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SpaceWar.com

US Lawmakers Urge Delay on START Vote

By Staff Writers

Washington, Agence France-Presse (AFP)

December 7, 2010

A group of US House Republicans urged the US Senate Tuesday to delay action on a landmark treaty with Russia until next year, citing worries about missile defense and upkeep of the US atomic arsenal.

"We are troubled by the administration's push to ratify the New START Treaty amid outstanding concerns regarding Russian intentions, missile defense limitations, and nuclear modernization," they told Senate leaders in a letter.

Representative Buck McKeon, the top Republican on the House Armed Services Committee, led fellow Republicans from the panel in signing the message of opposition to the new Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START).

The lawmakers acknowledged that they have no role in the accord's ratification, strictly the purview of the Senate under the US Constitution, but urged a delay until after a year-end "lame duck" session."

Republicans will formally retake the House of Representatives and see their numbers swell in the Senate when a new Congress convenes in January.

The 100-seat Senate currently counts 56 Democrats and two independents who vote with them, and ratification requires 67 votes. Republicans hold 42 seats now but that number will rise to 47 when a new Congress arrives.

US President Barack Obama, who has made approving the treaty a centerpiece of his effort to "reset" relations with Russia, has pushed for the Senate to act this year after months of congressional scrutiny.

The treaty has the support of nearly every past US foreign policy and national security heavyweight, the Pentagon, US spy chief, NATO, and Russia, where lawmakers say they will act only after the US Senate does.

But Republicans, many eager to deny Obama a major diplomatic victory, have sought to delay action.

The agreement restricts each nation to a maximum of 1,550 deployed warheads, a cut of about 30 percent from a limit set in 2002, and 800 launchers and bombers.

The agreement, which has broad US public support, would also return US inspectors who have been unable to monitor Russia's arsenal since the agreement's predecessor lapsed in December 2009.

Experts say it does not include binding language restricting US missile defense plans.

http://www.spacewar.com/reports/US_lawmakers_urge_delay_on_START_vote_999.html

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Defense News

Former Secretary of State Rice Backs START

Agence France-Presse

7 December 2010

WASHINGTON - Former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice called Dec. 7 on the U.S. Congress to ratify the landmark START arms control treaty with Russia, which she called "integral" to America's security.

"A modern but smaller nuclear arsenal and increasingly sophisticated defenses are the right bases for U.S. nuclear security (and that of our allies) going forward," wrote Rice in the Wall Street Journal newspaper.

If the "right commitments and understandings" are in place, she said, the treaty "deserves bipartisan support - whether in the lame-duck session or next year."

Republicans in the U.S. Senate have been holding up action on the new Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty, which President Barack Obama wants ratified by the end of the year.

Number-two Senate Republican Jon Kyl has suggested that there is insufficient time remaining in the current session of Congress to debate the treaty, which he has said lawmakers might block until March.

Rice expressed support for the deal, and said it is also time to look at ways to end proliferation in other countries to safeguard America's security.

"After this treaty, our focus must be on stopping dangerous proliferators - not on further reductions in the U.S. and Russian strategic arsenals, which are really no threat to each other or to international stability," she said.

Rice served for the eight years of the George W. Bush administration as national security adviser and secretary of state.

She added that the prospect of "loose nukes in the hands of a terrorist ... should give our governments a reason to work together beyond New START and address the threat from tactical nuclear weapons, which are smaller and more dispersed, and therefore harder to monitor and control."

Rice, who before joining the Bush administration worked in academia as a Russia expert, currently teaches political economy at Stanford University in California.

Last week, five former U.S. secretaries of state called for ratification of START, saying in a newspaper opinion piece that the treaty would continue a decades-long effort to make the world safer.

The article, which appeared in the Washington Post, was signed by secretaries of state for the past five Republican presidents: Henry Kissinger, George Shultz, James Baker, Lawrence Eagleburger and Colin Powell.

<http://www.defensenews.com/story.php?i=5182511&c=AME&s=TOP>

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Atlanta Journal-Constitution
Wednesday, December 8, 2010

Obama Confident Senate will Ratify START Nuke Pact

By JIM KUHNHENN, Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Pushing a top foreign policy priority, President Barack Obama expressed confidence Wednesday the Senate would ratify a U.S.-Russia nuclear arms pact before breaking for the holidays.

The president also reiterated his insistence that Congress approve a tax deal he negotiated with Republicans, urging lawmakers to examine the details of the deal and "get this done."

Obama drew specific attention Wednesday to Polish support for the treaty after meeting with Poland's president, Bronislaw Komorowski, in the White House Oval Office.

The treaty, known as START, has been a central piece of Obama's agenda for the lame duck session of Congress. Ratification has bogged down as Republicans have sought assurances that the U.S. arsenal would continue to be modernized.

Komorowski, seated at Obama's side, said START ratification would be an investment in a better and safer future, and said Poland wanted to help reset relations between Russia and the U.S.

Obama, noting he has discussed the pending treaty with Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell, said: "I am confident that we are going to be able to get the START treaty on the floor, debate and completed before we break for the holidays."

He said international allies, including Poland, and "basically the entire national security apparatus of previous Democratic and Republican administrations" have come out in support of the treaty — all of which, he says, gives him confidence the Senate will ratify the deal.

In recent days, a number of Republicans have voiced support for the agreement, increasing its chances of ratification.

Republicans, however, have also insisted that they would not take up any other issue until Congress completes action on the tax plan and on a broad spending measure to continue paying for government operations.

The tax plan is facing vigorous Democratic opposition in Congress. Obama forcefully rejected suggestions he had abandoned his allies to cut an agreement with the GOP.

"I think it is inaccurate to characterize Democrats, writ large, as quote-unquote betrayed."

He said economists predict higher job growth in 2011 and 2012 if Congress passes the agreement. It would extend expiring Bush-era tax rates to all taxpayers for two years. The deal avoids a tax increase next year. It also includes a 13-month extension of jobless benefits and a one-year cut in payroll taxes.

He urged lawmakers to "examine the agreement, look at the facts, have a thorough debate, but get this done. The American people are watching."

Associated Press White House Correspondent Ben Feller contributed to this report.

<http://www.ajc.com/news/nation-world/obama-confident-senate-will-770286.html>

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National Journal

Bush 41 Supports New START Ratification

His secretary of State and Joint Chiefs chairman had already endorsed the accord.

By George E. Condon Jr.

Wednesday, December 8, 2010

Former President George H. W. Bush added his name -- but not much else -- to the list of big-time Republican officials endorsing the New START treaty, which President Obama wants the Senate to ratify before going home for Christmas.

The former president's office released a terse 11-word statement with hardly a word to spare. The statement said simply, "I urge the United States Senate to ratify the START treaty."

Earlier in the day, after meeting in the Oval Office with Polish President Bronislaw Komorowski, Obama boasted of the many top national security officials he has lined up from past administrations, including former Secretaries of State Colin Powell, James A. Baker and George Shultz.

"I feel confident," said Obama, "that when you've got previous secretaries of State, Defense, basically the entire national security apparatus of previous Democratic and Republican administrations... saying that the New START treaty is important, that we are going to be able to get it through the Senate."

He also cited Komorowski's support, calling it significant because of his country's "thousand years of uneasy relations with Russia."

He said quick ratification is "very important... so that we can continue the verification process that is so important in reducing risks throughout that region."

A slew of major Republican administration officials have backed the nuclear arms accord, but former President George W. Bush and former Vice President Dick Cheney have declined to throw their clout behind it.

<http://nationaljournal.com/whitehouse/bush-41-supports-new-start-ratification-20101208>

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Gulf News – U.A.E.

Defector: Iran Hosted North Korean Technicians

A former Iranian diplomat who defected to the West this year said he saw North Korean technicians repeatedly travel to Iran, which Western officials fear is trying to develop nuclear weapons.

December 7, 2010

By Associated Press

Paris: A former Iranian diplomat who defected to the West this year said on Tuesday he saw North Korean technicians repeatedly travel to Iran, which Western officials fear is trying to develop nuclear weapons.

Mohammad Reza Heydari, who resigned in January from his post as Iranian consul in Norway, said he's "certain" the cooperation is continuing between his home country and North Korea.

The comments at a Paris think tank conference come amid rising international concerns that North Korea, which has already staged atomic tests, is cooperating with Iran on its nuclear programme.

Heydari said that from 2002 to 2007, when he headed the Iranian Foreign Ministry's office for airports, he saw many technicians from North Korea travel to Iran.

"I witnessed repeated roundtrips of North Korean specialists and technicians - given that I was right there at the border - who came to collaborate on the Iranian nuclear programme," he said through a translator.

Heydari said their visits were handled "in a very discreet way, so they could come through unnoticed."

Heydari said he also had contacts then with officials from Iran's Revolutionary Guards, and "it was clearly said that Iran was concentrating on two objectives ... the first was to build the range of surface-to-surface missiles, the second was to get a nuclear weapon with North Korea's help."

Today, Heydari heads the "Green Embassies Campaign," which seeks to rally opposition groups that adopted green as their symbolic colour against the Iranian government after last year's presidential election. The opposition claims Ahmadinejad won it through massive vote fraud.

Based on information from "friends and contacts" still in the know about the visits by North Korean technicians, Heydari said he is "100 per cent certain" they are continuing.

A US intelligence assessment - published among the flood of classified US State Department memos obtained by WikiLeaks - concluded that Iran received advanced North Korean missiles capable of targeting Western European capitals and giving Iran's arsenal a significantly longer reach than previously disclosed.

Heydari insisted a nuclear-armed Iran would "not be just a threat for the region, but for Europe" as well. Tehran says its nuclear programme is aimed to produce electricity, not weapons a claim many in the West have dismissed as inaccurate.

Heydari was the first of at least three Iranian diplomats who have defected this year. He said he quit his post in Norway to protest the killing of eight Iranian demonstrators during a December 27 opposition rally in Tehran.

A spokesman for the Iranian Embassy in Oslo said then that Heydari was lying about his defection, insisting that his job with Iran's Foreign Ministry had ended in December 2009 and that he had wanted to stay in Norway.

Heydari said he is working with about "five or six" current Iranian diplomats in Europe who also are preparing to defect, but he didn't provide details "because it's very dangerous for them."

<http://gulfnews.com/news/region/iran/defector-iran-hosted-north-korean-technicians-1.725195>

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Windsor Star – Canada

World Powers, Iran End Nuclear Talks, Agree to Meet Again

By Hui Min Neo, Agence France-Presse (AFP)

December 7, 2010

GENEVA - Six world powers and Iran wrapped up two days of talks in Geneva Tuesday on Tehran's contentious nuclear program, with an agreement to meet again in Istanbul next month despite clear differences.

The European Union's top diplomat Catherine Ashton told journalists they agreed to fresh talks in Istanbul to "discuss practical ideas and ways of co-operating towards the resolution of our core concerns about the nuclear issue."

But Iran's top negotiator Saeed Jalili said barely an hour later that both sides agreed only to further "talks based on co-operation" in Istanbul at the end of January and that everything else was "not true."

"The only outcome of our talks today was the agreement we reached to organize a set of talks based on co-operation . . . and anything other than this has no value," said Jalili, adding that additional points were a sign of "disrespect."

Jalili insisted that parties to the Geneva talks agreed on the final wording, and that he "didn't think parties would say differently from what happened."

"If this happened, then that would only create a high wall of mistrust.

"It only took us a few minutes to come to the hotel from the conference centre, it would be regretful if within a few minutes, the wording has been changed."

Jalili said that the next meeting would take place only "exclusively on the basis" of the wording agreed in the Geneva talks.

"We hope they will respect the conclusion of the meeting. As long as they respect it, the meeting will take place," he said.

The Swiss organiser of talks had originally announced that Jalili would hold a joint press conference with Ashton, but finally only the Iranian was present.

The Iranian nuclear negotiator would not be drawn into why Ashton cancelled.

In a separate meeting with the press, Ashton did not take questions, but only read out a statement, saying that world powers "recognize Iran's rights, but insist it fulfils its obligations."

The EU's top diplomat represented the five permanent powers of the Security Council — Britain, China, France, Russia and the United States, plus Germany at the Geneva meeting.

Besides holding plenaries with all parties, Jalili also met one-on-one with heads of several delegations, including Britain, China and Russia. In addition, he held a working dinner with Ashton on Monday night.

However, Jalili had refused a request by the head of the U.S. delegation, Under Secretary of State William Burns, for a bilateral meeting, a source close to the Geneva talks said.

A senior U.S. administration official said following the two-day negotiations: "All expectations for these talks were low and I can't say they were exceeded."

But he insisted that they were a start and that they had dealt three quarters of the time with the nuclear issue even though the discussions were "difficult, candid."

He underlined that suspension of enrichment "is still mandated by UN Security Council resolutions and that is still the position of the P5+1 (powers)."

In Istanbul, the six powers would be seeking "concrete steps that can be used to rebuild confidence," the official said.

Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad meanwhile called on the six — Britain, China, France, Germany, Russia and the United States — to lift international sanctions against his country if they want the talks "to be fruitful."

Iran is under four sets of UN sanctions over its refusal to suspend uranium enrichment, the sensitive process which can be used to make nuclear fuel or, in highly extended form, the fissile core of an atom bomb.

Iran rejects claims by the West and Israel that its uranium enrichment program masks a covert bid to acquire nuclear weapons, maintaining that it is developing nuclear energy solely for peaceful purposes.

Western sources had described the first day of talks as "good, constructive, and in a good atmosphere."

Iran triggered heightened concern in the West on Sunday by revealing it had taken a new step in the nuclear fuel cycle, producing its first home-grown batch of the raw material for enrichment, uranium yellowcake and making it "self sufficient," according to the country's atomic chief.

<http://www.windsorstar.com/technology/Iran+nuclear+talks+Tehran+wants+sanctions+lifted/3938431/story.html>

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Radio France Internationale (RFI) – France

Tuesday, 7 December 2010

Sanctions must be Lifted for Successful Talks, Says Ahmadinejad

By RFI

Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad says sanctions against his country must be lifted if nuclear talks in January are to succeed. Following two days of meetings in Geneva, discussions in late January will focus on "cooperation and find common points" according to a member of Iran's delegation.

"If you come to the negotiations by cancelling all the nasty things and wrong decisions that you have adopted lift resolutions, sanctions and some restrictions that you have created then the talks will definitely be fruitful," Ahmadinejad said in a speech broadcast on state television, according to the AFP news agency.

"The negotiations will resume in end January in Istanbul to discuss cooperation and find commons points," an Iranian member of the delegation told the AFP news agency.

The discussions in Geneva brought together the European Union's foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton and Saeed Jalili, the Secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council, as well as representatives from Britain, China, France, Germany, Russia and the United States.

<http://www.english.rfi.fr/middle-east/20101207-sanctions-must-be-lifted-successful-talks-says-ahmadinejad>

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Bangkok Post – Thailand

Iranians 'Want' Nuclear Arms

8 December 2010

Agence France-Presse (AFP)

Many Iranians are worried about international nuclear sanctions but also want the country to have atomic weapons, according to a survey by a US institute revealed Wednesday.

The poll, carried out by Charney Research for the International Peace Institute, a New York-based think tank, also indicated that most Iranians voted for President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in a controversial June 2009 election that many countries said was fixed.

Forty-seven percent of Iranians said sanctions ordered by the United Nations, and by individual countries, were having a big impact, said the poll of 700 people carried out in early September. Fifty three percent believed it is Iran's major foreign policy problem.

But 71 percent of Iranians want the country to have nuclear weapons and only 21 percent opposed such a move. Lead researcher Craig Charney said this compared to 52 percent support for nuclear weapons and 42 percent opposition in a similar poll in 2007.

The fourth round of sanctions was passed by the UN Security Council in June this year. Iran refuses to halt uranium enrichment but has denied the West's accusations that it is seeking a nuclear bomb.

Charney said the study shows "you can't just propose the grand bargain and expect Iranians to accept it straight away."

With international tensions rising, the poll indicated that the number of people who were pro-United States had fallen from 34 percent in 2008 to eight percent now. Sixty-eight percent believed that if there was an attack on Iran, it would come from the United States.

The poll also indicated broad support for Ahmadinejad, even though he is a mistrusted figure in the West, and other countries in the Middle East.

Sixty percent of those asked said they had voted for the populist Ahmadinejad in the June 2009 poll, close to the official figures released by the government.

IPI vice president Warren Hoge said the survey was ordered for a private Middle East forum in the United Arab Emirates held in early November and attended by 21 foreign ministers from the Middle East, Europe and Asia.

He said Palestinian leader Mahmud Abbas and former British prime minister Tony Blair, the diplomatic Quartet's Middle East envoy, was among those present but declined to name the participants.

Charney said the poll was carried out by telephone from Istanbul.

<http://www.bangkokpost.com/breakingnews/210353/iranians-want-nuclear-arms>

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Los Angeles Times

U.S., South Korea, Japan Reject Six-Party Talks on North Korea

Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton meets with South Korean and Japanese diplomats to form a united front.

By Brian Bennett, Los Angeles Times

December 6, 2010

Reporting from Washington — With tensions still high on the Korean peninsula, Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton on Monday met with South Korean and Japanese diplomats in Washington in hopes of building a unified approach to respond to future provocations by North Korea.

In what Clinton described as the first of "regular" meetings, the three nations rejected a call by China to return to the stalled six-party talks that also include Russia and are aimed at pressuring North Korea to drop its nuclear ambitions.

Instead, the U.S., South Korea and Japan laid out demands for returning to the negotiating table with North Korea. The North must resume diplomatic relations with the South and take "concrete steps" toward following agreements it has made to abandon its nuclear program, Clinton said.

"The six-party talks cannot be a substitute for action," she said.

Clinton's effort to pull Japan and South Korea into a closer working relationship reflects a growing U.S. frustration with China's hesitation to condemn a North Korean artillery attack last month that killed four South Koreans and with Beijing's inability to persuade the North's leadership to abandon its uranium enrichment plans.

"There is a sense that Chinese diplomacy in handling North Korea has its limitations," said John Park, an Asia specialist at the United States Institute of Peace.

As a show of military support for South Korea, Adm. Michael G. Mullen, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, will

travel to the country to meet Wednesday with its defense minister and chairman of the military, a trip intended to reassure South Koreans that the U.S. "will continue to stand by them in defense of their territory," said spokesman Navy Capt. John Kirby.

North Korean leader Kim Jong Il's youngest son, Kim Jong Eun, recently was named to senior positions in the ruling Workers' Party, and U.S. Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates sees North Korea's recent provocations as actions to show the son's toughness to the country's powerful military during a period of succession.

"Nobody wants a war on the Korean peninsula," Gates said Monday on his way to Oman. "And I think we just have to work with the Chinese to see if we can bring some greater stability, some greater predictability, to the regime in Pyongyang."

<http://www.latimes.com/news/nationworld/world/la-fg-clinton-korea-20101207,0,4055300.story>

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Itar-Tass News Agency – Russia

US, Japan Set Up Joint Nuclear Police to Fight Smuggling

9 December 2010

TOKYO, December 9 (Itar-Tass) - The United States and Japan are busy setting up a joint group to combat the smuggling of radioactive substances. The group specifically is called upon to work out international techniques to identify a source of leaked nuclear materials.

The group will include scientific experts as well as staff members of the US Federal Bureau of Investigation and Japanese police, a high official of the American administration has told the Kyodo news agency.

The official said that already now it is possible to determine confidently enough, on the strength of the composition of isotopes, where this or that radioactive material was produced. However, the joint group intends to suggest general rules for performing such expert examinations, the rules that would be recognized by main countries.

Analysts in Washington and Tokyo regard an exact identification of the source of a leaked radioactive substance as an important means to consolidate the nuclear weapons' non-proliferation regime. The joint "nuclear police" of the two countries also intend to carry out concrete operations to cut off smuggling channels and give expert assistance to other countries.

<http://www.itar-tass.com/eng/level2.html?NewsID=15761291&PageNum=0>

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Himalayan Times – Nepal

December 9, 2010

China, North Korea Reach Consensus over Crisis: Report

By Reuters

SEOUL/BEIJING: China and North Korea reached consensus on the Korean peninsula crisis after "candid" talks, Chinese state media reported, which analysts said suggested Pyongyang likely agreed not to inflame the situation.

The meeting came as Beijing and Washington continued to trade barbs over how best to deal with the spike in tension on the divided peninsula, with China rejecting U.S. pressure to take its impoverished ally to task over last month's artillery attack on the South.

China's Xinhua news agency said State Councilor Dai Bingguo met the isolated North's ailing leader Kim Jong-il for talks in the Pyongyang and "the two sides reached consensus on bilateral relations and the situation on the Korean peninsula after candid and in-depth talks."

North Korea's KCNA news agency said the talks were "held over the issue of boosting the friendly and cooperative relations between the two countries and a series of issues of mutual concern."

"It's difficult to expect much in the consensus more than a general agreement on the need to resolve the situation ... in a peaceful manner and through dialogue, and that they can't have tensions escalating," said Park Young-ho of the Korea Institute of National Unification.

Neither news agency gave any further details.

"It is hard to say what the consensus Xinhua mentioned really is, but from the words 'in-depth' and 'candid', I think that Kim Jong-il must have had a good attitude toward the meeting," said Wang Dong of the School of International Studies at Peking University.

"Dai may have gotten some kind of verbal promise from North Korea that there will be no escalation from its side, as China may have told Kim Jong-il to make an expression of goodwill to bring the other four countries back to the six-party talks table," Wang said.

The talks on Pyongyang's nuclear weapons program comprise the two Koreas, China, Japan, Russia and the United States but have been on hold for about two years.

The North wants to resume the talks, but Washington and Seoul have said they will only consider a return when Pyongyang shows it is sincere about denuclearization.

BEIJING VS WASHINGTON

The United States has repeatedly called on Beijing to bring its ally to heel after the North bombarded a South Korean island last month, killing four people, and revealed advances to its nuclear program opening another route to make an atomic bomb.

Earlier on Thursday, the U.S. military chief criticized Beijing for enabling its ally Pyongyang's "reckless behavior," prompting a sharp rebuke from Beijing.

"I would like to question that person who has accused China as to what he has done for maintaining peace and stability in the region," Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Jiang Yu told reporters in Beijing. "Military threats are not the solution. That will only worsen regional tensions."

The South has vowed to hit back hard against its neighbor if Pyongyang orders a repeat of last month's attack, bolstering its defenses in the disputed West Sea area and amending military rules of engagement to permit the use of fighter jets and bombs.

"I actually believe that because these provocations continue, and seemingly at a more frequent interval, that the danger is going up and that steps must be taken to ensure that they stop," Mullen said.

He also said that the United States wants sustainable military ties with China, instead of on-and-off contact. At the same time, Beijing said it had sent General Ma Xiaotian, deputy chief of general staff of the People's Liberation Army, to the United States for military-to-military talks.

Mullen justified staging joint military exercises with South Korea off the west coast of the peninsula, saying the Yellow Sea is free waters where the U.S. military has operated and will continue to do so.

A U.S. military official said Washington was encouraging Seoul to think strategically and in the long-term rather than focusing on tit-for-tat retaliation.

"Any actions that are taken -- actions, reactions -- have to be done very carefully to make sure that we don't escalate, that they are proportional, and at the same time send a very strong signal that the provocations must cease," Mullen said.

Analysts say Pyongyang will likely stage further, possibly bigger incidents, in the future to cement a leadership transition from ailing leader Kim Jong-il to his son. They say the North, which has a military-first policy, also stages "provocations" to extract concessions at multilateral talks.

Earlier on Thursday, North Korea released a report on defending last month's attack on Yeonpyeong, warning that the danger of clashes in disputed waters off the west coast will remain as long as Seoul and Washington are hostile toward it.

The North fired a barrage of artillery shells at Yeonpyeong, one of five South Korean islands near the contested Northern Limit Line (NLL), destroying dozens of homes there.

Pyongyang does not recognize the NLL, arguing that the demarcation was established without its consent after the 1950-1953 Korean war.

<http://www.thehimalayantimes.com/fullNews.php?headline=China%2C+North+Korea+reach+consensus+over+crisis%3A+report&NewsID=268842>

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America's Nightmare

The leaked documents show that the US is convinced that Pakistan will never cooperate fully in fighting extremist groups.

By Harsh V Pant

The latest disclosures from WikiLeaks merely confirm what has long been known that nuclear weapons in Pakistan have been giving sleepless nights to American policy-makers. Although President Barack Obama and his predecessor, George Bush, both have made repeated public expressions of confidence in Pakistani safeguards, the issue remains one of the top priorities for Washington. And it is not only the US but states like the UK, Russia and Israel too remain equally concerned.

Washington has pushed Pakistan since 2007 to accept help in moving highly enriched uranium out of an aging Pakistani nuclear reactor, fearing it could be diverted for illicit purposes. In May 2009, then US Ambassador to Pakistan Anne Patterson reported that Pakistan was refusing to allow American experts to visit the site and cited concern expressed by a Pakistani official that “if the local media got word of the fuel removal, ‘they certainly would portray it as the United States taking Pakistan’s nuclear weapons’.”

As the Obama administration was starting to review its Af-Pak policy, an intelligence report suggested that that while Pakistan’s weapons were well secured, there was deep, continuing concern about ‘insider access,’ meaning elements in the military or intelligence services. The US Ambassador wrote in a separate document that “our major concern is not having an Islamic militant steal an entire weapon but rather the chance someone working in GoP (government of Pakistan) facilities could gradually smuggle enough material out to eventually make a weapon.”

As a consequence, the two vital American interest identified in the region included not only the defeat of al-Qaeda but also making sure terrorists could never gain access to Pakistan’s nuclear programme. The second goal was classified so as not to anger Islamabad. Not surprisingly then that even as American officials were trying to persuade Pakistani officials to give up nuclear material, they were quietly seeking to block Pakistan from trying to buy material that would help it produce tritium, the crucial ingredient needed to increase the power of nuclear weapons. And yet a December 2008 US intelligence briefing to Nato noted that “Despite impending economic catastrophe, Pakistan is producing nuclear weapons at a faster rate than any other country in the world.”

When Pakistan decided to release A Q Khan from house arrest in early 1998, Richard A Boucher, the top State Department official for South Asia, suggested that the embassy in Islamabad should “express Washington’s strong opposition to the release of Dr Khan and urge the GoP to continue holding him under house arrest.”

Weak president

The cables also reveal the weakness of the civilian government of President Asif Ali Zardari who had been worried that the military might take him out. From the documents the Pakistani army chief, General Kayani emerges as the main power centre of power in Pakistan, as a stubborn guarantor of what he sees as Pakistan’s national interest and an army chief who meddles in civilian politics but stops short of overturning the elected order.

Interestingly, even the Saudi King finds the leadership of Zardari in fighting extremists ineffectual reflected in one of the cables that “King Abdullah firmly believes that Asif Zardari is the primary obstacle to the government’s ability to move unequivocally to end terrorist safe havens there (when the head is rotten, it affects the whole body).”

Washington’s frustration at its inability to persuade the Pakistani army and intelligence apparatus to cease supporting the Afghan Taliban and other militants is also palpable. It is clear from the leaked documents that Washington is convinced that Pakistan will never cooperate fully in fighting the whole range of extremist groups. It is also well understood in the US that Pakistan is preparing for the eventual US withdrawal from Afghanistan, viewing the militant groups as an insurance and as a means of exerting influence inside Afghanistan and against India.

The assessment of the former US ambassador is blunt: “There is no chance that Pakistan will view enhanced assistance levels in any field as sufficient compensation for abandoning support for these groups, which it sees as an important part of its national security apparatus against India.” Underlining her concerns about burgeoning US-India ties, she said “feeds Pakistani establishment paranoia and pushes them closer to both Afghan and Kashmir focused terrorist groups.”

It is no surprise then that US-Pakistani ties are once again in turmoil. Washington is trying its best to assuage Pakistan’s concerns. American officials have apologised and promised damage control, asking their Pakistani counterparts not to read too much into this matter. “The US deeply regrets the disclosure of any information that was intended to be confidential,” US ambassador Cameron Munter wrote in ‘News’, an English-language daily, and its Urdu-language counterpart last week. “And we condemn it.”

While Pakistani officials have dismissed fears over the safety of the nation's nuclear weapons, they have expressed frustration over how the world's sole superpower can't keep its secrets and confidences, making it so much more difficult to be America's ally.

The question that Washington needs to ask: Will Pakistan ever be a trustworthy partner in its war against terror? If not, then what are the alternatives? Getting this answer right will go a long way in solving many of the problems the US is facing in Af-Pak.

<http://www.deccanherald.com/content/118895/americas-nightmare.html>

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The Star – Malaysia

Tuesday December 7, 2010

Russia, U.S. Sign Deal to Reduce Nuclear Risk

MOSCOW (Reuters) - Russia and the United States agreed on Tuesday to study the possibility of making Russian research reactors less of a nuclear proliferation risk by converting them to the use of low-enriched uranium fuel.

U.S. Deputy Energy Secretary Daniel Poneman signed the agreement with the head of Russia's state nuclear corporation Rosatom, Sergei Kiriyyenko, during a visit aimed to further cooperation on nuclear security and peaceful atomic energy.

Russia has dozens of research reactors that run on highly enriched uranium (HEU) fuel, prompting fears that it could fall into the wrong hands and be used to make nuclear weapons.

Experts say converting reactors to the use of low-enriched uranium (LEU), as has been done with some in the United States and other nations, would significantly reduce that risk.

http://thestar.com.my/news/story.asp?file=/2010/12/7/worldupdates/2010-12-07T152840Z_01_NOOTR_RTRMDNC_0_-534004-1&sec=Worldupdates

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RIA Novosti – Russian Information Agency

Nuclear Warheads Ready for Bulava Missile as Test Program Picks up Steam

7 December 2010

Nuclear warheads have been completed for Russia's new Bulava submarine-launched ballistic missile, its designer Yury Solomonov said on Tuesday in an interview with Russia's Natsionalnaya Oborona (National Defense) journal to be published later in December.

"The nuclear payload will have been completed by the time the missiles are installed in the carrier [submarine]," Solomonov said.

Four Bulava test launches will be carried out in the second half of December from the Borei-class nuclear-powered missile submarine Yury Dolgoruky, he said.

In the last test in late October, a Bulava missile was successfully test-fired from the Dmitry Donskoi nuclear-powered submarine in the White Sea, hitting a target on a test range in Russia's Far East Kamchatka region some 6,000 kilometers to the east.

It was the second successful firing in a month, coming after several failures.

A government source had previously said that the second stage of Bulava tests will start at the end of May 2011, if the launches in 2010 are a success.

The Russian military expects the Bulava, along with Topol-M land-based ballistic missiles, to become the core of Russia's nuclear triad.

Despite previous failures, officially blamed on manufacturing faults, the Russian military has insisted that there is no alternative to Bulava and pledged to continue testing the missile until it is ready for service with the Navy.

The Bulava (SS-NX-30) SLBM carries up to 10 MIRV warheads and has a range of over 8,000 kilometers (5,000 miles).

The Russian navy plans to deploy Bulava on modified Project 941 and the new Project 955 Borei class submarines.

MOSCOW, December 7 (RIA Novosti)

http://en.rian.ru/military_news/20101207/161664867.html

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Barents Observer – Norway

Four Bulava Tests Scheduled for December

December 7, 2010

Chief designer confirms the nuclear warheads to be put on Russia's prestige Bulava submarine based missile have been completed.

- The nuclear payload will have been completed by the time the missiles are installed onboard the carrier, Yury Solomonov says in an interview with Natsionalnaya Oborona journal, reports RIA Novosti on Tuesday.

The Bulava missile will be placed onboard Russia's new 4th generation SSBN, the Borei-class. The first Borei-class submarine, the *Yury Dolgoruky* was commissioned last year and has been on many sea trails during the last year. A total of eight Borei-class submarines will be built at Sevmashtal' naval yard in Severodvinsk by the White Sea.

RIA Novosti reports that four Bulava test launches will be carried out in the second half of December. The tests will be the first Bulava tests to be carried out from *Yury Dolgoruky*.

The Bulava tests have so far been carried out from *Dmitry Donskoi*, a Typhoon-class submarine based in Severodvinsk. The last test took place in late October this year, the second successful firing in a month, after several failures during the last years.

<http://www.barentsobserver.com/four-bulava-tests-scheduled-for-december.4858051-58932.html>

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RIA Novosti – Russian Information Agency

Bulava Missile could be Modified for Ground Launches - Designer

8 December 2010

Russia's new submarine-launched ballistic missile (SLBM) Bulava could be fired from ground-based launchers after a slight modification, its designer Yury Solomonov said.

"This task is viable...although some parts - about 10 percent cost-wise - must be adopted for ground launches," Solomonov said in an interview with Russia's National Defense magazine to be published later in December.

The Bulava (SS-NX-30) three-stage liquid and solid propellant SLBM carries up to 10 MIRV warheads and has a range of over 8,000 kilometers (5,000 miles).

The missile is both lighter and more sophisticated than the Topol-M land-based ICBM. It has a low flight trajectory and uses a liquid-propellant third stage to allow high maneuverability during warhead separation.

The Russian military expects the Bulava, along with Topol-M ICBM, to become the core of Russia's nuclear triad.

Despite previous failures, officially blamed on manufacturing faults, the Russian military has insisted that there is no alternative to Bulava and pledged to continue testing the missile until it is ready for service with the Navy.

In the last test in late October, a Bulava missile was successfully test-fired from the Dmitry Donskoi nuclear-powered submarine in the White Sea, hitting a target on a test range in Russia's Far East Kamchatka region some 6,000 kilometers to the east.

According to some defense sources, the next test launch of the Bulava SLBM has been scheduled for December 17.

The Russian Navy plans to deploy Bulava on modified Typhoon class and the new Borey class submarines.

MOSCOW, December 8 (RIA Novosti)

http://en.rian.ru/military_news/20101208/161690695.html

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People's Daily – China

Obama Commits to Base Missile Interceptors in Poland

December 9, 2010

President Barack Obama on Wednesday committed the United States to basing land-based SM-3 interceptors in Poland in the 2018 timeframe as part of its NATO-wide missile defense system.

In a joint statement after meeting with visiting Polish President Bronislaw Komorowski at the White House, Obama expressed his gratitude for the commitment by the Polish government to host this system, saying Poland's commitment is "an extremely valuable contribution to the development of a NATO missile defense capability."

At a November summit in Lisbon, Portugal, NATO's 28 member states agreed to develop "the capability to defend our populations and territories against ballistic missile attack as a core element of our collective defense."

The Phased Adaptive Approach to European missile defense, unveiled by Obama in September 2009 to replace the Bush-era controversial missile defense shield program in the Czech Republic and Poland, will be deployed in four stages from next year until 2020 and would be capable of intercepting long-range and intercontinental ballistic missiles.

Under the plan, U.S. interceptor missiles and radar will be stationed in Europe, for which NATO member states have to invest 200 million euros (280 million dollars) to link their existing anti-missile systems to the U.S. system.

Obama and Komorowski agreed to enhance bilateral defense ties in the spirit of the 2008 U.S.-Polish Declaration on Strategic Cooperation, which includes increased cooperation between air forces of the two countries with the aim of strengthening interoperability as NATO allies through regular joint training exercises and the establishment of a U.S. air detachment in Poland to support periodic rotation of U.S. military aircraft.

The joint statement said the United States will place 800 U.S. troops under Polish tactical command in Ghazni province in Afghanistan and provide logistical assistance by loaning an additional 20 mine-resistant ambush-protected vehicles to the Polish military.

They reaffirmed their commitment to strengthening the U.S.- Polish alliance by expanding strategic and defense cooperation, supporting deeper economic links and promoting democratic institutions in Europe and around the world.

"The two leaders hailed NATO's historic decision in Lisbon to create a strategic and modern partnership with Russia," the statement said. "The United States and Poland are pursuing complementary policies of strengthening ties with Russia."

"President Komorowski expressed Poland's strong support for the prompt ratification of the new START treaty, as it would bolster Polish and European security and contribute to the Non-Proliferation Treaty's disarmament goals," the statement added.

The treaty, signed in Prague in April, is seen as a major accomplishment for the Obama administration and part of its efforts to reset relations with Russia. Obama has been pushing for its passage this year in the U.S. Senate.

Source: Xinhua

<http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/90001/90777/90852/7225337.html>

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Global Security Newswire

Pentagon Official Dismisses Prospects for Multiyear Nuclear Complex Funding

Thursday, December 9, 2010

By Elaine M. Grossman, Global Security Newswire

WASHINGTON -- A senior U.S. defense official on Tuesday ruled out the idea that the White House would soon seek from Congress a legislative commitment for multiple years of funding for the nuclear weapons complex (see *GSN*, Dec. 6).

James Miller, the Defense Department's principal deputy undersecretary for policy, said that although the Obama administration last month announced it would seek more than \$85 billion to modernize the nuclear arsenal over the next decade, it is too early to lock in funds with an advance request.

Until more solid cost estimates for key construction projects are available, the executive branch is not prepared to commit to a so-called "multiyear appropriation" for nuclear weapon maintenance and modernization, despite pressure by some GOP lawmakers to do just that, he told a Brookings Institution audience.

"It doesn't make sense to [seek] advance funding today when there's such a wide range of possible costs, when the designs aren't locked up," Miller said, referring to plans for a new facility in Tennessee to process uranium and a second structure in New Mexico to handle plutonium.

Miller's remarks appear to put to rest the notion that the administration might early next year seek congressional approval not only for fiscal 2012 nuclear modernization funds, but also money for fiscal 2013 and 2014. He indicated that in a few years, though, the White House might revisit the idea of a multiyear funding request.

Perhaps more importantly, the defense policy leader's comments seem to renew questions about whether Energy Department officials had White House support earlier this year when they reportedly floated the idea of multiyear appropriations to Republican critics of a U.S.-Russian nuclear arms control agreement (see *GSM*, Nov. 15).

Officials from the department's semiautonomous National Nuclear Security Administration have met repeatedly over the past few months with Senator Jon Kyl (R-Ariz.) and other Senate Republicans and their staffs in an effort to cultivate their support for ratification of the New START agreement.

In at least one of those meetings, NNSA officials suggested that Kyl could seek appropriations legislation that would secure three years of funding for portions of the nuclear complex in advance, rather than underwrite atomic infrastructure modernization on a year-to-year basis, the senator confirmed late last month.

Kyl, the Senate Republican whip, has become his party's point man in the debate over New START ratification. He has called on the administration to assure lawmakers that there is sufficient funding to keep the nuclear arsenal viable once treaty reductions are implemented, among other demands.

Signed by President Obama and Russian President Dmitry Medvedev in April, the nuclear arms pact would require support from two-thirds of the U.S. Senate before it could enter into force. During the current lame-duck session of Congress, that would demand "yes" votes from all of the chamber's 58 Democrats plus nine Republicans.

Under the treaty, the United States and Russia would each cap their deployed nuclear warheads at 1,550, and limit strategic delivery vehicles to 700. Another 100 delivery platforms -- like aircraft, ICBMs or submarine-launched missiles -- could be kept in reserve.

In a September meeting with staff members for Kyl and Senator Bob Corker (R-Tenn.) about ways in which future funds for the nuclear complex might be assured, at least one NNSA official suggested that the White House and Congress seal the increases with a multiyear commitment, according to the senator.

"Responsible advance funding mechanisms exist, such as [an] FY-12 request for three-year rolling funding [as] recommended by some NNSA budget specialists," Kyl told fellow GOP lawmakers in a November 24 memorandum, also signed by Corker.

"NNSA briefers" -- including Phil Niedzielski-Eichner, the agency's assistant deputy administrator for planning, resources and integration in defense programs -- recommended a multiyear appropriations approach during a September 27 meeting with the Senate staffers, according to a footnote in the Kyl-Corker memo.

Their missive makes clear, though, that the White House has not officially endorsed such an approach.

"The administration is ignoring the benefits of ensuring funding commitments for these facilities early in the budget process," the two senators told their colleagues.

The nuclear agency today declined comment on the matter. Last month, NNSA spokesman Damien LaVera similarly would not address the reported discussions about approaches for funding, but did say the "administration is fully committed to modernizing the nuclear arsenal and nuclear complex."

The multiyear appropriations practice is rare but not unheard of. For example, the Defense Department has over the years occasionally proposed multiyear appropriations for aircraft or other major procurement programs. However, such proposals are almost always controversial on Capitol Hill because they deny lawmakers the ability to review and alter program-funding plans on an annual basis.

From the perspective of an agency or program office, such multiyear commitments allow for planning stability and - in theory, at least -- lower contracting costs.

Word that NNSA officials had proposed a multiyear funding scheme without White House endorsement has outraged some New START proponents, who see the nuclear complex as trying to take advantage of the treaty debate to pad its own budget.

"Of all of the stupid, self-destructive things the nuclear-weapons complex has done over the years, this would take the cake," Jeffrey Lewis groused last month on his well regarded blog, ArmsControlWonk.com.

If Kyl ultimately opposes New START and the administration fails to win enough GOP votes to ratify the pact, NNSA officials will have boxed in the White House on a huge nuclear-complex funding package but without the benefit of treaty-enforced bilateral arms reductions with the Russians, argued Lewis, an arms control expert at the Monterey Institute of International Studies.

After reviewing the Kyl-Corker memo, Lewis would not dismiss the possibility that NNSA officials other than the agency budget representative named in the senators' memo were responsible for floating the multiyear funding idea, particularly because the document misstates Niedzielski-Eichner's title.

The senators' message seems to "suggest the proposal for a three-year rolling appropriation came from somewhere in the Office of the Deputy Administrator for Defense Programs," Lewis told *GSN* this week. "If true, it would be highly unusual, to say the least, for the bureaucracy to be so far out in front of the White House."

The nuclear arms analyst sees Kyl and Corker's mention of the NNSA proposal as a shot across the bow for the White House.

"I think they used that footnote to send a message about power to the president: 'Your bureaucracy is loyal to us, not you,'" Lewis said.

Some administration officials have said that NNSA discussions with Kyl and other senators over the past several months have been conducted with White House support, and -- like those led by the State and Defense departments -- were aimed at bolstering the effort to ratify New START.

One government source, though, said that if agency "freelancing" counter to White House policies actually took place, it could be consequential.

"I don't know that I've known every conversation and [all] briefings that have occurred with Senate staff by NNSA or DOD," the senior administration official told *Global Security Newswire* in an interview last month. "[The] routine business of government is that these conversations go on all the time. So accusing someone of freelancing is a very serious thing."

For his part, Miller said the two new facilities for which multiyear appropriations have been discussed are in relatively early stages of planning, with designs today roughly 45 percent complete and cost estimates varying widely. The Energy Department does not expect to have accurate estimates of total costs for the Uranium Processing Facility and the Chemistry and Metallurgy Research Replacement plant until the designs are nearly finished, in roughly two and a half years, he said.

Once construction designs are about 90 percent complete, "I think it would be appropriate to consider the possibility of advance funding," Miller said. Even then, though, there might be voices in Washington arguing against tying budgeters' hands for several years at a time.

"It will raise other issues," the defense policy leader said. "Obviously, the Office of Management and Budget will have a view," he said, referring to the White House office that oversees all federal dollars. "It's certainly worth considering, but it's just where we are right now -- it's just certainly not the right time."

Miller also said he could not support a provision in currently pending "continuing resolution" appropriations legislation that would link the administration's proposed fiscal 2011 budget increases for the nuclear complex -- \$624 million of a \$7 billion NNSA weapons budget -- to Senate ratification of New START.

Under the House-proposed legislation, the additional funds would "be available only upon the Senate giving its advice and consent to the ratification of the treaty." The Democratic measure is aimed at ensuring that if Senate Republicans prevent New START from proceeding, the budgetary sweeteners offered to win their ratification support would be withdrawn.

Although the White House announced the nuclear arsenal plus-ups in the context of discussions about treaty ratification with Republican lawmakers, Obama administration leaders insist the increases are needed for weapons modernization -- with or without New START (see *GSN*, Nov. 17).

"The administration's strong view is that the treaty makes sense on its own merits, and the administration's strong view is that additional funding for NNSA makes sense on its own merits," Miller said at the event. "So, no, we don't support that linkage."

http://www.globalsecuritynewswire.org/gsn/nw_20101209_8313.php

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December 7, 2010

China Joins the Axis of Evil

Pyongyang's nuclear program would have been impossible without Beijing.

By BRET STEPHENS

Last month, U.S. nuclear scientist Siegfried Hecker paid his fourth visit to North Korea, where he was granted a tour of some of the hermit kingdom's nuclear facilities. Think WikiLeaks is bad? Compared to what the former director of the Los Alamos lab saw, it's nothing.

Mr. Hecker was given a tour of a construction site where Pyongyang intends to build a 100-megawatt reactor. Next he was taken to a uranium enrichment facility. "The first look through the windows of the observation deck into the two long high-bay areas was stunning," relates Mr. Hecker. "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 below us."

Nor was that all. Mr. Hecker also writes that "The control room was astonishingly modern. Unlike the reprocessing facility and reactor control room, which looked like 1950s U.S. or 1980s Soviet instrumentation, this control room would fit into any modern American processing facility."

The North Koreans told Mr. Hecker they had developed all of this indigenously. I asked Thomas Reed and Danny Stillman, both former nuclear-weapons designers and authors of "The Nuclear Express," an excellent history of nuclear proliferation, what they thought were the chances of that. Answer: "Zero."

What does this mean? For starters, it means that Pyongyang's nuclear efforts are not, or not merely, of the what-else-do-you-expect-from-these-nutcases variety. Some other entity—or regime—has made a considered decision to actively support the North's efforts to field an ambitious nuclear program.

So who is it?

Messrs. Reed and Stillman have their suspicions. Could it be Iran? Tehran, Damascus and Pyongyang have such a flourishing trade in nuclear know-how that it seems a good possibility. Various news outlets have noted the resemblance of the North's enrichment facility to the Iranian one in Natanz. But the authors are doubtful. "Not likely," they say. "[The Iranians] can't even make their own machines work."

What about Pakistan? "A possibility." The nuclear and ballistic missile trade between Pakistan and North Korea dates to the early 1990s, when Pakistani scientist A.Q. Khan was perfecting his import-export model. Then, too, the centrifuges Mr. Hecker observed appeared to be of the second-generation, P-2 variety used by Pakistan.

Yet the Islamabad-Pyongyang express was shut down years ago, while the North Korean facility appears to be brand new. It's unlikely that Pakistan would have been able to supply the large numbers of centrifuges the North has assembled. And then there's that state-of-the-art control room, probably not a Pakistani specialty.

Which leaves China, the "most likely" provider of the North's new toys, according to the authors. "There is no possibility," they say, "of North Korea achieving what nuclear capability it has without Chinese help."

Mr. Stillman in particular knows whereof he speaks: He was among the first foreigners ever to visit China's nuclear-test base at Malan. In "The Nuclear Express," he and Mr. Reed note that beginning in 1982, the Chinese "decided to actively support nuclear proliferation in the Third World, specifically the Muslim and Marxist worlds. In the decade that followed, Deng's government then trained scientists, transferred technology, sold delivery systems, and built infrastructure in furtherance of that policy."

Why the government of Deng Xiaoping embarked on that very Maoist course remains a bit of a mystery. Yet embark it did: A.Q. Khan almost certainly obtained his first bomb blueprint from China, and China may also have been the site of Pakistan's first nuclear test in May 1990. In 1997, the CIA testified that "China was the most significant supplier of WMD-related technology to foreign countries."

In 2002 came news that Chinese experts had worked on Iran's nuclear facility in Isfahan. That same year, the Washington Times reported that a Chinese company had sold North Korea 20 tons of tributyl phosphate, a key ingredient for extracting plutonium from spent fuel rods. And thanks to WikiLeaks, we know that China facilitates North Korean weapons exports—over insistent U.S. protests—to sundry foreign destinations.

It's time the U.S. drew appropriate conclusions from this. Every effort to negotiate with the North has failed. Yesterday, President Obama called Hu Jintao to ask for help with Pyongyang. But as proliferation expert Henry Sokolski notes, what's the point of urging Beijing to be part of the solution when it's so willfully part of the problem? China has signed on to nearly every nonproliferation agreement around. Yet it continues to flout all of them.

This is not the behavior of a status quo power, but of a revolutionary one supporting activities and regimes that represent the most acute threat to global security. If it continues unchecked, it is China that should be sanctioned—and the North's facilities destroyed.

<http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748704156304576003124111945808.html>

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Christian Science Monitor
OPINION

Chief Obstacle to Iran's Nuclear Effort: Its Own Bad Technology

Continuing technical challenges mean Iran is still probably 3 to 5 years away from acquiring a nuclear bomb. Diplomats should exploit that leverage.

By Greg Thielmann and Peter Crail
December 8, 2010

Washington - Long before the mysterious Stuxnet computer virus struck an apparent blow at Iran's nuclear program, Tehran's nuclear effort was being delayed by a far more mundane problem: bad technology.

The technical hurdles that Iran continues to face with its nuclear program help explain why US officials say Iran is still 3 to 5 years away from acquiring the bomb. This provides time and leverage for diplomatic approaches to be pursued.

Bad centrifuge design

The most fundamental problem with Iran's enrichment program appears to be its own centrifuge design. Called the P-1 after a Pakistani mock-up of a Dutch design pilfered in the 1970s, the centrifuge that Iran has been attempting to operate is known to be temperamental and fault-prone. Centrifuge technology is already a very difficult process to master, since it requires constructing complex machinery at precise specifications to allow the cylindrical devices to spin at supersonic speeds, day in and day out. Reverse engineering faulty, smuggled equipment, as Iran has tried to do, only makes this challenge worse.

In fact, during an Arms Control Association briefing last month, former inspections chief Olli Heinonen said Iran's P-1 centrifuge "seems to be a cul-de-sac," stating that many of the delays Iran has experienced most likely "has to do with the design itself." Iran's own efforts to try to develop a better replacement seem to bear this out, and those efforts have been stalled in the R&D phase for years. "They are still struggling with the final design and have limitations in getting raw materials," Mr. Heinonen said about that replacement effort.

Running at half capacity

So in spite of making the development of gas centrifuge enrichment technology a national priority, Iran is currently only able to run about half of the 8,500 centrifuges that it has installed at its Natanz plant. The machines that Iran has been able to run only operate at about 60 percent of their capacity, and Tehran has repeatedly had to replace broken-down centrifuges with new ones.

Replacing centrifuges is not a trivial issue, either. Iran still needs access to high-quality materials and components produced to very specific parameters. Its smuggling network to acquire such goods is sophisticated, but increasing international support for UN sanctions has helped to cut off some of Iran's procurement pathways.

If Stuxnet indeed crippled Iran's nuclear program as several headlines read, it was already limping.

To that point, senior US officials have said over the past year that, because of the technical problems Iran has been facing, the timeframe in which Iran could make a dash toward nuclear weapons has been pushed further into the future. This only repeats a familiar pattern in which the "deadlines" cited by more alarmist assessments have come and gone:

Warnings of imminent nuclear threat – from 15 years ago

In 2000, the CIA reportedly told President Clinton that Iran might already be capable of making a nuclear weapon.

In 1995, the United States assessed that Iran could have the bomb by 2003.

That same year, a book by then-Likud Party Chairman Benjamin Netanyahu said the "best estimates" placed an Iranian nuclear weapons capability at 3 to 5 years away.

Fifteen years later, Vice Joint Chiefs of Staff Chair Gen. James Cartwright gave Congress the same 3-to-5 year timeframe this April.

Make no mistake, Iran's nuclear activities are worrisome, and the threat that they pose should be taken seriously. But taking them seriously means realistically appraising the progress Iran's nuclear program has made and how much further it needs to go before it gives Iran a viable nuclear weapons capability. A bomb's worth of low-enriched uranium is not a viable capability.

Diplomacy takes time

The meeting between Iran and the six major powers this week did not resolve much. But a diplomatic process of this kind takes time, and requires confidence to be built between both sides. Proposals such as the "fuel-swap" deal trading reactor fuel for enriched uranium can help build such necessary confidence, as well as buy additional time for a negotiation process.

And we should be mindful of just how much time we have, before once again taking any destabilizing actions ourselves that may only worsen the threat.

Greg Thielmann is a senior fellow with the Arms Control Association and former senior professional staffer of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence. Peter Crail is a nonproliferation analyst with the Arms Control Association.

<http://www.csmonitor.com/Commentary/Opinion/2010/1208/Chief-obstacle-to-Iran-s-nuclear-effort-its-own-bad-technology>

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The Moscow Times – Russia

OPINION

Superheroes Without a Superpower

08 December 2010

By Alexander Golts

It is very easy to predict the Kremlin's reactions. Amid the general euphoria over the rapprochement between Russian and U.S. leaders at the November NATO-Russia Council summit in Lisbon, I predicted in a previous column that any cooperation between Moscow and Brussels was doomed to be limited in scope. This was based on the fact that the Russian leadership has always expressed its irritation with the West — and tried to cover up its inferiority complex — by using the bluster of military threats against the West.

Only two weeks after the initial Lisbon euphoria, both President Dmitry Medvedev and Prime Minister Vladimir Putin have returned to their old habit of provoking NATO and the United States. In his state-of-the-nation address last week, Medvedev threatened a "new arms race" if the West remained deaf to Russia's proposal for a "sectoral" missile defense system.

Apart from the fact that Medvedev's threat amounted to an ultimatum, NATO leaders are skeptical about his sectoral proposal for several reasons — not least of all because the Kremlin itself doesn't understand what it is proposing. Dmitry Rogozin, Russia's envoy to NATO, tried to explain the proposal: "If there is a missile flying over our territory that is heading toward the United States, we will shoot it down. If there is a missile coming toward Russia over the U.S. zone of responsibility, then the Americans will shoot it down. But in either case, Russia retains control over its own missile defense system, and NATO over its own."

If you take Rogozin's explanation at face value, NATO would have no need for its own missile defense system in Europe since every possible medium-range or long-range missile trajectory from Iran toward Europe or the United States would pass over Russian territory.

The problem with Rogozin's overly confident assurance of protecting Europe is that Russia doesn't have a unified system of missile defense that is capable of shielding all of the country's territory. The only protection it has is a limited, outdated missile defense system that covers Moscow — one that was built 40 years ago and is based on a Cold War-era strategy of intercepting oncoming missiles in outer space using nuclear weapons. This system is clearly unable to respond to modern-day missile threats against Russia, much less Europe.

In addition, Russia has a S-400 missile defense system along with the yet-to-be-produced S-500 system. But the manufacturer of these weapons, Almaz-Antei, has been unable to start production. The total number of S-400 missiles has remained unchanged for several years and is limited to just two air defense battalions. Most likely, production of those interceptors will begin only after a new manufacturing facility is built, which is a long shot under the best of circumstances.

Moscow is also demanding that any U.S. or NATO radar installations cannot include Russian territory within its range. Thus, Russia is once again playing the spoiler role because a quick look at the map shows that any missile

defense system placed in Eastern Europe to defend against an Iranian missile would automatically capture parts of Russia. This is very convenient for the Kremlin, which will always be able to claim that any NATO or U.S. missile defense system deployed in Europe is designed to weaken Russia.

Putin expanded on this theme during his recent interview on “Larry King Live.” When King asked whether Russia had repositioned tactical nuclear weapons on its western border in the spring, Putin said Moscow was forced to respond to the threat from the West.

The real reason for this latest round of saber rattling has little to do with U.S. missile defense, which Russia’s leaders know doesn’t threaten the country at all but can’t admit this publicly, and a lot to do with WikiLeaks — in particular, U.S. Defense Secretary Robert Gates’ comment that “democracy in Russia has disappeared” and that governors pay bribes to Kremlin officials, according to one U.S. Embassy cable. Most important, no matter what Putin or Medvedev might say or do in the future, they know that they are perceived by the West as being little more than the comical Batman and Robin. Offended by these comments, Putin used the only political weapon in his arsenal: the empty threat of deploying new nuclear weapons and sparking an arms race.

The irony is that both sides know that Moscow does not have the resources to develop new nuclear weapons that could compete with the United States in terms of quantity. Even if Russia were foolish enough to try to compete with the United States militarily, the only thing it would ruin is its own economy, just like what happened to the Soviet Union.

When Medvedev and Putin don’t know how to respond to a crisis that reveals Russia’s weaknesses — whether it be WikiLeaks cables, NATO expansion or incriminating evidence of the country’s military backwardness — the only thing they know how to do is to issue empty threats about a new arms race, new nuclear weapons and “retaliatory measures.”

If there is another round of WikiLeaks cables, we might see reports in which U.S. diplomats explain the Kremlin’s strategy of relying on meaningless military bravado and grandstanding for internal political reasons. If these cables surface, Putin and Medvedev will be terribly offended again, and we can expect yet another round of militaristic bluster and hot air aimed at the West.

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<http://www.themoscowtimes.com/opinion/article/superheroes-without-a-superpower/425847.html>

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National Public Radio (NPR)
OPINION

National Review: Beijing's Build-up and New START

By Peter Brookes
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While there has been lots of discussion of the U.S.-Russia Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START) over the past few months, one very important consideration continues to receive insufficient attention: China’s robust nuclear-force modernization program.

It is not clear the administration or lawmakers have thought through the implications of the fact that as we build *down* our strategic nuclear forces (by some 20–30 percent under New START) in the White House’s hope of playing Pied Piper to others on the road to “global zero,” the People’s Republic of China is building *up* its strategic nuclear forces.

As Congress could vote on whether to ratify the treaty in the coming days or weeks, now would be an excellent, indeed critical, time to consider this matter, especially since passing the arms-control pact will obligate us to its provisions for the next 10 years.

While the exact shape of China’s ambitions may not be completely clear, there is little question that its aspirations are grand. In congressional testimony last year, then–director of national intelligence Dennis Blair said that Beijing’s international behavior is driven in part by a “longstanding ambition to see China play a role of a great power in East Asia and globally.”

To this end, China has been feverishly building all aspects of its national power: political, economic — and most worrisome, military. China’s military modernization has proceeded at a feverish pace; its defense budget has increased by roughly 10 percent per year over the last two decades.

On the nuclear front, China relies on the services of its strategic-rocket forces, known as the Second Artillery Corps. The Second Artillery has long been equipped with a small force of liquid-fueled, silo-based intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) armed with three to five megaton thermonuclear warheads such as the CSS-3s and -4s. But in recent years, it added a number of solid-fueled, road-mobile missiles such as the DF-31A, reducing the reaction time associated with the silo-based force while increasing survivability.

In addition, in its annual report to Congress on China's military power, the Pentagon warns this year that China has "the most active land-based ballistic and cruise missile program in the world." It may also "be developing a new road-mobile ICBM, possibly capable of carrying a multiple independently targeted re-entry vehicle (MIRV)," which can strike different targets, even though they are carried on a single ICBM. MIRVing of Chinese missiles will also mean that the number of warheads "could more than double in the next 15 years," according to the Department of Defense (DOD). The Pentagon further notes that the People's Liberation Army (PLA) is working on maneuvering re-entry vehicles (MARV), decoys, chaff, jamming, and thermal shielding for its strategic forces, increasing their ability to reach their intended targets.

And the problems do not end there. China's Second Artillery has reportedly built 3,000-plus miles of tunnels in northern China, known as "The Underground Great Wall." Some believe the tunnel system is intended to conceal China's growing nuclear arsenal, while providing Beijing with a land-based nuclear capability that could survive an enemy's first strike.

But it's not just the Second Artillery that is getting a boost. Beijing is also diversifying its nuclear dossier from its longstanding "monad" of land-based nukes into the more traditional "triad" of land-, sea-, and air-based nuclear forces embraced by other major nuclear powers such as Russia and the United States.

Nowhere is this transition more dramatic than at sea. During the Cold War, Soviet and American submarine forces were considered the stealthiest and most survivable arm of the nuclear triad, especially in providing for a second-strike capability. Well aware of this, China is now sending its nuclear deterrent below the waves.

China's new class of strategic submarine, the Type 094, has replaced its long-troubled first-generation fleet ballistic missile submarine (SSBN), the Type 092. The Type 094 may already carry twelve of China's first intercontinental-range, sea-launched ballistic missiles, the JL-2, whose range exceeds 4,000 miles. Two or three of the boats may be in service already, with another two to three on the way. Beijing is building another SSBN, too, the Type 096, which is expected to be able to carry as many as 24 intercontinental-range missiles.

China is adding an air leg as well, most notably via the upgraded, nuclear-capable B-6 Badger bomber, originally of Cold War vintage. Analysts believe that China, which is already capable of dropping nuclear gravity bombs, is developing land-attack cruise missiles for these aircraft, which may have both conventional and nuclear warheads.

While these weapons are all of great interest, one must also look at the policy context in which these strategic systems reside. Not surprisingly, there is increasing debate in U.S. security circles about how China's new strategic instruments fit into Beijing's nuclear policy — a pressing issue, considering that PLA scholars often describe the American military as its most likely adversary.

China has long adhered to a no-first-use policy, meaning it promises not to use nuclear weapons against a non-nuclear state, in a nuclear-free zone, or to initiate a nuclear war. Beijing has also embraced a minimum-deterrence strategy, meaning that if deterrence fails, it plans to absorb a first strike and then retaliate, focusing on countervalue targets (i.e., population centers) rather than counterforce targets (i.e., the enemy's nuclear forces).

China continues to espouse these policies publicly, but outside observers are starting to ask questions. According to some PLA watchers, there is an ongoing, behind-the-scenes debate in China about its nuclear policies, especially among the new generation of security strategists, who wonder if their seniors are failing to adapt to the country's elevated position in the international pecking order. Some speculate that China may be considering shifting to a new nuclear strategy, which includes a preemptive, first-strike capability, which is aimed at destroying an opponent's nuclear forces before they can launch.

Making matters more complex is China's refusal to provide transparency or discuss its nuclear forces. The PLA has a general penchant for strategic denial and deception, which is perhaps nowhere better demonstrated than in its unwillingness to talk about nuclear issues with the Department of Defense. This lack of openness and dialogue presents a challenge to our intelligence and policy communities, since it perpetuates a litany of unanswered questions about China's strategic doctrine, capabilities, and intent.

And while China's strategic forces are increasing in number, diversity and capability, American nuclear forces are in desperate need of modernization. In the view of some experts, if any country can undertake a "rush to nuclear parity" with the United States, it is the world's No. three nuclear power, China.

Indeed, according to some independent groups, Beijing could become a nuclear peer of Washington's in the not-too-distant future if it so desired, in light of the expected arms cuts by the United States under New START.

The question remains: Have we really considered what China's nuclear forces will look like over the life of New START? If not, we had better do so immediately.

Consequently, in considering New START, the Senate and the administration must factor in the trajectory of China's nuclear forces and the direction of its strategic policy to ensure that an arms-control treaty with Russia does not undermine our security.

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<http://www.npr.org/2010/12/09/131928912/national-review-beijing-s-build-up-and-new-start>

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