Minister Welshman Ncube on Monday dismissed a report in Britain's Daily Telegraph claiming Harare had struck a deal allowing Tehran to mine untapped uranium reserves to secure raw material for its nuclear programme.

The report said Zimbabwe would get oil for access to potential uranium deposits.

"It's not true. No such agreement was signed," said Ncube, a minister from a splinter faction of the Movement for Democratic Change in Zimbabwe's unity government.

"There is no certainty that Zimbabwe has uranium deposits. You first have to prove that there are uranium deposits and that has not been done," he told Reuters.

Ahmadinejad was in Zimbabwe last week for a two-day visit and there was no official indication of any link between his trip and Iran's nuclear programme.

Mugabe has previously said the country holds uranium deposits which have yet to be exploited.

Iran faces a possible new round of United Nations sanctions over its refusal to halt uranium enrichment. The West accuses Tehran of trying to build nuclear weapons. Iran says it aims only to generate electricity.

Ncube said Zimbabwe and Iran had only signed general cooperation agreements in the fields of energy, science and technology and agriculture but officials from the two countries still had to meet to finalise details of any investment.

Asked whether Zimbabwe would in future consider jointly mining uranium with Iran, Ncube said: "There is no evidence that Zimbabwe has commercial deposits of uranium, so that question does not arise at all."

<http://www.vancouversun.com/news/Zimbabwe+says+uranium+deal+with+Iran/2951834/story.html>

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Washington Post

Iran FM Hopeful For Nuke Fuel Deal, No Sanctions

By NASSER KARIMI

The Associated Press

Tuesday, April 27, 2010

TEHRAN, Iran -- Iran's foreign minister on Tuesday expressed optimism Tehran would soon strike a deal with the international community to provide his country with nuclear fuel - the latest in a new Iranian diplomatic push to stave off fresh U.N. sanctions over its controversial nuclear program.

As part of the push, top Iranian officials have been courting some non-permanent Security Council members to pre-empt possible sanctions.

Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki held talks with Bosnian leaders Monday after making little progress in Austria over the weekend. And last week, President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad visited Uganda, another non-permanent member of the 15-nation Council.

On Tuesday, Mottaki held talks with visiting Brazilian counterpart Celso Amorim.

"We are hopeful to see a fuel exchange go into operation in the near future," Mottaki said, adding that Brazil, also a non-permanent member, could play a more effective decision-making role in the Council.

The U.S. and its allies fear Iran's nuclear program aims to produce nuclear weapons, and are pushing for tougher sanctions in the Security Council over Tehran's refusal to halt uranium enrichment - a process that can lead to nuclear weapon making.

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

Under the U.N. proposal, Iran was to send 2,420 pounds (1,100 kilograms) of low-enriched uranium abroad, where it would be further enriched to 20 percent and converted into fuel rods, which would then be returned to Iran. Sending its low-enriched uranium abroad would leave Iran with insufficient stocks to enrich further to weapons-grade level.

Tehran needs the fuel rods to power a research reactor in the Iranian capital that makes nuclear isotopes needed for medical purposes. Once converted into rods, uranium can no longer be used for making weapons.

Iran, which denies any plan for making nuclear arms and says its nuclear program is for peaceful purposes only, has made several counteroffers to the West, including one to swap smaller batches of Iran's low-enriched uranium.

But the U.S. and its allies say the proposals obviate the goal of rendering Iran unable to build a nuclear-powered warhead.

Amorim said both Iran and the West should show more flexibility in efforts to find a peaceful solution. Iran should provide guarantee that its nuclear program has no military ambitions in return for enjoying its right to have peaceful nuclear technology, the Brazilian top diplomat said.

Separately, Amorim was quoted as saying in an interview with the official IRNA news agency that a swap between Iran and the West could take place in Brazil, if his country was asked to host the exchange.

"Such a proposal has not been offered to us so far," Amorim said, according to IRNA. "If we receive it, we consider it."

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/04/27/AR2010042701496.html>

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RIA Novosti – Russian Information Agency

Iran Behaves 'Irresponsibly' Regarding Nuclear Program - Medvedev

27 April 2010

Iran has behaved irresponsibly in response to international concerns over Tehran's controversial nuclear program, the Russian president said.

The United States and other Western countries suspect Iran of developing nuclear weapons under the guise of a civilian nuclear energy program and are seeking new sanctions following Iran's move to enrich uranium to 20%.

"So far Iran has not shown proper understanding and is behaving irresponsibly... If this situation continues we exclude nothing, including sanctions," Dmitry Medvedev said in an interview with the Danish Broadcasting Corporation (DR) before his official visit to Denmark on Tuesday.

"Sanctions of course are bad in their nature as they seldom yield results. But when all other means of influence are exhausted, we are left with no choice" he said.

The Iran Six (France, Britain, Germany, the United States, Russia and China) began on April 19 discussing the text of a draft resolution imposing sanctions on Iran over its controversial nuclear program.

Russia and China insist on resolving Iran's nuclear issue peacefully, but the United States, Britain, France and Germany are pushing for harsher sanctions against the Islamic Republic.

<http://en.rian.ru/world/20100427/158761330.html>

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Time

Tuesday, April 27, 2010

Is Iran Running Out Of Uranium?

By Vivienne Walt

Western governments may be scrambling to push through tougher international sanctions against Iran, but the Islamic Republic's nuclear program may be facing a more immediate hurdle: How to replenish its dwindling uranium stocks.

Iran's need to find fresh supplies of raw uranium supplies is increasingly urgent, according to some reports. That may be one reason for the bear hug President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad gave Zimbabwe's President Robert Mugabe last Thursday, when the Iranian leader landed in Harare on the first leg of an African trip. An anonymous Zimbabwe government source told Britain's *Telegraph* newspaper last Friday that his country's Minister of Presidential Affairs, Didymus Mutasa, had made a secret deal with Iran last month during a visit to Tehran, under which the Iranians would provide the sanctions-battered southern African country with critically needed oil supplies, in exchange for what he called "the exclusive uranium rights" in Zimbabwe.

Neither Iran nor Zimbabwe has confirmed the uranium deal, which could violate U.N. sanctions, and on Monday an official from Zimbabwe's Movement for Democratic Change, the minority partner in the coalition government, denied the report, insisting that "no such agreement was signed." Zimbabwe is believed to have large uranium deposits, discovered during the 1970s, which have never been mined.

Iran's uranium stockpile is 30 years old, dating to the early 1980s, when South Africa sold it about 531 tons of yellowcake, the powder produced from the raw uranium dug from the ground which is enriched in order to create

nuclear reactor fuel (or, potentially, bomb material). Of that supply, the country has only "a relatively small stock" left, according a report last December by the Institute for Science and International Security (ISIS) in Washington, which tracks Iran's nuclear industry. Much of Iran's yellowcake has been refined into uranium hexafluoride, which is kept under scrutiny by inspectors of the International Atomic Energy Agency, as required by the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty to which Iran is a signatory. Iran's current stockpile of low-enriched uranium, if enriched to weapons grade — a process that would require Iran kicking out the inspectors and thereby unambiguously declaring its intentions — would be enough to create a single nuclear bomb. But it is a lot less than Iran needs to fuel a nuclear reactor for energy purposes, let alone build several nuclear weapons that would constitute a credible nuclear arsenal.

Iran says its purpose in enriching uranium is to simply create fuel for a nuclear reactor to provide electricity, although Western powers doubt that its intentions are entirely benign. Still, whatever the program's purpose, it is potentially hobbled without a secure supply of uranium. "We know that they are short [of uranium] for a nuclear energy program," says David Albright, a former IAEA inspector in Iraq and president of ISIS. "If you don't have uranium you don't have anything."

The push for new sanctions has consumed so much of the diplomatic focus on Iran in recent months that few officials have paid much attention to Tehran's quest for new uranium stocks, says Cliff Kupchan, Iran analyst at Eurasia Group in Washington, who believes that Iran is "almost out of yellowcake."

While Western officials might not be paying attention to dwindling uranium supplies, Iranian officials are working hard to find new sources of the essential mineral. Iran owns a small stake in the giant Rossing uranium mine in Namibia, but under current sanctions is forbidden from importing any of its product.

Last November, an IAEA intelligence report leaked to the Associated Press said that Iran was close to buying 1,350 tons of purified uranium ore from Kazakhstan — one of the world's biggest uranium producers — for \$450 million, in "a deal to be signed soon." That deal appears to have been scuttled after the report became public. Kazakhstan President Nursultan Nazarbayev met privately with President Obama in Washington while attending the White House nuclear summit on April 11, and agreed to allow U.S. military planes to fly over the huge former Soviet Republic in order to resupply troops in Afghanistan, and to work together on non-proliferation.

That suggests Iran might need to shop elsewhere for uranium, rather than pursue supplies in Kazakhstan. If Zimbabwe officials opt to trade its uranium reserves for Iranian oil, U.S. officials will certainly take notice, says Kupchan, adding: "This is the kind of deal that the U.S. is going to have its sensors on high for."

<http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1984657,00.html>

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The Star – Malaysia
Monday April 26, 2010

China Seen Staking "Middle" Role At Nuclear Talks

By Chris Buckley

BEIJING (Reuters) - China is likely to stake out a position between the big nuclear weapons states and the non-nuclear-armed countries at an international conference next month, a prominent Swedish think tank said on Monday.

The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) said in a report that Beijing faces pressure over its nuclear weapons modernisation after Washington and Moscow signed a treaty to cut their much bigger arsenals of atomic missiles.

For now, however, China is likely to fend off calls to formally curb its nuclear weapons development and could seek to use the conference on the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) to push back by backing demands from non-nuclear-armed states for deeper cuts from Washington and Moscow, the report said.

"China is unlikely to take part in any unilateral or multilateral (nuclear) disarmament steps in the near- to medium-term," said the report written by Bates Gill, the director of SIPRI and an expert on Chinese security policy.

"On the contrary, Chinese steps to modernise its nuclear arsenal will stand out among the world's major nuclear weapons states," said the report.

U.S. President Barack Obama announced this month a shift in U.S. doctrine, vowing not to use atomic weapons against non-nuclear states that abide by the NPT.

CHINA'S AWKWARD POSITION

The deepening diplomacy over nuclear arms has thrown into relief China's awkward position in atomic diplomacy -- as a member of the club of five nuclear weapons states formally accepted by the NPT, but one claiming to share many developing countries' demands and grievances with that club.

Gill said that ambivalence is likely to play out at the conference throughout much of May discussing the NPT's future.

"Beijing will probably expect the United States in particular, but also Russia, to do much of the heavy lifting" over disarmament commitments, Gill said in an email.

China is also likely to use the conference to "defend the right of non-nuclear states, and particularly developing countries, to access nuclear technologies for peaceful purposes," said the SIPRI report.

Beijing faces growing calls from Western powers to support a fresh round of U.N. Security Council sanctions against Iran over its disputed nuclear activities. Although China has been discussing possible sanctions, it has also long stressed that Iranian demands for peaceful nuclear power must also be heeded.

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

The SIPRI has estimated that as of 2009 China possessed 186 deployed strategic nuclear warheads.

Since conducting its first nuclear test in 1964, China has said it will never be the first to use such weapons in any conflict.

But Beijing wants to preserve some leeway to upgrade its arsenal, insulating its deterrent against possible moves by potential foes, including the United States developing anti-missile technology.

China wants to have a limited nuclear "second strike" force to deter foes, the nation's main military newspaper said last week, spelling out the ideas behind the country's atomic modernisation.

China has been replacing liquid-fuelled ballistic nuclear-capable missiles with solid-fuel missiles, which will make launching them faster. It is also building new "Jin-class" ballistic missile submarines, capable of launching nuclear warheads while at sea.

"It remains too early to expect China to enter into official multilateral disarmament discussions with the other nuclear weapons states," Gill said in response to questions.

But if the United States and Russia were to contemplate cutting their strategic warheads to below 1,000 each, that would "depend on the other nuclear weapons states, and especially China, showing a willingness to engage in multilateral disarmament discussions", said Gill.

The report will be available on the SIPRI website (<http://www.sipri.org>).

(Editing by Benjamin Kang Lim and Ron Popeski)

http://thestar.com.my/news/story.asp?file=/2010/4/26/worldupdates/2010-04-26T112811Z_01_NOOTR_RTRMDNC_0_-479922-1&sec=Worldupdates

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London Sunday Times – U.K.

April 25, 2010

Hyperfast Missile To Hit Anywhere In An Hour

Tony Allen-Mills in Washington

HAUNTED by the memory of a lost opportunity to kill Osama Bin Laden before he attacked the World Trade Center in New York, US military planners have won President Barack Obama's support for a new generation of high-speed weapons that are intended to strike anywhere on Earth within an hour.

Obama's interest in Prompt Global Strike (PGS), a nonnuclear weapons programme, has alarmed China and Russia and complicated nuclear arms reduction negotiations.

White House officials confirmed last week that the president, who won the Nobel peace prize last year, is considering the deployment of a new class of hypersonic guided missiles that can reach their targets at speeds of Mach 5 — about 3,600mph.

That is nearly seven times faster than the 550mph Tomahawk cruise missiles that arrived too late to kill Bin Laden at an Al-Qaeda training camp in Afghanistan in 1998.

“The ability to attack a wide range of targets at intercontinental range, promptly and without resort to nuclear weapons, is of central importance to US national security,” said Daniel Goure, a defence analyst at the Lexington Institute in Virginia.

The White House has requested almost \$250m in congressional funding next year for research into hypersonic technologies, some of which harness the shock waves generated by a fast-moving missile to increase its speed further.

The new weapon could be launched from air, land or sea on a long-range missile travelling at suborbital altitudes above 350,000ft. The missile releases a hypersonic pilotless plane that receives updates from satellites as it homes in on its target at up to five times the speed of sound, generating so much heat that it has to be shielded with special materials to avoid melting.

Depending on the version the Pentagon chooses, the warhead would either split into dozens of lethal fragments in the final seconds of its flight or simply smash into its target, relying on devastating kinetic energy to destroy anything in its path. As a precision weapon its effects would be quite different from the mass destruction inflicted by nuclear warheads delivered by intercontinental ballistic missiles that can reach 13,400mph.

The development of PGS has won praise and criticism as the president seeks to reduce the strategic US nuclear arsenal in favour of tactical weapons that can be used swiftly to counter terrorists or rogue states. “Conventional weapons with worldwide reach ... enable us to reduce the role of nuclear weapons,” said Joe Biden, the vice-president, recently.

Sergei Lavrov, the Russian foreign minister, warned earlier this month that “states will hardly accept a situation in which nuclear weapons disappear, but weapons that are no less destabilising emerge in the hands of certain members of the international community”.

General Yuri Baluyevsky, a deputy secretary of the Russian National Security Council, complained that US concessions at nuclear arms reduction talks were not because of America’s love of peace, but because “they can kill you using conventional high-precision weapons”.

US analysts have also warned of the risk that Chinese or Russian monitors might mistake a hypersonic launch for nuclear attack. “The short flight time ... leaves very little time for an assessment of the situation, putting an enormous strain on national decision-making mechanisms and increasing the probability of an accident,” argued Pavel Podvig of Stanford University.

General Kevin Chilton, the US air force commander supervising the PGS programme, told The New York Times that the Pentagon’s current options were not fast enough.

“Today we can present some conventional options to the president to strike a target anywhere on the globe that range from 96 hours to maybe four, five, six hours,” he said. “If the president wants to act faster than that, the only thing we have that goes faster is a nuclear response.”

The Pentagon has already begun testing missile systems that might be used in a PGS programme. Last week the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (Darpa) launched a test flight of a prototype labelled the Hypersonic Technology Vehicle 2 (HTV-2), also known as the Falcon.

The prototype was launched from Vandenberg air force base in California on a solid-fuel rocket booster made from a decommissioned ballistic missile. There was no comment from US Strategic Command, which controls the programme, on either the success of the test or a timetable for future deployment.

“It is premature to discuss the actual implementation of this capability until the technology has sufficiently matured,” a Pentagon statement said.

The Washington Times reported last week that Darpa is building two Falcon vehicles, the second of which is scheduled for launch early next year.

US officials have sought to reassure Russian and Chinese authorities that the new weapons will be developed in small numbers and will be kept well away from US nuclear launch sites so there is no confusion that might trigger an accidental nuclear war.

The new arms reduction treaty signed by Obama and Dmitri Medvedev, the Russian president, in Prague two weeks ago also contains a provision that Washington will reduce its arsenal by one nuclear missile for every PGS weapon that it deploys.

Obama’s efforts to placate Moscow and Beijing have been criticised by US arms control hawks. Dean Cheng, a China specialist at the conservative Heritage Foundation, accused the administration of “pursuing a strategically

incoherent policy, one that is ostensibly aimed at reassuring other nations but will more likely lead to greater instability and uncertainty”.

Cheng added: “This is not the path to another Nobel peace prize.”

http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/us_and_americas/article7107179.ece

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Great Falls Tribune – Great Falls, Montana

Air Force Creates Coordination Group For ICBMs

By MATT VOLZ, Associated Press Writer

April 25, 2010

HELENA — The people in charge of keeping U.S. intercontinental ballistic missiles at the ready are teaming up for the first time with those responsible for extending the life of the aging missiles and their parts suppliers, Air Force officials said.

The ICBM Sustainment General Officer Steering Group held its first meeting this month at Malmstrom Air Force Base, with the goal of making sure those who maintain the nuclear-tipped missiles and those who are modernizing them are on the same page in keeping them alert-ready while upgrading their technology.

The participants included Air Force nuclear weapons and logistics commanders, plus the commanders from Malmstrom, F.E. Warren Air Force Base in Wyoming and Minot Air Force Base in North Dakota. Also in attendance were high-ranking officers from Global Strike Command, which oversees the nation’s nuclear equipped bombers and ICBMs, and a representative from defense contractor Northrup Grumman.

The four-day meeting was held behind closed doors and much of what was discussed is classified information, Malmstrom spokeswoman Valerie Mullett said. But the group was not meeting to discuss a recently signed U.S.-Russian treaty to cut nuclear stockpiles by 30 percent, Air Force officials said.

The aim is for the different groups to come together to set priorities, when at times in the past their missions have been at odds, said Col. Kevin Betz, Global Strike Command’s deputy director for logistics, installations and mission support.

“You want to make sure you optimize the transition between sustainment and modernization,” Betz said. “By getting folks together to talk, we make sure we understand each other. It’s kind of like walking a mile in an-other person’s shoes.”

There are 450 Minuteman III ICBMs in Montana, North Dakota and the Wyoming-Colorado-Nebraska triangle. The Minuteman IIIs were first fielded in the 1970s, and the Air Force’s goal is to extend their life through 2020. It also is studying how the weapons systems can be sustained until 2030.

The Air Force has committed nearly \$6.2 billion to such life-extension programs, according to Malmstrom’s website.

“We have today a very viable weapons system that is over 30 years old that is more capable than it was when we first started,” Betz said.

Global Strike Command, based in Barksdale, La., in February took over the consolidated Air Force nuclear arsenal. It organized the steering committee as the first phase in this effort to better coordinate “priorities and synergies” and plans for it to meet every six months, Betz said.

In a second phase, people responsible for modernization of the ICBMs will be assigned to work next to their counterparts in charge of maintenance to ensure they work and allocate resources together, he said.

The meeting comes on the heels of a nuclear arms reduction treaty signed by President Obama and Russian President Dmitry Medvedev that calls on both sides to reduce their nuclear warheads over the next seven years by 30 percent, to 1,550 from a previous maximum of 2,200. The new START treaty also calls on limiting to 800 the number of missiles, bombers and submarines used to launch the warheads.

A week after the treaty announcement, the Defense Department released its Nuclear Posture Review that said the agency will spend the next two years reviewing how many ICBMs should remain in silos in the region.

Air Force officials said the newly formed steering committee has nothing to do with the treaty or the nuclear posture review released by the Defense Department a week later.

“We’re aware of what’s going on with new START and the Nuclear Posture review, but these kinds of things are happening independently,” said Col. John Thomas, spokesman for Global Strike Command. “Once decisions are made on the force structure by the Department of Defense, we implement them.”

<http://www.greatfalltribune.com/article/20100425/NEWS01/100425002/1002/rss>

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Knoxville News Sentinel

Y-12 To Dismantle Nukes

Workers preparing to receive parts of massive B53 bombs

By Frank Munger

April 25, 2010

OAK RIDGE - Y-12 workers are prepping the Oak Ridge plant for a dismantlement project involving some of the most powerful nuclear bombs ever built.

Steven Wyatt, a federal spokesman at the Y-12 National Security Complex, confirmed that components from B53 bombs are expected to begin arriving in late 2011.

The B53 was introduced into the U.S. nuclear arsenal in 1962 and was retired in 1997 after playing a key role in Cold War deterrence. Each bomb weighs about 10,000 pounds and is the size of a minivan, with an explosive yield reported to be in the range of 9 megatons of TNT - several hundred times that of the A-bomb dropped on Hiroshima.

"We are already gearing up for this work, which will involve the dismantlement of the secondary that is part of this nuclear weapons system," Wyatt said in an e-mail response to questions.

Y-12 typically dismantles the same components that it built originally, and the Oak Ridge plant specializes in so-called secondaries - the second stage of thermonuclear weapons made with highly enriched uranium and other materials.

The National Nuclear Security Administration recently announced that the Pantex Plant in Texas, the main assembly and disassembly center for the nuclear weapons complex, had come up with a new process and special tooling to accelerate the dismantlement of the B53 bombs.

The new SS-21 process will allow Pantex to "safely and responsibly dismantle this legacy weapon," the NNSA said. Experts from Los Alamos and Sandia national labs also collaborated on the new dismantlement process, the federal agency said.

After the initial disassembly of the bombs at Pantex, the secondaries will be transported to Y-12 for further dismantlement and recycling of materials.

Damien LaVera, a spokesman at NNSA headquarters in Washington, said he could not discuss the number of B53 bombs awaiting dismantlement or the schedule for completing the work. That information is classified, LaVera said.

The size of the B53 is one of the main challenges facing Y-12.

"Every dismantlement program represents different technical requirements and challenges," he said. "For the B53, the main difference and challenge is the sheer size and weight of the unit as compared to other nuclear weapons we have dismantled in the past. The B53 requires special handling equipment and tooling to assist the technicians in lifting and moving of components during dismantlement operations."

To prepare for the work, Y-12 workers have been "updating" an area of the plant designated for the project and acquiring additional equipment.

"The installation of this equipment is already under way and will be followed by readiness reviews to ensure that we are ready for the upcoming work with the B53 system," Wyatt said.

<http://www.knoxnews.com/news/2010/apr/25/y-12-to-dismantle-nukes/>

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Boston Globe

GLOBE EDITORIAL

Prepare Now For A Nuclear Iran

April 26, 2010

DEFENSE SECRETARY Robert Gates was right to counsel, in a recently disclosed memo, that the Obama administration needs to engage now in “prudent planning and preparation” for the possibility of a nuclear-armed Iran.

This is not a matter for partisan point-scoring. But Senator John McCain did just that recently when he seized on the memo to charge that the Obama administration has failed to develop “a coherent policy” for Iran. Gates explained, credibly, that his purpose was to present “a number of questions and proposals intended to contribute to an orderly and timely decision making process.” The memo was clearly meant not to criticize President Obama’s current Iran policy but to insist on the need to think several moves ahead.

At present, Obama is doing exactly what he should be doing to avoid two intolerable outcomes: either a nuclear-armed Iran or a precipitous military conflict that the US defense establishment has warned against repeatedly. What’s more, there is still a chance that Obama’s current dual-track efforts — pursuing tougher economic sanctions while maintaining the offer of a negotiated agreement — will succeed.

Iran’s desperate efforts to round up UN Security Council votes against looming sanctions reveals how much that regime fears the domestic effects of new UN sanctions targeting the regime’s despised Revolutionary Guards. Iran’s hardliners inveterately feign indifference to sanctions. But even if China and Russia dilute proposed UN sanctions, the impact of those international penalties combined with the blackballing of Iran by Western and Asian financial, insurance, and energy companies can be devastating.

Gates is nonetheless right to argue that planning should begin now for the possibility that, despite severe new sanctions, Iran will continue refusing a deal that would end its pursuit of nuclear weapons. It is too soon to accept the inevitability of a nuclear-armed Iran and a containment policy. But it is not too soon to plan for how to combat an Iranian nuclear breakout. This would entail ever-harsher economic sanctions but also an acceleration of the military assistance already provided to Iran’s Arab neighbors, support for opposition groups inside Iran, and heightened efforts to sabotage Iran’s nuclear program.

If they are rational actors, Iran’s rulers may be made to understand that nuclear weapons would make their regime less, not more, secure.

http://www.boston.com/bostonglobe/editorial_opinion/editorials/articles/2010/04/26/prepare_now_for_a_nuclear_iran/

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WorldBulletin.net – Turkey
OPINION

Nuclear Terrorism, Iran And The NPR

In case of Iran, this is the first time that Washington explicitly threatens a non-nuclear-weapons state in its official doctrine.

Monday, 26 April 2010

By Dr. Kayhan Barzegar

The emphasis on the theme of “nuclear terrorism” in the Obama administration’s Nuclear Posture Review (NPR) is closely related to global and Middle East nuclear disarmament, and preventing the use of nuclear energy by other nations. By connecting the United States’ security to global security, as well as Middle East security, the Obama administration aims to redefine the United States hegemonic role in the world. Such a policy is in line with the unilateralist policy of the predecessor administration of George W. Bush, and in obvious contradiction with the Obama’s policy of “change”.

There are two noteworthy points in the NPR. First, the United States will not use nuclear weapons against countries lacking such weapons, excluding Iran and North Korea. In case of Iran, this is the first time that Washington explicitly threatens a non-nuclear-weapons state in its official doctrine. This concept totally belongs to the Cold War era and proves that the United States still considers nuclear weapons as cornerstone of its deterrence policy. Emphasis on the use of nuclear weapons on security grounds is a grave obstacle on the way of global nuclear disarmament particularly in the volatile region of the Middle East.

This aside, using nuclear deterrent power to threaten countries is at odds with Obama Administration’s pronounced goals of strengthening global peace and security because when deterrence is used as a threat factor, other countries will deem it their right to inhibit such threat by any possible means. In fact, this provides them with a good ground to justify their self-defense policies. Therefore, although Obama claims that the new nuclear position is a step forward to consolidate global peace, it is still founded on the old policy of threat which has been simply gift-wrapped for publicity purposes.

The second and more important point is the emphasis that new strategy puts on nuclear terrorism. Obama maintains that access to nuclear weapons by terrorist groups is "the single biggest threat to U.S. security, both short-term, medium-term, and long-term." This was the central focus with the recent Nuclear Security Summit in Washington.

Focusing on the concept of nuclear terrorism roots in redefinition of US security strategy, aiming to maintain its supremacy in the world. Following 9/11 terror attacks, global fight against terrorism has been a milestone in US national security strategy. Under this pretext, the George W. Bush administration connected the security of America and the world to the security of the Middle East, subsequently started the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Now, Obama is taking that policy a step forward, connecting it to a more advanced threat, nuclear terrorism, as the most important asymmetrical threat endangering US national security.

The important point here is the direct connection between the concept of nuclear terrorism and the concept of "interconnected security" in the world. According to this strategy, U.S. security is equivalent with global security and at the center of that the Middle East security. That explains why the United States tries to convince other nations to accept its leadership in war against the so-called greatest threat against the international community that is nuclear terrorism, and to ensure that terrorists will never gain access to nuclear weapons or nuclear materials. This will also bolster the international legitimacy of U.S. measures, the legitimacy that America had lost during Bush's presidency.

By incorporating nuclear terrorism as a new theme in its nuclear strategy, the United States will create the settings to make broad interpretations of threats against global security and entitle itself to interfere in the internal affairs of other nations. In this context, some observers believe that the threat of nuclear terrorism is being intentionally exaggerated and is a new tool for the Obama administration to achieve its global aims.

Meanwhile, the focus on nuclear terrorism will distract the public opinion from nuclear disarmament and the U.S. obligation to promote it. Nuclear disarmament, nonproliferation of nuclear weapons, and peaceful use of nuclear energy are the three pillars of the NPT. The United States has been more interested in nonproliferation of nuclear weapons than the other two pillars because it will provide Washington with a leverage to restrict other countries' access to nuclear energy and prevent them from focusing on all-out disarmament endeavors, pursued as a goal by non-aligned countries, and especially Iran. The Obama administration's NPR is an example of how the United States will work to maintain its global leadership by tools such as overstressing on nuclear terrorism.

Dr. Kayhan Barzegar: Professor of international relations, and director of international affairs, Center for Middle East Strategic Studies

http://www.worldbulletin.net/news_detail.php?id=57644

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U.S. News & World Report
OPINION

New Obama Nuclear Policy Could Spur Proliferation, Harm America

Calculated ambiguity served America well for decades. Changing the nuclear stance is a mistake.

April 26, 2010

Rep. Buck McKeon is a congressional Republican from California and the ranking member of the House Armed Services Committee.

President Obama, in an effort to appease the world community, recently altered the long-standing policy on when the United States would utilize a nuclear response to protect citizens, allies, and interests. The administration's Nuclear Posture Review serves to outline the "president's agenda for reducing nuclear dangers and pursuing the goal of a world without nuclear weapons, while simultaneously advancing broader U.S. security interests."

While some may admire the president's goal of a world free of nuclear weapons, we need to consider what French President Nicolas Sarkozy reminded us of last fall: "We live in a real world, not a virtual one." America's nuclear deterrent is designed to send a simple message to potential state and non-state aggressors: The cost inflicted upon those who would attack the United States—whether that assault is with nuclear, chemical, or biological weapons—will be so high that it would deter them from acting in the first place.

This long-standing policy of "calculated ambiguity" has served America well. One striking example was the thinly-veiled nuclear threat former Secretary of State James Baker issued to Baghdad in 1991, just prior to the first Gulf War. He sent a strong signal to the world: If Saddam Hussein or his military forces used chemical or biological weapons against United States and coalition forces, the United States may retaliate with tactical nuclear weapons.

Policymakers can debate whether the United States would have employed nuclear weapons under such a scenario. But we know one thing for certain: Saddam Hussein did not use chemical or biological weapons.

The president's new policy assures nonnuclear states that are signatories to and in compliance with the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) that the United States will never use nuclear weapons against them. Our country would not deploy or threaten to use nuclear weapons in retaliation, even if the United States, our allies, or interests are threatened with biological or chemical weapons.

Perversely, this new policy could actually undermine the president's top priority of preventing nuclear proliferation and nuclear terrorism. Senior administration officials have made it clear that all options are on the table with regard to Iran and North Korea. However, there are questions as to how the policy would handle countries such as Syria, Somalia, and Yemen. All three are NPT signatories, but they also support or have active terrorist cells. Most likely, the United States would never employ our most devastating weapons against any of these terrorist cells, but broadcasting our intentions only weakens our deterrent.

Also, the United States currently offers a "nuclear umbrella" to more than 30 allies, who in turn have agreed not to acquire nuclear weapons. It is possible that the policy changes and weapons reductions could lead to less confidence in our nuclear deterrent, which could drive some of our friends to consider developing their own.

The president appears to fundamentally believe that altering U.S. nuclear policies will "restore our moral leadership" to encourage others to do the same. However, we have reduced our nuclear stockpile by nearly 80 percent since the end of the Cold War. Despite these reductions, Iran and North Korea continue to expand their nuclear programs and al Qaeda remains intent on acquiring nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons.

Our nuclear forces work for us every day by providing assurance to allies and deterrence to adversaries. This capability is a point of strength—and a moral responsibility—for America.

<http://www.usnews.com/articles/opinion/2010/04/26/new-obama-nuclear-policy-could-spur-proliferation-harm-america.html>

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Time

Tuesday, April 27, 2010

Is Obama Overselling His Russia Arms Control Deal?

By Dimitri Simes

President Obama has presented the new arms control treaty he signed in Prague on April 8 as a "historic accomplishment" in both nuclear security and U.S. relations with Russia. But there are disturbing signs that the Obama Administration is overselling its progress with Russia, raising unrealistic hopes that Moscow would genuinely help in addressing the danger from Iran, the most likely nuclear threat to America and its allies.

The administration, eager to show foreign policy successes, argues that the new treaty with Russia, which calls on both sides to reduce their nuclear forces to 1500 warheads, reflects a significantly improved relationship that will help to deliver Moscow's support for strong sanctions against Tehran. But it is not clear that ties between the White House and the Kremlin have improved quite that much. Russian President Dmitri Medvedev's performance in Argentina, right after the nuclear summit, demonstrates that ties between Washington and Moscow fall well short of partnership. "If somebody is bothered" in America by Moscow seeking a greater role in Latin America, he said, "we want to spit on that." His statement led the news on Russian state television. Later in his "Spit Speech," the Russian President made clear that his government does not favor "paralyzing, crippling sanctions" — the only sanctions that could deter an Iranian regime determined to have a nuclear weapons capability.

Despite this, Administration officials describe the arms control talks as a victory for Mr. Obama and a model for winning Russian support for sanctions. As the *New York Times* reported, they claimed that "Russia backed down" after the President made clear to Mr. Medvedev that the U.S. would not budge on Russia's insistence to establish a link between offensive and defensive strategic systems. Off the record, Administration officials told reporters in Washington that the successor to the START treaty was so advantageous to the U.S. that the Russian media was hesitant to praise it.

The facts are quite different, however, and the Administration's handling of the agreement evokes strong echoes of history. Coverage of the deal in Russia's state-controlled media has been unenthusiastic not because it is favorable to Washington, but largely because Kremlin officials specifically advised journalists to keep their excitement under control. This is revealingly reminiscent of Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev's instructions to the media through the Communist Party Politburo to avoid complimentary reporting on the SALT II Treaty, fearing that it could undermine President Jimmy Carter's efforts to secure Senate ratification of the agreement.

I saw the real Russian attitude toward the treaty while participating in a Russian television program called "Think for Yourself." Broadcast after midnight, it is one of the few remaining shows during which participants can speak relatively freely on sensitive matters. There, prominent Russian specialists who had previously expressed concern about what the new treaty would look like were now endorsing it. According to Leonid Ivashov, a retired three-star general and well-known hard-liner, the treaty was a "real diplomatic success," because the Russian delegation "did not yield." Another well-known hardliner, Sergey Kurginyan, stated bluntly that "Russia could not have an easier partner on the topic of nuclear arms than Obama."

Russian experts and officials have this view because they believe that America made a tacit commitment not to develop an extended strategic missile defense. As a senior Russian official said to me, "I can't quote you unequivocal language from President Obama or Secretary Clinton in conversations with us that there would be no strategic missile defenses in Europe, but everything that was said to us amounts to this." In this official's account, the full spectrum of U.S. officials from the President to working-level negotiators clearly conveyed that the reason they rejected more explicit restrictions on missile defense was not because of U.S. plans, but because of fear that such a deal could not win Senate ratification. A senior U.S. official intimately familiar with the talks has confirmed that the Russians were advised not to press further on missile defenses because the Administration had no intention to proceed with anything that would truly concern Moscow. Yet putting specific constraints in the treaty could block the Senate ratification.

This background puts a different spin on the reference to the link between offensive and defensive weapons in the preamble of the new agreement and on the Russian government's unilateral statement on the treaty, which asserts that the agreement "can operate and be viable" only if America "refrains from developing its missile defense capabilities quantitatively or qualitatively." This language, coordinated in advance with the Obama Administration, means that Moscow might withdraw from the treaty if the U.S. deploys a meaningful strategic missile defense.

If the Administration actually wanted to build nuclear missile defenses, U.S. officials might be concerned about this prospect. Tellingly, however, the Administration has taken a rather benign view of the Russian statement, saying that since they have no plans for deploying strategic defenses in the foreseeable future, they had no reason to alarm the Russians with hypothetical situations.

Instead, the Administration publicly and privately conveyed to Moscow that if Washington decides to pursue strategic missile defense, the U.S. would work to develop it jointly with Russia.

The best case for ratifying the new treaty is that it doesn't really require either side to eliminate weapons it wants to keep. Whether the treaty will really help to get tough sanctions on Iran is another matter entirely, however. There is no mystery of what might make Moscow more cooperative on Iran. Far-reaching sanctions would cost Russia billions. To compensate Russia, Washington would need to facilitate greater economic cooperation, and as Prime Minister Vladimir Putin has stressed on several occasions, this would require canceling the Jackson-Vanik amendment and helping Russia gain membership in the WTO. However, these moves would face opposition in Congress. The Administration has indicated that this would be the right direction to take but has not yet made an effort to make that happen.

Although United Nations Security Council sanctions seem increasingly likely (even the Bush Administration succeeded three times at that), there is a difference between getting a deal and getting results. The new arms control treaty demonstrates that it is easier to produce nice-sounding diplomatic documents than to take major steps toward advancing American security. Iran will be the key test of U.S.-Russian relations and, unfortunately, watered-down sanctions from a divided Security Council are unlikely to move Tehran to abandon its nuclear ambitions.

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