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nuclear (CBRN) threats and countermeasures. It's our hope this information resource will help enhance your counterproliferation issue awareness.

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London Daily Telegraph
February 17, 2009

Israel in Covert War on Iran's Nuclear Plans

By Philip Sherwell in New York and Dina Kraft in Tel Aviv

Israel has launched an elaborate covert war against Iran as an alternative to direct military strikes against Tehran's nuclear programme, US intelligence sources have claimed.

The country is using hitmen, sabotage, front companies and double agents to disrupt the regime's weapons project, say the experts.

One element of the "decapitation" programme is said to be the planned assassination of figures involved in the country's atomic operations.

Israeli officials are aware of the change in mood in Washington and privately acknowledge that the new US administration is unlikely to sanction an air attack on Iran's nuclear installations. The aim is to slow or interrupt Iran's research programme without a direct confrontation that could lead to a wider war.

One former CIA operative said: "Disruption is designed to slow progress on the programme, done in such a way they don't realise what's happening.

"The goal is delay, delay, delay until you can come up with some other solution or approach.

"We certainly don't want the current Iranian government to have those weapons. It's a good policy, short of taking them out militarily, which probably carries unacceptable risks."

Reva Bhalla, a senior analyst with Stratfor, a US private intelligence company with strong government security connections, claimed that the strategy was to target key people. "With co-operation from the United States, Israeli covert operations have focused both on eliminating key human assets involved in the nuclear programme and in sabotaging the Iranian nuclear supply chain," she said.

"As US-Israeli relations are bound to come under strain over the Obama administration's outreach to Iran, and as the political atmosphere grows in complexity, an intensification of Israeli covert activity against Iran is likely to result."

The Israeli spy agency Mossad was rumoured to be behind the death of Ardeshire Hassanpour, a nuclear scientist at Iran's Isfahan uranium plant, who died from reported gas poisoning in 2007.

Other recent deaths of prominent figures in the procurement and enrichment process in Iran and Europe have been the result of Israeli "hits" intended to deprive Tehran of technical expertise, claim Western intelligence analysts.

"Israel has shown no hesitation in assassinating weapons scientists for hostile regimes in the past," said a European intelligence official. "They did it with Iraq and they will do it with Iran when they can."

Mossad's covert operations cover a range of activities. The former CIA operative said Israeli and US intelligence had co-operated with European companies working in Iran to obtain photographs and confidential material about Iranian nuclear and missile sites.

Israel has also used front companies to infiltrate the Iranian purchasing network that the clerical regime uses to circumvent UN sanctions. Iran has consistently asserted that it is pursuing a nuclear capability for civilian energy generation purposes.

The Iranian government has become so concerned about penetration of its programme that it has announced arrests of alleged spies in an attempt to discourage double agents.

"Without military strikes, there is still considerable scope for disrupting and damaging the Iranian programme and this has been done with some success," said Yossi Melman, an Israeli journalist for the Haaretz newspaper.

"Israel is part of a detailed and elaborate international effort to slow down the Iranian programme."

Israeli intelligence and government sources declined to comment.

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/israel/4640052/Israel-launches-covert-war-against-Iran.html>

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International Herald Tribune

Israel Seen Engaged in Covert War Inside Iran

Reuters

February 17, 2009

LONDON: Israel is involved in a covert war of sabotage inside Iran in an effort to delay Tehran's attempts to develop a nuclear weapon, the Daily Telegraph newspaper reported Tuesday.

Quoting intelligence experts and an unnamed former CIA agent, the newspaper said Israel's "decapitation" strategy had targeted members of Iran's atomic program, hoping to set back the country's nuclear ambitions without resorting to war.

The program has taken on extra emphasis with the election of President Barack Obama, who has adopted a more diplomatic line with Iran, quietening former Bush administration talk of a possible military strike against Iran to hit its nuclear assets.

"Disruption is designed to slow progress on the program, done in such a way they don't realise what's happening," the paper quoted a former CIA operative as saying.

"The goal is delay, delay, delay until you can come up with some other solution or approach.

"We certainly don't want the current Iranian government to have those weapons. It's a good policy, short of taking them out militarily, which probably carries unacceptable risks."

Asked about the newspaper report, Mark Regev, a spokesman for Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, told Reuters: "It is not our practice to comment publicly about these sorts of allegations, not in this situation, not in any situation."

As evidence of Israel's reported strategy, Iran watchers have pointed to events such as the death of Ardeshire Hassanpour, a nuclear scientist at the Isfahan uranium plant who died at home from apparent gas poisoning in 2007.

Meir Javendafar, an Iran expert at Meepas, a Middle East analysis group, said there were also reports Iran was being sold faulty equipment for its nuclear program on international markets, and that there were attempts to disrupt the electricity supply to Natanz, a uranium enrichment facility in central Iran.

"I think there is sabotage going on, it's a logical move and it makes sense in the game that is part of the overall struggle to disrupt Iran's nuclear ambitions," he told Reuters in London.

"In the absence of a diplomatic solution to resolve this problem, and the infeasibility of war for now, this is the best next solution," he said.

However, he said there were also indications that several more countries other than Israel were involved in attempting to infiltrate Iran to disrupt its nuclear program, and suggested much of the reported clandestine activity was more part of a psychological war than an actual one of sabotage.

"Numerous intelligence agencies are trying their best to do this. Not just Israel but the Americans and many European spy agencies -- there are even reports that neutrals such as Holland have been involved," he said.

"If it's true, then it's putting pressure on the Iranian program technically. If it's not true, then it's all just part of the psychological conflict.

"Since none of this is confirmed, we can't be sure. But even if there's no truth to it, it's part of what is a massive psychological war against Iran's nuclear program. That is a certainty. That is clear.

"It's also affordable, much more affordable than sabotaging equipment inside Iran."

<http://www.iht.com/articles/reuters/2009/02/17/africa/OUKWD-UK-ISRAEL-IRAN-SABOTAGE.php>

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Kansas City Star

Russia Won't Toughen Policy on Iran

By VLADIMIR ISACHENKOV

Associated Press Writer

Russia does not intend to toughen its policy toward Iran regarding its nuclear program, a senior Russian diplomat said Monday.

Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov said it's necessary to intensify international efforts to reach a political settlement of the Iranian nuclear standoff. But Ryabkov added that Russia has no intention to take a harsher attitude to Iran, Russian news agencies reported.

"Our stance on the Iranian nuclear program has no elements which could be interpreted as toughening of approach," Ryabkov was quoted as saying.

The U.S. has accused Iran of supporting terrorism and secretly seeking to build nuclear weapons - charges that Iran denies.

Russia has developed close ties with Iran and is building its first nuclear power plant. Moscow has supported limited U.N. sanctions on Iran, but opposed the U.S. push for tougher measures.

President Barack Obama has signaled a new willingness to engage Iran, whose relations with the Bush administration were long strained.

Iranian Defense Minister Mostafa Najari arrived in Moscow late Monday for talks with his Russian counterpart on bilateral military ties, the Interfax news agency reported.

Russia has supplied weapons to Iran, despite U.S. and Israeli complaints. However, Russian officials have rejected claims that they have provided Iran with powerful S-300 air defense missiles.

Anatoly Isaikin, head of the Russian Rosoboronexport state arms-selling monopoly, was quoted in an interview published earlier this month as saying that it had not supplied S-300s to Iran yet but was ready to do so if ordered by the government.

Interfax said that Najari will likely push for delivery of S-300s during his visit to Russia.

Ryabkov said Monday that ending the Iranian nuclear standoff could also help advance U.S.-Russian talks on possible cooperation on missile defense.

"As soon as there is a shift toward restoring confidence in the peaceful nature of Iran's nuclear program, opportunities will open for deeper talk on prospects for cooperation on missile defense," Ryabkov said. "We are studying signals from the U.S. administration, and, for our part, have made proposals on how we can cooperate in the missile defense field."

Russia has fiercely opposed plans by George W. Bush's administration to deploy a battery of missile interceptors in Poland and a related radar in the Czech Republic. Moscow has rejected the U.S. claims that the sites were intended to counter prospective missile threats from Iran, saying the facilities threaten Russia's security.

The Kremlin has voiced hope that Obama's administration will dump the missile defense plans.

Obama has not said how he intends to proceed. But he has stressed that the system has to be cost-effective and proven and that it should not divert resources from other national security priorities.

<http://www.kansascity.com/451/story/1037203.html>

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International Herald Tribune

Israel Cautions Anew Against a Nuclear-Armed Iran

Reuters

Monday, February 16, 2009

JERUSALEM: Israeli Defence Minister Ehud Barak told a forum of military chiefs on Monday that Israel would regard a nuclear-armed Iran as an "existential threat" that would speed up a regional arms race.

Israel's military spokesman released Barak's comments after the United Nation's nuclear watchdog chief said global nuclear disarmament work was being hampered by Arab perceptions Israel wasn't abiding by a non-proliferation treaty.

Barak told a closed forum of military chiefs at a strategy session that if Iran obtained atomic weapons it would pose a "central threat to world order," the statement said.

He added it would "dramatically accelerate nuclear proliferation in the region."

Israel is believed to have the Middle East's only nuclear arsenal, though it has never acknowledged such a programme or ever testing atomic weapons.

The Jewish state has long denounced Iran's nuclear programme as a threat to its existence and also cites remarks made by Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad saying Israel should be wiped off the map.

U.S. President Barack Obama has warned Tehran of tougher sanctions if it does not halt its disputed nuclear work, but in a departure from his predecessor George W. Bush, said last week he also saw the possibility of diplomatic openings with Iran.

Iran says it seeks nuclear technology for peaceful purposes, in order to generate electricity.

Writing in the International Herald Tribune, Mohamed ElBaradei, director of the International Atomic Energy Agency, referred on Monday to Arab perceptions of Israel in the context of global nuclear disarmament efforts.

"The nuclear non-proliferation regime has lost its legitimacy in the eyes of Arab public opinion because of the perceived double-standards concerning Israel."

ElBaradei said further that Israel was "the only state in the region outside the NPT and known to possess nuclear weapons," referring to a global nuclear non-proliferation treaty never signed by the Jewish state.

<http://www.iht.com/articles/reuters/2009/02/16/africa/OUKWD-UK-ISRAEL-IRAN.php>

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RIA Novosti

17 February 2009

Iran Confirms Trial Run of Bushehr NPP to go Ahead by Yearend

TEHRAN, February 17 (RIA Novosti) - Tehran hopes a trial run of the Bushehr nuclear power plant in southern Iran will take place before the end of this year, a Foreign Ministry spokesman said on Tuesday.

"The work to complete the construction of the nuclear power plant is proceeding as planned," Hasan Qashqavi said, citing Russian officials.

He added that Iran did not anticipate any "emergencies" that could prevent the plant's operation.

"Technical consultations with our Russian partners are ongoing, and we hope that the expectations of the entire Iranian people will not be disappointed - the NPP will be put into operation on time and will work for the benefit of our country," he said.

The head of Russia's state nuclear power corporation Rosatom said earlier this month the work was "moving according to schedule."

Sergei Kiriyenko said, however, that unforeseen obstacles were always possible, particularly, as the corporation was working to integrate "old equipment."

The construction of the Bushehr nuclear power plant was started in 1975 by German companies. However, the German firms stopped work after the imposition of a U.S. embargo on hi-tech supplies to Iran following the 1979 Islamic Revolution and the subsequent capture of the U.S. embassy in Tehran.

Russia signed a contract with Iran to finish the work on the plant in February 1998. The Bushehr project was originally scheduled go on line at the end of 2006, but the date has been pushed back several times. Russia has cited financial problems for the delay amid Western suspicions that Tehran could be seeking nuclear weapons. The Islamic Republic insists it needs its nuclear program to generate energy for non-military purposes.

Iran's Atomic Energy Organization said earlier the Bushehr plant was 94.8% complete. Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki said it was due to go on stream in the first half of 2009.

<http://en.rian.ru/world/20090217/120184704.html>

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RIA Novosti
17 February 2009

Iranian Defense Minister in Moscow 'to Talk S-300 Missile Deal'

MOSCOW, February 17 (RIA Novosti) - Iran's defense minister is likely to discuss the delivery of Russian S-300 air defense systems to the Islamic Republic during a meeting with his Russian counterpart on Tuesday, a business daily said.

Russia's Kommersant said Moscow had signed an S-300 contract with Tehran, but would not rush to implement it due to a seeming thaw in Russia's relations with the new U.S. administration.

Iranian media have repeatedly said, citing senior security officials, that Russia has started delivering elements of the advanced version of the S-300 missile with a range of over 150 kilometers (over 100 miles).

The reports have alarmed the U.S. and Israel, both of which have refused to rule out the possibility of military action against Tehran, accusing it of a failure to obey international nuclear non-proliferation demands.

However, Russia has dismissed the reports. "We do not supply any offensive weapons to Iran, and accusing Russia and Iran of cooperation that undermines regional security is unjust," Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov said earlier.

Iranian Defense Minister Mostafa Mohammad Najjar said ahead of his visit that Tehran would negotiate the delivery of S-300 missiles "when it is necessary."

In an official statement, the Islamic Republic's Defense Ministry said: "During his trip to Russia, the Iranian defense minister will hold talks with Russian officials and visit a number of defense industry companies. The main purpose of the visit is the expansion of bilateral [military-technical] ties and the implementation of existing agreements in the military-technical sector."

"The contract on the S-300 could be fulfilled any time," Kommersant said, citing an unidentified Russian defense official. "New deals are in the offing. Talks on Buk-M1 medium-range missile systems are continuing. However there has been no political decision, necessary for the deals to go ahead."

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov is expected to meet with the new U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, in March. The meeting is seen as a sign of a thaw in relations between Moscow and Washington, strained of late over a host of issues, including U.S. plans to deploy missile shield elements in Central Europe, which Russia strongly opposes.

Media reports said the new U.S. administration was seeking a compromise on the missile shield dispute that would be linked to Russia's cooperation in preventing Iran from building a nuclear bomb. The "Iranian threat" was one of the reasons cited for the missile shield.

Iran recently took delivery of 29 Russian-made Tor-M1 air defense missile systems under a \$700-million contract signed in late 2005. Russia has also trained Iranian Tor-M1 specialists, including radar operators and crew commanders.

<http://en.rian.ru/russia/20090217/120178299.html>

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Guardian.co.uk

Thursday 19 February 2009

Iran has Enriched Enough Uranium to Make Bomb, IAEA says

Julian Borger, diplomatic editor

The UN's nuclear watchdog reported today that Iran had managed to enrich a metric tonne of low enriched uranium (LEU), which UN officials say is technically enough to build a nuclear weapon.

UN officials cautioned that there remained many practical obstacles to the production of a bomb, and pointed out that the uranium was under close surveillance, and the report issued by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) said Iran appeared to have slowed down the rate at which its uranium enrichment capacity is expanding. But the report is likely to raise further the already high tensions surrounding the Iranian nuclear programme.

One respected US analyst said that the tonne milestone meant that Iran had reached "breakout capacity" - the theoretical ability to produce the 20-25 kg highly enriched uranium needed for one functioning warhead. Others were more cautious but said there was plenty more in the report to raise the level of international concern.

The IAEA said that Iran had put a roof over a "heavy-water" nuclear reactor being built near the town of Arak, capable and was preventing agency inspectors from carrying out ground inspections, meaning that they no longer had any way of seeing what was being done at the facility, which could potentially produce plutonium.

Iran is also refusing to tell the IAEA where it is manufacturing the centrifuges used to enrich uranium, so the agency cannot confirm how many are being produced and where they are being installed.

In a separate report released at the same time, the IAEA said traces of uranium taken from the site of an alleged nuclear reactor in Syria were manmade and rejected the Syrian government's claim that the uranium had come from Israeli missiles used to destroy the site in 2007.

The report on the Dair Alzour site puts enormous pressure on Damascus as it rejects the Syrian explanation for the presence of uranium and denounces the government for its lack of cooperation with the agency's inquiry.

Together, the reports on Iran and Syria add greater urgency to international efforts to curb nuclear proliferation, and in particular, bring closer the possibility of a military confrontation between Iran and Israel, which has declared it will not tolerate Iran reaching nuclear weapons capability.

The IAEA report on Iran surprised many proliferation experts because, it recorded a dramatic jump in Iranian stockpiles of LEU at the enrichment plant at Natanz. In its last report in November, the IAEA estimated that Iran had produced 635 kg of LEU, based partly on Iranian government figures.

The agency now estimates that Iran had produced 839 kg of LEU by November, and that Iran had reported producing a further 171 kg in the following two months - a total of 1010 kg. The Iranian LEU has less than a 4% concentration of the fissile isotope Uranium 235. To make weapons grade HEU, with a concentration of 80-90%, it has to be further enriched, by being passed through massed 'cascades' of centrifuges.

"Do they have enough LEU to produce a 'significant quantity' of HEU [enough for a bomb]? Yes, if you count the U235 atoms then they do have a significant quantity of HEU," a senior official close to the IAEA said. "But it is theoretical and they would need to use their full capacity to do so. They are not there yet. If they were to build another clandestine facility, then that would be different."

The official added that: "The nuclear material has been under containment and surveillance at all times."

UN officials also stressed that the number of centrifuges at Natanz actually being used to enrich uranium had increased relatively little since the last report in November, from 3,800 to nearly 4,000. But it also found a roughly 1,500 additional centrifuges had been installed and were "under vacuum", a preparatory step before enrichment can start.

David Albright, a veteran UN weapons inspector, who now heads the independent Institute for Science and International Security (ISIS) in Washington, gave a blunter assessment.

"They have reached a nuclear weapons breakout capability. You can dance about it, but they would have enough to make 20-25 kg of weapons-grade HEU," Albright said. "If they break out they will do it at a clandestine facility, not

at Natanz, so you can't use Natanz as a measure of how fast they could do it. The Iranians have stopped telling the IAEA about the production of centrifuges ... so the agency doesn't know how many they are making."

Another western analyst, speaking on condition of anonymity, argued that due to the wastage involved in making a first nuclear device, Iran would need a few more hundred kilograms of LEU to reach breakout capacity, but added that the country appeared "well on its way" to that milestone.

Daryl Kimball, the head of the Arms Control Association in Washington argued that Iran's LEU stockpile was not the most worrying aspect of the new IAEA report.

"The report shows that Iran is slowly amassing an LEU stockpile but that stockpile we must remember is safeguarded. Iran can't divert that quantity without being very obvious," Kimball said.

"What should be of concern is that the IAEA is becoming less able to provide an accurate picture of what is going on. We don't know where centrifuges are being manufactured and whether they are being delivered to Natanz or somewhere else. And we cannot remotely see what is happening at [a] heavy water facility under construction at Arak, and whether that is being used for peaceful purposes."

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2009/feb/19/iran-iaea-united-nations-nuclear-weapon>

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London Daily Telegraph

Syria 'Rebuilding' Chemical Weapons Capability

By Damien McElroy, Foreign Affairs Correspondent

18 February 2009

Any suggestion that Syria is enhancing the offensive potential of its chemical munitions threatens to provoke a new round of hostilities with Israel as it will be treated as an additional threat to Israel's existence.

Israel caught the world by surprise by ordering an aerial attack on a suspected Syrian nuclear research centre in the country's the eastern desert in 2007.

Syria has maintained stockpiles of chemical weapons, including Sarin gas and blister agents, for decades. But satellite images from two operators, GeoEye and DigitalGlobe, appeared to show significant efforts to update known facilities.

The Janes's report said that new structures for warehousing and manufacturing complex chemical materials had been built. The buildings had sophisticated filtration systems and cooling towers. Bays for specially adapted Scud missiles had also been built.

It has long been suggested in intelligence circles that Syria had acquired chemical weapons munitions from Iraq in the run-up to the US-led assault on the country. An analysis by JIR suggested that the work on the al-Safir facility in the north-west of the country had started in 2005, in the aftermath of the Iraq war, and was continuing last year.

Jane's analysts said that al-Safir was among the most significant chemical weapons production, storage and weaponisation sites in Syria. "Its presence indicates Syria's desire to develop unconventional weapons either to act as a deterrent to conflict with Israel or as a force enhancer should any conflict ensue," said Christian LeMière, editor of JIR. "Further expansion of al-Safir is likely to antagonise Israel and highlight mutual mistrust, even as peace talks between the two neighbours progress intermittently.

"Although an Israeli air strike on the facility may not yet be likely, such developments only serve to underline and exacerbate regional tensions."

An Israeli intelligence operation had penetrated the Syrian nuclear programme, which photographs appeared to show had been undertaken with North Korean assistance delivered by sea. The images show that al-Safir is protected by modern surface-to-air missiles acquired from Russia and there are several rings of security within the complex.

Syria's role in promoting instability in the Middle East is the subject of deep dispute between foreign powers. Some diplomats insist that overtures to the Ba'athist regime of Bashar al-Assad, the country's president, holds the key to regional peace. Others have concluded the country is an erratic element that seeks to shore up its strategic position under the guise of negotiations.

The country co-operated with Turkish mediators conducting indirect negotiations with Israel over the return of the occupied Golan Heights at the same time as it now appears to have been developing nuclear facilities and improving its chemical facilities.

Mr Assad expects to see relations with Washington undergo a rehabilitation under the foreign policy team assembled by President Barack Obama. President George W Bush downgraded relations with Damascus after it was accused of complicity in terrorism in Iraq and the murder of the Lebanese leader, Rafik Hariri.

Damascus expects the appointment of the first US ambassador in Syria for almost four years will be announced within weeks.

America is the "main arbiter" in the Middle East peace process, Mr Assad told *The Guardian* newspaper.

"There is no substitute for the US. An ambassador is important," he said. "Sending these delegations is important. This number of congressmen coming to Syria is a good gesture. It shows that this administration wants to see dialogue with Syria. What we have heard from them - Obama, Clinton and others - is positive."

But he added: "We are still in the period of gestures and signals. There is nothing real yet."

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/syria/4691464/Syria-rebuilding-chemical-weapons-capability.html>

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Guardian.co.uk
19 February 2009

UN Nuclear Watchdog Rejects Syrian Excuses for Uranium Find

Julian Borger, diplomatic editor

The UN's nuclear watchdog has said traces of uranium taken from the site of an alleged nuclear reactor in Syria were manmade and rejected the Syrian government's claim that it came from an Israeli air strike that destroyed the site in 2007.

The report by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) on the Dair Alzour site puts strong pressure on Damascus as it rejects the Syrian explanation for the presence of uranium and denounces the government for its lack of cooperation with the agency's inquiry.

The IAEA says Israel also failed to cooperate, but its findings give weight to the Israeli and US allegation that Dair Alzour was a secret reactor intended for eventual production of weapons. The report explicitly questions Syria's denials.

"Syria has stated that the origin of the uranium particles was the missiles used to destroy the building," the IAEA report says. "The agency's current assessment is that there is a low probability that the uranium was introduced by the use of missiles as the isotopic and chemical composition and the morphology of the particles are all inconsistent with what would be expected from the use of uranium-based munitions."

The report says that after an initial visit in June 2008, which revealed the presence of processed uranium, IAEA inspectors had not been allowed back to Dair Alzour and other sites where debris might have been stored, on the grounds they were "military installations".

Experts at the agency's Vienna headquarters carried out further analysis of the original samples and found more traces of uranium.

"These uranium particles ... are of a type not included in Syria's declared inventory of nuclear material," the report says. It pointedly requests "clarification of efforts by Syrian entities to procure materials and equipment which could support the construction and operation of a nuclear reactor".

The report says Damascus replied to some questions put to it about Dair Alzour by IAEA inspectors but is damning in its assessment of the quality of the Syrian responses, saying they "were only partial and included information already provided to the agency, and did not address most of the questions raised in the agency's communications".

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2009/feb/19/syria-israel-nuclear-reactor-missiles>

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New York Times
February 13, 2009

Global Economy Top Threat to U.S., Spy Chief Says

By MARK MAZZETTI

WASHINGTON — The new director of national intelligence told Congress on Thursday that global economic turmoil and the instability it could ignite had outpaced terrorism as the most urgent threat facing the United States.

The assessment underscored concern inside America's intelligence agencies not only about the fallout from the economic crisis around the globe, but also about long-term harm to America's reputation. The crisis that began in American markets has already "increased questioning of U.S. stewardship of the global economy," the intelligence chief, Dennis C. Blair, said in prepared testimony.

Mr. Blair's comments were particularly striking because they were delivered as part of a threat assessment to Congress that has customarily focused on issues like terrorism and nuclear proliferation. Mr. Blair singled out the economic downturn as "the primary near-term security concern" for the country, and he warned that if it continued to spread and deepen, it would contribute to unrest and imperil some governments.

"The longer it takes for the recovery to begin, the greater the likelihood of serious damage to U.S. strategic interests," he said.

Mr. Blair also used his testimony to deliver a withering critique of the Afghan government's inability to halt the spread of the Taliban, and he said corruption in Kabul and throughout the country had bolstered support for the Taliban and warlords.

The stark assessment of the security picture in Afghanistan laid bare the obstacles facing the Obama administration as it aims to direct more American troops and attention toward quelling the violence in the country.

Mr. Blair delivered his assessment to the Senate Intelligence Committee, in what was the new administration's first public recitation of the national security challenges facing the United States.

In a departure from recent years, when the heads of several intelligence agencies joined the director of national intelligence to deliver the testimony on the threats facing the nation, Mr. Blair faced the committee alone, a sign that the Obama administration plans for him to take on a more public role at the top of the intelligence pyramid.

Mr. Blair reiterated the oft-stated idea that no significant improvement in Afghanistan was possible unless Pakistan gained control of its own border areas, but he said that Pakistan's government was losing authority over that territory and that even more developed parts of Pakistan were coming under the sway of Islamic radicalism.

He linked Pakistan's problems, in part, to the fact that it was among the countries most badly hurt by the economic crisis. Already, he said, roughly a quarter of the world's nations have experienced "low-level instability such as government changes" as a result of the current slowdown in the global economy.

American officials say Pakistan's tribal areas remain home to the core leadership of Al Qaeda, though Mr. Blair said that its leadership had been battered in recent months by what he called "a succession of blows as damaging to the group as any since the fall of the Taliban in 2001." The attacks have been carried out by C.I.A. remotely piloted aircraft, which Senator Dianne Feinstein, the California Democrat who is the Intelligence Committee's chairwoman, said were operating out of a base in Pakistan.

Still, American intelligence officials have long said that dismantling Al Qaeda's haven in Pakistan would take more than a campaign of airstrikes against the group's leadership.

But Mr. Blair also spread around the blame for Afghanistan's problems. A day after a brazen attack by Taliban gunmen in Kabul, the Afghan capital, Mr. Blair named the American-backed government of President Hamid Karzai as part of the problem in Afghanistan.

"Kabul's inability to build effective, honest, and loyal provincial- and district-level institutions capable of providing basic services and sustainable, licit livelihoods erodes its popular legitimacy and increases the influence of local warlords and the Taliban," Mr. Blair said.

Speaking about North Korea, he cited renewed concern among American intelligence officials that the country could be using a covert uranium enrichment program to produce fissile material that could be used to build nuclear

weapons. American intelligence officials have previously estimated that the North has harvested enough plutonium for six or more bombs, although it has never been clear whether the North built the weapons.

Officials in Washington believe that North Korea is preparing for another long-range missile test, in an attempt to demonstrate an ability to threaten cities along the West Coast of the United States.

Iran is another nation that Mr. Blair cited as getting closer to mastering advanced missile technology, one aspect of what he told senators at the hearing was Iran's "dogged development of a deliverable nuclear weapon."

He repeated the assessment made by Bush administration officials that Iran was likely to be using thousands of centrifuges to enrich uranium to produce material for a nuclear weapon. (Iran says its nuclear program is for energy generation.) But he said that a political decision ultimately awaited Iranian leaders about whether or not to turn Iran into a full-fledged nuclear power. "I don't think it's a done deal either way," he said at the hearing.

Mr. Blair's focus on the world economy was a surprise to some senators. At one point, he assured one senator that he had no plans to turn the focus of American intelligence agencies away from threats like Iran and North Korea. "I won't be turning satellites to look at G.D.P. accounts," he said.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2009/02/13/washington/13intel.html?hp>

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New York Times
February 17, 2009

Re-evaluation of National Security Ordered

By ERIC SCHMITT

WASHINGTON — The homeland security secretary, Janet Napolitano, is re-evaluating the largest federal program for testing the country's ability to respond to terrorist attacks, one of several Bush administration initiatives she has ordered to come under review.

As governor of Arizona, Ms. Napolitano sent a searing two-page letter to her predecessor as secretary, Michael Chertoff, complaining that a \$25 million national exercise in October 2007, which she and 23,000 other federal, state and local emergency workers participated in, was too expensive, too long in planning and "too removed from a real-world scenario."

Now, in her first weeks as head of the Homeland Security Department, Ms. Napolitano has ordered a review of that program and several others, including cybersecurity, a strategy for protecting the border with Canada, and the vulnerability of power plants and other critical infrastructure.

The directives implicitly raise questions about how well the Bush administration prepared the nation's defenses against a terrorist attack. But they also reflect what homeland security analysts say is Ms. Napolitano's desire to apply her practical experiences as a border-state governor to several important homeland security policies.

Her pointed comments on the emergency preparedness exercise, which she repeated last month at her Senate confirmation hearing, offer a glimpse into how Ms. Napolitano may retool one of the centerpieces of the Bush administration's domestic security architecture.

"If we're going to be doing these kinds of things, and they are valuable, the underlying philosophy is a good one, but they need to be in my view streamlined," Ms. Napolitano told the Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs last month.

Ms. Napolitano's frustration with the system in place for rehearsing responses to natural disasters and terrorist attacks has struck a chord among state and local emergency managers, many of whom have long complained that the Homeland Security Department and its crisis-response component, the Federal Emergency Management Agency, have failed to consult fully with local communities in disaster planning.

"If we're going to do these exercises, D.H.S. needs to collaborate to a greater extent with local governments so we're not wasting resources, we're not spinning our wheels and we're making the country safe," said Russell Decker, emergency manager for Allen County, Ohio, who is also president of the International Association of Emergency Managers, which comprises 4,300 state and local agencies.

Congress is also eager to ensure that lessons learned from each exercise are broadly disseminated.

“If you participate in an exercise, you want to know its strengths and weaknesses,” said Representative Henry Cuellar, Democrat of Texas, who heads the House homeland security subcommittee that oversees emergency preparedness.

It will not take long to put Ms. Napolitano’s new thinking to the test. FEMA is completing plans for the next major exercise, scheduled for late July. Agency officials were reluctant to reveal too many details, but emergency planners in Arkansas, Louisiana, New Mexico, Oklahoma and Texas will be tested on how well and how quickly they detect a terrorist plot that begins with a mock attack in Europe and continues with a simulated strike against the United States from plotters infiltrating the border from Mexico.

The exercise this year, for the first time, focuses on preventing a potential attack, not just responding to a crisis, federal officials say.

Emergency planners say they have already taken Ms. Napolitano’s criticisms to heart, improving federal coordination with state and local partners in planning the disaster drill this summer, increasing the frequency of national exercises to every year from every two, cutting costs to encourage wider participation and providing feedback within 90 days to participants on what went well and what did not.

“Most of them were already on the radar scope in one way, shape or form,” said Steve Saunders, a retired Army National Guard major general who is an assistant FEMA administrator overseeing the national exercise division, “but her letter helped crystallize, I think, some of the things we needed to do.”

Mr. Saunders said he expected some changes as a result of the review ordered by Ms. Napolitano, but he cautioned in an interview, “don’t mess around” significantly with this year’s exercise or drills on the drawing board for 2010 and 2011 that will simulate an improvised nuclear bomb attack and a catastrophic earthquake.

Mr. Saunders said states and localities had already started budgeting for those exercises. “If we start shifting near-term activities,” he said, “it becomes fairly problematic.”

Sean Smith, the Homeland Security Department spokesman, said it was too soon to predict what Ms. Napolitano would decide, but added, “Her experiences with this were less than ideal, and it is something she will be reviewing.”

In addition, the Government Accountability Office, the investigative arm of Congress, is conducting a review of FEMA’s emergency preparedness programs, including the national-level exercises, that will be completed by the end of April.

States and cities routinely conduct emergency preparedness drills. Specialists in domestic security agree that it is also essential to hold large-scale national emergency exercises to test how federal, state and local officials and emergency personnel work together to prevent or deal with terrorist attacks.

Congress directed the government in 1998 to carry out a national exercise program, formerly called Topoff for the “top officials” who participate. There have been four major exercises since then, simulating chemical, biological and nuclear attacks. The exercises now also include foreign partners, like Britain and Canada.

Specialists in domestic security say Ms. Napolitano offers a new perspective to the program.

“She brings to the table real-world experience as a governor, as a person responsible for implementing these programs where the rubber hits the road,” said David Heyman, director of the domestic security program at the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

Ms. Napolitano’s unhappiness with the program stems from her participation in the five-day October 2007 exercise, which simulated a dirty-bomb attack against Phoenix; Portland, Ore.; and Guam. It was planned to test how well federal, state and local officials responded to such a cataclysm.

Within days after the exercise wrapped up, Ms. Napolitano complained to Mr. Chertoff that federal officials never contacted top Arizona emergency officials during the drill, did not involve her as much as she said she would have been during a real disaster, and gave participants too much advance information about the drill.

“When you have months to prepare for an exercise and you know the exact scenario being contemplated,” Ms. Napolitano said, “a large part of the exercise’s value is lost.”

<http://www.nytimes.com/2009/02/17/us/politics/17terror.html?partner=rss&emc=rss>

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USA Today
February 17, 2009

Raids on Federal Computer Data Soar

By Peter Eisler, USA Today

WASHINGTON — Reported cyberattacks on U.S. government computer networks climbed 40% last year, federal records show, and more infiltrators are trying to plant malicious software they could use to control or steal sensitive data.

Federally tracked accounts of unauthorized access to government computers and installations of hostile programs rose from a combined 3,928 incidents in 2007 to 5,488 in 2008, based on data provided to USA TODAY by the U.S. Computer Emergency Readiness Team (US-CERT).

"Government systems are under constant attack," says Joel Brenner, counterintelligence chief in the Office of the Director of National Intelligence. "We're seeing ... a dramatic, consistent increase in cyber crime (and) intelligence activities."

The government does not publicly detail the number or types of attacks that succeed. A commission of government officials and private experts reported in December that the departments of Defense, State, Homeland Security and Commerce all have suffered "major intrusions" in which sensitive data were stolen or compromised.

"The damage from cyberattack is real," says the report, issued by the Center for Strategic and International Studies with Reps. Jim Langevin, D-R.I., and Michael McCaul, R-Texas.

The new data on attacks represent a small sampling — just 1% of federal agencies have fully developed tracking systems — and some of the increase may reflect better reporting, says Mischel Kwon, who heads US-CERT at the Department of Homeland Security. Still, the reports are the best public accounting of such attacks and underscore concerns driving federal cybersecurity initiatives.

Director of National Intelligence Dennis Blair told Congress last week that government networks are targeted by foreign nations seeking intelligence, such as China and Russia, as well as criminal groups and individuals who may want to disrupt power, communication or financial systems.

Some attackers may be less interested in stealing data than in undermining a system's ability to operate, such as by planting software that could slow critical networks in emergencies, Brenner adds.

Security officials are especially alarmed about phishing, in which seemingly legitimate e-mails solicit sensitive information, and "web redirects," which shunt a computer to a website where it downloads malicious software, Kwon said.

As part of a Comprehensive Cyber Security Initiative launched by President Bush, the government has cut the number of portals linking federal computer networks to the Internet from 4,500 to 2,500.

Last week, President Obama named Melissa Hathaway, who headed the cybersecurity initiative, to run a 60-day review of federal cybersecurity programs.

The review should spur more cybersecurity initiatives, Brenner says. "What's going on now is not enough, but it is the absolute necessary condition for the progress we have to make."

Tracking cybercrimes against government

Reported incidents of unauthorized access to government computers and installation of malicious code have more than doubled in the past two years.

http://www.usatoday.com/news/washington/2009-02-16-cyber-attacks_N.htm?csp=34

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Air Force News Service
February 10, 2009

Officials Host First Nuclear Surety Inspector's Course

by Daniel Monahan
Air Force Inspection Agency

KIRTLAND AIR FORCE BASE, N.M. (AFNS) -- Inspectors throughout the Air Force attended the first Nuclear Surety Inspector's Course from Feb. 2 to 6 at the Air Force Inspection Agency, Kirtland Air Force Base, N.M.

As Air Force leaders reinvigorate the nuclear program, the implementation of this class was a top priority. The objective of the course is to standardize all training and certification of Air Force NSI inspectors.

"Each MAJCOM has or is currently conducting its own NSI inspector training course," said Chief Master Sgt. Brent Belcoff, AFIA Inspection and Oversight Directorate superintendent. "However, it lacks standardization, and this new class will remedy that."

In the fall of 2008, Lt. Gen. Ronald F. Sams, the Air Force inspector general, assigned AFIA information operations specialists to create the curriculum and teach the course.

"We conduct the NSI oversight mission, so we were given the task to conduct the NSI training mission as well," said George Parrott, AFIA/IO deputy director. "We have taken lessons learned from the last five years and have applied them to this class. A lot of work has been put into this and we will continue to do so."

The first class comprised 18 attendees from AFIA, the Defense Threat Reduction Agency and nuclear-capable major commands.

"We had a very diverse group of NSI inspectors here in the course," said Mr. Parrott. "When you get a diverse group like that, people discussed a wide variety of personal NSI experiences. As a result, there will be an increase of knowledge about the NSI process."

One experienced inspector expressed confidence this course will prove beneficial when conducting future inspections.

"I have performed about 30 NSIs in my career," said Jerry Garrett, Air Combat Command inspector general. "Because of this class, we will all have a broader scope to help us identify deficiencies in the NSI process, as well as ensure nuclear accountability."

According to Mr. Parrott, this first course culminates an intensive build-up by AFIA/IO personnel to develop an NSI inspector's course.

"The Air Force is taking this task very seriously and is leaning forward in the development and validation of this NSI Inspector Course," said Chief Belcoff.

To enhance future courses, the instructors are using attendees' feedback.

"Many of the inspectors think injecting more scenarios based on learning objectives will be helpful," said Mr. Parrott. "For example, many thought it would be beneficial to be presented an actual NSI dilemma requiring group interaction and discussion to come to a resolution. We want to avoid a strict lecture based class."

Although officials will continue to modify and improve the course, the first class was a success according to Chief Belcoff.

"Overall the first course was outstanding," he said. "With more than 220 years of experience among 18 personnel, the combined cooperation and passion for the nuclear enterprise is unmatched."

http://www.af.mil/news/story_print.asp?id=123134872

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RIA Novosti

17 February 2009

Al-Qaeda Gains Strength, Active in North Caucasus - Envoy

MOSCOW, February 17 (RIA Novosti) - Al-Qaeda, the international terrorist organization, has not become weaker but gained in strength, while hundreds of similar extremist groups have emerged worldwide, a Russian presidential representative said on Tuesday.

"We said that al-Qaeda had been weakened financially and that a change of generations had taken place, that did not result in management loss, but in its perfection, reformation, and today we see... that the organization in some ways is more prepared for the current global situation," Anatoly Safonov, the presidential representative for international cooperation on combating terrorism and organized crime, said.

He added that hundreds of similar organizations to al-Qaeda have emerged in recent years with some of them operating in the troubled Russian North Caucasus.

"There are still active representatives of international terrorist organizations, including al-Qaeda, operating in the North Caucasus," Safonov said.

Last month Russian Deputy Interior Minister Arkady Yedelev told journalists that al-Qaeda is active in Russia's Republic of Daghestan and Chechnya where they carry out regular inspections of illegal armed units providing them with weapons and explosives.

Sporadic terrorist attacks and militant clashes are common in the Russian republics of Ingushetia and Daghestan, and in neighboring Chechnya, although the Kremlin has ended its campaign to fight separatists and terrorists there.

<http://en.rian.ru/russia/20090217/120183833.html>

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London Daily Telegraph

17 February 2009

Geography Professor Claims to have Found Osama bin Laden

By Ben Farmer in Kabul

Using patterns of how animal species spread, the world's most wanted terrorist can be tracked down to a town in the tribal region of North West Pakistan it is claimed.

By factoring in his need for security, electricity, high ceilings to accommodate his 6ft 4in frame and spare rooms for his bodyguards, the search can be further narrowed to three walled compounds.

According to a team led by Thomas Gillespie, at the University of California in Los Angeles, bin Laden's location is "one of the most important political questions of our time".

Mathematical models used to explain how animal species spread out say he should be close to where he was last spotted.

Their research published in MIT International Review also concluded he should also be in a large town with a similar culture to Afghanistan where he can remain largely anonymous.

The most likely candidate is in Parachinar, 12 miles inside Pakistan, which housed many mujahideen during the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in the 1980s.

Finally after looking at his need for electricity for dialysis, high walls, spare rooms for his entourage, and trees to hide from prying eyes, satellite pictures show just three suitable houses.

"We believe that our work involves the first scientific approach to establishing his current location" the research concludes.

"The methods are repeatable and can be updated with new information obtained from the US intelligence community."

Kim Rossmo of Texas State University, who has worked with the military to find terrorists told USA Today: "The idea of identifying three buildings in a city of half a million especially one in a country the authors have likely never visited is somewhat overconfident."

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/pakistan/4681736/Geography-professor-claims-to-have-found-Osama-bin-Laden.html>

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New York Times
February 18, 2009

Saudi Arabia: Guantánamo Ex-Inmate is in Custody

By ROBERT F. WORTH

A former detainee at Guantánamo Bay, Cuba, who subsequently joined the Yemeni branch of Al Qaeda returned to Saudi Arabia on Tuesday and was in the custody of the authorities. The Yemeni government said it had returned the former detainee, Muhammad al-Awfi, to Saudi Arabia. But Saudi officials said Mr. Awfi, also known as Abu Hareth, had traveled to the Saudi-Yemeni border and turned himself in. Mr. Awfi was one of 11 Saudis who were believed to have returned to terrorist groups after being released from Guantánamo and passing through a Saudi rehabilitation program for former jihadists. He was on a wanted list of 85 terrorism suspects made public by the Saudi authorities last month.

http://www.nytimes.com/2009/02/18/world/middleeast/18briefs-GUANTNAMOEXI_BRF.html

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The Christian Science Monitor
February 19, 2009

In N. Africa, Al Qaeda Offshoot Claims Six Western Hostages

By Jonathan Adams

Al Qaeda's North African franchise has claimed responsibility for the kidnapping of two Canadian diplomats and four European tourists in Niger. The claims have not been verified, press reports say. But if true, the news is likely to fuel concerns that the Algeria-based Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) is expanding its reach in Africa and increasingly targeting Westerners.

Two Canadian diplomats, including the United Nations envoy to Niger, Robert Fowler, were abducted in mid-December. The four tourists – a Swiss couple, German woman, and British man – were abducted Jan. 22 in Niger after visiting a Tuareg cultural festival in neighboring Mali.

Initial suspicion for the kidnapping of the Canadian diplomats centered on the Tuareg, a nomadic group that is fighting the Niger and Mali governments to win autonomy for their homeland. But the Tuareg had denied involvement, reported the **BBC**.

The **BBC** reported Wednesday that the Al Qaeda claim came in an audio recording.

The audio recording of the man, who identified himself as Salah Abu Mohammed, was broadcast by Arabic satellite station al-Jazeera. ...

The authenticity of the tape, in which the group said it would soon issue conditions for the hostages' release, has not been verified.

The news service quoted Maghreb analyst Mohamed Ben-Madani as saying the move fits AQIM's "usual tactics."

"It is their normal practice not to speak until they are sure that they have got good people for good money and they are in a safe place before any negotiations," he told the BBC's Focus on Africa programme....

Mr Ben-Madani said the group's influence is spreading and it now has small branches in places like Mali, Niger, Mauritania, Nigeria and Morocco.

"It is spreading and growing in numbers," he said.

Ennahar Online, the website of an Algerian newspaper, quoted from the audio tape.

"We are pleased to transmit to the Islamic nation the good news of the success of the Mujahidines in achieving of two operations in Niger," says on this soundtrack the spokesman of Al Qaeda in the Maghreb, Salah Abou Mohammed....

Mujahidines "reserve the right to manage the case of six hostages by Islamic law (Sharia)," adds the spokesman, without further detail.

Reuters reported today that the group had published photos of four of the six hostages on the Web.

A posting on Islamist websites on Thursday showed three separate images of what it said were a Swiss couple, a German woman and a British man, surrounded by men bearing rifles.

In the photographs the women's faces have been blurred.

Meanwhile, **Agence France-Presse** (AFP) reported that a security summit of states in Africa's northern Sahel region – which includes Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, Algeria, Libya, and Chad – had been postponed again due to scheduling problems.

Notes AFP: "The Sahel region with vast stretches of inhospitable desert, is notoriously difficult to control. Rebels and several armed groups roam largely unhindered across the region and borders between the countries."

[Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb] intends to unify armed Islamist groups in Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia as well as emerging groups in countries bordering the Sahara including Burkina Faso, Chad, Eritrea, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal and Sudan.

The Daily Telegraph had more on the group's background:

Al-Qa'eda in the Islamic Maghreb grew out of an earlier Islamist organisation based in Algeria known as the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat [known by its French initials, GSPC].

Ayman al-Zawahiri, Osama bin Laden's deputy in the core al-Qaeda leadership, praised the organization's efforts to gather disparate north African militant groups together in attacks against France and the US as a "blessed union".

But there are doubts that [al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb] takes direct orders from bin Laden's organization. Some analysts suspect that the African group has simply adopted the name al-Qaeda.

In a briefing on AQIM in 2007, **The Christian Science Monitor** reported that AQIM membership was hard to pin down but that "the Algerian government said 800 jihadists were active in GSPC [in 2006]. But the group disputed that, saying far more were involved, according to Rita Katz, director of the Search for International Terrorist Entities (SITE) Institute in Washington."

"What we can say for certain is that [among] the jihadists online, the support for AQIM is growing. Adopting the name Al Qaeda brought the GSPC the instant support of tens of thousands of online jihadists, many now who perceive the group as fighting on behalf of Al Qaeda," says Ms. Katz in an e-mailed response to questions.

AQIM has been blamed for a spate of attacks in Algeria – including a massive bombing at a military college that killed 43 – and a few beyond its borders.

Mauritanian officials blamed the group for an attack that killed four French nationals in that country in December 2007, and a separate attack that month on UN offices in Algiers, according to a **Europol** report on terrorism.

The group made threats against the Mauritanian government for hosting the off-road vehicle race the Dakar Rally – which the group called "collaboration with the Crusaders" – leading to the cancellation of that event last year, the report said.

A background report by the **Council on Foreign Relations** said that the group had also "funneled" North African insurgents to Iraq to become suicide bombers.

<http://www.csmonitor.com/2009/0219/p99s01-duts.html>

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Pravda

17 February 2009

Russia may not Ship S-300 Missile Systems to Iran Hoping to Improve Ties with USA

Iranian Defense Minister Mostafa Najari arrived in Moscow Monday with an official visit, Interfax reports with reference to the press secretary of the Russian Defense Minister, Colonel Aleksei Kuznetsov. Najari is expected to negotiate the issue of the delivery of Russian S-300 missile systems to Iran.

The defense ministers of Russia and Iran will conduct negotiations on February 17 to discuss the current and future questions of military cooperation between the countries.

The visit of the Iranian minister will last till February 18. Mostafa Najari will have a meeting with an official spokesman for Russia's defense export giant, Rosoboronexport, and visit one of the country's defense enterprises.

In addition to the questions about the delivery of S-300 missile systems, Russia and Iran may discuss the perspectives of other arms contracts, as well as the questions of customer service for Tor-M1 missile systems which Russia has already delivered to Iran.

Rosoboronexport's General Director Anatoly Isaikin stated before that Russia had not shipped S-300 systems to Iran. However, the official added, Russia would be ready to organize the shipments upon the adequate instructions from the country's administration.

The information about the delivery of Russian S-300 missile systems originally surfaced in Iranian media outlets. Spokespeople for the Russian Federal Service for Military and Technical Cooperation released a statement claiming that the information was not true to fact.

Most likely, the above-mentioned visit of the Iranian defense minister to Moscow will most likely leave the situation with the delivery of S-300 systems unchanged. For the time being, Russia does not have an intention to ship the complexes to the Iran since the deal may seriously obstruct the new dialogue between the Kremlin and the new US administration, The Kommersant newspaper wrote with reference to sources at Russia's defense complex.

The S-300 contract can be executed at any moment; other contracts can be signed with Iran too, particularly about Buk-M1 missile systems. A political decision is required to give them all a go, although it seems that such a decision is not a matter of the near future.

Most likely, Russia hopes to improve its relations with the United States. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov is expected to have his first meeting with the new US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton in March. President Dmitry Medvedev will have an opportunity to shake hands with Barack Obama in April of this year. Moscow pins big hopes on those talks: the two countries may find a compromise on the issues of nuclear disarmament and the deployment of the US national missile defense system in Eastern Europe. The news about the shipment of S-300 systems to Iran will mar the atmosphere of the talks.

Vyacheslav Davidenko, the press secretary of Rosoboronexport, said that Russia would most likely not change any of its views pertaining to the deliveries of S-300 systems to Iran, not even after the visit of the Iranian defense minister.

Source: agencies

http://english.pravda.ru/world/asia/17-02-2009/107115-russia_s300_iran-0

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Pravda

16 February 2009

USA now wants to Blackmail Russia with Missile Defense System Plans

The United States pledges to revise the plans to deploy the missile defense system in Europe if Russia talks Iran out of its nuclear weapons program. A spokesperson for the US State Department said that the new administration would like to cooperate with Russia in terms of missile defense issues since the system was being built to protect Europe and North America against the rogue states - against Iran, first and foremost. Iran's recent satellite launch proves that the nation has an opportunity to launch long-range missiles, the US administration believes.

It is an open secret that the United States and several other countries suspect Iran of the development of nuclear weapons under the guise of a peaceful nuclear program. The Iranian leadership rejects the accusations claiming that its nuclear program is solely aimed at the needs of the country's energy industry.

Barack Obama's administration is prepared to conduct talks with Moscow regarding a possibility for the USA and Russia to join efforts in the field of missile defense. In this case, the Americans believe, it will be possible to relieve Russia of its concerns regarding the possible threat that the system could carry against Russia. Moscow is currently certain of the opposite.

Russia's Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov stated over the weekend that the deployment of the US missile defense system in Eastern Europe was related to strategic stability and strategic parity, *Interfax* reports.

"As for missile defense, we are certain that it has nothing to do with the Iranian nuclear program. It touches upon the strategic arsenal of the Russian Federation - we have released a number of public statements and explained it on a professional level. The new administration of the United States must analyze its missile defense plans in Europe, the minister believes.

"We hope that Obama's administration is currently analyzing its ideas and plans of the third missile deployment area in Eastern Europe and we hope that they will take our position into consideration. We have also paid attention to the signals coming from Washington about the readiness to develop anti-missile concepts in association with the Russian Federation, including those presented by then-President Vladimir Putin at his meeting with George Bush in Kennebunkport in July 2007." Lavrov said.

On the other hand, Washington hopes to improve ties with Iran after the presidential elections, which are slated to take place in the country in June. If Mahmoud Ahmadinejad leaves the office, Iran and the USA will be able to settle all scores alone, without Russia's help.

Source: agencies

http://english.pravda.ru/world/asia/16-02-2009/107110-usa_russia_missile_defense-0

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Washington Post
February 17, 2009

Living With a Nuclear North Korea

By Selig S. Harrison

Will North Korea ever give up its nuclear weapons?

To test its intentions, I submitted a detailed proposal to Foreign Ministry nuclear negotiator Li Gun for a "grand bargain" in advance of a visit to Pyongyang last month. North Korea, I suggested, would surrender to the International Atomic Energy Agency the 68 pounds of plutonium it has already declared in denuclearization negotiations. In return, the United States would conclude a peace treaty formally ending the Korean War, normalize diplomatic and economic relations, put food and energy aid on a long-term basis, and support large-scale multilateral credits for rehabilitation of North Korea's economic infrastructure.

The North's rebuff was categorical and explicit. Its declared plutonium has "already been weaponized," I was told repeatedly during 10 hours of discussions. Pyongyang is ready to rule out the development of additional nuclear weapons in future negotiations, but when, and whether, it will give up its existing arsenal depends on how relations with Washington evolve.

Sixty-eight pounds of plutonium is enough to make four or five nuclear weapons, depending on the grade of plutonium, the specific weapons design and the desired explosive yield. Li Gun would not define "weaponized," despite repeated questions, but Gen. Ri Chan Bok, a spokesman of the National Defense Commission, implied that it refers to the development of missile warheads.

Faced with this new hard line, the United States should choose between two approaches, benign neglect and limiting the North's arsenal to four or five weapons.

Benign neglect would mean a suspension of ongoing efforts to denuclearize North Korea by providing economic incentives and moving toward normalized relations. But it would also mean avoiding the hostile policies initially pursued by the Bush administration with their implicit goal of "regime change."

The strongest argument for this approach is that the United States has nothing to fear from a nuclear North Korea. Pyongyang developed nuclear weapons for defensive reasons, to counter a feared U.S. preemptive strike, and U.S. nuclear capabilities in the Pacific will deter any potential nuclear threat from the North.

The purpose of this strategy would be to end the present bargaining relationship in which Pyongyang uses its nuclear program to extract U.S. concessions. It would be risky, though, because Pyongyang could well react with provocative moves to make sure that it is not neglected.

Under the second approach, the six-party denuclearization negotiations would be continued with the goal of limiting North Korean nuclear weapons to the four or five warheads so far acknowledged. This would require, first, U.S.-orchestrated arrangements to provide the 200,000 tons of heavy fuel oil that have been promised but not yet delivered to North Korea in return for its disabling the Yongbyon plutonium reactor, and, second, negotiating the terms for dismantling the reactor so that additional plutonium cannot be reprocessed.

The terms outlined to me in Pyongyang for dismantling the reactor are much tougher than those hitherto presented: completing the two light-water reactors started during the Clinton administration and conducting the broadened verification process envisaged by the United States, China, Russia, Japan, South Korea and North Korea in a statement last July. This could require inspections of U.S. bases in South Korea to verify that the United States has removed its nuclear weapons, as announced in 1991, in parallel with inspections of North Korean nonmilitary nuclear installations. The inspections in North Korea would include taking samples at suspected nuclear waste sites, a key U.S. demand, but the "weaponized" plutonium would not be open to inspection.

While in Pyongyang, I found evidence that the hard-line shift in the North's posture is directly related to Kim Jong Il's health. Informed sources told me that Kim had suffered a stroke in August. While still making "key decisions," he has turned over day-to-day authority in domestic affairs to his brother-in-law, Chang Song Taek, and effective control over national security affairs to the National Defense Commission. I was not permitted to see several key Foreign Ministry officials identified with flexible approaches to the denuclearization negotiations whom I have regularly seen in previous trips.

The bottom line is that there is a continuing policy struggle in Pyongyang between the hard-liners in the National Defense Commission and pragmatists who want normalization with the United States. Continued U.S. engagement with North Korea leading progressively to economic and political normalization would strengthen the pragmatists.

If the United States can deal with major nuclear weapons states such as China and Russia, it can tolerate a nuclear-armed North Korea that may or may not actually have the weapons arsenal it claims. Just in case Pyongyang has, in fact, learned to miniaturize nuclear warheads sufficiently to make long-range missiles, the Obama administration should couple a resumption of denuclearization negotiations with a revival of the promising missile limitation negotiations that the Clinton administration was about to conclude when it left office. "If we can have nuclear negotiations," said negotiator Li Gun, "why not missile negotiations?"

Selig S. Harrison, a former Northeast Asia bureau chief for The Post and author of "Korean Endgame," directs the Asia program at the Center for International Policy.

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/02/16/AR2009021601101.html>

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Houston Chronicle
February 18, 2009

N. Korea: Missile, Nuclear Programs Pose No Threats

By JAE-SOON CHANG Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea — North Korea said Thursday its missile and nuclear programs pose no threat, ahead of a visit by U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton to South Korea for talks expected to focus on the communist country.

North Korea's military accused South Korea of misusing what it called "nonexistent nuclear and missile threats" as a pretext to invade, and renewed a warning that its troops are in an "all-out confrontational posture" against Seoul.

The statement from the North Korean military's general staff came as the regime is believed to be gearing up to test-fire a long-range missile and Clinton is scheduled to arrive in Seoul later Thursday for meetings expected to tackle the missile issue.

It also underscored high tensions between the two Koreas since Seoul's pro-American, conservative President Lee Myung-bak took office a year ago and sought hard-line policies toward Pyongyang.

North Korea is believed to be on track in preparations to launch its longest-range missile, the Taepodong-2 — believed to have a range that could reach Alaska — moving the rocket and other equipment to a launch site on the country's northeast coast.

South Korea's defense minister reportedly said Wednesday that the North could complete preparations to fire a missile within the next two weeks at the earliest.

Seoul's Foreign Minister Yu Myung-hwan warned that a missile launch will "inevitably" entail sanctions because it would be a violation of a 2006 U.N. Security Council resolution banning Pyongyang from pursuing missile or nuclear programs.

Clinton also warned Tuesday a missile launch "would be very unhelpful in moving our relationship forward."

Amid growing international pressure to drop the plan, Pyongyang said earlier this week that it has the right to "space development" — a term it has used in the past to disguise a missile test as a satellite launch.

When North Korea conducted a ballistic missile test in 1998, it claimed it put a satellite into orbit. The regime carried out its first-ever nuclear test blast in 2006, and claims it has atomic bombs.

Also Thursday, the official Korean Central News Agency accused the U.S. and South Korea of preparing to attack the North, warning the two countries of "a high price" for their moves.

The claim followed an announcement South Korea and the U.S. plan to conduct an annual military exercise next month.

North Korea has dubbed such drills a rehearsal for invasion, despite repeated assurances from the U.S. and South Korea that the exercises are purely defensive.

<http://www.chron.com/disp/story.mpl/world/6270193.html>

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Dong-A Ilbo, S.Korea

February 18, 2009

‘NK has Built Uranium Enrichment Facilities’

South Korean and U.S. intelligence have discovered that North Korea has built facilities that can produce a small amount of highly enriched uranium, a senior Seoul official said yesterday.

"Despite North Korea's denial that it has a uranium enrichment program, (South Korea and the United States) have shared information that North Korea has established uranium enrichment facilities," the source said.

The underground facilities are known to be located in Sowi-ri, North Pyongan Province.

Sowi-ri is an administrative district of Yongbyon, North Pyongan Province, where plutonium facilities including a five-megawatt and a 50-megawatt reactor and reprocessing facilities are located.

The North is believed to have set up underground facilities to enrich uranium nearby its Yongbyon facilities in Punkang-ri.

The official, however, declined to mention details, including North Korea's technological progress in enriching uranium and its uranium output.

<http://english.donga.com/srv/service.php3?bicode=050000&biid=2009021833768>

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Yonhap News
February 18, 2009

Nuke Threat Makes N. Korean Missile More Alarming: Minister

By Lee Chi-dong

SEOUL, Feb. 18 (Yonhap) -- North Korea's missile program poses a serious threat to international security because of its potential link with Pyongyang's nuclear ambitions, South Korea's top diplomat said Wednesday, as U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton hinted at addressing the missile concerns at six-way disarmament talks.

Foreign Minister Yu Myung-hwan also said that Pyongyang would face stern punitive measures imposed by the United Nations if it goes ahead with the launch, whether of a satellite as the North claims, or of a missile as feared.

"North Korea's missile is not a mere conventional weapon," Yu said at a meeting with foreign envoys here. "The combination of its long-range missile and nuclear capability will have a very serious impact on the world's peace and security."

Recent satellite images have shown that North Korea appears to be preparing to launch a long-range missile from a base on its east coast, according to South Korean and U.S. intelligence officials.

North Korea indirectly confirmed the move earlier this week by stating that it has a right to pursue "peaceful space activity," a term Pyongyang used in 1998 when it flew a rocket over Japan. At the time, the North said it was part of an effort to send its first satellite into orbit, while its neighbors labeled it a long-range missile launch.

The minister said North Korea is expected to follow a similar pattern this time around, adding that whether it is a missile or a satellite, a rocket launch of any kind would still violate U.N. Security Council Resolution 1718 -- adopted in 2006 -- which prohibits Pyongyang from conducting a missile test.

"It is hard to tell a missile from a satellite in terms of technology," Yu said.

The minister also urged Pyongyang to return to the six-way talks on its atomic weapons program and agree on proposed methods for inspection of its nuclear sites.

North Korea balked at the latest proposal put forth by its dialogue partners -- South Korea, the U.S., China, Russia, and Japan -- to use sampling and other scientific measures to verify its nuclear declaration, leaving the denuclearization process at a stalemate.

"The North's refusal means it has no will to denuclearize itself," Yu said, adding the issues will be high on the agenda in his talks with U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton on Friday in Seoul.

During an interview with a Japanese newspaper in Tokyo, Clinton suggested a comprehensive solution to the North Korean nuclear and missile issues.

"We have made it clear that we consider it (the missile program) both provocative and unhelpful," she told the Yomiuri Shimbun. "The North Koreans, as you know, have said that it is a space launch, but they have not complied with the rules that govern notification about space launches that have been agreed to by the international community."

Asked whether the missile issue would be part of future six-party talks, she said yes. "It has been on the edges of the six-party talks. But it is part of our overall concern with the North Koreans."

The Beijing-based negotiations, launched in 2003, have focused on denuclearization, though Japan has called for a more comprehensive approach covering missile and human rights issues as well as the nuclear concern.

South Korean officials expressed caution over Clinton's suggestion.

"South Korea and the U.S. have not yet discussed adding the missile issue to the agenda items for the six-way talks," a foreign ministry official said, asking not to be named. He said the matter could be up for discussion during the Yu-Clinton meeting.

On Seoul's efforts to bolster ties with other nations, the minister said President Lee Myung-bak is considering visiting the Czech Republic in the first half of this year for his first summit with the European Union. The Czech Republic currently holds the rotating EU presidency.

The president may instead opt to travel to Sweden around July, which takes over the EU presidency in the latter half of 2009.

Yu added that South Korea plans to complete protracted negotiations on a free trade agreement (FTA) with the EU by the end of March.

"South Korea will also begin FTA talks with Peru and Columbia next month," he said.

<http://english.yonhapnews.co.kr/northkorea/2009/02/18/67/0401000000AEN20090218005900315F.HTML>

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