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RIA Novosti

05 May 2009

Russia's Medvedev Welcomes New U.S. Stance on Missile Defense

BARVIKHA (Moscow Region), May 5 (RIA Novosti) - Russian President Dmitry Medvedev welcomed on Tuesday the readiness of the new U.S. administration to take on board Moscow's objections to the deployment of a U.S. missile shield in Central Europe.

Moscow considers Washington's plans to deploy a tracking radar in the Czech Republic and interceptor missiles in Poland to be a threat to Russian security. The United States has argued the facilities are necessary to guard against the threat of missile attacks from states such as Iran.

"I am pleased that our American partners are showing willingness to discuss this issue rather than take a stubborn stance and deploy [the shield] no matter what," Medvedev said at a meeting with A Just Russia party activists.

"Missile defenses [in Europe] are not the best idea proposed by the previous U.S. administration... it is an idea that was adopted without consulting certain NATO and EU institutions," he said.

Top Russian officials have repeatedly expressed their hope that the new U.S. administration will not follow through with the plans, and Medvedev said after talks with U.S. President Barack Obama in April that both countries would make every effort "to find a way out of this difficult situation."

Medvedev also said that Russia's initiative on a new pan-European security treaty was being cautiously received in Western countries.

"Of course, our European colleagues are trying to study it under a microscope, but this is understandable, and we are ready for discussions," he said. "It is a good idea, and it should be promoted."

Medvedev proposed the idea of a new European security treaty in Berlin last June, saying it should include peaceful conflict prevention and settlement arrangements, confidence building measures, and arms control mechanisms.

<http://en.rian.ru/russia/20090505/121447214.html>

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New York Times

May 5, 2009

U.S. Negotiator Signals Flexibility Toward Moscow Over New Round Of Arms Talks

By Ellen Barry

MOSCOW — The top arms control negotiator for the United States said on Monday that the government was willing to agree to count both nuclear warheads and their delivery vehicles when renegotiating the 1991 Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty, or Start — addressing one of Russia's longstanding concerns.

In an interview with the Russian news service Interfax, the negotiator, Assistant Secretary of State Rose Gottemoeller, also said the United States was open to a Russian proposal to use radar based in Azerbaijan or Southern Russia, rather than Eastern Europe, for the proposed missile defense system.

Officials from the administration of President George W. Bush had not followed up on the idea of relocating the radar from Eastern Europe, where Russia fears it would be part of a missile defense system that would be used against it. American officials have contended that the system is meant as a deterrent to Iran.

"I understood from talking to Russian counterparts that the offer is still on the table," Ms. Gottemoeller was quoted by Interfax as saying. "I think, personally, that it is an offer that the United States should be willing to explore."

The comments clarified Washington's position ahead of the first full talks on replacing Start, which are scheduled this month in Moscow, and set aside several problematic issues for later. With the landmark 1991 agreement due to expire on Dec. 5, the two sides have agreed to make significant further cuts in the number of nuclear warheads they have deployed, likely to a ceiling of between 1,000 and 1,500 each.

A short-term agreement, signed by Mr. Bush in 2002, requires each country to reduce its arsenal to fewer than 2,200 warheads by 2012. The agreement does not apply to delivery vehicles, which is a particular concern of the Russian side because of fears that nuclear warheads removed from delivery systems would simply be replaced by conventional weapons.

Ms. Gottemoeller said Washington would not agree to count warheads that are in storage, another Russian proposal, saying it would mean "a new phase and a very different approach to the strategic arms reductions we have ever had in the past."

"I think we have to consider it as something for the future," she said.

She said the United States would happily consider cuts in the number of nonstrategic, or tactical, nuclear weapons after the December deadline, saying Russia "has not been too keen to engage in those negotiations." Russia has four to six times as many tactical nuclear weapons as the United States, and has looked at them as a way to offset the gap in their conventional capabilities, according to Steven Pifer, a visiting fellow at the Brookings Institution. The comments — particularly those on missile defense, delivery systems and tactical nuclear weapons — are "more in Moscow's favor," said Peter Crail, an analyst at the Washington-based Arms Control Association.

"That doesn't mean there aren't going to still be some pretty hairy issues to deal with," Mr. Crail said. "It's certainly a bit of a move in their direction."

<http://www.nytimes.com/2009/05/05/world/europe/05russia.html>

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Washington Post

May 5, 2009

U.S. Wants Israel, India in Anti-Nuclear Arms Treaty

By Louis Charbonneau

Reuters

UNITED NATIONS (Reuters) - India, Pakistan, North Korea and Israel should join the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, the global pact meant to limit the spread of atomic weapons, a senior U.S. official said on Tuesday.

Speaking on the second day of a two-week meeting of the 189 signatories of the pact, Assistant Secretary of State Rose Gottemoeller also defended a U.S.-India civilian nuclear deal, which developing nations have complained rewards New Delhi for staying outside the NPT.

"Universal adherence to the NPT itself, including by India, Israel, Pakistan and North Korea ... remains a fundamental objective of the United States," Gottemoeller told the meeting, which hopes to agree on an agenda and plan to overhaul the treaty at a review conference next year.

Speaking to reporters later, she declined to say whether Washington would take any new steps to press Israel to join the treaty and give up any nuclear weapons it has. Israel neither confirms nor denies whether it has what arms control experts assume to be a sizable atomic arsenal.

The administration of President Barack Obama was encouraging all holdouts to join the treaty, she said.

Nuclear-armed India and Pakistan have never signed the treaty. North Korea withdrew from it in 2003 and tested a nuclear device in 2006.

At the NPT meeting, developing countries have criticized the endorsement of the U.S.-India nuclear agreement by the 45-nation Nuclear Suppliers Group, an informal club of the world's top producers of nuclear-related technology.

The group agreed in September to lift a ban on nuclear trade with India, imposed after New Delhi's first nuclear test in 1974.

Delegates from poor nations complain that the endorsement was tantamount to rewarding India for remaining outside the treaty and secretly developing nuclear weapons. In contrast, they say, developing states are denied access to sensitive technology because they are often deemed proliferation risks.

NO MENTION OF IRAN

Gottemoeller defended the agreement. "India is coming closer to the non-proliferation regime," she said.

She cited India's willingness to work with Washington in pushing for a binding international treaty that would prohibit the further production of bomb-grade nuclear material and by improving its nuclear export controls.

Iran's Deputy Foreign Minister Mohammad Ali Hosseini on Monday railed against the United States and what he said was its continued nuclear support for the "Zionist regime" (Israel). Western diplomats called this an attempt to divert attention away from its own nuclear program.

In failing to mention Iran even once in her speech, Gottemoeller broke from a tradition established by the administration of former President George W. Bush, which had used NPT meetings to criticize Iran and North Korea.

Gottemoeller said that Iran came up indirectly in her statement when she spoke of the need for "consequences for those breaking the rules or withdrawing from the treaty."

Obama has offered Iran's leaders direct talks on a wide range of issues, including its nuclear program. Tehran has reacted coolly to the U.S. overtures nearly three decades after Washington severed ties with Tehran during a hostage crisis.

The West suspects Iran is developing weapons under cover of a civilian atomic energy program, a charge Tehran denies.

Gottemoeller also reiterated commitments to disarmament that Obama made in a speech in Prague last month. She said the United States would continue its two-decade long moratorium on testing nuclear explosives and urged others to follow suit.

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/05/05/AR2009050502530.html>

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Washington Post
May 6, 2009

Obama: Tougher Treaty to Halt Nuke Weapons Needed

By EDITH M. LEDERER
The Associated Press

UNITED NATIONS -- President Barack Obama urged delegates at a U.N. meeting to strengthen the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty so it can deal with the threats of nuclear terrorism and the spread of nuclear weapons.

Obama's message was read Tuesday at a meeting to lay the groundwork for a 2010 conference to review the treaty and comes after his pledge last month in Prague to reduce and eventually eliminate nuclear weapons.

The pledge won praise Monday from China and developing countries, and spurred hope that the new U.S. policy and new U.S.-Russian cooperation will end a long deadlock on global disarmament efforts.

In Tuesday's message, Obama called for dialogue to overcome differences among the parties to the treaty to ensure that it remains the cornerstone of global disarmament and nonproliferation efforts and "continues to make an enduring contribution to international peace and security."

The last NPT review conference in 2005 failed to make substantive progress because of bickering over procedural issues and underlying disagreements between countries that do and don't possess nuclear weapons.

Rose Gottemoeller, a U.S. assistant secretary of state who heads the American team negotiating arms reductions, read Obama's message and said the U.S. wants a review process with balanced emphasis on the treaty's three pillars _ disarmament, nonproliferation and peaceful uses of nuclear energy.

The NPT requires signatory nations not to pursue nuclear weapons in exchange for a commitment by the five nuclear powers _ the U.S., Russia, Britain, France and China _ to move toward nuclear disarmament.

It also gives all treaty members the right to develop peaceful programs to produce nuclear power.

"We must strengthen the NPT to deal effectively with the threat of nuclear weapons and nuclear terrorism," Obama said. "Action is needed to improve verification and compliance with the NPT and to foster the responsible and widest possible use of nuclear energy by all states."

In a joint declaration on April 1, Obama and Russian President Dmitry Medvedev ordered negotiators to start work on a new treaty to reduce their nuclear stockpiles as a first step toward "a nuclear-weapon-free world."

Gottemoeller said she and her Russian counterpart would hold a second meeting in Moscow after the U.N. meeting ends.

And she pledged her "best efforts" to meet the goals set by the U.S. and Russian leaders to report on progress by July and to reach agreement before the current strategic arms-control treaty expires in December.

She said there are currently 190 countries that are parties to the NPT and the U.S. is encouraging the three holdouts _ India, Pakistan and Israel _ to join the treaty, and North Korea to come back.

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/05/06/AR2009050602144.html>

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Mainichi Daily News – Japan
6 May 2009

Nuclear Disarmament Commission Eyes Elimination of World's Nuclear Weapons from 2025

A draft report of the international nuclear disarmament commission that the Japanese and Australian governments set up last year has concluded that nuclear weapons can be eliminated from the world beginning in 2025.

The International Commission on Nuclear Non-proliferation and Disarmament's draft report, whose details became available Tuesday, states that nuclear weapons can be eliminated under a three-stage process in which the role of nuclear weapons is first lowered by having nuclear powers -- led by the United States -- limit the purpose of their arsenals to deterrence. The final version of the report is due to be compiled this autumn.

The draft, which adopts a theme of eliminating the threat of nuclear weapons with a concrete action plan targeting the world's policymakers, is separated into three sections: the world in crisis, policy options and constraints, and a concrete action plan.

The action plan sets short-, mid- and long-term goals. It states that the elimination of nuclear weapons is a feasible and realistic goal that can be achieved while maintaining the security of each country.

The short-term aims (between 2009 and 2012) are designed to be carried out during U.S. President Barack Obama's first term. Under the proposals, the U.S. president would release a statement saying that as long as other nuclear powers did not use nuclear weapons, then the U.S. would not use them, and that their use would be limited to deterrence for the U.S. and its allies. Furthermore, a declaration would also be made together with other nuclear powers, saying that each country would consider renouncing first-strike use of nuclear weapons.

Ratification of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty would be encouraged, and negotiations would begin over a treaty to ban the production of fissionable materials used in nuclear weapons, achieving a halt to Iran's nuclear development and denuclearization of North Korea at an early stage.

The mid-term goal, to be achieved by 2025, is to have each country reduce its nuclear capability to the minimum level necessary for security, and call off preparations for nuclear warfare. The long-term goal, from 2025 onwards, is to form an international verification system, to prevent secret nuclear weapons development.

The Japanese government has taken an opposing stance toward the elimination of first-strike use of nuclear weapons, saying that verification difficulties would lead to weakened security. However, former Japanese Foreign Minister Yoriko Kawaguchi, who chairs the International Commission on Nuclear Non-proliferation and

Disarmament together with former Australian Foreign Minister Gareth Evans, has stressed that it is important to move the process forward.

"We will have (the U.S.) firmly guarantee the security of its allies (even if it declares that it will abandon first-strike use of nuclear weapons). It's important to go a half step further than the Japanese government," she said.

The International Commission on Nuclear Non-proliferation and Disarmament was proposed by Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd, and at a Japan-Australia summit meeting in July 2008, Rudd and then Japanese Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda agreed to establish the commission. It has 15 commissioners altogether, including William Perry, former U.S. secretary of defense, and representatives of countries including Russia, China, Britain and India. It is hoped that in the commission Japan and Australia, allies of the United States, will be able to encourage the U.S. to reduce its nuclear arms by presenting a realistic nuclear disarmament process.

<http://mdn.mainichi.jp/mdnnews/news/20090506p2a00m0na010000c.html>

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Washington Times
May 6, 2009

Secret U.S.-Israel Nuclear Accord In Jeopardy

By Eli Lake, The Washington Times

President Obama's efforts to curb the spread of nuclear weapons threaten to expose and derail a 40-year-old secret U.S. agreement to shield Israel's nuclear weapons from international scrutiny, former and current U.S. and Israeli officials and nuclear specialists say.

The issue will likely come to a head when Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu meets with Mr. Obama on May 18 in Washington. Mr. Netanyahu is expected to seek assurances from Mr. Obama that he will uphold the U.S. commitment and will not trade Israeli nuclear concessions for Iranian ones.

Assistant Secretary of State Rose Gottemoeller, speaking Tuesday at a U.N. meeting on the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), said Israel should join the treaty, which would require Israel to declare and relinquish its nuclear arsenal.

"Universal adherence to the NPT itself, including by India, Israel, Pakistan and North Korea, ... remains a fundamental objective of the United States," Ms. Gottemoeller told the meeting, according to Reuters.

She declined to say, however, whether the Obama administration would press Israel to join the treaty.

A senior White House official said the administration considered the nuclear programs of Israel and Iran to be unrelated "apples and oranges."

Asked by The Washington Times whether the administration would press Israel to join the NPT, the official said, "We support universal adherence to the NPT. [It] remains a long-term goal."

The official spoke on the condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the issue.

Avner Cohen, author of "Israel and the Bomb" and the leading expert outside the Israeli government on the history of Israel's nuclear program, said Mr. Obama's "upcoming meeting with Netanyahu, due to the impending discussions with Iran, will be a platform for Israel to ask for reassurances that old understandings on the nuclear issue are still valid."

For the past 40 years, Israel and the U.S. have kept quiet about an Israeli nuclear arsenal that is now estimated at 80 to 200 weapons. Israel has promised not to test nuclear weapons while the U.S. has not pressed Israel to sign the nuclear NPT, which permits only five countries - the U.S., France, Britain, China and Russia - to have nuclear arms.

The U.S. also has opposed most regional calls for a "nuclear-free Middle East." The accord was forged at a summit between Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir and President Nixon on Sept. 25, 1969, according to recently released documents, but remains so secret that there is no explicit record of it. Mr. Cohen has referred to the deal as "don't ask, don't tell," because it commits both the U.S. and Israel never to acknowledge in public Israel's nuclear arsenal.

When asked what the Obama administration's position was on the 1969 understanding, the senior White House official offered no comment.

Over the years, demands for Israel to come clean have multiplied.

The Iran factor

Iranian leaders have long complained about being subjected to a double standard that allows non-NPT members India and Pakistan, as well as Israel, to maintain and even increase their nuclear arsenals but sanctions Tehran, an NPT member, for not cooperating fully with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the U.N. nuclear watchdog.

On Monday, Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Mohammad Ali Hosseini told a U.N. meeting preparing for a major review of the NPT next year that nuclear cooperation by the U.S., France and Britain with Israel is "in total disregard with the obligations under the treaty and commitments undertaken in 1995 and 2000, and a source of real concern for the international community, especially the parties to the treaty in the Middle East."

The Obama administration is seeking talks with Iran on its nuclear program and has dropped a precondition for negotiations that Iran first suspend its uranium enrichment program.

"What the Israelis sense, rightly, is that Obama wants to do something new on Iran and this may very well involve doing something new about Israel's program," said Henry Sokolski, executive director of the Nuclear Nonproliferation Policy Education Center, a Washington think tank.

Bruce Riedel, a former senior director for the Middle East and South Asia on the White House National Security Council, said, "If you're really serious about a deal with Iran, Israel has to come out of the closet. A policy based on fiction and double standards is bound to fail sooner or later. What's remarkable is that it's lasted so long." Mr. Riedel headed the Obama administration's review of strategy toward Afghanistan and Pakistan but does not hold a permanent administration position and has returned to private life as a scholar at the Brookings Institution.

The open secret

Elliott Abrams, deputy national security adviser for the George W. Bush administration, said that administration resisted international efforts to pressure Israel on the nuclear front.

"We did not want to accept any operational language that would put Israel at a disadvantage and raise the question of whether Israel was a nuclear power," he said. "That was not a discussion that we thought was helpful. We allowed very general statements about the goal of a nuclear-free Middle East as long that language was hortatory."

Israel began its nuclear program shortly after the state was founded in 1948 and produced its first weapons, according to Mr. Cohen's book, on the eve of the 1967 Six-Day War. Israeli defense doctrine considers the nuclear arsenal to be a strategic deterrent against extinction. But its nuclear monopoly is increasingly jeopardized by Iranian advances and the possibility that Iran's program could trigger a nuclear arms race in the region.

Israel's arsenal has also been an open secret for decades, despite the fact that Israeli law forbids Israeli journalists from referring to the state's nuclear weapons unless they quote non-Israeli sources.

In 1986, the Israeli nuclear scientist, Mordecai Vanunu disclosed in the Sunday Times of London photographs and the first insider account of Dimona, the location of Israel's primary nuclear facility. Israel responded by convicting him of treason. He was released in 2004 after spending 18 years in prison but has continued to talk about the program on occasion. The government has barred Mr. Vanunu from leaving Israel.

'Nuclear-free' zone

References to a "nuclear-free Middle East," meanwhile, have cropped up increasingly in international resolutions and conferences. For example, the 1991 U.N. Security Council Resolution 687, which sanctioned Saddam Hussein's Iraq, noted "the objective of achieving balanced and comprehensive control of armaments in the region." More recently, a March 2006 IAEA resolution, in referring Iran to the Security Council, noted "that a solution to the Iranian issue would contribute to global nonproliferation efforts and to realizing the objective of a Middle East free of weapons of mass destruction."

U.S. allies Egypt and Saudi Arabia also have pressed the U.S. to link Israel's weapons to Iran's as part of a plan to implement a nuclear-free Middle East.

A proposal to introduce a Security Council resolution declaring the Middle East a nuclear-free zone and calling for sanctions against those countries that did not comply was broached in a 2006 strategic dialogue between Saudi Arabia and the United States, said Turki al-Faisal, who was Saudi ambassador to the U.S.

"When I talked to American officials about that when I was ambassador here, and before that to British officials in the U.K., the immediate response was, 'Israel is not going to accept,'" Prince Turki told editors and reporters of The Washington Times last month. "And my immediate response was, 'So what?' If Israel doesn't accept, it doesn't mean it's a bad idea."

A balancing act

Mr. Netanyahu, whose meeting with Mr. Obama on May 18 will be the first since both took office, raised the issue of the nuclear understanding during a previous tenure as prime minister.

Israeli journalists and officials said Mr. Netanyahu asked for a reaffirmation and clarification of the Nixon-Meir understanding in 1998 at Wye River, where the U.S. mediated an agreement between Israel and the Palestinians. Mr. Netanyahu wanted a personal commitment from President Clinton because of concerns about a treaty that Mr. Clinton supported to bar production of fissile materials that can be used to make weapons. Israel was worried that the treaty would apply to de facto nuclear states, including Israel, and might oblige it to allow inspections of Dimona.

In 2000, Israeli journalist Aluf Benn disclosed that Mr. Clinton at Wye River promised Mr. Netanyahu that "Israel's nuclear capability will be preserved." Mr. Benn described as testy an exchange of letters between the two leaders over the Fissile Material Cut-Off Treaty. He said Mr. Netanyahu wrote Mr. Clinton: "We will never sign the treaty, and do not delude yourselves - no pressure will help. We will not sign the treaty because we will not commit suicide."

The Bush administration largely dropped the treaty in its first term and reopened negotiations in its second term with a proposal that did not include verification.

The Obama agenda

Mr. Obama has made nuclear disarmament a bigger priority in part to undercut Iran's and North Korea's rationale for proliferation. His administration has begun negotiations with Russia on a new treaty to reduce U.S. and Russian arsenals. He also has expressed support for the fissile material treaty.

"To cut off the building blocks needed for a bomb, the United States will seek a new treaty that verifiably ends the production of fissile materials intended for use in state nuclear weapons," he said last month in Prague. "If we are serious about stopping the spread of these weapons, then we should put an end to the dedicated production of weapons-grade materials that create them."

David Albright, president of the Institute for Science and International Security, a Washington think tank, said such a treaty would be the first step toward limiting the Israeli nuclear program.

"The question is how much of a priority is this for the Obama administration?" he said.

John R. Bolton, a former U.N. ambassador and undersecretary of state, said Israel was right to be concerned.

"If I were the Israeli government, I would be very worried about the Obama administration's attitude on their nuclear deterrent," he said. "You can barely raise the subject of nuclear weapons in the Middle East without someone saying: 'What about Israel?' If Israel's opponents put it on the table, it is entirely possible Obama will pick it up."

Asked about the issue, Jonathan Peled, spokesman for the Israeli Embassy in Washington, said, "We don't discuss the strategic relationship between the United States and Israel." The White House had no immediate comment.

However, Ms. Gottemoeller endorsed the concept of a nuclear-free Middle East in a 2005 paper that she co-authored, "Universal Compliance: A Strategy for Nuclear Security."

"Instead of defensively trying to ignore Israel's nuclear status, the United States and Israel should proactively call for regional dialogue to specify the conditions necessary to achieve a zone free of nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons," she wrote.

The paper recommends that Israel take steps to disarm in exchange for its neighbors getting rid of chemical and biological weapons programs as well as Iran forgoing uranium enrichment.

<http://washingtontimes.com/news/2009/may/06/us-weighs-forcing-israel-to-disclose-nukes/>

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London Guardian

6 May 2009

Washington Negotiator Calls on Israel to Sign Nuclear Non Proliferation Treaty

Julian Borger, diplomatic editor

A diplomatic row broke out today between the US and Israel after Washington's chief nuclear arms negotiator called on Israel to sign the Non Proliferation Treaty (NPT), breaking a US tradition of discretion over Israel's nuclear arsenal.

Israeli officials said they were puzzled by a speech to an international conference in New York by Rose Gottemoeller, an assistant secretary of state, who said: "Universal adherence to the NPT itself - including by India, Israel, Pakistan and North Korea - also remains a fundamental objective of the United States."

By including Israel on a list of countries known to have nuclear weapons, Gottemoeller broke with normal US diplomatic practice. Since 1968 when the CIA reported Israel had developed a nuclear weapon, Washington has pursued a policy of not demanding transparency from its close ally, and in return Israel agreed not to test a bomb or declare its nuclear capability - a policy of "strategic ambiguity".

"As far as we are concerned, there is no change to the close dialogue we have with Washington," Yossi Levy, Israeli foreign ministry spokesman, told Reuters. Privately, Israeli officials played down the importance of the NPT as a means of controlling proliferation.

Attempts to stop spread of nuclear weapons face a critical moment over the next year before the NPT comes up for review in 2010, at a time when North Korea has declared the resumption of its nuclear weapons programme, and fears over Iran's intentions threaten to trigger a Middle East arms race. Gottemoeller's speech was made at a meeting to prepare the way for next year's critical NPT review conference.

Daryl Kimball, the executive director of the Arms Control Association in Washington, said that Gottemoeller had not changed the long-held US position - that all states should join the NPT. However, she spelt that position out more explicitly in relation to Israel.

Since Gottemoeller was appointed by Barack Obama last month to lead disarmament talks with Moscow, she has signalled much greater flexibility than the previous administration, telling the Russian Interfax news agency this week that the US was open to a significant compromise on the US missile defence scheme. Moscow had proposed to use relocate radar installations that are part of the US missile defence scheme in southern Russia or Azerbaijan rather than in Eastern Europe, so that Moscow would have greater confidence it could not be used against Russia. The Bush administration rejected the suggestion. Gottemoeller said Washington should consider it.

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2009/may/06/israel-us-nuclear-non-proliferation>

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Washington Post

May 6, 2009

Israel Brushes Off Call to Sign Nuclear Arms Pact

By Allyn Fisher-Ilan

Reuters

JERUSALEM (Reuters) - Israel brushed off Wednesday a U.S. call to sign the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, saying it saw no indication that the Obama administration wanted to revise the secrecy around the assumed Israeli atomic arsenal.

"As far as we are concerned, there is no change to the close dialogue we have with Washington," Foreign Ministry spokesman Yossi Levy said in response to the call by U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Rose Gottemoeller on Israel to join the NPT.

Levy's statement did not elaborate. Such language by Israeli officials in this context refers to Washington's decades-old practice of not asking its ally to come clean on its nuclear capabilities and accept international regulation.

Israel is widely assumed to have the Middle East's only atomic weapons but neither confirms nor denies this under an "ambiguity" billed as deterring foes while avoiding the sort of provocations that can trigger arms races. Arab countries and Iran see a double-standard in the U.S.-sanctioned reticence.

Speaking Tuesday during a meeting at the United Nations of the 189 NPT signatories, Gottemoeller said "universal adherence to the NPT itself, including by India, Israel, Pakistan and North Korea ... remains a fundamental objective of the United States."

She did not say whether the Obama administration planned new steps to press Israel on the issue.

The NPT is designed to facilitate access to peaceful nuclear energy while placing safeguards against the production of bombs, such as mandatory U.N. inspections.

Speaking on condition of anonymity, an Israeli official said NPT membership had not stopped Iraq and Libya from trying to develop nuclear weapons.

"Its effects on Iran have (also) failed to meet the eye," the official told Reuters. "It is therefore hard to understand why there should be such an insistence on a treaty that has proven its inefficiency."

Israel and the West regard Iran's nuclear program as a potential threat, although Tehran insists its purpose is to produce nuclear energy only.

According to declassified American documents cited by the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists magazine, under Richard Nixon the United States knew Israel had developed nuclear weapons but opted against demanding transparency. In turn, Israel agreed not to test a bomb nor declare itself nuclear-armed, scholars say.

The arrangement allows Israel to skirt a U.S. ban on funding states that proliferate weapons of mass-destruction. It can thus enjoy some \$3 billion in annual defense aid from Washington.

(Writing by Dan Williams and Allyn Fisher-Ilan)

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/05/06/AR2009050600255.html>

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Times of India
7 May 2009

Latest from Obama Regime: India, 3 other Countries must Sign NPT

Sachin Parashar, TNN

NEW DELHI: The Obama administration's "different policy orientation" towards India may not have fully unfolded yet, but New Delhi is already facing the heat. After the US ambivalence over India's relations with Pakistan vis-a-vis the war in Afghanistan, comes the statement by assistant secretary of state Rose Gottemoeller that India, Pakistan, Israel and North Korea must sign the Non Proliferation Treaty, the global pact against atomic weapons.

The statement made during a UN meet attended by all 189 NPT signatories might appear generic, as India was named along with the three other recognised sovereign states who have not signed the treaty, but it has certainly riled New Delhi as its stand is unambiguous -- that it abides by non-proliferation in principle but it will not sign the treaty because it discriminates between nuclear weapon states and non-nuclear weapon states.

"We are with the rest of the world as far as non-proliferation is concerned. If we still appear to be dancing to another tune, it's because we don't want to sign a flawed and discriminatory treaty. India is a responsible power as manifested in our no first use commitment," said a senior official who did not want to be named.

Well known strategic affairs expert K Subrahmanyam, however, said India should follow a policy of wait and watch. "India's case is unique and it cannot be bracketed with the three others. The world has recognised that India has a strategic arsenal. The NSG waiver last year was facilitated also by countries like Russia and UK. As for any shift after the Obama administration taking over, I think we should still wait and watch," said Subrahmanyam.

Gottemoeller had said in her statement that adherence to NPT was a fundamental objective for the US. "Universal adherence to the NPT itself, including by India, Israel, Pakistan and North Korea...remains a fundamental objective of the United States," Gottemoeller said in her statement even as she defended the Indo-US civil nuclear deal citing

India's support to the US in conceiving an international treaty that would prohibit the further production of bomb grade nuclear material.

The Obama administration has maintained all along that it wants to strengthen the NPT framework but in the case of India, it might eventually boil down to how the new administrator looks upon India's nuclear weapons. As former US ambassador to India Robert Blackwill said on Tuesday, "It's not clear to me how they regard India's nuclear weapons -- as a destabilising factor in South Asia; as a fact of life to grudgingly tolerate or as a natural development from a close democratic collaborator and rising great power."

He added, "The US should treat India as a nuclear weapon state. Any American backsliding in that regard would produce a very strong negative reaction from New Delhi."

"I would say that with regard to India's agreement with the US on peaceful nuclear uses that the US has been able to agree with India to undertake a number of activities that would bring it in closure cooperation with other countries in the general non-proliferation regime," Gottemoeller said on Tuesday.

<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/India-may-come-under-pressure-from-US-to-sign-NPT/articleshow/4490055.cms>

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The Australian
8 May 2009

US Official Rose Gottemoeller Calls for Israel to Sign Non-Proliferation Treaty

Abraham Rabinovich, Jerusalem

A CALL by a US official for Israel to sign the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) has raised fears in Jerusalem that the Obama administration may be seeking to block the Iranian nuclear threat by sacrificing Israel's reported nuclear arsenal.

US Assistant Secretary of State Rose Gottemoeller said this week: "Universal adherence to the NPT, including by India, Israel, Pakistan and North Korea, remains a fundamental objective of the United States."

The US has quietly accepted Israel's nuclear ambitions over the years because the Jewish state's perceived vulnerability in the Middle East lent legitimacy to its desire for a "doomsday" weapon that could deter its enemies.

"In the past, there was an informal agreement by which the Americans looked the other way (regarding Israel's nuclear program)," said Uzi Even, a former Knesset member and a scientist who was involved in the program. "Now the US is breaching this agreement."

A senior official in Israel's Foreign Ministry said the ministry was "trying to verify" Ms Gottemoeller's statement, apparently meaning it was attempting to determine whether it meant a departure by the new US administration from previous policy. "In any case, it's baffling."

Under the treaty, only five nations are allowed to hold nuclear weapons - the US, Russia, Britain, France and China. All other signatories are obliged not to develop nuclear weapons.

Those that already have nuclear weapons are required to gradually rid themselves of them.

The only non-signatories in the world are the four countries cited by Ms Gottemoeller. India, Pakistan and North Korea have tested nuclear devices. Israel has not but is reported to have up to 200 nuclear warheads.

Under a 40-year-old understanding reportedly achieved between then Israeli prime minister Golda Meir and then US president Richard Nixon, Washington has refrained from pressuring Israel to sign the NPT.

Israel, for its part, maintained ambiguity about its nuclear program and refrained from any nuclear test. It was Israeli President Shimon Peres who formulated Israel's public position in the 1960s when he was deputy defence minister - "Israel will not be the first country to introduce nuclear weapons in the Middle East".

This formula was put to the test in the 1973 Yom Kippur War when the Egyptian and Syrian armies launched a successful surprise attack and for a few days Israel's survival appeared at stake.

Whatever thoughts may have gone through the minds of the leadership, Israel did not threaten to use nuclear weapons. Eventually, its ground forces succeeded in turning the tide.

By choosing nuclear ambiguity, Israel has been able to maintain its deterrent posture while reducing the pressures that would have come with an open declaration of nuclear capability.

However, with the rapid advances Iran is making in its nuclear program, Tehran's complaint of a double-standard towards Israel is being given increasing attention.

Israeli officials have in the past said they would be willing to sign the NPT but only after all Middle Eastern nations, including Iran, have acknowledged Israel's right to exist and signed peace treaties.

<http://www.theaustralian.news.com.au/story/0,25197,25444469-2703,00.html>

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RIA Novosti
07 May 2009

Russia to Deploy Regiment of RS-24 Ballistic Missiles in Late 2009

MOSCOW (RIA Novosti) - Russia will put the first regiment of new-generation RS-24 intercontinental ballistic missiles into service in late 2009, the Strategic Missile Forces (SMF) commander said on Thursday.

"We plan to put the first regiment of mobile [RS-24] missile systems equipped with multiple re-entry vehicle warheads into service by the end of this year," Col. Gen. Nikolai Solovtsov said.

The RS-24 ICBM, which will replace the older SS-18 and SS-19 missiles by 2050, is expected to greatly strengthen the SMF's strike capability, as well as that of its allies until the mid-21st century, Solovtsov said.

The missile will be deployed both in silos and on mobile platforms, and together with the Topol-M single-warhead ICBM will constitute the core of Russia's SMF in the future, he added.

He also said the SMF would conduct at least 14 missile test launches, including space launches, in 2009.

"We are planning 14 launches for various purposes, including the testing of missile components and warheads, the extension of missiles' service life, and space launches," Solovtsov said.

The SMF reportedly has a total of 538 ICBMs, including 306 SS-25 Sickle (Topol) missiles, 88 SS-18 Satan (Voyevoda) and 56 SS-27 Stalin (Topol-M) missiles.

<http://en.rian.ru/russia/20090507/121477681.html>

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RIA Novosti
07 May 2009

Russia Rules Out Cuts to Nuclear Deterrent Budget

MOSCOW (RIA Novosti) - Russia does not plan to cut budget spending on the development of the country's nuclear deterrent despite the ongoing economic crisis, the defense minister said.

The government has reviewed overall defense expenditures under the 2009-2011 federal budget, cutting spending on defense programs by 5.8 billion rubles (\$177 mln) from 1.5 trillion rubles (\$46 bln).

"Everything that relates to the nuclear deterrent, including R&D, prototypes, and especially modernization and existing procurement orders - all of that is a priority and will remain untouched," Anatoly Serdyukov told the government daily Rossiiskaya Gazeta in an interview published on Thursday.

According to Serdyukov, Russia will focus on the procurement and development of Topol-M mobile ballistic missile systems, the RS-24 ICBMs with multiple independently targetable reentry vehicle (MIRV) warheads, the sea-based Bulava ballistic missiles, and the Borey class nuclear-powered strategic submarines.

President Dmitry Medvedev said last year that Russia would make the modernization of its nuclear deterrent and Armed Forces a priority in light of the recent military conflict with Georgia.

"A guaranteed nuclear deterrent system for various military and political circumstances must be provided by 2020," Medvedev said.

<http://en.rian.ru/russia/20090507/121477002.html>

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Global Security Newswire
May 7, 2009

Iran Wields Nuclear Bomb-Building Capability, Senate Report Says

Iran is believed in foreign intelligence circles to have paused formal nuclear-weapon design efforts six years ago after gaining the technical proficiency to build a bomb, the Associated Press reported yesterday (see *GSN*, May 6).

According to a new Senate Foreign Relations Committee report, "intelligence indicates Iran had produced a suitable design, manufactured some components and conducted enough successful explosives tests to put the project on the shelf until it manufactured the fissile material required for several weapons."

The 2007 U.S. National Intelligence Estimate on Iran's nuclear program indicated that global pressure had led Tehran to suspend nuclear-weapon operations in 2003, AP reported.

The report indicates that the conclusion was based on information from "intelligence analysts and nuclear experts working for foreign governments."

"Unclassified U.S. intelligence assessments and staff interviews with government officials and diplomats in Washington and foreign countries leave little doubt that Iran has the technological and industrial capacity to eventually develop an atomic bomb," the report says.

The report also affirms the authenticity of seeming nuclear-weapon information allegedly smuggled out of Iran, turned over to U.S. intelligence officials and later furnished to the International Atomic Energy Agency. The electronic files included such details as missile flight patterns and best warhead detonation altitudes, along with video footage of facilities that intelligence officials described as clandestine Iranian nuclear laboratories.

Iran, which insists its nuclear program never had any military component, has dismissed the electronic documents as U.S. forgeries. However, Senate investigators spoke with officials who said the files "appear to be authentic, right down to the names, addresses and telephone numbers of the workshops," according to the report.

Iran has continued using front firms to pursue components for higher-speed uranium enrichment centrifuges, machines that can produce nuclear power plant fuel but also nuclear-weapon material, the report says. It adds that Tehran in summer 2008 reversed a decision to let IAEA officials inspect possible nuclear workshops (Desmond Butler, Associated Press/Google News, May 6).

"The ultimate solution to the conundrum of Iran's nuclear ambitions is not technical, but political," congressional investigators told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, according to Agence France-Presse.

"Only a political decision by the country's leaders is likely to prevent Iran from someday producing a nuclear weapon. And that decision is inherently reversible," the report states.

"At a minimum, one goal of the administration's strategy on Iran should be to provide the right balance of pressure and opportunity to persuade the regime to agree not to take any further steps toward enhancing its capability to build a bomb and to accept strict verification standards," the report says (Agence France-Presse I/Google News, May 7).

"We are not in 'regime change' mode," committee Chairman John Kerry (D-Mass.) said yesterday (Oliver Knox, Agence France-Presse II/Yahoo!News, May 6).

Meanwhile, Germany has pressed domestic firms to halt trade with Iran in an effort to pressure Tehran to shut down its disputed nuclear work, AFP reported.

Germany exported \$5.2 billion in goods to Iran last year, an 8.3 percent increase from 2007, government statistics indicate.

In an April 27 letter, the German Economy Ministry urged companies not to join two business conferences that Iranian representatives were expected to attend.

"These events stand in clear contrast to the policy of the federal government and could mean serious damage for German foreign policy," the newspaper *Handelsblatt* quoted the letter as saying (Agence France-Presse III/Spacewar.com, May 7).

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Washington Post
May 6, 2009

High-Enriched Uranium Traces Found in Egypt: IAEA

By Mark Heinrich
Reuters

VIENNA (Reuters) - The U.N. nuclear watchdog is investigating the discovery of traces of highly enriched uranium at a nuclear research site in Egypt, according to a restricted International Atomic Energy Agency report obtained by Reuters.

It did not specify whether the particles were weapons-grade -- enriched to a level high enough for use as fuel for an atom bomb, as opposed to fuel for some nuclear reactors. An IAEA official reached by Reuters said this was being checked.

The report, which described global IAEA work in 2008 to verify compliance with non-proliferation rules, said the highly enriched uranium (HEU) traces turned up in environmental swipe samples taken at the Inshas nuclear research site in 2007-08.

The HEU was discovered alongside particles of low-enriched uranium (LEU), the type used for nuclear power plant fuel.

Egypt had explained to the IAEA that it believed the HEU "could have been brought into the country through contaminated radio-isotope transport containers," the May 5 report said.

The U.N. watchdog's inspectors had not yet verified the source of the particles, it said, but there were no indications that Egypt's clarification was not correct.

The IAEA was in any case continuing an investigation to establish the provenance of the traces, with further test sampling planned in the vicinity near the capital Cairo.

The IAEA is sensitive to possible nuclear proliferation in the Middle East because of inquiries into allegations of secret weapons-oriented nuclear activity in Iran and Syria, which both countries deny, and the 2003 exposure of a covert atomic bomb program in Libya, since scrapped.

PAST IAEA PROBLEMS WITH EGYPT

In February 2005, an IAEA report chided Egypt for repeatedly failing to declare nuclear sites and materials but said inspectors had found no sign of an atom bomb program.

At the time, IAEA diplomats said Egypt's breaches appeared minor compared to those of Iran and South Korea, both of which experimented with uranium enrichment and plutonium reprocessing -- technologies applicable to nuclear bomb-making.

The new report said Egypt told the IAEA in 2004 that its atomic energy agency lacked the means to ensure "effective control" over all nuclear work in the country. A presidential decree was issued in 2006 to strengthen the agency's powers.

Egyptian regulators then mounted a state-wide investigation and detected previously undocumented nuclear items, including depleted uranium, a by-product of enrichment used as a hardening agent in ordnance or as radiation-shielding material.

The report said Egypt had turned over information about previously undeclared nuclear work and submitted design information about the Inshas facility, a hydrometallurgy pilot plant and a radio-isotope production site.

Egypt's statements were judged consistent with IAEA findings and there were no more outstanding questions, it said.

In 2007 Egypt said it aimed to build several atomic reactors to meet rising energy demand and has since received nuclear cooperation offers from China, Russia, France and Kazakhstan.

Many Arab states have similar ambitions, to offset high fossil-fuel costs and cut emissions to combat climate change.

Industry analysts have suggested the United States could be willing to help Egypt develop a nuclear program if it pledged never to enrich uranium or reprocess spent nuclear fuel -- both proliferation-prone processes -- on its own soil.

Egypt ratified the Non-Proliferation Treaty in 1981 but not the IAEA's 1997 Additional Protocol that gives inspectors the right to make intrusive, short-notice inspections of nuclear facilities and other sites not declared as nuclear.

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/05/06/AR2009050601426.html>

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Washington Post

May 7, 2009

Egypt Brushes off Reports on Nuclear Traces

Reuters

CAIRO (Reuters) - Egypt said on Thursday media reports that U.N. nuclear inspectors found traces of highly enriched uranium at an Egyptian reactor complex addressed an old issue that had already been resolved.

A restricted International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) report, obtained by Reuters on Wednesday, said the inspectors found the traces but did not specify if they were weapons-grade -- enriched to a high-enough level to make a bomb.

Diplomats said the traces were not enriched to that grade but their fissile concentration was higher than the level normally suited to fuelling civilian nuclear power stations.

The report said Egypt had explained to the IAEA that it believed the highly enriched uranium (HEU) "could have been brought into the country through contaminated radio-isotope transport containers." Egypt's Foreign Ministry spokesman Hossam Zaki said in a statement the media reports were "mistaken and old" and led to questions about the motivations behind such a leak.

"Egypt previously explained to the agency the circumstances of this issue and the officials in the agency agreed with the Egyptian explanation," he said, adding that the IAEA had always affirmed Egypt's nuclear plans were peaceful.

He said the issue had been first raised in 2007.

The report, dated May 5 this year, said HEU was discovered alongside particles of low-enriched uranium, the type used for nuclear power plant fuel, at Inshas, near Cairo, where there is a research reactor complex.

The report said the U.N. watchdog's inspectors had not yet determined the source of the particles, and more testing in the area was planned to draw conclusions, but the IAEA had no indication Egypt's clarification was not correct.

The report said Egypt in 2004-06 turned over information to the IAEA about previously undeclared nuclear activity and submitted design information about the Inshas facility.

The IAEA is sensitive to possible nuclear proliferation in the Middle East because of inquiries into allegations of weapons-related nuclear activity in Iran and Syria, which both countries deny. Israel, Egypt's neighbor, is the only Middle East state believed to have nuclear weapons.

An IAEA spokesman declined comment, saying the report was solely for the eyes of the agency's 35-nation governing board which next convenes in June.

A diplomat familiar with IAEA inspections work said it was "not that unusual for the Agency to find traces of nuclear material in environmental samples at nuclear sites in a country. As needed, these are followed up by Department of Safeguards."

(Additional reporting by Mark Heinrich in Vienna)

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/05/07/AR2009050702227.html>

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London Daily Telegraph
07 May 2009

North Korea 'Preparing for Second Nuclear Test'

By Peter Foster in Beijing

The preparations began days after Pyongyang threatened to conduct further nuclear tests following its censure at the United Nations for a failed ballistic missile launch early last month.

It takes place as Washington is dispatching Stephen Bosworth, its special envoy on North Korea, to Beijing and then to Seoul, Tokyo and Moscow in an effort to bring the isolated Stalinist regime back to the negotiating table.

Analysts say that Pyongyang will attempt to use the threat of a second nuclear test as a lever to gain concessions from negotiators. The last test in October 2006 was only a partial success according to the assessment of US defence officials.

The signs of increased activity at the Phunggye-ri site in the North Hamgyong province were reported in the South Korean *Chosun Ilbo* newspaper, quoting unnamed government sources.

South Korean commentators have said that Pyongyang, which has officially pulled out of the six party talks after the UN blacklisted four North Korean companies linked to the arms trade, could be ready to conduct a second test in a matter of weeks.

"Underground nuclear tests are hard to predict and you can't tell when exactly a nuclear test would be possible, but we think the North is ready to conduct a test in a near future if it wants to," the *Chosun Ilbo* quoted the South Korean government source as saying.

Relations on the Korean peninsula are now at their lowest point for a decade following Pyongyang's missile test last April in defiance of pleas from world leaders and a 2006 UN resolution banning North Korea from conducting ballistic missile tests.

The US called the April launch a "covert" weapons test, however the UN Security Council remained divided over the issue with China and Russia supporting Pyongyang's contention that it was a lawful "satellite" launch.

On Wednesday, the US state department said that the US President Barack Obama had held telephone talks with his Chinese counterpart, Hu Jintao, at which the US raised "concerns over recent actions by North Korea".

Although China, North Korea's long-standing ally, was slow to condemn Pyongyang over its missile test, Beijing was far less understanding of the previous nuclear test, condemning it as "brazen".

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/northkorea/5288645/North-Korea-preparing-for-second-nuclear-test.html>

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Miami Herald
5 May 2009

Taliban Closing In on Nuclear Supplies in Pakistan

BY SAEED SHAH

MCCLATCHY NEWS SERVICE

ISLAMABAD, Pakistan -- Armed Taliban insurgents seized control of the main town in Pakistan's Swat valley, sending thousands of residents fleeing in advance of a possible showdown between the Islamic militants and the army that could help decide the future of nuclear-armed Pakistan.

"You may say the city has fallen to the Taliban," school principal Zia-ud-Din Yusufzai told McClatchy by phone, as he followed the advice of Pakistani authorities and fled the valley's main town of Mingora on Tuesday. "Not everyone could leave. Those who stay will be hostage" to the Taliban.

"Pray for Swat," implored Yusufzai as he drove south with his wife and three children toward safety and an uncertain future.

The Taliban have dominated Swat since February, when the government agreed to establish Islamic courts in exchange for a cease-fire, and last month they sent forces into neighboring Buner, where the government capitulated without a fight.

After more than a week of heavy public pressure from the Obama administration, Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari told U.S. special envoy Richard Holbrooke Monday night that the army would retake the territory.

"The army is going back in as we speak," Holbrooke quoted him as saying on the eve of Zardari's meeting Wednesday with President Barack Obama in Washington.

Despite Zardari's assurance, however, there was no sign Tuesday that a major army operation had begun in Swat, and residents reported that Taliban had mined the roads into Mingora to block any army offensive.

Pakistan's army has proved to be ill-equipped and ill-trained, particularly to fight an Islamist insurgency with which many military officers sympathize, but the militants' advance into Swat and Buner poses an unparalleled threat to Zardari's government and to the U.S. battle against al Qaeda and the Taliban.

The militants are drawing closer to some of Pakistan's nuclear weapons and other military facilities. Swat and Buner also are close to the huge Tarbela dam and to two important highways, one of which is a main supply route for U.S. and NATO troops in Afghanistan and the link between Islamabad, the capital, and Peshawar, a city of about two million and the capital of the North West Frontier Province.

The fighting in Swat also could ignite Pakistan's tribal area along the Afghan border, which already is mostly in the hands of the al Qaeda-linked Taliban. The nightmare scenario is that a civil war in Swat could trigger a sympathetic uprising from Islamic extremist groups in Punjab province, the heart of Pakistan, and in Islamabad.

It isn't clear, however, whether the army can retake Swat, where the Taliban are well supplied and entrenched. Two Pakistani army offensives in the valley have failed in the past 18 months, and any new operation would likely be much larger, with the associated risk of turning more of the population against the army and the government.

Nevertheless, Holbrooke delivered another public pounding to Zardari before Congress on Tuesday.

"We need to put the most heavy possible pressure on our friends in Pakistan to join us in the fight against the Taliban and its allies," Holbrooke told the House Foreign Affairs committee. "We cannot succeed in Afghanistan without Pakistan's support and involvement."

One factor has turned in favor of a military operation in Swat: a shift in Pakistani public opinion.

Analysts said that the failed peace deal in Swat has demonstrated to the population that the militants aren't interested in a negotiated settlement or in fulfilling their stated demand for Islamic law. They never disarmed and disbanded as required by the accord, instead invading the Buner district last month, and this week, even a hard-line religious group, Sunni Tehreek, held an anti-Taliban march through Islamabad.

"This is the first time that the Pakistani nation has identified that Talibanization is a threat," said Asad Munir, a former head of military intelligence for northwest Pakistan. "If we say that this is 'our war,' then we can win it. If the nation is not behind the army, then the army cannot fight."

Zardari's government may be moving toward a showdown in Swat. It lifted the curfew in Mingora for five hours in the afternoon to allow residents to flee, but provided no help for evacuees.

Those who had private vehicles or could afford public transport abandoned their homes. The provincial government, appealing for emergency assistance, estimated that 500,000 people would leave Swat to become refugees in their own country.

On Monday night, intense firefights between security forces and Taliban had left residents cowering in their homes. According to Shaukat Saleem, a human-rights activist based in Mingora, 21 civilians died after they were caught in the crossfire. Others gave lower figures. There was no official word on the casualties.

"The streets are empty. I haven't seen any security forces today, just the Taliban patrolling in great strength," said Saleem, speaking by phone from Mingora, adding that he'd decided to stay. "I cannot abandon my people."

Some 46 paramilitary soldiers remain surrounded by Taliban at the town's electrical grid station. While the army denied that Mingora was in the hands of the Taliban, a spokesman based in the town, Maj. Nasir Khan, admitted that the militants were present in "outlying areas."

"Our purpose is to eliminate" the Taliban, Khan said. ``They don't want Islamic [law]. They want to establish their reign of terror."

<http://www.miamiherald.com/457/story/1034186.html>

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Boston Globe

May 5, 2009

Pakistan, US in Talks on Nuclear Security

By Bryan Bender, Globe Staff

WASHINGTON - US and Pakistani officials have begun behind-the-scenes talks aimed at achieving a greater US role in securing Pakistan's nuclear materials, including a proposal to ship some highly enriched uranium to the United States for disposal, according to two administration officials with direct knowledge of the discussions.

If successful, the talks between nonproliferation specialists at the State and Energy departments and their Pakistani counterparts would mark a breakthrough in efforts to persuade Pakistan to accept greater assistance in preventing terrorists from obtaining nuclear fuel or the technology to build a nuclear weapon.

"The Pakistanis take this very seriously," said a senior US official involved in the talks who asked not to be identified discussing the sensitive negotiations. "Pakistan faces some unique challenges."

The government of Pakistan, which is believed to have as many as 100 nuclear bombs, has been highly secretive about its nuclear activities for fear that the United States might try to destroy its arsenal or that its archenemy, nuclear-armed India, might launch a first strike. But the growing threat to the Pakistani government from the Taliban - and its allies in the Al Qaeda terrorist network - has given Pakistani leaders a new reason to cooperate with the United States, according to the officials.

"We believe the command and control of the nuclear arsenal is a primary concern of the Pakistanis," said the US official. The United States now provides some basic assistance to Pakistan in nuclear security. Measures include training Pakistani officials on export control and providing detection equipment for its seaports, airports, and border crossings to help thwart nuclear smuggling.

However, the new measures under consideration would for the first time give the United States access to some of Pakistan's nuclear ingredients, though not the actual weapons, which are reportedly stored unassembled under the control of a 10,000-member security force headed by a two-star general.

Two of the key proposals under discussion are a joint program to secure or destroy radioactive materials that could be used to make a crude nuclear device, and shipment to the United States of some of the highly enriched uranium fuel used in Pakistani civilian power plants. The enriched fuel is believed to be sought by terrorists as possible material for a weapon of mass destruction, the officials said.

Pakistan's embassy did not respond to several requests for comment.

Top officials in both countries continue to express public confidence that Pakistan's nuclear materials are safe from theft. President Obama, who is scheduled to meet with Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari in Washington tomorrow, told a news conference last week that "we can make sure that Pakistan's nuclear arsenal is secure because the Pakistani Army, I think, recognizes the hazards of those weapons falling into the wrong hands."

Navy Admiral Mike Mullen, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, told Pentagon reporters yesterday that he, too, is "comfortable" that the nuclear weapons cannot be stolen. "I don't think that's going to happen," said Mullen, who visited Pakistan last week. "I don't see that in any way imminent whatsoever at this particular point in time."

Yet many nuclear specialists both inside and outside the US government expressed worry that such expressions of confidence do not reflect the full extent of Pakistan's nuclear vulnerability - which, they say, goes far beyond the weapons themselves.

In addition to its arsenal, Pakistan has a vast network of nuclear facilities, equipment, and scientists - the extent of which the United States and its allies know very little. Any of those elements could be pilfered by terrorists or their sympathizers inside the Pakistani government or military, the international nuclear specialists said.

They point to the fact that A.Q. Khan, the builder of Pakistan's nuclear bomb, oversaw a black market that sold nuclear materials and know-how to a variety of international customers, including Iran and North Korea, for years before the scheme was revealed by the CIA in 2004.

"What other society has leaked nuclear secrets like Pakistan?" asked David Albright, a former United Nations weapons inspector who is now president of the Institute for Science and International Security in Washington, citing the documented evidence that classified bomb designs and centrifuges to enrich uranium into a bomb-making grade were sold to a variety of sources. "Why do people just sit there and say everything is fine?"

Others have raised similar alarms. The Congressional Research Service, an arm of Congress, issued a report last month that stated, "While nuclear weapons are currently under firm control, with warheads disassembled, technology could be sold off by insiders during a worsened crisis."

US officials hope to persuade the Pakistani government in the coming months that the importance given to the security of the weapons themselves must be extended to other parts of its nuclear industry, according to the officials. The US government official involved in the talks stressed, however, that there are legal restrictions on how far the United States can go in providing assistance. Because Pakistan is not a signatory of the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty, the US government is limited in how much assistance it can provide to Pakistan on nuclear matters.

Yet specialists said that if Pakistan's government were willing to accept more help, the United States could - and should - find ways to overcome those restrictions.

Bernard Finel, a senior fellow at the American Security Project, a Washington think tank, said enhancing nuclear-security cooperation "would be a really valuable place for us to spend a lot of diplomatic energy."

"The worst-case scenarios in Pakistan are worse than anywhere else," he added.

http://www.boston.com/news/world/asia/articles/2009/05/05/pakistan_us_in_talks_on_nuclear_security/?page=full

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Financial Times

May 6, 2009

US Anti-Terror Controls Delayed Flu Response

By Andrew Jack in London and Adam Thomson in Mexico City

Tough US import controls on biological materials, introduced after the September 11 2001 attacks, hindered the rapid identification of the H1N1 virus because samples from infected Mexican patients had to be sent to Canada for analysis instead of the US.

Health officials said the detour highlighted how bureaucratic attempts to protect the US from terrorist attacks had backfired.

Confirmation of the decision, which delayed the international response to the outbreak, added to reports of hurdles to cross-border co-operation in the fight against the latest infectious disease, health officials said.

In order to get a result as quickly as possible, Mexico initially sent as many as 200 samples to the Canadian government laboratory in Winnipeg in mid-April. It then forwarded some samples to Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta in the US, less than half the distance away.

The US centres had already analysed several cases of H1N1 in the US without realising it was the same virus.

José Angel Córdova, Mexico's health minister, told the FT: "There are always administrative procedures that can take time. And, given the urgency of needing a quicker response, we called Winnipeg, where they told us that they could do it in a day."

Mexican and Canadian public health specialists have long-established professional connections and personal relationships, which eased the rapidity of the analysis and informed Mr Córdova's decision.

The information adds to concerns that the US may have been too focused, in early April, on analysing domestic cases of H1N1 to look across the border and make comparisons with reported cases in Mexico.

There have also been suggestions that the World Health Organisation was slow to respond to media reports of outbreaks in Mexico in early April.

But Michael Ryan, director of global alert and response at the WHO, said his team had contacted Mexico on April 10 and April 17 regarding separate incidents, and were assured they had been investigated and found to be isolated cases.

The WHO then informed Mexico on April 19 of the US cases, and began talks that triggered an alert on April 22 of severe pneumonia associated with influenza.

Mr Ryan stressed that he had no criticism of the Mexican authorities. "They have been dealing with a complex situation and a difficult epidemic, and have been exceptionally responsive to requests for information."

As well as additional import controls after 9/11, the US imposed tough immigration restrictions, which squeezed the number of foreign visitors, including students attending universities.

At least 23 countries have confirmed more than 2,000 cases of the H1N1 flu virus. The US has reported two deaths and Mexico 42.

http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/50316396-3a6f-11de-8a2d-00144feabdc0.html?nclick_check=1

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Washington Post
May 7, 2009

U.S. Halts Pilot Program in New York to Detect Biological Attacks

By Spencer S. Hsu
Washington Post Staff Writer

The Department of Homeland Security is dismantling a next-generation biological attack warning system in New York City subways because of technical problems, U.S. officials said.

Robert Hooks, a deputy assistant secretary, said the department no longer believes it is necessary to expand the pilot program, as he told Congress in July, because of resource and technology limits. Hooks said a long-planned alternative sensor system, set for initial deployment late next year, also will not be available nationwide until 2012, to allow for more testing.

The deactivation of the pilot program in late March marks a setback in U.S. efforts to detect biological weapons, and its disclosure comes as the Obama administration is unveiling new security priorities as part of its 2010 budget today.

The federal government installed air samplers in more than 30 U.S. cities in 2003 to detect the release of potential bioweapons such as anthrax spores, plague bacteria and smallpox viruses. The BioWatch program, which cost about \$500 million, was meant to speed up the response before disease could spread.

Critics said older samplers are of limited use, however, because they rely on air filters that must be manually collected and evaluated by a laboratory, taking as much as 30 hours. New York City activated newer sensors in late 2007 that can automatically sniff the air hourly for as many as 100 harmful species and transmit results immediately.

In the past three or four months, however, officials noticed that an instrument designed to detect a particular agent in several of the Autonomous Pathogen Detection System sensors began malfunctioning, Hooks said. The department's science and technology directorate is working with an independent assessor and the sensors' maker, the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory, to troubleshoot the problem, he said.

DHS and New York officials said that the decision was mutual and that the city is still protected by older sensors, whose samples are being evaluated more frequently.

Lawrence Livermore spokesman Steve Wampler said the lab supports additional DHS testing and added: "We believe we have a technology solution for detecting biological agents that is available now."

DHS expects tests to begin this summer of a new generation of sensors, called Gen 3 BioWatch, Hooks said. "It's always a trade-off, a balance between how you can get technology out there and how much . . . risk there is that it will divert resources" from better options, he said. "We anticipate because of the production cycle and further testing we'll be deploying in 2012 widely across the country."

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/05/06/AR2009050603425.html>

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Gulf News

OPINION

May 06, 2009

Stopping Iran's Nuclear March is Futile

By Joseph A. Kechichian, Special to Gulf News

Vartan Gregorian, the erudite president of the Carnegie Corporation of New York, a grant-making institution founded by Andrew Carnegie in 1911, penned a thoughtful 12-page draft model letter for US President Barack Obama to consider sending to both the Supreme Leader of Iran as well as its President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

It is an exceptional document that contextualises key issues regarding Iran's quest for nuclear capabilities.

Gregorian, a Tabriz-born Armenian-American historian with a stellar academic record, is the author of several books, including the acclaimed *Islam: A Mosaic, Not A Monolith*. True to his style, the draft letter is well thought-out, and rich in detail.

It opens with a long overdue recognition that "Americans are deeply mindful and respectful of the renowned achievements and rich cultural legacy of Iranian civilisation, which reflect an unparalleled degree of historical continuity".

It then identifies three epochal contributions which etched the Iranian character ever since. With Zoroastrianism, Gregorian summarises, Iranians "affirmed man's absolute free will to choose between evil and a Divine Creator, and our common destiny to face a final Day of Judgment".

This is a fundamental building foundation for later analysis but oh so valuable in and of itself.

At a later stage, the academic highlights how under the Achaemenid Empire, enlightened leaders like Cyrus and Darius defined tolerance and pluralism.

"It was Cyrus the Great who decreed that 'all should be free to worship their gods without impediments or persecution' - a proclamation unique, not only for its time, but for centuries to come", acknowledges the author. Few outsiders appreciate the value such ideas have in molding Iranian perceptions.

With the advent of Islam, Gregorian underscores, "Iranians, drawing on their own early beliefs, helped to develop and then adhered to Shiite Islam."

He continues: "It was during this period that Iran became the seat of Islamic learning and gave to the world its science, philosophy, theology, arts, and architecture."

Because such an expose was seldom made public in the post-1979 US-Iranian environment, the tone of the letter sets the stage for significant policy differences. In fact, with this putative Obama letter, Gregorian wants the US to answer President Ahmadinejad's far-ranging, 18-page March 2006 dispatch to former US president George W. Bush, which was cavalierly ignored.

It may be worth recalling that the Iranian focused on major religious values, history, and international relations in his correspondence, and was deeply disappointed that his initiative was brushed aside.

Prodded by pro-Israeli forces that wished to launch pre-emptive attacks against Iran, Bush disregarded the Ahmadinejad memo, as Washington pigeonholed Iran into his infamous 'axis of evil' categorisation. To his credit, Gregorian touches upon past mistakes, invokes American understanding, and reminds Iranians that the US came under new management on 20 January 2009.

Iranians and Americans "enjoyed remarkably positive relations", he writes, because "the US [always] defended [the country's] territorial integrity". Gregorian stresses that were it "not for America's efforts, Iran might have been broken up" and, in frank statements, concedes that Washington "promoted the shah's ambitions to make Iran a regional superpower".

He then places a few choice words in Obama's mouth that will shock: the US "did not recognise that a nationalist, secular, and democratic Iran would have been a great counterforce against communism," concluding: "We were wrong."

This is a polite way of saying that Washington was mistaken to help organise the 1953 coup against former Iranian prime minister Mohammad Mossadeq.

Although a slew of painful policies followed, including the 444-day hostage ordeal as well as the failed April 24, 1980, rescue mission that cost eight American servicemen their lives, the letter acknowledges that today Washington continues to have grave concerns about Iran's nuclear programmes.

Yet, even on this front, the author clarifies how Washington assisted Tehran - as early as 1957 - to acquire nuclear power through the Atoms for Peace programme. In 1975, then secretary of state Henry Kissinger signed a National Security Memorandum, which affirmed that the "introduction of nuclear power will both provide for the growing needs of Iran's economy and free remaining oil reserves for export or conversion to petrochemicals".

The letter reminds Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei and Ahmadinejad that it was Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, who called nuclear power 'the work of the devil', although doubts remained as to whether current efforts are strictly for peaceful purposes. According to the putative letter, Washington offers to "discuss [Iran's] legitimate aspirations as a regional power and to cease all talk of 'regime change'."

In short, everything would be done to discourage Tehran from acquiring nuclear weapons, ostensibly to prevent a regional arms race.

While the letter closes with wishes for improved relations and a direct quote from Imam Ali calling for tolerance, mercy, and compassion, it does not include any references to Israel's nuclear weapons, or to Iranian fears of a potential assault on its nuclear facilities.

Consequently, and even if Ahmadinejad fails to win another presidential term on June 12, Khamenei is not likely to sacrifice this critical national security initiative. For precisely the reasons Gregorian enunciates, Iran will become a nuclear power, sooner rather than later.

Dr. Joseph A. Kechichian is a commentator and author of several books on Gulf affairs.

<http://www.gulfnews.com/opinion/columns/world/10311281.html>

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People's Daily Online – China

OPINION

7 May 2009

A Nuclear Weapon-Free World An Inspiring Ideal

In recent years, "a nuclear weapon-free world" has become a worldwide campaign. US President Barack Obama pledged to take steps for a nuclear weapon-free world in his speech in Prague on April 5, after the US and Russia issued a joint statement on April 1 declaring that the two countries will continue to negotiate a new nuclear weapons reduction treaty.

In 2007 and 2008, former US secretaries of State Henry Kissinger and George Shultz, former Defense Secretary William Perry and former Senator Sam Nunn, jointly wrote articles in the Wall Street Journal calling for a nuclear weapon-free world. Australia and Japan established the International Committee on Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament last September; UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon called for nuclear disarmament several times in his speeches; and, people from all walks of life proposed Global Zero in December.

It is the immediate as well as long-term need to make nuclear disarmament return to the diplomatic agenda of the US and Russia. During the eight years of the Bush Administration, bilateral disarmament of the US and Russia almost came to a standstill. The First Stage of Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START), which was signed by the US and Russia in 1991, is due to expire on Dec 5, 2009, and the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) Review Conference will be held again in 2010. The US and Russia should not only implement their disarmament commitments to the non-nuclear-weapon states but also consider how to continue reducing their nuclear arsenals after the expiry of the treaty.

Nuclear weapons played a role in maintaining the "balance of terror" during the Cold War. To some extent, nuclear deterrence even reduced the likelihood of wars. However, considering current international security environment, there is an off chance for nuclear wars to occur between powerful nations. The gigantic nuclear arsenals of the US and Russia tend to be a heavy economic burden and are potential safety hazards.

Moreover, challenges posed by the non-proliferation mechanisms also require the US and Russia take actions on nuclear disarmament. The risk of proliferation of nuclear weapons has risen after DPRK's nuclear tests. More and more countries are considering development of civil nuclear projects for coping with global warming and energy shortage. This, in turn, will increase the risk of proliferation of nuclear technology and materials. The existence of an underground nuclear smuggling network implies that it is also possible for terrorists to resort to "nuclear terrorism".

In the prevailing situation of nuclear proliferation, which is not an optimistic scenario, if nuclear powers such as the US and Russia continue to maintain huge nuclear arsenals and emphasize more on nuclear weapons in their national security strategies, they will lose the moral high ground to prevent other countries from developing nuclear weapons.

A nuclear weapon-free world should not be merely a beautiful dream. All countries, especially the US and Russia, should jointly make it come true by taking necessary action. In order to substantially reduce the huge nuclear arsenals of the US and Russia, the two countries should negotiate a new treaty aimed at achieving irreversible nuclear disarmament. The US and Russia should also reduce the role of nuclear weapons in their national security strategy. They should regard nuclear weapons as defensive means of the last resort. Meanwhile, countries without nuclear weapons deserve their safety to be guaranteed. This would require the nuclear powers, especially the US and Russia, to provide assurances that they will not use or threaten to use nuclear weapons against them.

Missile defense is an inescapable problem in the future nuclear disarmament process. After the US withdrew from the Treaty on the Limitation of Anti-Ballistic Missile Systems (ABM Treaty), theoretically there's no limitation on the development of the missile defense capability of the US. It will significantly influence the nuclear disarmament policies and positions of relevant countries. At present, the missile defense forces of the US cannot threaten Russia, which has a massive nuclear arsenal. If the US is still averse to engaging on the missile defense issue, the process of nuclear disarmament will not go too far. When former US President Ronald Reagan and former Soviet Union leader Mikhail Gorbachev met in Reykjavik more than 20 years ago, the two countries almost reached a consensus on eliminating nuclear weapons, but it eventually failed because of the Star Wars plan.

After all, "a nuclear weapon-free world" is desirable. Although the ideal cannot be realized in the short term, the appeal of such a global order will possibly restart the nuclear disarmament process and rebuild confidence in the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons.

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<http://english.people.com.cn/90001/90776/90883/6652527.html>

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