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Articles & Other Documents:

[Russia, U.S. Could Agree New START Treaty by December - Moscow](#)

[Russian President Welcomes Shift by U.S.](#)

[Medvedev 'Counting On a Reset' With U.S.](#)

[Russia Could Focus on Tactical Nuclear Weapons for Subs](#)

[Report: Russian Navy to Rely on Tactical Nukes](#)

[2 Navy Vessels Collide In Strait of Hormuz](#)

[Poland Hopes U.S. Will Not Let It Down On Shield](#)

[Poland Urges US to Stick to Missile Shield in Europe](#)

[Nuclear Security Official Hints At Leaner, Less Costly Weapons Complex](#)

[Russia Still Believes In Peaceful Nature of Iran's Nuclear Program](#)

[Iran's Supreme Leader Vows Nuclear Path Can't Be Blocked](#)

[U.S. Could Hit N. Korean Missile, Says Commander](#)

[U.S. Doesn't Want to Use Force in Denuclearizing N.K.: Envoy](#)

[Taliban Have Achieved Stalemate In Afghanistan, Warns David Miliband](#)

[Saudis Retool to Root Out Terrorist Risk](#)

[UK Seeks Return of 'Terror Plotter'](#)

[Smith: 60,000 in Training to Deal with Terror Attacks](#)

[Predator Strikes in Pakistan: U.S. says Drones Ravage al-Qaida](#)

[Obama Defends Detainee Policy](#)

[Cambodia Approves Draft Law on Non-proliferation of Nuclear, Chemical Weapons](#)

[Ban Welcomes Central Asia's Decision to Renounce Nuclear Weapons](#)

[Searching For Sunken Weaponry](#)

[Iran's Axis Of Nuclear Evil](#)

[Behind Moscow's Arms Buildup](#)

[Iran Has Started a Mideast Arms Race](#)

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RIA Novosti
20/03/2009

Russia, U.S. Could Agree New START Treaty by December - Moscow

MOSCOW, March 20 (RIA Novosti) - Russia and the United States have every chance of reaching an agreement on a new arms reduction treaty to replace START-1 by December this year, a Russian deputy foreign minister said on Friday.

"There is ample time before December to work out a serious and detailed document," Sergei Ryabkov said.

The Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START-1) signed between the Soviet Union and the United States in 1991 places a limit of 6,000 strategic or long-range nuclear warheads on each side. The treaty expires in December 2009.

Ryabkov also said that Moscow was pinning great hopes on a forthcoming meeting between President Dmitry Medvedev and his U.S. counterpart, Barack Obama, scheduled for April 1 in London.

"The widely discussed 'reboot' initiated by our American partners has really begun. We are doing well. We hope that further development of the dialogue and its reinvigoration ... will enable us to build up the positive quality of bilateral relations," he said.

Relations between the former Cold War archrivals have been strained in recent years over a host of differences, including the planned U.S. missile defense in Eastern Europe and Russia's armed conflict with U.S. ally Georgia in August.

The two countries' top diplomats made a symbolic reboot to improve ties when they met in Geneva earlier this month.

Ryabkov warned, however, that Russia would never mindlessly go along with the U.S. plans for a missile shield.

"We are ready for cooperation on the missile shield, but not in the role of a draft horse that puts on a harness and pulls in the direction ordered by a teamster," he said.

The United States has cited Iran's controversial nuclear program as one of the reasons behind its plans to deploy a missile base in Poland and radar in the Czech Republic. The missile shield has been strongly opposed by Russia, which views it as a threat to its national security.

Top Russian officials have repeatedly expressed their hope that President Obama will not follow through with the missile defense plans of his predecessor, George W. Bush.

<http://en.rian.ru/world/20090320/120660229.html>

[\(Return to Articles and Documents List\)](#)

New York Times
March 21, 2009

Russian President Welcomes Shift by U.S.

By ELLEN BARRY and MICHAEL SCHWIRTZ

MOSCOW — With less than two weeks left before his first meeting with President Obama, Russia's president, Dmitri A. Medvedev, hosted a group of veteran American policy makers that the Russian news media have dubbed "the wise men," saying he welcomes the shift in tone coming from Washington.

"I hope this remarkable term 'reset,' which began to run through analytical commentary on Russian-American relations after the meeting between Mr. Lavrov and Ms. Clinton, will be able to reflect the substantial transformation we hope to achieve," Mr. Medvedev said in a meeting with Henry A. Kissinger and George P. Shultz, both former secretaries of state, former Senator Sam Nunn, and former Defense Secretary William J. Perry. "We are counting on this kind of 'reset.'"

He referred to Sergey V. Lavrov, the Russian foreign minister, and Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton.

After repeated, if cautious, assertions of optimism about improving relations, the meetings on Friday seemed to lay the groundwork for concrete acts. After Mr. Obama and Mr. Medvedev meet on April 1, the two governments will have nine months to extend or replace the 1991 Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty, or Start I. A few months after that, both Russia and the United States will have to report on their compliance with the treaty, which ultimately eliminated 80 percent of the two countries' strategic nuclear weapons.

Sergei Ryabkov, Russia's deputy foreign minister, said at a news conference on Friday that Russia is ready to "begin full-format talks" on Start I as soon as their American counterparts have received approval from the United States Congress. Mr. Ryabkov said Russian negotiators believed that a new agreement could be ready by December.

"We are confident that the lowest point of the cool-down period in our relations has passed," he said, according to the Interfax news service.

Igor S. Ivanov, a former Russian foreign minister, said he believed that arms reduction was the most straightforward of the various negotiations ahead of the two governments, which have clashed in recent years over planned missile defense facilities in Poland and the Czech Republic, the war in Georgia and NATO expansion.

"We cannot let one issue block the rest of them," Mr. Ivanov said, after meeting with Mr. Kissinger's delegation as part of a joint American-Russian working group. "Where there is the possibility of progress, we should move forward."

As the meeting between the presidents draws near, he added, "there are big expectations — and this is understandable."

Mr. Nunn, who attended the same meeting, characterized the relationship between the countries as "a race between cooperation and catastrophe." He added: "I think with the leadership of President Obama and your president, we are going to see cooperation."

Despite the hopeful talk, it was clear on Friday that major policy differences remained. At his news conference, Mr. Ryabkov said that Russia had no concerns about Iran's developing nuclear weapons — undercutting hopes that Russia would join American efforts to put pressure on Tehran.

Russia on Friday also formalized agreements that allow for a permanent Russian military presence in South Ossetia and Abkhazia, territories that Russia has recognized as sovereign nations but that the United States considers to be part of Georgia.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2009/03/21/world/europe/21russia.html?ref=world>

[\(Return to Articles and Documents List\)](#)

Washington Post

March 21, 2009

Medvedev 'Counting On a Reset' With U.S.

By Philip P. Pan

Washington Post Foreign Service

MOSCOW, March 20 -- Russian President Dmitry Medvedev said Friday he was "counting on" the new U.S. administration to live up to its pledge to "reset" relations between the two countries, while a senior Russian diplomat sought to link the fate of a key nuclear arms control treaty to American concessions on missile defense.

The statements come less than two weeks before Medvedev is scheduled to meet President Obama for the first time on the sidelines of the Group of 20 economic summit in London. Expectations for a breakthrough in U.S.-Russian relations at their April 1 meeting have been on the rise, with both sides voicing optimism and putting talks to replace the 1991 Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty at the top of the bilateral agenda.

"The surprising term 'reset' . . . really reflects the essence of the transformations we would like to see," Medvedev said, referring to promises by Vice President Biden and Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton to "press the reset button" on ties with Russia after a rocky few years during the Bush administration. "We are counting on a reset. I hope it will take place."

Medvedev was speaking at the start of a meeting with a delegation led by Henry Kissinger and three other former U.S. cabinet secretaries. It was the second time in as many weeks that he has conferred with a high-level mission from the United States. Kissinger also met privately with Prime Minister Vladimir Putin in a meeting shown briefly on state television.

"We come away very hopeful . . . that our two presidents are going to make very substantial progress," former senator Sam Nunn (D-Ga.), a member of Kissinger's delegation, said after two days of meetings with Russian officials.

In a separate news conference, Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov said he expected Medvedev and Obama to emerge from the meeting with a "concrete and clear" signal on the future of the relationship, and agreement on the "parameters" of a pact to replace START, the landmark arms control treaty scheduled to expire in December.

But Ryabkov said negotiations on new limits on nuclear warheads and weapons must be linked to the future of U.S. plans to build a missile defense shield in Eastern Europe that Russia has repeatedly condemned.

As the two countries agree to reduce their nuclear arsenals, he argued, the impact of missile defenses on the balance of power naturally increases. "It would be irresponsible both politically and militarily to close our eyes to this fact," he said.

Ryabkov added that the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty barring missile defense systems had served as a foundation for the sharp reductions in nuclear weapons of the past two decades. The Bush administration unilaterally withdrew from the ABM treaty in 2002 to proceed with development of the missile defense shield.

Obama has previously expressed reservations about the technical feasibility of missile defense, and he said in a recent letter to Medvedev that there would be less need for the shield if the threat of Iran developing nuclear weapons could be diminished, a suggestion seen as an incentive for Russia to apply pressure on Iran.

But it is unclear whether Obama is willing to put the program on hold, whether that would satisfy Russia, and what he would ask from Moscow in return. Any decision to abandon missile defense could disappoint U.S. allies in Eastern Europe, especially in Poland and the Czech Republic, where the governments have agreed to host U.S. installations for the shield.

The Czech government postponed a parliamentary vote on the proposal this week because it did not have enough votes to pass it.

Ryabkov stopped short of saying missile defense would be a deal-breaker for a START agreement, and some analysts argue that Russia has limited leverage because it cannot afford a new arms race.

A deal to replace START is considered important because a 2002 treaty mandating further nuclear cuts depends on its verification mechanisms. But the United States and Russia remain divided on several issues, including a U.S. proposal to eliminate limits on long-range weapons that don't carry nuclear warheads.

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/03/20/AR2009032000745.html>

[\(Return to Articles and Documents List\)](#)

RIA Novosti
23 March 2009

Russia Could Focus on Tactical Nuclear Weapons for Subs

MOSCOW (RIA Novosti) - Russia may prioritize the development of nuclear-powered attack submarines armed with nuclear-capable cruise missiles in the future, while maintaining its fleet of strategic subs, a senior Navy official said.

The Russian Navy maintains a fleet of about 60 submarines, including 10 nuclear-powered strategic submarines, over 30 nuclear-powered attack submarines, diesel-electric submarines and special-purpose subs.

"Probably, tactical nuclear weapons [on submarines] will play a key role in the future," Vice Admiral Oleg Burtsev, deputy head of the Navy General Staff, told RIA Novosti. "Their range and precision are gradually increasing."

"There is no longer any need to equip missiles with powerful nuclear warheads. We can install low-yield warheads on existing cruise missiles," he said.

The admiral mentioned Russia's new Severodvinsk nuclear-powered attack submarine, which will be commissioned with the Navy in 2010-2011, as an example.

The fourth-generation Graney class submarine combines the ability to launch a variety of long-range cruise missiles (up to 3,100 miles) with nuclear warheads, and effectively engage hostile submarines and surface warships.

However, Russia will maintain and upgrade its fleet of strategic submarines, carrying ballistic missiles, as a naval component of the nuclear triad.

"In this regard, we will build at least six Borey-class strategic submarines to serve in the Northern and the Pacific fleets," Burtsev said.

The first Borey-class submarine, the Yury Dolgoruky, was built at the Sevmash plant in northern Russia, and is undergoing mooring trials. It will carry up to 16 Bulava-M sea-based ballistic missiles.

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.

<http://en.rian.ru/russia/20090323/120688454.html>

[\(Return to Articles and Documents List\)](#)

International Herald
March 23, 2009

Report: Russian Navy to Rely on Tactical Nukes

The Associated Press

MOSCOW: The role of tactical nuclear weapons in the Russian navy may grow, a news agency quoted a senior Russian admiral as saying Monday.

Vice Adm. Oleg Burtsev told the state-run RIA-Novosti that the increasing range and precision of tactical nuclear weapons makes them an important asset.

"Probably, tactical nuclear weapons will play a key role in the future," said Burtsev, the navy's deputy chief of staff.

He added that the navy may fit new, less powerful nuclear warheads to the existing types of cruise missiles.

"There is no longer any need to equip missiles with powerful nuclear warheads," Burtsev said. "We can install low-yield warheads on existing cruise missiles."

Tactical nuclear weapons have a much shorter range compared to strategic nuclear weapons. They are intended for use within a theater of battle.

The United States and the Soviet Union decided in 1991 to eliminate some of their non-strategic nuclear weapons and withdraw others from duty, including those used by navy ships.

But in 2006 Russia signaled it no longer intended to abide by that decision when then-Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov said that Russian submarines were carrying tactical nuclear weapons on patrol.

Last December, chief of the Russian military's general staff, Gen. Nikolai Makarov, said Russia will keep its arsenal of tactical nuclear weapons, which he said were necessary to counter a massive NATO advantage in conventional weapons.

Burtsev said the navy will also build six new nuclear submarines carrying intercontinental ballistic missiles. The first sub in the series, the Yuri Dolgoruky, already has been built and is undergoing tests.

However, the prospective Bulava missile designed to equip the new submarine has failed repeatedly in tests, making prospects of its deployment dim.

<http://www.iht.com/articles/ap/2009/03/23/europe/EU-Russia-Nuclear-Weapons.php>

[\(Return to Articles and Documents List\)](#)

International Herald Tribune

March 21, 2009

2 Navy Vessels Collide In Strait of Hormuz

By Michael Slackman

MANAMA, Bahrain — A nuclear-powered United States submarine collided with a Navy warship early Friday in the Strait of Hormuz, the narrow passage through which much of the world's oil must pass on its way to market, the Navy announced.

Both ships were damaged in the crash, and 15 sailors on board the submarine, the Hartford, were slightly injured, according to the Fifth Fleet, which is based in Bahrain. A spokesman for the fleet, Lt. Nate Christensen, said none of the sailors needed medical evacuation and all were back on duty.

The other vessel, the New Orleans, an amphibious assault ship with 1,000 on board, ruptured its fuel tanks and spilled 25,000 gallons of fuel, he said.

The submarine was submerged, Lieutenant Christensen said, and the vessels were headed to port around 1 a.m. when the collision occurred. The fleet reported that there was no damage to the submarine's nuclear reactor, and that both ships were able to return to port under their own power.

The vessels were involved in what the Navy calls "maritime security operations." The Navy does not release specific details of its activities for security reasons. Lieutenant Christensen said there were three dozen ships deployed in the region at any given time.

Lieutenant Christensen said that the Navy would investigate the cause of the crash. The last crash between a submarine and a ship in this region occurred in 2007, he said.

The Fifth Fleet covers an area of 7.5 million square miles, running through the Persian Gulf, the Red Sea, the Gulf of Oman and parts of the Indian Ocean.

That area covers 27 countries, including the critical passages at the Strait of Hormuz and the Suez Canal in Egypt.

Shortly after the crash, the price of oil went up. But Lieutenant Christensen said that the collision did not affect shipping lanes in the crucial passage "at all."

The submarine's home port is Groton, Conn., and the amphibious assault ship's is San Diego.

<http://www.iht.com/articles/2009/03/21/africa/21hormuz.php>

[\(Return to Articles and Documents List\)](#)

Washington Post

March 22, 2009

Poland Hopes U.S. Will Not Let It Down On Shield

BRUSSELS (Reuters) - Poland said on Sunday it hoped the new U.S. administration would not abandon plans to station a missile defence system on its territory.

President Barack Obama's administration is reviewing U.S. security policy, including the missile shield plan. This has prompted speculation he might shelve a project that has angered Moscow, with which Washington wants to mend ties.

Polish Foreign Minister Radoslaw Sikorski said Poland had taken "something of a political risk" in signing an agreement with the Bush administration to host the system.

"When we started discussing this with the United States, the U.S. assured us they would persuade the Russians that it was purely defensive and it would be a non-controversial decision," he told the annual Brussels Forum conference.

"We signed with the old administration; we patiently wait for the new administration, and we hope we don't regret our trust in the United States," he said, adding that Russia had continued to threaten to deploy missiles near Poland if the shield were deployed.

At the same event, U.S. Congresswoman Ellen Tauscher, who is expected to be named the new U.S. under secretary for arms control and international security, said the missile system would not be deployed until it had been proven to work.

She said the current missile threat to deployed troops and southern Europe was from short and medium-range missiles, against which there was already a defence capability.

She said NATO needed to develop a short- to medium-range system, something that could involve cooperation with Russia.

"We could certainly bolt on the long-range system once it has been tested and create a suite of systems that have complete coverage for everybody," she said.

NATO member Poland has said it expects the shield project, designed to counter possible threats from what Washington calls rogue states such as Iran, to go ahead eventually after the review and hopes to complete technical talks next month.

Under the deal agreed last year, Poland would host 10 ground-based interceptors, and in return Washington promised to station a Patriot missile battery on Polish territory for a period before the end of 2009.

Warsaw sees that as a symbolic security guarantee to counter an assertive Russia, and U.S. and Polish diplomats say this will go ahead independently of any decision on the missile shield.

Russia opposed NATO's admission of the three ex-communist countries in 1999 and is campaigning strongly against Georgia and Ukraine, former Soviet republics, being allowed to join an alliance that Russians still view with deep distrust.

(Reporting by David Brunnstrom, editing by Tim Pearce)

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/03/22/AR2009032200592.html>

[\(Return to Articles and Documents List\)](#)

Deutsche Welle
22 March 2009

Poland Urges US to Stick to Missile Shield in Europe

Warsaw urged the United States on Sunday, March 22, not to give up on the Bush administration's plans to station a controversial anti-missile shield in Poland -- despite continued pressure from Russia.

"We hope we don't regret our trust in the United States," Polish Foreign Minister Radoslaw Sikorski said at the Brussels Forum conference to an audience of senior world politicians and experts.

Russia was enraged by the US missile plans -- which the last administration under George W. Bush said was needed to counter a threat from Iran -- but has welcomed the review ordered by President Barack Obama.

"I am afraid Russian generals and even the Russian president continue to threaten us with the deployment of medium-range missiles," Sikorski said.

But Congresswoman Ellen Tauscher, who is expected to become the new undersecretary for arms control and international security in the new US administration, said it was more important to counter the real threat from short- and medium-range missiles, while the review takes place.

"We need to re-assess," she said, noting that the US Congress believes the shield should not be deployed further until it has undergone "three or four more tests."

"The threat is short- and medium-range missiles targeted towards our forward deployed troops, and our allies in southern Europe," she said. "We could certainly bolt on the long-range system once it has been tested and create a suite of systems that have complete coverage for everybody."

Bitter opposition

Russia has been bitterly opposed to the deployment of a US anti-missile system in Poland and the Czech Republic ever since it was proposed by the former US President George W. Bush. The US had been negotiating with the two ex-Communist countries to install 10 missile interceptors, which would not carry explosive warheads, and a radar system on their territories.

Moscow saw the interceptor system, which was initially meant to be in operation by 2013, as a threat to its own security. Washington always denied this, emphasizing that the system was meant to counter missile threats from states such as Iran.

Russia, in turn, had threatened to deploy Iskander missiles to Kaliningrad, a Russian exclave wedged between NATO and EU members Poland and Lithuania, if Washington did not withdraw the missile shield plan.

But it was assuaged by Obama's decision to order a review of the multi-billion dollar project to see whether it is still technically feasible and cost effective. The time needed to conduct it is unclear.

Fear of Russia

Warsaw sees the presence of a US shield on its territory as a symbolic security guarantee to counter an increasingly assertive Russia.

Russia opposed NATO's admission of the three ex-communist countries -- Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary -- in 1999 and is campaigning strongly against Georgia and Ukraine, former Soviet republics, being allowed to join an alliance that Russians still view with deep distrust.

But Sikorski stressed that Poland had taken "something of a political risk" in signing an agreement with the previous US administration.

"When we started discussing this with the United States, the US assured us they would persuade the Russians that it was purely defensive and it would be a non-controversial decision," he said.

Last month, Polish Defense Minister Bogdan Klich said talks with Washington on the plan, and in particular the stationing of US Patriot missiles in Poland and other benefits Warsaw stood to gain, were ongoing.

Czech officials, however, have said they would be prepared to wait three years for work on the radar base to begin. Polls show the Czech public is largely opposed to the system.

<http://www.dw-world.de/dw/article/0,,4118236,00.html>

[\(Return to Articles and Documents List\)](#)

Washington Post

March 24, 2009

Nuclear Security Official Hints At Leaner, Less Costly Weapons Complex

By Walter Pincus

The best status report on the U.S. nuclear weapons program and its future was delivered last Tuesday at a session of the House Appropriations subcommittee on energy and water development, where the head of the program declared, "We must stop pouring money into an old, Cold War complex that is too big and too expensive."

The speaker was Thomas P. D'Agostino, who heads the National Nuclear Security Administration, which runs the nuclear weapons complex and is a carryover from the Bush administration. As he had done before, D'Agostino pressed Congress to fund "urgent" change, while acknowledging that President Obama will favor a reduction in the nuclear weapons stockpile.

For example, he noted that over the past two years, the projection of the number of new plutonium triggers that will be needed to keep the U.S. nuclear weapons stockpile reliable and secure has steadily dropped from 450 a year to 20.

D'Agostino, a former Navy officer, told the subcommittee that he had made the production decision "that we would not exceed the minimum capacity, which was up to 20 pits," the industry name for plutonium triggers, per year, while awaiting Obama's decision on the future size of the stockpile.

During the Bush administration, the number of deployed strategic warheads was sharply reduced, from 6,000 to between 1,700 and 2,200 projected for 2012. At the same time, however, there were extensive plans for a major modernization and consolidation of the Cold War nuclear-weapons-production complex, including construction of a multibillion-dollar facility to build plutonium pits and production of a new generation of more secure nuclear warheads.

The Democratic Congress halted the warhead program and established a commission to propose a nuclear strategy for the future, which is due out this year. The Obama Defense Department is just beginning its own nuclear policy review, which will determine how nuclear forces fit within the Pentagon's broader national security strategy. The president and his National Security Council will use these studies to set the size of the future nuclear stockpile.

D'Agostino told the lawmakers that 20 pits a year would meet current needs and that he had delayed any further decisions affecting the complex "until the nuclear posture review, because we recognized that that could potentially drive some infrastructure changes."

Among the other pending decisions, he said, were replacing Cold War-era uranium facilities at Oak Ridge, Tenn., and plutonium facilities at Los Alamos National Laboratory in New Mexico. The plan had been to build a new uranium processing facility at Oak Ridge to replace buildings, some of which date to the Manhattan Project, which produced the first atomic bombs in the 1940s. However, as Everet H. Beckner, a former senior National Nuclear Security Administration official, told the panel, the planned facility's workspace was "at least 25 percent too big" because "the design was started several years ago, when the workload appeared to be considerably larger than now appears to be the case."

Plans are also underway to close the Chemical and Metallurgy Research Building at Los Alamos, which dates from the 1950s and handled plutonium research and production, and build a replacement. D'Agostino said this was part of an effort to limit where sensitive nuclear materials, such as plutonium, are stored.

"The thing I want to do is actually reduce the amount of plutonium capability in the country by shutting down plutonium capability at Lawrence Livermore [National Laboratory in California] and bringing it to Los Alamos," he added.

Asked what decisions should be made this year and what should be delayed until Obama develops a new policy regarding the size of the U.S. nuclear forces, D'Agostino said: "I think my approach would be to continue on with the design work. . . . And our projects -- the nuclear facility and the uranium processing facility -- have some more design work that has to get done." In the end, he said, the "real issue" for congressional appropriators would have to be confronted next year while preparing the fiscal 2011 budget, when the complex will need commitment of "large amounts of resources in certain areas."

Though no one could say for sure where the new administration will come down on the question of the size of the nuclear stockpile, D'Agostino said there "will be probably reduced numbers of what we have now, and maybe at some future date we'll bring in some warheads that are much safer and much more secure than the ones we have now -- but again, the general trend is going down."

"But," he added, "there will be, and I think President Obama has said this, a deterrent, and we do plan on maintaining it."

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/03/23/AR2009032303091.html>

[\(Return to Articles and Documents List\)](#)

RIA Novosti
20 March 2009

Russia Still Believes In Peaceful Nature of Iran's Nuclear Program

MOSCOW, March 20 (RIA Novosti) - Moscow has seen nothing to convince it that there is a military element to Iran's nuclear program, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov told journalists on Friday.

"The Russian Federation continues to believe that there are no signs of the [Iranian nuclear] program being switched toward military goals, and that it is of an exclusively peaceful nature," Ryabkov said at a press conference in Moscow.

The United States and other Western nations suspect Tehran of secretly seeking nuclear weapons. Iran says its nuclear program is purely aimed at generating electricity.

The United States has cited Iran's controversial nuclear program as one of the reasons behind its plans to deploy a missile base in Poland and radar in the Czech Republic. The missile shield has been strongly opposed by Russia, which views it as a threat to its national security. The dispute has strained relations between the former Cold War rivals, already tense over a host of other differences.

Ryabkov also welcomed the decision by U.S. President Barack Obama to send a video message to the Iranian people congratulating them on the Iranian New Year, saying that it was "important for us that the new [U.S.] administration is making advances to Tehran."

<http://en.rian.ru/world/20090320/120662744.html>

[\(Return to Articles and Documents List\)](#)

China View
20 March 2009

Iran's Supreme Leader Vows Nuclear Path Can't Be Blocked

TEHRAN, March 20 (Xinhua) -- Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei vowed Friday that the country's path to nuclear success can not be blocked.

"The world has come to know that the path to the Iranian nation's nuclear success can not be blocked," Khamenei said in a televised address on the occasion of the Iranian New Year Nowruz.

"Iran's achievements in different scientific and nonscientific fields show that sanctions are ineffective and prove that the great Iranian nation is flourishing and growing from within," Khamenei said.

The Iranian leader hailed the launching of the country's first home-made satellite and the test run of its first nuclear power plant at Bushehr in the past year as "important achievements."

Iran has been sanctioned by the United States for developing secretly nuclear weapons and being involved in anti-U.S. activities since the two countries severed ties in 1980.

http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2009-03/20/content_11045099.htm

[\(Return to Articles and Documents List\)](#)

Washington Post
March 20, 2009

U.S. Could Hit N. Korean Missile, Says Commander

There is a "high probability" that the United States could knock down a North Korean missile aimed at this country, the Pentagon's military commander for the Pacific told Congress yesterday.

But Navy Adm. Timothy J. Keating told the Senate Armed Services Committee he does not regard a missile test planned by the North Koreans in April as a threat.

"It is a normal notification process, which they didn't do in 2006, when they attempted a launch from the same facility," Keating said.

Keating added that U.S. intelligence cannot yet say whether the launch will be of a communications satellite, as North Korea has asserted, or of a missile with intercontinental range. But he and two other commanders said they think it will be a satellite launch because of the public announcements from Pyongyang, including coordinates of the ocean area where the booster rocket is likely to fall.

Air Force Gen. Kevin P. Chilton, the head of Strategic Command, told the Senate panel that "even if there is a satellite launch . . . it will help advance [North Korea's] technology of long-range missiles." Army Gen. Walter L. Sharp, commander of U.S. forces in Korea, added that North Korea's missile ability "is indeed a threat."

Sharp added that the launch would violate a 2006 U.N. Security Council resolution barring such tests by North Korea after one exploded shortly after being fired, and he called on North Korea to call off the launch.

The commanders spoke in moderate terms about U.S. relations with other countries, echoing the tone of two other regional commanders before the Senate panel on Tuesday and that of Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates in recent remarks.

--Walter Pincus

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/03/19/AR2009031903180.html?hpid=moreheadlines>

[\(Return to Articles and Documents List\)](#)

Yonhap News
23 March 2009

U.S. Doesn't Want to Use Force in Denuclearizing N.K.: Envoy

By Tony Chang

SEOUL (Yonhap) -- The United States is committed to diplomatic efforts in denuclearizing North Korea, its envoy to Seoul reiterated Monday, dismissing the possibility of resorting to military force.

"We have to be very persistent and strong. We don't want to see war here," responded U.S. Ambassador Kathleen Stephens after a lecture to university students in Seoul when asked whether Washington would consider using force as an option to end North Korea's nuclear program.

The U.S. has been engaging in multilateral talks to end the North's nuclear developments through six-party talks, also involving South Korea, China, Japan and Russia. The negotiations have been stalled since December as Pyongyang rejected a proposed protocol on verifying its past nuclear activities and stockpile.

"Nobody wants to see war and violence on the Korean Peninsula. Everyone understands what a disastrous course that would be," Stephens said.

Washington also wants to see "renewed dialogue" between the two Koreas, Stephens said.

"We want to see renewed dialogue between the North and South, a better relationship and an end to the sort of provocative rhetoric and behavior that we've seen recently," said Stephens.

As the U.S. and South Korea wrapped up an annual 12-day joint military drill on Friday, the North restored a military communication line with the South on Saturday, which it had cut off in protest of the joint exercise.

The North had sealed the inter-Korean border three times during the drill period and arbitrarily held South Koreans visiting a joint industrial complex in its border city of Kaesong.

On the issue of two American reporters detained by North Korea since last week, Stephens said that there were "a lot of diplomatic efforts going on."

"As the (U.S. State Department) spokesman has said, Secretary (Hillary) Clinton has engaged (on the matter) and we'll continue to be engaged on it," the ambassador said.

Pyongyang confirmed Saturday it is holding two U.S. female reporters who allegedly illegally crossed the border into the North.

Concerning U.S.-South Korean relations and coordinated plans to tackle the global economic crisis, Stephens said the leaders have a "big agenda" for a bilateral summit expected to be held on the sidelines of the G20 economic summit slated for next month in London.

"I'm sure President (Barack) Obama and President Lee Myung-bak will discuss some of these steps (to improve bilateral ties), as well as all the global challenges we face when they meet in about 10 days' time in London," Stephens said on the first expected face-to-face meeting between the two leaders, without providing more details.

<http://english.yonhapnews.co.kr/northkorea/2009/03/23/13/0401000000AEN20090323010100315F.HTML>

[\(Return to Articles and Documents List\)](#)

London Daily Telegraph
March 21, 2009

Taliban Have Achieved Stalemate In Afghanistan, Warns David Miliband

By Andrew Porter, Political Editor

The Taliban has achieved a "strategic stalemate" in Afghanistan, David Miliband, the Foreign Secretary, has admitted.

His statement came as he refused to say whether he wanted to reduce the number of British forces in the country.

A new American report has been assessing the future of its operation in Afghanistan to rid the country of the Taliban.

Mr Miliband told the BBC: "In parts of the country there is a strategic stalemate. It is not true that the Taliban are overrunning our forces because in any conventional encounter they lose.

"But they are a terrorist, counter-insurgency force which is able to do grave and grievous damage to our own troops and others."

Mr Miliband welcomed the American report which he said acknowledged that the issue of Afghanistan was linked closely with Pakistan. He said it was now understood that there could not be a solution in the region brought about by military means alone.

He added that the aim of a "civilian and military strategy" which recognises this is a Pakistan and Afghanistan problem was is to "break that stalemate".

One hundred and fifty two British troops have died in Afghanistan and both America and Britain want other Nato countries to share the burden in the fight against the Taliban. But Mr Miliband has so far received little positive response from those allies that have been unwilling to commit more service personnel to the more dangerous areas of the country.

He said: "Some countries are doing significant amounts but other countries have got serious caveats."

He added: "Yes, we do want a better sharing of the burden."

Mr Miliband said that by 2012 the Afghan national army will have doubled in size and that will give American and Britain the opportunity to look again at its commitments in terms of troop strength. However, he failed to say that it would mean a reduction of British forces.

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/afghanistan/5021248/Taliban-have-achieved-stalemate-in-Afghanistan-warns-David-Miliband.html>

[\(Return to Articles and Documents List\)](#)

New York Times
March 22, 2009

Saudis Retool to Root Out Terrorist Risk

By ROBERT F. WORTH

RIYADH, Saudi Arabia — Near the guard tower outside this country's main counterterrorism training center, some of the concrete barriers are still scarred with shrapnel. They are kept as a reminder: in December 2004, a suicide bomber detonated his car there, in one of a series of deadly attacks by Islamist insurgents that shook this kingdom.

"It was a wake-up call," said the commander of the training center, a tall, wiry officer in fatigues and a black beret who cannot publicly give his name for security reasons. "The situation was bad." A plaque just inside the commander's office bears the names of 57 Saudi officers who died fighting terrorists from 2003 to 2005.

Those deaths forced a decisive shift here. Many Saudis had refused to recognize the country's growing reputation as an incubator of terrorism, even after the international outcry that followed the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001.

Since then, much has changed. When Saudi Arabia released its latest list of wanted terrorism suspects in January, all 85 of them were said to be outside the kingdom.

That fact was a measure of the ambitious counterterrorism program created here in the past few years. The government has cracked down ruthlessly on terrorist cells and financing, rooting out officers with extremist sympathies and building a much larger and more effective network of SWAT teams. Even regular police officers now get a full month of counterterrorism training every year.

“We have killed or captured all the fighters, and the rest have fled to Afghanistan or Yemen,” said the commander, in an assessment largely echoed by Western security officials. “All that remains here is some ideological apparatus.”

The extent of that ideological apparatus remains uncertain. The list of 85 suspects that was released in January included 11 men who had been freed from the American prison camp at Guantánamo Bay, Cuba, had passed through Saudi Arabia’s widely praised rehabilitation program for jihadists, and then had fled the country. Two of them broadcast their aim of overthrowing the Saudi royal family in a video released on the Internet by the Yemeni branch of Al Qaeda, in an embarrassing moment for the authorities here.

But the Saudi government, which once seemed unwilling to acknowledge this country’s critical role in fostering jihadist violence around the world, has become far more open about the challenges it faces.

“We are still at the beginning, we have a lot to learn,” said Turki al-Otayan, the director of the rehabilitation program’s psychological committee. Like others involved in the program, he conceded that the return of some of its graduates to terrorism was a blow, but he said he believed that the success rate (14 failures out of 218 graduates) was still impressive.

Mr. Otayan and his colleagues won a partial vindication last month when one of the two graduates who had fled to Yemen later returned to Saudi Arabia and gave himself up. But Mr. Otayan shrugged that off.

“We can’t guarantee that he won’t go back to Yemen again,” he added. “You’re dealing with people, not cars.”

Saudi officials are also frank about the fact that Al Qaeda still has some popular sympathy here, though far less than before the bloody attacks from 2003 to 2005.

“Changing mind-sets is not easy, and it takes a long time,” said Abdul Rahman al-Hadlag, the Interior Ministry’s director of ideological security. “We have to monitor mosques and the Internet, because the extremists use these places to recruit people. Sometimes they even use afterschool activities. Sleeper cells exist.”

Some of the softer approaches to fighting terrorism, including the rehabilitation program, have been labeled coddling by Western critics. But the Saudi state must provide many former jihadists with jobs and financial assistance, Mr. Hadlag said, because if it does not, others will.

“Sometimes the extremists leave money in envelopes under the door, with ‘From your mujahedeen brothers’ written on it,” Mr. Hadlag said. “We can’t let them be the good guys.”

The postprison rehabilitation program, which is now being expanded, is only one part of a broader effort to address the issue of violent extremism across Saudi Arabia. It includes dialogues with — or even suppression of — the more extremist clerics. There are also a variety of outreach programs in areas known to harbor extremists, with the Interior Ministry sending its preferred clerics or sheiks to speak in schools and community centers for two or three weeks at a time.

At the same time, the kingdom has completely retooled its prison system, which had been criticized as having inhumane conditions. Five new prisons were built in a matter of months last year — as it happens, by the bin Laden family company — that hold 1,200 to 1,500 prisoners each.

Unlike the old prisons, the new ones allow a maximum of four inmates to a cell, and Islamists are kept separate from common criminals for the first time, minimizing the spread of jihadist ideas, or so the theory goes.

Some internal critics say that the “soft” counterterrorism strategies remain weak, and that the only way to address the roots of jihadist violence is by thoroughly reforming the Saudi educational system, a task that will take decades.

“One major problem is that the sheiks they bring for these programs aren’t authoritative,” said Mshari al-Zaydi, a Saudi journalist and political analyst who is himself a former hard-liner, referring to the rehabilitation efforts. “They don’t have credibility because they are seen as people who take money from the government.”

In the meantime, Saudi Arabia’s main terrorist threat appears to come from Yemen, where a number of Saudi extremists have regrouped in that country’s mountainous, tribal hinterland. They have struck there repeatedly in the

past year and have declared a goal of using Yemen as a base for attacks against Saudi Arabia. The border with Yemen is long and porous, and militants appear to have no trouble crossing it at will.

For all their success on the military front, Saudi officials seem cautious about declaring a victory against jihadists, especially when unexpected crises like the recent war between Israel and Hamas can create a sudden upwelling of popular anger that fuels extremist sentiment.

“We are victims of terrorism,” said the commander of the Riyadh training center, where 400 commandos sit ready to respond to attacks 24 hours a day. “It’s not what the world thinks.”

Muhammad al-Milfy contributed reporting.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2009/03/22/world/middleeast/22saudi.html?hp>

[\(Return to Articles and Documents List\)](#)

London Sunday Times

March 22, 2009

UK Seeks Return of ‘Terror Plotter’

BY DAVID LEPPARD

THE home secretary, Jacqui Smith, has intervened to demand that America release a Guantanamo Bay prisoner whom US officials have linked to many “significant terrorist plots”.

Smith said during a trip to Washington to meet Janet Napolitano, the US homeland security secretary, that Shaker Aamer, the last British-linked inmate in Guantanamo, is the “one outstanding [prisoner] we would want returned to the UK”.

The Americans told Smith on her visit this month that they do not want Aamer to return to the UK. They claim he is a “dangerous” terrorist who shared a flat in the late 1990s with Zacarias Moussaoui, the so-called 20th hijacker in the September 11 attacks.

A US official said Aamer was nicknamed “the professor” and was paid by Osama Bin Laden while acting as his interpreter.

They claim he met Richard Reid, the Briton imprisoned in America for trying to blow up a plane with a bomb in his shoe.

Sandra Hodgkinson, the former US defence official in charge of detainees, claimed Aamer “has been involved in a lot of significant terrorist plots”.

She said he had ties with Ayman al-Zawahiri, Bin Laden’s second-in-command, and was “personally associated” with individuals who plotted an attack on Westminster in 2005.

The diplomatic tussle over Aamer is posing a dilemma for ministers. While they have vowed to get all the British-linked inmates back, there is deep concern among some security officials about some detainees who have been released.

Whitehall officials say the Taliban commander responsible for a recent bombing campaign against British soldiers is a former Guantanamo inmate who was released to the Afghan authorities in December 2007.

Abdullah Ghulam Rasoul has since become the Taliban’s new operations chief in Helmand.

Brent Mickum, Aamer’s American lawyer, denied the US claims against his client. “I have looked at the available material and there is nothing to support any of these allegations,” he said this weekend.

<http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/politics/article5950462.ece>

[\(Return to Articles and Documents List\)](#)

Daily Guardian

23 March 2009

Smith: 60,000 in Training to Deal with Terror Attacks

Nicholas Watt, chief political correspondent

Jacqui Smith, the home secretary, yesterday pledged to end the "secret, behind closed doors" approach to tackling terrorism as the government prepared to launch a fresh strategy this week.

A new 60,000-strong civilian force, including security guards at shopping centres and hotel workers, will be hailed as one of the most important instruments in confronting the terrorist threat.

Smith outlined the new thinking in an interview on BBC One's The Politics Show programme. "It's the nature of this work that quite often in the past it's been the sort of thing that's happened in secret, behind closed doors," she said.

"We're clear that if we're going to address the threat from terrorism, we need to do that alongside the 60,000 people that we're now training up to respond to a terrorist threat, in everywhere from our shopping centres to our hotels. We need to do it alongside the 3,000 police officers, now working on counter-terror, out and about doing that, and we need to do it with international partners."

Ministers believe they need to adopt a twin-track approach in which the authorities take a hardline to people directly involved in terrorism, but avoid alienating young people who might be tempted by radical Islamism by avoiding heavy-handedness with the wider Muslim community and by showing that Britain's belief in democracy and human rights is open to everyone.

Gordon Brown outlined the approach in an article in yesterday's Observer. On the need to confront terrorists, the prime minister wrote: "Al-Qaida terrorists remain intent on inflicting mass casualties without warning, including through suicide bombings. They are motivated by a violent extremist ideology based on a false reading of religion ... We must remain vigilant at all times.

"On Tuesday, we will publish our updated counter-terrorism strategy, showing why this vigilance remains so vital and showing also the success we have had, thanks to the hard work of the thousands of brave, skilled and dedicated people working to keep us safe."

But Brown also made clear it was important to wage a battle for what he has in the past called hearts and minds.

"The approach we are taking tackles the immediate threat through the relentless pursuit of terrorists and disruption of their plots, builds up our defences against attacks and our resilience to deal with them, and addresses the longer term causes - understanding what leads people to become radicalised, so we can stop the process."

The prime minister also threw his weight behind Barack Obama who has warned that Pakistan-based terrorism represents a grave threat. "In 2001, al-Qaida were based in Afghanistan. While they are still active there, core al-Qaida has shifted across the border into Pakistan. More than two-thirds of the plots threatening the UK are linked to Pakistan."

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2009/mar/23/jacqui-smith-terrorism-civilian-force>

[\(Return to Articles and Documents List\)](#)

Boston Herald
March 23, 2009

Predator Strikes in Pakistan: U.S. says Drones Ravage al-Qaida

By Greg Miller - Tribune Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON - An intense six-month campaign of Predator strikes in Pakistan has taken such a toll on al-Qaida that militants have begun turning violently on each other out of confusion and distrust, U.S. intelligence and counterterrorism officials say.

The pace of the Predator attacks in northwest Pakistan has accelerated dramatically since August, when the Bush administration abandoned the practice of getting permission from the Pakistani government before launching missiles from the unmanned aircraft.

Since Aug. 31, the CIA has carried out at least 38 Predator strikes, compared to only 10 reported attacks in 2006 and 2007 combined, in what has become the most expansive targeted killing program run by the CIA since the Vietnam War.

Because of the accelerated campaign's success, the Obama administration is poised to continue it despite civilian casualties that have fueled anti-American sentiment and prompted protests from Pakistan's government.

"This last year has been a very hard year for them," said a senior U.S. counterterrorism official who tracks al-Qaida's operations in northwest Pakistan. "They're losing a bunch of their better leaders. But more importantly, at this point they're wondering who's next."

U.S. intelligence officials said they see clear signs the Predator strikes are sowing distrust within al-Qaida.

"They have started hunting down people who they think are responsible (for security breaches)," the senior U.S. counterterrorism official said, discussing intelligence assessments on condition of anonymity. "People are showing up dead or disappearing."

The counterterrorism official and others, who also spoke anonymously, said the U.S. assessments are based in part on reports from the region provided by Pakistan's intelligence service.

The stepped-up Predator campaign has killed at least nine senior al-Qaida leaders and dozens of lower-ranking operatives in what U.S. officials described as the most serious disruption of the terrorist network since 2001.

Al-Qaida's founders remain elusive. U.S. spy agencies have not had reliable intelligence on the location of Osama bin Laden since he slipped across the Pakistan border seven years ago, officials said. His deputy, Ayman al-Zawahiri, remains at large after escaping a missile strike in 2006.

But the Predator campaign has depleted the organization's operational tier. Many of the dead are longtime loyalists who once worked alongside bin Laden and were part of the network's hasty migration into Pakistan in 2001 as U.S. forces invaded neighboring Afghanistan. They are being replaced by less experienced recruits who have had little, if any, history with bin Laden and Zawahiri.

The offensive has been abetted by technological advances and an expansion of the CIA's Predator fleet. The drones take off and land at military airstrips in Pakistan but are operated by CIA pilots in the United States. Some of the pilots - who also pull the triggers on missiles - are contractors hired by the agency, former officials said.

Predators were originally designed as video surveillance aircraft that could hover over a target from high altitudes. But new versions are outfitted with additional intelligence gear that has enabled the CIA to confirm the identities of targets even when they are inside buildings and cannot be seen through the Predator's lens.

The agency also is working more closely with U.S. Special Operations teams and military intelligence aircraft that hug the Pakistan border, collecting pictures and intercepting radio or cell phone signals.

Even so, officials said that surge in strikes has less to do with expanded capabilities than with the decision to skip Pakistani approval.

"We had the data all along," said a former CIA official who oversaw Predator operations in Pakistan. "Finally we took off the gloves."

The Bush administration's decision to expand the Predator program was driven by growing alarm over al-Qaida's resurgence in Pakistan's tribal belt.

The breaking point came when Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf was forced to resign in mid-August, officials said. Within days, President George W. Bush had approved new rules: Rather than requiring Pakistan's permission to order a Predator strike, the agency was allowed to shoot first.

The impact was immediate.

There were two Predator strikes on Aug. 31, and three more by the end of the week. CIA officials had often suspected their targets were being tipped by Pakistani intelligence to pending U.S. strikes. Bypassing the government ended that concern.

Pakistan has criticized the Predator campaign.

"Drone attacks are counterproductive," said Nadeem Kiani, press attache at the Pakistani Embassy in Washington. Rather than firing missiles, Kiani said, the U.S. should provide intelligence to Pakistan "and we will take immediate action."

U.S. officials said despite such complaints, Pakistan's opposition has been muted because the CIA has expanded its targeting to include militant groups that threaten Islamabad.

http://news.bostonherald.com/news/international/asia_pacific/view/2009_03_23_Predator_strikes_in_Pakistan:_U_S_says_drones_ravage_al-Qaida/srvc=home&position=recent

[\(Return to Articles and Documents List\)](#)

Miami Herald
March 23, 2009

Obama Defends Detainee Policy

BY CAROL ROSENBERG

President Barack Obama said in an interview broadcast Sunday that the Bush administration did not properly vet Guantánamo detainees before freeing them. Still, he defended his plan to empty the prison camps to mend global relations.

Obama made the remarks in excerpts released by CBS *60 Minutes* a week after former Vice President Dick Cheney derided as risky the president's plans to dismantle GOP-led detainee policy.

"How many terrorists have actually been brought to justice under the philosophy that is being promoted by Vice President Cheney?" Obama retorted. "It hasn't made us safer. What it has been is a great advertisement for anti-American sentiment."

The Bush administration sent about 500 detainees to other countries in its periodic rounds of releases since opening the controversial prison camps in January 2002. The Obama White House has approved release of only one so far from Guantánamo -- a former British resident who was sent to London.

Justice Department officials are now sifting through the files of the 220 war-on-terrorism captives at Guantánamo to decide who can be sent home, who can be resettled in third countries and who should face trial.

BACK TO TERRORISM

Spokesmen for Secretary of Defense Robert Gates have claimed a sizable recidivist rate of former detainees who have rejoined the Taliban or attacked U.S. forces or allies. In a few instances, Pentagon spokesmen have cited specific cases but mostly pointed to secret intelligence reports and scarce public proof.

"There is no doubt that we have not done a particularly effective job in sorting through who are truly dangerous individuals . . . to make sure [they] are not a threat to us," Obama said.

But he said his predecessor's policy of indefinite detention at Guantánamo without trial was "unsustainable."

Only a few dozen have been charged in the now-frozen war court that the Bush administration championed. Of the three convicted -- Osama bin Laden's driver and media secretary and an Australian foot soldier -- two have been set free in Australia and Yemen, respectively.

Obama has said he prefers traditional prosecutions for which cases can be built in U.S. courts -- an approach that Cheney cast as an effort to transform war policies into law enforcement practices.

Cheney's remarks on a March 15 CNN broadcast sparked a new round of national debate on the future of the prison camps.

A former Bush appointee, retired Army Col. Lawrence Wilkerson reignited a feud with the former vice president by noting on a website that Bush-era intelligence suggested some at Guantánamo are innocent.

The Obama administration has been steadily breaking with Bush detainee policy since the president signed an executive order to empty the prison camps within his first year in office.

TABOO TOPPLED

Attorney General Eric Holder, who is leading the Cabinet-level review of what to do with the detainees, toppled one taboo last week:

He told reporters that he could imagine the United States resettling some Muslims from China on American soil. They have been cleared of being "enemy combatants" but cannot go home from Guantánamo for fear of religious persecution in their communist homeland.

<http://www.miamiherald.com/news/americas/guantanamo/story/962996.html>

[\(Return to Articles and Documents List\)](#)

China View
20 March 2009

Cambodia Approves Draft Law on Non-proliferation of Nuclear, Chemical Weapons

PHNOM PENH, March 20 (Xinhua) -- Cambodia approved on Friday a draft law banning nuclear, chemical, bio-chemical and radio-active weapons in the country.

The draft law was approved at a cabinet meeting chaired by Prime Minister Hun Sen.

"The draft law will help guarantee security, public orders, environment protection and welfare of our people, and also contribute to protecting security and peace in the region and in the whole world," said a statement of the Council of Ministers.

The draft law also completely prohibits production, recycling, receiving, transferring, storing, transportation and use of nuclear, bio-chemical, radioactive and chemical substances, which are essential for manufacturing weapons of their types, the statement said.

The draft law has 13 chapters and 32 articles, it added.

http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2009-03/20/content_11043547.htm

[\(Return to Articles and Documents List\)](#)

U.N. News Service
20 March 2009

Ban Welcomes Central Asia's Decision to Renounce Nuclear Weapons

All five Central Asian nations – Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan – have ratified the Treaty on a Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone, first formally proposed by Uzbek President Islam Karimov at the General Assembly in 1993.

The agreement, which opened for signature in September 2006, covers an area where nuclear weapons previously existed.

Kazakhstan, which endured over 400 atomic blasts at the Semipalatinsk testing ground in the country's north, previously had the fourth largest nuclear weapon arsenal in the world, but renounced its arsenal after gaining independence.

Central Asia joins the four other nuclear-weapon-free zones: Latin America and the Caribbean, the South Pacific, South-East Asia and Africa.

Mr. Ban pointed out that the Treaty is also "significant" because it sets up the first nuclear-weapons-free zone requiring parties to fully comply with the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT).

Additionally, the five nations must also conclude and bring into force an Additional Protocol of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). The Protocol is a set of safeguards to boost the IAEA's ability to ensure that a State does not have undeclared nuclear material.

"In order to ensure the effective implementation of the Treaty, the Secretary-General would like to urge the States concerned to address any outstanding issues that may affect its operation," according to a statement issued by Mr. Ban's spokesperson.

With the review of the UN-backed Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), which forms the foundation of the world's nuclear non-proliferation regime, coming up next year, the Secretary-General said that he "trusts that the entry into force of the Treaty on a Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone in Central Asia will reinforce efforts to strengthen the global nuclear non-proliferation regime, underline the strategic and moral value of nuclear-weapon-free zones, as well as the possibilities for greater progress on a range of issues in the pursuit of a world free of nuclear weapons."

<http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=30251&Cr=non-proliferation&Cr1=disarmament#>

[\(Return to Articles and Documents List\)](#)

Honolulu Advertiser
March 22, 2009

Searching For Sunken Weaponry

By William Cole, Advertiser Columnist

A 2007 report to Congress said 2,558 tons of chemical agents were dumped at three deep-water sites off O'ahu, including lewisite, mustard, cyanogen chloride and cyanide.

Included in the ordnance dump were 15,000 M70 115-pound mustard bombs, 1,100 M79 1,000-pound cyanogen chloride bombs and 20 M79 1,000-pound cyanide rounds. The weapons are in water up to 10,000 feet deep.

So it's a bit anti-climactic to hear that 16 dives to a site three to six miles south of Pearl Harbor by the University of Hawai'i's deep-diving submersibles found possibly 1,000 or more munitions, but not some of the volumes noted above.

To back up a bit, the Army contracted with UH to investigate the site using remote sensing equipment, dive down in its submersibles Pisces IV and V, and take sediment and water column samples in the area of the munitions to see if chemical agents were having any long-term environmental effect.

The weapons were dumped at the end of and after World War II. The dives were conducted earlier this month over 2 1/2 weeks in water 900 to 1,600 feet deep.

"We found scattered containers that were used for both conventional and chemical (weapons), and it's going to take the Army guys really looking at the photographs for them to decide which they think it is," said Margo Edwards, UH's principal investigator for the project. "(But) there was not anything that was approaching 1,000 of the 100-pound chemical-looking (munitions)."

What was found spanned a pretty wide gamut, including probable incendiary bombs and depth charges, as well as ammo cases, Edwards said.

But there was never any clear sign of colored bands, which might indicate a chemical fill.

"The deterioration of the outer casings was such that you just couldn't see. Every once in a while we'd see a letter or some writing, but we never saw anything that looked like (bands)," Edwards said.

Edwards has a couple theories for not finding bombs aplenty.

"We only looked at a 70-square-kilometer area. It's a big ocean, so we might not have looked in the right area," Edwards said. "The other thing is, I don't think there is going to be such a thing as the discovery of a huge pile. I could be wrong, but everything we've seen thus far looks like the ships were steaming above and a few pieces were being thrown over at a time."

So instead of big piles, the munitions may be in trails snaking along the bottom.

"There were places where we saw sort of smallish 18-inch shells where there were almost 20 of them in your field of view at a time," she said. "Then, we'd go for dives where we saw one or two things that were munitions."

Hundreds of sediment and water samples have been sent off for analysis. A final report is expected in about a year.

"I hope there's the possibility of going back. I'm certainly in discussions about that, but I don't decide," Edwards said.

The Army, directed by Congress to investigate the dumping, said it was spending about \$3 million for the UH research, and \$4.75 million to separately investigate and conduct the removal of some nearshore munitions near Wai'anae.

Edwards said a remote sensing system was used to map ordnance on the ocean floor before the submersibles were used to dive on the trails of munitions.

<http://www.honoluluadvertiser.com/article/20090322/COLUMNISTS32/903220350/1236>

[\(Return to Articles and Documents List\)](#)

Wall Street Journal
OPINION
March 21, 2009

Iran's Axis Of Nuclear Evil

By John Bolton

While President Obama's unanticipated Nowruz holiday greeting to Iran generated considerable press attention, his video wasn't really this week's big news related to the Islamic Republic. Far more important was that a senior defector -- Iran's former Deputy Minister of Defense Ali Reza Asghari -- disclosed Tehran's financing of Syria's nuclear weapons program. That program's centerpiece was a North Korean nuclear reactor in Syria. Israel destroyed it in September 2007.

At this point, it is impossible to ignore Iran's active efforts to expand, improve and conceal its nuclear weapons program in Syria while it pretends to "negotiate" with Britain, France and Germany (the "EU-3"). No amount of video messages will change this reality. The question is whether this new information about Iran will sink in, or if Washington will continue to turn a blind eye toward Iran's nuclear deceptions.

That the Pyongyang-Damascus-Tehran nuclear axis went undetected and unacknowledged for so long is an intelligence failure of the highest magnitude. It represents a plain unwillingness to allow hard truths to overcome well-entrenched policy views disguised as intelligence findings.

Key elements of our intelligence community (IC) fought against the idea of a Syrian nuclear program for years. In mid-2003, I had a bitter struggle with several IC agencies -- news of which was leaked to the press -- concerning my testimony before the House Foreign Affairs Committee about the Syrian program. Then Sen. Joe Biden made the Syria testimony an issue in my 2005 confirmation battle to become ambassador to the United Nations, alleging that I had tried to hype concern about Syria's nuclear intentions. (In fact, my testimony, in both its classified and unclassified versions, was far more anodyne than the facts warranted.)

Key IC agencies made two arguments in 2003 against the possibility of a clandestine Syrian nuclear weapons program. First, they argued that Syria lacked the scientific and technological capabilities to sustain such a program. Second, they said that Syria did not have the necessary economic resources to fund a program.

These assertions were not based on highly classified intelligence. Instead, they were personal views that some IC members developed based on public information. The intelligence that did exist -- which I thought warranted close observation of Syria, at a minimum -- the IC discounted as inconsistent with its fixed opinions. In short, theirs was not an intelligence conclusion, but a policy view presented under the guise of intelligence.

How wrong they were.

As for Syria's technical expertise, North Korea obviously had the scientific and technological ability to construct the reactor, which was essentially a clone of the North's own at Yongbyon. Moreover, it is entirely possible that Syria's nuclear program -- undertaken with Pyongyang's assistance -- is even more extensive. We will certainly never know from Syria directly, since Damascus continues to deny it has any nuclear program whatever. It's also stonewalling investigation efforts by the International Atomic Energy Agency.

As for Syria's ability to finance a nuclear program, Iran could easily supply whatever Syria might need -- even in a time of fluctuating oil prices. Moreover, given Iran's hegemony over Syria, it is impossible to believe Syria would ever undertake extensive nuclear cooperation with North Korea without Iran's acquiescence. Iran was likely an active partner in a three-way joint venture on the reactor, supplying key financial support and its own share of scientific knowledge. Cooperation on ballistic missile programs between Pyongyang and Tehran is longstanding and well-advanced, and thereby forms a basis of trust for nuclear cooperation. Moreover, both Iran and North Korea share a common incentive: to conceal illicit nuclear weapons programs from international scrutiny. What better way to hide such programs than to conduct them in a third country where no one is looking?

Uncovering the North Korean reactor in Syria was a grave inconvenience for the Bush administration. It enormously complicated both the failing six-party talks on North Korea and the EU-3's diplomatic efforts with Iran, which Secretaries of State Colin Powell and Condoleezza Rice so actively supported.

Mr. Asghari's revelations about Iranian financing of Syria's nuclear program -- if borne out -- will have precisely the same negative impact on Obama administration policies, since they track Mr. Bush's so closely. In fact, the two administrations' approaches differ only to the extent that Mr. Obama is poised to pursue policies, like face-to-face

negotiations with Iran, that the second term Bush State Department wanted to do, but faced too much internal dissonance to implement.

The Nowruz video reflects the dominant view within the Obama administration that its "open hand" will be reciprocated. It's likely Iran will respond affirmatively to the near-plaintive administration request to "engage."

And why not? Such dialogue allows Iran to conceal its true intentions and activities under the camouflage of negotiations, just as it has done for the past six years with the EU-3. What's more, Iran will see it as confirmation of U.S. weakness and evidence that its policies are succeeding.

There is very little time for Mr. Obama to change course before he is committed to negotiations. He could start by following Iran's money trail.

Mr. Bolton, a senior fellow at the American Enterprise Institute, is the author of "Surrender Is Not an Option: Defending America at the United Nations" (Simon & Schuster, 2007).

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[\(Return to Articles and Documents List\)](#)

New York Post

OPINION

March 21, 2009

Behind Moscow's Arms Buildup

By Amir Taheri

RUSSIAN President Dmitry Medvedev has unveiled a plan that commits his government to spending \$140 billion on arms within the next two years, the most massive rearmament program in Russian history.

The package is part of what Medvedev calls the New Russian Defense Doctrine, a program of sweeping reform to be completed by 2020. The headlines focus on the modernization of Russia's nuclear capability, but the really significant changes are elsewhere.

Medvedev justified his new military budget by pointing to NATO's further extension to countries closer to Russia, notably Ukraine. But no one in Moscow believes war with NATO is even remotely probable. The new doctrine is prompted, at least in part, by three other fears:

Ethnic unrest: Russia is still smarting from its long war in Chechnya which it only won after the Americans destroyed the Chechen camps in Afghanistan and dismantled the network of logistics that supplied the Islamist rebels.

China's rise: Throughout its history, Russia has seldom felt threatened from the East. Yet it suffered the most humiliating defeat in its history at the hands of an Eastern power, Japan, in 1904.

Islamist militancy: This is now symbolized by the regime in Iran Russia's neighbor.

In 1802 when Russia won the first of its three major wars against Iran, it boasted a population of 80 million compared to Iran's 5 million. Today, Iran has a population of 75 million compared to Russia's 140 million. With Russian demography in decline, Iran is slated to win the demographic race within two decades. By then, Tehran may also have developed a nuclear arsenal.

Complicating matters further, Muslim ethnic groups represent the only growing communities in Russia and many, including sizable nations like the Tatars and Bashkirs, are asserting their Islamic identity.

While the Orthodox Church seems to be back in the country's European regions, Islam is on the ascendancy in the Asian regions. Islamic missionaries, trained and financed by Arab states and Iran, are busy (re-)converting a growing number of people while building mosques and Koranic schools. In current estimates, Muslims account for almost 17 percent of Russia's population. Official studies suggest that Muslims could become a majority by the middle of the century.

In Siberia and the Far East, Moscow also faces the challenge of massive Chinese and Mongolian immigration. In some Russian border areas, ethnic Chinese, including millions of Muslims, already form a majority.

The Russian army is still based on conscription and Muslims represent almost half of all recruits. Medvedev wants to scrap conscription and develop an entirely professional army. The first model units already set up consist entirely of ethnic Russians.

Under the new doctrine, Russia's armed forces, now numbering almost 2 million, will be cut by almost half. Instead, there will be a massive increase in modern equipment. The huge but slow divisional units will be replaced by highly mobile brigades, modeled on the British army.

The new doctrine spells the end of two key concepts. The first is that of mass mobilization. Throughout its history, Russia has used demography against adversaries with smaller populations. Russian defense assumes the quick mobilization of up to 10 million men. With conscription phased out, the idea of a mass land force offering endless cannon fodder will be shelved.

The second concept is that of defense in depth with scorched-earth tactics. Russia depended on its huge land mass to destroy such invaders as Napoleon and Hitler. Under the new doctrine, it will move quickly to prevent the enemy from entering Russian territory. Medvedev spoke of pre-emptive war as an integral part of the new doctrine.

For all his talk of an imaginary threat from NATO, Medvedev's new doctrine is designed to adopt the NATO model. That, in turn, could make it easier for Russia to join NATO when and if there is a new mood in Moscow. That, however, is another story.

Amir Taheri's new book is "The Persian Night: Iran Under the Khomeinist Revolution."

http://www.nypost.com/seven/03212009/postopinion/opedcolumnists/behind_moscows_arms_buildup_160537.htm

[\(Return to Articles and Documents List\)](#)

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Iran Has Started a Mideast Arms Race

By AMIR TAHERI

In the capitals of Western nations, Abdul Qadeer Khan, the man regarded as the father of the Pakistani atom bomb, is regarded as a maverick with a criminal past. In addition to his well-documented role in developing a nuclear device for Pakistan, he helped Iran and North Korea with their nuclear programs.

But since his release from house arrest a month ago, Mr. Khan has entertained a string of official visitors from across the Middle East. All come with messages of sympathy; and some governments in that region are looking to him for the knowledge and advice they need to fast track their own illicit nuclear projects.

Make no mistake: The Middle East may be on the verge of a nuclear arms race triggered by the inability of the West to stop Iran's quest for a bomb. Since Tehran's nuclear ambitions hit the headlines five years ago, 25 countries -- 10 of them in the greater Middle East -- have announced plans to build nuclear power plants for the first time.

The six-nation Gulf Cooperation Council (Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates [UAE] and Oman) set up a nuclear exploratory commission in 2007 to prepare a "strategic report" for submission to the alliance's summit later this year. But Saudi Arabia is not waiting for the report. It opened negotiations with the U.S. in 2008 to obtain "a nuclear capacity," ostensibly for "peaceful purposes."

Egypt also signed a nuclear cooperation agreement, with France, last year. Egyptian leaders make no secret of the fact that the decision to invest in a costly nuclear industry was prompted by fears of Iran. "A nuclear armed Iran with hegemonic ambitions is the greatest threat to Arab nations today," President Hosni Mubarak told the Arab summit in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia two weeks ago.

Last November, France concluded a similar nuclear cooperation accord with the UAE, promising to offer these oil-rich lands "a complete nuclear industry." According to the foreign ministry in Paris, the French are building a military base close to Abu Dhabi ostensibly to protect the nuclear installations against "hostile action," including the possibility of "sensitive material" being stolen by terrorist groups or smuggled to Iran.

The UAE, to be sure, has signed a cooperation agreement with the U.S. forswearing the right to enrich uranium or produce plutonium in exchange for American nuclear technology and fuel. The problem is that the UAE's commercial hub, the sheikhdom of Dubai, has been the nerve center of illicit trade with Iran for decades, according

to Western and Arab intelligence. Through Dubai, stolen U.S. technology and spent fuel needed for producing raw material for nuclear weapons could be smuggled to Iran.

Qatar, the smallest GCC member by population, is also toying with the idea of creating a nuclear capability. According to the Qatari media, it is shopping around in the U.S., France, Germany and China.

Newly liberated Iraq has not been spared by the new nuclear fever. Recall the history. With help from France, Iraq developed a nuclear capacity in the late 1970s to counterbalance its demographic inferiority vis-à-vis Iran. In 1980, Israel destroyed Osirak, the French-built nuclear center close to Baghdad, but Saddam Hussein restored part of that capacity between 1988 and 1991. What he rebuilt was dismantled by the United Nations' inspectors between 1992 and 2003. But with Saddam dead and buried, some Iraqis are calling for a revival of the nation's nuclear program as a means of deterring "bullying and blackmail from the mullahs in Tehran," as parliamentarian Saleh al-Mutlaq has put it.

"A single tactical nuclear attack on Basra and Baghdad could wipe out a third of our population," a senior Iraqi official told me, on condition of anonymity. Since almost 90% of Iraqis live within 90 miles of the Iranian border, the "fear is felt in every town and village," he says.

Tehran, meanwhile, is playing an active part in proliferation. So far, Syria and Sudan have shown interest in its nuclear technology, setting up joint scientific committees with Iran, according to the official Islamic Republic News Agency. Iranian media reports say Tehran is also setting up joint programs with a number of anti-U.S. regimes in Latin America, notably Venezuela, Bolivia, Nicaragua and Ecuador, bringing proliferation to America's backyard.

According to official reports in Tehran, in 2006 and 2007 the Islamic Republic also initialed agreements with China to build 20 nuclear-power stations in Iran. The first of these stations is already under construction at Dar-Khuwayn, in the oil-rich province of Khuzestan close to the Iraqi border.

There is no doubt that the current nuclear race in the Middle East is largely prompted by the fear of a revolutionary Iran using an arsenal as a means of establishing hegemony in the region. Iran's rivals for regional leadership, especially Turkey, Egypt and Saudi Arabia, are aware of the propaganda appeal of the Islamic Republic's claim of being "the first Muslim superpower" capable of defying the West and rivaling it in scientific and technological fields. In that context, Tehran's development of long-range missiles and the Muslim world's first space satellite are considered political coups.

Mohamed al Quwaihis, a member of Saudi Arabia's appointed parliament, the Shura Council, warns of Iran's growing influence. Addressing the Shura Council earlier this month, he described Iranian interferences in Arab affairs as "overt," and claimed that Iran is "endeavoring to seduce the Gulf States, and recruit some of the citizens of these countries to work for its interests."

The Shura devoted a recent session to "the Iranian threat," insisting that unless Tehran abandoned its nuclear program, Saudi Arabia should lead the Arabs in developing their own "nuclear response." The debate came just days after the foreign ministry in Riyadh issued a report identifying the Islamic Republic's nuclear program as the "principal security threat to Arab nations."

A four-nation Arab summit held in the Saudi capital on March 11 endorsed that analysis, giving the green light for a pan-Arab quest for "a complete nuclear industry." Such a project would draw support from Pakistan, whose nuclear industry was built with Arab money. Mr. Khan and his colleagues have an opportunity to repay that debt by helping Arabs step on a ladder that could lead them to the coveted "threshold" to becoming nuclear powers in a few years' time.

Earlier this month, Mohamed ElBaradei, the retiring head of the International Atomic Energy Agency, warned that the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty has become a blunt instrument in preventing a nuclear arms race. Meanwhile, the U.S., France, Russia and China are competing for nuclear contracts without developing safeguards to ensure that projects which start as peaceful undertakings are not used as cover for clandestine military activities.

The Obama administration should take the growing threat of nuclear proliferation seriously. It should try to provide leadership in forging a united response by the major powers to what could become the world's No. 1 security concern within the next few years.

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[\(Return to Articles and Documents List\)](#)