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Deccan Herald – Bangalore, India
13 March 2009

'Al-Qaeda Grooming Gen Next Leaders'

Anirban Bhaumik, New Delhi, DH News Service:

The United States is concerned over Pakistan's 'deficiencies' in dealing with Al-Qaeda, Taliban and other extremists along its border with Afghanistan and elsewhere in the country.

With President Barack Obama's administration likely to come up with its new 'Af-Pak' (Afghanistan-Pakistan) policy by the end of this month, the US Army's intelligence wing assessed it would take years before efforts to enhance Pakistan's capability to take on terrorists start bearing fruits.

"Although US efforts to address Pakistani counter-insurgency deficiencies are underway, it will take years before meaningful capabilities are likely to be developed," said the director of the US Defence Intelligence Agency (DIA) Lt. Gen. Michael D Maples. In his recent testimony to the US Senate Committee on Armed Services, Maples said that Pakistan was facing an "expanded militancy" in addition to its economic and political challenges.

He stated that Federally Administered Tribal Areas in western Pakistan continued to provide 'vital sanctuary' to al-Qaeda and the Afghan Taliban. It also continued to be a safe haven for the extremist groups based in Pakistan. He added that the Qaeda was using FATA to groom the next generation of its leadership. The DIA in its Annual Threat Assessment said that the extremists used the sanctuary in Pakistan to train operatives.

"Al-Qaeda exploits the permissive operating environment (in areas along the porous Pak-Afghan border) to support insurgency in Afghanistan, while also planning attacks against the US and Western interests in Pakistan and worldwide," said Maples.

The DIA chief's testimony is likely to be one of the several inputs that are to be factored in when President Obama's administration formulates its policy for Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Though Obama recently indicated that he was in favour of exploring possibilities of peace-talks with the moderate section of the Taliban in Afghanistan; Maples made adverse comments against a similar move by the Pakistani government at SWAT valley of the North West Frontier Province.

The DIA reported that Islamabad continued to develop its nuclear infrastructure, expand nuclear weapon stockpiles and seek more advanced warheads and delivery systems. Maples expressed concern over the safety of nuclear weapons in Pakistan. "Pakistan has taken important steps to safeguard its nuclear weapons, though vulnerabilities exist," he said.

The regime-change in Washington is likely to shift the focus of US 'war on terror' from Iraq to Afghanistan and Pakistan. Obama's special envoy for Afghanistan and Pakistan Richard Holbrooke has already visited the region to study the situation in the two troubled countries. US has already ordered deployment of 17000 additional troops to Afghanistan.

The DIA noted that strategic rivalry with India continued to drive development of an expanding array of delivery systems by Pakistan. Islamabad was developing missiles such as the Babur for ground-launch and the Ra'ad for air-launch, it added.

<http://www.deccanherald.com/Content/Mar132009/scroll20090313123779.asp?section=frontpagenews>

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London Daily Telegraph
14 March 2009

Osama bin Laden Attacks 'Crooked' Arab Leaders

By Our Foreign Staff and Agencies in Dubai

In the recording, broadcast by Al-Jazeera television based in Qatar, a voice purporting to be the al-Qaeda leader attacked "moderate" leaders of Muslim countries for not strenuously opposing the Israeli offensive against Hamas.

"It has become clear that some Arab leaders were complicit with the Crusader Zionist alliance against our people," said the voice, which is yet to be verified.

"These are the leaders that America calls moderate. The countries of the Muslim world from Indonesia to Mauritania are divided into two: some of them are crooked, while others are even more crooked.

"The Holocaust of Gaza amid a long siege is an important historical event that confirms the importance of distinguishing between Muslims and hypocrites."

He also called on jihadists to "liberate" Iraq from the US army and then launch attacks on Israel from Jordan.

The recording is the second bin Laden message to be released in two months. In one posted on an Islamist website in January he called on Muslims across the world to take revenge against Israel over Gaza, charging that the onslaught had been timed to take advantage of the final days of the presidency of George W. Bush.

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/qatar/4991580/Osama-bin-Laden-attacks-crooked-Arab-leaders.html>

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International Herald Tribune
March 17, 2009

Drones: The Weapon of Choice in Fighting Al Qaeda

By Christopher Drew

A missile fired by a U.S. drone killed at least four people late Sunday at the house of a militant commander in northwest Pakistan, the latest use of what intelligence officials have called their most effective weapon against Al Qaeda.

And Pentagon officials say the remotely piloted planes, which can beam back live video for up to 22 hours, have done more than any other weapons system to track down insurgents and save U.S. lives in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The planes have become one of the military's favorite weapons despite many shortcomings resulting from the rush to get them into the field.

A sharp increase in the demand for the drones is contributing to new thinking inside the Pentagon about how to develop and deploy new weapons systems.

U.S. Air Force officials acknowledge that more than a third of their unmanned Predator spy planes which are 27 feet, or 8 meters, long, powered by a high-performance snowmobile engine, and cost \$4.5 million apiece have crashed, mostly in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Pilots, who fly them from trailers halfway around the world using joysticks and computer screens, say some of the controls are clunky. For example, the missile-firing button sits dangerously close to the switch that shuts off the plane's engines. Pilots are also in such short supply that the service recently put out a call for retirees to help.

But military leaders say they can easily live with all that.

Since the height of the cold war, the military has tended to chase the most technologically advanced solution to every threat, leading to long delays and cost overruns that result in rarely used fighter jets that cost \$143 million apiece, and plans for a \$3 billion destroyer that the navy says it can no longer afford.

Now the Pentagon appears to be warming up to the idea that, as Voltaire said, "The perfect is the enemy of the good."

In speeches, Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates has urged his weapons buyers to rush out "75 percent solutions over a period of months" rather than waiting for "gold-plated" solutions.

And as the Obama administration prepares its first budget, officials say they plan to free up more money for simpler systems like drones that can pay dividends now, especially as fighting intensifies in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

A rare behind-the-scenes look at the use of the Predator shows both the difficulties and the rewards in pushing out weapons more quickly.

"I'll be really candid," said Colonel Eric Mathewson, who directs the Air Force's task force on unmanned aerial systems. "We're on the ragged edge."

He said the service has been scrambling to train more pilots, who fly the drones via satellite links from the western United States, to keep up with a near-tripling of daily missions in the last two years.

Field commanders in Iraq and Afghanistan, where the Air Force is in charge of the Predators, say their ability to linger over an area for hours, streaming instant video warnings of insurgent activity, has been crucial to reducing threats from roadside bombs and identifying terrorist compounds. The C.I.A. is in charge of drone flights in Pakistan, where more than three dozen missile strikes have been launched against Al Qaeda and Taliban leaders in recent months.

Considered a novelty a few years ago, the Air Force's fleet has grown to 195 Predators and 28 Reapers, a new and more heavily armed cousin of the Predator. Including drones that the U.S. Army has used to counter roadside bombs and tiny hand-launched models that can help soldiers to peer past the next hill or building, the total number of military drones has soared to 5,500, from 167 in 2001.

The urgent need for more drones has meant bypassing usual procedures. Some of the 70 Predator crashes, for example, stemmed from decisions to deploy the planes before they had completed testing and to hold off replacing control stations to avoid interrupting the supply of intelligence.

"The context was to do just the absolute minimum needed to sustain the fight now, and accept the risks, while making fixes as you go along," Colonel Mathewson said.

It is easier, of course, for the military to take more risks with unmanned planes.

Complaints about civilian casualties, particularly from strikes in Pakistan, have stirred some concerns among human rights advocates. Military officials say the ability of drones to observe targets for lengthy periods makes strikes more accurate. They also said they do not fire if they think civilians are nearby.

The Predators were still undergoing basic testing when they were rushed into use in Bosnia and Kosovo in the 1990s and then hastily armed with missiles after the September 2001 terrorist attacks.

But it was only after the military turned to new counterinsurgency techniques in early 2007 that demand for drones became almost insatiable. Since then, Air Force Lieutenant General Gary North, the air-component commander for the combined forces in Iraq and Afghanistan, said the service has gone to "amazing lengths" to increase their use.

The Predators and Reapers are now flying 34 surveillance patrols each day in Iraq and Afghanistan, up from 12 in 2006. They are also transmitting 16,000 hours of video each month, some of it directly to troops on the ground.

The strains of these growing demands were evident on a recent visit to Davis-Monthan Air Force Base in Tucson, Arizona, one of four bases where Air National Guard units have been ordered to full-time duty to help alleviate crew shortages.

The Guard members, along with U.S. Air Force crews at a base in the Nevada desert, are 7,000 to 8,000 miles away from the planes they are flying. Most of the crews sit at 1990s-style computer banks filled with screens, inside dimly lit trailers. Many fly missions in both Iraq and Afghanistan on the same day.

On a recent day, at 1:15 p.m. in Tucson 1:15 a.m. the next day in Afghanistan a pilot and sensor operator were staring at gray-toned video from the Predator's infrared camera, which can make even the darkest night scene surprisingly clear.

The crew was scanning a road, looking for but not finding signs of anyone planting improvised explosive devices or lying in wait for a convoy.

As the Predator circled at 16,000 feet, the dark band of a river and craggy hills came into view, along with ribbons of farmland.

"We spend 70 to 80 percent of our time doing this, just scanning roads," said the pilot, Matthew Morrison.

At other times, the crews monitor insurgent compounds and watch over troops in battle. "When you're on the radio with a guy on the ground, and he is out of breath and you can hear the weapons fire in the background, you are every bit as engaged as if you were actually there," Major Morrison said.

When Predators spot possible targets, officers monitoring video at command centers in Iraq and Afghanistan decide whether to order an attack.

Colonel Gregg A. Davies, commander of the group that flies Predators for the Arizona Guard, said fighter planes with bigger bombs are often sent in to make the strikes. In all, the U.S. Air Force says, Predators and Reapers shot missiles on 244 of the 10,949 missions in Iraq and Afghanistan in 2007 and 2008.

U.S. Air Force officials said a few crew members have had a difficult time watching the strikes. And some pilots said it can be hard to transition from being a computer-screen warrior to dinner at home or their children's soccer games.

Another problem has been that few pilots wanted to give up flying fighter jets to operate drones. Given the shortages, the U.S. Air Force has temporarily blocked transfers out of the program. It also has begun training officers as drone pilots who have had little or no experience flying conventional planes.

Colonel Mathewson, director of the U.S. Air Force's task force on unmanned aerial systems, said that while upgrades have been made to control stations, the service plans to eventually shift to simpler and more intuitive ground systems that could allow one remote pilot to control several drones. Now, pilots say, it takes up to 17 steps including entering data into pull-down windows to fire a missile.

And even though 13 of the 70 Predator crashes have occurred over the last 18 months, officials said the accident rate has fallen as flying hours have shot up.

All told, 55 have been lost because of equipment failure, operator errors or weather. Four were shot down in Bosnia, Kosovo and Iraq; 11 were lost in combat situations, like running out of fuel while protecting troops under fire.

Given the demand for video intelligence, the Air Force is equipping 50 manned turbo-prop planes with similar cameras.

And it is developing new camera systems for Reapers that could vastly expand the intelligence each plane can collect.

P. W. Singer, a defense analyst at the Brookings Institution, said the Predators have already had "an incredible effect," though the remote control raised obvious questions about whether the military could become "more cavalier" about using force.

Still, he said, "these systems today are very much Model T Fords. These things will only get more advanced."

<http://www.iht.com/articles/2009/03/17/business/17uav.php>

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Boston Globe
March 14, 2009

Top Officials Urge Dialogue with Hamas

By Bryan Bender and Farah Stockman, Globe Staff

WASHINGTON - Nine former senior US officials and one current adviser are urging the Obama administration to talk with leaders of Hamas to determine whether the militant group can be persuaded to disarm and join a peaceful Palestinian government, a major departure from current US policy.

The bipartisan group, which includes economic recovery adviser Paul A. Volcker and former national security advisers Brent Scowcroft and Zbigniew Brzezinski, made the recommendation in a letter handed to Obama days before he took office, according to Scowcroft.

The group is preparing to meet this weekend to decide when to release a report outlining a proposed US agenda for talks aimed at bringing all Palestinian factions into the Mideast peace process, according to Henry Siegman, the

president of the US/Middle East Project, who brought the former officials together and said the White House promised the group an opportunity to make its case in person to Obama.

Talking to Hamas, which the State Department has designated a terrorist organization, would mark a dramatic reversal for the US government. Longstanding US policy has stipulated that before engaging in any talks, Hamas must renounce violence, recognize Israel, and agree to all previous agreements signed by Palestinian negotiators.

"I see no reason not to talk to Hamas," said Scowcroft, who was national security adviser to President George H.W. Bush.

Siegman said the letter, which was handed to Obama by Volcker but has not been made public, said the administration should "at least explore the possibility" that Hamas, which took control of the Palestinian territory of Gaza after elections in 2006, might be willing to transition into a purely political party and join with its rival, Fatah, which holds the Palestinian presidency in the West Bank.

The White House did not respond immediately last night to requests for comment on the letter. Volcker was unavailable for comment.

Both the West Bank and Gaza were occupied by Israel in 1967. Since Israel pulled out of Gaza in 2005, Hamas, which stands for the Islamic Resistance Movement, has launched hundreds of rockets into southern Israeli cities and has taken credit for suicide bombings against Israeli civilians.

Last fall, Israel conducted a military offensive against Hamas in Gaza that resulted in thousands of Palestinian casualties.

Siegman and Scowcroft said the letter urged Obama to formulate a clear American position on how the peace talks should proceed and what the specific goals should be.

"The main gist is that you need to push hard on the Palestinian peace process," Scowcroft said in an interview. "Don't move it to end of your agenda and say you have too much to do. And the US needs to have a position, not just hold their coats while they sit down."

Along with Scowcroft, Volcker, and Brzezinski, who was national security adviser under President Jimmy Carter, signatories included former House International Relations Committee chairman Lee Hamilton, a Democrat; former United Nations ambassador Thomas Pickering from the first Bush administration; former World Bank president James Wolfensohn; former US trade representative in the Ford administration Carla Hills; Theodore Sorensen, former special counsel to President John F. Kennedy; and former Republican senators Chuck Hagel and Nancy Kassebaum Baker.

Meanwhile, other leading foreign policy officials in the United States and in Europe have been calling for deeper international engagement with Hamas.

Michael Ancram, a Conservative Party member of the British Parliament, who has held several meetings with Hamas leaders over the past two years, is urging the British government to engage in "exploratory dialogue" with Hamas.

"There is a chance of a process," Ancram said in an interview. "Either they deliver, in which you move forward, or they don't deliver, in which case nothing is lost."

But many other Middle East specialists believe that meeting with Hamas would set a bad precedent of negotiating with terrorists and could also undermine more moderate Palestinian leaders, including Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas, the leader of the Fatah party.

Chuck Freilich, Israel's former deputy national security adviser, said in a recent interview that talks with Hamas would be a waste of time. "Maybe someday Hamas would moderate, but until then . . . I don't think there is much to talk about," he said. "I think they [the Obama administration] are going to find very quickly that the reason the Bush administration didn't do anything for seven years was there wasn't anything to do."

The recommendations in the letter will be laid out in more detail in the coming days, Siegman said, adding that the letter itself will not be released until the signatories have a chance to meet with the president.

In the early days of his presidency, Obama has widened the scope of voices advising him on how to approach the Israel-Palestinian peace process, including reaching out to Arab-American groups.

He has also named a special envoy, former senator George Mitchell of Maine, while Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton and National Security Adviser James L. Jones - who served as special envoy to the Mideast in the second Bush administration - are all playing primary roles.

Who will have Obama's ear among the many Middle East specialists remains a burning question.

"Somebody is going to coordinate the emissaries and coordinators," Scowcroft said.

http://www.boston.com/news/nation/washington/articles/2009/03/14/top_officials_urge_dialogue_with_hamas/

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New York Times

March 13, 2009

Obama Afghan Plan Focuses on Pakistan Aid and Appeal to Militants

By HELENE COOPER and THOM SHANKER

WASHINGTON — The emerging outlines of President Obama's plan for Afghanistan include proposals to shift more American efforts toward problems in neighboring Pakistan and to seek some kind of political reconciliation with the vast majority of insurgents in the region, according to administration officials.

The plan reflects in part a conclusion within the administration that most of the insurgent foot soldiers in Afghanistan and Pakistan are "reconcilable" and can be pruned away from the hard-core organizations of the Taliban and Al Qaeda. At least 70 percent of the insurgents, and possibly more, can be encouraged to lay down their arms with the proper incentives, administration officials have said.

A strategic review nearing completion is being carried out by a team of high-ranking administration officials whose recommendations will be subject to Mr. Obama's approval. After seven years of a United States-led war effort in Afghanistan, officials involved in the review say that the military to date has succeeded primarily in driving the most hard-core Taliban and other extremist militants out of Afghanistan and into western Pakistan, including the mountainous tribal areas and the city of Quetta.

To put more pressure on those Pakistani sanctuaries, United States and Pakistani officials said they expected the plan to recommend at least a continuation of what amounts to a covert war carried out by the Central Intelligence Agency inside Pakistan, using drone aircraft for missile strikes on insurgent hide-outs.

The plan will also call for an increase in military and financial aid to Pakistan, though there was still a debate on just how much additional aid should be provided, the officials said.

One senior Obama official said the military aid to Pakistan would be aimed at trying to get its army to focus more on counterinsurgency and less on its long-running feud with India.

Vice President Joseph R. Biden Jr., speaking to NATO allies this week in Brussels, called 5 percent of the Taliban "incorrigible — not susceptible to anything other than being defeated." A senior European diplomat involved in Afghanistan said officials believed that number to be 100 to 1,000 Qaeda and Taliban members. Mr. Biden said he believed that "another 25 percent or so" were uncertain about their commitment to the insurgency, while about 70 percent were involved because it meant "getting paid."

But how exactly the Afghan government and the United States will pry away those insurgents remained unclear. Whatever is decided must be presented by the Afghan government, Mr. Biden said. "I do think it is worth engaging and determining whether or not there are those who are willing to participate in a secure and stable Afghan state," he said.

Mr. Biden's comments echoed those made by Mr. Obama during an interview last week with The New York Times, in which he said reconciliation in Afghanistan could be comparable to the successful American effort to reconcile with Sunni militias in Iraq.

Senior military officials have submitted three separate reviews to the White House: those from Adm. Mike Mullen, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff; Gen. David H. Petraeus, commander of American forces in the region; and Lt. Gen. Douglas E. Lute, of the National Security Council. That work has contributed to the final package being assembled by Bruce O. Riedel, a former C.I.A. analyst who is chairman of the administration's strategic review.

Others involved in the review include Richard C. Holbrooke, the special envoy to Afghanistan and Pakistan, and Michele A. Flournoy, the under secretary of defense for policy.

Administration officials said Mr. Obama would probably announce the findings late next week or the week after, in advance of an international conference on Afghanistan that is scheduled for the end of the month in The Hague. Drafts of the final strategy are expected to be reviewed by a cabinet-level panel of Mr. Obama's national security team next week. A senior Pentagon official said the review would set out specific goals over the next three to five years.

While officials said no decision had been reached on the level of nonmilitary financial assistance to be offered to Pakistan, senior Congressional aides pointed out that before leaving the Senate for the White House, Mr. Obama and Mr. Biden sponsored legislation to triple nonmilitary aid to Pakistan over the next five years, to \$1.5 billion a year.

Mr. Holbrooke and General Petraeus briefed senators on Capitol Hill on Thursday about the review. Congressional aides said a similar bill providing for increased aid to Pakistan would soon be reintroduced by the Democratic chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, John Kerry of Massachusetts, and the ranking Republican, Senator Richard G. Lugar of Indiana.

Beyond the Pakistan aid proposal, there is agreement that the Afghan National Army, which has proved to be an effective force for internal security and has earned popular respect, should be expanded — but no decision has been made on its ultimate size, according to senior Pentagon officials.

Several European officials said that the overarching theme behind the Afghanistan review was that NATO was looking for a way out of Afghanistan, and that everything done now was toward that end. "The goal now is simply to get to a point to prevent Afghanistan and Pakistan from becoming a place from which you can launch attacks on the West," a senior European official said.

Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates has sounded a similar theme, although not quite so starkly. "The mission is to prevent the Taliban from retaking power against a democratically elected government in Afghanistan and thus turning Afghanistan, potentially again, into a haven for Al Qaeda and other extremist groups," Mr. Gates said on National Public Radio this week, setting ambitions for the military that are far more limited than the stated goals under the Bush administration.

"We need to have goals, at least in the near- to midterm, that are achievable," he said.

It is not clear whether the Obama administration intends to extend the secret authorizations signed last summer by President George W. Bush that allow American commandos to carry out limited raids inside Pakistan. In carrying out missile strikes, the C.I.A. has steadily developed its own network of sources in the tribal areas, and combined with improved information-sharing with Pakistan's main intelligence agency in recent months, as well as some technical advances like installing more mobile towers to intercept cellphone calls, the agency has been getting much better intelligence on its drone targets than it did just a few months ago, officials said.

Eric Schmitt contributed reporting.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2009/03/13/washington/13policy.html?ref=asia>

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Guardian.co.uk

Friday, 13 March 2009

Obama Administration to Abandon Bush Term 'Enemy Combatants'

Daniel Nasaw in Washington

The US government today revised the standard by which it claims authority to hold Guantánamo Bay detainees and said today it would drop use of the term "enemy combatant", which critics say George Bush's administration devised in order to hold prisoners outside traditional legal frameworks.

According to a filing in federal court today, the US justice department will only seek to detain individuals who provided "substantial" support for al-Qaida or the Taliban. It also acknowledges that president Barack Obama's authority to hold detainees is granted by an act of Congress and by international laws of war, rather than stemming from his power as commander in chief of the military.

"As we work towards developing a new policy to govern detainees, it is essential that we operate in a manner that strengthens our national security, is consistent with our values, and is governed by law," attorney general Eric Holder said in a statement. "The change we've made today meets each of those standards and will make our nation stronger."

Advocates for the detainees today said the new position is at best a modest departure from Bush policy, but is a public-relations effort to move away from the loaded term "enemy combatants" that critics across the world associate with the former president.

The brief maintains the US government's ability to hold terrorist suspects without charge, said Tom Malinowski, Washington director of Human Rights Watch, and applies international laws of war to suspects captured far from the battlefields of Afghanistan and Iraq.

"It's a symbolic effort to distance the new administration from the Bush approach," he said. "But they've preserved significant aspects of the previous administration's detention authority."

David Cole, a Georgetown University law professor who has written on Guantánamo Bay, said the crux of the administration's new standard for detention - "substantial support" - could still encompass many people who would not traditionally be subject to military detention as combatants.

"It's not a clear line," Cole said. "I'm not sure that it marks a significant departure from the Bush administration approach."

Josh Dratel, a New York attorney who represented Australian former Guantánamo prisoner David Hicks, said the move is "a step in the right direction."

"It acknowledges that the president is not free to make up the rules as he goes along," he said, and acknowledges in court distinctions between classes of Guantánamo prisoners, some of whom did not offer "substantial" support for terrorist organisations.

A spokeswoman for the Centre for Constitutional Rights, which has defended some of the detainees at Guantánamo, described the change as "old wine in new bottles".

"While the new government has abandoned the term 'enemy combatant', it appears on first reading that whatever they call those they claim the right to detain, they have adopted almost the same standard the Bush administration used to detain people without charge - with one change, the addition of the word 'substantially' before the word 'supported'," said Jen Nessel.

In one of his first acts as president, Obama ordered the prison at Guantánamo closed within the first year of his presidency and ordered a review of the status of the roughly 245 men still detained there. The review is underway now.

Five of the men are the self-proclaimed masterminds of the September 11 attacks and have publicly boasted about their role in the attacks. They and others may eventually land in a criminal court in the United States. Others maintain they were merely Taliban footsoldiers or had only incidental contact with the militia, or less. The United States has cleared dozens for release and aims to transfer many of the inmates to other countries, including Britain. Last month Binyam Mohamed, an Ethiopian-born British resident, was released from Guantánamo and returned to Britain.

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2009/mar/13/enemy-combatant-guantanamo-detainees-obama>

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Washington Post
March 14, 2009

U.S. Retires 'Enemy Combatant,' Keeps Broad Right to Detain

By Del Quentin Wilber and Peter Finn
Washington Post Staff Writers

The Obama administration yesterday jettisoned the Bush-era term "enemy combatant" but maintained a broad right to detain those who provide "substantial" assistance to al-Qaeda and its associates around the globe.

The disclosure came in a court filing by the Justice Department in response to orders by federal judges, who sought clarity on the government's legal justification for holding about 241 detainees at the military prison at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.

Though dropping the term "enemy combatant" was a symbolic break from the Bush administration, the practical effects of yesterday's action will not be known for months.

Bush administration officials had long argued they had a broad constitutional power to detain almost any terrorism suspect for an indefinite period. For those at Guantanamo, the government had said it needed to prove only that the detainees were supporting the Taliban, al-Qaeda or associated forces to justify their confinements.

The Justice Department said yesterday that it would seek to hold only terrorism suspects who "substantially supported" those groups and not those who "provide unwitting or insignificant support" to al-Qaeda and the Taliban.

"The particular facts and circumstances justifying detention will vary from case to case," Justice Department attorneys wrote.

The filing also revealed that the Obama administration sees the president's detention power as global and not limited to a battlefield in Afghanistan, as some human rights groups have advocated.

"Individuals who provide substantial support to al-Qaida forces in other parts of the world may properly be deemed part of al-Qaida itself," the court papers said. "Such activities may also constitute the type of substantial support that . . . is sufficient to justify detention."

In a statement, Attorney General Eric H. Holder Jr. said, "[I]t is essential that we operate in a manner that strengthens our national security, is consistent with our values and is governed by law."

"The change we've made today meets each of those standards and will make our nation stronger," he added.

Legal scholars and those representing detainees said that dropping the term "enemy combatant" was important but that the rest of the legal arguments may not change much about the nation's detention policy.

Robert M. Chesney, an expert on national security law at Wake Forest University, said the changes would affect detainees "at the margins."

"They've changed the label, but the substance has changed only a little bit," Chesney said.

Many human rights groups expressed dismay yesterday that the administration had not made a more radical change in tactics and policies.

Tom Parker, Amnesty International advocacy director for terrorism, counterterrorism and human rights, said, "It's symbolically significant that he's dropped the term 'enemy combatant,' but the power to detain individuals within the 'indefinite detention without charge' paradigm remains substantially intact."

The legal filing is the latest signal that Obama's team is not radically departing from many of the terrorism-related legal policies of the previous administration. Late Thursday, it urged an appeals court to reject a lawsuit brought by four Britons who alleged they were tortured at Guantanamo. In another case, involving the al-Haramain Islamic Foundation, which alleges it was the target of illegal government electronic surveillance, Justice Department lawyers have asserted defenses similar to those made under President George W. Bush.

The Obama administration's legal changes came under pressure from federal judges, who are presiding over lawsuits brought by about 200 detainees. The detainees won the right to challenge their confinements in a landmark Supreme Court ruling last year.

The Justice Department had recently argued it wanted to take a case-by-case approach to applying definitions.

But the judges said that was not fair to the detainees and their attorneys, especially because full-blown hearings could begin as soon as next month.

"The definition of the central legal term 'enemy combatant' is not a moving target, varying from case to case, and the court intends to rule on that definition before the parties reach a critical point in these proceedings," Judge John D. Bates wrote in a February order seeking the Justice Department's definition. At least two other judges had requested the government to provide them with the same definition by yesterday.

Another judge, Richard J. Leon, last year applied the "enemy combatant" definition used by the military, which required officials to find only that a detainee supported the Taliban, al-Qaeda or associated groups.

He has ordered that six detainees be freed but that four others can remain in custody. In one case, he ruled that preparing meals for the Taliban was enough to justify continued detention. It is not clear how the Obama administration's new standard will affect detainees in similar situations.

The filing also is occurring as judges are expressing increasing frustration at government delays and tactics in the lawsuits. In recent weeks, one judge has ordered a Justice Department attorney off a case for failing to comply with court instructions. Another has called the Justice Department's legal arguments on taking a case-by-case approach "ludicrous."

Yesterday, a third ordered Justice Department lawyers to file court papers explaining why they should not be held in contempt for failing to turn over exculpatory material to a detainee's attorneys in a timely manner.

In the order, the judge wrote that the Justice Department's legal argument "raises the disturbing implication" that its attorneys do not understand their obligations to turn over such material.

Staff writer Carrie Johnson and staff researcher Julie Tate contributed to this report.

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/03/13/AR2009031302371.html?hpid=topnews>

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Los Angeles Times
March 14, 2009

No More 'Enemy Combatants' at Guantanamo Bay

By David G. Savage

Reporting from Washington — There will no longer will be "enemy combatants" at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, the Obama administration said Friday. Moreover, the new president no longer claims that his title as commander in chief allows him to order people deemed to be dangerous captured and held without trial.

Having abandoned a favored Bush administration term in the war on terrorism, however, the new administration has claimed roughly the same power to hold Guantanamo's detainees indefinitely -- even those who never held a gun or went near a battlefield.

The Justice Department emphasized the terminology change in a news release.

But lawyers who have been fighting the government's detention policies countered that nothing had changed. The Center for Constitutional Rights said the new administration "offers essentially the same definition of 'enemy combatant' without using the term."

Friday's announcement arose as a result of last year's Supreme Court ruling that said Guantanamo prisoners could challenge their detention before a federal judge. Lawyers filed hundreds of petitions on their behalf.

Several federal judges were forced to decide what the Supreme Court had left undecided: Who exactly can be held indefinitely as a prisoner in the war on terrorism? Is the definition limited to those believed to be terrorists and fighters who carried guns, or does it extend to civilians who were arrested in Bosnia-Herzegovina or Pakistan and were suspected of conspiring with Al Qaeda?

In the 12-page legal memo sent to a judge Friday, the administration said it had tweaked the government's definition of who can be held without charges. The new definition says those who "substantially supported" Al Qaeda or the Taliban can be held, regardless of where they were captured. The prior definition referred to those who gave "support" to Al Qaeda or the Taliban.

President Obama's lawyers said Congress gave him the authority he needed when it authorized the use of military force one week after the Sept. 11 attacks. It said the president can use the military against "nations, organizations or persons" who planned or aided the terrorist attacks.

President George W. Bush cited the same authority when he created the prison at the U.S. naval base at Guantanamo Bay, but he also said he could act on his own as commander in chief.

Friday's announcement applies only to the Guantanamo prisoners, the government said. It does not cover future captures.

Reactions to the announcement differed sharply. Military Families United saw the change as a "drastic dismantling of the war on terror." The American Civil Liberties Union called it "deeply troubling" because it retained an "overly broad interpretation" of who can be held as a war prisoner.

Boston lawyer Stephen Oleskey said the court process has proved frustrating. He represented six Algerian-born men who were arrested in Bosnia, taken by the U.S. military to Guantanamo in 2002 and held for six years. One of them, Lakhdar Boumediene, was the lead plaintiff in the winning case before the Supreme Court last year. In November, a federal judge ruled that the government could not justify holding Boumediene and four of the other Algerians and ordered their release.

Nonetheless, Boumediene and another Algerian ordered freed remain prisoners at Guantanamo, because the Bosnian government has refused to take them back. "Our judicial system has given them their freedom, but they are not free," Oleskey said. "It's very hard to explain that to them."

<http://www.latimes.com/news/nationworld/nation/la-na-guantanamo-enemy-combatan-2009mar14,0,4719816.story>

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London Sunday Telegraph
March 15, 2009

Barack Obama Told: Help Pakistan or Risk A Repeat Of 9/11 In America or Britain

By Tim Shipman, in Washington

Barack Obama, the US president, is to be told that to avoid a repeat of the devastating 9/11 attacks on America or Britain he must dramatically step up aid to Pakistan.

A team headed by Bruce Riedel, a former CIA Middle East expert, asked to overhaul US policy on Afghanistan and Pakistan, has concluded that stabilising Pakistan is now the higher priority, a source familiar with the discussions has revealed.

The report, prepared in conjunction with the National Security Council, will focus on the need to co-opt moderate Taliban elements and shut down militant safe havens in Pakistan's lawless northwest border region. It will also urge a sharp increase in military and civil assistance.

But The Sunday Telegraph has learned that the need to prevent a repeat of the September 11 attacks has become the driving force behind the review, which could be published as early as this week.

Mr Riedel, who served on the NSC under three previous presidents, believes that unless serious action is taken, Pakistan will become a "terrorist university", posing a far greater threat to the security of the US and Europe than Afghanistan before the September 11 atrocities.

Recent "apocalyptic" intelligence on the situation in Pakistan has sent shockwaves through the upper echelons of the Obama administration and convinced Mr Riedel's review team that radicals trained in Pakistan are the greatest threat to Western security.

One White House aide emerged from an intelligence briefing on Pakistan three days after Mr Obama's inauguration to exclaim: "Holy s--t!"

A source who knows the substance of the White House policy review discussions said: "Bruce is on record saying that a failed state in Pakistan is America's 'worst nightmare' in the 21st century.

"What we've been seeing in recent weeks is truly apocalyptic warnings from the analysts, which suggest that that is now a live possibility. The Pakistani government seems unable to control its own military or intelligence people. The tribal areas are already a failed state and a safe haven for terrorists.

"If that spreads the whole country will become a terrorist university. The chance of a spectacular in the US, or Britain, is exponentially increased. And Pakistan has nuclear weapons."

In an interview with *The Sunday Telegraph* in January Mr Riedel argued that British al-Qaeda or Lakshar-e-Taiba militants, trained in Pakistan, are the likeliest source of a new terrorist spectacular in America.

The threat from Pakistan was a centrepiece of discussions between Jacqui Smith, the Home Secretary, and US Homeland Security secretary Janet Napolitano in Washington on Friday. Ms Smith also met Robert Mueller, the head of the FBI, who has publicly voiced fears about British-born Pakistani militants entering the US under the visa waiver scheme.

Amid fears that Pakistani militants have already entered the US to radicalise and recruit terrorist cells, US officials have been invited to visit the UK to observe the Home Office's anti-radicalisation programme.

A British diplomat said that British and American intelligence experts have concluded that while Pakistan used to be blamed for destabilising Afghanistan, the process has now been reversed and risks plunging the nuclear power into lethal chaos.

The US official agreed: "Everyone's calling it the Af-Pak report, but really it ought to be Pak-Af." US intelligence reports have expressed concern about the recent decision of Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari to allow militants to set up Shariah law in the strategic Swat Valley in the tribal areas of the northwest frontier.

The Riedel review will conclude that seven out of 10 Taliban and other militants in Afghanistan and Pakistan are "reconcilables" who might be bribed, cajoled and persuaded to turn away from extremism.

But it concludes that Pakistani military and civilian leaders do not yet have the resources to hold the line, let alone roll back the al-Qaeda safe havens along the border.

The review, due to be circulated to senior officials early this week, will recommend that non-military aid to Pakistan quadruple. In return, the Pakistani government will be expected to agree to a wholesale overhaul of its military which will see US special forces re-train Pakistani soldiers in counter insurgency warfare.

The army is currently configured to fight a conventional war with India. The US has 200 special forces ready to deploy and there is even talk of taking Pakistani officers to training camps in the US.

CIA and FBI chiefs are also demanding greater cooperation from Pakistan's ISI intelligence agency in locating militants in the region and potential terrorists who may already have travelled to the US.

President Obama will explain his new approach to Afghanistan at the Nato summit in Strasbourg next month. The Riedel review is recommending increased payments to Afghan tribal chiefs and moves to improve economic development and a clamp down on corruption in the Afghan government of Hamid Karzai., European nations, excluding Britain, will be asked to help train the Afghan armed forces.

Richard Holbrooke, the US envoy to Afghanistan and Pakistan, and a co-chair of the Riedel review, has warned that "there is no way that the international effort in Afghanistan can succeed unless Pakistan can get its western tribal areas under control".

David Miliband, Britain's foreign secretary, appears to agree with the expected conclusions of the Riedel review. In an interview last week he said that Pakistan's government needs to realise that it is not just the West that is threatened by the militants, but its very own survival that is at stake. "The situation in Pakistan is extremely dangerous," he said. "I would say it's very grave. I think Pakistan faces a mortal threat, not from India, but from domestic terrorism."

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/northamerica/usa/barackobama/4991675/Barack-Obama-told-help-Pakistan-or-risk-a-repeat-of-911-in-America-or-Britain.html>

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USA Today
March 16, 2009

Reports Question U.S. Shield of Europe

By Ken Dilanian, USA Today

WASHINGTON — After 24 years and more than \$100 billion spent to develop a U.S. missile defense, an American-operated system proposed for Europe would cost billions more to deploy and still may fail, a series of independent reports concludes. President Obama recently suggested he would consider scrapping the Europe system in exchange for Russia's help in thwarting Iran's nuclear ambitions. During last year's campaign, Obama said he would support missile defense if it proved workable.

The type of ground-based interceptors that would be deployed in Europe failed to hit targets in five of 13 tests, according to the Pentagon. They have not demonstrated an ability to detect decoys, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) says.

The Europe system has not been tested.

The system, planned as a potential defense should Iran develop a nuclear capability, would cost \$9 billion to \$13 billion, according to the Congressional Budget Office, and would leave parts of Europe unprotected from an Iranian missile. All told, the government has spent \$144 billion on missile defense since 1985, according to the CBO.

In the most recent test of the U.S.-based system, an interceptor launched in December from California destroyed a warhead launched from Alaska. But a goal of the test was to see if the interceptor could distinguish a live warhead from decoys, and the decoys failed to deploy.

Independent technical analysis has shown that Iran and North Korea, which has a nuclear program, could fool the system using simple countermeasures such as balloons, says critic David Wright of the Union of Concerned Scientists.

"Do I believe with any confidence that this system would be able to stop a nuclear attack? The answer is no," he said.

The successful tests "have all been scripted for success," said former Pentagon testing chief Philip Coyle, another skeptic. "It's a little bit like comparing the results of students doing open book exams."

Richard Lehner, spokesman for the U.S. Missile Defense Agency, disputed those assessments. In an e-mail, he said the tests are "as operationally realistic as possible."

Russia objects strenuously to the U.S. plan originated by the Bush administration to place a system of radar and interceptor missiles in Poland and the Czech Republic. Two weeks ago, Obama sent a letter to his Russian counterpart saying that the missile system might not be needed if Russia could help pressure Iran to give up its nuclear program. Republicans, including House Minority Whip Eric Cantor of Virginia, were criticized Obama for suggesting that deal.

The GAO told Congress last month that missile defense testing has been plagued by delays and "performance challenges." The type of system proposed for Europe, which is already partly in place in the United States, "continues to experience testing problems and delays," the GAO said.

A January report by the Congressional Research Service noted that "some observers continue to question how much confidence there should be in the system's potential operational or combat effectiveness based on the types of tests conducted and the test results to date."

Still, John Pike, a defense expert who runs the national security website globalsecurity.org, says the weak test record will improve and the system may be worth deploying despite its flaws. "I have a little difficulty believing that the whole damn thing is so manifestly a fool's errand," he said.

Charles McQueary, who directs testing for the missile agency, told a congressional committee last month that the U.S.-based system "has demonstrated a limited capability to defend against a simple long-range ballistic missile threat launched from North Korea," but "we still have a long way to go."

Physicist Richard Garwin, who helped design the hydrogen bomb and served recently on a commission to assess the ballistic missile threat, said in an email that because it can be so easily defeated by decoys, the "system is not worth deploying, because it will be useless."

http://www.usatoday.com/news/military/2009-03-15-missile_N.htm

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London Sunday Telegraph
15 Mar 2009

Russia Could Deploy Bombers to Cuba and Venezuela

By Alex Spillius in Washington

The claim by General Anatoly Zhikharev, chief of the Russian air force's strategic aviation staff, is the latest signal that Moscow intends to project its military capability in far-flung corners of the globe despite a tight defence budget and hardware that experts consider in many respects outdated.

"This is possible in Cuba," said Gen Zhikharev. But he indicated that Russia was looking only at occasional use of the facilities rather than setting up permanent bases in the region.

Russia resumed patrols by its long-distance strategic bombers in August 2007 after a 15-year hiatus, noting at the time that it was mirroring the United States, which did not suspend its global bomber patrols after the Cold War.

Last year, Russia temporarily based a pair of Tu-160 bombers at an airbase in Venezuela in a carefully choreographed display of force regarded as a warning to the US. Cuba's ruling Castro family and Venezuela's President Hugo Chavez have formed a Left-wing alliance designed to counter Washington's hegemony in Latin America.

The previous US administration officially shrugged off the Russian aviation and naval moves in the region, characterising them as more for show than anything representing a military worry.

However, last July, Gen Norton Schwartz, a senior US air force officer, warned that Russia would cross "a red line" if it were to base nuclear capable bombers in Cuba. Reports in Russia said that there were three types of Russian aircraft capable of long-distance bomber patrols: the Tu-95MS, the Tu-160 and the Tu-22, all of which are capable of carrying 12 cruise missiles that can be fitted with nuclear warheads.

Venezuelan officials confirmed on Sunday that they had offered Russia the use of their facilities.

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/russia/4996821/Russia-could-deploy-bombers-to-Cuba-and-Venezuela.html>

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New York Times

March 15, 2009

Russia is Weighing 2 Latin Bases, General Says

By ELLEN BARRY

MOSCOW — A top Russian Air Force official said that the government was weighing whether to base strategic bombers out of Cuban territory or on a Venezuelan island that has been offered by President Hugo Chávez, according to the Interfax news service.

In comments made at an awards ceremony on Friday night, Maj. Gen. Anatoly Zhikharev, chief of staff for Russia's long-distance aviation division, told reporters that either option would be practical.

"There are four or five airfields in Cuba with 4,000-meter-long runways, which absolutely suit us," he said. "If the two chiefs of state display such a political will, we are ready to fly there."

He confirmed that Mr. Chávez had offered the use of a military airfield on La Orchila island. "If a relevant political decision is made, this is possible," he said.

Russia has bolstered its ties with Cuba and Venezuela in the past year. High-ranking Russian officials, including President Dmitri A. Medvedev, have made visits to Cuba, and Moscow hosted Raúl Castro, the Cuban president, in January. The two governments signed a series of bilateral agreements, though there was little mention of military plans.

Russia's bomber fleet has been a favored piece in geopolitical gamesmanship with the United States. In August 2007, Vladimir V. Putin, then the president, punctuated the military's growing assertiveness by reinstating long-range patrols by nuclear-capable bombers over the world's oceans. And Venezuela, with an eye toward rankling the United States, hosted two Russian strategic bombers last year and also conducted joint naval exercises with Russia.

At the time, top United States military officials played down the joint efforts, with Adm. Mike Mullen, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, saying that Russia and Venezuela had the right to work together "if they see fit."

<http://www.nytimes.com/2009/03/15/world/europe/15russia.html?ref=americas>

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Boston Globe
March 16, 2009

Chávez Denies Offering Base to Russia

By Associated Press

CARACAS - President Hugo Chávez said yesterday that Russian bombers would be welcome in Venezuela, but the socialist leader denied that his country would offer Moscow its territory for a military base.

Chávez - a fierce critic of Washington with close ties to Russia and Cuba - said his government did not raise the possibility, as Russian media had reported.

"It's not like that," the president said, responding to a report by Interfax news agency quoting the chief of staff of Russia's long range aviation, Major General Anatoly Zhikharev, as saying some strategic bombers could be based on an island offered by Venezuela.

Zhikharev reportedly said Saturday that Chávez had offered "a whole island with an airdrome, which we can use as a temporary base for strategic bombers."

Speaking during his weekly television and radio program, Chávez said he told Russian President Dmitry Medvedev that his nation's bombers would be allowed to land in Venezuela if necessary, but no such plans have been made.

Also yesterday, Chávez deployed the navy to Venezuela's seaports, and he said state governors who challenge new legislation bringing transportation hubs under federal control could end up in prison.

Chávez ordered naval vessels to seize control of Port Cabello in Carabobo state and Maracaibo Port in Zulia state, two of Venezuela's largest seaports.

Then he singled out the opposition-sided governors of those states - Carabobo Governor Henrique Salas and Zulia Governor Pablo Perez - and told military officers they might decide to flout the newly approved law.

"If he gets smart . . . that deserves prison," Chávez said of Salas. "The same goes for the governor of Zulia."

Lawmakers loyal to Chávez voted last week to bring all airports, highways and seaports under federal control, a move government adversaries said was designed to expand the president's power.

http://www.boston.com/news/world/latinamerica/articles/2009/03/16/ch225vez_denies_offering_base_to_russia/

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RIA Novosti
16 March 2009

Bulava Missile Test Failed Due to Faulty Part - Defense Ministry

MOSCOW, March 16 (RIA Novosti) - A faulty ejection cartridge was responsible for the failure of the latest test launch of the Bulava sea-based ballistic missile, a Russian Defense Ministry source said on Monday.

The submerged launch of the Bulava ICBM took place on December 23 from the Dmitry Donskoi strategic nuclear-powered submarine in the White Sea, off Russia's northwest coast, targeting the Kura firing ground in Kamchatka in Russia's Far East.

The missile left the tube, but went off course and self-destructed due to a malfunction following the first stage separation.

"The cause of the latest failure during the launch of the Bulava missile was purely technical. One of the subcontractors supplied faulty ejection cartridges which were used in the separation of the missile's stages," the source said.

Despite the fifth failure in 10 trials, Russia's Defense Ministry is planning to complete a series of at least five Bulava tests and put the ICBM into service by the end of 2009.

The Bulava (SS-NX-30) ICBM carries up to 10 nuclear warheads and has a range of 8,000 kilometers (5,000 miles). The three-stage ballistic missile is designed for deployment on Borey-class Project 955 nuclear-powered submarines.

Sea trials of Yury Dolgoruky, Russia's first Borey-class strategic nuclear submarine, are due to start in the spring, when navigation begins in the White Sea.

Two other Borey-class nuclear submarines, the Alexander Nevsky and the Vladimir Monomakh, are currently under construction at the Sevmash shipyard and are expected to be completed in 2009 and 2011. Russia is planning to build a total of eight submarines of this class by 2015.

<http://en.rian.ru/russia/20090316/120580494.html>

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China View

March 13, 2009

Iran's President says Sanctions "Childish Thinking"

TEHRAN, March 13 (Xinhua) -- Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad on Friday dismissed international sanctions against the country as a "childish thinking" and a "grave blunder."

The idea of impeding Iran's progress through sanctions was a "childish thinking and a grave blunder," the official IRNA news agency quoted Ahmadinejad as saying in the Gulf city of Assalouyeh.

He made the remarks in his address to a ceremony for the inauguration of the 9th and 10th phases of South Pars gas field in Assalouyeh in southern Boushehr Province.

Calling the inauguration of the gas field projects as "the national feast of self-confidence, innovation and flourish," Ahmadinejad said the event marked "a rejoicing feast for the great Iranian nation."

"The happiness will double if you consider the fact that the huge task was done under conditions when certain people around the world refused to act on their duty and promises, showing bad temper and misbehavior," he said.

The Iranian president also said that the country's presence in the space and its progress in nuclear program were all because of "the superpowers' bad temper."

Ahmadinejad's remarks came one day after U.S. President Barack Obama announced that the United States would continue its sanctions against Iran as the Islamic republic was continuing its "unusual and extraordinary threat" to the U.S. security and economy.

Washington, long being at odds with Tehran, began imposing its routine sanctions since 1995 when former President Bill Clinton was in office.

The sanctions, which have been extended on an annual basis by successive presidents, include prohibiting American companies aiding the development of the Iranian oil industry and halting trade, export and import as well as investment ties with Iran.

Some Western countries believe that Iran aims at developing nuclear weapons, but Tehran insists its nuclear program is for peaceful use.

The UN Security Council has also imposed three times tough sanctions on Iran for its ongoing uranium enrichment programs.

http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2009-03/13/content_11007842.htm

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RIA Novosti

13 March 2009

Iranian President Declares His Country a Space and Nuclear Power

TEHRAN, March 13 (RIA Novosti) - Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad said on Friday that pressure from Western powers trying to keep Iran in economic isolation had in fact spurred the country to become a space and nuclear power.

"Had you not been bad-tempered and blocked the way, the Iranian nation would not have been present in space, and would not have become a nuclear power," Fars news agency quoted Ahmadinejad as saying at the inauguration ceremony of a natural gas deposit in the Bushehr province.

Iran put its first communications satellite, Omid (Hope), into a near-Earth orbit on February 2. The research satellite was carried into orbit by a home-made launch vehicle, Safir (Messenger). Iranian Communications Minister Mohammad Soleimani earlier said that the country's scientists were working on the creation of four new satellites to be placed into near-Earth orbit.

The Iranian president said Western powers are unable to stop Iran's technological and scientific progress with their "spiteful actions." He also called the international economic sanctions against Iran over its nuclear program a "grave blunder."

"Of course, we believe that the Iranian nation can tread the path to progress under God's mercy," he said.

Western powers led by the United States, along with Israel, have accused Tehran of attempting to develop nuclear weapons and ballistic missile technology for their delivery. Iran says it needs its nuclear program for electric power generation, and its missile program for space exploration.

<http://en.rian.ru/world/20090313/120554424.html>

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New York Times

March 14, 2009

Japan Warns North Korea over Rocket Launch

By CHOE SANG-HUN

SEOUL — Japan on Friday condemned North Korea's plan to launch a rocket next month, warning that it can legally shoot down any threatening object if it falls toward its territory.

North Korea told international agencies earlier this week that it plans to put a communications satellite into orbit between April 4 and 8, using a rocket that will fly over Japan and likely drop spent fuel stages into the Pacific.

The announcement unsettled neighboring countries that consider the launching a cover for testing the North's Taepodong-2 intercontinental ballistic missile. On Thursday, Washington, Seoul and United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-moon all urged Pyongyang to cancel its plans.

"They can call it a satellite or whatever, but it would be a violation" of a United Nations resolution, said Prime Minister Taro Aso of Japan.

The United Nations Security Council adopted a resolution banning North Korea from nuclear tests and ballistic missile activities after the Communist state detonated its first nuclear device in 2006.

"Under our law, we can intercept any object if it is falling towards Japan, including any attacks on Japan, for our safety," said the Japanese government's top spokesman, Chief Cabinet Secretary Takeo Kawamura.

If North Korea's rocket launching is successful, it will not fall toward Japan but rather fly over it. North Korea has said that it will consider any attempt to intercept its rocket "an act of war" and that it will attack the interceptors.

This week, North Korea gave map coordinates for two danger areas where its rocket's spent boosters were expected to fall.

One zone lies in waters less than 75 miles, or 120 kilometers, from Japan's northwestern shore. The other lies in the middle of the Pacific between Japan and Hawaii.

It was unclear from Mr. Kawamura's comments whether Japan will try to shoot down a jettisoned rocket booster if it falls toward its territory. Japan, which has been developing a missile defense system with the United States, has said it is ready to intercept an incoming missile.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2009/03/14/world/asia/14korea.html>

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Chicago Tribune
March 14, 2009

North Korea Satellite: Pyongyang's Neighbors Angry at Launch Plans

By John M. Glionna
Tribune Newspapers

SEOUL — North Korea's neighbors reacted angrily to its announcement that it plans to launch a satellite into orbit and say they suspect the effort masks plans for a long-range missile test.

Pyongyang informed international aviation and maritime agencies that the first stage of the rocket would splash down in the Sea of Japan and the second in the Pacific Ocean, which it identified as "danger zones" for shipping and aircraft.

On Friday, Japan asserted it had a right to challenge any dangerous foreign object fired across its territory.

"Under our law, we can intercept any object if it is falling toward Japan, including any attacks on Japan, for our safety," Chief Cabinet Secretary Takeo Kawamura said at a news conference.

North Korea says it will launch an "experimental communications satellite" between April 4 and 8 and insists that it is a non-threatening gesture. Pyongyang warned it will retaliate against any nation that tries to interfere with the launch.

Officials in Tokyo said that even a satellite launch by North Korea violates a 3-year-old UN Security Council resolution that bans North Korea from engaging in any ballistic missile launches.

"They can call it a satellite or whatever, but it would be a violation," Japanese Prime Minister Taro Aso told reporters Friday. "We protest a launch and strongly demand it be canceled."

South Korea's Foreign Ministry echoed the concerns.

Coordinates released Thursday by the International Civil Aviation Organization and the International Maritime Organization show that one "danger zone" for the North Korean launch was less than 75 miles from Japan's shoreline. The second lies in the Pacific Ocean between Japan and Hawaii.

http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/nationworld/chi-korea-missile_14mar14,0,2863285.story

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Yonhap News
15 March 2009

N. Korea Removes Over 75 Pct of Used Fuel Rods: U.S. Report

SEOUL, March 15 (Yonhap) -- North Korea has removed more than 75 percent of the used fuel rods at its atomic facilities, a U.S. report showed Sunday, a sign that progress has been made towards denuclearization despite hang-ups in multilateral talks.

According to the report by the Congressional Research Service, the North has removed 6,100 out of 8,000 used fuel rods as of the end of February with efforts underway to fully disable nuclear facilities at its Yongbyon complex.

The report comes as the six-party talks on the North's atomic programs have been stalled since December, when North Korea refused to agree to a verification protocol for its nuclear facilities.

Tensions have mounted on the Korean Peninsula since Pyongyang said it will launch a "satellite" early next month, a move that neighboring countries suspect is a ruse to test-fire a missile.

The communist country on Friday again sealed the border crossing to an inter-Korean industrial park, the second time in a week. Hundreds of South Korean workers remained stranded at the complex, and the cross-border delivery of goods and raw materials has also been suspended.

Despite these developments, the report noted that progress has been made in disabling nuclear facilities.

South Korean officials visited the North in January to discuss purchasing unused fuel rods but failed to reach an agreement, the report noted, adding the destruction of the rods will not begin until all of the spent ones are removed.

Removing the rods is one of the few remaining steps that Pyongyang has to take to disable the Yongbyon complex under a 2007 aid-for-denuclearization deal with the other six-party members -- South Korea, the United States, China, Russia and Japan.

<http://english.yonhapnews.co.kr/northkorea/2009/03/15/78/0401000000AEN20090315000600320F.HTML>

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Honolulu Star-Bulletin
March 12, 2009

Munitions Dump Eludes Undersea Hunters

By Gregg K. Kakesako

After 12 dives six miles south of Pearl Harbor, University of Hawaii and Army researchers using deep-diving submersibles and remote underwater drones still have not located the main site of chemical munitions believed to have been dumped there during and after World War II.

They have found "numerous munitions of varying types, mostly conventional," said J.C. King, assistant for munitions and chemical matters in the office of the deputy assistant secretary of the Army for environment, safety and occupational health, in an e-mail yesterday.

He said of munitions recorded by high-definition video cameras are "multipurpose (conventional or chemical)."

The Army has contracted the Hawaii Undersea Research Laboratory submersibles Pisces IV and V to explore the ocean bottom in an area dubbed "Hawaii-05" by the Army. The 2 1/2 -week project will end March 19.

Seventeen dives by the submersible and an additional six by remotely operated vehicles are planned.

The purpose of the \$3 million Army project is to determine the risks of some 600 tons of chemical weapons dumped there. The Army plans to test water and sediment samples taken from the muddy bottom.

King said, "The goal is to assess the impact of the munitions on the ocean environment and the impact of the ocean environment on munitions."

The Pearl Harbor site is one of three off Oahu where the Army dumped 2,558 tons of chemical agents, including blister agents lewisite and mustard gas and blood agents cyanogen chloride and hydrogen cyanide. The practice of ocean dumping was banned in 1972.

The largest dump is reported to be in area 10 miles west of the Waianae Coast.

The Army has said it believes 16,000 M47-A2 bombs containing 598 tons of mustard gas were dumped at "Hawaii-05" around Oct. 1, 1944. Each chemical bomb weighs 100 pounds and is nearly 32 inches long.

Most of the dives are at about 1,500 feet.

King has been a passenger on at least two of the dives.

"As expected," King said, "the munitions are meters apart and generally of the same type (e.g., a series of .50-caliber boxes, a series of projectiles). This is expected because ship loads would have been from storage, and we generally store and transport these same munition types together."

http://www.starbulletin.com/news/20090312_Munitions_dump_eludes_undersea_hunters.html

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The Only Thing That Can Keep Nuclear Bombs Out of the Hands of Terrorists is a Brand-new Science of Nuclear Forensics

By Graham Allison

In 2007, at the very moment Washington was sitting at the negotiating table with Pyongyang to hammer out a nuclear deal, North Korean officials were supplying know-how, equipment and nuclear material to Syria to build a weapons-grade reactor only a few miles from Israel's border. When the news came to light, diplomats and nuclear experts were shocked at Kim Jong Il's duplicity. Israel bombed the Syrian site later that year.

What is Kim Jong Il doing now? The question is foremost on the minds of U.S. national-security officials. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, when asked recently what keeps him awake at nights, said, "It's the thought of a terrorist ending up with a weapon of mass destruction, especially nuclear." What if Osama bin Laden offered to pay Kim Jong Il \$10 million, say, for a nuclear bomb to be exploded in New York City and \$20 million for a second bomb destined for Tel Aviv?

U.S. security officials are now convinced that the only effective way to stop Kim Jong Il is to put in place an effective deterrence against such a foolish action, and that the task is urgent. On the bottom-line question of whether a successful nuclear terrorist attack is more or less likely than it was when George W. Bush entered office, just last month the bipartisan Commission on the Prevention of WMD Proliferation and Terrorism offered a unanimous judgment: "Our margin of safety is shrinking, not growing." The key to a new deterrent is coming up with some way of tracing the nuclear material backward from the explosion in New York City to the Pyongan reactors that forged the fissile material, even to the mines in Sunchon-Wolbingson that yielded the original uranium ore.

The idea behind this type of nuclear forensics would be to put doubt in the minds of North Korean officials. The scenario that U.S. intelligence officials imagine is a debate between two North Korean national-security advisers over the merits of a bin Laden offer—let's call them Hawk and Chicken Hawk—in the presence of their leader, Kim Jong Il. Here's how the debate might go:

"We should do the deal," says Hawk. "Under your enlightened leadership, Dear Leader, we have expanded our arsenal to 10 bombs. If we sold two, we'd still have eight bombs left, which is more than enough to deter the United States or South Korea from invading our country to overthrow our regime. And besides, we need the cash."

The prospect makes Chicken Hawk shudder. "If Al Qaeda successfully detonates a nuclear bomb in midtown Manhattan and kills half a million people, don't you think that when the United States discovers the source of the material it will erase North Korea from the map?"

Hawk leans back in his chair and smiles like Dr. Strangelove. "The Americans will not know where Osama got his bomb," he says. "It could just as well have come from Pakistan, where bin Laden is now headquartered."

As things stand now, Hawk might prevail. What U.S. security officials want to do is give Chicken Hawk the upper hand.

Holding nations accountable for their fissile material offers the best prospect available for creating the conditions for a standoff—like the Cold War standoff between the Soviet Union and the United States, in which fear of retaliation prevented each nation from launching its missiles against the other. This "mutually assured destruction" held the peace for decades in large part because missiles have an unambiguous return address. Discovering the origin of a shipping container of black-market plutonium is more challenging, but by no means impossible. Scientists are beginning to figure out just how to do it.

The science of nuclear forensics is key to creating a new deterrence. It entails working backward from a terrorist event—debris from an exploded bomb, or a seizure of fissile material on the black market—to trace the path of the

material to its source. The process is analogous to identifying a criminal by fingerprints. Not until the 20th century did detectives learn to capture smudges from a surface, recognize that each is unique to an individual and create a database of fingerprints from known criminals or suspects.

As in normal police work, fingering a nuclear culprit is possible only if one has a database for comparison. Today, the materials terrorists would need for a nuclear device are present in at least 40 countries. Nuclear experts are now at work assembling a vast database of all known sources. In the case of uranium and plutonium, the two elements from which nuclear bombs are made, every step in the nuclear-fuel cycle—mining the uranium ore, converting it into uranium hexafluoride, enriching the uranium and reprocessing the spent fuel—leaves traces that can identify where on the planet the material came from. Ores have different mixtures of elements—uranium and americium or polonium—which emit alpha, beta and gamma radiation at different rates. The mix of plutonium isotopes differs from one type of reactor to another.

After a nuclear bomb detonates, nuclear forensic cops would collect debris samples and send them to a laboratory for radiochemical analysis. By identifying unique attributes of the fissile material, including its impurities and contaminants, one could trace the path back to its origin.

Analysis in the wake of an explosion could also find clues about bomb design. For example, much has been learned about the technology sold by Pakistani nuclear scientist A. Q. Khan and what International Atomic Energy Agency director-general Mohamed ElBaradei called Khan's nuclear "Wal-Mart of private-sector proliferation." Khan had particular ways of arranging the highly enriched uranium core and surrounding explosives in his bombs, which would leave clues even after detonation.

Consider the case of North Korea's reprocessing facility at Yongbyon. Since the country was a member of the nonproliferation treaty subject to inspections by the IAEA, the agency has an extensive library of nuclear materials against which collected samples could be compared. One or more national intelligence communities may also have collected relevant evidence, and it may soon be technically feasible to trace these samples.

In 2002 a study inspired by 9/11 and commissioned by the National Research Council on the role of technology in countering terrorism concluded that "the technology for developing post-explosion nuclear attribution exists but needs to be assembled, an effort that is expected to take several years." By 2008 the American Association for the Advancement of Science was reporting that we are falling short of what we need. In particular, we lack a central global database of unique material signatures that countries can promptly access in the event of a nuclear detonation. According to the AAAS report, the Department of Energy has created a database of uranium compounds, and other government agencies and international partners hold "substantial data, but the consolidation of these data into an accessible nuclear-forensics database has not taken place and the tools to utilize the database have not been developed."

Even if such a database existed, states would not be prepared to take advantage of it after an explosion or other event. As the report asserts, "Neither equipment nor people are at the level needed to provide as prompt and accurate information for decision makers as is possible."

The deterrence that nuclear forensics could provide is not as different from Cold War doctrine as one might think. In the Cuban missile crisis of 1962, the United States discovered the Soviet Union attempting to sneak nuclear-tipped missiles into Cuba. American strategists worried that Nikita Khrushchev might transfer control of the nuclear arsenal in Cuba to a young, hotheaded revolutionary leader named Fidel Castro. After careful deliberation, President John F. Kennedy issued an unambiguous warning to Khrushchev and the Soviet Union: "It shall be the policy of this government to regard any nuclear missile launched from Cuba against any nation in the Western Hemisphere as an attack by the Soviet Union on the United States requiring a full retaliatory response against the Soviet Union." Khrushchev understood this meant full-scale nuclear war.

In the years after the Cuban missile crisis, nuclear strategists wrestled with an array of scenarios in which a Soviet nuclear weapon, or a small number of them, might explode on American soil. The U.S. plan was to retaliate by delivering a nuclear warhead capable of destroying a counterpart Russian city. No one knows whether an American president would in fact have responded to the accidental destruction of Minneapolis by destroying Vladivostok. What was important, however, was that Soviet leaders believed he might and were thus fully motivated to ensure that no accidental launches occur.

In building his case for the U.S. attack on Iraq in 2003, President Bush essentially trashed the traditional doctrine of deterrence. His 2002 West Point address argued that "deterrence—the promise of massive retaliation against nations—means nothing against shadowy terrorist networks with no nation or citizens to defend." But he failed to offer any viable conceptual alternative.

As we face the threat of nuclear terrorism with a weapon that could come not only from North Korea but also from Pakistan or, in time, Iran, the challenge is to revitalize the concept of deterrence. The goal would be twofold: first, to deter leaders of nuclear states from selling weapons to terrorists by holding them accountable for any use of their own weapons; second, to give leaders every incentive to tightly secure their nuclear weapons and materials.

Could personal or national accountability for terrorist use of a nuclear weapon deter leaders from selling weapons to terrorists? To what extent could, or should, accountability apply in cases where proliferation is the result of negligence, not intent? Hard questions, yes, but questions 21st-century strategists must not only ask but also answer.

The capability to identify the source of nuclear material in a credible fashion is not enough to prevent nuclear terrorism. The world needs an accepted principle of nuclear accountability—and it should begin with the United States and Russia, since they still own 95 percent of all nuclear weapons. They should take the lead in establishing a new organization called the Global Alliance Against Nuclear Terrorism. Its goal should be to minimize the risk of such terrorism by taking every action physically, technically and diplomatically possible to prevent nuclear weapons or materials from falling into the hands of terrorists.

Membership in the alliance would require an unambiguous commitment to the principle of assured nuclear security. States would have to guarantee that all nuclear weapons and materials in their territories were secured to a "gold standard"—beyond the reach of terrorists or thieves. And states' means of securing these materials would have to be sufficiently transparent that leaders of other member states could reassure their own citizens that terrorists would never get a nuclear bomb from another alliance member. In addition, member states would be required to deposit samples of nuclear materials in an international library that forensic technicians could use in identifying the source of any weapon or material that found its way into the hands of terrorists.

If nuclear weapons or materials should be stolen, states that had satisfied the requirements for assured nuclear security, met the new standards in securing their materials and made their safeguards sufficiently transparent to the other members would be judged less harshly. A state that was unwilling to participate fully in the alliance would automatically be put on a list of suspect sources of a terrorist nuclear bomb. If a member of the alliance was found to have knowingly allowed nuclear materials to fall into terrorist hands, it would face consequences—anything from financial reparations to military retaliation—worked out in advance.

The grim reality is that President Bush failed to organize and execute a coherent strategy against what he rightly called "the single most serious threat to the national security of the United States." While devoting more than a billion dollars to cargo scanning, the Bush administration invested only tens of millions in nuclear forensics.

President Obama has declared that nuclear terrorism is "a threat that rises above all others in urgency" and has committed his administration to action. Updating 20th-century concepts of nuclear deterrence to meet 21st-century threats should be a high priority for his administration, and there are signs that it is. Before he became vice president, Joe Biden called for "a new type of deterrence" to restrain countries that might contribute to a terrorist attack. Establishing a general principle of nuclear accountability that will apply to Pakistan, Iran or even Russia and the United States is an undertaking for the global alliance discussed above. But this will take months of consultations. The time to deter Kim from the extreme act of selling a nuclear weapon to terrorists is now. The new administration should act immediately to convince him that North Korea will be held fully accountable for every nuclear weapon that comes from North Korea. Ideally, the United States would act in concert with Russia and China in taking a page from Kennedy's playbook during the Cuban missile crisis. A specific policy of nuclear accountability for North Korea would warn Kim directly and unambiguously that the explosion of any nuclear weapon of North Korean origin on the territory of these states or their allies will be met with a full retaliatory response.

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