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Los Angeles Times
June 19, 2009

U.S. Boosts Missile Defense amid Reports of Planned N. Korea Test

By Julian E. Barnes

Reporting from Washington -- Reacting to reports that North Korea may be preparing to test-fire a missile toward Hawaii, Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates said Thursday that he had ordered additional assets deployed to shore up defense of the islands.

Gates ordered the deployment of a powerful sea-based radar system that can help closely track the path of intercontinental ballistic missiles and also sent terminal-phase missile interceptors to Hawaii.

The comments may be intended to deter North Korea from attempting another long-range missile launch and to reassure allies that the United States is willing to act to prevent a successful test by the government in Pyongyang.

According to reports in Japanese media, the North Koreans appear to be preparing to conduct their next long-range test around July 4. Experts believe that because the last long-range missile test failed, Pyongyang has more to prove and may see another test as necessary.

Although Gates did not explicitly say that the U.S. would try to shoot down a test missile aimed in the direction of Hawaii, he noted that interceptor missiles in California and Alaska were ready.

"The ground-based interceptors are clearly in a position to take action," Gates said. "So without telegraphing what we will do, I would just say, I think we are in a good position, should it become necessary to protect American territory."

Victor D. Cha, a scholar at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, said Gates' comments could be intended as a deterrent.

"It is probably to let the North Koreans and the world know we are going to prepare a response if they are going to continue to launch missiles, particularly if they are going to launch it in the direction of Hawaii," said Cha, who was President George W. Bush's top advisor on North Korea.

This week, Marine Gen. James Cartwright, the vice chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said that he was "90%-plus" confident the U.S. could shoot down a North Korean missile.

Gates' more assertive language shows a deeper confidence by the military and government in the missile defense system, Cha said.

"We are just more capable now," Cha said. "We are much more willing to say we are preparing missile defenses if we are confident we would be able to take something out either in the boost phase or on a ballistic path."

Theater missiles in the Pacific Ocean, which target the boost phase, or the mid-course interceptors in Alaska and California would probably be the ones most likely to shoot down a North Korean missile.

The Terminal High Altitude Area Defense, or THAAD, missiles that Gates deployed to Hawaii are meant to shoot down missiles minutes before they strike their target. Meant for short-range missiles, they have not been tested on long-range rockets.

The sea-based radar system, known as the SBX, had been docked in Hawaii for maintenance and repairs and was not deployed when the North Koreans shot a Taepodong 2 rocket in April.

Missile defense experts said that if the system had been deployed, the U.S. would have been able to gather more information about that launch.

The SBX was due to deploy anyway to participate in planned missile defense tests this summer. But by linking the deployment to the prospect of another North Korean test, Gates appears to be sending a signal that the U.S. might try to shoot down a missile from Pyongyang.

Before April's launch, military officials suggested the U.S. could destroy the rocket, but Gates publicly tamped down speculation that the defense system would be used.

Thursday, Gates said the Defense Department was watching the situation closely.

"We do have some concerns, if they were to launch a missile . . . in the direction of Hawaii," he said.

Military officials are also tracking a North Korean ship that has been involved in transporting weapons in the past. The Kang Nam left North Korea on Wednesday.

A new United Nations resolution allows other nations to ask to search North Korean ships or inspect them when they make port calls if the vessels are suspected of smuggling arms or nuclear material.

<http://www.latimes.com/news/nationworld/world/la-fg-gates-north-korea19-2009jun19.0.2004099.story>

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RIA Novosti

19 June 2009

Russia Monitors N. Korea Preparations for Missile Launch

MOSCOW (RIA Novosti) - Russia is monitoring North Korea's preparations for a ballistic missile launch, but does not know when one might take place, a deputy chief of the Russian General Staff said on Friday.

"It is too early to say when North Korea could launch a missile - this could happen at any time," Lt. Gen. Alexander Burutin said. "Our monitoring facilities are on permanent alert, and we will detect the missile seconds after it is launched."

Japanese and South Korean intelligence sources have said the North appears to be preparing to test-launch two intercontinental ballistic missiles, in defiance of new UN sanctions.

Burutin said that if a missile were launched, it would not fly over Russia.

"But if a North Korean missile goes in our direction, we will shoot it down," he added.

Japan's Yomiuri daily said on Thursday, citing Defense Ministry analysis and U.S. intelligence, that North Korea may launch a long-range ballistic missile toward the U.S. state of Hawaii in early July.

The missile, thought to be a long-range Taepodong-2, would be launched from the country's Dongchang-ni site on the northwestern coast, Japan's best-selling newspaper said, adding that the Defense Ministry believes the launch is most likely to take place between July 4 and July 8.

Burutin said that in predicting the possible launch date Japan has to use indirect indicators and may be wrong.

The reclusive communist state carried out a series of short-range missile launches after its May 25 nuclear test, and has threatened steps to build up its deterrence potential to counter what it calls hostile U.S. policies.

<http://en.rian.ru/world/20090619/155296480.html>

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Christian Science Monitor

June 19, 2009

With Its Ship Kang Nam, North Korea Tests UN's Resolve

By Gordon Lubold, Staff writer of The Christian Science Monitor

WASHINGTON - The North Korean ship the US is monitoring in the Pacific Ocean offers a vexing first test of how far the international community can go to prevent the North from shipping nuclear materials, even as it works under a UN resolution that some say lacks teeth.

The US began tracking the Kang Nam after it left a North Korean port Wednesday, reportedly headed for Singapore. It is not known what the ship actually contains but American officials suspect it may be carrying banned nuclear-related material or equipment. They have begun monitoring the ship using US naval vessels and planes. The destroyer USS John McCain is also reportedly in the vicinity as part of the interdiction effort, according to Fox News.

The Kang Nam is the first vessel to be tracked under a new UN resolution aimed at preventing the North from shipping nuclear-related materials. The resolution passed last week after North Korea staged a missile test and a separate, underground test of a nuclear device.

But, because of concerns voiced by Russia and China, the resolution only authorized voluntary inspections of ships to and from the North. With North Korea unlikely to voluntarily submit to searches of its ships, experts say, it leaves open the question of what more the US OR the international community is prepared to do to counter the North.

"The administration is going to have to make a very hard decision right now," says Michael Auslin, a resident scholar of Asian Studies at the American Enterprise Institute, a conservative think tank in Washington. "If they have good intelligence that this ship is carrying contraband and if they do not succeed in interdicting it or getting the first port to investigate it, then you've blown a hole in the effectiveness of the resolution on its first test."

North Korea has said that it would see any forced inspection as an act of provocation.

The UN resolution adopted June 12 authorizes countries to conduct inspections of North Korean ships if there are "reasonable grounds" to suspect that banned cargo is aboard. It also adopted stricter economic sanctions and a ban on the North's arms sales.

Some ships are known to be outfitted with extra fuel and water tanks, but most will have to stop at a port sooner or later, where they could presumably be searched by local authorities amenable to the UN resolution.

Adm. Mike Mullen, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, acknowledged during a Pentagon briefing Thursday that the US faces a tricky situation with North Korea, but offered no details about the Kang Nam or what the US was prepared to do.

Some analysts say the glass is half-full regarding the UN resolution. It has galvanized the international community against North Korea and that is a major step, they say.

"It's a pretty big step for the Security Council to take," notes Allen Weiner, a former State Department attorney specializing in international law and now a senior lecturer at the Stanford Law School. The sanctions, he says, "are not as much as we might like, but they are not bad."

<http://www.csmonitor.com/2009/0619/p02s10-usmi.html>

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FOXNews.com

June 19, 2009

Navy Positions Destroyer for Possible Intercept of North Korean Ship Suspected of Proliferating Missiles, Nukes

The U.S. military is preparing for a possible intercept of a North Korean flagged ship suspected of proliferating weapons material in violation of a U.N. Security Council resolution passed last Friday, FOX News has learned.

The USS John McCain, a navy destroyer, is positioning itself in case it gets orders to intercept the ship Kang Nam as soon as it leaves the vicinity off the coast of China, according to a senior U.S. defense official. The order to interdict has not been given yet, but the ship is moving into the area.

"Permission has not been requested. Nor is it clear it will be," a military source told FOX News. "This is a very delicate situation and no one is interested in precipitating a confrontation."

The ship left a port in North Korea Wednesday and appears to be heading toward Singapore, according to a senior U.S. military source. The vessel, which the military has been tracking since its departure, could be carrying weaponry, missile parts or nuclear materials, a violation of U.N. Resolution 1874, which put sanctions in place against Pyongyang.

The USS McCain was involved in an incident with a Chinese sub last Friday - near Subic Bay off the Philippines.

The Chinese sub was shadowing the destroyer when it hit the underwater sonar array that the USS McCain was towing behind it.

That same navy destroyer that was being shadowed by the Chinese is now positioning itself for a possible interdiction of the North Korean vessel.

This is the first suspected "proliferator" that the U.S. and its allies have tracked from North Korea since the United Nations authorized the world's navies to enforce compliance with a variety of U.N. sanctions aimed at punishing North Korea for its recent nuclear test.

The ship is currently along the coast of China and being monitored around-the-clock by air.

The apparent violation raises the question of how the United States and its allies will respond, particularly since the U.N. resolution does not have a lot of teeth to it.

The resolution would not allow the United States to board the ship forcibly. Rather, U.S. military would have to request permission to board -- a request North Korea is unlikely to grant.

North Korea has said that any attempt to board its ships would be viewed as an act of war and promised "100- or 1,000-fold" retaliation if provoked.

Since the U.S. does not expect to be granted permission, it expects to be asked to interdict that it will have to shadow the ship until it runs out of fuel. At that point, the ship would likely have to be towed into the port.

The U.S. military may request that the host country not provide fuel to the ship when it enters its port. North Korean merchant ships usually need fuel as they approach Singapore and the ports of eastern India. When tipped off, Indian port authorities are stringent enforcers of UN sanctions against ships carrying contraband.

The U.S. Navy does not need to enforce the sanctions. Instead, it could "poison the host," a move that entails working behind the scenes with Indian Ocean port authorities to inspect and confiscate illegal cargos.

This move worked last year when U.S. officials reportedly warned Indian officials in advance of a North Korean transport aircraft that had requested permission to fly through Indian airspace on the way to Iran after stopping in Burma to refuel. The Indians refused to allow the aircraft to fly through their airspace. The aircraft reportedly was carrying gyroscopes for ballistic missiles.

The Kang Nam is known to be a ship that has been involved in proliferation activities in the past -- it is "a repeat offender," according to one military source. The ship was detained in October 2006 by authorities in Hong Kong after the North Koreans tested their first nuclear device and the U.N. imposed a subsequent round of sanctions.

The latest tension follows a Japanese news report that North Korea may fire a long-range ballistic missile toward Hawaii in early July.

Defense Secretary Robert Gates said Thursday the military is "watching" that situation "very closely," and would have "some concerns" if North Korea launched a missile in the direction of Hawaii. But he expressed confidence in U.S. ability to handle such a launch.

Gates said he's directed the deployment of the Theater High Altitude Area Defense, a mobile missile defense system used for knocking down long- and medium-range missiles.

"The ground-based interceptors are clearly in a position to take action. So, without telegraphing what we will do, I would just say ... I think we are in a good position, should it become necessary, to protect the American territory."

<http://www.foxnews.com/politics/2009/06/19/military-set-intercept-north-korean-ship-suspected-proliferatin-missiles-nukes/>

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RIA Novosti
21 June 2009

North Korea Accuses South and U.S. of Plotting Nuclear War

MOSCOW, June 21 (RIA Novosti) - North Korea has accused the leaders of the United States and South Korea of plotting a nuclear attack on the country at their recent meeting.

Barack Obama met with Lee Myung-bak in Washington last week for discussions focused on the potential threat from North Korea in the wake of the reclusive communist state's May 25 nuclear test and planned ballistic tests.

"During his recent visit to the U.S., Lee discussed reinforcing the nuclear deterrent against his fellow countrymen in DPRK [North Korea's official name]. He is full of foolish ambitions to attain unification even through a nuclear war aided by foreign forces," the North's state-run weekly Tongil Sinbo in a commentary.

"It's not a coincidence at all for the U.S. to have brought numerous nuclear weapons into South Korea," the article, translated by South Korea's Yonhap agency, said.

At the U.S.-South Korean summit, the sides agreed to build a "strategic alliance" to "work together to achieve the complete and verifiable elimination of North Korea's nuclear weapons and existing nuclear programs, as well as ballistic missile programs."

Yonhap cited a South Korean presidential official as saying Lee would seek a written commitment from the U.S. to provide a nuclear "umbrella" as part of an "extended deterrence" against Pyongyang.

The presidents' meeting came amid North Korea's threats to strengthen its nuclear arsenal, in defiance of a UN Security Council resolution passed after its nuclear test.

Both presidents urged the North to change its confrontational stance.

"We urge North Korea not to make any unacceptable demands because we really do not know what will happen if they keep on this path," Lee told reporters after the talks.

The U.S. leader said: "there has been a pattern in the past where North Korea behaves in a belligerent fashion and, if it waits long enough, it is rewarded... I think that is the pattern they have come to expect. The message we are sending them is that we are going to break that pattern."

<http://en.rian.ru/world/20090621/155309704.html>

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Melbourne Herald Sun – Australia

June 22, 2009

US 'Prepared for N Korea Missile Launch'

From correspondents in Washington

PRESIDENT Barack Obama has assured the American public that the United States is ready and able to deal with any North Korean missile launch towards its territory.

"This administration - and our military - is fully prepared for any contingencies," Mr Obama said in a CBS interview to be aired overnight.

The comment came after he was asked about the possibility that Pyongyang could fire a missile toward Hawaii on or about July 4, US Independence Day.

Asked if his answer meant Washington was "warning of a military response", Mr Obama replied: "No. It's just we are prepared for any contingencies."

"I don't want to speculate on hypotheticals," he said, according to excerpts.

"But I do want to give assurances to the American people that the T's are crossed and the I's are dotted in terms of what might happen."

A Gallup poll released on Thursday suggested that 51 per cent of Americans believe North Korea poses the greatest direct threat to US security, ahead of Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan.

The Pentagon has beefed up defences in Hawaii over fears Pyongyang may launch a missile towards the island chain, Defence Secretary Robert Gates said on Thursday.

"I would just say I think we are in a good position should it become necessary to protect American territory," Mr Gates said.

He said he had approved the deployment to Hawaii of Theatre High Altitude Area Defence weaponry for support in case of a North Korean launch.

Such weapons, coupled with a radar system nearby, are designed to shoot down ballistic missiles.

Ground-based defences in Alaska are also ready, Mr Gates said.

Meanwhile, a US Navy destroyer, the USS *John S. McCain*, has been tracking a North Korean ship previously linked to illicit missile-related cargo, say US defence officials.

South Korea's YTN television channel, citing an unnamed intelligence source, said the US suspects the 2000-tonne Kang Nam 1 is carrying missiles or related parts, and is heading for Burma via Singapore.

It is the first vessel to be monitored under a United Nations resolution passed a week ago that bans shipments of arms and nuclear or missile technology to and from North Korea.

US officials have yet to indicate if or when they might ask to search the vessel under the UN Security Council resolution.

The measure calls for inspections of ships if there are "reasonable grounds" that a vessel may be carrying illicit cargo but rules out the use of military force to back up the searches.

In the TV interview, Mr Obama said there was strong international consensus against Pyongyang, after it detonated its second nuclear device on May 25 and went ahead with what Washington called a disguised test of a long-range missile in April.

Pyongyang said its April 5 launch put a satellite into orbit, a claim the US military has disputed, saying the payload - along with the rest of the missile - splashed into the Pacific Ocean.

"More broadly, I think the international community has spoken," Mr Obama said, noting that the Security Council has agreed to tighter cargo inspections, a stricter arms embargo and new targeted financial curbs to choke off revenue for the North's nuclear and missile sectors.

But the US President also pointed out that North Korea still had "a path towards rejoining the international community".

"And we hope they take that path," he said.

<http://www.news.com.au/heraldsun/story/0,21985,25672950-23109,00.html>

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RIA Novosti
22 June 2009

Russia Backs Five-Nation Talks on North Korea

MOSCOW, June 22 (RIA Novosti) - Moscow supports the idea of five-party talks on North Korea's nuclear problem to determine further steps in dealing with the current crisis, the Russian Foreign Ministry said on Monday.

"We highly regard cooperation between the 'seven' [Russia, the United States, France, Britain, China, Japan and South Korea] in the UN Security Council," the ministry said in a statement.

"We are in favor of conducting five-party talks [between countries involved in six-nation talks on North Korea] to discuss further actions," the statement said.

The concept of five-party talks, which would exclude North Korea, has been gaining popularity after a summit between South Korean President Lee Myung-bak and his U.S. counterpart Barack Obama last week.

The South Korean leader has suggested that a new framework of dialogue may be needed to draw the North back to the negotiations.

The six-nation talks involving North and South Korea, Russia, Japan, China and the United States, were launched in 2003 after Pyongyang withdrew from the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT).

Under deals reached in 2007, the North began disabling a nuclear reactor and other facilities at Yongbyon under international supervision, in exchange for economic aid and political incentives, which included the deliveries of fuel oil to Pyongyang.

However, in December last year, a round of six-nation talks ended in deadlock over a U.S. demand that nuclear inspectors be allowed to take samples from North Korean facilities out of the country for further analysis.

The UN has recently imposed new sanctions on North Korea that forbid the import and export of nuclear material, missiles and all other weapons, with the exception of small arms. It has authorized the world's navies to enforce the ban. The sanctions came in response to a North Korean nuclear test on May 25.

On June 13, the reclusive communist state released a statement threatening "resolute military action" if the United States and its allies tried to isolate it, vowing to "weaponize" plutonium, and warning it would consider attempts to blockade it an "act of war."

The Russian Foreign Ministry reiterated on Monday that there was no alternative to a diplomatic solution to the crisis, but said Moscow viewed the latest threats from Pyongyang as an open challenge to the world community.

<http://en.rian.ru/russia/20090622/155314493.html>

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Time.com

Jun. 22, 2009

The North Korean Showdown Ratchets Up

By MARK THOMPSON / WASHINGTON

North Korea would like to test missiles and advance its nuclear program, while smuggling arms to some potentially bad actors for extra cash. The U.S. would like North Korea to stop doing all of these things. Neither side is particularly interested in finding out what happens should the other press the issue. And thus North Korea and the U.S. find themselves in a very strange Kabuki war. Pyongyang is plainly the instigator, continuing its rash of missile and nuclear tests while apparently seeking hard currency by peddling weapons to all buyers. Like automated chess pieces, U.S. military assets have responded by moving into place: to thwart any missile launch, ground-based missile defenses are being deployed to Hawaii, and a nearly \$1 billion 10-story, seaborne missile radar has been dispatched to keep an eye peeled for any missile launch from North Korea. It would clearly be a dumb move for North Korea to launch a missile toward the U.S. Its long-range Taepodong 2 has had multiple failures, and even when it works it is limited to a range of only 4,000 miles, about 500 short of Hawaii. (The longest ranging U.S. missile can travel more than 6,000 miles.) But just because it's foolish doesn't mean the North Koreans — hardly a predictable bunch — won't consider it.

As a result, it's been a busy weekend for U.S. intelligence. Spy planes and satellites are monitoring launch preparations at several North Korean launch sites, while other U.S. surveillance platforms are following the progress of the *Kang Nam*, a North Korean vessel suspected of ferrying banned arms, missiles or nuclear components. The destroyer U.S.S. *John S. McCain* — named for the father and grandfather of the Arizona Senator, both admirals — is trailing the 2,000-ton vessel. According to South Korean television, the ship is headed to Burma, a nation run by a military dictatorship and a suspected longtime buyer of North Korean weaponry. "If we have hard evidence" that the ship is carrying banned weaponry, Senator John McCain told CBS on Sunday, "I think we should board it."

Under a June 12 U.N. Security Council resolution, the U.S. and its allies can ask Pyongyang for permission to inspect the *Kang Nam*. But once North Korea refuses — as it is expected to do — all the mighty U.S. military can do under the resolution is inform the U.N. and stand aside while diplomats try to force any nation resupplying the ship to allow inspectors aboard. Pyongyang has said any interception of its shipping would be an "act of war," and declared over the weekend that it would "respond to sanctions with retaliation" including "unlimited retaliatory strikes" against South Korea if it helps apply U.N. sanctions.

The Obama Administration has made it clear it has no desire to negotiate yet again for North Korea's good behavior. Pyongyang has sporadically engaged in such actions for more than a decade, content to use them as levers to win concessions from the international community in exchange for civilized conduct — before abandoning such pledges. Significantly, China — long North Korea's protector — also seems to be growing weary of North Korea's belligerent behavior.

Meanwhile, interceptor missiles in Alaska "are clearly in a position to take action" if Hawaii is threatened, Defense Secretary Robert Gates said on June 18. "We do have some concerns, if they were to launch a missile to the west in the direction of Hawaii," he added. "We are in a good position, should it become necessary, to protect Americans and American territory." If a North Korean shot somehow draws close, Marine General James Cartwright, vice chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said on June 16 that he felt "very comfortable," predicting that existing U.S. missile defenses have a 90% chance of destroying it in flight.

Few Hawaiians, or the tourists on whom the state's economy relies, seem concerned. The state's tourism office told the Associated Press that only a single prospective visitor had called to ask about the threat. "We believe," spokeswoman Marsha Wienert said, "that this is a very safe destination."

<http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1906113,00.html>

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Associated Press (AP)
News Hosted by Google
22 June 2009

Official: N. Korean Ship Carries Weapons to Myanmar

By HYUNG-JIN KIM

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — A North Korean-flagged ship under close watch in Asian waters is believed to be heading toward Myanmar carrying small arms cargo banned under a new U.N. resolution, a South Korean intelligence official said Monday.

Still, analysts say a high seas interception — something North Korea has said it would consider an act of war — is unlikely.

The Kang Nam, accused of engaging in illicit trade in the past, is the first vessel monitored under the new sanctions designed to punish the North for its defiant nuclear test last month. The U.S. military began tracking the ship after it left a North Korean port on Wednesday on suspicion it was carrying illicit weapons.

A South Korean intelligence official said Monday that his agency believes the North Korean ship is carrying small weapons and is sailing toward the Myanmar city of Yangon.

The official, who spoke on condition of anonymity citing the sensitive nature of the information, said he could provide no further details.

Myanmar's military government, which faces an arms embargo from the U.S. and the European Union, reportedly has bought weapons from North Korea in the past.

The Irrawaddy, an online magazine operated by independent exiled journalists from Myanmar, reported Monday that the North Korean ship would dock at the Thilawa port, some 20 miles (30 kilometers) south of Yangon, in the next few days.

The magazine cited an unidentified port official as saying that North Korean ships have docked there in the past. The magazine's in-depth coverage of Myanmar has been generally reliable in the past.

South Korean television network YTN reported Sunday that the ship was streaming toward Myanmar but said the vessel appeared to be carrying missiles and related parts. The report cited an unidentified intelligence source in South Korea.

Kim Jin-moo, an analyst at Seoul's state-run Korea Institute for Defense Analyses, said the North is believed to have sold guns, artillery and other small weapons to Myanmar but not missiles, which it has been accused of exporting to Iran and Syria.

The U.N. sanctions, which toughen an earlier arms embargo against North Korea, ban the country from exporting all weapons and weapons-related material, meaning any weapons shipment to Myanmar would violate the resolution.

The Security Council resolution calls on all 192 U.N. member states to inspect North Korean vessels on the high seas "if they have information that provides reasonable grounds to believe that the cargo" contains banned weapons or material to make them. But that requires approval from the North.

If the North refuses to give approval, it must direct the vessel "to an appropriate and convenient port for the required inspection by the local authorities."

North Korea, however, is unlikely to allow any inspection of its cargo, making an interception unlikely, said Hong Hyun-ik, an analyst at the Sejong Institute think tank outside Seoul.

A senior U.S. military official told The Associated Press on Friday that a Navy ship, the USS John S. McCain, is relatively close to the North Korean vessel but had no orders to intercept it. The official spoke on condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the issue.

Any chance for an armed skirmish between the two ships is low, analysts say, though the North Korean crew is possibly armed with rifles.

"It's still a cargo ship. A cargo ship can't confront a warship," said Baek Seung-joo of the Korea Institute for Defense Analyses.

Tension on the Korean peninsula has been running high since the North's May 25 nuclear test, with Pyongyang and Washington exchanging near-daily accusations against each other.

President Barack Obama assured Americans in an interview broadcast Monday that the U.S. is prepared for any move North Korea might make amid media reports that Pyongyang is planning a long-range missile test in early July.

"This administration — and our military — is fully prepared for any contingencies," Obama said during an interview with CBS News' "The Early Show."

Still, ever defiant, North Korea declared itself a "proud nuclear power" and warned Monday that it would strike if provoked.

"As long as our country has become a proud nuclear power, the U.S. should take a correct look at whom it is dealing with," the country's main Rodong Sinmun said in commentary. "It would be a grave mistake for the U.S. to think it can remain unhurt if it ignites the fuse of war on the Korean peninsula."

<http://www.google.com/hostednews/ap/article/ALeqM5iURO8fOyWVOA0ytFlaAGuC9F7R9wD98VS8A80>

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Wall Street Journal
June 23, 2009

U.S. Keeps Close Eye On North Korean Ship

By Jay Solomon and Yochi J. Dreazen

The Pentagon continues to trail a North Korean cargo ship believed headed toward Myanmar, in part because U.S. officials worry that Pyongyang plans to transfer major weapons systems and possibly nuclear technologies to the repressive Southeast Asian country, current and former U.S. officials said.

North Korea has used Myanmar ports and airstrips to transfer arms and contraband to third countries, including Iran, these officials said. Myanmar's military government also has purchased on the open market technologies that are potentially usable in a nuclear program, and North Korean arms companies involved in the nuclear trade have become active in Myanmar, said U.S., Asian and United Nations officials.

North Korean workers, meanwhile, have aided Myanmar's military junta in building underground tunnels near the new capital city of Naypyitaw that could have military applications, say U.S. officials.

U.S. and U.N. officials said there could be nonmilitary reasons to explain Myanmar's actions, and they acknowledge there is no "smoking gun" to back fears of nuclear proliferation inside the Southeast Asian country. But U.S. and Asian diplomats draw strong similarities between the military governments in Pyongyang and Naypyitaw and their efforts to develop weapons of mass destruction as deterrents against U.S. power.

"Given North Korea's nuclear trade to Syria, its attempts to sell Scuds to Myanmar, and its ongoing sales of conventional arms, there's reason to be worried about a WMD relationship," said Michael Green, who tracked Myanmar as a top adviser to former President George W. Bush. In 2004, Myanmar's military junta was in negotiations to buy Scud missile parts from Pyongyang, but the Bush administration convinced Myanmar to back off.

Pentagon officials said Monday that the U.S. Navy continues to track a North Korean cargo ship, in an operation that could serve as a test case for U.N. sanctions enacted last month to try to choke off Pyongyang's weapons trade.

The cargo ship Kang Nam left North Korea on Wednesday and has been trailed by the USS John S. McCain heading south toward the Myanmar coast, according to Pentagon officials. A second U.S. destroyer, the USS McCampbell, is set to pick up the trail with the aid of a P-3 reconnaissance plane.

Pentagon officials said the guided-missile destroyers haven't been given orders to intercept the Kang Nam and hadn't requested permission to do so. "Right now, we're just watching," a Pentagon official said.

North Korea analysts said the cat-and-mouse game highlights a potential weakness in last month's U.N. Security Council resolution concerning North Korea. The measure only allows U.N. member states to inspect vessels with the consent of the nation whose flag the ship is flying. Since North Korea is unlikely to give such permission, U.S. officials acknowledge that they are largely powerless to stop and search the Kang Nam. The resolution also calls for ships seeking port services from U.N. member countries to be refused, but that is unlikely to come up in this case.

U.S. and Asian diplomats have voiced alarm about the growing military and trade relationship between North Korea and Myanmar. The two countries severed diplomatic ties in the 1980s after North Korean agents assassinated South Korean ministers on a state visit. But Myanmar formally opened an embassy in Pyongyang last year.

In August 2008, Washington worked with the Indian government to deny flyover rights to a North Korean Air Koryo jet, which Washington believed was moving missile components to Iran from Myanmar. Officials from one of North Korea's principal arms companies, Nomchongang Trading Co., have also become active inside Myanmar in recent months, former U.S. officials said.

Officials at Myanmar's embassies in Bangkok and Washington, D.C., and at the Ministry of Information in Myanmar didn't respond to questions about the country's alleged nuclear ambitions. North Korea has denied selling nuclear equipment.

Earlier this month, an online magazine of Yale University's Center for the Study of Globalization published photos believed to show tunnels being built under Myanmar's new capital of Naypyitaw with the help of North Korean technicians, ostensibly for military purposes. The accuracy of the photos couldn't be verified.

Several Myanmar citizens, some of them expatriates, have claimed direct knowledge of a nuclear-weapons program, including a reactor under construction near Maymyo, according to Myanmar experts. But the remote area is off-limits to outsiders without government permission and the reports haven't been independently confirmed.

Residents in the area say foreign technicians, including from Russia, have visited the town recently. Russia has acknowledged an agreement with Myanmar to help build a nuclear reactor and do civilian nuclear research, but says no projects have materialized.

Myanmar is a party to the international Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty that went into effect in 1970, and thus has committed not to develop nuclear weapons. It also has reached agreements with the U.N.'s International Atomic Energy Agency to verify that Myanmar isn't diverting nuclear research, material, or technology to make nuclear weapons. Still IAEA officials have privately voiced their concerns about Myanmar's recent purchases of dual-use technologies.

<http://online.wsj.com/article/SB124571192210838865.html>

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RIA Novosti

19 June 2009

Russia's Bulava Missile 'Will Fly' - Navy chief

MOSCOW (RIA Novosti) - Russia will carry out the next test of a Bulava sea-launched ballistic missile in late July, and will conduct a total of four or five launches this year, the Navy commander said on Friday.

"The next launch is planned for the second half of July, and a total of four or five launches are planned in 2009," Adm. Vladimir Vysotsky said.

Despite five failures in 10 trials, the last unsuccessful trial being in December 2008, Russia's Defense Ministry is planning to complete Bulava tests and put the ICBM into service by the end of 2009.

"It will fly, it will definitely fly," Vysotsky told reporters.

The Russian military says the Bulava, along with Topol-M ballistic missiles, will become the backbone of Russia's nuclear triad.

The triad comprises land-based ballistic missile systems, nuclear-propelled submarines armed with sea-launched ballistic missiles, and strategic bombers carrying nuclear bombs and nuclear-capable cruise missiles.

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

Currently, six types of silo-based and road-mobile ICBMs, including the heavy Voyevoda (SS-18 Satan), capable of carrying 10 warheads, and the Topol-M (Stalin), are in operational service with the Strategic Missile Forces.

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

<http://en.rian.ru/russia/20090619/155296534.html>

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Barents Observer - Norway
19 June 2009

State-of-the-Art Nuclear Submarines to the Russian Navy

By the end of the year, the Russian Navy will be receiving two state-of-the-art nuclear powered strategic submarines. "Yury Dolgoruky" is brand new, while "Karelia" has been modernized to improve its tactical and technical performance. Russia also plans to resume testing of the new "Bulava" ballistic missile this summer.

"Karelia"

The strategic nuclear Delta-IV class submarine K-18 "Kareliya" has started mooring trials after modernizations at the Zvezdochka ship yard in Severodvinsk, Arkhangelsk Oblast. The modernization has prolonged the submarine's lifetime with approximately ten years and improved its tactical and technical performance considerably.

News paper Izvestia reports that sea trials will start this autumn and that the submarine will be handed over to the Northern Fleet at the end of the year.

According to Wikipedia, "Kareliya" is one of seven Delta-IV class nuclear submarines built from 1985 to 1992. All are still in service in the Russian navy today. Five submarines have already gone through modernization at the Zvezdochka shipyard.

After the modernization the submarine's main weapon system is the Sineva ballistic missile. According to Wikipedia, it can carry ten 100kT warheads. In a test launch on 11 October 2008, an R-29RMU travelled 11,547 kilometers downrange.

"Yury Dolgoruky" and "Bulava"

Governmental tests of the strategic nuclear submarine "Yury Dolgoruky" are planned to be conducted this autumn, and the submarine should be delivered to the Fleet at the end of the year, web site Severnyflot.ru reports. This is Russia's first submarine of the Borey-class, and the first to be equipped with Bulava missiles.

"Yury Dolgoruky" has been built at the Sevmashtopshipyard in Severodvinsk. Two other Borey-class nuclear submarines, the "Alexander Nevsky" and the "Vladimir Monomakh", are currently under construction at the Sevmashtopshipyard.

Construction of a fourth submarine of this class is planned to start up either in connection with the celebration of Navy's Day in the end of July, or in connection with the shipyard's 70 year anniversary in December 2009. The name of this submarine is yet unknown.

Both the Pacific Fleet and the Northern Fleet will receive submarines of the Borey-class. As Barents Observer earlier reported, the three first vessels will probably be taken into service at the Pacific Fleet.

“Yury Dolgoruky” will be Russia's first submarine to be equipped with Bulava missiles. It will have 16 missiles, each carrying up to 10 nuclear warheads and having a range of 8,000 kilometers.

The next test launch of the “Bulava” sea-based intercontinental ballistic missile is planned to take place at the end of July, Head of the Russian Navy Vladimir Vysotsky said according to Vedomosti . There will be four or five test launches this year.

Since 2003, Russia has conducted ten test launches of the “Bulava” missile. Five of the tests have ended in failure, like the last test on December 23rd last year, reported by Barents Observer.

<http://www.barentsobserver.com/state-of-the-art-nuclear-submarines-to-the-russian-navy.4608935-58932.html>

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RIA Novosti
20 June 2009

Medvedev Hopes for Progress in Nuclear Talks with U.S.

AMSTERDAM, June 20 (RIA Novosti) - Russian President Dmitry Medvedev said Saturday he hopes his meeting with U.S. President Barack Obama in July in Moscow will promote a new nuclear disarmament treaty.

"We are ready to cut our strategic delivery vehicles by several times compared to the START-1 treaty. As for warheads connected with these delivery vehicles, their number should be lower than the level envisioned by the Moscow Treaty of 2002," Medvedev told journalists.

"We are for real, effective and checkable cuts," he said, adding that at the meeting with Obama they will also discuss economic and regional problems, as well as other aspects of bilateral relations.

Under the Strategic Arms Reductions Treaty (START-1), which expires on December 5, Russia and the United States are to reduce their 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.

Medvedev and Obama agreed during their London meeting in early April on an immediate start to talks on a new strategic arms reduction treaty.

There have been two rounds of Russia-U.S. arms reduction talks (May 19-20 in Moscow and June 1-3 in Geneva). A third round is to be held on June 23-24 in Geneva.

Medvedev also said Saturday that strategic arms reductions are possible should Washington alleviate Moscow's concerns over the deployment of a U.S. missile defense shield in Central Europe.

"We cannot agree with U.S. plans to create a global missile defense, I would like to stress that the cuts we propose are only possible if the U.S. alleviates Russia's concerns," he said.

Russia opposes Washington's plans to deploy interceptor missiles in Poland and a tracking radar in the Czech Republic as a threat to its security. The United States says the shield elements are needed to counter possible strikes from rogue states such as Iran.

Obama has indicated he could put on hold his predecessor George Bush's plans concerning the third site for Washington's global missile defense system, which he said needed more analysis.

<http://en.rian.ru/russia/20090620/155304063.html>

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New York Times
June 21, 2009

As Arms Meeting Looms, Russia Offers Carrot Of Sharp Cuts

By Clifford J. Levy

MOSCOW — President Dmitri A. Medvedev said Saturday that Russia was prepared to carry out significant reductions in its nuclear arsenal as part of its continuing arms control negotiations with the United States, which are to culminate here in a summit meeting with President Obama next month.

His comments were among the clearest yet by Russia outlining its position on arms control.

But Mr. Medvedev, issuing a warning in advance of the summit meeting, also reiterated Russian objections to an antimissile system proposed by the United States. He indicated that it had to be scrapped for the two countries to make any progress on arms control.

Negotiators for the United States and Russia have met several times already to hammer out a successor to the 1991 Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty, or Start, which expires Dec. 5.

The Obama administration has said that coming to an agreement is a cornerstone of its effort to improve the United States' relations with Russia, which turned contentious toward the end of the Bush administration.

On a visit to Amsterdam, Mr. Medvedev said at a news conference that Russia was committed to "real and effectively verifiable" arms control reduction.

"We are ready to cut our strategic delivery vehicles by several times compared with the Start I treaty," he said.

He said the number of deployed nuclear warheads should be well below those in an interim agreement signed in 2002 by President George W. Bush and Vladimir V. Putin, Russia's president at the time and its current prime minister.

That arrangement requires each country to cut its arsenal to fewer than 2,200 deployed warheads by 2012.

Officials said they expected any new agreement to push that figure to 1,500 apiece or fewer.

Later on Saturday, the Kremlin released a statement from Mr. Medvedev that emphasized that Russia would not move forward if the United States did not cancel its plan for an antimissile system based in Poland and the Czech Republic.

"The reductions that we are suggesting are possible only if the United States addresses Russian concerns," he said. "In any event, the issue of the relationship between strategic offensive and defensive weapons should be clearly laid out in the treaty."

The antimissile plan was proposed by the Bush administration, which said it was intended to respond to threats from countries like Iran, and was not aimed at Russia. But the Kremlin has called such assertions hollow.

The Obama administration has said it is reviewing the antimissile system, and it has not officially embraced it.

At the news conference, Mr. Medvedev said that under President Bush, ties between Russia and the United States had suffered "corrosion."

"I hope that with the advent of the new administration, the relationship will take on a new form — more favorable, more trusting," Mr. Medvedev said.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2009/06/21/world/europe/21russia.html>

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RIA Novosti

22 June 2009

Russia to Lease only One Nuclear Sub to India – Official

MOSCOW, June 22 (RIA Novosti) - A Russian government official dismissed on Monday media rumors that Russia planned to lease several nuclear submarines to India, saying a contract envisioned only the transfer of the Nerpa vessel.

"We will lease only one submarine. In my opinion, India needs the sub more for enhancing its prestige rather than for accomplishing specific goals," Vyacheslav Dzirkaln, deputy head of the Federal Service for Military-Technical Cooperation, said in an exclusive interview with RIA Novosti.

India reportedly paid \$650 million for a 10-year lease of the 12,000-ton K-152 Nerpa, an Akula II class nuclear-powered attack submarine.

Indian media have reported that the construction of the vessel was partially financed by the government.

On November 8, 2008, while the Nerpa was undergoing sea trials in the Sea of Japan, its on-board fire suppression system went off, releasing a deadly gas into the sleeping quarters. Three submariners and 17 shipyard workers were killed. There were 208 people, 81 of them submariners, on board the vessel at the time.

According to Russian navy officials, the trials will resume in early July and the submarine will be delivered to India by the end of 2009.

Akula II class vessels are considered the quietest and deadliest of all Russian nuclear-powered attack submarines.

http://en.rian.ru/military_news/20090622/155315485.html

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Wall Street Journal

June 22, 2009

Iran's Web Spying Aided By Western Technology

By CHRISTOPHER RHOADS in New York and LORETTA CHAO in Beijing

The Iranian regime has developed, with the assistance of European telecommunications companies, one of the world's most sophisticated mechanisms for controlling and censoring the Internet, allowing it to examine the content of individual online communications on a massive scale.

Interviews with technology experts in Iran and outside the country say Iranian efforts at monitoring Internet information go well beyond blocking access to Web sites or severing Internet connections.

Instead, in confronting the political turmoil that has consumed the country this past week, the Iranian government appears to be engaging in a practice often called deep packet inspection, which enables authorities to not only block communication but to monitor it to gather information about individuals, as well as alter it for disinformation purposes, according to these experts.

The monitoring capability was provided, at least in part, by a joint venture of Siemens AG, the German conglomerate, and Nokia Corp., the Finnish cellphone company, in the second half of 2008, Ben Roome, a spokesman for the joint venture, confirmed.

The "monitoring center," installed within the government's telecom monopoly, was part of a larger contract with Iran that included mobile-phone networking technology, Mr. Roome said.

"If you sell networks, you also, intrinsically, sell the capability to intercept any communication that runs over them," said Mr. Roome.

The sale of the equipment to Iran by the joint venture, called Nokia Siemens Networks, was previously reported last year by the editor of an Austrian information-technology Web site called Futurezone.

The Iranian government had experimented with the equipment for brief periods in recent months, but it had not been used extensively, and therefore its capabilities weren't fully displayed -- until during the recent unrest, the Internet experts interviewed said.

"We didn't know they could do this much," said a network engineer in Tehran. "Now we know they have powerful things that allow them to do very complex tracking on the network."

Deep packet inspection involves inserting equipment into a flow of online data, from emails and Internet phone calls to images and messages on social-networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter. Every digitized packet of online data is deconstructed, examined for keywords and reconstructed within milliseconds. In Iran's case, this is done for the entire country at a single choke point, according to networking engineers familiar with the country's system. It couldn't be determined whether the equipment from Nokia Siemens Networks is used specifically for deep packet inspection.

All eyes have been on the Internet amid the crisis in Iran, and government attempts to crack down on information. The infiltration of Iranian online traffic could explain why the government has allowed the Internet to continue to function -- and also why it has been running at such slow speeds in the days since the results of the presidential vote spurred unrest.

Users in the country report the Internet having slowed to less than a tenth of normal speeds. Deep packet inspection delays the transmission of online data unless it is offset by a huge increase in processing power, according to Internet experts.

Iran is "now drilling into what the population is trying to say," said Bradley Anstis, director of technical strategy with Marshal8e6 Inc., an Internet security company in Orange, Calif. He and other experts interviewed have examined Internet traffic flows in and out of Iran that show characteristics of content inspection, among other measures. "This looks like a step beyond what any other country is doing, including China."

China's vaunted "Great Firewall," which is widely considered the most advanced and extensive Internet censoring in the world, is believed also to involve deep packet inspection. But China appears to be developing this capability in a more decentralized manner, at the level of its Internet service providers rather than through a single hub, according to experts. That suggests its implementation might not be as uniform as that in Iran, they said, as the arrangement depends on the cooperation of all the service providers.

The difference, at least in part, has to do with scale: China has about 300 million Internet users, the most of any country. Iran, which has an estimated 23 million users, can track all online communication through a single location called the Telecommunication Infrastructure Co., part of the government's telecom monopoly. All of the country's international links run through the company.

Separately, officials from the U.S. embassy in Beijing on Friday met with Chinese officials to express concerns about a new requirement that all PCs sold in the China starting July 1 be installed with Web-filtering software.

If a government wants to control the flow of information across its borders it's no longer enough to block access to Web sites hosted elsewhere. Now, as sharing online images and messages through social-networking sites has become easy and popular, repressive regimes are turning to technologies that allow them to scan such content from their own citizens, message by message.

Human-rights groups have criticized the selling of such equipment to Iran and other regimes considered repressive, because it can be used to crack down on dissent, as evidenced in the Iran crisis. Asked about selling such equipment to a government like Iran's, Mr. Roome of Nokia Siemens Networks said the company "does have a choice about whether to do business in any country. We believe providing people, wherever they are, with the ability to communicate is preferable to leaving them without the choice to be heard."

Countries with repressive governments aren't the only ones interested in such technology. Britain has a list of blocked sites, and the German government is considering similar measures. In the U.S., the National Security Agency has such capability, which was employed as part of the Bush administration's "Terrorist Surveillance Program." A White House official wouldn't comment on if or how this is being used under the Obama administration.

The Australian government is experimenting with Web-site filtering to protect its youth from online pornography, an undertaking that has triggered criticism that it amounts to government-backed censorship.

Content inspection and filtering technology are already common among corporations, schools and other institutions, as part of efforts to block spam and viruses, as well as to ensure that employees and students comply with computer-use guidelines. Families use filtering on their home computers to protect their children from undesirable sites, such as pornography and gambling.

Internet censoring in Iran was developed with the initial justification of blocking online pornography, among other material considered offensive by the regime, according to those who have studied the country's censoring.

Iran has been grappling with controlling the Internet since its use moved beyond universities and government agencies in the late 1990s. At times, the government has tried to limit the country's vibrant blogosphere -- for instance, requiring bloggers to obtain licenses from the government, a directive that has proved difficult to enforce, according to the OpenNet Initiative, a partnership of universities that study Internet filtering and surveillance. (The partners are Harvard University, the University of Toronto, the University of Cambridge and the University of Oxford.)

Beginning in 2001, the government required Internet service providers to install filtering systems, and also that all international connections link to a single gateway controlled by the country's telecom monopoly, according to an OpenNet study.

Iran has since blocked Internet users in the country from more than five million sites in recent years, according to estimates from the press-freedom group Reporters Without Borders.

In the 2005 presidential election, the government shut down the Internet for hours, blaming it on a cyberattack from abroad, a claim that proved false, according to several Tehran engineers.

Several years ago, research by OpenNet discovered the government using filtering equipment from a U.S. company, Secure Computing Corp. Due to the U.S. trade embargo on Iran, in place since the 1979 Islamic revolution overthrew the U.S.-backed shah, that was illegal. Secure Computing, now owned by McAfee Inc., at the time denied any knowledge of the use of its products in Iran. McAfee said due diligence before the acquisition revealed no contract or support being provided in Iran.

Building online-content inspection on a national scale and coordinated at a single location requires hefty resources, including manpower, processing power and technical expertise, Internet experts said.

Nokia Siemens Networks provided equipment to Iran last year under the internationally recognized concept of "lawful intercept," said Mr. Roome. That relates to intercepting data for the purposes of combating terrorism, child pornography, drug trafficking and other criminal activities carried out online, a capability that most if not all telecom companies have, he said.

The monitoring center that Nokia Siemens Networks sold to Iran was described in a company brochure as allowing "the monitoring and interception of all types of voice and data communication on all networks." The joint venture exited the business that included the monitoring equipment, what it called "intelligence solutions," at the end of March, by selling it to Perusa Partners Fund 1 LP, a Munich-based investment firm, Mr. Roome said. He said the company determined it was no longer part of its core business.

-- Ben Worthen in San Francisco, Mike Esterl in Atlanta and Siobhan Gorman in Washington contributed to this article.

<http://online.wsj.com/article/SB124562668777335653.html>

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Washington Times

June 23, 2009

Iran Being Undercut On Nukes, U.S. Says

By Nicholas Kralev, The Washington Times

Stung by criticism that the U.S. has not condemned Iran's crackdown on demonstrators harshly enough, the Obama administration said Monday that the protests would weaken the current regime and might improve the chances of capping Iran's nuclear program.

"Our long-term security interests ... haven't changed," White House press secretary Robert Gibbs told reporters. "Our interests, as it relates to our grave concern about the help that's provided to terrorists, the grave concern that we have about the pursuit of a nuclear weapon, remain unchanged."

At the State Department, spokesman Ian Kelly dismissed speculation that the administration is rethinking its engagement policy. Although the "focus is on what's going on in Iran right now" and "this is not about our bilateral relationship," engagement is not "on hold," he said.

"We have made a strategic decision to engage on a number of fronts with Iran, and we've tried many years of isolation, and we are pursuing a different path now," Mr. Kelly said.

The administration has been criticized by some Republicans and democracy advocates for continuing to seek talks with Iran despite its harsh treatment of demonstrators protesting what many Iranians perceive as a rigged outcome to the June 12 presidential elections.

Despite a massive security presence in the streets of Tehran on Monday, sporadic protests continued and supporters of opposition candidate Mir Hossein Mousavi have called for a nationwide strike on Tuesday. Violent clashes on Saturday left at least 10 dead, and at least seven died last week. Hundreds of reform politicians and journalists have been arrested.

President Obama has criticized Iran's behavior, but also said that Iranians must determine their own political future. On Monday, a senior administration official suggested a silver lining in Iran's political upheaval.

"The government's domestic political capital has been seriously eroded," said the official, who asked not to be named because of the sensitivity of the topic. "That may lead to willingness on their part to engage more."

Tehran has refused to join talks with the West on its controversial nuclear program, but in November, incumbent President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad congratulated Mr. Obama on his election victory and has suggested at times that Iran would be willing to talk.

The U.S. administration had hoped that it would have an opportunity this week for direct interaction with Iranian officials, who were invited by Italy to a meeting on the sidelines of the gathering of foreign ministers from the Group of Eight leading industrialized countries in Trieste, northern Italy.

Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton, who is recovering from elbow surgery, canceled her trip on Monday and asked William J. Burns, undersecretary of state for political affairs, to lead the U.S. delegation after it appeared unlikely that Iran would send representatives.

"With three days to go, I still do not have a reply. I must consider that Iran has declined the invitation," Italian Foreign Minister Franco Frattini told Italian television. "Iran has lost an opportunity by not participating in the conference."

A number of senior Republicans, including Sen. John McCain of Arizona, have faulted Mr. Obama for not speaking out more forcefully against the Iranian government since the reported landslide victory of Mr. Ahmadinejad sparked nationwide protests.

Some Iranian human rights activists have also criticized Mr. Obama.

Mohsen Sazegara, a founder of Iran's Revolutionary Guards who is now a prominent dissident in exile, said, "We need a very clear announcement to the world that the U.S. will not negotiate with the coup d'etat government of Iran. Promise Iranians that as long as the government is repressing the majority on the streets, the U.S. will not negotiate with a coup d'etat government. This is what we expect from President Obama."

Suzanne Maloney, an Iran specialist at the Brookings Institution's Saban Center, said she doubted that the current Iranian government would be more eager to reach a deal with the U.S. now.

"I can understand the argument intellectually, but it seems very unlikely," she said. "When push comes to shove, it's not going to be that easy for us or for them" to resolve the nuclear issue.

Trita Parsi, president of the National Iranian American Council, also expressed doubts.

The Obama administration "wants the best out of the situation, but I'm not sure they will get it," he said.

However, over the weekend, Republican Sen. Richard G. Lugar of Indiana, ranking member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, backed the administration's overtures.

Bruce Riedel, a former senior official on the White House National Security Council dealing with Iran, compared the situation to past dealings with communist nations.

"Our national interest is best served by engaging with Iran, just like it was best served by engaging with the Soviet Union and even China after Tiananmen. ... The logic of why we want to engage doesn't change, but the politics becomes more difficult."

The West has accused Iran of pursuing a nuclear weapon under the cover of a civilian program, but Tehran insists its efforts are for peaceful purposes. The United States, Britain, France, Germany, Russia and China have invited Iran's nuclear negotiator to a meeting and have offered a package of political and economic incentives. Iran has yet to respond.

The Obama administration also lifted a ban on inviting Iranian diplomats to events at U.S. embassies and consulates abroad. In fact, it actively encouraged American missions to include Iranians in their upcoming July Fourth celebrations.

"There is no thought to rescinding the invitations to Iranian diplomats," Mr. Kelly said.

<http://washingtontimes.com/news/2009/jun/23/clinton-cancels-trip-to-europe-after-surgery/>

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Daily Nation
June 21 2009

Al-Qaeda Threat to Peace in East Africa

By NATION Team

An Al-Qaeda force fighting alongside Somali extremists against the transitional government has sent ripples through regional capitals.

Commanded by a Kenyan, the group, called Al-Muhajirun, has 180 well-trained and battle-hardened fighters, some who have seen action in Afghanistan, Pakistan and possibly Iraq.

Al-Shabaab, the Somali militant group which has threatened to annex Kenyan territory, is not itself considered a serious threat to Kenya, a ministry of Internal Security official told the Nation, “not in the conventional sense” and because its main concerns are domestic.

But Al-Qaeda, whose dream is to create a Taliban-type super-state running from Mozambique to the north, has the potential to destabilise East Africa.

Al-Muhajirun has also internationalised the conflict and brought some of the most dangerous terrorists in the world to East Africa’s front door, said the official, who can not be named because of government secrecy laws.

“The extent to which Kenyans are being exposed to these kinds of terrorist things is a major concern,” said a senior police officer who asked not to be named so as to comment freely.

The emergence of a large and well-trained and armed group reflects a dynamic which could have disastrous consequences for Kenya’s future security.

The group is headed by Kenyan Saleh Nabhan, an old Al-Qaeda hand, and many of its members are Kenyan, some of them young people who have been recruited, turned into radicals and sent to fight in the Somali “jihad”, said a regional conflict and peace expert, who declined to be named because of his work with the security services.

Security and defence bosses are concerned that Somalia could become East Africa’s Afghanistan, a country that attracts extremists who are trained in terrorism but who return to their own countries to set up Al-Qaeda networks.

They fear that the war in Somalia will spawn a new breed of war-hardened Al-Qaeda terrorists.

The other members of Al-Muhajirun are Ugandans, Americans, Europeans and Saudis. Others are from other parts of the Middle East and Asia, said the Internal Security official, who is privy to intelligence reports.

A Mr Abu Mansur al-Meriki, a US citizen, is Nabhan’s deputy in the Al-Muhajirun chain of command.

On Saturday, the Speaker of the Somali Transitional Federal Parliament, Sheikh Aden Mohamed Nur, also known as Sheikh Aden Madobe, issued an urgent appeal for Yemen, Kenya, Djibouti and Ethiopia to send forces in Somalia within 24 hours to fight off an invasion by Al-Qaeda jihadists and save the fledgling government.

Speaking at a press conference at Villa Somalia, the State House in Mogadishu, Sheikh Madobe said the Transitional Federal Government was fighting against “international jihadists who have come to Somalia from all the five continents of the globe”.

He claimed that a “general” from Pakistan was now in Somalia and directing the Al-Qaeda. He did not name him but said he was operating out of Bakara market, the biggest trading centre in Mogadishu and around Sana’a, a strategic junction in north Mogadishu.

“This terror will pass on to the rest of the world, especially to neighbouring countries, if not confronted,” he warned.

On Thursday, suspected terrorists killed Somali National Security minister Omar Hashi Aden and 24 others. A day before, Mogadishu’s police chief was killed during a fight with insurgents.

On Sunday, Foreign Affairs minister Moses Wetang’ula said the government would not respond to statements made by the insurgents.

However, he assured the public that Kenya’s national and strategic interests would be protected at all costs.

Restore order

Nominated MP Sheikh Mohamed Dor dismissed threats from the Al-Shabaab group and said Kenya and other regional countries had a duty to intervene in Somalia to restore peace.

“Al-Shabaab should not issue threats, especially against Kenya, that has hosted a lot of Somali leaders,” he said on the phone.

Sheikh Dor warned that the escalating situation in Somalia will affect its neighbours and urged members of the African Union or Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (Igad) to move in and restore order.

Ethiopia, which fought and routed the extremists in 2006, rejected the call for armed intervention and government spokesman Bereket Simon told the *Nation* in Addis Ababa that Ethiopia would not deploy its armed forces in Somalia without "a clear and approved mandate by the international community".

"Any further action from Ethiopia will be done according to the international community's reaction," said Mr Simon.

Mr Simon, a minister in the Ethiopian government, said helping Somalia was not the responsibility of neighbouring countries, alone but of the international community.

There has been heightened diplomatic activity in Addis Ababa, with Western diplomats reportedly trying to get Ethiopia, an influential nation in the region because of its huge military, to intervene again in Somalia.

The view in Addis Ababa is that the insurgency in Somalia is largely supported by Eritrea and some Arab states. Eritrea, Ethiopia's bitter enemy, is reported to have put thousands of troops on alert, possibly with the intention of sending them in to back up the extremists should Ethiopia respond to the call for help.

Ethiopian withdrew its troops from Somalia early this year after a tough, two-year campaign.

Defence assistant minister David Musila declined to comment on the deployment on grounds that such matters cannot be discussed in public. But he echoed Mr Wetang'ula's statement and said Kenya's national interests will be protected.

"It is not in our normal tradition to discuss matters on national security publicly," he said.

There has been some speculation that some form of military action was in the offing, possibly under AU or Igad auspices.

But Kenya, which has a relatively large and influential Somali population of its own, has been reluctant to play the aggressor in Somalia and might not attack unless attacked.

But Kenyan security officials appeared to support the Ethiopian position that a multi-lateral, rather than unilateral approach, is the only hope for Somalia.

<http://www.nation.co.ke/News/-/1056/613782/-/item/0/-/xovw7x/-/index.html>

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New York Daily News
June 22nd 2009

Al Qaeda Leader Mustafa Abu al-Yazid: We'd Use Nuclear Weapons against the U.S. if We Could

DAILY NEWS STAFF AND Wire Reports

Al Qaeda would not hesitate to use Pakistan's nuclear weapons on the United States - if only it could get its hands on them, the terrorist group's leader in Afghanistan said in a recent interview.

"God willing, the nuclear weapons will not fall into the hands of the Americans and the Mujahideen would take them and use them against the Americans," Mustafa Abu al-Yazid said in an interview televised on the Al Jazeera news network, according to Reuters.

But Abu al-Yazid also said that the terrorist group is willing to make a 10-year truce with the United States - if the Obama administration would just agree to pull all American troops out of Muslim countries, and withdraw support for Israel and pro-Western Islamic regimes.

Western fears over the security of Pakistan's nuclear arsenal have been amplified by the recent incursions in the Swat Valley by al Qaeda's allies, the Taliban. An estimated 2 million refugees have fled the region in the wake of the fighting and the United Nations launched an appeal for \$543 million in humanitarian aid to stem the crisis, Reuters reported.

Even as 46 suspected Taliban members were killed in military strikes across the region Sunday, analysts still worry that the turmoil in the region could destabilize the rest of the nuclear power.

And then, al-Yazid said, Islamic militants will strike.

"The strategy of the organization in the coming period is the same as in the previous period: To hit the head of the snake, the head of tyranny - the United States," al-Yazid told Al Jazeera.

http://www.nydailynews.com/news/us_world/2009/06/22/2009-06-22_al_qaeda_leader_mustafa_abu_al_yazid_wed_use_nuclear_weapons_on_the_us_if_we_coul.html

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Al Jazeera.net
22 June 2009

Al-Qaeda Commander Threatens US

Al-Qaeda's third-in-command has told Al Jazeera that the group would use Pakistan's nuclear weapons against the US if it gained access to them.

Pakistan has been battling the Taliban and its al-Qaeda allies in the Swat valley and tribal areas in the northwest since April when fighters took hold of a region just 100km away from the capital, Islamabad.

"By God's will, the Americans will not seize the Muslims' nuclear weapons and we pray that the Muslims will have these weapons and they will be used against the Americans," Mustafa Abul-Yazeed, al-Qaeda's leader in Afghanistan, said in an exclusive interview that aired on Sunday.

He said al-Qaeda assists the mujahidin fighters in Afghanistan, maintains strong relations with the leaders of Taliban and expects that Pakistan's government will be defeated in the Swat conflict.

Asked about the whereabouts of al-Qaeda's two main leaders, Abul-Yazeed said: "Praise God, Sheikh Osama (bin Laden) and Sheikh Ayman al-Zawahiri are safe from the reach of the enemies, but I don't know where they are and I can't say where they are, but they are aware of everything and all the fighting in the field."

Taliban 'welcomed'

Before arriving in Afghanistan, Abul-Yazeed was al-Qaeda's chief financial officer and reportedly also provided funds for the September 11, 2001, attacks in the US.

In the early 1980s, he served time in jail along with al-Zawahiri for his involvement in the assassination of Anwar Sadat, the Egyptian president.

In his interview, Abul-Yazeed praised the conditions in Pakistan, saying that the "Taliban and all the tribal areas welcomed and always defended us when we left Afghanistan.

"They were attacked by the Pakistani army when they protected us. We always defend each other.

"We believe in the same principles about jihad, faith and loyalty. After that, when the conditions improved and we were allowed to go to Afghanistan, we entered and some of us stayed in the tribes' areas. They are still protected there."

Commenting on Abul-Yazeed's remarks, Michael Griffin, an al-Qaeda expert, told Al-Jazeera that they reveal a "curious mix of bravado and defiance" but also a "certain sense of weakness about al-Qaeda".

"If they had safe havens in Swat, they have pretty much vanished along with the entire three million population of Swat as a result of recent government military activities up there," Griffin said.

"I don't think this is as powerful an organisation as it was last year."

'Not weakened'

For his part, Abul-Yazeed insisted that al-Qaeda had not been weakened, and instead suggested that its presence was spreading widely, with new fronts opening up across the region.

"Through these fronts, we replaced the big operation implemented against our enemies with small ones as we achieved our great goals from launching massive operations," he said.

"We will never abandon the big operations...We already planned for some but they were postponed due to certain circumstances."

While it is known that the Taliban and al-Qaeda have collaborated in Pakistan on significant and destructive attacks, Griffin said that to a large extent the Taliban in Afghanistan is operating independently of al-Qaeda.

"Except for certain very prestigious operations like attacks on the Serena hotel or attempts to assassinate [Afghan President] Hamid Karzai, I think the attacks are organised by local Taliban commanders working in loose co-operation with al-Qaeda," Griffin said.

"When the military in Pakistan was making peace agreements with the Taliban, they were effectively making peace agreements with al-Qaeda," he said.

"Now that they are on the backfoot, you will see al-Qaeda pulling themselves out of Waziristan and moving its men to Somalia and Yemen."

'Taliban's defence'

In other remarks, Abul-Yazeed criticised Pakistan for adopting English laws to rule a Muslim country instead of using the Islamic sharia law.

He also blamed the Pakistani army for attacking Taliban fighters in the Waziristan region and other tribal areas.

"[The fighters] were defending themselves only. They didn't start fighting the Pakistani army. We didn't have the intentions to attack the Pakistani army or the government. We did so when they repeatedly attacked us and committed different crimes against the Pakistani people and the mujahidin," he said.

As for Abul-Yazeed's comments about gaining control of Pakistan's nuclear weapons and using them against the US, Griffin said that the threat was once pressing, especially when al-Qaeda launched an effective suicide attack on Wah, west of Islamabad - one of the main nuclear assembly storage areas.

But the threat has since become diffused.

"That attack indicated the vulnerability of the areas within Pakistan which are called the settled areas as opposed to the tribal areas," Griffin said.

"But Pakistan is looking much, much less like a failed state than it did last year."

<http://english.aljazeera.net/news/asia/2009/06/2009622112724339957.html>

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Yonhap News

22 June 2009

S. Korea begins Activity as PSI Member

By Lee Chi-dong

SEOUL, June 22 (Yonhap) -- South Korea has dispatched a director-level foreign ministry official to an international meeting of the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI), its first official act since becoming a full-fledged member of the U.S.-led counter-proliferation campaign, officials said Monday.

South Korea announced its participation in the PSI on May 26, a day after North Korea conducted its second nuclear test, despite warnings from the communist neighbor that such a move would be seen as an "act of war."

"The government has sent Lee Jang-geun, director of the foreign ministry's disarmament and nonproliferation department, to the PSI's European Regional Operational Experts Group meeting in Sopot, Poland, from June 22-24," the ministry's deputy spokesman Choe Jong-hyun said. Although the forum is for European members, nonregional members are also invited.

The PSI, launched by former U.S. President George W. Bush in Krakow, Poland, in May 2003, seeks to prevent the transfer of weapons of mass destruction, their delivery systems and related materials by air, ground or sea to and from states and nonstate actors of proliferation concern. It currently consists of 95 member countries.

North Korea, known for exporting illicit weapons, is among the major targets of the initiative.

The isolated nation must also contend with U.N.-sponsored sanctions imposed after its latest nuclear test.

U.N. Security Council Resolution 1874 bans North Korea from trafficking a wide range of weapons of mass destruction and conventional weaponry. It "calls upon" U.N. member states to search North Korean ships if there are "reasonable grounds" to suspect that they are carrying contraband cargo.

The U.S. navy is currently keeping tabs on a North Korean freighter, the Kang Nam, which is reportedly heading towards Myanmar after leaving North Korea's western port in Nampo last Wednesday, according to foreign news reports which cited unidentified U.S. officials.

South Korean government officials insisted that despite the U.N. resolution, the PSI remains active as it targets not only North Korea but also other countries involved in the trade of illegal weapons.

South Korea has yet to decide whether to take part in a major interdiction exercise to be held in October off the coast of Singapore, they added.

<http://english.yonhapnews.co.kr/northkorea/2009/06/22/68/040100000AEN20090622003600315F.HTML>

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Foreign Policy

Posted June 2009

Don't Play Nuclear Chicken with a Desperate Pariah

By Hui Zhang

In retaliation for tightened U.N. sanctions following North Korea's May 25 nuclear test and subsequent missile tests, Pyongyang defiantly upped the ante on Saturday, June 13. North Korea said it will move forward with its plans to build a nuclear arsenal, begin a program of uranium enrichment, and take "resolute military actions" against the United States and its regional allies. Then on Thursday, June 18, news surfaced that the next missile test might be pointed toward Hawaii (the missiles in question don't have the range to actually reach the islands -- only head that way). Pyongyang is also reportedly preparing another nuclear test.

This game of escalation will go on and on until North Korea gets what it desires most from Washington: a reliable security assurance. Of course, no one likes to yield to dictators. But ultimately, playing chicken with a desperate and nuclear-armed North Korea is too risky to endeavor. The more isolated the North Koreans become, the more likely they will be to use the nuclear card in threatening two hostages: South Korea and Japan. Everyone loses that game.

With two nuclear tests under its belt, Pyongyang should have more confidence in its capability to mate its smaller and low-yield warheads (about 4 kilotons) with its existing Scud missiles (which are capable of reaching all of South Korea) and Nodong missiles (with the range to strike all of Japan, including the U.S. military bases there). A 4-kiloton bomb would not be as powerful as the 15 to 20 kilotons dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, but it could cause greater casualties given the significantly higher population densities of South Korea and Japan today, especially in their capitals of Seoul and Tokyo. A 4-kiloton bomb could cause hundreds of thousands of deaths from the blast, burns, and ensuing radiation.

It gets worse. Pyongyang also said on Saturday that it had reprocessed more than one third of its newly discharged 8,000 spent fuel rods -- a claim that is likely true. Within another three months, North Korea could harvest between 8 and 12 kg of plutonium, or enough for one to two bombs. The country has also confirmed that it started a program to create highly enriched uranium (HEU). If North Korea were to successfully develop a centrifuge enrichment facility capable of producing one bomb's worth of HEU, it would pose a huge challenge to denuclearization. Unlike plutonium production, which involves large reactor facilities and generates a considerable amount of heat, the facility North Korea has in mind would be compact and thus easier to hide. Verification would require more-invasive inspections -- and the (unlikely) cooperation of Pyongyang.

Conveniently for North Korea, HEU is also much more attractive than plutonium to subnational groups in the market for nuclear weapons because HEU bombs are relatively easier to make. For an eager buyer, Pyongyang might become a willing supplier with the right situation and price. After all, North Korea has dabbled in selling missiles and missile technologies to Iran and others. North Korea reportedly helped Syria build a reactor that was destroyed by Israeli airstrikes in September 2007. The probability that any sane country would make such a nuclear transfer is extremely low, but an armed and desperate North Korea might do so in a last-ditch attempt to save the regime. From Pyongyang's perspective, what's not to like? North Korea could earn foreign currency and build anti-Washington alliances at the same time.

Under the new U.N. sanctions and the U.S.-led Proliferation Security Initiative, Washington, Tokyo, and Seoul are meant to intercept and interdict any such shipments from North Korea. However, Pyongyang states clearly that an attempted blockade of any kind by the United States and its allies would be regarded as "an act of war" and met with "a decisive military response."

Given North Korea's capabilities and its threatening rhetoric, it's important to ask: How likely is it to act on brinkmanship threats?

The short answer: likely enough to worry. Although Washington might want to facilitate North Korea's implosion and collapse through long-term isolation, a desperate Pyongyang would almost certainly not go down quietly. Military conflict could lead to a full-scale war on the Korean Peninsula in which the possibility of nuclear weapons being used, as Pyongyang has ominously threatened, should not be ruled out. The regime would do anything to survive.

Over the long term, North Korea cannot tolerate isolation and economic sanctions. Economic development, which the country sorely needs, requires that Pyongyang open its doors to the international community, and especially to foreign investment, trade, and aid. But long before that happens, Pyongyang wants to address its foremost security concerns -- mainly from the U.S. "threat" (read: troops) just across the border in South Korea. Given Kim Jong Il's health problems and North Korea's ever worsening economic situation, Pyongyang is eager to push Washington into offering reliable security assurances and guarantees.

Regardless of Pyongyang's intention, Washington's only way to win this game is to prepare a large "carrot" to induce Pyongyang to denuclearize, while the United Nations and others, including China, prepare "sticks" to enforce the deal. Simply taking time and waiting would result in consequences in no one's best interests. Taking chances on an escalating game of chicken could ultimately leave both sides bloodied.

http://www.foreignpolicy.com/story/cms.php?story_id=5020

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RIA Novosti
22 June 2009

United States-Russia: Last Stop Before the Summit

MOSCOW. (RIA Novosti political commentator Andrei Fedyashin) – On June 23-24, the United States and Russia will hold the third round of consultations on replacing the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START I), which expires on December 5. Most likely, this will be the last meeting of the negotiating teams before President Dmitry Medvedev meets with Barack Obama in Moscow for the first time in two weeks from now, on July 6-8.

Strange as it may seem, but the Americans have not yet clearly outlined their position on the new treaty. They have merely made general statements about the need to further reduce strategic arms and find an adequate replacement for the expiring treaty, and expressed their readiness to cooperate with Russia for this purpose. There are not even usual pre-summit "inspired leaks" through which the White House tries to test the partner's reaction, or brainwash the public.

It seems that Washington is seriously considering all options of agreements with Moscow, including possible concessions on missile defense facilities in Poland and the Czech Republic. The Obama Administration is unlikely to bury George W. Bush missile defense program before the Moscow summit. It is now revising it because it is very difficult, even for technical reasons, to curtail the Pentagon's launched or partially funded programs, not to mention political opposition in Congress and in the Pentagon itself. Starting with such a big "retreat" will be too much even for Obama and his declared intention to "reset" relations with Russia. Such things are not done in one go.

There are some weak hints that Washington may initially agree to adjust its missile defense plans, impede their implementation, and then give up on them altogether. This is what happened with Ronald Reagan's Star Wars program. Washington may seriously reconsider its plans and move the missile defense third positioning area closer to Iran's borders, but these are merely assumptions for the time being.

During his visit to the Netherlands on June 19-20, President Medvedev made a statement to encourage his American counterpart to ponder over a treaty which could be called START III: "We cannot accept the American plan for creating global missile defense. I would like to emphasize that the Russia-proposed reductions are only possible if

the United States removes Russia's concerns. In any event, the link between strategic offensive and defensive armaments must be clearly sealed in the treaty."

American experts noted immediately that despite being tough, this statement is by no means an ultimatum: either cancel missile defense or say goodbye to the new START Treaty. Sealing the link is not a demand to give up on the missile defense plan there and then.

The Americans seem to be doing all they can to link the new treaty with the Iranian nuclear program. This is what the bargaining is all about. In early June, Defense Secretary Robert Gates suddenly told journalists that he thinks Russia has softened its position on missile defense because it has been ostensibly persuaded that the Iranian nuclear program is much more advanced than it thought before. Judging by Medvedev's statement in Amsterdam, Moscow does not seem to be convinced of this at all.

Most likely, the summit will produce a framework agreement or a protocol for continued work on the new treaty in 2010.

<http://en.rian.ru/analysis/20090622/155319899.html>

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