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Washington Times

Ex-Military Officers, Senators Support Arms Treaty

By Michelle Phillips

Tuesday, July 20, 2010

A group of four retired military officials and senators have expressed their support for the new START agreement as the nuclear arms reduction treaty between the United States and Russia makes its way through the Senate.

During a teleconference call Monday, they said the treaty is a necessary step toward global security in an increasingly complicated world.

"Any time we use nuclear weapons, it is a failure of national security," said former Sen. Gary Hart, Colorado Democrat, adding that nuclear disarmament must begin with the United States and Russia, which together hold 90 percent of the world's nuclear weapons.

Besides Mr. Hart, the group includes former Sen. Chuck Hagel, Nebraska Republican; retired Navy Adm. William Owens, former vice chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff; and retired Air Force Lt. Gen. Arlen "Dick" Jameson, former vice commander of strategic command.

Their teleconference marked the launch of the Consensus for American Security, a bipartisan initiative promoting a national security strategy focused on 21st-century threats with the backing of more than 30 senior former military and government officials.

"Things like this should always be above politics," Mr. Hart said. "We owe it to our children."

However, some critics of the treaty, such as former Undersecretary of State for Arms Control Robert Joseph, have said it does not provide complete freedom in monitoring Russia's nuclear activities, as its advocates have said. He noted several potential gaps, particularly at the missile manufacturing facility Votkinsk.

"I believe the Senate can play a very constructive role by ensuring that there is no room for ambiguity, through amendment or other means," Mr. Joseph said at a hearing before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

<http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2010/jul/20/ex-military-officers-senators-support-arms-treaty/>

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Press TV – Iran

'West Cannot Rob Iran Of Nuclear Right'

Saturday, 17 July 2010

Nicaragua's Ambassador to Iran Mario Barquero has reaffirmed support for Iran's nuclear program, stressing that the West cannot stop Iran from pursuing its "right."

Speaking on the sidelines of a summit in Tehran, Barquero told IRNA that "neither the United States, the European Union nor any other country can deprive Iran from its right to make peaceful use of nuclear energy."

Meanwhile, Ecuador's charge d'affaires in Tehran Daniel Alvarez said his country would continue supporting Iran's right to a civilian nuclear program.

Alvarez stressed that Quito was following a "South-to-South" policy, "which includes supporting the Iranian nation and government."

"As we announced at Tehran's nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation conference, we support Iran's right to seek a peaceful nuclear technology," the diplomat told Mehr News Agency on Saturdays.

He added that certain international organizations and bodies, such as the United Nations were following the domineering policies of the United States and its allies in acting against Iran.

Alvarez stressed that confronting these organs was an integral part of the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America's (ALBA) mission.

The remarks came three days after the Latin American trade alliance, ALBA, issued a declaration in Tehran warning the US and Israel that fueling the nuclear conflict with Iran could destabilize the entire Middle East.

"We ratify the support of our governments to the sovereign right of the Islamic Republic of Iran, to generate atomic energy and use it with peaceful aims, the right of all nations laid down in the NPT (Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty)," the declaration issued on Wednesday added.

The eight-member non-aligned trade group includes Ecuador and Nicaragua. Tehran has been granted observer status by the group's founder Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail.aspx?id=135166§ionid=351020104>

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London Sunday Telegraph – U.K.

CIA Suspects Iranian Nuclear Defector Who Returned To Tehran Was A Double Agent

The CIA is investigating whether Shahram Amiri, the Iranian nuclear scientist who defected to the US but last week flew back to Tehran, was a double agent.

By Philip Sherwell in New York and William Lowther in Washington

17 July 2010

The strange case of Shahram Amiri has puzzled US intelligence chiefs who approved a \$5 million payment to him for information about Iran's illicit nuclear programme.

Former US intelligence agents have predicted that Mr Amiri will disappear into prison or even face death, despite the hero's welcome he was accorded as he was met by his wife and hugged his seven-year-old son.

But his decision to fly back voluntarily, claiming outlandishly that he was kidnapped by CIA and Saudi agents during a pilgrimage to Saudi Arabia last June and then tortured in the US, has prompted suspicions that he was a double agent working for Iran all along, *The Sunday Telegraph* has learned.

There are also questions about why the Iranian authorities allowed him to travel alone to Saudi Arabia, despite his sensitive work, and why he left his family behind if he was intending to leave Iran permanently.

And his role as one of the sources for the now heavily disputed 2007 National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) that downplayed Iran's suspected nuclear weapons operations has raised further doubts. The US intelligence community has been working on a new NIE that will give a much more alarming assessment of the Islamic republication's atomic bomb ambitions.

The CIA nonetheless believed that Mr Amiri was a genuine defector as he was debriefed in Arizona and revealed information about how the Tehran university where he worked was the covert headquarters for the country's atomic programme.

"The CIA would not have been paying \$5 million unless they had vetted him carefully and believed he was genuine," said Art Keller, a former agency case officer who worked on Iran's nuclear and missile programmes.

"They think he was legitimate. Iranian nuclear physicists do not grow on trees. And to get someone with really good access, sometimes you have to wave a really big potential payday for him."

Another former CIA operative, who spoke on condition of anonymity, told *The Sunday Telegraph* that the agency was investigating whether Mr Amiri was a double agent - a possible explanation for his mysterious actions.

Even if was not a "double", there are fears that he will reveal key information to his Iranian interrogators about what US officials know about the country's nuclear programme - itself vital intelligence in the game of atomic cat-and-mouse between Tehran and the West.

Mr Amiri turned up last week at the Pakistani diplomatic mission in Washington, which handles Tehran's interests as the US and Iran do not have relations, and requested a ticket and money to fly home. He had previously released bizarre and contradictory videos on YouTube suggesting that he was happily studying in America or was being held there against his will.

In the wake of his decision to return to Iran, US officials have been unusually open in releasing information about his dealings with the CIA.

They disclosed details of the \$5 million payment - funds which are now beyond his reach as financial sanctions mean he cannot access the money in the US. And they also said that he had been an informant inside Iran "for several years" before he disappeared on a pilgrimage to Saudi Arabia last June.

Standing alone, the revelations would appear to endanger Mr Amiri's wellbeing, especially as President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad has handed control of the country's nuclear programme to hardliners from the Revolutionary Guards, the praetorian corps charged with defending the 1979 Islamic revolution.

But Scott Stewart, vice-president of tactical intelligence for Stratfor, a private intelligence company, said: "Amiri was already in real trouble if was a real defector. But if the CIA suspect that he was a double agent or even a fabricator, it would make sense to mess with the minds of the Iranians by putting this sort of information out there."

And a CIA analyst with direct knowledge of the case said that the returned scientist had become the centre of a propaganda war and that the agency was "disinclined" to remain silent while Tehran scored points against Washington.

The analyst, who cannot be named because he is not authorised to speak on this issue, said there had been an internal debate about the rights and wrongs of revealing details on Mr Amiri's history as a spy for the US.

"It might look as if the CIA is taking revenge on Amiri for returning to Iran and that by telling the US media about his cooperation and long record as an agent they are simply signing his death warrant and ensuring that the Iranian authorities would eventually execute him," he said. "But in reality, whatever the CIA says at this point will have little impact on Amiri's fate."

He also acknowledged that it was possible that Mr Amiri was a double agent and that he had been sent to the US by Iranian intelligence to plant false information and that he always intended to return.

"If that is the case, he will become an Iranian hero and the CIA's charges will do him no harm," he said. "If, on the other hand, he was a genuine defector who returned because he had a change of heart, there is nothing the CIA can do to protect him."

"Amiri will be subjected to intense interrogations that will quickly break his cover story about being drugged and kidnapped."

"When that happens, the Iranians will have to decide if they want to hang him as a traitor or carry on the fiction - for propaganda purposes - that he was the victim of a CIA plot."

Mr Keller also did not hold out much hope for Mr Amiri's prospects if he is regarded as a traitor by Tehran. "Iran's nuclear programme is in the hands of the Revolutionary Guards now and they are not a forgive-and-forget bunch," he said. "I think he's in a lot of trouble."

Mr Amiri was recruited as part of the US "brain drain" programme to lure top Iranian scientists and military officers to defect. There will now be concerns that the project has been compromised, whether he was acting as a double agent or supplies Tehran with revealing information about how he was approached.

The agency encouraged him to defect last year because it was feared he had been identified inside Iran. Whether those concerns were actually a misreading of his status with the regime is also now under investigation.

But other scenarios include the possibility that Mr Amiri returned because of pressure on his family or simple became homesick, said Mr Keller.

"The care of a defector is a major headache," he said. "Obviously, they provide very valuable information, but, thereafter, they have really cut themselves off from their homeland. And remorse is very common in that situation."

"So, I don't find myself too surprised that he returned, although, in this particular case, I wonder if he returned under pressure on his family back in Iran."

There are precedents for this sort of behaviour by defector - most notably Vitaly Yurchenko, a veteran KGB agent who crossed sides to the US in 1985 but after three months he apparently changed his mind and re-defected. There are still doubts about whether his original defection was legitimate or an attempt by the KGB to plant disinformation.

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/northamerica/usa/7896463/CIA-suspects-Iranian-nuclear-defector-who-returned-to-Tehran-was-a-double-agent.html>

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Press TV – Iran

Amiri Reveals US Reason For His Kidnap

Sunday, 18 July 2010

Days after Iranian academic Shahram Amiri returned home following 14 months of captivity in the United States, he reveals more details about his abduction.

In an interview with IRIB on Saturday, Amiri said US officials had asked him to take part in a scenario, which could help them secure the release of three American nationals who are held in Iran on charges of espionage.

"They wanted me to allegedly confess that I was an intelligence agent of the Islamic Republic and that what had happened during my captivity was part of a scenario by Iran's intelligence agency," Amiri explained.

The Iranian researcher dismissed claims by Western media outlets that he had agreed to take the risk of infiltrating the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) as an Iranian intelligence agent, saying, "This scenario was created by the US administration."

Amiri went on to reveal that the US wanted him to admit that he was an agent working for Iran's intelligence agency, saying, "That's what they told me. I absolutely have no idea. Maybe Iran's intelligence officials know the reasons."

"They told me if you say that you are an agent of Iran's intelligence services, the US could swap you as a spy who has been arrested in a foreign country with the three American spies who were arrested near the Iraqi border inside Iran," he explained.

The Iranian academic said US officials had described the scenario as a "common practice among intelligence agencies in different countries," while reassuring Amiri that it would cause no problem for him.

The proposed swap scenario was aimed at the release of Joshua Fattal, Shane Bauer and Sarah Shourd who were arrested in the western Iranian city of Marivan for illegal entry into the country in July 2009.

Amiri's remarks come as officials in Iran had earlier dismissed the Iranian scholar's swap with the three US detainees.

According to the Iranian academic, the CIA and FBI agents had stormed his house in Tucson, Arizona, after he posted his first video message on the Internet.

He added that following his first video message, the Americans forced him to post a second video message on the Internet to "falsify his earlier remarks."

Amiri was referring to two of his videos and one audio message which emerged after his abduction.

In his first video, he said that he was abducted "in a joint operation by terror and kidnap teams from the US intelligence service, CIA and Saudi Arabia's Istikhbarat" from the Saudi city of Medina.

In the second footage, however, he contradicted his earlier statements, saying that he was in the US of his own free will to further his education, dismissing all rumors about his defection.

Amiri went on to describe his abduction as a total failure for US intelligence services.

The revelations come nearly a year after US security forces in collaboration with Saudi forces kidnapped Amiri while he was on a pilgrimage in Saudi Arabia. He was later transferred to the United States.

Earlier on Tuesday, Amiri took refuge in Iran's interest section at the Pakistani embassy in Washington, calling for an "immediate return" to his home country.

He left the United States for the Iranian capital, Tehran, on Wednesday and arrived home early Thursday.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail.aspx?id=135223§ionid=351020101>

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Jerusalem Post – Israel

'Israel Convinces US With Credible Military Plan On Iran'

Recent media reports suggests Jerusalem has increased diplomatic efforts to persuade White House that credible military option needed.

By YAAKOV KATZ

July 19, 2010

Have Israel's efforts to convince the US to threaten Iran with a credible military option paid off? According to recent media reports, the answer might be yes.

Since the US pushed a fourth round of sanctions against Iran through the UN Security Council last month, Jerusalem has increased diplomatic efforts to convince the White House that for the sanctions to work, a credible military option needs to be on the table to scare Iran to reconsider its pursuit of a nuclear weapon.

An indication that this might have happened came in the latest issue of Time magazine, in an article titled "An Attack on Iran: Back on the Table."

Written by Joe Klein, the article claims that in recent months, the US military's Central Command has made significant progress in planning targeted air strikes on Iranian nuclear facilities, some of which were deemed impossible to penetrate just two years ago.

According to the report, the progress was made possible by the "vastly improved human-intelligence operations in the region."

Israel has reportedly been "brought into the planning process."

Israel's current strategy regarding Iran is to cooperate with the White House and at the same time to continue preparing its own independent military option. This dates back to the beginning of Barack Obama's term as president in January 2009, when Israel warned against engaging the Iranians but eventually acceded to the new US policy, albeit while demanding that the talks be limited in time.

When the talks failed and Obama moved to the sanction track, Jerusalem again said it was in favor of sanctions but that they needed to be tough and crack down on the energy sector.

Now that the latest round of sanctions have been approved, Israel has been calling for the US and the international community to threaten Iran with a credible military option.

"Without this, the sanctions will likely not work," a senior defense official said.

This issue was one of the main topics of discussion between Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu and Obama in Washington earlier this month. Netanyahu also discussed the Iranian nuclear threat with US Secretary of Defense Robert Gates.

Part of Israel's argument is Iran's decision to suspend its enrichment of uranium and its nuclear weapons program in 2003, after the US invaded Iraq. Then, the Iranians feared that they were next in line, and as a result they decided to comply with the international community's demands.

"Since then, the military threat has basically disappeared," the official said. "For diplomacy and sanctions to work, there needs to be a real military option."

<http://www.jpost.com/IranianThreat/News/Article.aspx?id=181854>

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FARS News Agency – Iran
July 19, 2010

DM: Iran To Launch New Submarine In August

TEHRAN (FNA) - Iranian Defense Minister Brigadier General Ahmad Vahidi announced on Monday that the country plans to launch a newly developed hi-tech submarine, equipped with advanced weapons, in early August.

Vahidi made the remarks in the central city of Isfahan where he is attending a ceremony to mark the first round of national competitions of Iran-made unmanned submarines.

"The submarine enjoys advanced technology, high power of maneuvering and underwater operations and is equipped with hi-tech weapons," Vahidi said, elaborating on the characteristics of the new home-made submarine.

Iran has been pushing an arms development program in recent years in a bid to reach self-sufficiency. It has produced its own jet fighters and armored vehicles as well as radar-avoiding missiles and other high-tech weapons.

Iran announced in June 2009 that a home-made submarine, named Ghadir 948, had joined the naval brigade of the first naval zone.

In November 2009, Iran announced that its first domestically built Ghadir class submarine launched operation.

The Iranian military said that the submarine can easily evade detection as it is equipped with sonar-evading technology and can fire missiles and torpedoes simultaneously.

Navy Commander Rear Admiral Habibollah Sayyari said in November that Ghadir-class submarines are the second Iranian-built underwater craft outfitted with "state-of-the-art electronic equipment". He said it took 10 years to build the submarine.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=8904281447>

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The Australian – Australia

Iran Scientist: I Was To Be Spy Swap

July 20, 2010

THE Iranian scientist who claimed to have been abducted by the US, says he was pressured to take part in a spy swap with three Americans in Tehran.

Shahram Amiri told Iranian state television that US agents told him the three Americans detained on the Iran-Iraq border a year ago were spies, as Tehran had claimed previously. "That is the term they used," Mr Amiri said.

Washington says Shane Bauer, 27, Sarah Shourd, 31, and Josh Fattal, 27 were holidaymakers who, at worst, accidentally strayed over the border while hiking in Iraq.

Mr Amiri said the spy swap offer emerged after officials discovered that he had been in touch with Iranian agents. "They wanted me to say that I was an Iranian intelligence agent infiltrating the CIA," Mr Amiri said. "If I said this, they said I could be part of a spy exchange program, whereby I could be handed over to Iran in return for the three American spies."

Mr Amiri's claims will be met with dismay by the hikers' families, who insist they were abducted by the Iranians and are innocent pawns in a political stand-off. Iranian officials have talked of trying the trio for espionage, but no charges have been announced.

Mr Amiri disappeared in Saudi Arabia last year. He resurfaced last week at an Iranian consular office in Washington asking for passage home. His decision to return has started a propaganda war between the US and Iran.

The US appears to be trying to safeguard its efforts to lure other Iranians into its "brain drain" program to learn more about Iran's suspected nuclear weapons work.

US officials claimed at the weekend that Mr Amiri was one of two long-term informants whisked out of Iran amid concerns that the regime was on to them. It could explain Mr Amiri's sudden departure without his family and his subsequent change of heart.

Other reports claim Mr Amiri contributed to a now discredited 2007 National Intelligence Estimate on Iran's nuclear program.

<http://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/world/iran-scientist-i-was-to-be-spy-swap/story-e6frg6so-1225894287303>

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Korea Herald – South Korea

Seoul Gets Long-Range Cruise Missile: Sources

July 17, 2010

By Song Sang-ho

South Korea has developed a cruise missile with a range of 1,500 kilometers, which is capable of striking all nuclear and military sites in North Korea, military sources here said Sunday.

The military and the state-funded Agency for Defense Development began the project to develop the surface-to-surface missile, called "Hyunmu-3C," in 2008 and have succeed in its mass production, they said.

The operational deployment of the missile has already begun, according to local news reports. However, officials at the Ministry of National Defense refused to confirm it.

The missile with a 450-kilogram warhead measures 6 meters in length and 53-60 centimeters in diameter and weighs 1.5 tons. It can hit targets in all nuclear facilities and major missile bases in the communist state with high precision, experts said.

"With the range of 1,500 kilometers, the missile can practically attack all areas in the North. The missile, guided with the help of the global positioning system, can accurately hit the target with a margin of error of less than 2 meters," said Shin In-kyun, a military expert who heads a civic group, called Korea Defence Network.

"We have now obtained the means to mount an attack when signs (of possible attacks from the North) are detected. The missile is not just for a war. It is meaningful in that we have secured deterrence capabilities."

Experts say Hyunmu 3-C is comparable with the U.S.-made Tomahawk missile in its precision strike capability. Only South Korea, the U.S., Russia and Israel have developed cruise missiles with a range of 1,500 kilometers or more.

The military has thus far been known to have deployed Hyunmu-3As and Hynmu-3Bs on the ground, which have ranges of 500 kilometers and 1,000 kilometers, respectively. Hyunmu series missiles have been developed and tested by ADD and manufactured by LIG Nex1, a local defense firm.

Under the Missile Technology Control Regime, the South is allowed to build ballistic missiles with a range of up to 300 kilometers and a payload weighing 500 kilograms or less.

However, the regime does not restrict the development of a long-range cruise missile as long as its warhead does not weigh more than 500 kilograms. Thus, the military has been focusing on the development of the cruise missiles such as the Hyunmu series. The MTCR is a global weapons export control program.

The North is known to possess approximately 600 Scud B and C ballistic missiles with ranges of 300-500 kilometers. In addition, it has deployed some 200 units of 1,300-kilometer Rodong missiles. The Rodong missile puts all of South Korea's territory within striking range.

<http://www.koreaherald.com/national/Detail.jsp?newsMLId=20100718000258>

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UPI.com

U.N. Report: N. Korea Evades Sanctions

July 17, 2010

NEW YORK, July 17 (UPI) -- North Korea has played a shell game with state-owned companies and taken other steps to evade economic sanctions, a U.N. report says.

Kyodo News said it obtained a copy of the report by the Security Council's Sanctions Committee Friday. The Japanese news service said the report was presented to the Security Council in May.

The report said the system of identifying and designating corporate entities and individuals subject to sanctions doesn't work.

The sanctions committee, using information obtained from U.N. member states, listed 13 companies and individuals involved in illegal actions, the report said. In response, North Korea "quickly moved to substitute other companies to assume their activities and/or to act on their behalf."

As one example, after Korea Mining Development Trading Corp. was designated for sanctions, its functions were taken over by Green Pine Associated Co., which is controlled by the North Korean Army's surveillance bureau.

North Korea faces sanctions for refusing to abandon its nuclear program. Recently, the council voted to condemn the sinking of a South Korean naval vessel.

http://www.upi.com/Top_News/US/2010/07/17/UN-report-N-Korea-evades-sanctions/UPI-16771279421454/

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Yonhap News – South Korea

18 July 2010

No Nuke Talks If N. Korea Requests Preconditions: S. Korean FM

SEOUL, July 18 (Yonhap) -- South Korea's foreign minister made it clear Sunday that the country does not want the six-way nuclear talks over North Korea's nuclear program to resume until the communist nation stops pushing for unacceptable preconditions.

"It is not time to discuss six-way talks laden with North Korea-set preconditions," Foreign Minister Yu Myung-hwan said in an interview with state-owned broadcaster KTV.

Yu said the North is apparently attempting to use the long-stalled nuclear negotiations as a means to distract world attention away from the deadly sinking of a South Korean warship in March.

A South Korea-led multinational probe found that the North sank the 1,200-ton Cheonan patrol ship with a torpedo just south of their western sea border, killing 46 sailors.

The U.N. Security Council discussed the issue at the request of Seoul. After several weeks of debates, it issued a presidential statement earlier this month backing Seoul's condemnation of the attack, but also mentioning Pyongyang's denial of involvement.

China and North Korea were quick to call for the resumption of the six-way talks, which also involve the U.S., Japan and Russia. The Beijing-based talks have been stalled since the North stormed out last year before carrying out its second nuclear test.

Last week, North Korea offered to return to the negotiations, reiterating its calls for the lifting of sanctions on it imposed after its missile and nuclear tests.

It also demanded immediate talks on signing a peace treaty to replace the current Armistice Agreement that effectively ended the 1950-53 Korean War.

"The removal of the barrier of such discrimination and distrust may soon lead to the opening of the six-party talks," the North said in its statement.

South Korea and the U.S. said the secretive regime needs to first halt its provocative acts and show a sincere attitude toward denuclearization.

"North Korea's position is that it can discuss the nuclear issue only after the peace treaty issue is discussed -- namely on the equal footing," the minister said. "It is a demand for the nullification of the sanctions Resolution 1874 for the second nuclear test."

Yu said the U.S. is also wary of North Korea's attempt to use the six-way talks to evade responsibility for the Cheonan incident.

"(South Korea) will closely cooperate on the purpose of denuclearization of North Korea not only with the U.S. and Japan, but also China and Russia, which are members of the six-way talks," he said.

With regard to the so-called two-plus-two meeting among the foreign and defense ministers from South Korea and the U.S. to commemorate the 60th anniversary of the start of the Korean War, Yu said it will be used to assess the Seoul-Washington alliance and establish a clear vision.

The meeting, which will be held in Seoul on Wednesday, will contribute to regional peace and security, he said.

<http://english.yonhapnews.co.kr/national/2010/07/18/30/0301000000AEN20100718001000315F.HTML>

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Straits Times – Singapore

July 19, 2010

Asean Needs Detection Capability

By Agence France-Presse

HANOI - ASEAN wants to develop the capability to detect atomic weapons so it can effectively implement a treaty aiming to keep the region free of nuclear arms, a diplomat said on Monday.

The diplomat said the Association of South-east Asian Nations (Asean) is also striving to deal with potential nuclear disasters, as some members consider the use of nuclear energy for civilian purposes.

'We would like to have the capacity to monitor the presence of nuclear weapons in our territories,' including on warships transiting the region's waters, the diplomat told AFP on condition of anonymity.

The region does not currently have the right training or equipment to verify whether nuclear weapons are in its ports or passing through its waters, he added.

The South-east Asia Nuclear Weapon-Free Zone treaty commits Asean states 'not to develop, manufacture or otherwise acquire, possess or have control over atomic weapons'.

It also prohibits the storage or transit of nuclear weapons in Asean, which groups Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam.

http://www.straitstimes.com/BreakingNews/SEAsia/Story/STIStory_555397.html

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Asia Times – Hong Kong

21 July 2010

Myanmar's Nuclear Plans Under Fire

By Marwaan Macan-Markar

BANGKOK - When Southeast Asian foreign ministers gather in Hanoi this week for a series of annual security meetings, the region's most troublesome member, military-ruled Myanmar, is due to come under scrutiny after reports of its alleged nuclear ambitions.

Alarm bells have been going off in Southeast Asian capitals since the early June expose by the Democratic Voice of Burma (DVB), an Oslo-based broadcasting station run by Burmese journalists in exile, reported that the ruling junta intended to build nuclear weapons facilities.

Indonesia, the largest country in the 10-member Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), is among those expected to seek an explanation from Myanmar during the meetings in the Vietnamese capital, which will run from July 20-23.

"Jakarta is concerned about this issue," a Southeast Asian diplomatic source said.

Myanmar, also known as Burma, is expected to face similar queries from the Philippines, which in May had an envoy, Libran Cabactulan, chair the 2010 review conference of the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty at the United Nations' headquarters in New York.

At that meeting, Cabactulan urged delegates to work towards the treaty's common goals: disarmament, non-proliferation of nuclear weapons and the right to the peaceful use of nuclear technology. The treaty, which entered into force in 1970, remains the cornerstone for building a global nuclear non-proliferation regime.

ASEAN, whose members include Brunei, Cambodia, Laos, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand in addition to Myanmar, Indonesia, the Philippines and Vietnam, itself has a nuclear weapons-free zone agreement. The Southeast Asian Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone Treaty came into force in 1997, the same year Myanmar became an ASEAN member. Myanmar signed the regional nuclear weapons moratorium treaty at a 1995 meeting in Bangkok.

Against the backdrop of reports of Myanmar's nuclear plans, the ASEAN prohibition on building and storing nuclear weapons now faces a serious challenge. "The issue will be raised at this meeting even though the concrete evidence may be hard to find," said Kavi Chongkittavorn, a columnist on regional affairs for Thailand's English-language daily The Nation. "This is about intention and motive."

According to media reports, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, who will be in Hanoi to join ASEAN counterparts in a broader security forum, is likewise expected to seek clarification about Myanmar's nuclear intentions. Washington has also expressed concern about Myanmar's close links to North Korea, which is under sanctions imposed by the UN Security Council.

UN Security Council Resolution 1874, adopted unanimously by the Security Council in June 2009 in the aftermath of an underground nuclear test by North Korea, also calls on UN members to search North Korean cargo ships, but Myanmar has reportedly not adhered to this provision.

The DVB's investigative report, entitled "Burma's Nuclear Ambitions" pointed to Myanmar-North Korean collaboration in building a network of tunnels for military purposes in the secretive nation. The report has already prompted the Vienna-based International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to send a formal letter of inquiry to the junta, which has denied the DVB's findings. The military regime has also issued two formal statements denying it has any nuclear ambitions.

Those statements, however, have not turned the heat off the regime. Proliferation experts have entered the fray, arguing that "Myanmar's nuclear ambition is apparently real and alarming", according to one commentary recently published in The Nation.

"Although [Myanmar's] pursuit of nuclear weapons has long been rumored, the [DVB] documentary contains new information from a recent defector who provided DVB with photographs, documents and a view from inside the secretive military that should finally put to rest any doubt about Myanmar's nuclear ambition," wrote Robert Kelly, a recently retired director of the IAEA, in that commentary.

"The evidence includes chemical processing equipment for converting uranium compounds into forms for enrichment, reactors and bombs," Kelly added. "Taken altogether in [Myanmar's] covert program, they have but one use: nuclear weapons."

ASEAN's latest troubles with Myanmar come on top of mounting pressure from Western nations and human-rights groups for ASEAN to urge the junta to enable a free and fair general election it has promised to hold within this year.

ASEAN is already grappling with the plight of tens of thousands of refugees from Myanmar who have fled due to the army's campaign against separatist rebel groups, as well as the estimated two million undocumented migrant workers who have left a crumbling economy.

Thus far, ASEAN has not viewed this exodus as an urgent threat to regional security. But the nuclear threat could end its silence and cooperation with Myanmar, analysts suggest.

"For decades, Myanmar's ruling regime has been regarded primarily as a menace to its own people," Aung Zaw, editor of Irrawaddy, wrote in Monday's edition of the Bangkok Post newspaper. "But with recent reports confirming long-held suspicions that the junta aspires to establish [Myanmar] as Southeast Asia's first nuclear state, there is now a very real danger that it is emerging as a threat to the rest of the region."

"Myanmar is not North Korea, but the country's military rulers are no less capable than their fellow despots in Pyongyang of holding their neighbors to ransom if they believe their own survival is at stake," he added. "They have taken the first steps toward realizing their nuclear dream; now the international community must act to prevent it from becoming a nuclear nightmare for the rest of us," Aung Zaw wrote.

(Inter Press Service)

http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Southeast_Asia/LG21Ae02.html

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Daily Mail – U.K.

Defence Secretary To Fight Treasury Over Plans To Cut Britain's Nuclear Arms Budget

By Gerri Peev
18 July 2010

Defence Secretary Liam Fox has urged the Treasury not to play 'fast and loose' with Britain's security by threatening to cut the nuclear arms budget.

Dr Fox is locked in a row with the Treasury over suggestions that the Ministry of Defence should absorb the £20billion capital costs of renewing the Trident system.

Cost-cutting plans by the government could palm this off onto the Ministry of Defence, eating into its budget of nearly £37billion.

This would put a massive strain on the MoD's other capabilities, he warned.

The Ministry of Defence – which faces a ten per cent spending cut - is just one department battling the worst ravages of the austerity measures: Communities Secretary Caroline Spelman today vowed to 'fight my corner' on cuts if they affected the frontline services of her department, which she said acted as the government's 'emergency services' during times of floods and other environmental disasters.

And Dr Fox has warned that landing the MoD with the bill for Trident would make it difficult to maintain the armed forces' current 'capabilities'.

In an interview on the BBC's Andrew Marr show, he also refused to rule out quitting if the government did not agree the renewal of Trident.

'We really can't play fast and loose with the country's defence. We don't know what the threats will be between now and 2050 - no one could have predicted 40 years ago what the world would look like today,' he said. 'So we have to ensure we have the precautions to protect Britain from nuclear blackmail by any other state.'

There has always been an understanding that the budget for the nuclear deterrent came from outside the core defence budget. Running costs for the deterrent have always come from inside although the capital costs were outside.

'To take the capital cost (into the department's core budget) would make it very difficult to maintain what we are currently doing in terms of capability so there is an ongoing debate with the Treasury.'

Dr Fox has described the Whitehall discussions on cuts as 'the absolute mother of horrors of a spending review'.

Labour MP John Woodcock, who represents the Barrow shipyard where the submarines would be built and is a member of the defence select committee, said: 'It is alarming that George Osborne is intent on ditching the commitment to proper funding for renewing our deterrent made by the last Labour government.'

'The new Chancellor seems intoxicated by his new power to threaten colleagues with unrealistic and unwise spending contractions.'

‘He had better grow out of this soon or he will do lasting damage to our national security and the drivers of future economic growth.’

But SNP Westminster leader Angus Robertson said he was more alarmed by suggestions that the MoD’s cost cutting drive could see it scrap the Scottish regiments Black Watch, the Highlanders or the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders.

He said: ‘Nobody doubts that difficult decisions have to be made under the strategic defence review but it would totally disgraceful if any Scottish infantry unit was cut – especially if the decision to waste billions on weapons of mass destruction went ahead.’

Ministers across Whitehall are fighting off the Treasury’s swingeing cost cutting plans which could see departments forced to cut up to 40 per cent from their budgets.

Work and Pensions Secretary Iain Duncan Smith has locked horns with the Treasury over his ambitious revolution of the benefits system. Mr Duncan Smith wants to increase payments to those in work who are receiving top up benefits, to encourage people to look for jobs. But the Treasury is unwilling to stump up more money to a department that is meant to be slashing costs.

London Mayor Boris Johnson is also lobbying the government over plans to slash housing benefit. He has argued that London’s high costs should make it exempt from the £400 a week limit imposed in the Budget.

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1295696/Defence-Secretary-fight-Treasury-plans-cut-Britains-nuclear-arms-budget.html?ITO=1490#>

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Global Security Newswire

Researchers Create New Anthrax Detector

Tuesday, July 20, 2010

A Dutch research site announced last week that its nanotechnology specialists had created an anthrax detector that improves upon all existing systems (see *GSN*, June 14).

The sensor was developed by the MESA+ Institute for Nanotechnology at the University of Twente. It is capable of identifying a biomarker of anthrax spores at levels 1,000 times below the concentration at which bacteria for the potential bioterror agent become toxic, according to a press release.

"Techniques for detecting anthrax spores (such as fluorescence and mass spectroscopy) already exist, but the UT sensor is much more sensitive and effective than any of them. It can also be reused in subsequent trials," the release states.

Researchers now plan to create a "lab on a chip" version of the system that would allow for automatic analysis of samples (University of Twente release, July 16).

http://www.globalsecuritynewswire.org/gsn/nw_20100720_6912.php

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Salt Lake Tribune

Report: Hill Fails Again To Account For Nuke Inventory

By Matthew D. LaPlante, The Salt Lake Tribune

July 19, 2010

Hill Air Force Base was one of the worst offenders in a list of nine military facilities that failed to properly account for nearly 1,000 nuclear-related items, according to an article in The Air Force Times.

The Times article, based on an Air Force audit conducted last year, indicated none of the accounting errors compromised the safety or security of any weapons.

The discrepancies came, however, in the wake of an international debacle in which contractors at Hill mistakenly sent sensitive components of ballistic missiles to Taiwan. The nuclear missile fuses had mistakenly been labeled as helicopter batteries.

That error caused tension with China, which considers Taiwan a renegade province, and may have violated international treaties. The scandal led to the immediate ouster of the Air Force’s two top officers. Later, the

Department of Defense punished six more generals from the Air Force, including two previous commanders of Hill's Ogden Air Logistics Center and the former commander of the base's maintenance wing.

The recent audit examined 25 bases that take part in the nuclear mission in order to assure the security of an inventory of more than 18,000 nuclear weapons-related items valued at \$1.7 billion, according to the Times, a private news-gathering organization owned by Gannett Company, Inc.

At the nine bases, auditors found 932 items on site but not listed on "accountable records," according to the Times. Almost half of the assets were at two of the installations: Hill Air Force Base, Utah; and Malmstrom Air Force Base, Mont.

"Now that we know what those areas are, we are concentrating on improving them," Air Force officials said in a statement responding to the audit. "Although none of the findings show compromises in safety, security and reliability of nuclear weapons sustainment, we continue to hone our training, processes and procedures to ensure we provide the best possible support."

Calls to Air Force staff members representing Maj. Gen. Andrew Busch, who commands the Hill logistics center, were not immediately returned.

When Busch took the reins of Utah's highest profile military command last summer, he said the base "has recommitted itself to the basic fundamentals of our profession, especially as it applies to oversight and control of sensitive components."

Among other things, he said, the base was "strengthening our supply chain management" when it comes to sensitive weapons parts.

<http://www.sltrib.com/sltrib/home/49955109-76/force-hill-base-nuclear.html.csp>

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London Daily Telegraph – U.K.

Laser Used To Shoots Down Planes

Laser beams have been used for the first time in naval warfare to shoot down aircraft, it can be disclosed.

By Thomas Harding, Defence Correspondent

19 July 2010

The weapon, mounted on a warship's missile, shot down four unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV) in secret testing carried out off the California coast, *The Daily Telegraph* has learnt.

In a joint enterprise between US Navy and Raytheon Missile Systems the technology has now got to the stage where lasers will be deployed on warships as part of their short-range defence.

For the first time a 'solid state' 32 mega watt laser beam of directed energy has been fired from a warship to a distance of more than two miles burning into a drone travelling at about 300mph.

The laser is mounted on a Phalanx close in weapons system that has a radar detection system. The targeting system was used in Iraq, to train fire from a Gatling onto rockets and mortars raining down on British bases.

Raytheon developed the system after buying six off-the-shelf commercial lasers from the car industry and joining them to make a single, powerful beam guided by the Phalanx's radars. Unlike other tests which have been conducted on aircraft it uses a solid state laser rather than a chemical generated beam.

Mike Booen, vice president of Directed Energy Weapons at Raytheon, said the tests off San Nicolas Island were "a great day for the laser".

"This is more real than Star Wars," he said, speaking at the Farnborough Air Show. "Our lasers destroyed the UAVs lighting them on fire.

"This is the first successful shoot down over water. We are now on the path to deliver the first battlefield lasers integrated into real weapons systems.

With drones being used more frequently to spy on or attack fleets in future warfare it is necessary to make defences against them.

The laser system, which is mostly situated under the deck, fires an invisible beam that is only seen when it strikes an intruder. The system is also being developed to tackle small boats and potentially anti-ship missiles and will be ready for full military development by 2016.

"This will proceed to production because it is solving real problem," Mr Booen said.

Raytheon have steadily been developing laser technology for several years developing a land system that can shoot down mortar rounds.

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/northamerica/usa/7898710/Laser-used-to-shoots-down-planes.html>

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Washington Post

Extending The Life Of B-61 Nuclear Weapons Could Cost \$4 Billion

By WALTER PINCUS

Tuesday, July 20, 2010

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Any spy who listened to the directors of the three national nuclear laboratories testify before the Senate Armed Services and Foreign Relations committees could have gotten an advanced primer on the U.S. nuclear weapons complex and the stockpile of missile warheads and bombs.

The directors' prepared testimony and the National Nuclear Security Administration's Stockpile Stewardship and Management Plan for fiscal 2011 were also made available.

For example, the B-61 bomb, the basic U.S. nuclear weapon stored in Europe for use by NATO forces, probably will not remain "as a vital weapon system through the decade" without completion of its life-extension program, according to Paul J. Hommert, director of the Sandia National Laboratories.

The original B-61 entered the stockpile in 1968 as a tactical nuclear bomb. In those days, and for almost two decades, they were hung from F-4 fighter bombers on forward bases in Greece, Italy and Turkey -- on the perimeter of the Soviet Union -- with both U.S. and foreign pilots on 15-minute alert.

Those early B-61s had dials that could make them low-, medium- or high-yield weapons, with explosive power that could be less than, or far greater than, the Hiroshima atomic bomb. Beginning in 1985, a newer B-61-7 replaced the old ones. This strategic version has yields that range from 10 kilotons to more than 300 kilotons, the equivalent of 300,000 tons of TNT. Hiroshima was 12.5 kilotons.

An even more modern version, B-61-11, ended production in 2008, with a raised yield and a hardened nose cone to make it more effective against deeply buried targets. More than 150 of the B-61s -- the 7s and 11s -- are now stored in Western European countries.

Sandia has the lead in the life-extension program of the older versions of the B-61-7s, which has been underway since 2009. As currently planned, the design and cost analysis for the extension is to take place next year.

Development and engineering will run through 2017, and production, of probably 100 or less, will occur from 2018 to 2023. That offers an example of just how long the life-extension process takes.

Hommert told the senators that critical non-nuclear components "are exhibiting age-related performance degradation." He cited specifically that the earlier B-61 radar, which begins the fusing process of the weapon as it descends toward the target, includes vacuum tubes that now will be replaced by computer chips. Plans also call for replacing the battery component and the neutron generator in each bomb, the latter device being the one that initiates the fission process leading to the nuclear explosion.

The nuclear package of the B-61 was developed at the Los Alamos National Laboratory, and its director, Michael R. Anastasio, told the committees that his staff was turning to the nuclear bomb, having finished work on the extension program for W-76, the warhead carried by the submarine-launched Trident intercontinental ballistic missile. Los Alamos will refurbish a new detonator cable assembly for the B-61 as well as foams and polymers that have shown decay and are needed to protect the nuclear package.

Anastasio also added that the extension program will see installation of "safety and security features," which probably means devices that would allow disarming the bomb if someone stole it.

One additional driver for hastening the B-61 schedule, Hommert told the panels, is the schedule for the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter, which the Sandia director said "requires a new digital interface" to enable it to carry the nuclear bomb. With costs of that fighter-bomber rising, making it nuclear-capable has become a contentious issue. Given the potentially limited future use of nuclear weapons, and the existence of long-range strategic bombers such as the B-52 and B-2 that are equipped to carry the B-61 bomb, questions have been raised as to why to make the short-range F-35 nuclear-capable. The answer: While some NATO countries want the United States to remove its B-61 nuclear bombs from Europe, others want the bombs to remain and therefore want fighter-bombers stationed alongside that can deliver those weapons.

Cost estimates for the B-61-7 extension program, as Hommert put it, "are subject to change until the design definition and requirements are finalized next year."

But according to the National Nuclear Security Administration's recently publicized fiscal 2011 Stockpile Stewardship and Management Summary, the costs for the total B-61-7 life-extension program -- which began in 2003 and are expected to run through 2023 -- could total \$4 billion.

By the way, on Wednesday, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee had a closed hearing on the National Intelligence Estimate on START.

To date, no word has leaked out about its contents on how the intelligence community views its ability to monitor and verify Russian observance of the treaty's provisions.

At the Senate Armed Services hearing the next day, however, Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory Director George Miller told the panel he concurred with the NIE's key judgment on the monitoring of the treaty.

That is a pretty firm indication that the intelligence crowd's key judgment holds that the treaty's inspection provisions and other available U.S. national technical means, such as satellites, mean compliance can be verified.

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/07/19/AR2010071905187.html>

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Miami Herald

OPINION

July 18, 2010

Arabs Fear Nuclear Iran

BY FRIDA GHITIS

One of the open secrets surrounding the Iranian nuclear program is that Tehran's Arab neighbors dread the prospect of a Persian bomb more than anyone else does.

For years Arab leaders quietly told foreign visitors that they cannot accept a nuclear-armed Iran; that it would prove catastrophic for them and for the region. In public, however, they always spoke in conciliatory terms, calling for negotiations, telegraphing to Tehran that they want only a peaceful solution. That is now changing as Arabs become increasingly concerned about facing a future with Tehran in possession of nuclear weapons.

In a stunning departure from the Arab diplomatic script, the ambassador from the United Arab Emirates to Washington revealed -- in public and before microphones -- that he wants the United States to use force to stop Iran.

Speaking at the Aspen Ideas Festival, Ambassador Yousef al-Otaiba conceded that a U.S. attack against Iranian facilities would trigger a backlash of riots and protests. But, he explained, "If you are asking me, 'Am I willing to live with that versus living with a nuclear Iran?' my answer is still the same: We cannot live with a nuclear Iran."

Otaiba, whose country lies less than 100 miles from Iran's coast, noted that Iran is much more of a threat to the UAE than to the United States. If countries "lack the assurance that the U.S. is willing to confront Iran, they will start running for cover towards Iran."

Otaiba subtly removed another line from the traditional script, the part that suggests Israel is also a threat. "There's no other threat," he declared, "There's no country in the region that is a threat to the UAE."

The idea of containing Iran, he said, makes him "very nervous." If Iran's behavior cannot be contained now, he pointed out, why think "that once they have a nuclear program we're going to be more successful in containing them?"

Nobody has spoken as bluntly as Otaiba, but we have heard veiled hints about this before. When the Saudi Foreign Minister visited Washington in February, he uttered the usual support for a diplomatic process. But he warned that history shows when a weapon is introduced in the Middle East, it ends up being used. Then he noted that sanctions are a long-term approach and "we need immediate resolutions rather than gradual resolution."

The UAE foreign ministry denied the report of Otaiba's statements, calling them "inaccurate and taken out of context" but the ambassador's words were recorded for all to hear. Iran responded with fury, warning of a "teeth-breaking" response.

Another curious denial came last month after the Times of London revealed that Saudi Arabia has granted Israeli fighter planes access to a corridor leading to Iran. The Saudis, of course, would deny facilitating an attack on a fellow Muslim nation. And yet, the belief that Iran is more of a threat to the Arabs, their historic rivals, than to anyone else, is becoming widespread.

In a recent article, the popular Saudi cleric Aidh al-Qarni wrote a column entitled *Oh Arabs, Iran is Coming*, saying the West would not prevent Iran from obtaining nuclear weapons, which Tehran would then aim at Arabs, not Israelis.

In its earliest days the revolutionary Islamic Republic stoked animosity between Persians and Arabs and has urged the people to turn against their governments. Thirty years ago, the Ayatollah Khomeini declared that "Mecca is now in the hand of a group of infidels." Saudis shot back that Iran was in the hands of a "corrupt bunch of thieves," who had created a "slaughterhouse."

Tension between Arab leaders and Iran is increasing. But Tehran looks confident and defiant, while the Arabs look nervous.

A Kuwaiti paper revealed authorities uncovered an Iranian spy ring in Kuwait. To calm the situation, the government banned reporting on the matter. The respected Arab commentator Abdul Rahman Al-Rashed wrote in the daily Asharq al-Awsat that "Obama and his refusal to use the threat of force in a genuine manner has made everybody -- not just Tehran -- believe that nothing will stop the Iranian project."

Time is clearly growing short for Obama's strategy to produce results. Before long, the most dangerous region in the world could become far, far more unstable.

<http://www.miamiherald.com/2010/07/18/1735258/arabs-fear-nuclear-iran.html>

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Gulf News – U.A.E.

OPINION

War Not An Option In Dealing With Iran's Nuclear Ambitions

An attack on Iran will inflame Syria and Lebanon, which will probably be drawn into the conflict

By Linda S. Heard, Special to Gulf News

July 19, 2010

It doesn't matter that the Islamic Republic of Iran has an absolute right to pursue nuclear energy for civilian use and to enrich low-grade uranium under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) to which it is a signatory.

What matters is that the international community is suspicious of Tehran's stated intentions and will not accept a nuclear-armed Iran.

The US will not countenance an enemy nation with nuclear weapons within its oil-and-gas rich sphere of influence. Israel believes Iranian nukes would threaten its very existence. Most of Iran's neighbours are fearful of Iranian military dominance, which the acquisition of weapons of mass destruction would provide.

Most major powers, including Russia and China to varying degrees, are keen to ensure that Tehran will never manufacture a nuclear bomb. The burning question is what should be done to prevent this from happening?

Carrot and stick

The first option is dialogue using a carrot-and-stick approach. Thus far, this has failed. The face-to-face unconditional talks between the US and Iran that were promised by President Barack Obama during the early days of his presidency have not materialised. Moreover, Obama considered a recent deal between Iran, Brazil and Turkey involving a uranium swap to be unacceptable.

The second option consists of anti-Iranian UN sanctions. Three rounds of sanctions against Iran have been approved by the UN Security Council, which have failed to bite; mainly because China is opposed to any harsh punishment of an ally with which it enjoys strong economic links.

Former US secretary of state Colin Powell told ABC's This Week that sanctions won't work.

"The Iranians have been around for thousands of years trading and selling and getting around, various constraints and what not," Powell said.

In any event, sanctions are unlikely to force Tehran to relinquish its right to nuclear energy and technological advancement which Iranians feel are matters of national pride. Certainly ten years of anti-Iraqi UN sanctions inflicted great hardship upon the Iraqi people but did not bring Baghdad to its knees.

The military option has been touted and discussed in Western corridors of power for almost a decade. This would involve either the US or Israel (or both) striking Iran's nuclear facilities. This option has been off the table for some years and, in fact, George W. Bush resisted pressure for his neoconservative cabal to give a green light to the former Israeli prime minister Ehud Olmert, thought to have been champing at the bit.

However, according to the Debkafile — an Israeli political website believed to be linked to the Mossad — Iran is currently on "war alert over US and Israeli concentrations in Azerbaijan".

The article maintains that "Israel has secretly transferred a large number of bomber jets to bases in Azerbaijan, via Georgia and that American special forces are also concentrated in Azerbaijan in preparation for a strike. It further cites "the arrival of the USS Harry S. Truman Strike Group" in the Gulf and the Arabian Sea "and its war games with France and Israel, which included live fire-bombing practices."

Debkafile also highlights this comment made by Dr Uzi Arad, head of Israel's National Security Council and a close adviser to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu: "The latest round of UN Security Council sanctions on Iran is inadequate for thwarting its nuclear progress. A preemptive military strike might eventually be necessary."

But before those of us who live in the region send off for gas masks and tin hats, it may be that the alleged military build-up and Israel's increasingly belligerent rhetoric is a bluff designed to send Tehran a message.

A newly-published report by the Oxford Research Group, which is a respected British think tank, suggests the military option is no option.

"An Israeli attack on Iran would be the start of a protracted conflict that would be unlikely to prevent the eventual acquisition of nuclear weapons by Iran and might even encourage it," it reads. "This would be in addition to the extensive instability and unpredictable security consequences for the region..."

Two alternatives

The report proposes two alternative paths open to Western states. The first centres upon "redoubling efforts to get a diplomatic settlement", facilitated by a serious Israeli-Palestinian peace process, the beginnings of a nuclear-free Middle East and improved relations between Iran and the Gulf states.

The second hangs upon a general acceptance that Iran "may eventually acquire nuclear capability" which the report admits would not be easy "given Israel's position and the possibility that an Iranian nuclear weapons capability could encourage regional proliferation."

Lastly, the Oxford Research Group believes that "war is not an option in responding to the difficult issue of Iran's nuclear ambitions." That's a view which I wholeheartedly share. An attack on Iran will inflame Syria and Lebanon, which would probably be drawn into the conflict.

It would also lead to high numbers of civilian casualties, increase attacks on Western interests, interrupt the flow of oil and harm the struggling global economy. And one consequence is sure. If Iran isn't pursuing nuclear arms now, at the first opportunity, it will be.

Will the US and Israeli hawks prevail or will cooler heads clip their wings? We've yet to see.

Linda S. Heard is a specialist writer on Middle East affairs.

<http://gulfnews.com/opinions/columnists/war-not-an-option-in-dealing-with-iran-s-nuclear-ambitions-1.656393>

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Center For American Progress

OPINION

New START Is Critical For Our National Security And International Credibility

July 20, 2010

Remarks by Sen. Tom Daschle

"The rejection of New START has the real potential to push the world into a state of nuclear anarchy," warned CAP Distinguished Senior Fellow and former Sen. Tom Daschle in a moving speech Monday morning on the importance of the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty, also called New START, to national and international security.

New START, which President Barack Obama and Russia President Dmitry Medvedev signed in April, is currently pending Senate ratification. The treaty updates the first Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty negotiated by President Ronald Reagan, which expired last year.

Daschle argued that failure to ratify the treaty not only would blind the United States to Russia's nuclear activities but would also undermine international support for cooperation on nuclear nonproliferation and especially for preventing Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons. He blamed conservative opposition to New START on partisan

politics, pointing to the long history of bipartisan agreement on the previous START and the unanimous support of senior military officials.

The bilateral treaty provides for mutual reductions in redundant strategic nuclear arms by each country. The treaty's verification scheme creates transparency so that each country can be assured of the other's honesty, including allowing inspectors of each country to monitor the other's disarmament activities. The first START treaty has enabled an 8 percent reduction in nuclear weapons in the 15 years in which it has been enforced.

"If you have any doubts about what the Russians are doing, you should be voting for this treaty. You want U.S. inspectors back in Russia as soon as possible," said Joe Cirincione, president of the Ploughshares Fund, a nonprofit dedicated to nuclear disarmament. Cirincione joined Daschle after his remarks for a conversation moderated by CAP President and CEO John Podesta.

The debate over New START occurs amid increasing international momentum for the regulation of nuclear weapons. Forty-seven nations committed to lock down loose nuclear materials at a nuclear security summit the United States hosted in April, which will make it much more difficult for terrorists to acquire nuclear weapons. And in May the president secured recommitments from all parties to the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty, or NPT, at the treaty's review conference in New York. The previous review of the NPT five years ago had ended in division and doubts about the treaty's future.

The administration also won sanctions from the U.N. Security Council against Iran directed at halting that country's nuclear weapons program. Daschle and Cirincione agreed that ratifying New START was critical to maintaining international pressure on Tehran. Failure to ratify the treaty would, they argued, lead to doubts among our allies about our commitment to preventing nuclear proliferation and strengthen Iran's position.

"American credibility on nuclear issues would evaporate," Daschle said, adding that problems might not be limited to Iran in the long term. "Countries belonging to the NPT would ask a very simple question: 'If the U.S. is unwilling to live up to its commitments, why should we live up to ours?'"

Experts, diplomats, and military commanders agree that ratifying and enforcing New START is vital. Testimony from 17 senatorial hearings on New START offers what Daschle called "almost a universal expression of urgency" for ratification.

This consensus is unsurprising given that the treaty contains no significant departures from the old START, a popular and effective treaty that President Ronald Reagan began negotiating in the early 1980s—almost 30 years ago. President George H.W. Bush signed the treaty, and the Senate ratified it with a vote of 93-6.

Regarding current objections to New START, Daschle said, "The obstacles today to reducing the number of nuclear weapons in the world, the obstacles to increasing this country's national security, the obstacles to continuing down the path that President Reagan himself first cleared—they are entirely political."

He pointed to a July 6 editorial in *The Washington Post* by Massachusetts Gov. Mitt Romney. The treaty does not limit American missile defense capabilities as Romney suggested, said Daschle. Indeed, U.S. Missile Defense Agency chief Gen. Patrick O'Reilly testified that ratification would improve American missile defense by allowing it to focus on threats other than Russia, notably Iran.

Others have argued that the treaty should be rejected because it is not expansive enough, omitting reference to tactical nuclear arms and omitting China from negotiations. But the treaty, a bilateral agreement on strategic arms, was never meant to be comprehensive. It provides a foundation between the world's two greatest nuclear powers for agreements with other countries and on other kinds of weapons.

"These claims are being made at the expense of a sober evaluation of the real risks to our national security and how our government should respond to them," said Daschle.

http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/2010/07/new_START_critical.html

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