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Moscow Times

19 May 2009

U.S. Diplomat Flies in for Key Nuclear Talks

By Nikolaus von Twickel / The Moscow Times

Crucial disarmament talks kick off in Moscow on Tuesday when U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Rose Gottemoeller meets with Foreign Ministry officials to discuss replacing the 1991 Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty, or START I.

Pressure on participants will be high, because Presidents Barack Obama and Dmitry Medvedev agreed last month in London to have a replacement ready when the treaty regulating both countries' Cold War-era nuclear stockpiles expires in December.

In addition, both sides pledged to have a road map ready as soon as July 8, when Obama is due in town for his first visit to Russia.

Gottemoeller said after a preliminary meeting in Rome last month that the negotiations are important for "hitting the reset button" in U.S.-Russian relations.

Mutual ties were affected by fresh setbacks earlier this month when Moscow and NATO traded tit-for-tat expulsions of diplomats over spying allegations and the Kremlin stepped up criticism over the Western alliance's military exercises in Georgia.

The Russian delegation will be led by Anatoly Antonov, who heads the Foreign Ministry's security and disarmament department. Gottemoeller, who headed the Carnegie Moscow Center before joining Obama's administration, knows him very well, officials have said.

No news conference is planned during the two-day talks at the Foreign Ministry, spokespeople for both the ministry and the U.S. Embassy said Monday.

The negotiators' task seems formidable not just because of the extremely tight time frame and highly complex technical issues, but because Moscow wishes to tie in other arms disputes. Washington has said it would like to handle START in isolation to increase the chances of success.

Prime Minister Vladimir Putin has said any new treaty is definitely linked to U.S. plans to build a missile defense system in Poland and the Czech Republic, which Russia opposes. "Russia will naturally always link missile defense with everything that is related to it, including the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty," Putin told Japanese media last week.

The Foreign Ministry threw another arms agreement into the ring last week when it said Russia was proposing a new version of the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe, in which Moscow suspended its participation more than a year ago.

Russia also wants a new cap on the means of warhead delivery to be introduced in the new treaty. The previous U.S. administration planned to equip missiles with non-nuclear warheads and was believed to have been reluctant to cut the number of missiles.

Analysts said it was necessary for Russia to push for combined talks rather than treating each treaty in isolation.

"This is the right thing to do now, because so many unsolved and complex issues are on the table," said Alexander Khranchikhin, an analyst with the Institute of Political and Military Analysis.

Gennady Yevstafyev, a retired general who serves as a nuclear arms expert at the Center for Policy Studies, said Moscow seemed unhappy about the pace with which Washington was tackling the issue.

"The problem is that the U.S. has not been too clear about their concept for the talks," he told The Moscow Times.

He said this could be guessed from Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov's remarks last week that the talks in Moscow were no warm-up meeting and that they should produce clarity about each side's position.

He added that although negotiations would be difficult, chances for a new treaty were good because both parties have pledged to move ahead. "They are doomed for success," Yevstafyev said.

A new treaty could dramatically cut U.S. and Russian strategic nuclear arsenals to 1,500 each. Figures on the current numbers of warheads differ, but most estimates say both countries have more than 3,000 strategic warheads.

<http://www.themoscowtimes.com/article/600/42/377209.htm>

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China View
19 May 2009

China Reiterates Support for Ban on Nuclear Weapons, Complete Nuclear Disarmament

BEIJING, May 19 (Xinhua) -- China reiterated its continuing support for the comprehensive ban on nuclear weapons and complete nuclear disarmament here on Tuesday.

Chinese Assistant Foreign Minister Liu Jieyi said China was willing to make joint efforts with the international community to realize a nuclear-free world.

Liu made the remarks when attending an international seminar co-sponsored by the Chinese government and the Preparatory Commission for the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization (CTBTO) here on Tuesday.

The seminar, opened on Tuesday, will end Saturday.

Liu also spoke highly of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty's important contributions to the progress of the international nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation.

He restated the Chinese government's aspiration for the Treaty's becoming effective as early as possible.

The Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty, which was signed and ratified by 180 and 148 nations respectively, was agreed in 1996. The treaty aimed at banning nuclear weapon test of any form, so as to effectively prevent nuclear proliferation and push forward the process of nuclear disarmament.

China was among the first countries to sign the treaty in September 1996 in New York, one month after the treaty was agreed.

The Preparatory Commission for the CTBTO was founded in November 1996, with its headquarters in Vienna. The Commission was established to prepare for the Treaty's becoming effective.

http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2009-05/19/content_11401434.htm

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Global Security Newswire
May 19, 2009

Russia, U.S. Open START Talks

U.S. and Russian negotiators today launched formal efforts to hammer out the terms of a successor agreement to the 1991 Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty, Agence France-Presse reported (see *GSN*, May 18).

The talks kicked off early this morning in Moscow, a Russian Foreign Ministry source told AFP, adding that the ministry's press officials had no details on the session and that no news briefings were expected.

This week's two-day meeting follows introductory talks conducted last month. The talks are intended to produce a follow-on to START, which expires in December, and could lead to further reductions in the two nations' nuclear arsenals (see *GSN*, April 24).

There are a number of potential areas of disagreement between the sides. Russia has pressed for a treaty that would reduce both stockpiled nuclear warheads as well as delivery vehicles such as missiles and bombers, while the United States has emphasized reductions to the number of warheads deployed on delivery vehicles (Alexander Osipovich, Agence France-Presse I/Google News, May 19).

The sides might also need to address differing stances on the deployment of space-based weaponry, according to RIA Novosti. They have not yet formulated any draft treaty and Washington has not yet formulated official proposals for addressing the potential areas of dispute, the Russian newspaper *Kommersant* reported.

In addition, Moscow might link the arms reduction talks to its efforts to squelch a U.S. plan to field missile defense elements in Poland and the Czech Republic (see related *GSN* story, today). The missile shield dispute could potentially prevent the sides from finalizing a deal before the current treaty expires, according to *Kommersant* (RIA Novosti, May 18).

"There is a will on both sides to agree [to] a deal," said Dmitry Danilov, an analyst with the Russian Academy of Sciences' Institute of Europe.

"Unlike the Bush administration, [U.S. President Barack Obama's] negotiating team will be more constructive, there have been signals that they're ready to discuss difficult issues," Danilov said (Conor Sweeney, Reuters, May 19).

U.N. Secretary General Ban Ki-moon today praised U.S.-Russian moves toward new nuclear arsenal reductions, AFP reported.

"There are now a number of initiatives from nuclear and non-nuclear states that together provide a new momentum for disarmament," Ban said at the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva. "Let me extend my best wishes for the negotiations between the two countries taking place in Moscow."

Ban added that the five recognized nuclear-weapon states set a "refreshingly positive tone" in a recent statement of support for the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (see *GSN*, May 18).

"[Disarmament] can only be realized if all states, nuclear and non-nuclear alike, are prepared to abide by their disarmament and nonproliferation commitments and nurture an international climate conducive to disarmament," he said. "The entry to force of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty is therefore of crucial importance" (Agence France-Presse II/Spacewar.com, May 19).

http://www.globalsecuritynewswire.org/gsn/nw_20090519_1653.php

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New York Times
May 20, 2009

U.S. and Russia Begin Arms Talks with a December Deadline

By Ellen Barry

MOSCOW — After months of prelude, Russian and American teams sat down in Moscow on Tuesday to begin renegotiating the 1991 Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty, or Start, a key plank in the promised "reset" of relations between the countries.

The negotiators face a tight timeline if they are to replace the old agreement, which runs more than 700 pages, before it expires on Dec. 5. In recent days, top Russian officials have suggested that success at renegotiating Start is contingent on changes to an American plan for a missile defense system, a difficult negotiation in its own right.

But leaders in Washington and Moscow have a "strong political motivation" to propel the process forward, said Richard Burt, a former ambassador to Germany, who served as Washington's chief Start negotiator in the waning days of the Soviet Union.

For Russia, Mr. Burt said, a return to arms talks asserts its role as a global player after a long and frustrating hiatus. The United States, meanwhile, sees the agreement as a first step toward a broader nonproliferation strategy that could eventually curb the spread of weapons to "irresponsible nuclear states" like Pakistan, he said.

Basic outlines of an accord have already emerged. A short-term agreement signed in 2002 by President George W. Bush and Vladimir V. Putin, the president of Russia at the time, requires each country to reduce its arsenal to fewer than 2,200 deployed warheads by 2012; the new agreement is likely to lower the ceiling to 1,500 apiece or fewer.

Assistant Secretary of State Rose Gottemoeller, Washington's chief negotiator, this month signaled a willingness to count delivery vehicles as well as warheads, a longstanding Russian request, but not to address the question of counting warheads in storage, which Russia has also sought, until after the December deadline.

On Wednesday, Ms. Gottemoeller will meet for a second day with her counterpart, Anatoly Ivanov, who leads the Russian Foreign Ministry's security and disarmament department. The meetings are closed.

A Foreign Ministry spokesman told the Interfax news agency that Russia was hoping to see a written proposal from the Americans, calling this week's meetings "a switch to a detailed discussion of the future treaty." The teams will try to resolve as many questions as possible before a July summit meeting between Russia's president, Dmitri A. Medvedev, and President Obama.

Vladimir Z. Dvorkin, a retired major general who acted as an adviser to the Russian side during the original Start negotiations, said either side could speed the process with key concessions. "There is little time, and lots of time," Mr. Dvorkin said. "If there is a desire, they will get it done."

Separately, a report released Tuesday by the EastWest Institute, a New York-based policy organization, concluded that a European missile defense system — a bone of contention between Russia and the United States — would not protect against a nuclear threat from Iran. The group recommended canceling plans to station radar facilities and interceptor missiles in Poland and the Czech Republic, deployments the Kremlin sees as a threat.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2009/05/20/world/europe/20start.html>

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Malaysia Star
May 20, 2009

U.S.-Russia Nuclear Talks make Positive Start

By Amie Ferris-Rotman and Guy Faulconbridge

MOSCOW (Reuters) - The United States and Russia have held two days of successful talks on ways to slash vast stockpiles of Cold War nuclear weapons, a Russian diplomat said on Wednesday.

Finding a replacement for the 1991 Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START I) before it expires on Dec. 5 could herald a thaw in relations between the world's biggest two nuclear powers.

U.S. President Barack Obama and his Russian counterpart Dmitry Medvedev last month ordered officials to begin the complicated talks needed to find a replacement for START, one of the biggest arms reduction deals in history.

"The talks were held in a constructive spirit, we consider they were successful," a Russian diplomat told Reuters after the first round of formal negotiations ended on Wednesday. He gave no details on where progress had been made.

The diplomat said the next round of talks would be held in Geneva on June 1-3 and that a progress report would be made to Obama and Medvedev at their meeting in Moscow on July 6-8.

"We agreed that the first results of work on a new agreement will be reported in the forthcoming meeting in early July in Moscow," the diplomat said.

The talks are complicated by Washington's plan to station elements of an anti-missile system in Poland and Czech Republic, in order to intercept rockets fired from what it sees as rogue states, such as Iran. Russia says the plan will undermine its national security.

"EQUAL SECURITY"

Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov on Wednesday said the United States must allay Russian concerns over the missile system to achieve a breakthrough in the nuclear weapons talks.

"The fundamental principle of an agreement must be equal security for both sides and the preservation of strategic parity," he told reporters at the 19th century mansion where the talks took place. "This of course cannot be ensured without taking into account the situation with anti-missile defence."

Obama said last month that the United States would go ahead with the anti-missile system if Washington thought there was a continued threat from Iran.

But a study published on Wednesday by the East-West Institute, a think tank, said the system would have great difficulty distinguishing between warheads fired from Iran and the decoys that might accompany them.

The proposed shield "cannot provide a dependable defence for Europe or the United States" against Iranian missiles, it said.

Lavrov said the nuclear talks should also take account of any plans for space-based missiles and the development of highly destructive non-nuclear weapons.

Finding a deal could warm relations between Russia and the United States after bitter arguments under former U.S. President George W. Bush over missile defence, NATO expansion and last August's war between Russia and Georgia.

The negotiators face tight pressure to work through scores of complicated technical issues -- including differences over how to count nuclear weapons and ensure compliance -- before the December 5 deadline for replacing START.

http://thestar.com.my/news/story.asp?file=/2009/5/21/worldupdates/2009-05-20T215155Z_01_NOOTR_RTRMDNC_0_-397636-1&sec=Worldupdates

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RIA Novosti
20 May 2009

Lavrov says Arms Control Pact with U.S. Must Give Equal Security

MOSCOW, May 20 (RIA Novosti) - Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said on Wednesday that a new Russian-U.S. strategic arms reduction treaty must be based on the principle of equal security for both countries.

A team of U.S. negotiators led by Assistant Secretary of State Rose Gottemoeller is currently in Moscow for the first two-day round of official bilateral talks on a replacement for the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START), which is set to expire on December 5, 2009.

"Equal security and parity in the sphere of strategic stability should be the main principle of a new agreement," Lavrov told a news conference after talks with Egyptian Foreign Minister Ahmed Ali Aboul Gheit in Moscow.

"This goal cannot be achieved without taking into account the situation in the sphere of missile defense, and other aspects, such as the possible deployment of weapons in space and plans to make conventional warheads. I hope that all these factors will be fully accounted for," the top Russian diplomat said.

The Strategic Arms Reductions Treaty (START 1), signed in 1991, obliges Russia and the United States to reduce nuclear warheads to 6,000 and their delivery vehicles to 1,600 each.

In 2002, a follow-up agreement on strategic offensive arms reduction was concluded in Moscow. The agreement, known as the Moscow Treaty, envisioned cuts to 1,700-2,200 warheads by December 2012.

According to a report published by the U.S. State Department in April, as of January 1 Russia had 3,909 nuclear warheads and 814 delivery vehicles, including ground-based intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBM), submarine launched ballistic missiles (SLBM) and strategic bombers.

The same report stated the United States had 5,576 warheads and 1,198 delivery vehicles.

Moscow, which proposed a new arms reduction agreement with Washington in 2005, expects the United States to agree on a deal that would restrict not only the numbers of nuclear warheads but also place limits on all existing kinds of delivery vehicles.

"The final result of the talks should certainly be a step forward compared to the current regime of limitations," Lavrov said.

<http://en.rian.ru/russia/20090520/155048749.html>

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Los Angeles Times
May 20, 2009

Russia Foreign Minister: Arms Control Talks need to take US Missile Defense Plans into Account

VLADIMIR ISACHENKOV
Associated Press Writer

MOSCOW (AP) — Russia's foreign minister warned Wednesday that Moscow will demand that U.S. plans for a missile defense system be on the table during nuclear arms control talks.

Sergey Lavrov's remarks signal that the Kremlin is taking a tough posture in negotiations on cutting nuclear arsenals. The statement came as U.S. and Russian negotiators wrapped up their first round of talks on forging a replacement to the 1991 Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty.

Lavrov said at a news conference that any deal must mark a "step forward" from the existing agreements and provide "equal security to both parties and preserve parity in the sphere of strategic stability."

"It's impossible to achieve that without taking into account the situation in the missile defense sphere and many other factors, including (plans for) deployment of strike systems in space, plans for development of non-nuclear warheads and the situation with conventional weapons taking into consideration numerous innovative approaches," he said.

U.S. Defense Secretary Robert Gates said Wednesday in Washington that a decision was yet to be made on the future of the missile defense system. Gates said the U.S. may want to see whether Russia can be brought into the program, which he said would make it more effective.

Russian officials have warned in the past that the planned U.S. missile shield with potential space-based components could erode Russia's nuclear deterrent and give Washington a first-strike capability.

Moscow also has voiced concern about the U.S. plans to swap nuclear warheads for conventional explosives on some long-range ballistic missiles. It says the plan is destabilizing because it would be impossible to tell whether a missile launched by the U.S. was carrying a nuclear warhead.

These and other differences make many experts doubt that Moscow and Washington can reach a new agreement before the START treaty expires on Dec. 5, even though both nations have said they want to further reduce their nuclear stockpiles.

President Barack Obama's push for better ties with Moscow, which deteriorated under his predecessor, paved the way for the rapid launch of talks on a successor deal to START. The next round of arms control talks is scheduled to take place in Geneva on June 1-3, according to the Russian Foreign Ministry.

Obama has put the missile defense plan on hold, but Russia wants the U.S. to scrap it. Russian officials reject the U.S. claim that the plan to deploy 10 interceptor missiles in Poland and put a radar station in the Czech Republic is meant to defend against a potential threat from Iran.

U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton insisted the plan isn't directed against Russia in an interview with Russian state television broadcast Wednesday, saying it would be "stupid" to design a shield against Russia's massive nuclear arsenal. She said the U.S. has offered to work together with Russia on missile defense.

A Russian Foreign Ministry statement released late Wednesday said only that the first round of talks took place in a "constructive atmosphere."

But Lavrov's remarks signaled that Russia continues to see the missile defense as an important factor in arms control talks.

START, signed by Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev and President George H.W. Bush, led each country to cut its nuclear warheads by at least one-quarter, to about 6,000.

In 2002, then-President Vladimir Putin and President George W. Bush signed the so-called Treaty of Moscow, which called for further cuts to between 1,700 and 2,200 operationally deployed warheads by 2012.

The page-long document relied on comprehensive verification procedures contained in the 700-page START, including onsite inspections and regular exchange of data.

Failure to negotiate a replacement pact would leave Russia and the U.S. unable to inspect and verify each other's stockpile of nuclear warheads.

Alexander Pikayev, an arms control expert at Russia's Institute for World Economy and International Relations, said the parties may sign a quick interim agreement this year and then continue talks on a broader deal. He warned that a deadlock in arms control talks would have "negative consequences for overall relations."

<http://www.latimes.com/news/nationworld/wire/sns-ap-eu-russia-us-arms-control.1.5875675.story>

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China View
20 May 2009

Moscow says First Round of Russia-U.S. Arms Talks Successful: Report

MOSCOW, May 20 (Xinhua) -- Moscow sees the first round of the Russia-U.S. talks on a new strategic arms reduction treaty as successful and constructive, the Interfax news agency reported, citing a source with the Russian Foreign Ministry.

"The talks are over. We qualify them as a success," the source was quoted as saying.

The two-day meeting was held in a constructive way, the diplomat said, adding that the sides agreed to meet for the next round in Geneva on June 1-3.

"Reports on the first results of the work on a new treaty will be made at a Russian-U.S. summit in Moscow in early July," the source added.

Russian President Dmitry Medvedev and his U.S. counterpart Barack Obama, at their first meeting in London in early April, agreed to work out a replacement for the Strategic Arms Reductions Treaty (START) by the end of the year. The heads of state have ordered the negotiators to report back on progress by July.

The START, which is due to expire in December, places a limit of 6,000 strategic or long-range nuclear warheads on each side. The subsequent Moscow treaty called for reducing nuclear warheads to between 1,700 and 2,200 by the end of 2012.

http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2009-05/20/content_11409585.htm

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News International – Pakistan
21 May 2009

Russia Links Nuclear Talks to US Anti-Missile Plan

MOSCOW: The United States must allay Russian concerns over its planned anti-missile system in Europe if the two sides are to achieve a breakthrough on cutting nuclear weapons, Russia's foreign minister said on Wednesday.

US President Barack Obama and his Russian counterpart Dmitry Medvedev last month agreed to pursue a deal on cutting nuclear weapons that would replace the 1991 Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START I), which expires in December.

The world's two biggest nuclear powers began formal talks on Tuesday to find a replacement for START and diplomats hope progress can be made before Obama and Medvedev meet in Moscow on July 6-8.

But the talks are complicated by Washington's anti-missile plan. It is considering stationing elements of a missile shield in Poland and the Czech Republic, in order to intercept rockets fired from what it regards as rogue states, such as Iran. Russia sees this as upsetting the strategic balance and threatening its own security.

“The final product of the negotiations must of course be a step forward from the current system of limits and cuts,”

Lavrov told reporters at the 19th century mansion in central Moscow where talks on the successor to START continued on Wednesday. “The fundamental principle of an agreement must be equal security for both sides and the preservation of strategic parity. This of course cannot be ensured without taking into account the situation with anti-missile defence,” Lavrov said.

He added that the talks should also take account of any plans for space-based missiles and the development of highly destructive non-nuclear weapons. Finding a deal could herald a thaw in relations between the Cold War foes after bitter arguments under former US President George W Bush over missile defence, Nato expansion and last August’s war between Russia and Georgia.

Obama said last month that the United States would go ahead with the anti-missile system if Washington thought there was a continued threat from Iran.

The negotiators face tight pressure to work through scores of complicated technical issues — including differences over how to count nuclear weapons and ensure compliance — before the December 5 deadline for replacing START.

Meanwhile, the United States and Russia will hold a second round of talks on replacing the START nuclear disarmament treaty on June 1-3 in Geneva, a Russian foreign ministry source was quoted as saying on Wednesday.

The source also said that a first round of talks which ended in Moscow earlier on Wednesday had been “successful” and “constructive,” the Interfax news agency said, in a report also carried by RIA Novosti.

“The talks have ended. We evaluate them as successful ... The meeting was conducted in a constructive tone,” the source said, quoted by Interfax. “The first results of the work on a new treaty will be presented during the upcoming Russian-US summit in Moscow in July,” he added, referring to a planned visit by US President Barack Obama to the Russian capital.

Both Interfax and RIA Novosti cited a foreign ministry source as saying that negotiators had agreed to hold a second round of talks on START in Geneva from June 1 to 3. Russia and the United States have been seeking to create a new agreement to replace START, a 1991 treaty seen as a cornerstone of strategic arms control, before it expires on December 5.

http://www.thenews.com.pk/daily_detail.asp?id=178640

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Miami Herald
21 May 2009

Photos in Pakistan Signal Growing Nuclear-Arms Program

BY JONATHAN S. LANDAY
McClatchy News Service

WASHINGTON -- Additional evidence has emerged that Pakistan is "greatly expanding" its nuclear weapons program even as Islamic insurgents have been advancing toward the country's heartland from its border with Afghanistan.

Commercial satellite photographs published by the private Washington-based Institute for Science and International Security show the construction of new facilities at sites that produce components for Pakistan's nuclear warheads.

The new buildings appear to include a second plant near the military headquarters city of Rawalpindi for separating plutonium for nuclear weapons from spent reactor fuel.

"Commercial satellite imagery supports the conclusion that Pakistan, over the last several years, has concentrated on greatly expanding its nuclear weapons production complex," said one of two ISIS reports published Tuesday on the group's Web site. "The reasons for this expansion are undoubtedly related to Pakistani decisions to upgrade its nuclear arsenal."

MILITARY'S QUEST

The Pakistani military is likely seeking warheads that are more powerful, compact and easier to deliver than those in its current arsenal, which is believed to comprise 60-100 highly enriched uranium weapons, said the report on the expansion of a chemical complex at Dera Ghazi Khan.

Pakistan and archrival India conducted tit-for-tat underground nuclear tests in 1998, and some experts think Pakistan's efforts to expand its nuclear program may be a response to a 2007 U.S.-India agreement that critics charge could enable India to produce more plutonium for its nuclear arsenal.

"Activities at Dera Ghazi Khan related to nuclear weapons production are unnecessary, as Pakistan currently has more than enough nuclear weapons," said the ISIS report. "In the current climate, with Pakistan's leadership under duress from daily acts of violence by insurgent Taliban forces and organized political opposition, the security of its nuclear assets remains in question."

The report called on the Obama administration to persuade Pakistan to halt its production of fissile materials and join international negotiations on a global treaty banning the production of plutonium and highly enriched uranium for nuclear weapons.

FIRST REPORTS

McClatchy News Service first reported the expansion of Pakistan's nuclear weapons program on May 1, after ISIS published satellite pictures showing the construction of two new plutonium production reactors at Khushab in Punjab province.

Concerns have been rising over the security of Pakistan's nuclear arsenal and weapons facilities amid a drive by Taliban insurgents allied with al Qaida to seize the North West Frontier Province districts of Swat, Dir and Buner, which is about 60 miles north of Islamabad, the capital.

<http://www.miamiherald.com/news/world/story/1058382.html>

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Ha'aretz Daily – Israel
22 May 2009

U.S. Military: Nuke-Armed Iran would be 'Calamitous'

By Reuters

The consequences of Iran acquiring a nuclear weapon would be "calamitous" and major powers must act together to prevent it, the top U.S. military commander said on Thursday.

Admiral Mike Mullen's remarks came the day after Iran's president announced the country had tested a missile that analysts said could hit Israel and U.S. bases in the Gulf, a major source of crude oil for the United States.

Israel, the United States and other Western powers are concerned that Iran could combine elements of its uranium enrichment and missile programs to create a nuclear weapon, although Tehran denies it intends to do this.

"I'm one who believes that Iran getting a nuclear weapon is calamitous for the region and for the world," Mullen, chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, told the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

"It then, in my view, generates neighbors who feel exposed, deficient and then develop or buy the capability themselves," he said, suggesting Iran's acquisition of a nuclear weapon likely would trigger a nuclear arms race in the Middle East.

"The downside, potentially, is absolutely disastrous."

But Mullen did not suggest the United States should take military action to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons.

He echoed the Obama administration's policy that big powers should work together to persuade Iran not to pursue a nuclear bomb and halt the proliferation of nuclear weapons generally.

"Major leaders, internationally, have got to come together to arrest this growth or the long-term downside for the people in the world is really, really tragic and drastic," he said.

Israel and the United States have not ruled out military action against Iran but the Obama administration has adopted a policy of trying to engage Tehran diplomatically to resolve differences.

President Barack Obama said on Monday he hoped to begin negotiations with Tehran soon, after Iran holds elections next month. Iran's leaders largely have rebuffed his efforts so far to reach out to them, and toughened their rhetoric.

Obama also set a rough timetable for his diplomatic outreach, saying that by the end of this year the United States should have a sense of whether the effort was making progress.

Mullen has previously expressed concern that a military strike against Iran could add further turmoil to the unstable Middle East.

A U.S. National Intelligence Estimate issued in late 2007 concluded that Iran did have a nuclear weapons program but put the program on hold in 2003.

U.S. officials say they believe Tehran still wants to acquire at least the capability to make a nuclear bomb. Iran says its nuclear program is only to produce electricity so it can export more of its valuable oil and gas.

<http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/1087270.html>

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Jerusalem Post

May. 18, 2009

Iran to Mass Produce Long-Range Missiles

Yaakov Katz , THE JERUSALEM POST

Iran is in the midst of a multi-year plan that it hopes will culminate in the production of several hundred missile launchers and over 1,000 long-range ballistic missiles within the next six years, according to estimates in the Israeli defense establishment.

Teheran is believed to currently have an arsenal of 100-200 long-range Shihab missiles that have a range of up to 2,000 kilometers and carry up to one-ton warheads.

In addition, the Iranians last year test-fired a missile called Ashura believed to have recently entered production, the goal being to eventually replace the Shihab.

The Ashura is a solid-fuel missile, giving it a long shelf-life. Unlike the Shihab, it does not need to be fueled shortly before launching.

According to Israeli estimates, Iran's plan is to obtain 500 missile launchers and over 1,000 missiles with a range of 2,500 km. by 2015.

"The Iranians are making great efforts to obtain a significant number of missiles," said Tal Inbar, head of the Space Research Center at the Fisher Brothers Institute in Herzliya. "They already talk about how one of the ways they will overcome the missile defense systems is by firing salvos of missiles."

Inbar said that Iran was likely digging missile silos throughout the country that could be used to launch the Ashura solid-fuel missile.

In addition, regular trucks carrying hydraulic launchers could be manufactured in Iran and used as portable launchers, capable of firing from anywhere in the country.

According to estimates in Israel, Russia is still considering supplying the S-300 air defense system to Iran but is waiting to see what happens with the dialogue that the United States plans to hold with Iran.

Depending on the outcome of the dialogue and the status of relations between Washington and Moscow at the time, Russia will decide whether it will supply the system to Iran.

The S-300 is one of the most advanced multi-target anti-aircraft-missile systems in the world, with a reported ability to track up to 100 targets simultaneously while engaging up to 12 at the same time.

It has a range of about 200 kilometers and can hit targets at altitudes of 90,000 feet.

On Monday, the IAF will hold a countrywide exercise that the military stressed was not connected to current events.

The exercise will include the IAF's reserve forces and the public, should not be alarmed if it hears sirens and notices increased activity in Israel's skies, the army said.

<http://www.jpost.com/servlet/Satellite?cid=1242212398670&pagename=JPost%2FJPostArticle%2FShowFull>

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Los Angeles Times
May 20, 2009

Iran Nuclear Danger Downplayed in Reports

By Borzou Daragahi

Reporting from Beirut — A pair of reports released Tuesday by prominent think tanks downplay the potential dangers presented by Iran, concluding that Tehran is at least six years away from building a deliverable nuclear weapon and that its ability to wreak havoc in the Middle East through surrogates is exaggerated.

A report by a group of Russian and American scientists and engineers at the EastWest Institute concludes that although Iran could build a nuclear device within one to three years of deciding to do so, it would not be able to deliver a long-range weapon for many more years. The scientists also say that a U.S. missile defense system being considered for Central Europe would be useless against an Iranian nuclear weapon.

A separate 230-page report by the Rand Corp., the result of political and military research for the U.S. Air Force begun in 2007, found Iran a less formidable adversary than some believe.

The report notes "significant barriers and buffers" to Iran's ambitions because of the reality of regional ethnic and religious politics and "its limited conventional military capacity, diplomatic isolation and past strategic missteps."

It argues for exploiting the gap between Iran's ambitions and abilities while engaging with Tehran on areas of mutual interest, such as Afghanistan.

The reports come as the Obama administration ponders its next move regarding Iran, which continues to refine and expand nuclear technology that the West suspects is ultimately aimed at producing weapons but that Iranian leaders insist is meant only for peaceful purposes.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, in Washington this week, is trying to sway the administration to place Iran at the forefront of its Middle East agenda, ahead of the Arab-Israeli conflict. But President Obama told reporters after meeting Netanyahu on Monday that he saw resolving the issue of a Palestinian state as a way of lessening Iran's influence.

The Rand report argues that Iran "feeds off existing grievances with the status quo, particularly in the Arab world," rather than activating agents to stir up trouble. It suggests that the outside world ignore Iranian officials' sometimes aggressive, religiously tinged rhetoric and focus on its activities.

"Its revolutionary ideology has certainly featured prominently in the rhetoric of its officials," the report says. "However, the record of Iranian actions suggests that these views should be more accurately regarded as the vocabulary of Iranian foreign policy rather than its determinant."

Iran's foreign policy is driven more by old-fashioned nationalism and a desire to maintain territorial integrity and ensure the Islamic Republic's survival than by a desire to expand Iran's revolutionary ideology, the report says.

Rand also paints Iran as a military paper tiger, with poorly maintained and outdated equipment and shortages of personnel. Tehran exercises less control over militant groups such as Hezbollah, Hamas and its allies in Iraq than popularly believed, the report says.

"Iran has limited leverage over so-called proxy groups," it says. "In the event of conflict between the United States and Iran, the willingness of these groups to retaliate purely in the service of Tehran should not be assumed as automatic."

The EastWest Institute report, a year in the making, says it could take as long as 15 years for Iran to acquire long-range missile technology that would pose a threat to Europe or North America. Only the U.S., Europe, Russia and China have the technology that could help it achieve a breakthrough sooner, the report says.

The reports call on the U.S. to work with Russia and China in addressing Iran's ambitions.

"The U.S. and Russia together can create a much more robust response to any potential threat than the two countries can deal with by themselves," said Sarosh Syed, a spokesman for the EastWest Institute.

<http://www.latimes.com/news/nationworld/world/la-fg-iran-threat20-2009may20,0,5589113.story>

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Fars News Agency – Tehran, Iran
20 May 2009

Iran Successfully Test-Fires Sejil 2 Missile

TEHRAN (FNA)- Iran's President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad announced on Wednesday that the country has successfully test-fired a new missile called Sejil 2, underlining that the advancement would highly increase the country's deterrent power.

Addressing a large and fervent congregation of people in Iran's eastern province of Semnan, Ahmadinejad said when he and his cabinet ministers were on the flight to Semnan, the defense minister told him on the phone that "we have launched a Sejil-2 missile, which enjoys a very advanced technology, from Semnan and it has struck the intended target".

"The Sejil missiles are among multi-stage missiles which move fast and are able to go into space then come back and hit the target. It works on solid fuel," Ahmadinejad added to cheers from the crowd.

He did not specify the missile's range.

The Defense Minister Mohammad Mostafa Najjar said on November 12 that Iran had test-fired a new generation of ground-to-ground missiles.

Iran successfully test fired a new generation of ground-to-ground missile called "Sejil" on November 12. Sejil is a two-stage missile that carries two engines and burns combined solid fuel.

Prior to the test, Iran's missile capability was measured by its medium-range ballistic missile known as the Shahab-3, which means "shooting star" in Farsi, with a range of at least 800 miles (1,300 kilometers) which was improved and promoted to 1,200 miles (2,000 kilometers) in 2005.

Iran's Shahab-3 missile has been known to use liquid fuel. Missiles using liquid fuel are less accurate than those using solid fuel.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=8802301225>

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Times of London
May 20, 2009

Ahmadinejad Claims Iran's New Missile is Capable of Hitting Israel

NICO HINES

Mahmoud Ahmadinejad claimed today that Iran has successfully test fired a new medium-range missile capable of striking as far as Israel or southern Europe.

The Iranian President told a cheering crowd that the military had launched a surface-to-surface missile called Sejil-2 which has a range of about 1,200 miles.

"I was told that the missile is able to go beyond the atmosphere then come back and hit its target. It works on solid fuel," Mr Ahmadinejad said during a speech in Semnan, northern Iran.

"The defence minister told me today that we launched a Sejil-2 missile, which is a two-stage missile and it has reached the intended target."

The weapon is an updated version of the Sejil missile, which Iran said it had successfully tested late last year.

The announcement comes two days after President Obama said he would seek deeper international sanctions against Iran if it shunned American attempts to open talks on its controversial nuclear programme.

In the past, Iran has often boasted of developing new weapons systems, only to be met with scepticism from Western defence analysts.

Benjamin Netanyahu, the new Israeli Prime Minister, has said that Iran's missile technology combined with its nuclear programme pose the greatest threat the Jewish state has faced since its creation in 1948.

Iran insists that its nuclear programme is aimed solely at producing electricity for a growing population once its huge reserves of fossil fuels run out. Israel and other states suspect that it is a cover for attempts to create a nuclear weapon.

The UN Security Council has imposed three packages of sanctions against Iran after it ignored successive warnings to suspend uranium enrichment.

But Mr Ahmadinejad insisted once again today that Iran would not give in to any pressure over its nuclear programme. "They (Western governments) said if you don't stop, we will adopt (sanctions) resolutions... They thought we would retreat but that will not happen," he said. "I told them you can adopt 100 sets of sanctions, but nothing will change."

Sejil, the name of the new missile, is a reference to the stones hurled by holy birds sent to defeat an army of elephants in the Koran.

http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/middle_east/article6325697.ece

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Chicago Tribune
May 21, 2009

Iran Touts Missile Launch

By Borzou Daragahi
Tribune Newspapers

BEIRUT -- Iran's president announced the successful test-launch of an advanced surface-to-surface solid-fuel missile Wednesday that could reach Israel and other potential targets across the Middle East.

Iranian state television showed the blue rocket rising against a sunny desert backdrop, surrounded by the red, white and green flags of the Islamic Republic.

Iran has long had missiles that could reach Israel and the Persian Gulf states where the U.S. maintains several bases. But Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad boasted that the new Sajjil-2 incorporates "advanced technology" that makes it more accurate than Iran's arsenal of Shahab-series missiles, based on North Korean-designed rockets.

The two-stage missile has a range of 1,200 miles, according to a report by the official Islamic Republic News Agency. Iran's single-stage, liquid-fueled Shahab 3 also has a maximum range of about 1,200 miles. But experts say solid-fuel, double-stage rockets are more accurate for striking targets.

In Washington, Obama administration officials said the test demonstrated that Iran has made progress in its efforts to develop a solid-fuel missile with a longer range.

Defense Secretary Robert Gates described the launch as "a successful flight test" of a missile with a range between 1,200 and 1,500 miles. "Because of some of the problems they've had with their engines, we think at least at this stage of the testing it's probably closer to the lower end of that," Gates told the House Appropriations Committee.

Iran and the West are at odds over Iran's nuclear development program and its refinement of missile technology, which the U.S., Israel and many other nations believe are the cornerstones of an eventual nuclear weapons program. Hours after Ahmadinejad's speech announcing the launch, the French foreign ministry said it viewed the news with "great concern."

Iranian officials say the missile program is meant to defend the country in the face of threats by Israeli officials to bomb Iran's nuclear facilities. Ahmadinejad repeatedly has called for Israel's destruction.

Ahmadinejad's rocket announcement upstaged news that the Guardian Council, a powerful body of clerics and jurists, had approved the candidacies of three rivals against him in the June 12 presidential vote.

Karim Sadjadpour, an Iran expert at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, said the exercise may have been an effort by Ahmadinejad to bolster his defiant reputation before the elections.

"He wants to divert public attention away from his economic failings and portray himself as a strong leader," Sadjadpour said. "I'm sure Ahmadinejad was hoping for a stronger U.S. reaction, which could keep the attention focused on this issue, but the Obama team has so far been wise enough not to take the bait."

<http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/nationworld/chi-iran-missilemay21,0,5542225.story>

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San Francisco Chronicle
May 21, 2009

Nuclear Missile Test-Fire a Success, Iran Says

Thomas Erdbrink, Debbi Wilgoren, Washington Post
Semnan, Iran --

Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad announced Wednesday that his country had successfully launched a medium-range missile, just two days after President Obama and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu discussed the importance of halting Iran's nuclear ambitions.

The missile was test-fired in Semnan province, east of Tehran. Ahmadinejad visited the province Wednesday as part of a campaign tour in advance of national elections June 12.

The hard-line Iranian leader told a crowd of several thousand that the missile - which according to previous descriptions by Iranian officials would be capable of striking Israel or U.S. bases in the Persian Gulf region - was an important scientific achievement. But he also described the launch in belligerent terms as a blow to those trying to thwart Iran's nuclear program.

"In the nuclear case, we send them a message: Today the Islamic Republic of Iran is running the show," Ahmadinejad said in a speech at a soccer stadium that was broadcast live on Iranian television. "We say to the superpowers, who of you dare to threaten the Iranian nation? Raise your hand! But they all stand there with their hands behind their backs.

"Every center of power which wants to shoot a bullet, before it can put its finger on the trigger, we will cut its hands and send it to hell."

Ahmadinejad said that "in the short future we will launch longer rockets with bigger reach from this province."

"God is the greatest scientist," Ahmadinejad said. "A country needs science in order to develop. It's the light of the path."

Iran's nuclear program was the top priority for Netanyahu when he visited Obama at the White House for the first time Monday. Although Iran's leaders say they are working to create nuclear power only for civilian use, Netanyahu and others believe the program is designed to produce nuclear weapons, which Israel's government views as an existential threat to the Jewish state.

Israel reacted to the news of the launch by saying Europe and the United States should share Israel's goal of stopping Iran's missile program. "In terms of strategic importance, this new missile test doesn't change anything for us since the Iranians already tested a missile with a range of 1,500 kilometers, but it should worry the Europeans," Deputy Foreign Minister Danny Ayalon told Israel Radio. "If anybody had a doubt, it is clear the Iranians are playing with fire."

<http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2009/05/20/MNI617NVJ4.DTL>

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New Zealand Herald

Iranian Missile Launch Alarms US

JERUSALEM - The missile test-fired by Iran early yesterday was the longest-range solid-propellant missile it had launched yet, raising concerns about the sophistication of Tehran's missile programme, a United States Government official said.

He said Tehran had demonstrated shorter-range solid-propellant missiles in the past.

Solid-propellant rockets were a concern because they could be fuelled in advance and moved or hidden in silos, the official said. Liquid-propellant rockets have to be fuelled and fired quickly, which makes preparations for launches easier to monitor and would allow a pre-emptive strike if necessary.

But according to Defence Secretary Robert Gates, who yesterday provided official US confirmation of the Iranian launch, the missile had a range of 2000 to 2500km.

That puts Israel, US bases in the Middle East, and parts of Eastern Europe within striking distance.

"The information that I have read indicates that it was a successful flight test," Gates told the House Appropriations Committee nearly eight hours after it was announced by Iran's President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

Gates added that "because of some of the problems they've had with their engines we think, at least at this stage of the testing, it's probably closer to the lower end of that range. Whether it hit the target that it was intended for ... I have not seen any information on that".

US officials said government analysts and other specialists were still assessing information from the launch. "Obviously, that's concerning," White House spokesman Robert Gibbs said of the launch.

The launch comes less than a month before Iran's presidential election and just two days after President Barack Obama declared a readiness to seek deeper international sanctions against Tehran if it did not respond positively to US attempts to open negotiations on its nuclear programme.

Ahmadinejad said the Sejil 2 missile had "landed exactly on the target".

The launch may also have been timed to coincide with the official start of campaigning for the June 12 election.

The President faces challenges by critics of his stridently anti-Israel and anti-Western rhetoric. At a rally in the northern Selman province, where the official Iranian news agency IRNA said the launch had taken place, Ahmadinejad said Iran had the power to "send to hell" any military base from which "a bullet" was fired against the country. State television showed footage of a missile soaring into the sky, followed by a vapour trail.

In a reference to Israel, Ahmadinejad said: "The Zionist regime ... threatens Iran with its false threats and the Iranian nation should know that it is just theatre."

Danny Ayalon, Israel's deputy Foreign Minister, said: "If anyone had any doubt, now it's clear to all that Iran is playing with fire."

http://www.nzherald.co.nz/world/news/article.cfm?c_id=2&objectid=10573753

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RIA Novosti
19 May 2009

Russian-U.S. Panel says Missile Shield in Europe Ineffective

MOSCOW, May 19 (RIA Novosti) - A missile shield planned by the U.S. to protect Europe from a possible Iranian attack would be ineffective against the kinds of missiles Iran could deploy, according to a study by U.S. and Russian experts.

The report, produced by the EastWest Institute, an independent think tank based in Moscow, New York and Brussels, concluded it would take Iran at least five years to build a nuclear warhead and a delivery system.

"The missile threat from Iran to Europe is thus not imminent," the 12-member technical panel said.

The document, released on Tuesday, said the experts' conclusions were presented to U.S. National Security Adviser James Jones, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and Russian Security Council Secretary Nikolai Patrushev in February.

The report said Iran's current arsenal was derived from relatively unsophisticated North Korean missiles, which in turn were modified versions of a Russian submarine-launched missile that dates from the 1950s.

"We believe that these components were likely transferred to North Korea illegally in the late 1980s and early 1990s, when Russia was experiencing major political and economic chaos," the report states.

If Iran was to build a nuclear-capable missile that could strike Europe, the defense shield proposed by the United States "could not engage that missile," the report says. The missile interceptors could also be easily fooled by decoys and other simple countermeasures, the report concludes.

"The more immediate danger comes from the military and political consequences that would follow if Iran were to acquire nuclear weapons," the report says.

"The urgent task, therefore, is for Russia and the United States (and other states) to work closely together to seek, by diplomatic and political means, a resolution of the crisis surrounding the Iranian nuclear program," it adds, noting that this "could be helped if the issue of European missile defense were set aside."

The findings seem to strengthen the positions of Moscow, which has been at loggerheads with Washington over plans to deploy a missile defense system in Central Europe. The U.S. has signed agreements with the Czech Republic and Poland on the deployment of a radar station and 10 interceptor missiles by 2013.

Russia says the missile shield would be a threat to its national security while the U.S. has argued it is necessary to guard against the threat of missile attacks from states such as Iran.

<http://en.rian.ru/world/20090519/155043876.html>

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Washington Post

May 19, 2009

U.S.-Russian Team Deems Missile Shield in Europe Ineffective

By Joby Warrick and R. Jeffrey Smith

Washington Post Staff Writers

A planned U.S. missile shield to protect Europe from a possible Iranian attack would be ineffective against the kinds of missiles Iran is likely to deploy, according to a joint analysis by top U.S. and Russian scientists.

The U.S.-Russian team also judged that it would be more than five years before Iran is capable of building both a nuclear warhead and a missile capable of carrying it over long distances. And if Iran attempted such an attack, the experts say, it would ensure its own destruction.

"The missile threat from Iran to Europe is thus not imminent," the 12-member technical panel concludes in a report produced by the EastWest Institute, an independent think tank based in Moscow, New York and Belgium.

The report, scheduled for release today, could further dampen the Obama administration's enthusiasm for a Bush administration plan to deploy radars and interceptor missiles in Poland and the Czech Republic. The missile shield has been promoted as a safeguard against future attacks from rogue states, particularly Iran. But the plan has severely strained relations with Moscow, which says it would undermine strategic stability and lead to a new arms race.

The year-long study brought together six senior technical experts from both the United States and Russia to assess the military threat to Europe from Iran's nuclear and missile programs. The report's conclusions were reviewed by former defense secretary William J. Perry, among others, before being presented to national security adviser James L. Jones and Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov.

The report acknowledges dramatic technological gains by Iran, and it predicts that the country could probably build a simple nuclear device in one to three years, if it kicked out U.N. inspectors and retooled its uranium-processing plants to make weapons-grade enriched uranium. Another five years would be needed to build a warhead that would fit on one of Iran's missiles, the panel says. U.S. intelligence agencies have made similar predictions; Israel maintains that Iran could build a bomb in as little as eight months.

The U.S.-Russian experts say Iran faces limits in developing ballistic missiles that could someday carry nuclear warheads. Its current arsenal is derived from relatively unsophisticated North Korean missiles, which in turn are modified versions of a Russian submarine-launched missile that dates from the 1950s. "We believe that these components were likely transferred to North Korea illegally in the late 1980s and early 1990s, when Russia was experiencing major political and economic chaos," one of the U.S. team members said in a separate commentary.

As a result, the missiles have inherent weaknesses stemming from such aged technology, despite some improvements in their range, the report states. Moreover, the country lacks "the infrastructure of research institutions, industrial plants, or the scientists and engineers that are needed to make substantial improvements."

They conclude that it would take Iran at least another six to eight years to produce a missile with enough range to reach Southern Europe and that only illicit foreign assistance or a concerted and highly visible, decade-long effort might produce the breakthroughs needed for a nuclear-tipped missile to threaten the United States.

Moreover, if Iran were to build a nuclear-capable missile that could strike Europe, the defense shield proposed by the United States "could not engage that missile," the report says. The missile interceptors could also be easily fooled by decoys and other simple countermeasures, the report concludes.

"The much more urgent problem is to seek a resolution" of the Iranian nuclear crisis, the report says. "That is a project on which the United States and Russia need to cooperate more closely."

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/05/18/AR2009051803055.html?hpid%3Dmoreheadlines%E2%8A%82=AR>

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Reuters.com

May 20, 2009

Gates Defends U.S. Missile Defense Cuts

By Andrea Shalal-Esa

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - Defense Secretary Robert Gates on Wednesday defended cuts to U.S. missile defense programs, saying Washington would still invest in boosting defenses against long-range missile threats, like those posed by North Korea and Iran.

Gates told a House of Representatives subcommittee that the United States had made "great technological progress on missile defense" in the last two decades, but it was vital to strike a balance between research and development of new programs and procurement.

He said the Pentagon had enough money from its fiscal 2009 budget to start building missile defense facilities in the Czech Republic and Poland if those countries approve and the Obama administration decides to move ahead with the plans.

But he said the administration also had "great interest" in partnering with Russia on missile defense.

"The reality is that radars located in Russia supplementing those in the Czech Republic would give additional capability to the sites in Europe," Gates told the House Appropriations Committee's defense subcommittee.

Michele Flournoy, defense undersecretary for policy, told a defense writers breakfast the Pentagon was working on the issue with other federal agencies, Russia and the European partners, and hoped to reach a solution in the next months.

"We are also looking at the full range of technological solutions, are there better ways to do this, and importantly, can we do this in a cooperative manner with Russia," she said.

The administration's fiscal 2010 budget plan calls for termination of two missile defense programs and cut funding for the Missile Defense Agency by \$1.2 billion.

The cuts have been questioned by lawmakers.

U.S. Rep. Dave Obey, a Wisconsin Democrat, questioned the timing of the missile defense cuts, particularly after Iran announced on Wednesday that it had tested a missile that analysts say could hit Israel and U.S. bases in the Gulf.

Obey, who heads the Appropriations Committee, also cited "continuing rhetoric about threats to our friends and allies in the region" from Tehran.

Representative Tom Price, chairman of the Republican Study Committee, said Iran's test of the surface-to-surface missile underscored the "very real danger of a hostile Iran."

"A strong, strategic missile defense system will go a long way toward preventing a constant threat of attack by rogue nations," he said in a statement.

Gates said the Pentagon would continue robustly to fund research on improving defenses against long-range missile threats, and had added funding to protect against shorter-range regional threats.

The budget added \$700 million in funding for the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) system being developed by Lockheed Martin Corp and the Standard Missile-3 (SM-3) program run by Raytheon Co.

But he was sharply critical of several multibillion-dollar programs, including two aimed at destroying enemy missiles during the boost phase, soon after launch.

Northrop Grumman Corp's Kinetic Energy Interceptor, a program once valued at \$6 billion, was scrapped because it offered limited capability against threats from Iran, and virtually none against Russia or China, he said.

Gates said he also cut plans for a second Airborne Laser to be built by Boeing Co, given serious cost and technology issues. He said the chemical laser developed for the program would have to be 20 to 30 times bigger to be operationally useful, making its proposed role "highly questionable."

Gates also canceled the Multiple Kill Vehicle built by Lockheed because it faced significant technical challenges.

(Reporting by Andrea Shalal-Esa, editing by Matthew Lewis)

<http://www.reuters.com/article/politicsNews/idUSTRE54J74520090520?sp=true>

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Google News

19 May 2009

India Tests Nuclear-Capable Missile: Sources

BHUBANESWAR, India (AFP) — India successfully tested a nuclear-capable missile off its eastern coast on Tuesday, defence sources said, as part of the nation's efforts to build a credible minimum nuclear deterrent.

The medium-range surface-to-surface Agni-II, which can hit targets at a distance of 2,500 kilometres (1,560 miles), was fired from a mobile launcher on Wheeler Island off the coast of Orissa state, the source said.

"A trial of Agni-II was conducted Tuesday," the source told AFP, adding the test was successful.

"It was a trainer use trial" intended to help the army learn how to use the weapon, the source added.

There was no immediate comment available from the defence ministry.

The Indian-developed 20-metre-long missile weighs 16 tonnes and is capable of carrying one tonne of conventional or nuclear warheads.

It was the third successful trial of the Agni-II, the Press Trust of India news agency reported, saying the missile was now ready for production.

India already has the 3,000-kilometre range Agni-III missile -- the longest in the Agni series -- which can carry conventional or nuclear payloads.

The missile is one of a series being developed by India's Defence Research Development Organisation as part of the country's deterrent strategy against neighbouring China and Pakistan which also have nuclear weapons.

The Agni-I missile has a strike range of 1,500 kilometres.

http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5jtdsaTRQgjRLfqJrloe7LDLAom_Q

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Wall Street Journal

OPINION

MAY 19, 2009

The Arms-Control Dinosaurs Are Back

By MARC A. THIESSEN

When John Bolton served in the State Department during the Bush administration, he often walked the halls of Foggy Bottom wearing his trademark dinosaur ties -- a self-deprecating nod to those who thought his political views somewhat Jurassic. Today other dinosaurs have replaced him. The aging arms controllers who once haggled with Soviet officials are staging a comeback in the Obama administration.

This week in Moscow they'll pick up where they left off nearly two decades ago, sitting across the table from their Russian counterparts negotiating a renewal of the 1991 U.S.-Soviet Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (Start). One of the U.S. negotiators, Assistant Secretary of State Rose Gottemoeller, refers to herself as a "Sputnik baby." She told the Washington Post after initial talks in New York earlier this month: "We've all been looking around and chuckling and saying 'We're all over 50.'"

President Barack Obama's goal of "a world without nuclear weapons" notwithstanding, the State Department is reportedly scrambling to staff its arms-control bureau because so many arms-control experts have retired and there's no one coming up in the ranks to replace them. Apparently not many young policy wonks are aware that cutting nuclear deals with Moscow is again the fast track to a high-flying diplomatic career.

The Obama revival of arms control comes at an odd moment. The past eight years have seen the fewest arms-control negotiations in a generation and some of the deepest nuclear weapons reductions in history. Thanks to the work of the Bush administration, the U.S. nuclear stockpile is now one-quarter the size it was at the end of the Cold War -- the lowest level since the Eisenhower administration. When George W. Bush took office, the U.S. had more than 6,000 operationally deployed strategic nuclear warheads. Today, that number has been reduced to less than 2,200. The U.S. had originally planned to reach this milestone on Dec. 31, 2012, but instead met its goal this February.

How did the U.S. achieve such dramatic reductions so quickly? Answer: By abandoning traditional arms control. When Mr. Bush took office, he decided not to engage in lengthy, adversarial negotiations with Russia in which both sides kept thousands of weapons they did not need as bargaining chips. He did not establish standing negotiating teams in Geneva with armies of arms-control experts doing battle over every colon and comma. If he had done so, the two sides would probably still be negotiating today.

Instead, Mr. Bush simply announced his intention to reduce the U.S.'s operationally deployed strategic nuclear warheads by some two-thirds and invited Russia to do the same. President Vladimir Putin accepted his offer. These unilateral reductions were then codified in the 2002 Moscow Treaty, a three-page pact that took just six months to negotiate. By contrast, the Start treaty signed by President George H.W. Bush and Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev -- and now being revived by the Obama team -- is 700-pages long and took nine years to negotiate.

Even as he enacted massive reductions in nuclear weapons, George W. Bush took other actions to reduce nuclear dangers. His administration launched the Global Threat Reduction Initiative, which secured more than 600 vulnerable nuclear sites around the world and helped convert 57 nuclear reactors in 32 countries from highly-enriched uranium to low-enriched uranium, removing enough weapons-grade material from countries around the world for more than 40 nuclear bombs.

With G-8 leaders, Mr. Bush launched the Global Partnership Against the Spread of Weapons and Materials of Mass Destruction -- a \$20 billion international effort to secure and dispose of nuclear and fissile materials and help former weapons scientists find new lines of work. The U.S. and Russia launched the Global Initiative to Combat Nuclear Terrorism, a coalition of 75 nations that is working to stop the illicit spread of nuclear materials. The U.S. and Russia also launched the Bratislava Initiative, which has secured nearly 150 Russian sites containing nuclear warheads and hundreds of metric tons of weapons-quality material.

Despite this record of achievement, the arms controllers see the Bush era as a dark age from which they must rescue the world. They are intent on reviving the antiquated and adversarial approach to arms reductions. As serious negotiations begin, Russia will use these negotiations on arms reductions as leverage to get the U.S. to give up its planned deployment of ballistic missile defenses in Poland and the Czech Republic. Unlike Ronald Reagan at Reykjavik, it is not clear that Mr. Obama would walk away from a deal to preserve these vital defenses.

In addition to a new Start treaty, the Obama administration also reportedly plans to press the Senate to approve the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), a fatally flawed agreement that was rejected by the Senate in 1999 because it would undermine reliability of our nuclear stockpile. Instead of pressing the Senate to act on the CTBT, the administration should be calling on Congress to restore the funding it eliminated last year for the Reliable Replacement Warhead program, which would allow us to develop new warheads without the need for nuclear testing and thus ensure the reliability of America's nuclear deterrent.

Mr. Obama will visit Moscow in July where he and President Dmitry Medvedev will discuss progress on their stated goal to "move beyond Cold War mentalities and chart a fresh start in relations." Bringing back Cold War-era arms-control negotiations is a strange way to do so. In the 21st century, arms-control agreements are as antiquated as cave drawings. We no longer need pieces of parchment and armies of arms-control aficionados to achieve deep reductions in nuclear weapons. This fact is lost on the Sputnik babies now inhabiting the State Department.

<http://online.wsj.com/article/SB124268963178032407.html>

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Wall Street Journal

OPINION

May 20, 2009

Get Ready for another North Korean Nuke Test

By John R. Bolton

The curtain is about to rise again on the long-running nuclear tragicomedy, "North Korea Outwits the United States." Despite Kim Jong Il's explicit threats of another nuclear test, U.S. Special Envoy Stephen Bosworth said last week that the Obama administration is "relatively relaxed" and that "there is not a sense of crisis." They're certainly smiling in Pyongyang.

In October 2006, North Korea witnessed the incredible diplomatic success it could reap from belligerence. Its first nuclear test brought resumption of the six-party talks, which gave Kim Jong Il cover to further advance his nuclear program.

Now, Kim is poised to succeed again by following precisely the same script. In April, Pyongyang launched a Taepodong-2 missile, and National Security Council official Gary Samore recently confirmed that a second nuclear test is likely on the way. The North is set to try two U.S. reporters for "hostile acts." The state-controlled newspaper calls America "a rogue and a gangster." Kim recently expelled international monitors from the Yongbyon nuclear complex. And Pyongyang threatens to "start" enriching uranium -- a capacity it procured long ago.

A second nuclear test is by no means simply a propaganda ploy. Most experts believe that the 2006 test was flawed, producing an explosive yield well below even what the North's scientists had predicted. The scientific and military imperatives for a second test have been strong for over two years, and the potential data, experience and other advantages of further testing would be tremendous.

What the North has lacked thus far is the political opportunity to test without fatally jeopardizing its access to the six-party talks and the legitimacy they provide. Despite the State Department's seemingly unbreakable second-term hold over President Bush, another test after 2006 just might have ended the talks.

So far, the North faces no such threat from the Obama administration. Despite Pyongyang's aggression, Mr. Bosworth has reiterated that the U.S. is "committed to dialogue" and is "obviously interested in returning to a negotiating table as soon as we can." This is precisely what the North wants: America in a conciliatory mode, eager to bargain, just as Mr. Bush was after the 2006 test.

If the next nuclear explosion doesn't derail the six-party talks, Kim will rightly conclude that he faces no real danger of ever having to dismantle his weapons program. North Korea is a mysterious place, but there is no mystery about its foreign-policy tactics: They work. The real mystery is why our administrations -- Republican and Democratic -- haven't learned that their quasi-religious faith in the six-party talks is misplaced.

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton recently rejected "linkage" in Russia policy as "old thinking." Disagreement in one area, she argued, shouldn't prevent working on "something else that is of overwhelming importance." Whatever the merits of linkage vis-à-vis Russia, de-linking a second North Korean nuclear test from the six-party talks simply hands Pyongyang permission to proceed.

Even worse, Iran and other aspiring nuclear proliferators will draw precisely the same conclusion: Negotiations like the six-party talks are a charade and reflect a continuing collapse of American resolve. U.S. acquiescence in a second North Korean nuclear test will likely mean that Tehran will adopt Pyongyang's successful strategy.

It's time for the Obama administration to finally put down Kim Jong Il's script. If not, we better get ready for Iran -- and others -- to go nuclear.

<http://online.wsj.com/article/SB124277648950937029.html>

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London Daily Telegraph

OPINION

21 May 2009

Barack Obama is giving Iran the Time it needs to build a Nuclear Bomb

Has President Obama inadvertently given Iran the green light to develop an atom bomb? I only ask because it appears to be the logical conclusion to be drawn from his announcement this week that he is giving Iran until the end of the year to decide whether or not to co-operate with the West over its controversial nuclear programme.

In all the furore over MPs' expenses, it is hardly surprising that the implications of Mr Obama's highly revealing comment have gone unnoticed in this country. But taken at face value, it could have a major impact on how the international crisis over Iran's nuclear programme plays out.

Under pressure from a visiting Benjamin Netanyahu, the Israeli prime minister, to explain the latest White House position on Iran, a relaxed Mr Obama remarked: "We should have a fairly good sense by the end of the year as to whether [the Iranians] are moving in the right direction."

The only problem with this somewhat lackadaisical approach to the most pressing security issue of the modern age is that, come the end of the year, Iran's development of a nuclear weapon will be a *fait accompli*.

At the heart of the international campaign to persuade Tehran to halt its programme is the awareness that, according to intelligence estimates, Iran will by the end of this year have sufficient quantities of low-enriched uranium (LEU) to build a nuclear warhead. Even the most doveish intelligence analysts agree that 2,000 kilos would be sufficient for an atom bomb, and in March, the International Atomic Energy Agency, the UN's nuclear watchdog, confirmed that Iran had so far successfully produced half of that amount in its uranium enrichment facility at Natanz.

Natanz has the capacity to produce 100 kilos of LEU a month, which means that, unless Tehran can be persuaded to halt its enrichment activities, it will have all the fuel it needs to produce a bomb by the end of year – just when Mr Obama will be looking to Tehran to respond to his peace overtures.

Whether or not Iran has an active military nuclear programme to turn that fuel into a bomb is a topic of hot debate within the western intelligence community. It is now widely agreed that such a programme was in place until 2003, when it was abruptly abandoned, as Tehran took fright following the invasion of Iraq. Many experts argue that there is now sufficient evidence to suggest that the country has resumed its efforts since the hardliner Mahmoud Ahmadinejad won the presidency in 2005.

Because of this, those involved in the tortuous negotiations to persuade Tehran to freeze uranium enrichment – which have been under way for six years – are well aware that time is of the essence. Even when Mr Obama, in his first weeks in office, offered the hand of friendship to Iran if it agreed to "unclench its fist", most western negotiators believed that the diplomatic pressure – in the form of economic sanctions – had to be maintained if Tehran was to be brought to its senses.

At a stroke, however, Mr Obama's comments have taken the pressure off Iran, just as the nuclear crisis approaches a critical juncture. Next month, Iran goes to the polls to choose a new president. The outcome of this election will determine the fate of Iran's 30-year stand-off with the West.

However, if this week's confirmation of the four presidential candidates is anything to go by, don't expect a radical change of direction in Tehran anytime soon. Of the 475 people who put their names forward for the contest, 471 were excluded on ideological grounds by the Guardian Council, the all-powerful body which is charged with protecting the core principles of Ayatollah Khomeini's revolution.

The Guardian Council reports directly to Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, Khomeini's successor as Supreme Leader, which means that the regime has yet again manipulated the election result in its favour before a vote has even been cast.

Mr Ahmadinejad remains the favourite, but in the unlikely event that he fails to win a second term, he would simply be replaced by another conservative hardliner. The other candidates are Mohsen Rezai, a former commander of the Revolutionary Guards, Mir Hossein Musavi, who served as Iran's prime minister under Ayatollah Khomeini in the 1980s, and Mahdi Karroubi, a former speaker of the Iranian parliament. Not exactly a list that will give Iranians a chance to vote for change they can believe in.

As if to set the tone for the forthcoming election campaign, Mr Ahmadinejad earlier this week announced that Iran had successfully launched a missile capable of hitting Israel, while reiterating his determination to press ahead with the nuclear programme.

Whatever happens at the polls, Mr Obama does not have to wait until the end of the year to find out whether Tehran is prepared to make the concessions necessary to resolve this crisis. Whether it is Mr Ahmadinejad or one of the other candidates who triumphs on June 12, the message will be the same: no deal.

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/comment/columnists/concoughlin/5363486/Barack-Obama-is-giving-Iran-the-time-it-needs-to-build-a-nuclear-bomb.html>

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Time

OPINION

May. 22, 2009

Iran's Missile Test: A Message to Obama and Netanyahu

By Tony Karon

Iran's latest missile test may have less to do with advancing its military capability than with getting a last word in on Monday's conversation between President Barack Obama and Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. After all, the weapon whose test-firing was announced Wednesday by President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad on the election campaign trail does not significantly extend the reach of others already in Iran's arsenal. Instead, it appears to have been a ballistic message, to Iranian voters as well as to the U.S. and its Mideast allies, that Iran isn't about to be intimidated into backing off its nuclear development, and that it has the means to retaliate against any military strikes.

Netanyahu emerged from Monday's White House meeting saying he and Obama saw "exactly eye to eye" on the Iran issue, and some media reports suggested that Obama had agreed to a deadline of the end of 2009 for his diplomatic efforts to succeed in persuading Iran to reverse course on its nuclear program. In fact, Obama was more nuanced in response to the Israelis' agitation for a time limit on Washington's outreach to Tehran, refusing to impose an "artificial deadline" but affirming that his patience was not unlimited, and that by year's end he would have a good idea whether Iran was making a "good-faith effort to resolve differences." The President seeks to avoid being strung along by Tehran in open-ended talks, but is also mindful of the futility of simply reiterating ultimatums that have until now left the Iranians unmoved.

Iran insists its nuclear intentions are confined to generating electricity, but the concern of the U.S. and its allies is that the infrastructure of a civilian nuclear program — particularly uranium enrichment — puts a nuclear weapon within short-term reach should Iran decide to assemble one. (Israel and U.S. believe that Iran has not yet taken such a decision, and to do so it would have to expel the international inspectors that currently monitor its enrichment facility at Natanz. That's because the uranium already enriched there would have to be reprocessed to a far higher degree of enrichment to create bomb matériel.) The position adopted until now by the U.S. and its European allies and Israel is that Iran should not be permitted to develop even "breakout capacity" of the type maintained by, for example, Japan — i.e., a peaceful nuclear-energy infrastructure that could be quickly converted to bomb production should the government choose to weaponize.

The Israelis want to limit the diplomatic time frame out of fear that Iran will use open-ended talks as a cover for expanding its nuclear infrastructure. After all, even the Bush Administration had, in its final years, backed away from demanding that Iran suspend uranium enrichment as a precondition for talks, and Obama is unlikely to resuscitate a position to which the Iranians have shown no intention to concede. Instead, he seeks to create the most favorable conditions for diplomacy to work, because the alternatives are so unpalatable. Military strikes against Iran's nuclear facilities are deemed by the U.S. military to be likely to cause more problems than they'll solve — at best, they'd simply set back the Iranian program by a few years, at the price of potentially triggering a regional war that could imperil the interests of the U.S. and its allies, including Israel, for years to come. Winning Chinese and Russian support for harsher sanctions remains unlikely absent Iran taking actual steps towards nuclear weaponization, while an economic blockade could prompt a confrontation.

The timetable for talks is obviously less important than the result, however, so the key question facing Obama is this: Can Washington and Tehran agree to a compromise on Iran's nuclear program, and would such a formula be acceptable to the Israelis?

Until now, the European diplomacy backed by the Bush Administration has aimed at getting Iran first to suspend uranium enrichment and then to agree to forgo the right to enrichment on its own soil, instead importing the fuel for its nuclear-energy program, in exchange for a package of political, economic and diplomatic incentives. Even if the

U.S. agrees to talk while Iran's centrifuges are spinning, what's less clear is whether Washington and its allies will eventually settle for less than Iran forgoing enrichment altogether, and accept some level of low-grade enrichment being conducted under an expanded inspection regime.

The purpose of seeking to deny Iran enrichment capability had been, as President Bush stressed, to prevent Iran from "mastering the technology" to create bomb-grade matériel. But Iran has clearly now mastered enrichment technology, producing a steadily growing stockpile of low-enriched uranium. While the U.S. would obviously like Tehran to dismantle its enrichment facilities, there's widespread doubt in Washington and beyond that the Iranians would agree.

"It is highly unlikely that the United States will be able to persuade or pressure Iran to forgo uranium enrichment entirely," former Bush Administration State Department official and current Council on Foreign Relations president Richard Haass recently noted. "The best that can be hoped for is a ceiling on what Tehran does — in particular, not enrich uranium to a concentration required for a weapon — and intrusive inspections so that the world can be confident of this. The outcome is less than ideal, to say the least, but it is one we could live with."

Whether the Israelis would be ready to live with Iran maintaining a measure of "breakout capacity," albeit under a far tighter inspection regime, remains to be seen. Israeli officials have in the past insisted on a quick and complete end to uranium enrichment in Iran, failing which they'll consider military action — although Netanyahu has undertaken to refrain from attacking Iran without first consulting Washington. But Iran is unlikely simply to climb down. It will likely show flexibility in seeking a formula that addresses Western concerns over its nuclear intentions, but on its own terms. What either side will offer, or be willing to accept, of course, must remain a matter of conjecture: diplomatic opening bids seldom resemble bottom lines in resolving a strategic stalemate. But the conversation between Obama and Netanyahu on Iran could yet prove testy in the months ahead.

<http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1900387,00.html>

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