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Bulletin of Atomic Scientists
12 January 2009

Organizing for Arms Control in The Obama Administration

By Pierce S. Corden

Ten years ago this March, the U.S. Arms Control and Disarmament Agency (ACDA) was merged with the State Department. ACDA had been created in 1961 as an independent agency, in recognition by President John F. Kennedy and prominent senators such as Hubert Humphrey that the nuclear arms race warranted a separate bureaucratic structure to pursue negotiated solutions to threats to national security. During its 38-year history, ACDA played a key role in setting in place a broad range of arms control and nonproliferation undertakings, including the 1963 Limited Test Ban Treaty, the 1970 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), the 1972 Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention, the 1987 Intermediate Nuclear Forces Treaty, and the first Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty.

However, the end of the Cold War and loss of Senate focus on arms control led to a situation in which arms control skeptics were allowed to execute a bureaucratic coup. In 1997, in political deal-making that amounted to a step forward and a step backward, the Senate gave its consent to ratification of the convention banning chemical weapons while--at the instigation of late North Carolina Republican Sen. Jesse Helms--giving a green light to the merger of ACDA with State.

Supporters of arms control and nonproliferation might have persuaded themselves that, given the lack of strong congressional interest in a separate agency, the merger was the least-bad option for supporting--or at least not hampering--the maintenance of existing international agreements and institutions and the negotiation of next steps in weapons reductions. It seems safe to say that arms control skeptics believed that ACDA, as a separate entity in the executive branch's national security structure that had been effective in pursuing measures that were, in their minds, counterproductive, was a voice that should be silenced.

As the Obama administration takes office, the question arises whether this merger has served the United States well.

Almost a year ago, Democratic Sen. Daniel Akaka of Hawaii convened an important, although little noted, hearing of the government management oversight subcommittee of the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs. The witnesses were former ambassadors Thomas Graham and Norman Wulf and former Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Andrew Semmel. All three had top policy and management responsibilities in administrations as far back as that of Richard Nixon for U.S. policies and programs for lowering the risk of nuclear war, reversing proliferation, eliminating chemical and biological weapons, and reducing destabilizing stockpiles of conventional weapons. Their testimony makes depressingly clear that these objectives haven't been best served by the 1999 merger.

U.S. resources for implementing arms control agreements, supporting important organizations such as the International Atomic Energy Agency, and developing and negotiating new accords are considerably fewer than those available a decade ago. In his statement to the subcommittee, Akaka called for the new presidential administration to correct the damage to these resources caused by factors such as "a hostile political environment, a poorly conducted reorganization in 2005, and a resultant loss of well-qualified federal civil service employees." (See "Reorganization Run Amok: State Department's WMD Effort Weakened.") He also termed the merger "a tragic mistake."

The subcommittee witnesses testified that the merger didn't work as intended. Rather, they said, the merger precipitated a substantially diminished capability--in terms of technical and policy expertise and historical memory--to address twenty-first century security challenges. The debilitating restructuring of State's arms control and nonproliferation bureaucracy in 2005, morale issues, and the lack of sustained attention to the detailed requirements of implementing key arms control undertakings such as the NPT should compel the new administration to take prompt remedial action.

President-elect Obama has voiced support for moving toward a nuclear-weapon-free world. But this won't happen by him waving his hands. The army entrusts its operations to officers trained and experienced in combat. Similarly, U.S. foreign policy is entrusted, in embassies and in the State Department in Washington, to career foreign-service

officers. Indeed, this is why there's a Foreign Service and not simply a practice of assigning civil servants to foreign posts. In the same vein, the business of arms control should be carried out by career officials mandated to maintain existing agreements and negotiate next steps.

ACDA's size was always modest, even compared with State, let alone the Defense Department. Yet its presence in the executive branch and its access to the highest levels of the administration were critical to success in arms control. Presence matters. Access matters.

But how would this work? Should State still house the bureaucracy to support the arms control and nonproliferation mission of the U.S. government? Or is a separate, dedicated entity better? And should a new ACDA be "independent"?

If a president isn't of a mind to maintain, let alone advance, negotiated agreements for reducing the threats posed by nuclear and other weapons, even an ideal structure with the best staff will find the going tough. But a president needs to know the full spectrum of available options. The president's ability to turn to a robust bureaucracy that lays out the arms control options and then pursues the chosen option is demonstrably better than simply deciding on a correct policy--look at the bureaucratic tasks now facing the Treasury Department in rescuing Wall Street and Main Street.

Clearly, independence does not mean "independent of the executive." On ACDA's organization chart there was a solid line to the president and the National Security Council and a dotted line to the secretary of state.

But independence does mean access. Arms control and nonproliferation are vital to national security, and officials with primary responsibility for these issues should have direct access to the president and the National Security Council. Independence also means a structure, however related to the regional and line bureaus in State and to counterpart elements in other departments and agencies, with sufficient "clout" that its recommendations can be considered at the highest levels without being submerged by competing approaches to national security.

In addition, independence means the presence of a stable structure with sufficient personnel with the right background and experience--scientific, technical, policy, legal, diplomatic, and military. It means the continuity of this structure and staff from administration to administration. This translates into an organization of career civil servants together with an appropriate mix of foreign service and military officers.

In short, the best way to realize the twin objectives of presence and access would be to establish an agency very much like ACDA. And the easiest way would be simply to restore ACDA by adopting legislation along the lines of the 1994 Arms Control and Nonproliferation Act.

Reducing the threats to national security posed by nuclear weapons and their proliferation is no less urgent now than it was in the 1960s. As the president-elect's senior national security team takes office, it should consider promptly how it will implement his policy directions, in concrete terms of optimal institutional arrangements. The new president deserves no less from a well-organized executive branch.

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<http://www.thebulletin.org/print/web-edition/features/organizing-arms-control-the-obama-administration>

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New York Times
January 19, 2009
Editorial

U.A.E. 123

The United Arab Emirates has bested other oil-rich Persian Gulf countries by becoming the first to conclude a legally binding nuclear cooperation agreement with the Bush administration. It deserves even greater congratulations for forswearing uranium enrichment and plutonium reprocessing. Those are the key processes for making fuel for nuclear reactors — or nuclear weapons.

Many countries have these agreements — known in the business as 123's — with Washington, which allow them to buy American nuclear reactors and fuel. But none have made that important concession.

Under the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty, all members in good standing have the right to make their own fuel. But the temptations are considerable and the technology far too easy to divert (see Iran). That is why the U.A.E.'s choice is so especially important, and why other nuclear suppliers should be encouraging their clients to make the same choice.

Nuclear energy is one way to address climate change, and developing countries — that agree to international rules for inspections — must have the same access to nuclear technology as the developed world. President Bush promoted nuclear energy with gusto but notably failed to develop a strategy to ensure that a proliferation of nuclear power would not also lead to a proliferation of nuclear weapons. Mr. Obama and the new Congress must do better.

More than 25 nations plan to build nuclear power plants for the first time. That includes Saudi Arabia, which is negotiating its own cooperation deal with Washington. Many of these countries say they must diversify to meet future energy needs. And the major nuclear suppliers are only too eager to compete for their business.

Too often these countries ignore serious questions about whether more nuclear plants will pose new safety and waste disposal hazards, and whether their clients' sudden enthusiasm is driven less by concerns about global warming or declining oil reserves and more by rising fears of Iran's nuclear ambitions and appetites for their own weapons programs.

Congress must review the U.A.E. deal before it is finalized. Some lawmakers have raised worrisome questions about goods with military or potential nuclear-related uses moving through Dubai, one of the emirates, to Iran. Officials there must explain how they plan to strengthen their export controls. If not, Congress may have to slow its approval or place tougher restrictions on the 123 agreement until it is sure that American technology sold to the U.A.E. cannot be diverted.

There is also something unsettling about the slick lobbying campaign the U.A.E. has mounted to push the deal through quickly. The agreement sets an important and welcome new standard. But Congress must exercise due diligence with this agreement and all of the others that will follow.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2009/01/19/opinion/19mon2.html?th&emc=th>

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Wall Street Journal
January 16, 2009
Pg. 1

Fresh Clues of Iranian Nuclear Intrigue

By Glenn R. Simpson and Jay Solomon

WASHINGTON -- U.S. security and law-enforcement officials say they have fresh evidence of recent efforts by Iran to evade sanctions and acquire metals from China used in high-tech weaponry, including long-range nuclear missiles. Iran's efforts are detailed in a series of recent emails and letters between Iranian companies and foreign suppliers seen by The Wall Street Journal. Business records show one Iranian company, ABAN Commercial & Industrial Ltd., has contracted through an intermediary for more than 30,000 kilograms (about 66,000 pounds) of tungsten copper -- which can be used in missile guidance systems -- from Advanced Technology & Materials Co. Ltd. of Beijing. One March 2008 email between the firms mentions shipping 215 ingots, with more planned.

The United Arab Emirates has informed the U.S. that in September it intercepted a Chinese shipment headed to Iran of specialized aluminum sheets that can be used to make ballistic missiles. A month earlier, UAE officials also intercepted an Iran-bound shipment of titanium sheets that can be used in long-range missiles, according to a recent letter to the U.S. Commerce Department from the UAE's Washington ambassador.

Evidence of Iran's efforts to acquire sensitive materials also is emerging from investigations by state and federal prosecutors in New York into whether a number of major Western banks illegally handled funds for Iran and deliberately hid Iranian transactions routed through the U.S. One focus of the inquiries is the role of Italy, including

the Rome branch of Iran's Bank Sepah and Italy's Banca Intesa Sanpaolo Spa. Banca Intesa said it is cooperating in the inquiries.

The developments could present President-elect Barack Obama with an early test in responding to what many Washington security officials now say is a rapidly growing threat to the region, including U.S. allies Israel and Saudi Arabia. All of the high-performance metals Iran has been acquiring also have industrial uses such as commercial aviation and manufacturing, making it difficult for intelligence agencies to be absolutely certain how the materials are being used. "We can't say we know it would, or would not, be used for military purposes," said proliferation expert Gary Milholland of the nonprofit Wisconsin Project on Nuclear Arms Control, noting that broad economic sanctions on Tehran led by the U.S. mean Iran has to go to unusual lengths to find high-grade materials for industrial use as well as weapons. Still, he added, "There doesn't seem to be any real doubt or debate whether Iran is going for the bomb or whether Iran is using front companies to import things. Everyone agrees on that around the world."

Officials at the International Atomic Energy Agency said they believe Iran could have enough fissile material for an atomic weapon sometime this year, though it would need to be further processed into weapons-grade uranium. That assessment was echoed Thursday by Central Intelligence Agency Director Michael V. Hayden. U.S. and European governments have grown increasingly alarmed in recent months at the speed they believe Iran is developing ballistic-missile and nuclear capabilities. Last year the United Nations Security Council, which includes China, formally imposed sanctions on Iran's military and most of its banks for nuclear proliferation activities.

A spokesman for Iran at its U.N. mission in New York declined to comment. China "has been strictly implementing" U.N. proliferation sanctions on Iran, said a spokesman for the Chinese foreign ministry in Beijing. The export of restricted items such as high-grade metals, which include specialized aluminum and titanium, is prohibited, he added.

The patchwork of proliferation agreements don't cover certain materials. Sales to Iran of a powdered form of tungsten copper are prohibited by a nonproliferation accord China has agreed to adhere to, but documents about Iran's tungsten copper purchases refer to ingots, which aren't banned in the agreement though they can be used to make missiles. High-grade tungsten copper alloy withstands ultrahigh temperatures and thus can be used in the fins of long-range missiles to greatly enhance their accuracy, according to proliferation experts.

George Perkovich of the pro-disarmament Carnegie Endowment for International Peace said use of the ingots may be an attempt to legally circumvent the restrictions. Chinese merchants, he said, "take a legalistic approach to whether it is prohibited under the treaties," while on the Iranian side, "if there's a problem where somebody's not supposed to sell them stuff, their view is, that's the sellers' problem." Because of economic sanctions and the small size of Iranian banks, the banks have long relied on big European multinational banks to finance their international trade and wire transfers. Many of those transfers flowed through New York City.

Documents detailing Iran's metals acquisition efforts are being reviewed by U.S. law-enforcement and intelligence officials, people involved in the matter said. Manhattan District Attorney Robert Morgenthau said he is conducting a broad inquiry into illegal transactions by Iran. Last week, Lloyds TSB of London agreed to pay \$350 million to settle U.S. sanctions-busting charges with Mr. Morgenthau's office and the Justice Department. The bank admitted it violated U.S. law but said the practice has ceased.

"There are nine other banks that we think were doing this," said Mr. Morgenthau in an interview, including Barclays PLC of the U.K. A Barclays spokesman had no comment beyond a prior disclosure confirming the inquiry. Other banks under scrutiny in the probe include Credit Suisse and Deutsche Bank, people with knowledge of the inquiries said. Credit Suisse "is cooperating with the New York County District Attorney's Office, the U.S. Department of Justice and other governmental authorities," the bank said in a statement. A Deutsche Bank spokesman declined to comment.

ABAN Commercial & Industrial Ltd. had accounts at the Rome branch of Iran's government-owned Bank Sepah, records show. Bank Sepah has longstanding ties to Banca Intesa, although no evidence has surfaced to date showing that Banca Intesa facilitated illegal acquisitions of sensitive materials by ABAN, people with knowledge of the matter said. ABAN is run by two top officials of Iran's Aviation Industries Organization, the documents show. That agency is already under U.S. and U.N. sanctions. Efforts to contact the firm by phone and fax for comment were unsuccessful.

An Oct. 14, 2007, invoice says ABAN contracted for 30,900 kilograms of tungsten copper alloy from a firm in China in exchange for €2.1 million (\$2.8 million). Additional orders were made in 2008, according to a March 27, 2008, email to ABAN from Advanced Technology & Materials Co. "I was very happy talking to you on the phone," an AT&M executive told an executive at ABAN in the email. "By now we had sent 215 pieces" of tungsten copper, he added.

ABAN didn't respond to requests for comment. Dan Hong, a lawyer for AT&M, said in an email that AT&M received warnings several months ago of allegations "that we have business dealings with Iran." But he said the firm has never heard of ABAN. "AT&M never signed any contracts with and exported to Iran" the specialized metal, he added. "We checked our business records carefully." Records show AT&M supplied the tungsten copper to an intermediary firm called Liaoning Industry & Trade Co. Ltd. That firm couldn't be reached for comment.

Another document reviewed by the Journal is a Jan. 10, 2007, message from an executive at a Chinese metals company to Shahid Sayyadi Shirazi Industries of Iran, regarding the impact of U.S. banking sanctions on payment for a shipment of unknown material. Marked "Top Urgent!" the letter observes that the payment was arranged through Bank Sepah.

The Chinese executives "are worrying the payment may be blocked by USA or UK government through their bank/treasury system," states the letter, from an executive other business records show had shipped tungsten copper to Iran. "You are kindly required to consider the matter and check carefully and seriously with Bank Sepah if the payment can be effected safely under the current situation." Bank Sepah has denied financing illicit weapons programs. Shahid Sayyad Shirazi Industries is part of Iran's Ammunition Industries Group, according to the Wisconsin Project on Nuclear Arms Control, and has been under U.N. sanctions since March 24, 2007. Efforts to contact the firm for comment were unsuccessful.

Sabrina Cohen and Siobhan Gorman contributed to this article.

<http://online.wsj.com/article/SB123206759616688285.html>

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International Herald Tribune

Iran, Iran, Iran

Opinion

By William Luers, Thomas R. Pickering and Jim Walsh

Friday, January 16, 2009

Three of the most pressing national security problems facing the Obama administration - nuclear proliferation, the war in Iraq and the deteriorating situation in Afghanistan - have one thing in common: Iran.

All three challenges are, in principle, amenable to diplomatic solution, but only if we give it a try. Success on any of the three will not be possible without serious engagement with Iran.

We propose coordinating and integrating policies on these three security challenges with a regional diplomatic strategy that includes Iran.

The United States should seek to open talks with Iran without preconditions. On the nuclear dispute, we propose that the United States and its European allies present a plan for Iran's current uranium enrichment program to be reorganized as a multinationally owned, operated, and managed program with enhanced international monitoring and verification.

Sanctions and threats have failed to force Iran to abandon its enrichment program and by themselves are unlikely to do so even with Iran's recent economic problems.

Iran has expanded its centrifuges from none to roughly 5,000 over the past three years of UN Security Council sanctions. To believe that a proud country like Iran is simply going to dismantle all its centrifuges is wishful - and ultimately dangerous - thinking.

Agreement on the multinational enrichment option would lead to greater assurance about Iran's nuclear activities, and it would open the door to serious discussions with Iran on other issues of great importance to the U.S.

On Iraq and Afghanistan, direct U.S. engagement with Iran and other key regional and international players, including the United Nations, will be necessary if the United States hopes to draw down its forces and bring stability to these war-torn nations.

This process must be truly multinational and cannot be seen as another, purely American initiative.

Diplomatic discussions must focus on support for Iraq's territorial integrity; national reconciliation; ending military support for non-state groups in Iraq and Afghanistan; the resettlement of millions of refugees; and the establishment of confidence-building measures that include Iran's neighbors.

Achieving serious commitments from the relevant governments will not be easy and will take time, but such an approach will be essential to provide stability as U.S. troops are drawn down. No such regional arrangement is possible, however, without the inclusion of Iran.

Preparing the ground for negotiations with Iran on these critical issues will take time and patience. This process could include a series of steps such as changing the tone of public discourse, working to build confidence that a new, positive approach has been adopted and establishing direct, official contacts with Tehran to explore reciprocal actions and responses while working to avoid misunderstandings.

More formal direct negotiations with Iran should then begin late this summer following the Iranian elections with whomever is elected president of Iran.

As General David Petraeus, commander of the U.S. Central Command, recently observed, Iran has many common interests with the United States in Iraq and Afghanistan. Both the United States and Iran support the Iraqi and Afghan central governments, seek to establish stability, oppose Sunni terrorists such as Al Qaeda and the Taliban, want to reduce drug trafficking, and, perhaps most importantly, need to prevent these countries from descending into chaos and civil war.

Of course, there are issues on which Washington and Tehran disagree, such as Hamas, Hezbollah and human rights. But treating Iran as a donkey that must be dealt with carrots and sticks is unlikely to work.

It is time to begin dealing with Iran as a serious, proud and influential nation with a deep culture and history, one whose common interests with the U.S. and other countries in the region should be recognized and acted on before events make success impossible.

William Luers is president of the UN Association-USA. Thomas R. Pickering is a former Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs. Jim Walsh is a research associate at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. A longer version of this article appears in the current issue of the New York Review of Books.

<http://www.iht.com/articles/2009/01/16/opinion/edluers.1-409075.php>

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MarketWatch.com

The Wall Street Journal Digital Network

India Test-fires Nuclear-capable Missile

Jan. 20, 2009

NEW DELHI, Jan 20, 2009 (UPI via COMTEX) -- India successfully test-fired a new version of a nuclear-capable missile Tuesday at Pokhran in Rajasthan's desert near Pakistan, defense officials reported. The testing of the BrahMos missile in the western state comes as tensions between India and Pakistan intensify over the November terrorist attacks in Mumbai, which India says were led by terrorists based in Pakistan.

Defense Minister A.K. Antony, however, said in New Delhi the test was already scheduled and not directed against any country, calling the test-firing a "normal thing," the Press Trust of India reported. The missile, with a range of about 180 miles, is being developed in collaboration with Russia and named after the Brahmaputra River and Moscow.

http://www.marketwatch.com/news/story/india-test-fires-nuclear-capable-missile/story.aspx?guid=%7B2DAEE8F5-AF29-4921-B65C-3DC293E6FFBD%7D&dist=msr_1

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Sydney Morning Herald

North Korea Suggests Bombs Built

January 19, 2009

SEOUL: The North Korean military has declared an "all-out confrontational posture" against South Korea as an American scholar said North Korean officials told him they had "weaponised" enough plutonium for roughly four to six nuclear bombs. US intelligence officials had previously estimated that the North had harvested enough fuel for six or more bombs, although it was never clear if the North constructed the weapons.

The scholar, Selig Harrison, said the officials had not defined what "weaponised" meant, but the implication was that they had built nuclear arms. After the threats, made on Saturday, South Korea ordered its military to heighten vigilance along its heavily fortified border with North Korea, a spokesman with the South Korean military joint chiefs of staff said.

North Korea's saber-rattling towards the South has increased in intensity since the President, Lee Myung-bak, took office in Seoul a year ago, vowing to take a tougher stance on the North, reversing 10 years of his liberal predecessors' efforts to engage it with economic aid. But what made the threat on Saturday more worrisome to some South Korean analysts was the way it was delivered: in a statement read on North Korean television by a uniformed spokesman for the North's joint chiefs of staff. Usually the North Korean Government issues written statements that are delivered by the country's state-controlled media.

<http://www.smh.com.au/news/world/north-korea-suggests-bombs-built/2009/01/18/1232213448850.html>

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guardian.co.uk

North Korea has Plutonium Ready for up to Five Nuclear Bombs, Reports Claim

Pyongyang threatens to destroy new South Korean government as reports emerge of North Korean nuclear bomb capacity

Martin Hodgson and agencies

Saturday 17 January 2009

North Korea today threatened to "shatter" the conservative South Korean government in Seoul, as reports emerged that Pyongyang claims to have weaponised enough plutonium stocks to produce four or five nuclear bombs. Relations across the heavily fortified border have turned frosty since South Korea's president, Lee Myung-bak, came to office last year promising to get tough on his communist neighbour after a decade of attempts by liberal governments to engage with Pyongyang. In December, North Korea closed border crossings and accused Seoul of plotting to assassinate the North's leader, Kim Jong-il. But today's rare statement from the Korean People's Army – read on television by a uniformed officer – is likely to further raise tensions on the divided peninsula.

"Now that traitor Lee Myung-bak and his group opted for confrontation, denying national reconciliation and cooperation, backed by foreign forces, our revolutionary armed forces are compelled to take an all-out confrontational posture to shatter them," the statement said. "Strong military measures will follow from our revolutionary armed forces," the spokesman added, warning of a clash along a disputed maritime border. Disagreements over the boundary triggered naval skirmishes in 1999 and 2000.

The statement came as an American scholar said North Korean officials had told him Pyongyang has weaponised 30.8 kg (68lb) of plutonium, enough for four or five bombs. Selig Harrison, a North Korean expert at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars in Washington, said the North Koreans had told him the weapons cannot be inspected. The officials were vague about what weaponisation meant, but it appeared most likely the plutonium would be fitted in missile warheads, Harrison said.

Harrison said he could not vouch for the credibility of such a claim, but the allegations are likely to complicate future talks. Speaking after a visit to North Korea, Harrison said officials had told him Pyongyang wants friendly relations with the US, but it was not able to say when it might commit itself to nuclear disarmament.

The tougher stance over nuclear weapons may be a consequence of a shift in power after the reclusive Kim suffered a stroke in summer, Harrison said. The ruling party has issued a stream of reports supporting its claim that the "Dear Leader" is well, but Harrison said Kim now appears to have given up handling day-to-day tasks,

"My view is that change in the leadership situation has strengthened the hardliners in the National Defence Commission, who are now in control of the nuclear disarmament negotiations more directly," Harrison said. Earlier today, North Korea issued a new challenge to Washington, saying that reopening diplomatic ties would not be enough to persuade it to give up its nuclear weapons. It said it would maintain its "status as a nuclear weapons state" as long as there was a US nuclear threat. "It will be wrong if the United States thinks that we are giving up nuclear programme in exchange for normalising diplomatic ties with them," a spokesman was quoted as saying by the official Korea Central News Agency. "There'll be no change in our status as a nuclear state as long as US nuclear threat remains."

The incoming Obama administration is likely to continue the Bush government's effort to persuade Pyongyang to give up its nuclear arms in talks involving North and South Korea, China, the US, Japan and Russia. But Hillary Clinton, Obama's designate secretary of state, has indicated the new administration is likely to review US policy. Despite an agreement struck at the six-nation talks in Beijing, North Korea has delayed dismantling its nuclear weapons programme, amid disagreements over verification rules and energy aid

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2009/jan/17/northkorea-south-korea-nuclearweapons>

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World Politics Review

January 20, 2009

Global Insights: Saving the World from Mass Destruction

Richard Weitz

When Barack Obama takes the oath of office today, he will become the person most empowered to protect Americans, and the world, from attacks of mass destruction. Although he assumes the presidency at a time of grave danger, real progress in curtailing the threat from weapons of mass destruction (WMD) is possible under his leadership.

The threats, both real and potential, are significant. This past weekend, for instance, North Korean leaders claimed to have used the plutonium generated by the country's nuclear energy program to make several atomic bombs. They insist that they will not relinquish these nuclear weapons even if Washington normalizes relations with Pyongyang. Instead, North Korea has demanded that the United States renounce its commitment to defend South Korea with American nuclear forces, create a mechanism to allow Pyongyang to verify that no U.S. nuclear weapons enter South Korea, and engage in nuclear disarmament talks among "all nuclear states."

In Iran, the threat is less certain yet potentially more ominous. Although Iranian leaders deny they are seeking to acquire nuclear weapons, the outgoing director of national intelligence, Michael McConnell, told reporters on Friday that he remains "very concerned" that Iran will continue to develop the technical capacity to manufacture nuclear weapons as well as long-range ballistic missiles. McConnell and other experts fear that Tehran could eventually use these capabilities to threaten Israel, the United States, or other countries.

The danger of near-term mass destruction is not limited to nuclear weapons. The U.S. Commission on the Prevention of Weapons of Mass Destruction Proliferation and Terrorism, a bipartisan committee established by the Congress, released a report in December warning that biological terrorism from non-state actors presented the gravest near-term WMD threat to international security. According to the commission, whereas terrorists might be able to acquire or construct a nuclear weapon, they could more easily gain access to dangerous biological pathogens because these are normally less well-protected than fissile materials.

The commission concluded that the threats of WMD terrorism and proliferation have increased faster than Washington's preventive and response capabilities. While the commissioners acknowledged that U.S. and international programs against WMD terrorism and proliferation have made some progress since September 2001, they warned that the global diffusion of WMD-related technologies, and the resulting growing destructive capacity

of terrorists, have resulted in a net decline in U.S. security in recent years. That leaves Americans in what departing Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff has called "a race against time."

Some of the commissioners indicated that they did not stress the risks of chemical terrorism because of recent government action to improve the protection of commercial chemicals. In November 2008, for instance, the Transportation Security Administration issued new regulations to enhance the security and safety of rail shipments containing dangerous chemicals.

Even so, other studies have reaffirmed concern about the continuing threat of chemical terrorism within the United States and elsewhere. Last November, the Center for American Progress released a report (.pdf) warning that more than 80 million Americans live within range of a worst-case toxic gas release from the country's vulnerable commercial chemical plants. Outside the United States, the threat of chemical weapons use by both state and non-state actors remains high given the ease with which commercial chemicals can be converted into powerful weapons capable of killing thousands of unprotected civilians.

Fortunately, President Obama has already pledged to take actions that will help curtail these threats, calling for regular summits of world leaders to discuss how to implement additional measures to avert nuclear terrorism.

These meetings could profitably expand on the Global Initiative to Combat Nuclear Terrorism, which the U.S. and Russian governments launched during the July 2006 G-8 summit in St. Petersburg. The initiative aims to improve coordination of nonproliferation programs that contribute to averting nuclear terrorism. Its priorities include: decreasing the availability of nuclear material to terrorists; improving the capabilities of participating states to counter trafficking of such materials; and promoting cooperation between law enforcement agencies engaged in combating nuclear terrorism. Although the Global Initiative began as a bilateral Russian-American effort, it has since gained widespread international support among non-G-8 members.

The Obama administration might wish to expand the scope of these global leadership summits to address biological and chemical terrorism as well. For similar reasons, the president should consider broadening his proposal to double the budget of the International Atomic Energy Agency during the next four years to provide more resources to the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons and the Implementation Support Unit of the Biological Weapons Convention. All three bodies play essential roles in supporting, respectively, the core pillars of the international WMD nonproliferation regime: the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, the Chemical Weapons Convention, and the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention.

President Obama has also vowed to strengthen the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI), a voluntary international coalition launched by President George W. Bush in 2003 to curtail the illicit transfer of WMD, their means of delivery, and related materials. In particular, Obama aims to extend PSI so that it more directly combats illicit nuclear networks by strengthening national export controls, broadening global intelligence sharing, and disrupting proliferators' financial networks.

In addition to these objectives, the new administration should renew efforts to secure Beijing's adherence to the PSI. Concerns persist that some Chinese companies have been providing North Korea and Iran with technologies and materials suitable for manufacturing nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons as well as ballistic missiles.

The Obama White House should also pressure Moscow to tighten Russian military-related exports to Iran. Tehran's growing nuclear and missile capabilities have been driving support for the planned deployment of U.S. ballistic missile defenses in Poland and the Czech Republic, the most visible source of tension between Russia and the United States today.

Greater support from Beijing and Moscow won't guarantee that President Obama realizes his worthy nonproliferation goals. But they will make it more likely.

Richard Weitz is a senior fellow at the Hudson Institute and a World Politics Review senior editor. His weekly WPR column, Global Insights, appears every Tuesday.

<http://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/article.aspx?id=3180>

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The Washington Times
January 19, 2009, (updated Jan 20, 2009)

Al Qaeda Bungles Arms Experiment

Eli Lake

An al Qaeda affiliate in Algeria closed a base earlier this month after an experiment with unconventional weapons went awry, a senior U.S. intelligence official said Monday. The official, who spoke on the condition he not be named because of the sensitive nature of the issue, said he could not confirm press reports that the accident killed at least 40 al Qaeda operatives, but he said the mishap led the militant group to shut down a base in the mountains of Tizi Ouzou province in eastern Algeria.

He said authorities in the first week of January intercepted an urgent communication between the leadership of al Qaeda in the Land of the Maghreb (AQIM) and al Qaeda's leadership in the tribal region of Pakistan on the border with Afghanistan. The communication suggested that an area sealed to prevent leakage of a biological or chemical substance had been breached, according to the official. "We don't know if this is biological or chemical," the official said.

The story was first reported by the British tabloid the Sun, which said the al Qaeda operatives died after being infected with a strain of bubonic plague, the disease that killed a third of Europe's population in the 14th century. But the intelligence official dismissed that claim.

AQIM, according to U.S. intelligence estimates, maintains about a dozen bases in Algeria, where the group has waged a terrorist campaign against government forces and civilians. In 2006, the group claimed responsibility for an attack on foreign contractors. In 2007, the group said it bombed U.N. headquarters in Algiers, an attack that killed 41 people.

Al Qaeda is believed by U.S. and Western experts to have been pursuing biological weapons since at least the late 1990s. A 2005 report on unconventional weapons drafted by a commission led by former Sen. Charles Robb, Virginia Democrat, and federal appeals court Judge Laurence Silberman concluded that al Qaeda's biological weapons program "was extensive, well organized and operated two years before the Sept. 11" terror attacks in the U.S.

Another report from the Commission on the Prevention of Weapons of Mass Destruction Proliferation, released in December, warned that "terrorists are more likely to be able to obtain and use a biological weapon than a nuclear weapon."

British authorities in January 2003 arrested seven men they accused of producing a poison from castor beans known as ricin. British officials said one of the suspects had visited an al Qaeda training camp. In the investigation into the case, British authorities found an undated al Qaeda manual on assassinations with a recipe for making the poison.

The late leader of al Qaeda in Iraq, Abu Musab Zarqawi, was suspected of developing ricin in northern Iraq. Then-Secretary of State Colin L. Powell referred to the poison in his presentation to the U.N. Security Council in February 2003 that sought to lay the groundwork for the U.S. invasion of Iraq.

Roger Cressey, a former senior counterterrorism official at the National Security Council under Presidents Bill Clinton and George W. Bush, told The Washington Times that al Qaeda has had an interest in acquiring a poisons capability since the late 1990s.

"This is something that al Qaeda still aspires to do, and the infrastructure to develop it does not have to be that sophisticated," he said.

Mr. Cressey added that he also is concerned about al Qaeda in the Land of the Maghreb, which refers to the North African countries of Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia.

"Al Qaeda in the Maghreb is probably the most operationally capable affiliate in the organization right now," he said.

<http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2009/jan/19/al-qaeda-bungles-arms-experiment/>

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The Times of India

20 January 2009

Plague Sweeps Qaida Camp in Africa, 40 Die

Nearly 40 al-Qaeda fanatics died after plague swept through a training at a forest camp in Algeria, North Africa. It came to light when security forces found a body by a roadside, reports the Sun. The victim was a terrorist in AQLIM (al-Qaida in the Land of the Islamic Maghreb), the largest and most powerful al-Qaida group outside the Middle East. It trains Muslim fighters to kill British and US troops.

The al-Qaida epidemic began in the cave hideouts of AQLIM in Tizi Ouzou province, 150km east of the capital Algiers. The group, led by wanted terror boss Abdelmalek Droudkal, was forced to turn its shelters in the Yakouren forest into mass graves and flee. The extremists supporting Osama bin Laden went to Bejaia and Jijel provinces — hoping the plague did not go with them. A source said: “The emirs (leaders) fear surviving terrorists will surrender to escape a horrible death.”

Now al-Qaida chiefs fear the plague has been passed to other terror cells — or Taliban fighters in Afghanistan. One security source said: “This is the deadliest weapon yet in the war against terror. Most of the terrorists do not have the basic medical supplies needed to treat the disease. It spreads quickly and kills within hours. This will be really worrying al-Qaida.”

AQLIM boss Droudkal claims to command around 1,000 insurgents. Training camps are also based in Morocco, Tunisia and Nigeria. AQLIM bombed the UN headquarters in Algiers in 2007, killing 41. Attacks across Algeria last year killed at least 70 people. In an interview last July, Droudkal boasted his cell was in constant contact with other al-Qaida “brothers”.

http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/World/Plague_sweeps_Qaida_camp_in_Africa/articleshow/4004140.cms

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LA Times

January 18, 2009

Young Men Vanish into Somalia, Stirring Fears of Terrorist Recruitment

By Bob Drogin

Reporting from Minneapolis -- Tall and lean, with a wispy mustache and shy smile, 17-year-old Burhan Hassan chalked up A's last fall as a senior at Roosevelt High School, vowing to become a doctor or lawyer. After school and on weekends, he studied Islam at the nearby Abubakar As-Saddique mosque. He joined its youth group. "He wanted to go to Harvard," said his uncle Osman Ahmed. "That was his dream." Instead Hassan has gone to Somalia, the anarchic East African nation that his family fled when he was a toddler. On election day, Hassan and five other youths slipped away from their homes here, and anguished family members now say they may have joined a Taliban-style Islamic militia that U.S. authorities call a terrorist organization.

The youths, who have U.S. passports, followed a well-trod trail from Minneapolis to Mogadishu. Another group took off in August. The FBI believes that over the last two years, 12 to 20 Minnesotans have gone to Somalia. As a result, a joint terrorism task force led by the FBI is scrambling to determine if extremist Islamic groups are seeking recruits here in the nation's largest Somali community -- as well as in San Diego, Seattle, Boston and other cities.

"We're aware that these guys have traveled from Minneapolis and other parts of the country," said E.K. Wilson, the FBI spokesman here. "Our concern obviously is they've been recruited somehow to fight or to train as terrorists." Topping their concern is the case of Shirwa Ahmed, a 27-year-old former Minneapolis resident who went to Somalia in 2007 -- and who may be what Wilson called "the first occasion of a U.S. citizen suicide bomber."

Officials believe the naturalized American was on a terrorist team that detonated five car bombs in two northern Somali cities on Oct. 29, killing at least 30 people, including U.N. aid workers. Ahmed phoned his sister in Minneapolis a day before the bombings to say he would not see her again, according to a family friend. "She thought he was sick," the friend said. The next day, someone else called from Somalia to say he had "gone to paradise" as a martyr for Islam.

The FBI brought back bone fragments and other remains found in Bosaso, one of the blast sites, Wilson said. DNA tests established Ahmed's identity. He was buried in a Muslim funeral in Burnsville, south of Minneapolis, on Dec. 3. Ahmed had not been on the FBI's radar before the bombings. And his death raised fears that someone trained in Somalia might import terrorist tactics to America.

"There is always a concern about spillover, bleed-out, call it what you will," said a U.S. official tracking the case who requested anonymity when discussing U.S. intelligence matters. "Especially if they were to return on a U.S. passport." In late November, Homeland Security officials put the imam of the Abubakar As-Saddique mosque and the coordinator of its youth group on a no-fly list. They were barred at Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport from leaving on a pilgrimage to Mecca.

The imam, Abdirahman Ahmed, did not respond to interview requests. In a posting on its website, the mosque said it "unequivocally condemns" suicide bombings and other terrorist acts. It blamed the travel ban on "false, unsubstantiated rumors."

The leader of another mosque under scrutiny, the Darul Da'wah center in St. Paul, Minn., denied rumors in the Somali community that the alleged suicide bomber and several other missing men were among his followers.

"Nobody who is part of my mosque left for Somalia except one man who went for his health," the imam, Hassan A. Mohamud, insisted in an interview last week. "He left for depression, stress that he was feeling, and he will be back in three months."

It might seem odd to seek a restorative cure in a country that has been mired in war for 18 years and now is known for its pirates. But many Somalis in Minneapolis retain strong political and social ties to the intrigues and battles in their homeland.

"They each support a particular warlord back in Somalia," Omar Jamal, head of the Somali Justice Advocacy Center, explained as he puffed on a huge hookah at the crowded Pyramids Cafe and Shisha Lounge.

Somali refugees began flocking to America in the early 1990s when their homeland erupted in famine and civil war -- a chaotic bloodletting portrayed in Hollywood's "Black Hawk Down."

Like Hmong refugees before them, many Somalis moved to Minnesota for good schools, community aid and unskilled jobs in meat-processing plants and factories. A thriving Somali community, estimated at 60,000, has taken root in the state.

The largest group lives in and around a bleak cluster of high-rise apartments beside a busy highway in eastern Minneapolis, an area known as Little Mogadishu.

Women in thick shawls scurry down the icy streets as men in skullcaps pray in storefront mosques and cluster at a local Starbucks. Jobs are scarce and school dropout rates are high. According to police, gangs with names like Somali Mafia and Murda Squad killed seven people last year.

Saeed Fahia, a community activist and local historian, said many youths struggle with alienation in the cultural cross-fire of Somali tradition and American freedom.

"They're easy to manipulate," he said. Those who went to Somalia, he added, "are trying to find a mission in life. They're trying to find out where they came from and who they are."

Many local Somalis bitterly opposed the Ethiopian invasion of their homeland in 2006. The U.S.-backed force overthrew an Islamic coalition seen as having briefly brought peace, and installed in its place an unpopular regime.

Among the rebel forces now fighting to seize power is Shabab, aka the Youth. The hard-line Islamist militia controls much of southern and central Somalia, and is considered the strongest insurgent faction.

In declaring Shabab a terrorist organization last February, the State Department called it "a violent and brutal extremist group with a number of individuals affiliated with Al Qaeda" -- including the terrorists who bombed the U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998.

It's not clear that the still-missing Minnesotans have joined Shabab or were radicalized at local mosques to join the jihad. But many family members and community activists believe they have.

Abdurahman Yusuf, a local Head Start worker, is convinced that his 17-year-old nephew, Mustafa Ali, was lured to Somalia to join the radical group. "He went to fight for the cause," Yusuf said.

The baby-faced senior at Harding High School in St. Paul had attended both the Abubakar As-Saddique and the Darul Da'wah mosques, Yusuf said. Last summer, the youth embraced the extremist Saudi style of Islam known as Wahhabism, and praised Shabab as the "liberators" of Somalia.

"I told him, 'This is wrong -- your father and your grandfather don't believe this,' " Yusuf recalled in an interview. "He told me they were ignorant. He called me an unbeliever."

On Aug. 1, Mustafa told his mother he "was just going to do his laundry," Yusuf said. "And he never came back."

The youth phoned his mother several days later to say he was in Somalia. He would not say who paid for his ticket, who organized his travel or why he had gone. Other missing youths are said to have made similar calls home.

"No one knows for sure who recruited them," said Abdisalam Adam, an educator who heads the Dar al-Hijrah Islamic Center around the corner from the high-rises. "But they obviously did not wake up one morning and decide to go."

At first, some community elders and clerics warned families to keep silent to avoid a repeat of the FBI raids, arrests and deportations that followed the Sept. 11 attacks. But the wall of silence began to crumble in November, after the second group went missing.

When Burhan Hassan failed to come home Nov. 4, his mother checked his room and realized that his passport, laptop computer and cellphone were gone.

Family members also found paperwork showing he had nearly \$2,000 in airline tickets from Universal Travel -- a tiny business tucked behind the high-rises -- even though he had no job or savings.

The itinerary showed the six youths flew to Amsterdam, changed planes for Nairobi and caught a connecting flight to the Indian Ocean port of Malindi, Kenya.

Hassan's family phoned cousins in Nairobi, who raced to the airport but arrived too late. They then rushed to Malindi, but the boys had already boarded boats headed north to Kismayo, a Somali port that Shabab seized last summer.

Hassan has called three times since then, but he hangs up quickly. His family is convinced that someone monitors his calls, and that the bookworm who once hoped to attend Harvard is undergoing guerrilla training -- or worse.

"He sounds brainwashed," worried Abdirizak Bihi, another uncle. "He talks but doesn't answer questions. . . . He just says he is safe and not to worry. But we are obviously frantic. Who could imagine such a thing?"

<http://www.latimes.com/news/printedition/front/la-na-missing18-2009jan18.0,4394612.full.story>

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Homeland SecurityToday.com

Thursday, 15 January 2009

US Military Warns of Mexico Falling into Hands of Narco-Terrorists

by Anthony L. Kimery

'Rapid and sudden collapse' of Mexico

The recent US Joint Forces Command (USJFCOM) report, "Joint Operating Environment 2008: Challenges and Implications for the Future Joint Force," warns that Mexico is on the verge of becoming a failed state under control of narco-terrorists. During the Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs' hearing today on Arizona Gov. Janet Napolitano's nomination by President-elect Barack Obama to be Secretary of Homeland Security, Napolitano stated that "Mexico is going through a very serious scenario right now."

The USJFCOM report is the latest report in recent months warning of the possibility that Mexico or some of its northern border states could fall under the domination of the country's increasingly violent drug and human trafficking cartels.

The USJFCOM report, which outlines a strategic framework for possible threats that will challenge the future joint force, is "intended to spark discussions with the widest set of national security and multinational partners about the nature of the future international environment and its potential military requirements."

"A serious impediment to growth in Latin America remains the power of criminal gangs and drug cartels to corrupt, distort, and damage the region's potential," the report states.

"The fact that criminal organizations and cartels are capable of building dozens of disposable submarines in the jungle and then using them to smuggle cocaine, indicates the enormous economic scale of this activity," the report noted, warning "this poses a real threat to the national security interests of the Western Hemisphere. In particular, the growing assault by the drug cartels and their thugs on the Mexican government over the past several years reminds one that an unstable Mexico could represent a homeland security problem of immense proportions to the United States."

"In terms of worst-case scenarios for the Joint Force and indeed the world" is the "rapid and sudden collapse" of Mexico, the report warned.

The report pointed out that "the government, its politicians, police, and judicial infrastructure are all under sustained assault and pressure by criminal gangs and drug cartels. How that internal conflict turns out over the next several years will have a major impact on the stability of the Mexican state. Any descent by Mexico into chaos would demand an American response based on the serious implications for homeland security alone."

HSToday.us's "Kimery Report," Obama Admin to Inherit Southern Border Nightmare, reported that former US drug czar Barry McCaffrey, an Adjunct Professor at West Point, stated in a recent strategic and operational assessment of drugs and crime that cartel-related violence in Mexico is as severe as terror-related violence in Afghanistan, and that the Obama administration should "immediately focus on the dangerous and worsening problems in Mexico, which fundamentally threaten US national security."

"Before the next eight years are past," McCaffrey wrote, "the violent, warring collection of criminal drug cartels could overwhelm the institutions of the state and establish de facto control over broad regions of northern Mexico."

Leaders in border states have urged President-elect Barack Obama to do more to help Mexico fight drug violence due to growing concern drug violence could spill over into the United States.

The January HSToday cover investigation, *Savage Struggle on the Border*, explores the narco-terrorism problem in Mexico that increasingly is becoming the US's most immediate homeland security problem.

Meanwhile, more caches of weapons and ammunitions – some available only to the Mexican military – are being uncovered.

This week, Baja California state police said 500,000 rounds of ammunition were discovered at an abandoned warehouse in the border city of Mexicali. Police found nearly 200,000 rounds of ammunition for AR-15 assault rifles and 160,000 rounds of ammunition for AK-47 assault rifles, a gun widely employed by Mexico's narco-cartels.

Police also found 135 sacks containing .357 caliber, .380 caliber, 10 mm, .45 caliber and .38 caliber "super" ammunition that only the Mexican army can legally possess.

Elsewhere, Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (ATF) agents found a small arsenal in Phoenix. Dozens of automatic assault weapons and 23,000 rounds of ammunition were seized. ATF said the weaponry was enroute to Mexican cartels.

What is more disturbing, said ATF Special Agent in Charge William Newell, is "we're seeing an alarming increase in the amount of hand grenades being seized" in Mexico.

Grenades have widely been used by Mexican narco-cartels and US law enforcement are concerned they could be used by the cartels in carrying out operations in the United States.

In a meeting Monday with Mexican President Felipe Calderon, Obama pledged to help Calderon's government combat the escalating violence related to the narco-cartels that have killed more than 8,000 people in the last several years

HSToday.us earlier reported that the Department of Homeland Security and Pentagon have already developed contingency plans to respond to narco-cartel violence spreading across the border into the United States.

<http://www.hstoday.us/content/view/6843/128/>

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Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty

January 19, 2009

Who 'Owns' Afghanistan?

by Ahto Lobjakas

KABUL -- Success has many fathers, while failure is an orphan. It's an adage that looks increasingly apt in Afghanistan as stability continues to elude the country. Accusations and counteraccusations fly. President Hamid Karzai has been increasingly vocal in blaming the West for the worst ills afflicting his country -- an explosion of poppy production, a resurgence of the Taliban and Islamic extremism, and even pervasive corruption. His government lacks the requisite control, funds, and support, he says.

Albeit a little less vocally, some in the international community have laid much of the blame at Karzai's doorstep. The Afghan president is regarded by such critics as a weak leader, prone to opportunism, nepotism, and shady backroom deals. Karzai has accused NATO of operating a "second government" in Afghanistan. Strictly speaking, he might be right. Most development projects do not originate within Afghan government ministries, and most financial assistance never passes through them. Western governments also control the international troops without whom the country would collapse "the next day," in the words of one of Karzai's own ministers.

Karzai's real problem, however, is the existence of a third power structure. Various insurgent formations exert real, daily power in about half of Afghanistan's 34 provinces. It is in recognition of this fact that Karzai is now seeking deals with insurgents. And the international community supports him in this.

What the West appears to want is a government in Afghanistan with enough political authority and legitimacy to allow it to take full charge of the entire country. That is arguably not the case today; the international community is in the difficult position of having to act on behalf of a government that in crucial respects remains its own ward. Faced with this chicken-and-egg problem, Western officials in Kabul often resort to talk of "Afghanization" of governance in the country. There appears to be no agreement, however, as to how advanced this process might be.

Outside Kabul

NATO's top civilian representative in Afghanistan, Fernando Gentilini, says the Karzai administration is fully in the driver's seat. "I think the government has the capacity, and the government has the legitimacy -- the full legitimacy, this is a sovereign country -- to drive the process," Gentilini says. But at the same time, Gentilini concedes "legitimization" problems persist in the relationship between the "national" and "subnational" levels -- code for Kabul's limited authority in many provinces.

Consequently, Gentilini says NATO would "applaud a political settlement" between the central government and any insurgents willing to join the political process. Like other ISAF officials, he carefully steers clear of imposing conditions on the terms of any such settlement. Gentilini paints a picture in which the long-term trend in NATO's cooperation with the Afghan authorities is firmly positive -- and measurable.

"There are targets, there are numbers, you know -- the 6 million children going to school, the hundreds of kilometers of roads which are paved, the improvement in health delivery. There are some [measurable] parameters," Gentilini says. "We have to remain balanced."

Statistics, though, are a fickle ally in Afghanistan.

Ramzan Bashedost, a member of Afghanistan's parliament, a fierce Karzai critic, and a one-time minister of Planning, says the estimated \$21 billion of foreign aid "did not build anything." "Anything," he repeats for effect. "It is not possible to show me that in seven years in Afghanistan we built a [single] school [that meets] international norms," Bashedost says. "The Kabul-Kandahar road: It is a famous road which Mr. Karzai said [was] a good job; two years after [its] reconstruction, now the road needs to be rebuilt."

The problem goes beyond norms and standards, however. In Pashtun-dominated provinces like Wardak, Western-built schools for girls admit only boys. Kabul residents complain that the Kabul-Kandahar highway is too dangerous to travel. In Helmand, virtually anything built with foreign funds is a target for insurgents.

Building Institutions

The Afghan government is essentially making the argument that the current predicament is largely a result of the international community's having "mis-Afghanized" Afghanistan. Jelani Popal, a close Karzai ally in charge of the newly created Directorate of Local Governance, says NATO and its allies "imposed" on Afghanistan people "with bad reputations" -- drug dealers, criminals and warlords -- for the short-term objective of fighting Al-Qaeda and the Taliban. Now, he complains, "the Afghan government is expected to get rid of them overnight" to rid itself of corruption and incompetence. But "it is not a problem of the Afghan people," Popal contends.

Facing elections this fall, Karzai is suspected by many of trying to play to the dominant conservative elements within his own Pashtun community. But numerous conversations with Western officials in Afghanistan suggest that many in the international community, led by Washington, have lost considerable confidence in Karzai and would like to be rid of him. Karzai's calls for the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) to tackle insurgents head-on increasingly look like a clever tactic to simultaneously weaken the position of both his international and his domestic opponents.

But, arguably, the international community itself is at least partly at fault. Bashedost, who is making a long-shot bid to succeed oust Karzai in the presidential vote, says the United States and its NATO allies have tried to "build a new system with the old people." Bashedost explains the seemingly implacable hostility of today's Taliban leadership toward Karzai by pointing out that many of those currently in power are the same people the Taliban ousted in the 1990s. Western governments seem to have decided that the best chance of long-term success lies in a strong Afghan National Army (ANA).

Tacitly undermining his own case that the Afghan government is in full possession of its sovereign powers, NATO representative Gentilini says the focus on the ANA is a logical "first step."

"[For] the Afghan national security forces overall being able to take full responsibility for the country, this to me is the real first step," Gentilini says. "Then we can discuss many other things, [including] how much we want to move on with the agenda defined in the Afghan [National Development Agenda]. But this, to me, is a kind of first milestone we should be able to achieve."

The challenge for NATO and its allies in Afghanistan is to ensure that the empowerment of the Afghan National Army -- dubbed "the only functioning institution in Afghanistan" by a top U.S. general in the country -- does not become a fig leaf for an international coalition in search of an exit strategy from an unpopular war.

Local journalists say that in the Pashtun-dominated provinces that compose roughly half of the total, the Afghan National Army and its auxiliary forces are often the only law apart from the insurgents. Anecdotal evidence suggests that in a society largely unacquainted with the concept of rule of law, the army might be unable to offer anything other than another highly repressive solution against the backdrop of a long history filled with injustice and violence. It may be unwilling to provide anything else either, given that it is ANA policy to use units that are not indigenous to the area of their deployment.

Alarming, Western officials increasingly are defining their long-term goals exclusively in terms of the central government's ability to exert control over territory rather than the presence of a functioning democracy, the rule of law, or prosperity and stability.

They fail to notice that, for NATO, far more is at stake than its first-ever out-of-area mission. Afghanistan has for the past seven years also been a nation-building experiment unrivaled in scale outside Europe. As such, it constitutes a test for the West's entire "weltanschauung" and its determination to expand its vision globally. Should the experiment founder or become perverted despite the money and lives invested, the likelihood of its being restaged could recede irrevocably.

RFE/RL correspondent Ahto Lobjakas gathered information for this report during a recent, NATO-hosted visit to Afghanistan with a small group of journalists

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<http://www.rferl.org/articleprintview/1371837.html>

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Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty
January 18, 2009

Drug Trade Remains a Contentious Issue for ISAF, Afghan Government

by Ahto Lobjakas

KABUL -- Even as new figures point to gains in the battle against Afghanistan's drug problem, the issue remains deeply contentious for the government in Kabul and NATO-led forces. Citing UN data, Afghan and International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) officials say fresh figures will show the drugs trade shrinking by 19 percent in terms of area cultivated and 6 percent in terms of crop yields.

No one, however, is willing to assume ultimate responsibility or to say whether Afghanistan has turned a corner. It remains unclear how much of the decline in opium poppies is a result of government action and how much is owed to weather conditions like drought or cold.

Afghan officials tend to emphasize the constraints under which they operate. The country's counternarcotics minister, Colonel General Khodaidad, complains that the drug trade is an "international problem" fueled by Western demand and that the Afghan government has insufficient resources at its disposal. "We do not have [any] budget in

Afghanistan to [fight] the narcotics [industry]," Khodaidad says. "It all belongs to the international community...[not] to me [or] to the Afghan government."

It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the absence of a dedicated counternarcotics budget in a government largely propped up by international funds reflects international distrust; most ISAF states have preferred to spend directly on specific projects and measures aimed to curb Afghanistan's drug problem.

Dangerous 'Nexus'

Khodaidad says his job mostly boils down to "talking" -- traveling the country and trying to persuade local elders to take a stand against poppy cultivation. He says Nangahar and Wardak provinces have become poppy-free, partly as a result of government efforts and partly thanks to the success of alternative crops such as saffron and apples. The latter owe their viability mostly to international investment in the construction of "coolhouses" and infrastructure improvements, like building roads and helping forge commercial links abroad, that allow farmers to get their products to market.

Khodaidad contends that 18 of Afghanistan's 34 provinces are now "poppy-free." He neglects to mention the 13 provinces reckoned by Afghan and foreign observers to be largely under insurgent control, where poppy cultivation often extends to the outskirts of the government-controlled administrative centers and opium is sold in bazaars within a stone's throw of the governor's compound.

Mindful of the threat poppy cultivation constitutes for his government, the Afghan minister appeals to ISAF for direct action against drug labs, convoys, dealers -- or, he warns, "Afghanistan will grow more poppy."

The heroin trade also represents a direct threat to international forces in Afghanistan. The Taliban insurgency is said to skim anywhere between \$100 million and \$400 million off the proceeds of Afghanistan's estimated \$4 billion narcotics industry. ISAF spokesman Brigadier General Richard Blanchette says the money fuels a deadly "nexus" between the insurgents and the drug trade.

"This is the money that allows the insurgents to buy ammunition, to buy explosives, suicide vests that kill our soldiers and the people of Afghanistan," Blanchette says, "so what we want to ensure is that we can cut that flow of money."

Modest Goals

Few ISAF states are willing to get directly involved in the fight against drug trafficking. Most fear the casualties that would inevitably result from confrontations with poppy farmers and their Taliban "muscle." Cultivating poppy has become an integral part of the local economy in places like the southern Helmand Province. Poppy farmers have made significant investments in infrastructure such as wells and irrigation systems. The investments, often in the form of loans, need to be recouped and large families must be fed. Alternative crops, such as wheat, fetch nowhere near the price of opium, and many poppy farmers face a vicious circle and will go to great lengths to protect their current livelihood.

"At harvest time, all the guys who were out there fighting are now doing the harvest -- there is a massive drop in security incidents," a British official says of the relationship between the insurgency and the drug trade in Helmand. He adds that there is no evidence of "Taliban coercion" because Taliban are in many cases "rural farmers."

It is perhaps unsurprising, then, that NATO defense ministers, meeting in Budapest in October, were unwilling to go beyond promises of greater willingness in responding to future Afghan requests for military support in operations against drug traffickers. The British, who do most of the fighting in Helmand and are also ISAF's "lead counternarcotics nation," are themselves none too keen on heavy-handed tactics. Their strategic goal, according to the official quoted above, is to "direct the drug trade away from the insurgents."

ISAF provides support for the Afghan government's drug-control strategy, supplies wheat seed to farmers, and helps train Afghan troops providing security for poppy eradicators. There are also internationally funded, multimillion-dollar reward schemes for governors who manage to rid their provinces of poppy cultivation, with the money going to finance local infrastructure projects. Blanchette also points to international law on armed conflict, which

prohibits military action against civilians. A trafficker is a civilian, says the ISAF spokesman, "and we cannot call an air strike on him just because he is a trafficker."

Powerful Friends?

While ISAF officials argue that law enforcement remains an Afghan responsibility, they bemoan what they regard as a lack of political will within President Hamid Karzai's government to go after drug kingpins. Speaking on condition of anonymity, one senior Western official complains that "the president is not calling for senior traffickers or the senior ministers involved [in the drug trade] to be prosecuted or even investigated." The official pointed out, however, that suspicions of government-level involvement remain "rumor and conjecture."

Some in the Afghan government take exception to suggestions that authorities are not aggressively pursuing drug offenders. Jelani Popal, a Karzai confidante and head of the Directorate for Local Governance, says authorities have in recent years jailed 2,500 traffickers -- which he says is "a huge number." Popal dismisses suggestions of collusion between drug traffickers and Afghan authorities.

"We will go to any extent if somebody provides us [with a list and says], 'OK, these are the drug dealers in your government,' or [accuses] a governor or minister or something -- which I doubt [that] there will be any." Popal likens broad accusations against Afghan officials to "rumors" that drug kingpins are in close contact with representatives of the international community in Afghanistan.

But the counternarcotics minister, General Khodaidad, says there is little doubt that such allegations are well-founded.

"The governors are involved in this -- local governors [in the] provinces, local districts, officials in the provinces, police, [their] vehicles, officials -- of course they are involved," Khodaidad says. "They are involved with the corruption, of course they are involved, even with the drug traffickers." Khodaidad's words appear to corroborate claims by Afghan journalists that large quantities of drugs are transported across Afghanistan by police officers themselves, who enjoy unrivaled freedom of movement.

"Heroin is not the drug of choice in the West," a British official tells RFE/RL, suggesting that Western demand is not the primary factor fueling the staggering Afghan drug trade. For instance, while 90 percent of the heroin consumed in Britain is thought to originate in Afghanistan, that figure accounts for just 2 percent of Afghanistan's heroin output.

Regional markets are absorbing an increasing amount of Afghan opium poppies and heroin. Demand in Iran is now thought to account for about half of Afghanistan's opium production, with China, India, and Russia moving up the table fast. But it is Afghans who pay the ultimate price, and not only in terms of stunted economic development and political corruption. The country has an estimated 1.2 million drug addicts within a population of 31 million and, as General Khodaidad observes, just 40 small clinics to treat them.

RFE/RL correspondent Ahto Lobjakas gathered information for this report during a recent, NATO-hosted visit to Afghanistan with a small group of journalists

http://www.rferl.org/Content/Drug_Trade_Remains_A_Contentious_Issue_For_ISAF_Afghan_Government/1371561.html

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Afghanistan: We Can Do Better

By Jaap de Hoop Scheffer

It has been seven years since Afghan forces supported by the United States toppled the Taliban and denied al-Qaeda the terrorist haven, training ground and launch pad that Afghanistan had become. Since then, there has been clear, substantial progress, including democratic elections, the liberation of growing numbers of Afghan women to take their place in public life, and clear improvements in health care and education.

But an honest assessment of Afghanistan must conclude that we are not where we might have hoped to be by now. While the country's north and west are largely at peace and improving, the south and east are riven by insurgency, drugs and ineffective government. Afghans are increasingly frustrated by the lack of progress in building up their country. And the populations in countries that have contributed troops to the NATO-led mission are wondering how long this operation must last -- and how many young men and women we will lose carrying it out.

In April, to mark the 60th anniversary of NATO's founding, the member nations' heads of state and government will meet in Strasbourg, France, and Kehl, Germany. This meeting is to be part of Barack Obama's first visit to Europe as president, and it will present an opportunity for alliance leaders to discuss the way forward. Five key lessons from recent years should help shape the path of this mission:

- Afghan leadership is not some distant aspiration -- it's something that we need as soon as possible and on which we must insist. The basic problem in Afghanistan is not too much Taliban; it's too little good governance. Afghans need a government that deserves their loyalty and trust; when they have it, the oxygen will be sucked away from the insurgency. The international community must step up its support of the elected government, and, through it, the Afghan people. But we have paid enough, in blood and treasure, to demand that the Afghan government take more concrete and vigorous action to root out corruption and increase efficiency, even where that means difficult political choices.
- NATO, too, needs a more cohesive approach. Our operations are still too much of a patchwork, with individual countries assigned to specific geographic areas. The advantage of this approach is that specific countries get experience with the terrain and the locals and are able to link development and military operations. The drawback: Multiple approaches to military operations and development assistance within one mission reduce effectiveness and can strain solidarity. We should have more common approaches to our efforts, including fewer geographic restrictions on where forces can go in support of each other.
- Afghanistan's problems cannot be dealt with exclusively within its borders. The challenges faced by Pakistan are organically linked to those of Afghanistan; so, politically, are Pakistan's relations with India. Indeed, all neighboring countries have a stake, and an interest, in what happens in Afghanistan. The international community must have a regional approach. All of the relevant neighbors need to be engaged in addressing Afghanistan's challenges. While NATO should not necessarily be in the lead, the alliance has a clear interest in playing its part.
- We cannot just pay lip service to the comprehensive approach. We have repeatedly said that force alone cannot solve Afghanistan's problems. But we are obliged to keep ramping up the military operation partly because of insufficient resources and coordination on the civilian side. There must be a stronger effort to support the police; coordinate development assistance; and beef up the U.N. mission in Afghanistan. Crucially, Afghan officials must make the difficult choices necessary to create an efficient and corruption-free government in which its people can believe. The longer progress takes in these areas, the longer the military operation will be required, at real cost in lives.
- Communications are a strategic battleground. This is no secondary task for spokesmen. There is a general perception in the West that Afghans do not want foreign soldiers on their territory. In fact, polls find that more than 70 percent support the NATO mission. Great attention is rightly paid to occurrences of civilian casualties accidentally caused by our forces; much less attention is paid to the deliberate killings of civilians by the Taliban, which happens five times more often. The international community must prioritize strategic communications. We must do better in showing that there is tangible, steady progress in reaching our goal -- and in reminding the world that the Taliban remain the ruthless killers and abusers of human rights they have always been.

Addressing these challenges will require fresh approaches, political courage and new resources. But the cost of failure -- instability in a highly unstable region; a haven for international terrorism; and massive suffering for the Afghan people -- is much higher. The world simply cannot afford to fail in Afghanistan. Within the NATO alliance and the international community more broadly, we must absorb the lessons from the past as we chart the way forward.

The writer is secretary general of NATO.

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/01/16/AR2009011603717.html>

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January 14, 2009

Report: Nation Not Ready for Pan Flu

Today, Committee on Homeland Security Chairman Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS) and former Subcommittee Chairman for Emerging Threats, Cybersecurity, and Science and Technology, James R. Langevin (D-RI), released a Majority staff report entitled "Getting Beyond Getting Ready for Pandemic Influenza."

The report examines the Nation's state of preparedness and response capabilities in the event of a pandemic influenza outbreak. It identifies sixteen weaknesses in the outgoing Bush Administration's approach to get prepared for pandemic influenza. In addition, the report provides fifteen critical recommendations for what Congress, the incoming Administration, and the public and private sectors can do to achieve National readiness to combat this threat.

Chairman Thompson released the following statement along with the report: "It is possible that the next influenza pandemic will result in hundreds of thousands to millions of deaths – even here in the US. Further, pandemic influenza could destroy the security of our Nation and Homeland. Yet despite the horrific consequences, we still are not prepared as a Nation to fully withstand the impact of such a devastating widespread biological event.

The change in Presidential leadership presents a new opportunity to ensure that the Nation is ready to address pandemic influenza from a position of strength. The House Committee on Homeland Security looks forward to working with the Obama Administration to address this threat and achieve National readiness.

The will to meet and overcome pandemic influenza is as great a mission as any on the global battlefield. Our success depends on keeping up the fight until pandemic influenza is overcome."

<http://homeland.house.gov/SiteDocuments/20090114124322-85263.pdf>

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