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Obama Redoubles Efforts to Push for Senate Passage of Nuke Treaty with Russia

November 21, 2010

In his latest efforts to push for passage of the arms reduction treaty with Russia this year in the Senate, U.S. President Barack Obama has appealed to the U.S. public and foreign leaders for support in the last two days.

The president's weekly address focuses on domestic issues, but on Saturday he touched on the new Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) he signed in April with Russian President Dmitry Medvedev to replace the 1991 START treaty which expired in December last year.

"Today, I'd like to speak with you about an issue that is fundamental to America's national security: the need for the Senate to approve the new START treaty this year," Obama said, repeating a refrain echoed oftentimes these days by himself and other high-ranking officials.

"This treaty is rooted in a practice that dates back to (former president) Ronald Reagan. The idea is simple: as the two nations with over 90 percent of the world's nuclear weapons, the United States and Russia have a responsibility to work together to reduce our arsenals," he said.

The treaty stipulates that the number of nuclear warheads be reduced to 1,550 on each side over seven years, while the number of delivery vehicles, both deployed and non-deployed, must not exceed 800. It also sets out rules for verification and monitoring of the nuclear arsenals on both sides.

"And to ensure that our national security is protected, the United States has an interest in tracking Russia's nuclear arsenal through a verification effort that puts U.S. inspectors on the ground, as President Reagan said when he signed a nuclear arms treaty with the Soviet Union in 1987, 'Trust, but verify,'" Obama said in his weekly address.

The new START treaty is seen as a major achievement of the Obama administration in foreign relations and part of its efforts to reset relations with Russia.

The pact sets the stage for further arms reductions, as its preamble states that the U.S. and Russia see the new START as providing new impetus to the step-by-step process of reducing and limiting nuclear arms, with a view to expanding this process in the future to a multilateral approach.

Obama reiterated to Medvedev last Sunday that it is a "top priority" of his administration to get the U.S. Senate to ratify the new START pact.

"The treaty also helped us reset our relations with Russia, which led to concrete benefits," Obama told his American audience. "For instance, Russia has been indispensable to our efforts to enforce strong sanctions on Iran, to secure loose nuclear material from terrorists, and to equip our troops in Afghanistan."

Some Republican senators have not only asked to review the new pact, but also have sought access to the negotiating record to get clarity on whether the treaty would limit U.S. missile defense programs and more money for maintaining the nuclear weapons stockpile and modernizing the production complex.

Obama has promised an extra 4.1 billion dollars in addition to an existing 80 billion dollar over 10 years for the modernization of the country's nuclear weapons complex. In his weekly address, he said 18 hearings have been held in the Senate to answer nearly 1,000 questions relating to the pact in the past six months.

However, Republican Senator Jon Kyl, who is seen as key to winning enough support to ratify the treaty, said Tuesday that a deal did not seem possible in the lame-duck session of Congress, dealing a severe blow to the Obama administration.

At a White House meeting on Thursday, Obama stressed that "It is a national security imperative that the United States ratify the new START treaty this year. This is not about politics, it's about national security. This is not a matter that can be delayed." The meeting joined many current and former high-ranking officials who support the pact, including former secretaries of state Madeleine Albright, James Baker and Henry Kissinger and former defense secretaries William Cohen and William Perry.

The U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee approved in September the new START treaty, clearing the way for a vote on the Senate floor. The U.S. and Russian presidents had agreed that the ratification process should be simultaneous at U.S. Senate and Russia's Duma.

Obama's Democrats lost control of the House of Representatives to the opposition Republicans in the Nov. 2 mid-term elections but retained control of the Senate. On Monday, a lame-duck session of Congress begins until the start of the new Congress in January next year.

For the passage of the treaty in the Senate now, the Democrats need nine Republican votes for support. If delayed until next year when the new Congress opens, 14 Republican votes are needed.

In his weekly address, Obama said: "Bipartisan support for new START could not be stronger, it has been endorsed by Republicans from the Reagan administration and both Bush administrations."

"Some make no argument against the treaty -- they just ask for more time. But remember this: it has already been 11 months since we've had inspectors in Russia, and every day that goes by without ratification is a day that we lose confidence in our understanding of Russia's nuclear weapons."

While in Lisbon, Portugal on Friday for a NATO summit, Obama spared no efforts to win support among his foreign colleagues.

He told reporters there: "The message that I've received since I've arrived from my fellow leaders here at NATO could not be clearer: a new START will strengthen our alliance and it will strengthen European security."

The White House quoted German Chancellor Angela Merkel as saying: "We have to thank President Obama that he negotiated a new START treaty. I would wish that the new START treaty would also be ratified."

NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen told reporters: "I would strongly regret if the ratification of the START treaty is delayed. A delay of the ratification of the START treaty would be damaging to security in Europe. I strongly encourage all parties involved to do their utmost to ensure an early ratification of the START treaty."

Obama and other NATO leaders are scheduled to meet Russian President Dmitry Medvedev on Saturday at a NATO-Russia Council summit in Lisbon.

Source: Xinhua

<http://english.people.com.cn/90001/90777/90852/7205753.html>

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Boston Globe

Europeans Eager for US-Russia Arms Pact

Fear failure would hurt efforts to deal with Moscow, Iran

By Mary Beth Sheridan , Washington Post

November 23, 2010

WASHINGTON — President Obama's trip to Europe this past weekend has revealed a growing alarm among US allies over the possible failure of a US-Russia nuclear arms treaty, with many warning that it would hurt the West's efforts to deal with Iran and with Russian weapons near Eastern Europe.

Obama comes home from the NATO summit facing one of the most significant showdowns of his presidency: trying to win ratification of the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START) before the Senate adjourns in December.

Jon Kyl of Arizona, the second-ranking Republican senator, said last week he did not think there was time to bring it up during the current lame-duck session. But Obama has forced the issue, reflecting Democrats' belief that if the treaty is pushed into next year, it could become a political issue for an emboldened Republican Party. The pact needs nine Republican votes to pass the full Senate but will need 14 next year.

Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton emphasized Sunday that political leaders appealed for passage of the treaty during the NATO summit. They included Angela Merkel, Germany's chancellor; Anders Fogh Rasmussen, NATO's secretary general; and leaders from Eastern and Central Europe.

"Now, why are they saying that? Not because they have a dog in the hunt between Republicans and Democrats in our country. It's because they know that this would be an important treaty for the continuing cooperation between Russia and the United States," she said on "Fox News Sunday."

Kyl has said little publicly about the treaty in recent days, but he has continued to hold private talks with Democratic senators.

Not ratifying the treaty could be a deep blow to the US "reset" with Russia, according to US and foreign officials. The warming relations with Russia have fed closer cooperation on Afghanistan and Iran, with Moscow supporting tougher UN sanctions on the latter and canceling the sale of S-300 anti-aircraft missiles to Tehran.

There is another reason that Europeans are worried: Without New START, it will be difficult to carry through on Obama's plans to hold follow-up talks on reducing the thousands of smaller Russian nuclear weapons within range

of Eastern and Central Europe. Like its predecessor, signed in 1991, New START deals only with long-range weapons aimed at the United States.

The treaty would reduce by up to 30 percent the deployed, long-range warheads of both nuclear giants. It would also restart a system in which inspectors from each country monitor the other's stockpiles.

For the first time in 15 years, the two nuclear giants are not directly checking on each other's arsenals because of the expiration of the first START treaty.

http://www.boston.com/news/world/europe/articles/2010/11/23/europeans_eager_for_us_russia_arms_pact/

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International Business Times – U.S.

Stuxnet May be Part of Iran Atom Woes: Ex-IAEA Aide

By Fredrik Dahl

20 November 2010

VIENNA - Iran has been experiencing years of problems with equipment used in its uranium enrichment program and the Stuxnet computer virus may be one of the factors, a former top U.N. nuclear inspections official said.

Olli Heinonen, who stepped down in August as head of the U.N. nuclear watchdog's inspections worldwide, said there may be many reasons for technical glitches that have cut the number of working centrifuges at Iran's Natanz enrichment plant.

"One of the reasons is the basic design of this centrifuge ... this is not that solid," Heinonen, a former deputy director general of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and now a senior fellow at Harvard University, told Reuters on Friday.

Asked about the Stuxnet virus, he said: "Sure, this could be one of the reasons ... There is no evidence that it was, but there has been quite a lot of malfunctioning centrifuges."

Security experts have said the release of Stuxnet could have been a state-backed attack on Iran's nuclear program, which Tehran says is designed to produce electricity but which Western leaders suspect is a disguised effort to develop nuclear bombs.

Any delays in Iran's enrichment campaign could buy more time for efforts to find a diplomatic solution to its stand-off with six world powers over the nature of its nuclear activities.

Iran has tentatively agreed to meet with a representative of the powers early next month, for the first time in over a year.

Earlier this week, experts said new research showed definitively that Stuxnet was tailored to target the kind of equipment used in uranium enrichment, deepening suspicions its aim was to sabotage the Islamic Republic's nuclear activities.

Centrifuges are finely calibrated cylindrical devices that spin at supersonic speed to increase the fissile element in uranium so that it can serve as fuel for nuclear power plants or, if refined to a much higher degree, for atomic bombs.

EQUIPMENT PROBLEMS

The Islamic state's P-1 centrifuges, adapted from a smuggled 1970s European design, have been plagued by breakdowns since a rapid expansion of enrichment in 2007-08. In September, an IAEA report said the number of producing centrifuges had fallen to 3,772 from 3,936 a few months earlier. It did not give a reason.

But Iran is testing an advanced, more durable model able to refine uranium two or three times faster, and says it intends to introduce the model for production in the near future.

Heinonen said the P-1 centrifuge was quite brittle and prone to outages. He also cited other quality problems and "poor workmanship" as possible factors.

"They have some problems but you don't know what the real reason is for those problems and there may be many reasons."

Stuxnet, a malicious computer worm of unknown origin that attacks command modules for industrial equipment, is described by some experts as a first-of-its-kind guided cyber missile.

New research by cyber security company Symantec unearthed evidence that apparently supports the enrichment sabotage theory, pointing to tell-tale signs in the way Stuxnet changes the behavior of equipment known as frequency converter drives.

A frequency converter drive is a power supply that can alter the frequency of the output, which controls the speed of a motor. The higher the frequency, the higher the motor's speed.

"They have had some problems with the frequency converters ... but that is a way back," Heinonen said, citing Iranian media information from a few years ago.

Editing by Mark Heinrich

<http://www.ibtimes.com/articles/20101120/stuxnet-may-be-part-of-iran-atom-woes-ex-iaea-aide.htm>

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Arab News – Saudi Arabia

Iran to Hike Atomic Output Despite Possible Talks

By Reuters

November 21, 2010

TEHRAN - An Iranian lawmaker dealing with foreign policy said on Sunday Iran will increase its production of nuclear fuel despite a possible resumption of talks with major powers over its disputed uranium enrichment program.

Iran will probably try to blunt international pressure on it to curb enrichment once it resumes talks with the United States, Russia, China, Britain, France and Germany. The venue and agenda of the talks have yet to be agreed upon.

"Iran will increase the production of nuclear fuel to secure its needs," Esmail Kowsari, a member of parliament's national security and foreign policy committee, was quoted as saying by the semi-official Mehr news agency, without giving details.

Since the last round of talks between Iran and big powers in October 2009, Tehran has continued to stockpile low-enriched uranium (LEU) and now has enough for at least two atomic bombs, experts say, if it was refined to a much higher level.

Iran, a major oil producer, says it wants only LEU for the running of nuclear power plants to boost its electricity supply.

In remarks that could deepen Western suspicion Iran will try again to avoid addressing its enrichment drive, Kowsari joined other Iranian officials in asserting that Tehran may not discuss its nuclear program at all.

"From the viewpoint of the Islamic Republic, the nuclear issue has been finished and raising that in this round of negotiations has no point," he said, according to Mehr.

Differing Agendas

Iranian officials have said Tehran would be willing to address general global political and economic issues.

Similar talks last year yielded a deal in principle under which Iran would have shipped out the bulk of its stock of low-enriched uranium in exchange for higher-enriched fuel for a Tehran reactor that makes isotopes for cancer care.

That understanding unraveled when Iran backed away from its terms and later started producing higher-enriched uranium itself, raising Western concerns about an advance toward the threshold of weapons-grade material.

In June, the UN Security Council imposed a fourth round of sanctions on Iran, reiterating its demand that it suspend enrichment — a process which some countries fear could lead to Iran producing bomb-quality fuel.

The Islamic Republic has also been hit by more far-reaching sanctions imposed by the United States and the EU, but President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad has dismissed them as no more effective than a "used handkerchief."

Ahmadinejad has also asked the powers to declare their opinion on Israel's alleged nuclear arsenal and whether they come to the table as Iran's friend or foe — issues Western diplomats say are irrelevant to the essence of the talks.

Iran's arch-foe Israel has not rule out striking Tehran militarily to prevent it from getting an atomic bomb, if diplomacy fails.

The six powers want Iran to suspend enrichment activities which can have both civilian and military uses, in exchange for trade and diplomatic benefits on offer since 2006.

<http://arabnews.com/middleeast/article197546.ece>

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Bangkok Post - Thailand

N.Korea Showed US Scientist New Nuclear Plant: Report

21 November 2010

Agence France-Presse (AFP)

North Korea last week showed an American scientist a vast, new plant for enriching uranium with hundreds of centrifuges already installed and running, the New York Times reported on Saturday.

Scientist Siegfried Hecker told the US daily that he had been "stunned" by the sophisticated new plant and that he had already privately informed the White House of his findings.

The North Koreans had claimed some 2,000 centrifuges were already installed and running in the plant, which Hecker was allowed to tour, the Times reported. It was not immediately clear where the facility was located.

Hecker said he saw "hundreds and hundreds" of centrifuges set up in an "ultra-modern control room".

But he said he was forbidden from taking photographs and could not verify North Korean claims that the plant was already producing low-enriched uranium.

"There are reasons to question whether that's true," Hecker told the daily, adding that he doubted Pyongyang would be able to complete the project.

The revelations came as the State Department said on Saturday that the top US envoy for North Korea would arrive in Asia on Sunday for talks with regional leaders on Pyongyang's suspect nuclear program.

Stephen Bosworth left for Seoul on Saturday, and was then to travel to Tokyo and Beijing for discussions on the stalled six-party talks on Pyongyang's nuclear program.

The new facility seen by Hecker must have been rapidly built, as it did not exist when international inspectors were thrown out of the impoverished, Stalinist state in April 2009, the Times said.

The daily speculated that Pyongyang, which tested its first nuclear device in 2006, must have had foreign help to be able to build the new plant so quickly and may have flouted strict UN sanctions.

It added that the White House had already begun on Saturday to brief allies and lawmakers about Hecker's revelations, expecting a global debate about his findings.

Administration officials told the New York Times that they had been watching the area where the plant was said to be by satellite, but would not confirm if they knew of its existence previously.

Hecker, who used to direct the Los Alamos National Laboratory, had already revealed when he left North Korea that North Korean leaders claimed to be building an experimental light-water nuclear reactor to be completed by 2012.

His claims were backed by Jack Pritchard, president of the Korea Economic Institute, who told journalists in Washington on Tuesday that he had visited the Yongbyon nuclear complex where the North claims the light-water reactor is being built.

While the existing ageing reactor at Yongbyon has supplied plutonium for the North's nuclear weapons, light-water reactors are generally used for generating electricity.

The North quit the nuclear disarmament talks in April 2009 and staged a second nuclear test a month later. In recent months it has expressed conditional willingness to return to dialogue.

US President Barack Obama warned recently that North Korea must show "seriousness of purpose" before the six-party nuclear talks can resume, saying he was not interested in simply "going through the motions".

<http://www.bangkokpost.com/news/world/207441/nkorea-showed-us-scientist-new-nuclear-plant>

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Yonhap News – South Korea

November 21, 2010

S. Korea Expresses 'Very Grave' Concern over N. Korea's Alleged Uranium Enrichment Plant

By Hwang Doo-hyong and Chang Jae-soon

SEOUL/WASHINGTON, Nov. 21 (Yonhap) -- South Korea expressed "very grave" concern Sunday following a news report that North Korea has an operational uranium enrichment plant, as Washington's special envoy on Pyongyang has begun a hastily arranged swing through Asia to discuss countermeasures.

The revelations, if confirmed, would mean that the recalcitrant regime would be able to build not only plutonium-based nuclear weapons, but bombs fueled by highly enriched uranium, which are considered easier to detonate than plutonium weapons.

The North's move fits a pattern of behavior by a defiant regime that has raised tensions with provocative moves when its negotiations with the outside world are stalled or ahead of important negotiations to extract greater concessions from its negotiating partners.

"If that's true, it would be a very grave issue," a senior foreign ministry official said.

"Uranium enrichment by North Korea runs counter to U.N. Security Council resolutions" banning the regime from all nuclear activity as well as a 2005 nuclear disarmament pledge by Pyongyang, he said, speaking on condition of anonymity.

South Korea cannot verify the report about the North's uranium enrichment facility, but it is possible that North Korea could have sped up the program since April last year, he said without elaborating.

Apparently alarmed by the revelations, the U.S. special envoy on North Korea, Stephen Bosworth, flew to South Korea on Sunday as part of a three-nation Asian trip that will also take him to Tokyo Monday and Beijing Tuesday. He will return to Washington Wednesday.

Upon arrival at Incheon International Airport, Bosworth said his trip is aimed at discussing with his partners in the region "next steps in the process of negotiating with the North Koreans." He declined to elaborate, saying he would speak to the press Monday.

According to The New York Times newspaper, North Korea showed a U.S. nuclear scientist a vast, new plant to enrich uranium with "hundreds and hundreds" of centrifuges installed when he visited the North last week.

The scientist, Stanford professor Siegfried Hecker, told the paper that he had been "stunned" by the sophistication of the new plant and the centrifuges operated from what he called "an ultra-modern control room."

The new plant that Hecker saw raises the prospect that North Korea "is preparing to expand its nuclear arsenal or build a far more powerful type of atomic bomb," the report said. Hecker said the North Koreans claimed 2,000 centrifuges were already installed and running.

The revelations back up another claim by Pyongyang that it has begun construction of a light-water nuclear reactor at its main Yongbyon nuclear complex. Hecker and another American security expert, Jack Pritchard, relayed the claim after trips to the North.

A light-water reactor uses low-enriched uranium as fuel. If highly enriched, uranium can be used to build atomic bombs. North Korea claimed last year that it succeeded in experimental uranium enrichment.

On Friday, State Department spokesman Philip Crowley rebuffed North Korea's claim that it is building the reactor for power generation.

"North Korea is not pursuing a civilian nuclear program by itself," Crowley told reporters. "It is a proliferator. It has a military program. That military program poses a danger to the region and to the rest of the world."

Crowley urged the North to abide by its denuclearization commitment made in a six-party deal in 2005.

"North Korea has made a commitment to denuclearize, and we expect North Korea to live up to its commitments," he said.

The North's latest moves to ratchet up tensions came as South Korea and the United States have remained reluctant to accept Pyongyang's expression of willingness to rejoin the stalled six-party nuclear disarmament talks involving the two Koreas, China, Japan, Russia and the U.S.

Seoul and Washington have urged the North to take concrete steps demonstrating its denuclearization commitments and take responsibility for the March sinking of a South Korean warship before reopening the negotiations. The North has denied any role in the sinking that killed 46 sailors.

By stoking concern about the country's attempt to enrich uranium for weapons, the North could be trying to pressure South Korea and the U.S. to resume the stalled six-nation negotiations, where the country could get economic and political concessions.

"North Korea appears to be trying to move the situation to a negotiating phase," the foreign ministry official said.

Another ministry official said the uranium issue should be on the table if the six-party talks reopen.

The talks, which were last held in December 2008, have been stalled amid tensions over North Korea's missile and nuclear test last year and the ship sinking.

Crowley said Washington will help provide North Korea with much-needed energy if it takes denuclearization steps.

"If they take affirmative steps to denuclearize, we are prepared to have a conversation about how to meet North Korea's legitimate energy needs," he said.

<http://english.yonhapnews.co.kr/national/2010/11/21/60/0301000000AEN20101121002000315F.HTML>

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London Guardian – U.K.

North Korea's Uranium Plant Sends a Chilling Message to Washington

The West's policy of trying to cut Pyongyang off from nuclear supplies has been shown to be failing miserably

Julian Borger, diplomatic editor

Sunday, 21 November 2010

North Korea does not as a rule give American academics tours of its most sensitive nuclear sites. Siegfried Hecker was shown around Yongbyon not out of a sudden spirit of scientific openness, but to send a message to Washington. That message said: not only are we enriching uranium, we are already very good at it.

Hecker, who used to run the US nuclear weapons laboratories at Los Alamos, was whisked around the new enrichment facility with his mouth agape. The place was much bigger than he imagined and much more modern.

It means that efforts to cut North Korea off from nuclear technology are failing miserably. The policy of imposing sanctions and refusing to resume talks with Pyongyang until it ceases the most provocative elements of that programme (and apologises for sinking a South Korean battleship this year), is not working.

North Korea has shown itself extremely adept at the game of nuclear bluff. It has provoked three previous nuclear crises, in 1994, 2002 and 2006, aimed at raising the stakes at the six-party talks and winning more pledges of economic aid and fuel oil deliveries. These new developments suggest that, whatever the health of the Dear Leader, Kim Jong-il, the regime as a whole has not lost its taste for brinkmanship.

The Hecker report gives Washington a lot to think about on several fronts. First, despite its claims that everything Hecker saw was home-made, it is clear that North Korea has been able to go shopping around the world for the equipment it needs, despite multiple UN sanctions. In fact, the Institute for Science and International Security in Washington deduced the existence of such an enrichment plant over a month ago, based on analysis of North Korea's procurement methods.

The second striking element of the discovery is the speed at which the 2,000-centrifuge enrichment plant was built. It was not there just a year ago. That is highly unusual because getting precise high-speed centrifuges to work consistently and lining them up in "cascades" of 300 machines would normally take years.

"There is an anomaly in how rapidly this has been built," said David Albright, the head of the institute, which yesterday published satellite pictures of the site. "That raises the question of whether this plant was originally put together somewhere else and was moved to Yongbyon, or whether there is a parallel plant elsewhere."

Albright said that the third reason for international concern was that the sophisticated centrifuge plant had gone undetected until the North Koreans had chosen to reveal it to Hecker.

"It shows how difficult it is to find these centrifuge plants," he said, adding that that had implications in Iran, where some western intelligence agencies believe the government is pursuing a secret enrichment project in parallel to its publicly acknowledged programme.

It is just the latest in a series of blows to Barack Obama's nuclear agenda. He took office in 2009 promising that the nuclear weapons powers would do more to disarm and thereby further isolate "rogue" states like Iran and North Korea, strangling their attempts to join the nuclear club by the back door.

So far, his disarmament efforts appear stalled at home while both Pyongyang and Tehran show no sign of surrendering their nuclear ambitions.

Wall Street Journal
November 21, 2010

North Korea Nuclear Fears Grow

U.S. in Recent Months Shared Concerns with Chinese and Russian Leaders, People Familiar With the Matter Say
By JAY SOLOMON And ADAM ENTOUS

WASHINGTON—President Barack Obama and senior U.S. diplomats have in recent months privately shared with their Chinese and Russian counterparts growing U.S. concerns that North Korea was taking steps to enrich uranium and that the effort, unless stopped, would have serious national-security implications, according to people familiar with the matter.

But the revelation on Saturday that Pyongyang had already installed thousands of centrifuges to produce nuclear fuel at its Yongbyon nuclear facility is raising questions inside Washington's nuclear-nonproliferation community about why more wasn't done by a succession of U.S. administrations to block the North's atomic advances.

U.S. officials and nonproliferation experts are specifically trying to gauge whether North Korea might already have in place additional uranium-enrichment sites that could be used to produce nuclear fuel at levels closer to weapons grade. There is also a renewed focus on the role that third countries, such as Pakistan and Iran, might have played in Pyongyang's proliferation activities, and the possibility that the North could begin exporting centrifuges and nuclear fuel overseas.

"This is not a crisis," said the U.S. envoy to North Korea, Stephen Bosworth, after meeting with South Korea's foreign minister Monday. But, Mr. Bosworth said, North Korea's uranium program is a violation of several agreements it has made with the U.S. and others in the six-party talks and a violation of U.N. resolution 1874, which was imposed after Pyongyang tested a nuclear explosive last year.

North Korea's alleged role in supplying Syria with a nearly completed nuclear reactor is stoking new fears that Pyongyang could emerge as the new engine for global proliferation—a role once played by the Pakistani scientist Abdul Qadeer Khan.

"It's a travesty and tragedy that we didn't stop this program when we had the opportunity," said David Asher, who helped direct efforts to counter North Korea's proliferation activities in the George W. Bush administration. "My fear is that just as Iran's demands for enriched uranium for a bomb are expanding, North Korea may be in the position to begin supplying."

On Saturday, a Stanford physicist, Siegfried Hecker, startled Washington and Asia by releasing a report that documented what he said were 2,000 centrifuges that had been installed by North Korea at its Yongbyon nuclear complex.

Mr. Hecker said he saw the equipment during a North Korean-led tour of the site on Nov. 12. The North Koreans told the American scientist that the centrifuges were already beginning to enrich uranium to 3.5% purity for use in a light-water reactor that is under construction.

Mr. Hecker said in the report that he couldn't confirm that uranium gas had already been introduced into the centrifuges, but said he was "stunned" by the advancement and sophistication of the enrichment plant.

"Instead of seeing a few small cascades of centrifuges, which I believed to exist in North Korea, we saw a modern, clean centrifuge plant of more than a thousand centrifuges all neatly aligned and plumbed," Mr. Hecker wrote in his report.

Mr. Hecker estimated that the North Korean facility could produce around two tons of low-enriched uranium per year, or around ((40 kilograms)) 88 pounds of highly enriched uranium—nearly enough for a single atomic weapon.

Mr. Hecker's report seemed to put to rest a debate that has raged inside the U.S. intelligence community for nearly a decade: whether North Korea actually has a uranium-enrichment capacity. But the finger-pointing about how Pyongyang's facility grew so advanced without U.S. intervention only seemed to be beginning.

People familiar with issue said President Obama personally raised concerns about North Korea's uranium-enrichment activities with Chinese President Hu Jintao during a Nov. 11 meeting in Seoul.

Mr. Obama told Mr. Hu that, combined with the North's existing nuclear and intercontinental ballistic missile capabilities, the uranium-enrichment work raised serious national-security concerns for the U.S., one of the people

said. The person wouldn't characterize Mr. Hu's response to Mr. Obama's presentation but said that "it got his attention."

Earlier this year, a U.S. delegation told Russian officials about Washington's concerns about the uranium-enrichment program, according to these people.

U.S. officials wouldn't confirm Sunday if the information presented by Mr. Obama and others was related to the same facility that Mr. Hecker visited.

However, an American intelligence official said, "American intelligence agencies have known about North Korea's uranium-enrichment activities for years. It's simply incorrect to suggest otherwise."

The Bush administration first raised concerns about Pyongyang's uranium-enrichment work in 2002.

U.S. intelligence agencies at the time detected North Korean efforts to acquire the aluminum tubes needed to build centrifuges from Pakistan and European suppliers. President Bush cited North Korea's suspected work as a reason to terminate a 1994 disarmament agreement reached with the North that sought to mothball the Yongbyon reactor in exchange for Western financial assistance.

Still, since 2002, current and former U.S. officials involved in counterproliferation said Washington and its allies have missed a string of opportunities to more clearly gauge North Korea's uranium-enrichment work and to move against it.

In 2003, German security forces foiled an attempt by a North Korean diplomat named Yun Ho-jin to import 22 metric tons of aluminum tubes into North Korea using Chinese front companies. The tubes were built to the exact same specifications as those used in Pakistan's centrifuge designs, according to current and former American officials, which U.S. intelligence officials believe Islamabad had shared with Pyongyang. But China's government balked at U.S. requests to detain Mr. Yun.

In May 2008, as part of another attempt to forge a disarmament agreement, North Korea handed over to the U.S. State Department 18,000 pages of operating records from the Yongbyon reactor that were contaminated with uranium particles from the Yongbyon facility. North Korea argued that the uranium was traced to equipment provided to Pyongyang by Pakistan, according U.S. officials involved in the exchange. But in retrospect, these officials said, there should have been more focus on the potential that North Korea was already beginning to enrich uranium.

The Obama administration this weekend dispatched Mr. Bosworth to South Korea, Japan and China to try to forge a united stand against North Korea. Mr. Bosworth and other U.S. officials are also seeking to gain a better understanding of the current state of North Korea's uranium-enrichment activities and how they fit into Pyongyang's broader nuclear program, according to American officials.

Nonproliferation experts are specifically wondering, however, whether North Korea might already have a second uranium-enrichment site that could produce nuclear fuel closer to the 90% enrichment level needed for a bomb. They also focused on whether Pyongyang already has an indigenous facility producing centrifuges on an industrial scale, possibly for export.

David Albright, a nuclear expert at Washington's Institute for Science and International Security, said the U.S. needs to understand what role third countries may have played in developing North Korea's facility. U.S. intelligence officials believe that Pakistan provided Pyongyang with the designs for the P-2 centrifuge, a more advanced centrifuge that can enrich uranium more efficiently and quickly than the P-1. But Mr. Albright believes countries like Iran may have played a role in helping the North obtain some of the sophisticated computer-control systems found at the Yongbyon facility.

"Iran and North Korea appear in some cases to use similar illicit procurement networks," Mr. Albright said.+

Mr. Bosworth and the Obama administration will also need to come up with a new longer-term strategy to confront North Korea and its leader, Kim Jong Il, acknowledged U.S. officials.

Mr. Hecker argued in his report that the U.S. had no choice now but to directly sit down with the North Koreans to try to find new diplomatic tools with which to contain Pyongyang's nuclear activities. The U.S. has been working through a diplomatic process that also involves China, South Korea, Japan and Russia to try to end North Korea's nuclear program.

"It is clear that waiting patiently for Pyongyang to return to the six-party talks on terms acceptable to the United States and its allies will exacerbate the problem," Mr. Hecker wrote.

The new revelations, however, appeared to reinforce doubts within the administration about getting back into negotiations with North Korea that could result in the U.S. providing financial assistance to the North in exchange

for the North taking disarmament steps it had already pledged to take. The White House is "prepared to negotiate with North Korea if it demonstrates that it is serious about honoring its commitments by taking concrete and irreversible steps towards denuclearization," a senior administration official said.

Evan Ramstad in Seoul contributed to this article.

<http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748704496104575627740592221262.html>

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Washington Post

U.S. Alerts Asian Capitals to Possible North Korean Uranium Enrichment Program

By John Pomfret, Washington Post Staff Writer
Sunday, November 21, 2010

The Obama administration has dispatched a team of experts to Asian capitals to report that North Korea appears to have started a program to enrich uranium, possibly to manufacture more nuclear weapons, a senior U.S. administration official said Saturday.

The team was sent out after North Korea told two visiting American experts earlier this month that it possessed such a program and showed them a facility where it claimed the enrichment was taking place.

"North Korea's claim to have a uranium enrichment program is yet another provocative act of defiance and, if true, contradicts its own pledges and commitments," the senior administration official said.

"We have long suspected North Korea of having this kind of capability, and we have regularly raised it with them directly and with our partners in this effort," the official said.

The claim of the facility's existence - made to Siegfried Hecker, the former chief of the Los Alamos National Laboratory, and former U.S. government analyst Robert Carlin - complicates the Obama administration's efforts to counter nuclear proliferation around the globe. It also raises questions about North Korea's motivations in announcing the presence of the plant as it undertakes a leadership transition from leader Kim Jong Il, apparently to his third son, Kim Jong Eun.

North Korea's disclosure of this facility was first reported by the New York Times on its Web site Saturday.

The North Koreans told Hecker that the facility - located at Yongbyon, where North Korea once had a program to isolate plutonium for nuclear weapons - was for the low-enriched uranium generally used in power plants, according to David Albright, the director of the Institute for Science and International Security, which has monitored North Korea's nuclear programs for years.

But Albright said he thinks the program could be used to produce weapons-grade, highly enriched uranium. North Korea's nuclear arsenal has so far used plutonium recovered from spent nuclear reactor fuel rods, the other way to obtain weapons-grade fissile material.

In October, Albright's group reported that North Korea "has moved beyond laboratory-scale work" and is capable of building a "pilot plant" of centrifuges to enrich uranium.

The senior U.S. official said that North Korea's policy of using "missiles and nuclear tests to threaten the international community and extract concessions . . . hasn't worked because of strong unity among allies."

Still, there is debate among the nations involved in the stalled six-party talks on North Korea's nuclear program - South Korea, Japan, the United States, Russia and China. Beijing has advocated that the talks resume because, it says, if North Korea is involved in talks, it will be less likely to lash out at the West or conduct another nuclear test. a third nuclear test. (North Korea is thought to have tested a nuclear device in 2006 and again in 2009.) Some officials in Washington, Seoul, Tokyo and Moscow agree with the Chinese position.

Nonetheless, many in the Obama administration and in other capitals are wary of being drawn into the same pattern with North Korea that bedeviled previous U.S. administrations and other governments - wherein Kim Jong Il's government made threats and then was rewarded with cash and other benefits not to carry them out.

"We have consistently insisted that any talks must be real negotiations over its nuclear weapons program," the senior official said in an e-mail.

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/11/21/AR2010112100145.html>

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San Francisco Chronicle

Pentagon: New Facility Speeds NKorean Nuke Ability

By ANNE GEARAN, AP National Security Writer

Sunday, November 21, 2010

SANTA CRUZ, Bolivia (AP) -- A newly revealed North Korean nuclear facility could speed up that unpredictable nation's ability to make and deliver viable nuclear weapons, the Pentagon's top leaders said Sunday.

U.S. Defense Secretary Robert Gates said he doesn't believe the facility is part of a peaceful nuclear energy program.

"I don't credit that at all," Gates said in Bolivia, where he is attending a regional defense conference.

The facility appears to be a uranium enrichment facility, Gates said, and it could enable North Korea to build "a number" of nuclear devices beyond the handful it is presumed to have already assembled.

Adm. Mike Mullen, chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, called North Korea "a very dangerous country."

"I've been worried about North Korea and its potential nuclear capability for a long time," Mullen said on ABC's "This Week."

"This certainly gives that potential real life, very visible life that we all ought to be very, very focused on."

North Korea has tested two relatively crude plutonium devices. The new facility uses uranium, which can be used both for civilian power production and to make bombs.

North Korea has not yet demonstrated the capability to refine bomb-making skills to the point that the devices could be attached to long-range missiles. That ability would be needed if the North ever intended to launch a catastrophic attack far beyond its borders, including on the U.S.

The United States and other countries are also worried that North Korea could sell the abilities it now has to terrorists or other nations that might use them for small-scale "dirty bomb" attacks.

Gates warned that North Korea is developing new long-range missiles, and possibly a new mobile intercontinental ballistic missile.

"All of these programs are of great concern to every nation," Gates said.

Stephen Bosworth, the U.S. special envoy on North Korea, called the revelation "another in a series of provocative moves."

Bosworth, who met Monday in Seoul with South Korean Foreign Minister Kim Sung-hwan, added: "We are not surprised by this. We have been watching and analyzing the (North's) aspirations to produce enriched uranium for some time."

North Korea recently showed off the new facility to a visiting American nuclear expert. The scientist said he was told the small industrial-scale uranium enrichment facility is producing low-enriched uranium for a new reactor.

Robert Carlin, a North Korea expert at Stanford University, also toured the site and said it was "way beyond anything anybody had imagined."

In an interview broadcast Sunday on ABC, Carlin said, "It was such a surprise, and it showed me that the policy that we've been following seems to be at a dead end."

Gates said the revelation Saturday confirms long-standing suspicions that North Korea wanted to develop a second path to nuclear capability.

Mullen, the top U.S. military officer, said such activities would violate U.N. Security Council resolutions and agreements by North Korea over its nuclear program.

"From my perspective, it's North Korea continuing on a path which is destabilizing for the region. It confirms or validates the concern we've had for years about their enriching uranium, which they've denied routinely," Mullen said. "They are a country that routinely we are unable to believe that they would do what they say."

Noting the sinking of the South Korean warship Cheonan in March, which killed 46 sailors and has been blamed on North Korea, Mullen said on CNN's "State of the Union" that "all of this is consistent with belligerent behavior, the kind of instability-creation in a part of the world that is very dangerous."

The United States wants North Korea to resume international disarmament talks with Japan, China, Russia, South Korea and the U.S. Those on-again, off-again negotiations yielded a 2005 promise from North Korea to give up its nuclear program, and it did dismantle some facilities before talks foundered.

North Korea has demanded one-on-one negotiations with the United States, which Washington refuses to hold in a formal setting. U.S. diplomats have met with North Koreans on the sidelines of the six-nation talks.

Gates said it is too soon to say how news of the new facility might affect diplomatic strategy.

Sen. John Kerry, chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, pointed to China as a key. The Massachusetts Democrat said Beijing is an influential ally and trading partner of the North and is "well-positioned to enhance the international community's enforcement activities."

<http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/n/a/2010/11/21/international/i141843S51.DTL&type=business>

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Kansas City Star
November 22, 2010

US: NKorea's Nuke Claim Provocative, Not Surprise

By KELLY OLSEN, Associated Press

The U.S. special envoy for North Korea said Monday that Pyongyang's claim of a new uranium enrichment facility is provocative and disappointing but not a crisis or a surprise. Washington, he vowed, will keep working closely with its regional partners in response.

Stephen Bosworth's comments, following a meeting with South Korean Foreign Minister Kim Sung-hwan, came as the United States and the North's neighbors scrambled to deal with Pyongyang's revelation to a visiting American nuclear scientist of a highly sophisticated, modern enrichment operation that had what the North says are 2,000 recently completed centrifuges.

"This is obviously a disappointing announcement. It is also another in a series of provocative moves" by North Korea, Bosworth said. "That being said, this is not a crisis. We are not surprised by this. We have been watching and analyzing the (North's) aspirations to produce enriched uranium for some time."

Kim also played down the facility, telling reporters: "It's nothing new."

Top U.S. military officials, however, warned that it could speed up the North's ability to make and deliver viable nuclear weapons. South Korea's defense minister told lawmakers Monday that Seoul will discuss the possibility of having the U.S. bring tactical nuclear weapons back into the country.

U.S. Defense Secretary Robert Gates said the facility could enable North Korea to build "a number" of nuclear devices beyond the handful it is presumed to have already assembled. Gates was speaking in Bolivia, where he is attending a regional defense conference.

The American scientist, Siegfried Hecker, posted a report over the weekend saying that during a recent trip to the North's main Yongbyon atomic complex, he was taken to a small, industrial-scale uranium enrichment facility.

Hecker, a former director of the U.S. Los Alamos Nuclear Laboratory who is regularly given glimpses of the North's secretive nuclear program, said the North Korean program had been built in secret and with remarkable speed.

It wasn't immediately clear why the North chose to reveal the previously hidden facility. It could be a ploy to win concessions in nuclear talks or an attempt to bolster leader Kim Jong Il's apparent heir. The North could also be serious about producing nuclear electricity.

Regardless, it provides a new set of worries for the Obama administration, which has shunned direct negotiations with North Korea following its nuclear and missile tests last year and in the wake of an international finding that a North Korean torpedo sank a South Korean warship in March, killing 46 sailors.

The United States has been working with China, Japan, Russia and South Korea since 2003 to persuade North Korea to abandon its nuclear programs through a framework known as the six-party talks. Bosworth, who plans to visit China on Tuesday, traveled later Monday to Tokyo for discussions with Japanese Foreign Minister Seiji Maehara.

"If what North Korea is claiming is really true, it's an extremely grave problem," Maehara said at the outset of his meeting with Bosworth. "We must respond calmly, and will step up our cooperation, particularly among Japan, the U.S. and South Korea."

Adm. Mike Mullen, chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, called North Korea "a very dangerous country."

"I've been worried about North Korea and its potential nuclear capability for a long time," Mullen said on ABC's "This Week." "This certainly gives that potential real life, very visible life that we all ought to be very, very focused on."

North Korea told Hecker it began construction on the centrifuge facility in April 2009 and finished only a few days before the scientist's Nov. 12 visit.

The facility appeared to be primarily for civilian nuclear power, not for North Korea's atomic arsenal, Hecker said. But, he said, it "could be readily converted to produce highly enriched uranium bomb fuel."

Uranium enrichment would give the North a second way to make nuclear bombs, in addition to its known plutonium-based program. At low levels, uranium can be used in power reactors, but at higher levels it can be used in nuclear weapons.

Asked about the possibility of resuming the stalled six-nation nuclear disarmament talks with the North, Bosworth said U.S. officials "do not at all rule out the possibility of further engagement with North Korea." But, he added, "I do not believe in engagement just for the sake of engagement or talking just for the sake of talking."

Bosworth said the uranium revelation does not constitute a failure of U.S. policy toward the country's nuclear programs and that Washington will work closely with "our allies and partners" going forward.

"This is a very difficult problem that we have been struggling to deal with for almost 20 years," Bosworth said. "They are a difficult interlocutor ... but we're not throwing our policy away."

New satellite images show construction under way at Yongbyon, which, combined with reports from Hecker and another American expert who recently traveled to the atomic complex, appear to show that the North is going forward with its stated plans to build a light-water nuclear power reactor.

Light-water reactors are ostensibly for civilian energy purposes, but such a power plant would give the North a reason to enrich uranium. While light-water reactors are considered less prone to misuse than heavy-water reactors, once the process of uranium enrichment is mastered, it is relatively easy to enrich further to weapons-grade levels.

Experts say the North has yielded enough weaponized plutonium for at least a half dozen atomic bombs.

Hecker said the North Koreans emphasized during his trip that the centrifuge facility was operating; although he couldn't verify that statement, he said "it was not inconsistent with what we saw."

AP National Security Writer Anne Gearan in Bolivia, and APTN Senior Producer Seung-jai Moon and AP writers Foster Klug and Hyung-jin Kim in Seoul and Mari Yamaguchi in Tokyo contributed to this report.

<http://www.kansascity.com/2010/11/22/2459032/us-nkoreas-nuke-claim-provocative.html>

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Financial Times – Britain

S Korea Reconsiders US Nuclear Weapons

By Christian Oliver in Seoul

November 22, 2010

South Korea may ask the US to redeploy nuclear weapons in the country after North Korea unveiled a previously secret uranium enrichment facility.

Breaking a significant taboo, Kim Tae-young, the South Korean defence minister, told parliament that Seoul would discuss redeploying US nuclear weapons, which were removed from the country in 1991, with a US-South Korean defence committee.

When asked by a parliamentary committee whether US atomic weapons should be brought back to the peninsula, Mr Kim said: "I will review what you said in consultation with members of the Extended Deterrence Policy Committee".

The forceful South Korean reaction to the nuclear plant – which Seoul described as a "grave" problem – undermined Washington's assertion that North Korea possessing such a modern facility was not a surprise.

While Mr Kim is a well-known hawk who has been admonished by the president for previous tough talk, it is highly significant that he dared to break such a taboo, which will unsettle Beijing and Tokyo as well as infuriate Pyongyang. The Japanese government declined to comment on his remarks.

Other South Korean government officials tried to play down his comments, but many conservatives favour basing atomic warheads in South Korea.

“Even though relocating nuclear weapons to South Korea could provoke China or Russia, it could be an effective tool to press the North,” says Cheon Seong-whun, senior research fellow at the Korea Institute of National Unification.

Any move to return US nuclear missiles in South Korea would cause huge anxiety in Beijing. As well as escalating tensions with North Korea, it would expand the US military presence in the Korean peninsula, which China has long hoped to see heavily reduced.

Beijing would also worry that greater uncertainty in the region could encourage Japan to invest in its own nuclear deterrent.

It was not immediately clear however whether any move for deployment would win broad political traction in South Korea. Policymakers sometimes make outspoken remarks – on topics such as extending South Korea’s ballistic missile programme – to please nationalist lawmakers, but without later taking serious action.

The intense South Korean concern about North Korea’s new enrichment facility contrasts sharply with a display of sangfroid from Stephen Bosworth, US envoy to North Korea, who said there was no crisis.

“I would not accept that our policy toward North Korea is a failure,” he told reporters in Seoul.

But other US officials have undermined Mr Bosworth’s claims that the US was aware of North Korea’s advances in uranium enrichment. Robert Gates, defence secretary, has revealed greater doubts, admitting Washington is still only assuming the new site is an enrichment facility.

Siegfried Hecker, the Stanford University scientist who visited the site earlier this month at the invitation of North Korea, said the centrifuge cascades appeared more advanced than US experts had assumed North Korea might be able to achieve.

Most remarkably, the unknown complex was located in the heart of North Korea’s main atomic facility, which is under constant observation by US spy satellites.

Mr Hecker observed that – if the US had missed an enrichment facility there – it would be easy to imagine there could be other facilities hidden in North Korea.

Additional reporting by Geoff Dyer in Beijing

<http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/8edddda4-f616-11df-a313-00144feab49a.html#axzz161cIuQru>

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MSNBC.com

Analysis: N. Korea Likely Needed Outside Help for Centrifuge Site

Reuters

November 22, 2010

VIENNA — North Korea probably needed external assistance to build a uranium enrichment site, which could offer it a second source of weapons-grade nuclear material, but from whom and where remains shrouded in mystery.

Nuclear experts believe North Korea might have secretly obtained components and material from several sources to help it set up a centrifuge facility at its main nuclear complex, which Washington has condemned as a provocative move by Pyongyang.

A U.S.-based think-tank, the Institute for Science and International Security (ISIS), had said in a report last month that North Korea had used China either directly or indirectly, as a transshipment point, to procure items for enrichment.

"Most believe that China views North Korea's nuclear weapons program as destabilizing to the region," the report said. "Nonetheless, China is not applying enough resources to detect and stop North Korea's illicit nuclear trade."

ISIS stressed there was no evidence that Beijing was "secretly approving or willfully ignoring exports" to its neighbor to strengthen the North's nuclear weapons program.

Mark Fitzpatrick, proliferation expert at the International Institute for Strategic Studies in London, said he believed Chinese private firms and individuals, rather than state authorities, may have assisted Pyongyang.

"Chinese middlemen, undoubtedly, are a major part of North Korea's procurement network," he said.

Beijing, the closest thing to an ally for Pyongyang, has not commented on the latest reports on the North's nuclear advances.

For Shannon Kile of the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), it is unlikely that North Korea had the indigenous expertise needed to assemble a centrifuge plant.

"I just can't imagine they would have been able to do this on their own. This is pretty esoteric technology," he said.

Centrifuges are finely calibrated cylindrical devices that spin at supersonic speed to increase the fissile element in uranium so that it can serve as fuel for nuclear power plants or, if refined to a much higher degree, for atomic bombs.

U.S. nuclear scientist Siegfried Hecker of Stanford University revealed at the weekend he had been shown more than a thousand centrifuges during a tour of the Yongbyon nuclear complex this month.

<http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/39530624>

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Kansas City Star

US, China Disagree on more Nuke Talks with NKorea

The Associate Press

Tuesday, November 23, 2010

A U.S. envoy on Tuesday ruled out resuming six-nation nuclear disarmament talks with North Korea while it works on a new uranium facility - even as the North's patron China called for restarting the discussions.

Stephen Bosworth spoke in Tokyo before North Korea shelled a populated South Korean island and the South returned fire. The skirmish came amid new tension over the North's nuclear program, the subject of intermittent talks that stalled last year.

Bosworth has been conducting hurried consultations with North Korea's neighbors, including China, after a U.S. nuclear scientist reported visiting the new sophisticated uranium enrichment plant that could improve North Korea's ability to make and deliver nuclear weapons.

Bosworth said that North Korea's work on the new facility makes it impossible to resume the negotiations on its nuclear disarmament.

"Needless to say, we regard this development with great seriousness," Bosworth told reporters at a Tokyo hotel. "We do not contemplate resuming negotiations while active programs are under way or while there is a possibility that North Koreans will test another nuclear device or test a missile."

A Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman, however, said the report of the new nuclear installation made an early resumption of talks more necessary.

"We have taken note of the relevant report" on the facility, said the spokesman, Hong Lei. "What is imperative now is to restart six-party talks as soon as possible."

Disagreements between the U.S. and China over how best to coax Pyongyang to the table have occasionally roiled the talks, which also involve, Japan, Russia and South Korea as well as North Korea. Pyongyang had agreed to dismantle its nuclear programs in return for aid and other concessions before the talks foundered last year after North Korea conducted a second nuclear test.

Cooperation between Beijing and Washington is considered key, though, to any progress on the nuclear issue. After talking with the Chinese foreign minister, Bosworth made an apparent nod to that cooperation.

"We strongly believe that a multilateral, diplomatic approach is the only way to realistically resolve these problems," he said.

Despite North Korea's moves, Beijing worries more about instability in its communist neighbor, preferring to offer aid, trade and other incentives as a way to encourage Pyongyang's cooperation.

The U.S., engaged in conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan and consumed with a listless economy at home, has also reacted coolly to Pyongyang's provocations and tightened its coordination with allies Japan and South Korea, both wary of North Korea.

The new North Korean uranium facility, which Stanford University scientist Siegfried Hecker over the weekend reported that he was taken to, is part of the main Yongbyon atomic complex. Hecker reported that the facility appeared modern and that his North Korean hosts told him that it contained 2,000 centrifuges to enrich uranium.

The North's previously known nuclear program is plutonium-based. At low levels, uranium can be used in power reactors, but at higher levels it can be used in nuclear weapons.

<http://www.kansascity.com/2010/11/23/2463325/us-china-disagree-on-talks-with.html>

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Hindustan Times – India

Seoul Rules Out Redeployment of US Nuclear Weapons

Agence France-Presse

Seoul, November 23, 2010

South Korea's defence ministry on Tuesday ruled out the redeployment of US nuclear weapons on its soil as a deterrent to North Korea, a day after its minister had raised the prospect. "Redeploying US tactical nuclear weapons in South Korea would cross the line set by the policy of denuclearizing the Korean peninsula," Deputy Defence Minister Chang Kwang-Il told reporters.

"We've not considered redeploying US tactical nuclear weapons and there has been no consultation with the US over the issue," he was quoted as saying by a ministry spokesman.

The Pentagon also said on Monday that the United States has no immediate plans to redeploy the weapons, which were withdrawn in 1991.

Revelations over the weekend about a new uranium enrichment plant in North Korea triggered alarm in Washington, Tokyo and Seoul.

Asked in parliament on Monday whether the South would consider asking for a redeployment, Defence Minister Kim Tae-Young told a lawmaker that the government "will review what you said".

His comment made front-page headlines in most newspapers Tuesday.

Chang said that the minister's comment had been taken out of context and meant that the South could consult with the US on "all possible options".

The United States still stations 28,500 troops in the South, but pulled out the atomic weapons as part of a disarmament initiative.

<http://www.hindustantimes.com/restofasia/Seoul-rules-out-redeployment-of-US-nuclear-weapons/629896/H1-Article1-629870.aspx>

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International Business Times – India

November 23, 2010

N.Korea Enrichment "Worst Nightmare" for U.S. Intel.

By Reuters

North Korea's surprise disclosure of an ultra-modern uranium enrichment facility is raising fresh questions about the ability of U.S. intelligence to penetrate one of the world's most reclusive states.

Are there other uranium enrichment facilities in North Korea that Washington may not know about? How extensive is the proliferation of sensitive nuclear technology? What are the motives for the North's nuclear "show-and-tell"?

U.S. officials have played down the significance of the revelations, saying intelligence agencies have known for years about North Korea's uranium enrichment efforts.

Still, Defense Secretary Robert Gates, a former CIA director, has acknowledged he did not know about the enrichment facility that North Korea unveiled to a visiting U.S. nuclear scientist this month. Other officials have declined comment, citing sensitive intelligence.

Instead of being buried deep in a mountain, the facility was located at the Yongbyon nuclear complex -- a well-known site under close scrutiny by U.S. spy satellites monitoring developments in the North's nuclear drive.

"From an intelligence perspective, it's sort of your worst nightmare," said Victor Cha, director of Asian Affairs at the White House National Security Council during the Bush administration.

"Their capabilities are beyond what (U.S. intelligence) thought they would be and it was a facility that was basically sitting right under our noses, but we weren't able to see it."

U.S. officials have cautioned for years about the difficulties of spying on North Korea and its secretive leader Kim Jong-il. Passing U.S. satellites can be evaded, the mountainous landscape helps conceal troops and citizens are encouraged to report on each other.

"On top of that, a nuclear weapons program is clearly the holy of holies, and the most secret of secrets," said Bruce Klingner, former head of the CIA's Korea branch.

That raises questions about the North's motives for unveiling the facility. Admiral Mike Mullen, the top U.S. military officer, linked it to Kim Jong-il's attempts to boost his son's military credentials before an eventual succession.

Analysts have questioned whether the impoverished state might be using uranium enrichment as a bargaining chip in stalled aid-for-disarmament talks.

But the top U.S. State Department official for the region warned Congress in September that Washington lacked intelligence on North Korea, describing it as a "black box."

The United States has some glimpses into North Korea "but the truth is often times in retrospect, some of that intelligence has proven to be wrong," said Kurt Campbell, assistant secretary of state for East Asia and Pacific Affairs.

"It's a very, very hard target, probably the hardest we face in the global arena," he said.

PARTIAL VINDICATION?

Some observers say the disclosure itself is a partial vindication of U.S. intelligence, which has accused the North of pursuing uranium enrichment since 2002, even in the face of skepticism. This includes detection of North Korean attempts to acquire aluminum tubes to make centrifuges.

Uranium enrichment is itself difficult to detect, much more so than plutonium enrichment -- which requires a very large reactor and processing facility.

"American intelligence agencies have known about North Korea's uranium enrichment activities for years," a senior U.S. intelligence official told Reuters. "The North Koreans haven't always been particularly good, quite frankly, at concealing their intentions or capabilities."

Siegfried Hecker, the American nuclear scientist who toured the site said North Korean officials showed his team the early stages of construction of a uranium enrichment facility with 2,000 centrifuges. Although he could not verify Pyongyang's claims that the centrifuges were operational, he said they would be "shortly" if they weren't already.

"This control room would fit into any modern American processing facility," Hecker wrote in his trip report.

State Department spokesman P.J. Crowley cautioned that Hecker's account was, by itself, inconclusive.

"Based on a relatively brief exposure to some technology, by itself, we can't draw implications about how mature this capability may be," said Crowley, who called the North's revelation a "show-and-tell" and a possible publicity stunt.

Crowley said the United States did not believe the North had acquired any nuclear technology since U.N. Security Council resolution 1874, which imposed additional sanctions, was passed last summer after the North conducted a nuclear test in 2009.

<http://in.ibtimes.com/articles/84671/20101123/north-korea-s-surprise-disclosure-of-an-ultra-modern-uranium-enrichment-facility-is-raising-fresh-qu.htm>

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New Scientist

North Korea could make Two Nuclear Bombs per Year

23 November 2010

By David Shiga

North Korea, which fired dozens of artillery shells at the South Korean island of Yeonpyeong this morning, could make one or two bombs' worth of enriched uranium per year if its new enrichment facility is fully operational, a nuclear analyst says.

The shells killed two soldiers and set houses ablaze, according to Reuters, in one of the heaviest attacks on South Korea since the Korean war in the 1950s. The two countries then exchanged further fire.

These events closely follow reports on 20 November by an engineer and two nuclear policy experts from the Center for International Security and Cooperation at Stanford University in California that they saw an industrial-scale uranium enrichment plant in a visit a few days earlier to North Korea.

Nonetheless, the possibility that North Korea is merely making fuel for a peaceful nuclear power plant cannot be ruled out, says engineer Siegfried Hecker, former director of the Los Alamos National Laboratory in New Mexico, and his two colleagues Robert Carlin and John W. Lewis.

'Stunning' views

Although North Korea had previously announced its intention to enrich uranium, most analysts believed it did not have a large-scale capability to do so. But Hecker's team say they were given a "stunning" view of a major new enrichment facility at the country's Yongbyon nuclear complex.

"We saw a modern, clean centrifuge plant of more than 1000 centrifuges all neatly aligned," Hecker writes in a report posted on the Stanford website.

North Korean officials told the team that the plant has 2000 centrifuges that are already being used to separate fissile uranium-235 from the more abundant uranium-238.

If that is true, North Korea could make 30 to 40 kilograms of highly enriched uranium per year, enough for one or two nuclear weapons, says Hui Zhang of the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University.

Civilian power

Although North Korea is believed to already possess plutonium-based nuclear weapons, uranium-based weapons can be more efficient, allowing them to produce more powerful explosions, says Robert Alvarez of the Institute for Policy Studies in Washington DC.

Uranium can also be used to trigger nuclear fusion of heavy isotopes of hydrogen, unleashing vastly more explosive power than is possible with uranium or plutonium alone, Alvarez says. But he adds that to make fusion weapons, North Korea would first have to develop other capabilities, including the ability to make the hydrogen isotope tritium.

North Korean officials told the visitors the facility is intended to make low-enriched uranium fuel for a nuclear power plant it is building to generate electricity. "These facilities appear to be designed primarily for civilian nuclear power, not to boost North Korea's military capability," Hecker writes in the report.

Hecker accepts that they could quickly be switched to making highly enriched, weapons-grade uranium. But he argues that if North Korea wants to make nuclear bombs it would make more sense for it to restart plutonium production at the dormant plant it once used for this purpose.

Act of war?

Zhang says the number of centrifuges is appropriate if they are really intended to make fuel for a nuclear power plant. He and Alvarez both say they suspect North Korea has revealed this new capability in order to influence any future negotiations over its nuclear activities.

"I think the North Koreans are pushing very hard to convince the United States of its nuclear ambitions and where it stands right now as a way of increasing their bargaining leverage," Alvarez says.

As far as the situation on Yeonpyeong is concerned, North Korea is claiming South Korea fired the first shot, according to the BBC. South Korea says it was conducting a military drill in the area before North Korea fired.

Jung Hoon-lee, professor of international relations at Yonsei University in Seoul, South Korea, told the BBC World Service: "If this is not an act of war, I don't know what is... We fired back in accordance with the rules of engagement. This is the bare minimum, one has to wonder are we really doing enough?"

<http://www.newscientist.com/article/dn19757-north-korea-could-make-two-nuclear-bombs-per-year.html>

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Knoxville News Sentinel Blog
Frank Munger's *Atomic City Underground*
November 20, 2010

Enough Material to Make 775 Nuke Weapons

There have been a number of reports this week about a year-long project that secured tons of weapons-grade nuclear materials in Kazakhstan, with the National Nuclear Security Administration announcing that the material -- 10 metric tons of highly enriched uranium and 3 metric tons of plutonium -- was enough to make 775 nuclear weapons.

According to the NNSA: "Over the course of 12 shipments during the last year, the nuclear material was transported from the BN-350 reactor in Aktau to a new secure storage facility in Eastern Kazakhstan. The material was

packaged into 60 specially-designed casks -- each weighing 100 metric tons -- which were transported by train and road over 3,000 kilometers (more than 1,800 miles)."

Anne Harrington, the NNSA's deputy administrator for defense nuclear nonproliferation, was on hand for the ceremonies announcing the secure storage in Eastern Kazakhstan, along with a slew of other officials from the IAEA, Britain and Kazakhstan.

In a statement, NNSA Administrator Tom D'Agostino said moving the fuel to a new facility is a "a critical nuclear nonproliferation milestone and an important contribution to global security."

The NNSA said the shipments were carried out by the agency's Global Threat Reduction Initiative in conjunction with other government agencies, including the Kazakhstan Ministry of Industry and New Technology.

The BN-350 fast reactor was reportedly designed to generate both electric power and to breed plutonium for the former Soviet Union's nuclear weapons program.

"In 1997, the United States and Kazakhstan signed an agreement that established a joint program for the long-term, secure storage of the fuel from the BN-350 reactor, which stopped weapons material production in the 1980s, and was completely shut down in 1999," the NNSA said.

Back in 1994, super-secret Project Sapphire rescued about 600 kilograms of HEU from Kazakhstan, where it was considered extremely vulnerable, and brought to the Y-12 nuclear weapons plant in Oak Ridge.

http://blogs.knoxnews.com/munger/2010/11/enough_material_to_make_775_nu.html

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London Guardian – U.K.

Report: Nuclear Weapon Drivers Sometimes got Drunk

AP foreign, Monday, November 22, 2010

By FREDERIC J. FROMMER

WASHINGTON (AP) — Government agents hired to drive nuclear weapons and components in trucks sometimes got drunk while on convoy missions, including an incident last year when two agents were detained by police at a local bar during one, according to a report Monday by the U.S. Energy Department's watchdog.

The department's assistant inspector general, Sandra D. Bruce, said her office reviewed 16 alcohol-related incidents involving agents, candidate-agents and others from the government's Office of Secure Transportation between 2007 through 2009. There are nearly 600 federal agents who ship nuclear weapons, weapon components and special nuclear material across the U.S.

The report said that two incidents in particular raised red flags because they happened during "secure transportation missions" while agents checked into local hotels during extended missions. In these cases, the vehicles were placed in "safe harbor," meaning they were moved to safe and secure locations.

One of those occurred in 2007, when an agent was arrested for public intoxication; the other happened last year, when police handcuffed and temporarily detained two agents after an incident at a local bar.

"Alcohol incidents such as these, as infrequent as they may be, indicate a potential vulnerability in OST's critical national security mission," the report warns.

The Energy Department's National Nuclear Security Administration, which oversees the agents, stressed that the report found no evidence of them driving drunk while on duty, or of a systemic problem.

"NNSA's Office of Secure Transportation maintains a highly trained, highly professional force that has safely and securely transported nuclear materials more than 100 million miles without a single fatal accident or any release of radiation," said NNSA spokesman Damien LaVera.

"Of hundreds of agents," he added, "the report identifies just two cases involving NNSA personnel being intoxicated while on overnight stops during official missions." LaVera said that the agency takes the cases seriously, and is working to evaluate the report and make additional improvements.

Current guidelines call for alcohol testing at least once a year and when there is reasonable suspicion of alcohol use; a ban on consuming alcohol within 10 hours before scheduled work; and sending home agents who have an alcohol concentration of 0.02 or more.

"When alcohol-related incidents have occurred, OST officials told us that they have taken immediate action to include removal of agents from mission status," the report states.

The report recommends that officials consider actions such as a "zero tolerance" policy for alcohol incidents.

Edolphus Towns, chairman of the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee, is seeking more information on the report and will be monitoring implementation of the recommendations, a committee spokeswoman said.

"As the report suggests, a potential vulnerability in the secure transportation of nuclear materials is entirely unacceptable," said Towns, D-N.Y.

Associated Press writer Ted Bridis contributed to this story.

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/feedarticle/9372943>

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RIA Novosti – Russian Information Agency

OPINION

Obama's Final Push for New START

22 November 2010

By RIA Novosti political commentator Andrei Fedyashin

U.S. President Barack Obama signaled from his bully pulpit that he intends to push for Senate ratification of the New START arms reduction treaty with Russia before the end of the year, while his Democrats still enjoy a large majority in the Senate. Obama sat down for a high-profile meeting at the White House on Thursday with Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, Vice President Joe Biden and a group of former secretaries of state, who served under both Republican and Democratic presidents, and who unanimously support the new treaty.

Debate on ratification in the Senate will likely take place either in the second or third week of December. On November 30, the president will hold a meeting with Congressional leaders of both parties to decide when the Senate will discuss New START, perhaps for the last time.

Risky business

This is a risky move by all accounts. Obama could win, but he could also fall flat on his face, in which case he can kiss New START, the "reset" and his reputation goodbye. When Congress refuses to ratify a treaty negotiated by a president, the slight is never forgotten and never forgiven. A defeat on New START would deal an especially hard blow to Obama, as the treaty represents his only chance to retroactively earn his Nobel Peace Prize.

The White House is attempting to corner Republicans during the lame-duck session of Congress, before they take over the House and narrow the margin in the Senate in the new session beginning on January 3. Ratification of international treaties requires approval by two-thirds of the Senate, or 67 votes.

According to Obama's logic, if the Republican Senators refuse to join the Democratic majority in the Senate and vote yes, they will bear full responsibility for blocking a treaty that is important for the world in general and U.S. national security in particular. They will also be responsible for obstructing the reset with President Dmitry Medvedev and all the serious consequences that would surely follow.

Republicans are being warned that if the treaty collapses, Moscow could refuse to support efforts to pressure Iran over its nuclear program, close the transport corridor for NATO supplies through Russia, and halt any further expansion in its cooperation on Afghanistan. Finally, the reputation of the United States as a responsible actor that respects international law would be tarnished.

These are solid arguments, but the Republicans have their own reasoning. Their leaders say that it is unethical to force a major treaty through the outgoing Congress. There is a reason voters sent six more Republicans to the Senate and sent six Democrats packing. On November 2, they expressed support for the Republican Party, and the party has reservations about the treaty. Therefore, it's only fair to give the treaty a second look. The people vested more trust in the Republicans, and so their views must be taken into account. A lame-duck Congress can only ratify a lame treaty.

Ten incoming Republican senators published an open letter to Obama, which reads, in part: "Indeed, no bilateral strategic arms reduction treaty with the Soviet Union or Russia has ever been ratified during a lame duck session... We call on you to defer action on this arms control treaty until the Senate reconvenes in the 112th Congress and we are able to participate fully in its deliberations on New START."

These are serious arguments, but the administration is in no mood to hear it. Come January 3, Obama will have to persuade 14 Republican senators, instead of nine today - a much steeper hill to climb. Only three of eight

Republicans on the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations voted the treaty out of committee. Another seven senators are on the fence, and the White House is hoping to win them over.

If Obama fails, and the treaty gets stuck in the Senate, it will be subjected to double the scrutiny next year.

Moscow only cares about results

Gary Samore, Obama's top adviser on arms control, believes that the treaty would get held up in the new Congress indefinitely, breeding mistrust on the part of the Russians, who will wonder why they should deal with the Obama administration if it can't deliver on its promises. It is not important who is to blame - Congress or the White House. Moscow only cares about the end result.

Even now, the math in the Senate does not bode well for ratification. The Democratic majority in the Senate will lose one more vote on November 29, when Republican Mark Kirk will be sworn in early to replace Roland Burris, who was appointed to fill Obama's vacated Senate seat after he was elected president. And come January 3, the math becomes even more daunting. The Democrats' 58-42 majority will shrink to 53-47.

One thing is for sure, Obama would much rather do battle with 9 Republicans than 14.

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

<http://en.rian.ru/analysis/20101122/161441237.html>

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Dong-A Ilbo – South Korea

OPINION

Stop N. Korea's Uranium Enrichment

November 22, 2010

North Korea has shown to an American nuclear scientist uranium enrichment facilities in Yongbyon with hundreds of centrifuges being run. The facilities were refined enough to stun Siegfried Hecker, a nuclear expert. Pyongyang aims to build nuclear weapons by using enriched uranium to solidify its status as a nuclear power.

The North's uranium enrichment grew into a public issue after the U.S. raised suspicion in October 2002. Since then, Pyongyang has obtained a small amount of centrifuge and a blueprint from Pakistan in the 1990s and imported from Russia high-strength aluminum pipes that could be used to make 1,000 centrifuges. The North had denied suspicions over its uranium enrichment but in June last year, it declared its initiation of an enrichment process through a Foreign Ministry statement. It claimed success just three months after the declaration. Pyongyang told Hecker that it possesses 2,000 centrifuges. While the international community remained half in doubt, the North became capable of producing two 20-kilogram-grade nuclear weapons per year.

Uranium bombs have simpler detonation devices than plutonium bombs, so the manufacture of nuclear weapons is possible without conducting high explosive tests. As was the case with India and Pakistan, countries possessing plutonium nuclear bombs get to develop uranium bombs without exception. If the world allows the North to enrich uranium, the communist country could soon possess as many as nuclear weapons as it wants. This will pose a serious threat to Northeast Asia and other regions, let alone South Korea. It is also a direct challenge to U.S. President Barack Obama's policy of a nuclear-free world.

North Korea created this situation by conducting plutonium nuclear tests in 2006 and last year while developing uranium-based nuclear weapons at the same time. The six-party nuclear talks have been suspended for the past two years. China, the host of the dialogue, is mainly responsible for driving the situation to this point. So perhaps it is worth considering inviting the European Union and Australia to the six-party talks to increase pressure on the North and replacing China as host.

Through its invitation of an American expert to inspect its nuclear facilities, Pyongyang seems intent to exploit the nuclear card for its third-generation power succession. The world can deter the North's nuclear ambition only by making it clear that Pyongyang's continued action will strengthen international sanctions to threaten the communist regime's power. South Korea should work together with the international community to send a strong signal to the North's leadership and bring about disadvantages to Pyongyang.

<http://english.donga.com/srv/service.php3?biid=2010112287578>

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