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Arm Forces News Service

20 February 2009

Air Force Efforts Put Nuclear Security Back on Track

Samantha L. Quigley

American Forces Press Service

MINOT AIR FORCE BASE, N.D. (AFNS) -- Prioritization and "incredible attention to detail" have restored "nuclear surety" in the Air Force, the general in charge of the service's nuclear program said here Feb. 19.

Nuclear surety is the equipment, people and processes aimed at ensuring the safety, security, reliability and control of nuclear weapons.

After an erosion of the nuclear process that began at the end of the Cold War, Maj. Gen. Roger Burg, commander of the 20th Air Force, said he feels the service is back on track, even though the required standards to pass a nuclear surety inspection have never changed. What is different, he said, is how the service has applied the standards.

"I will say our application of those standards has changed dramatically," General Burg said. "And our oversight of any problems identified in the inspections has changed dramatically."

It wasn't until a B-52 Stratofortress from Minot Air Force Base flew nuclear-tipped missiles cross-country to Barksdale AFB, La., in October 2007 that nuclear surety became a newsworthy topic, General Burg said.

"An equally well-publicized event that occurred several years earlier ... involved the [intercontinental ballistic missile] force [and] the fuses that were erroneously sent to Taiwan," he said. "I think it rightly made all of us question how could such a thing happen."

The fuses were shipped to Taiwan from Utah in August 2006.

These are the types of incidents nuclear surety is designed to prevent.

A nuclear surety inspection for an ICBM or bomber unit is a broad, intrusive type of inspection, General Burg said. Hundreds of areas might be inspected and each area may have hundreds or even thousands of individual pieces of equipment, records, and activities to be inspected.

After the Cold War, Air Force leaders decided to shorten the inspection time frame and decrease the size of its inspection team. Instead of inspecting everything, they began taking representative samples, General Burg said.

"It wasn't an intent to say, 'Let's not take care of this business,'" he said. "It was an intent to say, 'How can we do this business more efficiently?'"

The 2007 and 2008 incidents prompted the Air Force to resume 100 percent inspections, General Burg added. That includes personnel medical records in addition to equipment and activity logs.

"One of our key areas is looking at the Personnel Reliability Program, which is how we maintain confidence in the people who are working around nuclear weapons," he said. "In the past, we might inspect 20 percent of the medical and personnel records of people associated with a certain unit.

"You'll have thousands of potential points [to inspect], any one of which, if found to be deficient in a critical way, could lead to the finding of an unsatisfactory for the wing," General Burg said. Deficiencies receive immediate

attention, he said.

The process of maintaining nuclear surety has become the top Air Force priority, Navy Adm. Mike Mullen, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff noted during his visit this week here. The chairman toured several sites including the weapons storage area and a missile maintenance trainer.

The Air Force is reorganizing to better support the nuclear enterprise, General Burg said. But inspections will get a unit only so far.

"You do not make an organization excellent by inspecting it," he said. "You make it excellent by supporting it with priority, with resources, with people, with experience. That's what the Air Force is doing with these nuclear units now."

General Burg added that he's OK with inspections turning up deficiencies despite the goal of achieving excellence.

"I'm never satisfied that ... we're getting better because we're not finding fewer problems," he said. "[What] we're not finding now indicates an incredible attention to detail."

<http://www.af.mil/news/story.asp?id=123136498>

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Boston Globe

February 22, 2009

Nuclear Agenda Draws Scrutiny

By Bryan Bender /Globe Staff

WASHINGTON - President Obama is preparing to move ahead with the most ambitious arms-control agenda in decades, calling for dramatic cuts in US and Russian arsenals, a halt to the Bush administration's plan for a more advanced nuclear warhead, and the ratification of a global treaty banning underground nuclear tests.

Obama's agenda, posted on the White House website shortly after his inauguration and outlined by several top officials, also includes a worldwide ban on the production of nuclear weapons material - leading to what the administration calls "a world without nuclear weapons."

The new administration's goal of starting down what it calls the "long road" toward total elimination of nuclear weapons represents perhaps its most striking foreign-policy departure from the Bush administration, which expressed widespread skepticism about arms-control treaties and pulled out of the anti-ballistic missile pact with Russia.

Obama has said he would base his arms-control efforts in part on the work of the bipartisan Nuclear Security Project, whose initiatives, including a plan for sharp reductions in US nuclear stockpiles, were crafted by centrists including former Democratic senator Sam Nunn and former Republican secretaries of state Henry Kissinger and George P. Shultz.

Nonetheless, the president's plans are rousing sharp opposition from other key elements of the national security community, including members of government advisory boards on nuclear weapons, independent weapons analysts, and think tank scholars - all of whom have expressed concern that Obama's proposals could weaken US security.

Henry D. Sokolski, a member of the bipartisan US Commission on the Prevention of Weapons of Mass Destruction Proliferation and Terrorism, which was established last year by Congress, is one who worries that Obama's agenda could increase global nuclear competition.

"This brave new, nuclear world may be anything but peaceful," said Sokolski, an independent analyst who has supported arms-control pacts in other contexts. "As the qualitative and quantitative differences between nuclear weapons states become smaller, rivalries are likely to become much more dangerous."

Beyond the arms-control community, Obama is facing potential opposition within his own Cabinet. The White House website says the administration will "stop the development of new nuclear weapons," a step that many arms control advocates believe is necessary to convince the international community that the United States is serious about disarmament.

But Secretary of Defense Robert M. Gates said last fall that building the so-called Reliable Replacement Warhead is essential to ensuring that the nation's nuclear defenses remain viable for years to come. Without the new warhead, Gates said, the United States would have to test its current inventory to be sure it works properly, something it hasn't done since 1992. (Some specialists believe computer modeling technology may make it possible to test the new warheads without exploding one.)

Gates has also expressed concerns that it may be difficult to catch nations that disregard obligations under the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, which Obama is urging the Senate to ratify.

"Currently, the United States is the only declared nuclear power that is neither modernizing its nuclear arsenal nor has the capability to produce a new nuclear warhead," Gates said in a speech last October to the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. "To be blunt, there is absolutely no way we can maintain a credible deterrent and reduce the number of weapons in our stockpile without either resorting to testing our stockpile or pursuing a modernization program."

Gates has not outlined his views about the new warhead since deciding to remain as defense secretary under Obama. When asked earlier this month what his role will be in implementing Obama's arms-control agenda, Gates made it clear that he will be questioning some of the White House's assumptions.

"It will be our job to identify pros and cons of various proposals and help identify options for the president with the risks and benefits of each of those options," he told reporters at the Pentagon.

Denis McDonough, Obama's deputy national security adviser, told the Globe that the president is still assembling the team to implement his arms control agenda but said it "is a principal priority for the president, as he talked about during the campaign."

On the campaign trail, Obama had said his arms-control efforts would follow the parameters laid out by the Nuclear Security Project, an initiative established last year by Shultz, Kissinger, Nunn, and former Clinton administration secretary of defense William J. Perry.

Their vision for a nuclear-free world is predicated on the view that the United States - the only country to ever use a nuclear weapon, to help bring an end to war with Japan in 1945 - must lead by example in reducing nuclear arms.

Without America taking the first step, they say, other nuclear powers will be too slow to reduce their arsenals, increasing the likelihood that terrorists will obtain a nuclear bomb.

Many arms control advocates and top government officials believe there is a historic opportunity to implement the first steps on the vision laid out by the four former officials.

Representative Ellen Tauscher, a California Democrat who chairs the House subcommittee overseeing US nuclear forces, said in an interview that reducing US and Russian arsenals, negotiating a treaty to end production of new nuclear weapons material, and ratifying the test ban pact "are all achievable goals. The debate is at a point where it is a question about when we achieve these goals, not if," she said.

But there remain deep divisions among American specialists over the wisdom of some of the steps that the White House is contemplating.

Some are raising fears that changing the so-called "alert status" of the US and Russian arsenals - by taking weapons mounted on land-based missiles, submarines, and bombers off launch standby - would undercut the arsenal's deterrent value and make the United States vulnerable to a sneak attack from another nuclear power.

Others are warning that reducing the overall number of US and Russian nuclear weapons from several thousand to hundreds - the initial goal of Perry, Nunn, Shultz, and Kissinger - could motivate states with smaller arsenals, such as China, India, and Pakistan, to seek parity, thus increasing the danger of nuclear confrontation.

And some argue that deep cuts in the American arsenal could force non-nuclear states - including US allies who have long relied on America's "nuclear umbrella" for protection - to consider developing their own arsenals.

"The problem is that they are betting the physical survival of the US on nothing more than the hope that other nuclear-armed states and any states or non-state actors that join the nuclear club will follow suit by disarming," said Baker Spring, a defense analyst at the conservative Heritage Foundation who is actively seeking to persuade members of Congress to vote against many of the Obama proposals. "This gamble involves the highest possible stakes and has an exceedingly low likelihood of success."

Frank Gaffney, a top Pentagon official during the Reagan administration who is president of the conservative Center for Security Policy, is even more blunt about the risks of Obama's approach at a time when other nuclear powers are upgrading their arsenals and US adversaries are seeking to develop their own arsenals.

"Every other declared nuclear weapon state is modernizing its stockpile and the most dangerous wannabes - North Korea and Iran - are building up their offensive missile capabilities and acquiring as quickly as possible the arms to go atop them," Gaffney wrote in a newly published paper. As currently outlined, he said, Obama's arms-control agenda risks turning America "into a nuclear impotent, with possibly catastrophic consequences."

McDonough responded that such concerns - including the possible risks from reducing the US arsenal too much or too quickly - will be taken into account as the administration undertakes a series of policy assessments in the coming months.

But he also noted that taking the steps that Obama has outlined toward realizing a nuclear-free world already has a strong analytical foundation. "There is a very hardened strategic argument for this view," he said.

Backers of the president's agenda warned it won't be easy to convince Congress, the international community, and the national security apparatus.

"It is going to require a herculean effort," said Joseph Cirincione, president of the Ploughshares Fund, a nonprofit foundation dedicated to halting the spread of nuclear weapons. "It is completely doable, but it will require the sustained attention of the president himself."

http://www.boston.com/news/nation/articles/2009/02/22/nuclear_agenda_draws_scrutiny/?page=full

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Gulf News - Qatar

OPINION:

21 February 2009

Muslim States have the Right to Own Nuclear Weapons, says

Qaradawi

By Anwar Elshamy

MUSLIM countries have the right to possess nuclear weapons but they are prohibited to use them, renowned Islamic scholar Dr Sheikh Yousuf al-Qaradawi said yesterday.

In his Friday sermon, Sheikh Qaradawi said that Muslims had been ordained in the Qur'an to side with peace once they had the choice between it and war.

"Throughout history Muslims have sided with peace when it looms during their battles against enemies. We have been ordered to incline toward peace choice once the enemy inclined to it," he told a congregation of the faithful at the Omar bin al-Khattab mosque at Khalifa South town.

However, Sheikh Qaradawi said that such peace should be protected by force.

"Islam has never been a religion of aggression," he said.

"Muslims were only repelling the attacks of detractors. I was asked whether Muslim countries may own weapons of mass destruction and nuclear weapons. I told the questioner that Muslims have the right to own such weapons but not to use them.

"By owning these weapons, our enemies will be frightened away from our lands. But these weapons should be only used as a deterrent as was the situation between the former Soviet Union and the US and now between India and Pakistan. Muslims are ordered to be fully prepared to confront their enemies," he said.

About the Middle East peace process, the scholar raised doubts over Israel's desire of peace, saying that the atrocities committed by Israel during its recent war on Gaza had dispelled any claims made about their peaceful intentions toward their neighbouring Arab nations.

"How can we say that Jews want peace while they used prohibited weapons to kill children, women and civilians during their aggression on Gaza. When the Prophet Muhammad migrated to Madina, he signed a treaty with the Jews in the Madina but they did not respect their pledges," he added.

“We do not need the type of peace which Israel seeks to impose on the Palestinians. We need the peace which can be attained through power, not weakness. Jews have to return the land they have usurped before we make any peace with them,” he maintained.

About Qatar’s efforts to broker peace between Sudan’s government and the Darfur rebel groups, Sheikh Qaradawi, who is the president of the Dublin-based International Union for Muslim Scholars (IUMS), hailed the accord signed by the Justice and Equality Movement and Sudan’s government as a “great work”. He hoped that Qatar would continue its efforts until it brought peace to the war-ravaged region of Darfur.

“It was the first step to bring peace to the people of Darfur who spread Islam in Sudan as well as in Africa,” he said. “We did not wish a conflict between the Arabs and the Africans of Darfur had erupted. It is the West who exploited it and widened the gap between the Africans and Arabs living in the territory,” he maintained.

He also hoped that Qatar would play a mediatory role in the war-torn Somalia as well as continue its reconciliatory efforts between the Palestinian factions.

http://www.gulf-times.com/site/topics/article.asp?cu_no=2&item_no=274538&version=1&template_id=57&parent_id=56

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Iranian Students News Agency
20 February 2009

Iran has Indigenous Uranium Mines to Produce Yellowcake: Soltaniyeh

ISNA - Tehran
Service: Nuclear Energy

TEHRAN, Feb. 20 (ISNA)-Iran's ambassador to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Ali Asghar Soltaniyeh said Iran can use its own uranium supply even if it runs out of the material.

"Our uranium mines are working and we will be able to produce yellowcake on our own," he said.

The study by the Institute for Science and International Security (ISIS) in Washington claimed that Iran had provided more uranium supplies to make up for its decreasing supply of yellowcake through local uranium mining.

The report also claimed that Iran has not gained a large amount of yellowcake after it achieved 600 tones of the material from South Africa in 1970.

Soltaniyeh then noted the IAEA newly-released report on Iran's nuclear work contains no new point.

The IAEA Director General Mohammad ElBaradei has recently released a report on Iran's nuclear activities saying the country has not installed that many centrifuges as fast as it could and it is good.

ElBaradei also said any concern on nuclear weapon in Iran is insignificant.

The West claims Iran is trying to develop nuclear weapon, but Iran denies the allegation and says its nuclear plan only seeks peaceful purposes including power generation and medical and agricultural aims.

<http://www.isna.ir/ISNA/NewsView.aspx?ID=News-1293633&Lang=E>

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New York Times
February 20, 2009

Iran has More Enriched Uranium than Thought

By William J. Broad and David E. Sanger

In their first appraisal of Iran’s nuclear program since President Obama took office, atomic inspectors have found that Iran recently understated by a third how much uranium it has enriched, United Nations officials said Thursday.

The officials also declared for the first time that the amount of uranium that Tehran had now amassed — more than a ton — was sufficient, with added purification, to make an atom bomb.

In a report issued in Vienna, the International Atomic Energy Agency said it had discovered an additional 460 pounds of low-enriched uranium, a third more than Iran had previously disclosed. The agency made the find during its annual physical inventory of nuclear materials at Iran's sprawling desert enrichment plant at Natanz.

Independent nuclear weapons experts expressed surprise at the disclosure and criticized the atomic inspectors for making independent checks on Iran's progress only once a year.

"It's worse than we thought," Gary Milhollin, director of the Wisconsin Project on Nuclear Arms Control, said in an interview. "It's alarming that the actual production was underreported by a third."

The political impact of the report, while hard to measure, could be significant for the Obama administration. Mr. Obama has said that he wants to open direct talks with Iran about its nuclear program. But starting that process could take months, and the report suggests that Iran is moving ahead briskly with its uranium enrichment.

"You have enough atoms" to make a nuclear bomb, a senior United Nations official, speaking on the condition of anonymity because of the topic's diplomatic sensitivity, told reporters on Thursday. His remarks confirmed estimates that private nuclear analysts made late last year. But the official noted that the material would have to undergo further enrichment if it was to be used as fuel for a bomb and that atomic inspectors had found no signs that Iran was making such preparations.

On Thursday evening, an Obama administration official who had reviewed the new report said, "There is a steady timeline of improvement, especially in terms of mastering the efficiency of the centrifuges," meaning that Iran has been able to increase its output of enriched uranium.

The official acknowledged that there were longstanding suspicions that Iran could have additional uranium enrichment sites that the inspectors had not seen or heard about. "Everyone's nervous and worried about the possibility of Iran pursuing a clandestine capability," he said.

The disclosure of the unaccounted third came in the atomic agency's quarterly report to its board, which was made public on Thursday. The report noted that Iran had now produced a total of 1,010 kilograms — or 2,227 pounds — of low-enriched uranium.

The discrepancy came to light when the report noted that the new total came from the addition of 171 kilograms of new production to 839 kilograms of old production. But the agency had previously reported the old production as 630 kilograms.

So the Iranians had actually made far more uranium than previously disclosed — 209 kilograms more, an increase of a third. That amounts to a little more than 460 pounds.

The United Nations' officials explained the discrepancy as resulting from Iran's estimates versus careful measurement. They called the inconsistency reasonable for a new enrichment plant.

The officials dismissed suggestions that the discrepancy meant that Iran could smuggle enriched uranium out of the Natanz plant for processing at a secret location. "We're sure that no material could have left the facility without us knowing," the senior United Nations official said. But he admitted that the inspection teams do their own inventory just once a year. "It's only at that moment," he said, "that we have our own independent data."

The report also gave updated figures for Iran's use of centrifuges — the machines that spin incredibly fast to enrich uranium into nuclear fuel. At Natanz, it said, Iran is feeding uranium into about 4,000 centrifuges and has 1,600 more in the wings, for a total of 5,600. That compares with 3,800 working centrifuges listed in the agency's November report.

In Paris earlier this week, the head of the United Nations nuclear agency, Mohammad ElBaradei, said Iran appeared to have made "a political decision" to do less enrichment than it physically could. The Security Council has imposed sanctions on Iran for failing to suspend enrichment, which can be used to make fuel for nuclear reactors or bombs. While Iran insists that its efforts are entirely peaceful, the United States and other Western nations see the enrichment as a bid for atom bombs.

In a separate report to its board, the atomic agency said it had analyzed uranium particles found at a Syrian facility that Israel had bombed in 2007 and found "a low probability" that the tiny specks came from Israeli bombs, as Syria has insisted. Uranium, heavier than lead, is sometimes used in arms meant to destroy hardened targets.

But the report said the shape and composition of the particles "are all inconsistent with what would be expected from the use of uranium-based munitions." The United States has charged that the facility was a reactor that Syria could have used to make fuel for nuclear arms.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2009/02/20/world/middleeast/20nuke.html?hp>

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New York Times
February 20, 2009

Interview: Iran May Achieve Capability to Make a Nuclear Weapon in 2009

By DAVID ALBRIGHT AND BERNARD GWERTZMAN

Interviewee: David Albright, President, Institute for Science and International Security

Interviewer: Bernard Gwertzman, Consulting Editor, CFR.org

David Albright, a long-time expert on Iran's nuclear program, says that Iran will probably accumulate enough low-enriched uranium this year to "reach the first level of breakout capability, namely enough low-enriched uranium to make one nuclear weapon." And in an ironic twist, he says even though Iran's stated goal is to have a nuclear program for domestic power, it appears to be running out of uranium for such a plan. "It's one of the unfortunate ironies of the situation that while they don't have enough uranium for a civil nuclear energy program, they have plenty for a weapons program," Albright says. "Even if Iran runs out of uranium, they have more than enough to eventually produce tens of nuclear weapons." He urges the United States to seek tougher sanctions, but also to open wide-ranging negotiations with Iran.

You've been following Iran's nuclear activities for years. Could you provide an update on its progress so far?

Iran continues to move forward on developing its nuclear capabilities, and it is close to having what we would call a 'nuclear breakout capability.' That's a problem because once Iran reaches that state then it could make a decision to get nuclear weapons pretty rapidly. In as quickly as a few months, Iran would be able to have enough weapons-grade uranium for nuclear weapons. And if a breakout occurred, they would not likely do so at the well-known Natanz enrichment plant. Rather, the Iranians would most likely take low-enriched uranium that's produced at that plant and then divert it at a secret facility that we wouldn't know anything about. And at this secret facility, the Iranians would produce this weapons-grade uranium. And so if you were in the camp that said, 'Well, we'll have to strike militarily,' you won't actually know where to strike because you won't know where that secret facility is. Whatever camp you are in, the situation is bound to grow more tense. So for 2009, probably the big technical issue is when Iran establishes this breakout capability. It could be soon. They don't need that much more low-enriched uranium before they reach the first level of breakout capability, namely enough low-enriched uranium to make one nuclear weapon.

So you think it could happen even within the next year or so?

Within this year, it could happen. Once Iran reaches that breakout capability, countries will have different responses. Some, like Russia, will probably say, 'So what? They're still not building nuclear weapons.' The United States will have to worry that they don't know Iran's intentions. The U.S. government has believed Iran would eventually seek nuclear weapons and it would have to face the prospect that it could happen with little notice, complicating any negotiation process. A country like Israel will see it as a major threat because they'll worry that if things do go bad and Iran decides to get nuclear weapons, they can do so quickly, and Israel wouldn't know what or where to strike. For Israel, an Iranian nuclear breakout capability brings up existential questions.

Your organization, the Institute for Science and International Security (ISIS), recently published a report (PDF) saying essentially that Iran was running out of uranium oxide, so-called yellowcake. It had just enough to make some nuclear weapons, but it didn't have enough for electrical power, their ostensible purpose in enriching uranium. How should an American official interpret that report?

Iran has some domestic uranium resources, and it's constructed two uranium mines. But for some reason, it's way behind opening the larger one. But it is operating the smaller one. But even if you look at the total capacity of those mines, it's not large enough if you want to have a full-blown nuclear electricity program. And for that kind of program, with up to eight 1,000-megawatt nuclear reactors, you need a lot more uranium than what Iran can produce. Iran has never really had the uranium resources to support an indigenous nuclear electricity program. So they are dependent on importing the fuel. If you consider the Bushehr reactor, that's what they did. They bought the reactor from Russia, and they also bought the fuel for at least ten years. What they've been doing so far to operate the Isfahan Uranium Conversion Facility is depending on a stock of roughly six hundred tons of "yellowcake" that

they imported from South Africa in the 1970s. They've been using it to make uranium hexafluoride at the Isfahan facility, and if they operate Isfahan anywhere near capacity, then they're going to run out pretty soon. They don't produce enough in their own mines for a civil electricity program. Their stock of imported yellowcake is running out and so, they're reaching a point where they're going to have to take some steps to improve their situation. They could try to smuggle in uranium, and that is something to watch for. From our point of view, the best thing they can do is work out a solution with the international community so they can proceed with the nuclear electricity program and import the low-enriched uranium fuel that they need for those reactors. Once they have a deal, and the West and Russia are fully prepared to guarantee the Iranians their supply of low-enriched uranium, then that will free them from this bind of too little uranium. Now, on the other hand, it's one of the unfortunate ironies of the situation that while they don't have enough uranium for a civil nuclear energy program, they have plenty for a weapons program. Even if Iran runs out of uranium, they have more than enough to eventually produce tens of nuclear weapons. It's a situation where you have to wonder whether Iran's intention all along was to have the infrastructure to have a bomb program and it was never intending to achieve an indigenous civil nuclear electricity program.

All right, now you're in the White House, and you're on the National Security Council staff, which is trying to come up with an Iran policy. President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad gave a speech today where he says that we might be interested in talking to the United States, but don't ask us to stop our nuclear program because that's not negotiable. ISIS made some recommendations (PDF). What is your opinion?

Don't accommodate Iran with short-term solutions. Iran is determined to move forward right now. Compromises that the United States may offer, such as settling for merely slowing down the enrichment program, are guaranteed not to work. The important thing is to maintain the U.S. goal of an Iranian suspension of uranium enrichment. It is also important to increase the sanctions on Iran in order to try to get Iran to rethink its calculation on whether an enrichment program is in their interest. It's critical to also negotiate directly with Iran, so Iran understands what the United States wants, and the United States understands what Iran wants. And then it's important to broaden this issue to the entire Middle East. It's very important right now to start talking about a Middle East free of enrichment plants and reprocessing plants [that can separate plutonium], which could be used in nuclear weapons. And so, you want to achieve a region that doesn't have nuclear weapons capabilities. Then inevitably, bring in other players, some very much of concern to Iran. Israel would be number one, but also Egypt and Turkey—they're not going to respond favorably as Iran develops nuclear weapons. You need to bring in more players striving for a goal of a Middle East free of nuclear weapons capabilities.

Do you think it's at all possible that Israel would agree to be involved in such a thing?

They have in the past. In the 1990s, they were willing to consider achieving a nuclear weapons-free zone in the Middle East, if the conditions were right. In the 1990s, the key issues revolved around Iraq and Iran and the security threats they posed. And so, the threat of Iran remains for Israel, but Israel doesn't see many military options out there. It could be open to this idea. It's also not asking Israel to give up its nuclear weapons. It's asking Israel to give up production of plutonium and any highly enriched uranium for nuclear weapons. They've already got plenty of nuclear explosive material.

How do you get Iran to agree to a freeze if Iran keeps saying it won't do it?

You have to change the conditions, and you also have to accept that achieving this goal is going to take a long time. It is useful to think of the examples of Pakistan and South Africa. In the case of Pakistan, in the 1970s when Pakistan was working all-out on an enrichment program, the U.S. position was initially, 'No, we can't tolerate that.' And then it started to accommodate itself to Pakistan's enrichment program because of other priorities; first, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. We eventually got Pakistan to cap its enrichment output at 5 percent or so. And that didn't hold once Pakistan tested nuclear weapons in 1998.

But in the South Africa case, the vision held. The goal was a South Africa without nuclear weapons, and sanctions were put on South Africa. South Africa, under tremendous pressure, because of its isolation internationally, decided that it had to do two things. One of which was to give up apartheid and the other [was] to give up nuclear weapons. The key factor was that the United States and the others didn't falter on pressing South Africa. What do we have in Pakistan? The opposite. Now we have to fear Pakistan for many reasons. One of which would be a nuclear war with India, and the other, it could be the place where the wherewithal to build nuclear weapons is acquired by terrorists which use these weapons against us. So the accommodation approach, unfortunately, is by no means guaranteed to be successful, and it's better to focus on what we really want and work on that. But it's a long-term issue. You have to maintain your resolve, and tensions are going to increase like they did in southern Africa.

You're saying it would be helpful to talk to Iran, but you have to put the nuclear freeze up front?

I would. It is essential that the United States talk to Iran directly. And talk to them on many fronts. The United States should allow diplomats to engage with Iranians around the world.

There's still discussion about whether there should be an interests section in Tehran [a U.S. office that would fall short of diplomatic recognition]. I guess that's all going to come out of this policy review.

The interests section is a step forward, but there's a more fundamental decision that's needed. Is the United States going to allow negotiations with Iran? That's the more fundamental issue, and also, it allows more freedom in making the next decision. How do you actually have negotiations with Iran? Many would probably argue that we secretly start mid-level negotiations rather than having some top-level envoy approach Iran in a visible way. It's just harder to negotiate when everyone is watching you, but you can't do either unless you permit these discussions to take place-government to government-and create the mechanisms for that to happen.

It's also important in this to remember that you want to avoid setting up this situation with Iran where you are forced to two choices, namely capitulation or military strikes. Military strikes are very unlikely to be effective unless you're willing to launch massive campaigns against the country and that means going to war against Iran. I don't think anyone wants to do that. And I'll also say, even in that case, you might not stop Iran from building nuclear weapons because in the end, the places that they would need to make nuclear weapons are not that large. And after being attacked, they would likely launch a Manhattan-style program [the code name for the U.S. secret program during World War II to produce the atomic bomb]. So I would still say that military options are just not feasible. That doesn't mean you can't apply pressure on Iran, and I would argue that if you're not going to favor military strikes, then you need to focus more on sanctions to get Iran to rethink its priorities on enrichment.

How do you get the Russians to be more cooperative on this?

One way is what [Vice President Joe] Biden said, "push the reset button" on relations with Russia. The Obama administration should look again on all the issues involved with missile defense and arms control, in particular the START treaty. The United States can engage with Russia in a less confrontational mode and see if in the process, Russia will be more helpful in Iran. It may not, but the approach taken by the Bush administration clearly didn't work, because if you increase the tension with Russia, particularly on nuclear issues, they're less likely to help you on Iran. So it's worth trying. Now, it's not necessary to get Russia, although it would be very helpful to get Russia to put a bit more pressure on Iran. You at least don't want to create situations where Russia has more incentive to work against U.S. interests on Iran. More productive engagement on nuclear arms-control issues can go a long way in stopping that.

http://www.nytimes.com/cfr/world/slot3_20090220.html

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Guardian.co.uk

Friday 20 February 2009

Iran Offered to End Attacks on British Troops in Iraq, Claims Diplomat

Julian Borger, diplomatic editor

Iran offered to curb attacks on British troops in Iraq in exchange for British acceptance of its nuclear programme, a top British diplomat has said.

The claim is made by Sir John Sawers, now Britain's ambassador to the UN, in a BBC documentary to air tomorrow night. *Iran and the West: Nuclear confrontation* charts the diplomatic efforts to persuade Iran to stop enriching uranium since its secret enrichment plant in Natanz was exposed in 2002.

"There were various Iranians who would come to London and suggest we had tea in some hotel or other. They'd do the same in Paris, they'd do the same in Berlin, and then we'd compare notes among the three of us," Sawers, who was political director at the foreign office at the time, told the BBC.

At the time US and British officials suspected Iran of supplying Shia militants in Iraq with sophisticated roadside bombs and other weapons which were used against coalition troops.

Sawers said: "The Iranians wanted to be able to strike a deal whereby they stopped killing our forces in Iraq in return for them being allowed to carry on with their nuclear programme: 'We stop killing you in Iraq, stop

undermining the political process there, you allow us to carry on with our nuclear programme without let or hindrance.' "

Britain dismissed the deal. Britain, together with the US, France, Germany, Russia and China, have offered economic incentives and support for Iran's nuclear energy plans in return for a suspension of uranium enrichment. The UN security council has also demanded suspension, and has imposed sanctions for Iran's failure to comply. Iran insists its nuclear programme is for peaceful energy generation.

The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) reported yesterday that Iran was continuing to expand its nuclear plant, although at a slower rate than last year, and had already amassed more than a tonne of low enriched uranium.

That is technically enough for a single nuclear weapon, but UN officials caution that Iran faces many more technical hurdles before it is capable of making a bomb.

The BBC documentary charts some of the missed diplomatic opportunities for defusing tensions between Iran and the west, particularly while Mohamed Khatami was president, from 1997 to 2005. For example, it details how much help Iran offered to the US in ousting the Taliban and al-Qaida in Afghanistan after the September 11 attacks.

Hillary Mann, a former US state department official recalled how an Iranian military official tried to guide the US at a meeting in New York in late 2001.

"He unfurled the map on the table and started to point to targets that the US needed to focus on, particularly in the north," said Mann. "We took the map to Centcom, the US Central Command, and certainly that did become the US military strategy."

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2009/feb/20/iran-curb-attacks-on-british-troops>

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China View

IAEA Finds No Weapons-Grade Enriched Uranium in Iran

21 February 2009

VIENNA, Feb. 20 (Xinhua) -- The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) said its inspectors have not found that Iran is attempting to process low-enriched uranium into weapons-grade uranium, the Austrian Press Agency (APA) reported on Friday.

The report quoted an anonymous IAEA expert as saying, "so far, Iran has carried out good cooperation with us in relevant verifications."

The uranium substances produced in Natanz (plant) have all been carefully registered, some of which are under the supervision of IAEA's remote cameras, the expert said.

"If the Iranians intend to transport these uranium substances to a secret location for further processing, agency's inspectors will find out."

In a report submitted on Thursday to the United Nations Security Council, Mohamed El Baradei, director general of the IAEA, said Iran was still refusing to fulfill the UN's requirement of stopping its uranium enrichment activity.

The report said Iran had so far produced around 1,000 kg of low-enriched uranium, an amount according to experts, was sufficient to produce weapons-grade enriched uranium with 95 percent purity required for one nuclear bomb.

The United States and its allies have accused Iran of trying to develop nuclear weapons under the guise of a civilian nuclear program, which Tehran denies.

Iran insists that its nuclear plan is only for peaceful purposes, and continues its uranium enrichment activity despite pressures from Western countries and relevant UN resolutions and sanctions.

http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2009-02/21/content_10860981.htm

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The Jerusalem Post

22 February 2009

'Iran Secretly Accelerated A-Bomb Drive'

BY YAAKOV LAPPIN

Iran is speeding ahead toward the production of a nuclear weapon, and is operating a shadow nuclear program in tandem with its public program to achieve that goal, a US analyst of the Islamic republic has said, following the publication of a UN report that suggests Teheran already has enough enriched uranium to build a bomb.

In a report unveiled in Vienna on Thursday, the UN's International Atomic Energy Agency said Iran had produced 1,010 kg. of low-enriched uranium. The figure includes an additional 210 kg. of low-enriched uranium, a third more than Iran had previously disclosed.

The low-enriched uranium would have to undergo further enrichment before it could be used in a nuclear weapon.

The IAEA report based its findings on an annual survey by inspectors of Iran's Natanz uranium enrichment plant.

"Because it takes more time to create LEU [low-enriched uranium] than to go from LEU to HEU [highly-enriched uranium], the discovery of the additional LEU suggests that the Iranian regime has accelerated its quest for nuclear weapons capability," Prof. Raymond Tanter, president of the Washington-based Iran Policy Committee, told *The Jerusalem Post*.

The Iran Policy Committee is comprised of former officials from the White House, State Department, Pentagon and intelligence services, as well as academic experts, who believe that Iranian opposition movements should be given a central role in pushing for democratic change in the Islamic republic.

"If inspectors had overlooked such a large amount of uranium, it is an additional indication that Teheran operates a shadow nuclear program in coordination with the public one, the latter of which is open to inspection," Tanter said.

UN inspectors said the discovery of an additional 210 kg. of enriched uranium was a product of a case of mistaken underreporting by Iran. According to a *New York Times* report, the inspectors said the the inconsistency was "reasonable for a new enrichment plant [Natanz]."

UN officials were dismissive of suggestions that "Iran could smuggle enriched uranium out of the Natanz plant for [further] processing at a secret location," the report added.

But Tanter challenged the UN dismissal, saying, "Contrary to explanations by the UN officials, the regime probably smuggled enriched uranium out of the Natanz plant for additional processing at a secret location, such as a military site called Lavizan-2 in the northeastern area of Teheran.

"Because Lavizan-2 is a military site, it is my understanding that it is not open to inspection. Buried deep in tunnels, the regime conducts covert enrichment activities at Lavizan-2, operated by the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps [IRGC]," Tanter said.

"The regime has a sophisticated method to hide its bomb-making research and development. The Islamic Republic of Iran hides a secret nuclear program under the cover of a legitimate program to complete the construction of the Bushehr civilian facility.

"Materials legitimately acquired for Bushehr are diverted to the covert military program operated by the IRGC," Tanter said.

The IAEA report exposed an urgent need for more intelligence on the ground in Iran, Tanter said.

He added that "one of the best sources of intelligence about the Iranian regime's quest for nuclear weapons status are Iranian opposition organizations - the National Council of Resistance of Iran and its largest component, the Mujahedeen-e Khalq. They first revealed the parallel Iranian nuclear military program in 2002 and continue to make startlingly accurate revelations."

The EU recently took the Mujahedeen-e Khalq off of its list of terrorist organizations, but the US has kept the organization on its own list of such groups.

Teheran was also swiftly developing missile technology that would enable delivery of any future nuclear weapon, said Emily Landau, director of the Arms Control and Regional Security Program at Tel Aviv University's Institute for National Security Studies.

"Iran is moving full steam ahead, not only with uranium enrichment but missile development as well. It's going to reach its goal - whether nuclear weapons or remaining one step short of them - very soon, or it could be that they are indeed already at the 'one step before' stage," Landau said.

"The situation is very serious, and you can see already a certain escalation in statements issued in Israel about the severity of the threat and preparations for the possibility of some kind of action," she said.

No substantial diplomatic efforts to put real pressure on Iran had been attempted so far, Landau said.

"I'm not very optimistic to say the least, because I don't think the right approach is being taken, and mainly because so much time is slipping away with nothing at all being attempted - the last sanctions were decided upon in March of 2008, almost a year ago - and Iran of course is pushing forward all the time," she said.

Landau stressed that "pressure on Iran is not an alternative to engagement, but rather a prelude to it. In other words, pressure is essential to get Iran to be serious about negotiating. But, as I said, I don't see any indication that things are going in that direction."

The Foreign Ministry released a statement on Friday saying the new IAEA findings indicated "a continuation of the uranium enrichment project which goes against the Security Council's resolutions, and proves Iran's lack of cooperation with the IAEA's effort to clear up heavy suspicions over the military goals of Iran's plan."

Thursday's IAEA report also said that traces of uranium were found at the Syrian site which the international media says was bombed by IAF planes in September 2007. Syria had alleged the the uranium came from Israeli munitions, but UN inspectors said that was unlikely.

"Iran and Syria are secretly working on nuclear technology in a manner which risks peace in the region and the world, while blatantly ignoring their international obligations," the Foreign Ministry said. •

<http://www.jpost.com/servlet/Satellite?cid=1233304841494&pagename=JPost%2FJPArticle%2FShowFull>

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Washington Post
February 23, 2009

Iran's First Nuclear Power Plant Set for Tests before Launch

By Thomas Erdbrink
Washington Post Foreign Service

TEHRAN, Feb. 22 -- Iran's first nuclear power plant will undergo a critical series of tests starting Wednesday before full-scale operation begins later this year, Iranian state radio reported Sunday.

The plant is a highly symbolic facet of Iran's controversial nuclear program. Iranian leaders insist the country's nuclear ambitions are peaceful, but the United States, Israel and some European nations have charged that Iran is trying to produce nuclear weapons.

The long-delayed 1,000-megawatt reactor is being built by the Russian state company Atomstroieksport, which also supplies enriched uranium for the plant's operation. Iranian and Russian officials will inspect the Bushehr plant before the testing begins.

During what is known as the "virtual fuel-injection test," all operations at the plant will be checked, state radio reported.

"God willing, this will be an important step towards the full launch of the Bushehr nuclear power plant," Mohsen Delaviz, a spokesman for the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran, said Sunday, according to state radio. A batch of low-enriched uranium, supplied by Russia and needed to activate the reactor, will not be used during the testing.

Western countries have criticized Russia over its support for the Iranian nuclear program. Russia says the plant is purely civilian and cannot be used for any weapons program. The spent uranium has to be returned, so it cannot be used for other means, Russian officials say. Russia, together with China, has weakened Western-backed efforts in the United Nations Security Council to sanction Iran over its nuclear program.

Iran had stockpiled 2,227 pounds of low-enriched, or reactor-grade, nuclear fuel by late January, according to a report by the International Atomic Energy Agency that was issued Thursday. That could be enough, physicists say,

to make a single bomb if the fuel were enriched to a higher level. The quantity represented an increase from earlier estimates.

The IAEA published a statement Sunday that seemed intended to counter the impression that the accounting shortfall might have been a result of deliberate evasion.

"Iran is cooperating well with U.N. nuclear inspectors to help ensure it does not again understate the amount of uranium it has enriched," the agency said.

The issue is important because of suspicions, denied by Tehran, that it may use uranium enrichment to produce weapons. The West is also concerned the IAEA may not be able to keep track of Iran's nuclear advances.

Defenders say that to weaponize its program, Iran would have to take steps such as withdrawing from the Non-Proliferation Treaty, kicking out international inspectors, breaking U.N. seals on batches of uranium and shutting down dozens of U.N. cameras that monitor nuclear sites across the country.

"Our production of a nuclear energy program is completely within the framework or structure of international laws," said Ali Akbar Javanfekr, media adviser to President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/02/22/AR2009022201127.html>

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China View

Spokesman: Iran's Nuclear Activities have not Slowed Down

23 February 2009

TEHRAN, Feb. 23 (Xinhua) -- Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Hassan Qashqavi said on Monday that his country's nuclear activities have not slowed down, the official IRNA news agency reported.

"Iran's peaceful nuclear activities are going on according to the schedule," Qashqavi was quoted as saying.

He rejected the claims that the country's nuclear activities had slowed down and reiterated that the Iranian nuclear program was under direct supervision of the UN nuclear watchdog.

"Our cooperation with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) is based on the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and its Safeguards Agreement," Qashqavi said.

The IAEA was conducting regular inspections from Iran's nuclear sites and products of the enrichment facilities, he said, rejecting the allegations that Iran's cooperation with the IAEA was not transparent.

"Nothing is concealed. We cooperate (with the IAEA) within the NPT and everything is clear and accurate," the Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman added.

In a report on Iranian nuclear issue to the UN Security Council on Thursday, IAEA chief Mohamed ElBaradei said that only 164 gas centrifuges which were able to produce low-enriched uranium had been newly installed at Iran's Natanz uranium enrichment center since last December, which was slower than the past.

However, the report also pointed out that although the UN Security Council has implemented sanctions on Iran, Iran still refused to fulfill UN's requirement of stopping its uranium enrichment activity.

Iran's uranium enrichment program is questioned by many parties. Western countries like the United States' claim that Iran intends to secretly develop nuclear weapons, while the UN Security Council also requires Iran to suspend its uranium enrichment activity.

However, Iran insists that its nuclear plan is only for peaceful purposes, and continues its uranium enrichment activity despite the pressure from the Western countries and relevant resolutions and sanctions of the United Nations.

http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2009-02/23/content_10877958.htm

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Strategy Page

Syria Seeks To Pass More Gas

NUCLEAR, BIOLOGICAL AND CHEMICAL WEAPONS

February 20, 2009

Commercial satellite photos have revealed that Syria has been expanding its chemical weapons plant in the northwestern portion of the country. Three years ago, Syria began increasing production of ballistic missiles. Syria already has several hundred ballistic missiles aimed at Israel, some of them believed to have chemical warheads. Syria relies on chemical weapons for some degree of defense from Israel. The Syrian army is in no shape for a war with anyone, especially Israel. Years of low budgets has left most aircraft and armored vehicles unable to operate.

Last year Syria ran tests on its ballistic missile inventory, with over a dozen missiles fired. Israel has made no secret of the fact that, in a future war with Syria, they estimate that there would be as many as 3,300 Israeli casualties (including up to 200 dead). That's if Syria just used its long range missiles armed with conventional warheads (high explosives or cluster bombs). If the Syrians used chemical warheads, Israeli casualties could be as high as 16,000. Over 200,000 Israelis would be left homeless, and it's believed about a 100,000 would seek to leave the country.

Syria has underground storage and launch facilities for its arsenal of over a thousand SCUD missiles. Armed with half ton high explosive and cluster bomb warheads, the missiles have ranges of 500-700 kilometers. Syria also has some 90 older Russian Frog-7 missiles (70 kilometer range, half ton warhead) and 210 more modern Russian SS-21 missiles (120 kilometer range, half ton warhead) operating with mobile launchers. There are also 60 mobile SCUD launchers. The Syrians have a large network of camouflaged launching sites for the mobile launchers. Iran and North Korea have helped Syria build underground SCUD manufacturing and maintenance facilities. The Syrian missiles are meant to hit Israeli airfields, missile launching sites and nuclear weapons sites, as well as population centers. Syria hopes to do enough damage with a missile strike to cripple Israeli combat capability.

Israel has long been aware of the Syrian capabilities and any war with Syria would probably result in some interesting attacks on the Syrian missile network. The SCUD is a liquid fuel missile and takes half an hour or more to fuel and ready for launch. So underground facilities are a major defensive measure against an alert and astute opponent like Israel. Syria has some solid fueled SS-21 missiles (and is shopping for more) these only have a range of 120 kilometers.

It is feared that the Syrian missile tests are partly training exercises to see how ready the missile launcher crews are. Some of the tests may have tested new guidance systems, perhaps using GPS or Russian Glonass to attain high accuracy. Syria has been working more closely with Russian military suppliers lately, and has been a client state of Iran for over two decades.

<http://www.strategypage.com/htmw/htchem/articles/20090220.aspx>

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Aljazeera.net

Saturday, 21 February 2009

US Seeks Syria Nuclear Explanation

The US government has asked for a meeting with Syria's ambassador to discuss concerns including Damascus' possible nuclear programme and support for groups that Washington labels as terrorists, a state department spokesman has said.

The request follows a report by UN inspectors on Thursday that uranium traces were found at a Syrian site that Washington says was an almost-built nuclear reactor.

Imad Moustapha, the Syrian ambassador to the US, has been asked to meet the acting head of near eastern affairs at the state department next week, spokesman Gordon Duguid said.

"The meeting is an opportunity for dialogue to discuss our concerns with the Syrians," he said.

"There remain key differences between our two governments, including concerns about Syria's support for terrorist groups and networks, Syria's acquisition of nuclear and non-conventional weaponry, interference in Lebanon and a worsening human rights situation."

Duguid said the US expected the "mounting evidence and ongoing concerns" with Syria to be addressed by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) board of governors at its March 2 - 6 meeting.

"We fully support the IAEA in its investigation [into Syria's nuclear programme] and urge the international community to continue insisting that Syria comply with its IAEA obligations and cooperate fully with the IAEA without delay," he said.

Lebanese affairs

Relations between Syria and the United States nosedived after the 2005 assassination of Rafik al-Hariri, the former Lebanese prime minister, although Syria denies involvement.

Tensions have lingered over Damascus' support for the Palestinian group Hamas and the Lebanese Hezbollah movement, and accusations that Syria allowed fighters to infiltrate Iraq.

Bashar al-Assad, the Syrian president, told a British newspaper this week he hoped for better relations with the US and that Barack Obama, the US president, would send an ambassador to Syria soon.

The US withdrew its ambassador under in 2005 after al-Hariri's assassination.

John Kerry, chairman of the US senate foreign relations committee, will visit Syria over the weekend.

<http://english.aljazeera.net/news/americas/2009/02/20092210415524209.html>

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London Daily Telegraph
20 February 2009

North Korea could be ready to Test Fire Missile in Days

By Tim Shipman in Washington

Experts at Jane's Defence Weekly revealed that a provocative missile test by the hermit state is likely after studying satellite photographs of the preparations.

The analysis reinforces claims by South Korean intelligence that the communist nation is on a collision course with international arms control agreements by unveiling its prototype Taepodong 2 missile.

Joseph Bermudez, an analyst at the magazine, said that the country is preparing to fire either a missile or a Paektusan 2 space launch vehicle.

"There has been a significant increase in launch preparation activity at the Musudan-ni Launch Facility," he said.

The magazine reported that satellite imagery and reports indicated that a rise in activity at the engine test stand, and launch pad and umbilical tower maintenance.

"The satellite imagery and reports indicate that these launch preparation activities include the activation or installation of range control telemetry equipment and radars, the arrival of numerous trucks and support vehicles, including what appear to be fuel vehicles, increased activity at the engine test stand and maintenance activity at the launch pad and umbilical tower," Mr Bermudez said.

"The support facilities for the engine test stand, located near the umbilical tower, are currently undergoing expansion and the satellite images show the possible addition of fuel tanks or rocket engines awaiting testing."

Any test firing of a missile will provoke new questions about the political stability of North Korea, where the maverick dictator Kim Jong-il's rule is widely believed to be drawing to a close.

American officials have revealed that they believe a power struggle is underway to succeed Mr Kim after he suffered what Western intelligence agencies believe was a stroke last autumn.

The test firing of a missile that could fire a nuclear warhead would be a good way for the North Korean military to assert its influence. The North's military announced Thursday it is "fully ready" for war with neighbouring South Korea.

The missile activity comes as US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton is visiting the region. Mrs Clinton said in Tokyo on Tuesday such a launch would be "very unhelpful".

Some analysts believe that the regime in Pyongyang wants to drive a wedge between America and its South Korean ally by provoking a war. The North recently cancelled all peace accords with the South.

Lee Hang-See, the South Korean defence minister, said on Friday that Seoul would target North Korean launch sites if its ships came under missile attack in the Yellow Sea, an area that saw deadly naval clashes in 1999 and 2002. He added that North Korea will face UN sanctions if it goes ahead with the missile test.

In 2006, the UN Security Council imposed sanctions on the North after it last launched the Taepodong-2, which fizzled just seconds into flight and destructed. But that did not stop the North Korean regime conducting its first nuclear test three months later, a move that brought more sanctions.

The Taepodong 2 was designed to reach the US, according to the CIA, but the missile has so far never been flown successfully.

A declassified CIA report concluded: "This missile could reach major cities and military bases in Alaska and the smaller, westernmost islands in the Hawaiian chain. Light-weight variations of the TD-2 could fly as far as 10,000 km, placing at risk western U.S. territory in an arc extending northwest from Phoenix, Arizona, to Madison, Wisconsin."

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/northkorea/4737946/North-Korea-could-be-ready-to-test-fire-missile-in-days.html>

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Yonhap News – South Korea
23 February 2009

N. Korea Ups Ante by Diversifying Missiles Targeting U.S.

By Sam Kim

SEOUL, Feb. 23 (Yonhap) -- The North Korean regime is apparently trying to increase its chances of survival while boosting its diplomatic leverage by broadening its missile arsenal capable of hitting U.S. territory, defense officials and analysts said Monday.

In its latest defense white paper, South Korea said its communist neighbor has recently deployed new ballistic missiles that could threaten U.S. bases in Guam.

The evaluation of the North Korean military came amid heightened tensions as Pyongyang appears to be preparing to test-fire its longest-range missile, theoretically capable of hitting Hawaii and Alaska.

"The North is demonstrating that it can strike back if it is provoked, which translates into a form of war deterrence capabilities," Koh Yu-hwan, a North Korea professor at Seoul's Dongguk University, said.

Brg. Gen. Cho Bo-geun, who oversees the biennial policy report at the Ministry of National Defense, said the new missiles aim "beyond South Korea."

"The development of missiles with such a range obviously has other strategic reasons," he said, declining to disclose the number of the medium-range missiles that can fly approximately 3,000 km.

North Korea, which has hundreds of short-range missiles, began to develop intermediate-range ones in the late 1990s, according to the white paper.

Cho declined to confirm a media report that the new missiles were placed along the heavily armed border with South Korea, but said the deployment took place "over a long stretch of time" last year.

Officials believe that even though the North conducted an atomic test in 2006, it has yet to develop the technology to mount a nuclear warhead on its missiles.

A 2006 test of its most advanced Taepodong-2 missile also failed soon after takeoff. But the country appears to have largely fixed the glitches since, the white paper says.

Shin Won-sik, deputy of policy planning at the defense ministry, said the North has also expanded missile gear that can move around swiftly to dodge counterfire.

The U.S., which has 28,500 troops in South Korea, has expressed confidence that it can take out North Korean artillery and rockets in a dominant fashion if a conflict erupts on the divided peninsula.

In an apparent move to reduce its losses, the North has increased the number of multiple rocket launchers that can hit and run, the defense paper said, making it harder for the U.S. to track targets.

The isolated North, despite a decrepit economy, maintains about 1.19 million troops. The white paper said it has shifted to strategies that center around light infantry divisions.

"After examining the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, North Korea appears to have developed new strategies that can complement its shortfalls while reinforcing its strengths," Shin said.

Training has recently increased to help soldiers more quickly infiltrate cities and mountains, it said, as the North seeks to wage guerilla warfare to make up for a lack of advanced weaponry.

The number of lightly equipped special troops who focus on infiltration to strike U.S. and South Korean forces from behind has increased 50 percent to 180,000, he said.

Relations between the divided Koreas deteriorated after South Korean President Lee Myung-bak took office last year with a tougher stance on the North, drawing a bitter reaction from Pyongyang.

Weapons experts say North Korea is believed to have some 600 Scud short-range missiles and about 100 Rodong missiles, which are retrofitted Scuds. It has also developed the Taepodong-1 that can fly up to 2,500 km.

<http://english.yonhapnews.co.kr/northkorea/2009/02/23/71/0401000000AEN20090223006700315F.HTML>

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New York Times
February 23, 2009

South Korea says North Deploys New Missile

By CHOE SANG-HUN

SEOUL — North Korea has deployed a new ballistic missile that threatens U.S. military bases in Guam, according to a South Korean Defense Ministry report released on Monday.

The biannual defense report also said that in the past two years, the North has boosted the number of its special operations troops by 50 percent to 180,000, focusing on night-time and mountain and urban warfare based on "the lessons it had learned while watching the war in Iraq."

The North's new intermediate-range missile can travel about 1,800 miles carrying a 1,400-pound warhead, the report said.

Although South Korean officials detected the new missile during a military parade in Pyongyang in 2007, this was the first time they have publicly confirmed its deployment.

The revelation came as North Korea is reportedly preparing to test-fire a longer-range missile. In recent days, both Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton and South Korean Foreign Minister Yu Myung-hwan have warned the North Korea not to conduct a test.

Over the weekend, Jane's Defence Weekly reported that recent satellite imagery showed North Korea could be ready for the launch of its Taepodong-2 missile from the Musudan-ri missile base on the country's east coast within days.

The Taepodong-2 is the North's longest-range missile with an estimated range of more than 4,000 miles, putting Hawaii and Alaska under potential threat.

Since the 1980s, North Korea has deployed Scud and Rodong missiles that put all of South Korea and most of Japan within their ranges. But it remains unclear whether the North has mastered the technology needed to miniaturize a nuclear warhead to be carried atop its missiles.

“North Korea’s conventional force, its development and reinforcement of weapons of mass destruction such as nuclear weapons and missiles, and the forward deployment of its troops, are a direct and serious threat to our security,” the South’s defense report said.

North Korea has 1.19 million troops, one of the world’s largest armies, as well as 2,500 to 5,000 tons of chemical weapons, the South said.

Washington has identified North Korea as a key proliferator of missile technology in the Middle East. The North is also believed to maintain technological ties with Iran’s missile programs.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2009/02/24/world/asia/24korea.html?ref=world>

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Guardian.co.uk
24 February 2009

Fears Grow Over North Korean Missile Plans

Justin McCurry in Tokyo

Speculation was mounting today that North Korea is preparing to launch a long-range missile, described by the regime as an "experimental satellite", in defiance of American warnings not to provoke instability in the region.

The US has repeatedly urged the North Korean regime to abandon the launch and return to negotiations on its nuclear weapons programme.

Last week, the US secretary of state, Hillary Clinton, warned Pyongyang against making "provocative" moves, adding that the Obama administration would reach out to "those with whom we have had difficulties, as long as they unclench their fists".

Her appeals appear to have failed after South Korean satellite images showed that preparations were under way to launch what analysts believe to be a Taepodong-2 missile from a site in North Hamgyong province, on the north-east coast.

The North has been eager to prove the missile's capabilities after a previous test launch in 2006 ended in failure after less than a minute.

Observers have interpreted the threat as another round of diplomatic brinkmanship aimed at winning quick concessions on aid from the US and other countries taking part in multilateral nuclear talks.

But the KCNA news agency, North Korea's official mouthpiece, described the hardware as a communications satellite that is part of the country's space programme.

"The preparations for launching an experimental communications satellite are now making brisk headway," it said.

"When this satellite launch proves successful, the nation's space science and technology will make another giant stride forward in building an economic power."

The regime used similar language ahead of the 1998 launch of a Taepodong-1 missile that flew over Japan before landing in the Pacific Ocean.

The latest threat to regional stability comes as North Korea steps up its rhetoric against South Korea, whose government's hardline stance, including the cancellation of unconditional aid, prompted threats of "all-out war" from Pyongyang last week.

A successful launch of a Taepodong-2 would raise anxiety to new levels in the US, whose territory would theoretically be in the communist regime's firing line for the first time. The missile, with a maximum range of 4,100 miles (6,700km), is capable of striking Alaska and Hawaii.

The North Koreans did not name a date for the launch, but analysts said it could take place within days. Other potential dates are the 8 March meeting of the supreme people's assembly and the anniversary of the Korean people's army on 25 April.

A South Korean defence ministry report released yesterday warned that the North had deployed a new ballistic missile capable of striking a key US military base on the Pacific island of Guam.

Although experts do not believe North Korea possesses the technology to miniaturise a nuclear device to use as a warhead, it is believed to have made progress on developing biological and chemical missiles.

"North Korea's conventional force, its development and reinforcement of weapons of mass destruction such as nuclear weapons and missiles, and the forward deployment of its troops, are a direct and serious threat to our security," the ministry report said.

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2009/feb/24/north-korea-rocket-launch>

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London Daily Telegraph
24 February 2009

North Korea Feared to be Testing Missile Which Could Hit Alaska

By Malcolm Moore in Shanghai

The country's space agency released a statement saying full preparations for launching an "experimental communications satellite" were making "brisk headway".

It said the satellite would be used for "communications, prospecting of natural resources and weather forecasting" and was essential for the economic development of the country.

However, South Korea and the United States believe the rogue state is actually gearing up to fire the Taepodong-2 missile, the first ballistic missile that North Korea has built which is capable of striking Alaska and even the West Coast of America.

North Korea said it had the right to "space development", a term it has used before to cover for a missile test. In 1998, a "satellite launch" was later discovered to be a ballistic missile test.

Joseph Bermudez, a leading analyst with Jane's Defence Weekly, said recent satellite imagery showed North Korea could be ready for the launch of the Taepodong-2 within a matter of days.

"There has been a significant increase in launch preparation activity at the Musudan-ni Launch Facility," he said, including the activation of radars, the arrival of support vehicles, including fuel tankers, and maintenance work at the launch pad.

Last year, North Korea agreed to dismantle its nuclear weapons programme in return for aid and recognition from America and Japan. But the country has failed to implement this deal and observers believe it has pressed ahead with developing long range missiles including the Taepodong-2. Very little is known about the missile, and it is unclear whether it can carry a nuclear warhead.

The US believes North Korea has tested the missile once before, in 2006, a flight which failed around 40 seconds after launch, crashing the missile into the ocean. Both the US and Japan have threatened further sanctions if North Korea tests the missile, and any launch would violate a U N Security Council resolution. Hillary Clinton, the US secretary of State, warned North Korea last week not to make any provocative moves.

The South Korean Defence minister, Lee Sang Hee, told a parliamentary committee that he regarded the satellite launch as "provocation". He said: "We will make preparations. North Korea may claim it is a satellite but we will track its movement on the assumption it's a missile." North Korea said earlier this month that it is ready for "all out confrontation" with the South. Yu Myung Hwan, the South Korean Foreign minister, has flown to Beijing to ask the Chinese to intervene.

Tensions between the North and South have rarely been higher. The South Koreans believe their neighbours have boosted troops along the demilitarised zone separating the countries by 50 per cent since 2006. Shin Won-sik, a senior Defence official, said there are now 180,000 North Korean soldiers poised on the border. He said the troops could overwhelm the 28,000 US and South Korean soldiers patrolling on the other side of the line.

North Korea has also boosted its propaganda forces, in a bid to win the sympathy of South Koreans, and has apparently developed medium-range missiles that can reach all of South Korea and most of Japan.

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/4798625/North-Korea-feared-to-be-testing-missile-which-could-hit-Alaska.html>

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Washington Post
Tuesday, February 24, 2009

North Korea Says It Is Preparing Satellite Launch

By Blaine Harden
Washington Post Foreign Service

TOKYO, Feb. 24 -- By announcing that it is preparing to launch a "communications satellite," North Korea on Tuesday dressed up its planned test of a long-range ballistic missile -- which might be able to reach Alaska -- as a benign research project.

"Outer space is an asset common to mankind, and its use for peaceful purposes has become a global trend," said a spokesman for the North Korean Committee of Space Technology.

North Korea's announcement comes amid warnings from the United States not to test the missile. A United Nations resolution, passed after North Korea exploded a nuclear device in 2006, bans the country from any ballistic missile activity.

U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton said last week that a missile test would "be very unhelpful in moving our relationship forward." In a tour of East Asia, she urged the government of Kim Jong Il to stop its "provocative actions."

North Korea appears to be setting up radar and other monitoring equipment around a missile launch site on its northeast coast, South Korea's Yonhap news agency reported Tuesday. It said, however, that a missile has not yet been placed on the launch pad.

South Korea's defense ministry says preparations for launch could be completed within days, although other analysts in Seoul say that North Korea has historically waited for much warmer weather before test launches.

Eleven years ago, North Korea surprised the world by firing a long-range, three-stage Taepodong-1 missile over Japan into the Pacific Ocean. Afterward, amid an international outcry, the North said that it had merely exercised its right to "space development."

It claimed then that it had succeeded in launching a research satellite. The U.S. government later concluded the missile had failed to put a satellite into orbit.

That launch and another round of North Korean missile tests in 2006 alarmed Japan, which has since invested heavily in American-made ballistic missile defense systems. North Korea has 200 Nodong medium-range missiles that could hit anywhere in Japan, according to the Japanese defense ministry.

Should North Korea launch another missile in the direction of Japan, it will enter airspace that is now protected by Aegis anti-ballistic missiles, which are deployed on Japanese and U.S. Navy destroyers in the Sea of Japan and designed to intercept incoming missiles in mid-flight. As a secondary layer of defense, Tokyo is also protected by a Patriot missile system.

These systems raise the possibility that a North Korean missile launch -- even one advertised in advance as a peaceful space probe -- could be destroyed in flight.

Analysts say knocking down a North Korean missile could precipitate a much greater regional crisis than the initial launch.

"Kim Jong Il will absolutely lose face, if his missile is destroyed," said Satoshi Morimoto, a professor at Takushoku University in Tokyo and a former director of security policy at Japan's Foreign Ministry. "We are afraid that the North Koreans may overreact and that there may be another launch, perhaps on South Korea."

Daniel A. Pinkston, an expert on North Korean missiles who works for the International Crisis group, said that Kim's government has much to gain and little to lose from launching a satellite as the payload atop its long-range missile, especially if it gets shot down by an American-made weapon.

"I see this as a no-brainer for the North Koreans," Pinkston said. "All the indications are that they are likely to go forward with this. I don't think people see how serious the implications are. They are all bad for the United States."

He said that if the missile is shot down, it will give North Korea an excuse to back out of long-running negotiations with the United States, South Korea, Japan, China and Russia over dismantling its nuclear weapons program.

"The North could say, 'Why should we denuclearize? This just shows hostile intent.' " said Pinkston. "The best thing is no launch or the thing blows up on the launch pad. All the other scenarios are bad."

North Korea's planned missile launch comes at a time of deteriorating relations between North and South Korea.

South Korean President Lee Myung-bak last year ended a decade of policies designed to ease tensions on the Korean Peninsula. Lee's predecessors had given Kim's government large amounts of food, fertilizer and trade concessions, all without conditions and without asking questions about nuclear weapons, missile proliferation or human rights abuses.

Chronically hungry North Korea has received virtually no food or fertilizer since Lee came to power last year. In response, it has called Lee a "fascist," canceled all military and political agreements with the South and made frequent references to the possibility of war.

Analysts in Seoul speculate that North Korea is making a public show of launching a missile in order to attract attention from the Obama administration.

Officials in Pyongyang, the North Korean capital, have said they would like to establish diplomatic and trade relations with Washington.

Over the years, North Korea has provoked the United States with missile launches and a nuclear test. It has then shifted gears and negotiated for food, fuel and diplomatic concessions.

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/02/24/AR2009022400324.html>

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Global Security Newswire

Global Chemical Weapons Disarmament Operations Approach Halfway Mark

February 20, 2009

More than 40 percent of the known global stockpile of chemical warfare materials has been destroyed, the monitoring agency for Chemical Weapons Convention announced today (see GSN, April 8, 2008).

A total of 29,741 metric tons of Category 1 chemical agents, materials that have essentially no applications other than as chemical weapons, had been verifiably destroyed as of Jan. 31, according to the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons. That is 42.8 percent of the more than 71,000 metric tons of banned materials once held by the six states that have declared stockpiles under the treaty -- Albania, Libya, India, Russia, the United States and an anonymous state widely known to be South Korea.

That figure does not encompass chemical weapons abandoned by Japan in China at the end of World War II.

Another 915 metric tons of Category 2 chemical weapons, which do have commercial applications and are considered less threatening to the treaty, have been eliminated.

Russia by the end of last month had destroyed 11,960 metric tons of Category 1 chemical warfare materials, 29.8 percent of its world's-largest stockpile. Three disposal plants are operating and the facility at Shchuchye is scheduled to begin tests using live chemical agent on March 5, according to a press release taken from OPCW Director General Rogelio Pfirter's statement Tuesday to the agency's Executive Council

The United States has finished off 16,126 metric tons of material, 58 percent of the nation's stockpile. Disposal is complete or under way at all but two U.S. chemical weapons storage sites.

India has eliminated 98.2 percent of its stockpile and operations are expected to be completed by April 29.

Albania and a nation believed to be South Korea have already completed elimination of their stockpiles.

Libya has not yet started work on its small stockpile.

China and Japan recently finished a trial excavation of weapons from one site but have not built any destruction facilities or eliminated any weapons (Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons release, Feb. 20).

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Boston Globe
February 23, 2009

Team Finds Secret that could Stem Flu Viruses

By Stephen Smith, Globe Staff

Scientists led by a team from Dana-Farber Cancer Institute have discovered what they describe as the Achilles' heel of the influenza virus, a finding that suggests it might be possible to end the ritual of the annual flu shot.

Yearly vaccination is currently needed because different strains of the virus circulate around the world regularly, owing to the germs' rapidly changing genetic makeup. But the researchers reported yesterday that they had found one pocket of the virus that appears to remain static in multiple strains, making it an attractive target for a vaccine, as well as drugs.

If the research stands up to further testing, the flu vaccine might one day be more like the shots given to ward off measles, mumps, and polio. Children and adults would be inoculated once in their lives and have a universal shield against the various strains that hopscotch across the world - even the much-feared bird flu.

Such a vaccine is still years off - even if the quest succeeds - so the researchers have begun animal testing of a new medicine that would exploit the virus's weakness and stem a flu infection once someone falls ill. Their early results suggest that the drug would work against the highly virulent avian flu, as well as the lethal "Spanish flu" strain that killed millions during a 1918 global epidemic.

One scientist not involved with the government-sponsored research described it as "trailblazing," and even specialists with more measured reactions agreed that it marks a potentially pivotal advance in understanding a virus that kills an average of 36,000 Americans annually and a quarter-million people worldwide.

The timing couldn't be better, they said, as fears flourish that the world is overdue for a major epidemic, and as once-heralded flu drugs lose their punch.

"It's the first time that a universal vaccine, in terms of influenza viruses, may really be on the horizon," said Peter Palese, a specialist in respiratory viruses at the Mount Sinai School of Medicine in New York. He was not involved with the research.

The findings, detailed in the journal *Nature Structural & Molecular Biology*, are very much a made-in-Boston story: The discovery would not have been possible without the blood of 57 New Englanders, donated a decade ago and used to build a library of 27 billion disease-fighting cells called antibodies.

Scientists screened those antibodies and found 10 capable of stopping the bird flu. Next, they tried the antibodies on the deadly 1918 strain. "Sure enough, it blocked that virus also," said Dr. Wayne A. Marasco of Dana-Farber and Harvard Medical School, who directed the research team. "And at that point, we knew we had something special."

Further analysis showed why: The antibodies targeted a specific spot on proteins that sit on the surface of the flu virus. Crucially, the antibodies landed at the same site on several flu strains.

Greatly magnified, those surface proteins resemble a lollipop. And it is the globular head of the lollipop where the flurry of genetic changes occur that make flu shots an annual event.

"You can imagine one season, it's like a red lollipop. The next season, it's a yellow lollipop. And the season after that, it's a green lollipop," said Marasco, an infectious-disease doctor who specializes in treating cancer patients with compromised immune systems.

Most vaccines work by revving up the body's disease-fighting cells, helping them to recognize and rapidly neutralize invading germs. The researchers realized that the disease fighters generated by existing flu vaccines - which contain killed or weakened whole viruses - head straight toward the biggest target, the globular head. It is, in effect, a Trojan horse that prevents the body's immune system from directing more of its firepower toward the stalk of the lollipop, where the scientists found the pocket that was so static. That site contains machinery that lets the virus penetrate human cells.

"Somehow, they'd have to make the vaccine so that the focus of the immune response would be toward the part that does not mutate," said Dr. Sharon Frey, a vaccine researcher at Saint Louis University. "That is not a trivial task. That is a major challenge."

The current work dealt with just influenza A, one of two predominant types of flu. But the scientists said they believe that a similar strategy could work with influenza B viruses, and that a successful vaccine would consist of a cocktail of immune-system triggers.

"People tend to emphasize vaccines as the Holy Grail," said Robert Liddington of the Burnham Institute for Medical Research in California, another of the study's authors. But because of the complexity of developing vaccines, he said, it's likely that antibody-based medicines will become available first.

Those drugs, known as monoclonal antibodies, are man-made clones of natural antibodies that act like guided missiles against invaders. The flu antibodies identified in yesterday's report have been used to make monoclonal antibodies that target the static stalk region.

So far, the medication has been shown to protect mice against several flu strains, though not all strains that were tested. Dr. Anthony S. Fauci, director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, said that if the drug works in other animals and then in humans, he will conclude, "Wow, now you've really got something."

The research team, which included scientists from the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, said it believes the drug could be ready for human testing by the 2011-2012 flu season. The researchers have not yet had extensive conversations with drug companies about making the medicine. Dana-Farber holds patents on the monoclonal antibodies and the discovery of the static region.

Such a drug, scientists said, could be crucial if a novel strain ignited a global flu epidemic, especially since a growing number of flu strains are becoming resistant to the main drug now available, Tamiflu. The experimental medicine, which would probably be far more expensive than current flu drugs, might initially be given to doctors and nurses, and to patients whose disease-fighting capacity was compromised.

http://www.boston.com/news/health/articles/2009/02/23/team_finds_secret_that_could_stem_flu_viruses/?page=full

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