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Articles & Other Documents:

[Obama's Atomic Meeting At UN Attempts to Level Playing Field](#)

[Iran's Missile Program Potential Greater than N. Korea's - Expert](#)

[Obama Faces Battle with Pentagon Hawks to Achieve Nuclear-Free Goal](#)

[As Talks With U.S. Near, Iran Denies Nuclear Arms Effort](#)

[Barack Obama Ready to Slash US Nuclear Arsenal](#)

[Iran says Makes New Model of Nuclear Centrifuges](#)

[Slash Arsenal, Pentagon Told](#)

[DPRK Signals Nuclear Talks Possible](#)

[U.S., Russia Begin Arms Control Talks](#)

[Location of N. Korea's Nuke Facility Confirmed](#)

[Russia's Reaction On Missile Plan Leaves Iran Issue Hanging](#)

[ROK President Proposes "Grand Bargain" for DPRK](#)

[Russia, U.S. Likely to Agree on Arms Reduction Deal by Yearend](#)

[China says Never Engaged In Nuclear Proliferation](#)

[Obama Missile Decision May Smooth U.S.-Russia Arms Talks](#)

[Investigation: Nuclear Scandal - Dr Abdul Qadeer Khan](#)

[Russian Gen. says Global Missile Shield could Eliminate Nuke Threat](#)

[Global Network Detects Sign of Atomic Bomb Testing](#)

[Clinton Challenges Iran on Nuclear Aims](#)

[Looking To Fool Us Twice](#)

[Israel won't Strike Iran - Russia's Medvedev](#)

[Can Medvedev Help Obama?](#)

[Israel Accused of Using Golan Heights for Dumping Nuclear Waste](#)

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Xinhua News – China
19 September 2009

Obama's Atomic Meeting At UN Attempts to Level Playing Field

by Lucy-Claire Saunders

UNITED NATIONS, Sept. 19 (Xinhua) -- The decision to refrain from singling out specific countries at the Sept. 24 UN Security Council special meeting on nuclear disarmament will provide world leaders with the opportunity to hit the reset button on an issue fraught with political blame games, according to an internationally renowned scholar and award-winning author.

In a recent interview with Xinhua, Hamid Dabashi, professor of Iranian studies at Columbia University, said the time is ripe to address nuclear disarmament in a meaningful and systematic way without targeting specific countries.

"The logic of not laser beaming on any single country, but talking about regional and global disarmament is a perfect strategy of addressing the more fundamental issue -- that it is the entirety of humanity that is in peril of these massive stockpiles," he said.

The special meeting on disarmament and non-proliferation is to be chaired by U.S. President Barack Obama -- the first time a U.S. president has led a UN Security Council session.

According to U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Susan Rice, discussions will highlight arms control and nuclear disarmament, strengthening the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) regime, and denying and disrupting trafficking in and the securing of nuclear materials.

The United States, one of the five permanent members of the Security Council, holds the rotating Council presidency in September.

The 15-nation Council is expected to discuss a U.S.-drafted resolution that calls on all signatories of the NPT to begin talks on nuclear arms reduction and to negotiate "a treaty on general and complete disarmament," according to earlier reports.

Since taking office in January, Obama has said that the United States has a responsibility to rid the world of atomic weapons, having been the only country to have ever used them.

The Security Council meeting will help world leaders to reevaluate the strategic use of nuclear weapons in a world where most conflicts are characterized by an asymmetric balance.

"It is very important to keep in mind that the logic of global warfare has changed," said Dabashi. "The United States has massive stockpiles of nuclear warheads and what particular safety has it brought to the U.S. if you consider the events of 9/11?"

"Morally, militarily, politically, and diplomatically they are of no use and these are the facts that will be in President Obama's discussion," he added.

By having an open discussion on the changing dynamics of warfare and not singling out countries unwilling to give up their nuclear programs -- rightly or wrongly -- Obama's meeting will strengthen international pressure for regional and global disarmament.

PLAYING "POLITICAL FOOTBALL"

Significantly, the special Security Council meeting comes at a time when Western countries have renewed their scrutiny on Iran for its nuclear program. The United States has accused Tehran of developing a nuclear military program and has repeatedly called on the latter to re-engage with the UN nuclear watchdog, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

Iran, which is a signatory of the 1970 NPT -- a treaty to limit the spread of nuclear weapons -- insists that its nuclear program is only for peaceful purposes and justifies it in the context of other nuclear countries, such as Israel, India and Pakistan, that have never signed the NPT but are believed to have large nuclear stockpiles.

Israel has never confirmed or denied its military nuclear program.

"The fact is that Iran is surrounded by military nuclear powers: Israel to one side, Pakistan to another side, Russia to the north, and the massive military buildup by the United States in the Gulf," said Dabashi. "So who can point their finger at the Islamic Republic and tell them not to develop nuclear capabilities when Iran is surrounded by four nuclear powers and nobody is pointing a finger at them?"

The United Nations and the NPT are being used to stage a game of "political football," he said.

Both are wielded as instruments of partisan foreign policy and until the NPT is substantially strengthened at next year's review conference, both will continue to serve political purposes.

DO SANCTIONS WORK ON IRAN?

The European Union recently announced that on Oct. 1 Iran's chief nuclear negotiator will meet with the P5 + 1 -- Britain, Russia, China, France, the United States and Germany, renewing hopes for closer cooperation.

But if negotiations do not meet Western expectations, the United States, Britain and France will push for tougher economic sanctions. Iran is already subject to three sets of Security Council sanctions for not suspending its uranium enrichment program.

But Dabashi warned that more economic sanctions would not deter Tehran from continuing on the same path.

"Any sanctions would in fact make the Islamic Republic more belligerent and the horrible effects of economic sanctions will be on the people of Iran, not on the administration, not on the leadership," he said.

Ultimately, sanctions only serve as a "stepping stone" toward U.S. or Israeli military strikes, he added.

Both the United States and Israel have suggested that a military strike on Iran's nuclear facilities would be a last option.

Dabashi has written 18 books and is the author of over 100 essays, articles and book reviews in major scholarly and peer reviewed journals on subjects ranging from Iranian Studies, medieval and modern Islam, and comparative literature.

He has been a professor for nearly three decades and lives in New York with his wife, the Iranian-Swedish feminist, Golbarg Bashi.

http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2009-09/06/content_12081666.htm

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

London Guardian
September 20, 2009

Obama Faces Battle with Pentagon Hawks to Achieve Nuclear-Free Goal

By Julian Borger

Five months ago in Prague, Barack Obama used one of his first foreign policy speeches to call for a world free of nuclear weapons. Ever since then the White House has been engaged in a race to turn that declaration into real-world policy. The first obstacle is the Pentagon.

According to officials with knowledge of the inter-agency bargaining, the US defence department produced a draft nuclear posture review that did not just fall short of Obama's vision. In some ways it appeared to be moving in the opposite direction.

The current Pentagon take on US nuclear doctrine envisages maintaining a stockpile of thousands of weapons for the foreseeable future, partly in the name of "extended deterrence". Supporters of that doctrine argue that without a large arsenal, allies abroad will lose confidence in Washington's willingness and capacity to defend them from attack.

The US currently has a deployed arsenal of some 2,600 warheads, with a 2,500-strong reserve and another 4,000 awaiting dismantlement. Significant cuts in the operational warheads would, the argument goes, lead countries like Japan to build a nuclear force of their own. Cuts would paradoxically spur proliferation.

A recent British parliamentary delegation to Washington was surprised to be told in the Pentagon that Britain was one of those countries that would lose faith in the transatlantic alliance if the stockpiles were cut, even though British policy is to encourage those cuts.

The Pentagon, under the leadership of the defence secretary, Robert Gates, is also wedded to the idea of building a new generation of warheads, arguing that only that can guarantee that US nuclear weapons will work, and so allow for deeper cuts and a permanent ban on tests.

The arms control teams in the White House and state department, led by Gary Samore and Ellen Tauscher respectively, argue that there are other ways of ensuring reliability, and that developing new nuclear weapons is the worst possible sign to send to the non-proliferation treaty (NPT) review conference next year.

Joseph Cirincione, head of the Ploughshares Fund which sponsors debate on nuclear policy, said Obama was not just up against existing doctrine, but against a huge industry. "There is \$54bn spent [annually in the US] on nuclear weapons and weapons-related programmes. That's a lot of contracts and a lot of jobs, and right now it's a battle for budgets," Cirincione said. "The new weapons programmes are seen as a way of guaranteeing funding and jobs in the infrastructure. Obama is trying to convince [the weapons establishment] that he is going to look after them in ways other than building new weapons."

This is a difficult time for Obama to enter a gruelling bureaucratic battle with the Pentagon, since he is already in a fight over troop deployments to Afghanistan.

But his arms control advisers are aware they only have a narrow window of opportunity to bring about radical change before their agenda gets bogged down in Congress. "There's a strong commitment to live up to Obama's Prague speech, but Afghanistan is dragging all the oxygen out of the room," said a European official.

The looming deadline is next May, when the world's government are supposed to come together to review the non-proliferation treaty, which has succeeded over the past four decades in keeping the number of nuclear weapons states in single figures. But with North Korea's departure from the treaty to build an arsenal, and rising suspicions over Iran's intentions, the NPT is under extreme pressure.

If, as in 2005, May's review conference fails to find common ground between states with nuclear weapons and those who do not have them, many fear that the barriers to untrammelled proliferation could fall away. About a dozen Middle Eastern states are exploring the creation of civil nuclear power programmes, which will give them the option of building weapons at a later date.

"If Obama can't rescue the NPT at this conference you might be looking at the end of the treaty," Cirincione said. "It's already on shaky ground. If you can't shore it up in 2010, you face the real possibility that it won't be there in 2015."

Iran led the resistance to new anti-proliferation measures in 2005, rallying developing countries behind the claim that the weapons states were trying to impose double standards – keeping their weapons while denying nuclear technology to the have-not nations.

The strategy being pursued by Obama, with the support of Gordon Brown, is to make such significant strides towards disarmament that Iran can no longer credibly make that argument next May. "This is about isolating the Iranians, and denuding them of the arguments they made in 2005," a British official said.

Stopping Iran's enrichment of uranium – which Tehran insists is for civil power generation and which the west alleges is ultimately for building a bomb – is an even harder task. Many officials in western capitals privately fear nothing can prevent the increasingly autocratic regime in Tehran from developing an arsenal, or at least the capacity to put together weapons at short notice. If diplomacy has any chance of succeeding, they say, it will have to be backed up by the credible threat of international sanctions.

That requires Russian backing, and one of the reasons Obama sacrificed US plans for missile defence in eastern Europe last week was to win that support. Whether he has succeeded may become clear in the next few days, as the focus shifts to the United Nations assembly in New York.

A second treaty at stake is the comprehensive test ban treaty. But Obama's hopes of winning long-awaited Senate support for a treaty first agreed internationally more than 13 years ago, have had to be put on hold, at least until

Congress has debated his healthcare reforms, the budget, and at least two other pending treaties, on the law of the sea and the International Criminal Court.

US ratification of the test ban would be represent a significant step towards bringing it into force, but the White House says it will not bring the treaty to the floor of the Senate before it is sure of the 67 votes needed to ratify.

Interviews blitz

Facing a perfect storm of a week, as his big foreign policy challenges threaten to collide while his principal domestic healthcare problem remains unresolved, Barack Obama embarked on an unprecedented media blitz today, with five separate morning television interviews.

During a marathon session in the White House's Roosevelt Room, Obama recorded interviews with CNN, CBS, NBC, ABC and the Spanish-language network Univision. But he snubbed Rupert Murdoch's conservative-leaning Fox, which he accused earlier this year of being "entirely devoted to attacking my administration", prompting one Fox host to describe the administration as a bunch of "crybabies".

In the interviews, Obama reprised the same themes - healthcare, Afghanistan and the need for a strategic review, race, the economy and prospects for resumed growth, Kim Jong-il and his apparent revival. ("He's reasserted himself".) Obama hasn't finished re-asserting himself though. His attempt to seize back the initiative will culminate tomorrow night in an encounter with the late night chat show host David Letterman, his first appearance on the show as president.

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2009/sep/20/pentagon-obama-nuclear-arms>

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

London Guardian
20 September 2009

Barack Obama Ready to Slash US Nuclear Arsenal

Julian Borger

Barack Obama has demanded the Pentagon conduct a radical review of US nuclear weapons doctrine to prepare the way for deep cuts in the country's arsenal, the Guardian can reveal.

Obama has rejected the Pentagon's first draft of the "nuclear posture review" as being too timid, and has called for a range of more far-reaching options consistent with his goal of eventually abolishing nuclear weapons altogether, according to European officials.

Those options include:

- Reconfiguring the US nuclear force to allow for an arsenal measured in hundreds rather than thousands of deployed strategic warheads.
- Redrafting nuclear doctrine to narrow the range of conditions under which the US would use nuclear weapons.
- Exploring ways of guaranteeing the future reliability of nuclear weapons without testing or producing a new generation of warheads.

The review is due to be completed by the end of this year, and European officials say the outcome is not yet clear. But one official said: "Obama is now driving this process. He is saying these are the president's weapons, and he wants to look again at the doctrine and their role."

The move comes as Obama prepares to take the rare step of chairing a watershed session of the UN security council on Thursday. It is aimed at winning consensus on a new grand bargain: exchanging more radical disarmament by nuclear powers in return for wider global efforts to prevent further proliferation.

That bargain is at the heart of the nuclear non-proliferation treaty, which is up for review next year amid signs it is unravelling in the face of Iranian and North Korean nuclear ambitions.

In an article for the Guardian today, the foreign secretary, David Miliband, argues that failure to win a consensus would be disastrous. "This is one of the most critical issues we face," the foreign secretary writes. "Get it right, and we will increase global security, pave the way for a world without nuclear weapons, and improve access to

affordable, safe and dependable energy – vital to tackle climate change. Get it wrong, and we face the spread of nuclear weapons and the chilling prospect of nuclear material falling into the hands of terrorists."

According to a final draft of the resolution due to be passed on Thursday, however, the UN security council will not wholeheartedly embrace the US and Britain's call for eventual abolition of nuclear weapons. Largely on French insistence, the council will endorse the vaguer aim of seeking "to create the conditions for a world without nuclear weapons".

Gordon Brown is due to use this week's UN general assembly meeting to renew a diplomatic offensive on Iran for its failure to comply with security council demands that it suspend enrichment of uranium. The issue has been given greater urgency by an International Atomic Energy Agency document leaked last week which showed inspectors for the agency believed Iran already had "sufficient information" to build a warhead, and had tested an important component of a nuclear device.

Germany is also expected to toughen its position on Iran ahead of a showdown between major powers and the Iranian government on 1 October. But it is not yet clear what position will be taken by Russia, which has hitherto opposed the imposition of further sanctions on Iran.

Moscow's stance will be closely watched for signs of greater co-operation in return for Obama's decision last week to abandon a missile defence scheme in eastern Europe, a longstanding source of irritation to Russia.

"I hope the Russians realise they have to do something serious. I don't think a deal has been done, but there is a great deal of expectation," said a British official.

Russia has approximately 2,780 deployed strategic warheads, compared with around 2,100 in the US. The abandonment of the US missile defence already appears to have spurred arms control talks currently underway between Washington and Moscow: the Russian president, Dmitry Medvedev, said today that chances were "quite high" that a deal to reduce arsenals to 1,500 warheads each would be signed by the end of the year.

The US nuclear posture review is aimed at clearing the path for a new round of deep US-Russian cuts to follow almost immediately after that treaty is ratified, to set lower limits not just on deployed missiles but also on the thousands of warheads both have in their stockpiles.

The Obama strategy is to create disarmament momentum in the run-up to the non-proliferation treaty review conference next May, in the hope that states without nuclear weapons will not side with Iran, as they did at the last review in 2005, but endorse stronger legal barriers to nuclear proliferation, and forego nuclear weapons programmes themselves.

"The review has up to now been in the hands of mid-level bureaucrats with a lot of knowledge, but it's knowledge drawn from the cold war. What they are prepared to do is tweak the existing doctrine," said Rebecca Johnson, the head of the Acronym Institute, a pro-disarmament pressure group. "Obama has sent them it back saying: 'Give me more options for what we can do in line with my goals. I'm not saying it's easy, but all you're giving me is business as usual.'"

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2009/sep/20/barack-obama-us-nuclear-weapons>

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

Sydney Morning Herald
September 22, 2009

Slash Arsenal, Pentagon Told

JULIAN BORGER

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the US would use the weapons; and exploring ways of guaranteeing the future reliability of nuclear weapons without testing or producing a new generation of warheads.

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<http://www.smh.com.au/world/slash-arsenal-pentagon-told-20090921-fyqx.html>

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

Washington Times
September 22, 2009

U.S., Russia Begin Arms Control Talks

By Vladimir Isachenkov, Associated Press

MOSCOW -- A new round of U.S.-Russia arms control talks began Monday, and Russian military specialists predicted they would not be easy, despite President Obama's decision to scrap plans for an Eastern Europe-based missile shield that Moscow opposed.

Russian and U.S. diplomats are trying to negotiate a successor to the 1991 Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) before it expires Dec. 5. The agreement is seen as crucial for both nations to keep an eye on each other's nuclear stockpiles and also add credibility to their efforts to persuade countries such as Iran and North Korea to abandon their nuclear programs.

As talks got under way in Geneva, retired Maj. Gen. Vladimir Dvorkin said Mr. Obama's decision to dump the George W. Bush-era plan for missile defense installations in Poland and the Czech Republic removed a major stumbling block. Russian officials had vociferously opposed the plan, claiming it was meant to weaken Russia.

But Gen. Dvorkin, the former head of a military think tank that developed Moscow's strategy in arms control talks, said their differences were yet to be resolved.

Moscow and Washington have been arguing about which weapons will be subject to cuts, what will be the rules for counting nuclear warheads and how intrusive inspections of military facilities could be, Gen. Dvorkin told a news conference in Moscow.

"Negotiations aren't going easily," said retired Col. Gen. Viktor Yesin, the former chief of staff for the Russian military's Strategic Missile Forces.

He told the news conference that Moscow wants an end to intrusive U.S. inspections at the main Russian missile factory in Votkinsk, 600 miles east of Moscow, while the United States wanted to continue them.

"There are still many obstacles negotiators have to deal with," Gen. Yesin said.

The latest round of talks on a successor to START were expected to continue until Oct. 2, U.S. officials said.

Even if the parties fail to reach agreement quickly enough for the deal to be ratified before START expires, they may begin observing terms of the new deal immediately, Gen. Dvorkin said. "Nothing horrible will happen if the deal isn't ratified by December 5," he added.

Gen. Dvorkin said Mr. Obama's move to scrap the missile shield in Eastern Europe has created favorable conditions for prospective Russian cooperation with the United States and NATO on joint missile defense. "If we do that, it will be even more important than START," he said, adding that cooperation on a missile shield would dramatically boost mutual trust.

<http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2009/sep/22/us-russia-begin-arms-control-talks/>

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

New York Times
September 19, 2009

Russia's Reaction On Missile Plan Leaves Iran Issue Hanging

By Clifford J. Levy and Peter Baker

MOSCOW — President Obama's decision to cancel an antimissile defense system in Eastern Europe earned a strong welcome from Russian leaders on Friday. Now, the question is whether Russia will do more to help prevent Iran from developing nuclear weapons.

Prime Minister Vladimir V. Putin, who had repeatedly assailed the antimissile system as a grievous threat to Russia's security, called Mr. Obama's decision "correct and brave." President Dmitri A. Medvedev hinted that Russia would respond favorably to the decision to replace former President George W. Bush's plan with a missile shield seen as less threatening to Moscow.

Still, neither leader offered any immediate indication that Russia would make specific concessions, especially on Iran, which has become a major stumbling block in relations between the countries. If Russia does not toughen its opposition to Iran's nuclear program, analysts say, Mr. Obama may be vulnerable to criticism that he yielded to Russian complaints on the antimissile plan but received little in return.

"I hope our administration really thought this through and this was not about appeasing Russia, because I don't think that justifies the decision," said Riki Ellison, chairman of the Missile Defense Advocacy Alliance, a nonpartisan group that receives financing from defense contractors as well as private individuals who support missile defense.

The White House described the missile defense announcement as a response to changing Iranian capabilities, not as giving in to Russia, and said there was no quid pro quo. But the Obama administration needs support from Russia, which has veto power in the United Nations Security Council, in order to increase sanctions on Iran. American and European officials argue that Iran has carried out significant advances in recent months in developing a nuclear weapon.

Russia and China so far have resisted taking strong diplomatic steps or imposing tougher sanctions against Iran. Mr. Obama's decision to remove one of the main irritants in relations between Washington and Moscow seems intended, in part, to alter that diplomatic equation and help increase the chances of addressing the impasse over Iran without resorting to military force.

But Mr. Obama was already facing a backlash on Friday from Congressional Republicans and politicians in Poland and the Czech Republic, nations that have looked to the United States for protection against what they perceive as Russian aggression.

Mr. Obama's decision on Thursday cancels an antimissile plan proposed by the Bush administration. Mr. Obama replaced the Bush system, which would have been based in Poland and the Czech Republic, with a reconfigured system designed to knock down short- and medium-range missiles instead of intercontinental ones.

The Bush administration had said the system was intended to deter countries like Iran, but the Kremlin had long insisted that it was in fact aimed at Russia.

Mr. Medvedev on Friday maintained that Russia did not feel obligated to respond to the United States as part of some deal. But he added: "There always is a score in politics. And if our partners hear some of our concerns, we will, of course, be more attentive to theirs."

Mr. Medvedev and Mr. Obama are to meet at the United Nations in New York next week.

Russian officials did indicate that they would withdraw a proposal to base short-range missiles on Russia's western border, in Kaliningrad, though American officials had not seemed very worried about that Russian plan.

What else Russia might do to respond was a topic of speculation in both Washington and Moscow on Friday. One issue was whether the Kremlin, after more closely examining the new Obama antimissile plan, would voice new protests about it.

Mr. Obama ordered the development of a system that would deploy smaller SM-3 missile interceptors in 2011, at first on ships, later on land in Europe. They are aimed mostly at short- and medium-range Iranian missiles. At least

as currently designed, they are not capable of destroying Russia's intercontinental missiles, though they are expected to be eventually upgraded, Obama administration officials said.

The Obama plan calls for dozens and eventually possibly even hundreds of the smaller interceptors, not just the 10 larger ones included in Mr. Bush's plan.

Pavel Y. Felgenhauer, a military analyst who writes a column for Novaya Gazeta, an opposition newspaper in Moscow, said he doubted that the Kremlin would be able to complain about the new plan. Mr. Felgenhauer emphasized that the Kremlin had opposed the Bush system because it believed, on the advice of the Russian military, that the system was intended not to bring down Iranian missiles, but to give the United States the potential to make a crippling first strike against Russia.

Also on Friday, in another sign of a warming in relations, NATO called for new cooperation with Moscow, including possibly on antimissile systems.

In his first major foreign policy speech, which was coordinated with the White House, NATO's new secretary general, Anders Fogh Rasmussen, proposed a "genuine new beginning of our relationship with Russia" and said the West and Russia had a shared interest in opposing proliferation of missile technology.

Some Obama supporters in Washington said the remarks by Mr. Putin and Mr. Medvedev did not necessarily help Mr. Obama.

"Critics will inevitably make hay of the positive comments," said Mark Medish, a former Russia expert in the Clinton White House and now a scholar at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. "Much as in the Soviet days, Moscow's praise can be seen as a political kiss of death for Western counterparts. But the criticism misses the point that Mr. Obama has made a hardheaded calculation based on U.S. national security interests and strategic priorities."

The Obama administration continued to use Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates, a Republican first appointed by Mr. Bush, to explain the new plan and deflect criticism. Mr. Gates met with the Czech defense minister, Martin Bartak, in Washington on Friday and offered more reassurances that the United States was not abandoning Eastern Europe.

Even so, some analysts in Washington contended that Mr. Obama had sacrificed the Bush system in order to reach a broader arrangement with Russia that was by no means assured.

Mr. Ellison, the missile defense advocate, said that if the mobile SM-3 interceptors that the Obama administration planned to deploy instead of the Bush system were genuinely effective, "the Russians should be much more concerned about having hundreds of interceptors in this system that could potentially shoot down missiles in and around Europe."

The fact that Russia is not, he said, "validates to me that the SM-3 system won't be at that level for long-range ballistic missiles."

<http://www.nytimes.com/2009/09/19/world/europe/19shield.html>

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

RIA Novosti
20 September 2009

Russia, U.S. Likely to Agree on Arms Reduction Deal by Yearend

MOSCOW, September 20 (RIA Novosti) - Russian President Dmitry Medvedev said Sunday the chances to reach agreements with the United States on a new strategic arms reduction treaty by the end of 2009 are "high enough."

"If we agree by the yearend, and I believe the chances are high enough, this would be useful both for us and the entire global community," Medvedev told CNN.

Medvedev and U.S. President Barack Obama agreed in July in Moscow on the outline of a deal to replace the 1991 Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START-1), which expires on December 5, including cutting their countries' nuclear arsenals to 1,500-1,675 operational warheads and delivery vehicles to 500-1,000.

The START-1 treaty obliges Russia and the U.S. 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 document, 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 said the United States had 5,576 warheads and 1,198 delivery vehicles.

<http://en.rian.ru/russia/20090920/156195746.html>

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

Washington Post
September 21, 2009

Obama Missile Decision May Smooth U.S.-Russia Arms Talks

By Mary Beth Sheridan and Philip P. Pan, Washington Post Staff Writers

President Obama's decision to scrap a planned missile defense system that had infuriated Russia is expected to produce one quick payback: smoother talks between the two nuclear giants on renegotiating their most important arms-reduction treaty. But U.S. and Russian officials say it is too late to replace the pact before it expires in December.

Getting an updated version of the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty, or START, has been a centerpiece of Obama's effort to "reset" relations with Russia. U.S. officials see it as crucial to bolstering American credibility as the administration seeks to jump-start non-proliferation efforts worldwide.

But after six months of negotiations, the two governments remain divided on key questions, with Russian authorities pressing for deeper cuts in nuclear-capable launchers and bombers and U.S. officials trying to exclude from the treaty weapons converted to non-nuclear missions. Both sides have essentially given up on ratifying a treaty before Dec. 5, when START expires.

Instead, U.S. officials said they have begun exploring options for temporarily extending the treaty and preserving inspections and other verification measures that have served as the foundation for sharp reductions in the countries' nuclear arsenals for 18 years.

Officials say they are making progress in the talks, which resume Monday, and hope that Obama and Russian President Dmitry Medvedev will be able sign a new treaty in December. But such a treaty would not go into effect until it is ratified, which could take months, with Senate Republicans already objecting to Obama's decision on missile defense as a giveaway to the Russians.

Obama said Thursday he was abandoning plans for a missile shield in Poland and the Czech Republic that Russia had denounced as a threat to its security and an obstacle in START talks. He introduced instead a partly sea-based missile defense system that would focus on protecting Europe from short- and medium-range Iranian missiles, rather than defending the United States from longer-range missiles Iran might develop in the future.

Sen. Jon Kyl (R-Ariz.), a leading skeptic of arms control treaties, said the timing of the announcement "makes clear that the administration ignored the input of senators of both parties who warned that linking START and missile defense would be ill-advised."

A senior State Department official said the Bush-era plan wasn't such a huge obstacle that it would have torpedoed a new START treaty. Still, "the overall atmospherics will be improved" in the talks after Obama's decision, said the official, who was not authorized to comment on the record.

Negotiators who will meet this week in Geneva have agreed to reduce the number of deployed nuclear warheads in each country to somewhere between 1,500 and 1,675, down from the previous ceiling of 2,200. But they remain far apart on how many nuclear-capable bombers, submarine-based launchers and missile silos each side can keep, with the Russians insisting on deeper cuts.

During a summit in July, Obama and Medvedev agreed that the START limit of 1,600 such "delivery vehicles" for each country should be lowered to between 1,100 and 500. Russian negotiators have not strayed far from the lower end of that range, according to the State Department official.

Col. Gen. Viktor Yesin, a former commander of Russia's nuclear missile forces who has been following the talks, said negotiators appeared to be looking at a compromise of between 700 and 900 launchers and bombers.

But he said the two sides have not reached a consensus on how to count the weapons, including whether those that no longer carry nuclear warheads should be included.

The dispute reflects Russian concerns about the Pentagon's ability to quickly rebuild the U.S. nuclear arsenal by taking warheads out of storage and putting them on missiles and bombers again. The Russian military is also worried about U.S. plans to refit missiles and bombers with conventional payloads, a process it fears could extend American military superiority and could be used to overwhelm Russia's nuclear forces.

The United States currently has about 1,200 delivery vehicles, as counted under START rules. But that includes hundreds of "phantom" vehicles that no longer carry nuclear warheads -- such as decrepit B-52G bombers that are being cannibalized to serve other aircraft.

Under START rules, a nuclear-capable delivery vehicle could only be deducted from each side's arsenal if it was destroyed or permanently modified. The U.S. side says the procedures are too costly and complicated, and is seeking more flexible rules.

Anatoli Diakov, director of the Center for Arms Control, Energy and Environmental Studies in Moscow, said the U.S. approach wasn't acceptable.

"They want to take a strategic weapon and say, okay, we'll rename it, it's not a strategic weapon anymore, though it still has the capability to carry nuclear bombs," he said.

U.S. negotiators are resisting Russian demands for deeper cuts in launchers and bombers in part because the U.S. nuclear arsenal is structured to use more of them than the Russian military, which has cut costs by relying on fewer missiles and placing more warheads on each. But U.S. military planners also want to preserve submarines and bombers and convert them for use on non-nuclear missions, including developing a new capability to quickly strike faraway targets with conventional payloads.

Replacing the hefty START treaty in only a few months was an ambitious task to begin with, and therefore many analysts are not surprised that the two sides haven't reached their goal. The State Department official said the delays thus far are due mainly to both sides getting their negotiating teams in place.

"It's been 20 years since we negotiated an agreement of this kind," the official said.

But Yesin said he believed there was a 50 percent chance that the two sides would fail even to sign an agreement before START expires. That could embolden critics in each country to accuse the other of intransigence and make compromise even more difficult, he warned.

"It would have a negative impact on the whole reset of relations," he said.

The new treaty is expected to win ratification fairly easily from Russia's Kremlin-controlled parliament. The U.S. Senate may be another matter.

Already, top senators from both parties have called on the Obama administration to submit, along with the treaty, a plan and budget for modernizing the U.S. nuclear weapons complex. The administration's range of nuclear-weapons and missile-defense policies may come under scrutiny in the hearings.

"This will not be a quick process," said one Republican staffer involved in the issue, speaking on condition of anonymity. "These are existential issues."

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/09/20/AR2009092002376.html>

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

RIA Novosti

21 September 2009

Russian Gen. says Global Missile Shield could Eliminate Nuke Threat

MOSCOW, September 21 (RIA Novosti) - A missile defense system developed jointly by the world's leading powers could eliminate the global threat of nuclear strikes, a former top Russian military official said on Monday.

The U.S. last week announced the cancellation of plans to deploy an anti-missile system in central Europe, which had been fiercely contested by Moscow. NATO has since said it is willing to consider a joint missile defense project with Russia.

"If we return to the issue of a European missile defense system, which was abandoned a few years ago and included the U.S., we could organize mutual controls, and use the means available to all participants, in order to control the mutual nuclear potential," said Col. Gen. Viktor Yesin, who led the Strategic Missile Forces in 1991-1993.

If a global missile defense system was to be built in cooperation with Russia, France, Italy, Israel and Britain, on equal terms, then China would also need to be included, he said.

"If we decide to do this without China, then on a certain level, China may react angrily," Yesin said.

According to a senior fellow at the Center for International Security, Gen. Maj. Vladimir Dvorkovich, China would have to be included in data collection at first in order to ease possible tensions with China.

"Without China, this would be dangerous and irrational. China is a very significant player in these processes," Dvorkovich said.

According to Yesin, a framework document would need to be created that would be open for all interested parties in order to create a unified missile defense system "from Vladivostok to Vancouver."

"China must not sit on the sidelines and if we develop such a global system, then we will not be afraid of any nuclear strike," Yesin said.

Missile defense remains a controversial issue in military circles, with many experts saying the technology for intercepting ballistic missiles - often compared to hitting a bullet with a bullet - is still a long way off.

The U.S. Missile Defense Agency says interception of incoming missiles "has been successfully demonstrated in test after test," while critics say the tests depend on detailed advance planning and information on the incoming missile.

<http://en.rian.ru/world/20090921/156204398.html>

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

Washington Post
September 19, 2009

Clinton Challenges Iran on Nuclear Aims

By Glenn Kessler
Washington Post Staff Writer

Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton challenged Iran on Friday to come clean on its nuclear program and ease its repression of opposition activists, saying that "the Iranian government seeks a sense of justice in the world but stands in the way of the justice it seeks."

Previewing next week's meeting of the United Nations General Assembly, at which Iran's nuclear ambitions will be a primary topic, she told an audience of foreign policy experts at the Brookings Institution that the Obama administration is still willing to engage with Iran.

"Our message will be clear: We are serious," she said. "And we will soon see if the Iranians are serious."

Clinton warned that there is "no appetite for talks without action," and she said Iran must quickly decide whether it is willing to cooperate or face increased international sanctions. She said there needs to be "movement" by the end of the year.

William Burns, undersecretary of state for political affairs, will join senior diplomats from five other countries on Oct. 1 in a meeting with an Iranian delegation. It will be the first public meeting between an Obama administration official and the Iranians and is intended to determine whether Tehran is willing to address concerns about its nuclear program.

Clinton did not make any demands on Tehran, such as insisting it suspend its uranium enrichment activities, and said Iran has a right to "peaceful nuclear energy." But she said international concerns have grown because Iran has

refused to "demonstrate that its program is designed for peaceful purposes" and because its "continued refusal to cooperate has damaged the credibility of its claim that it does not seek a nuclear weapon."

"There will be accompanying costs for Iran's continued defiance: more isolation and economic pressure, less possibility of progress for the people of Iran," Clinton said. "We have made clear our desire to resolve issues with Iran diplomatically. Iran must now decide whether to join us in this effort."

In an interview posted Thursday on NBC News's Web site, Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad appeared to play down the prospects for a breakthrough, saying: "If you are talking about the enrichment of uranium for peaceful purposes, this will never be closed down here in Iran." He also refused four times to rule out Iran's eventually acquiring nuclear weapons.

Clinton vigorously defended President Obama's decision to abandon a Bush-era plan on missile defense for a different approach: "We believe this is a decision that will leave America stronger and more capable of defending our troops, our interests and our allies."

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/09/18/AR2009091801530.html>

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

RIA Novosti
20 September 2009

Israel won't Strike Iran - Russia's Medvedev

MOSCOW, September 20 (RIA Novosti) - Israel will not strike Iran, Russian President Dmitry Medvedev said.

Medvedev said in an interview with CNN aired Sunday that Israeli President Shimon Peres, when on a visit to the Russian Black Sea resort of Sochi in August to discuss Russia's arms deals with Iran, told him: "Israel is not going to make any strikes on Iran, we are a peaceful country."

Medvedev said Russia supplies purely defensive armaments to Iran. "Our task is not to strengthen Iran and weaken Israel or vice versa, but [to establish] a normal, quiet situation in the Middle East," he said.

Asked what could happen should Israel nevertheless make a strike, Medvedev said: "This is the worst thing that could be imagined... This would be the most unwise development of events. But my Israeli colleagues told me they are not going to act like this, and I trust them."

Peres said in August that Russia could review its plans to deliver advanced air defense systems to Iran.

"President [Dmitry] Medvedev gave a promise he will reconsider the sales of S-300s because it affects the delicate balance which exists in the Middle East," Peres said during his visit to Sochi.

Russia has until recently delayed the implementation of a 2007 deal with Iran on the supply of S-300s. The contract is worth hundreds of millions of dollars.

Israel and the United States have been making proactive diplomatic efforts to influence Russia to drop the plans. They suspect the Islamic Republic of secretly seeking to build nuclear weapons, and have refused to rule out a military strike on its nuclear facilities.

Russian officials said in March that Iran had not yet received any missiles, but Moscow reaffirmed its commitment to fulfill the contract. Medvedev earlier said some payments under the contract had already been made.

S-300s are considered one of the world's most effective all-altitude regional air defense systems, comparable in performance to the U.S. MIM-104 Patriot system.

The latest version of the S-300 family is the S-300PMU2 Favorit, which has a range of up to 195 kilometers (about 120 miles) and can intercept aircraft and ballistic missiles at altitudes from 10 meters to 27 kilometers.

<http://en.rian.ru/world/20090920/156195202.html>

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

Arab Monitor
21 September 2009

Israel Accused of Using Golan Heights for Dumping Nuclear Waste

Damascus, 21 September – In a report submitted to the United Nations Syria accuses the Israeli authorities of using occupied Syrian territories for dumping nuclear waste. According to the report Israel has dug tunnels in the occupied Golan Heights using them as waste deposits.

A tunnel dug underneath Mount Hermon is allegedly being used to store nuclear warheads. In reports dating back to 2003 Syria had already accused Israel of burying nuclear waste from its nuclear plant Dimona in tunnels dug underneath Mount Hermon. At that time Tel Aviv admitted it was digging tunnels in Mount Hermon, but denied they were intended as dumping site for nuclear waste.

<http://www.arabmonitor.info/news/dettaglio.php?idnews=28405&lang=en>

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

RIA Novosti

21 September 2009

Iran's Missile Program Potential Greater than N. Korea's - Expert

MOSCOW, September 21 (RIA Novosti) - Iran's missile potential is greater today than North Korea's, the former head of a Russian defense industry research institute said on Monday.

International experts said Iran is working to develop intercontinental ballistic missiles. The Islamic Republic has Shahab-3 (Meteor-3) medium-range ballistic missiles with a range up to 2,000 kilometers (1,242 miles). North Korea provided assistance to the country to design and produce these missiles.

"Believing that Iran is not developing missiles we [the U.S.S.R.] invented back in the 1950s is naive. In my view, Iran has even greater potential and greater resources than North Korea has today," Maj.-Gen. Vladimir Dvorkin, the chief research associate of the International Security Center, told journalists in Moscow.

Dvorkin disagreed with the Russian General Staff's assessment of Iran's missile potential. "I believe statements by the Russian General Staff that Iran possesses missiles with a range of up to 1,000 km are inaccurate," he said.

Dvorkin said Iran already has missiles capable of reaching over 3,000 kilometers (1,864 miles). "And if the upper stage of the carrier rocket that took the first Iranian satellite into space is reequipped, the range could be increased to 4,000 km (2,485 miles)," he said.

He stressed that the change in the U.S. stance on missile defense in Europe is justified. "We don't know what Iran is going to use," he said.

A former top Russian general said earlier Monday that Russia and the United States could take up the issue of deploying a joint missile defense system in Europe if Iran develops long-range ballistic missiles.

U.S. President Barack Obama announced on Thursday that Washington would not deploy a radar system in the Czech Republic and a missile base in Poland due to a reassessment of the threat from Iran. Moscow fiercely opposed the Europe-based missile defense plans as a national security threat.

"Russia and the U.S. could jointly turn to this topic again in the future if Iran gets such a weapon (long-range ballistic missile), but this won't happen until at least 2015," said Col. Gen. Viktor Yesin (Ret.), who was chief of staff of the Russian Strategic Missile Forces in 1991-1993.

Yesin said the non-strategic missile defense program could not guarantee security from ballistic missiles traveling at 7 km/s (4 mi/sec). He said the short- and medium-range missiles that Iran now possesses have a speed of no more than 4.5 km/sec and could be effectively destroyed by a non-strategic missile system.

According to Yesin, should a long-range ballistic missile threaten Russia, it could use its Gabala missile defense program it has developed with Azerbaijan, or the Armavir radar station in Russia's south, which will be completed by October-November. Russia may also use its S-300 and S-400 surface-to-air missile systems.

The United States has stationary strategic missile defense systems deployed at two sites, in Alaska and California, while Russia has one based near Moscow.

In November 2008, Iran reported a second successful launch of the Kavoshgar 2 rocket into space.

http://en.rian.ru/military_news/20090921/156207542.html

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

Washington Post
September 21, 2009

As Talks With U.S. Near, Iran Denies Nuclear Arms Effort

By Thomas Erdbrink, Washington Post Foreign Service

TEHRAN, Sept. 20 -- On the eve of a visit by Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad to the United States, Iran's supreme leader charged Sunday that the United States is falsely accusing the Islamic republic of trying to develop nuclear weapons, state television reported.

The remarks come after President Obama on Thursday canceled a plan for a missile shield in Eastern Europe that was officially intended to thwart possible Iranian attacks. Earlier this month, the U.S. representative to the United Nations nuclear watchdog said that Iran had enough low-enriched uranium to produce one nuclear weapon.

"The U.S. officials who claim that the Iranian missiles are dangerous or that we are seeking to produce atomic bombs know themselves that such statements are false," said Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. "We fundamentally reject nuclear weapons and prohibit the use and production of nuclear weapons." Khamenei issued a fatwa, a religious edict, against nuclear weapons five years ago.

Iran is scheduled to join world powers, including the United States, at the negotiating table on Oct. 1, but Iranian officials have said they have no intention of halting their uranium-enrichment project, a key demand under three sets of U.N. sanctions. Ahmadinejad, who like other Iranian officials insists that the country's nuclear program is for peaceful energy use, is due in New York this week to speak at a gathering of the U.N. General Assembly.

Western powers, including the United States, have proposed tougher sanctions if Iran fails to suspend its uranium enrichment. But Russian President Dmitry Medvedev said in an interview with CNN broadcast Sunday that Iran needs "positive motivation," not sanctions, to prompt cooperation on its nuclear program.

Medvedev confirmed that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu made a secret visit to Moscow earlier this month and said Israeli officials had assured him that they are not planning a military strike on Iran. Medvedev said any Israeli attack on Iranian facilities would result in "humanitarian disaster, a vast number of refugees, Iran's wish to take revenge -- and not only upon Israel, to be honest, but upon other countries as well."

In his speech, Khamenei called Zionism a "fatal cancer" and lauded nationwide demonstrations against Israel that took place Friday. But he did not refer to opposition demonstrators who came out in large numbers and denounced Ahmadinejad's government.

The opposition demonstrations were the largest in two months, and they came after government attempts to portray politicians questioning the outcome of the June 12 elections as members of a foreign-backed plot to overthrow Iran's leaders. Many of Ahmadinejad's opponents are on trial and have confessed to conspiracy charges. Their supporters say the confessions were made under duress.

Khamenei dismissed those accusations. "Any confession in a court, before cameras, before millions of viewers, is religiously and in the eye of the wise people credible," Khamenei said. But he also indicated that the confessions will not be used against others who have not yet been charged, as has been feared by the opposition. "Making confessions against others is not acceptable," Khamenei said.

Khamenei confronted dissension within the top ranks of Iran's religious order Sunday, as several grand ayatollahs openly disagreed with his decision to declare Sunday the end of the fasting month of Ramadan. They said Monday should mark the end of Ramadan, an opposition Web site reported. While Khamenei has congratulated Ahmadinejad on his election victory, only some of Iran's approximately 20 grand ayatollahs have done the same.

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/09/20/AR2009092001940.html>

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

Reuters India
September 22, 2009

Iran says Makes New Model of Nuclear Centrifuges

TEHRAN, Sept 22 (Reuters) - Iran has built a new generation of centrifuges for enriching uranium and is testing them, the official news agency IRNA quoted its nuclear energy agency chief as saying on Tuesday.

"Iranian scientists have made a new generation of centrifuges that are currently undergoing necessary tests," Ali Akbar Salehi told a Tehran news conference as reported by IRNA.

"Chains of 10 centrifuges are now under test," he said, and the number in each chain "will be gradually increased."

Salehi did not say when the new model of centrifuge would be introduced to the production line in its Natanz enrichment plant but said it was stronger and faster than those now in operation.

Iran says it is enriching uranium only to low levels suitable for electricity generation and is committed to non-proliferation safeguards maintained by inspectors from the International Atomic Energy Agency.

United States and some Western countries suspect Iran has a secret project to fuel atomic bombs with highly enriched uranium, something the Islamic Republic has repeatedly denied.

A senior diplomat close to the IAEA said there appeared to little new in Salehi's announcement. The IAEA has reported Iran testing advanced models of centrifuges for more than two years but found no sign of them being phased into production lines.

An Aug. 28 IAEA report said Iran had actually somewhat reduced the number of older-model P-1 centrifuges enriching uranium in a step diplomats said appeared to be related to needed repair and maintenance work.

But the report said Iran had raised the number of installed, although not yet all running, centrifuges to more than 8,300, boosting its potential nuclear fuel production capacity.

World powers base their assessment of possible proliferation risk posed by Iran on the number of centrifuges installed.

The U.N. Security Council has demanded that Iran suspend its enrichment activities because of unresolved concerns about its nuclear ambitions, but Tehran has refused.

Iran is due to hold talks on Oct. 1 with six world powers. (Reporting by Hossein Jaseb, additional reporting by Sylvia Westall in Vienna; Writing by Reza Derakhshi; Editing by Mark Heinrich and Jon Hemming)

<http://in.reuters.com/article/oilRpt/idINLM24002120090922?sp=true>

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

China Daily – China
19 September 2009

DPRK Signals Nuclear Talks Possible

PYONGYANG: Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) leader Kim Jong-il is willing to engage in "bilateral and multilateral talks", a strong indication that the country might be close to rejoining stalled negotiations aimed at ending its nuclear weapons programs.

Kim met on Friday with Dai Bingguo, the special envoy of President Hu Jintao.

In a letter delivered by Dai to Kim, Hu said that the Chinese Communist Party and the government attach great importance to the relationship between China and the DPRK.

Hu said that China has always considered the China-DPRK friendship as the treasure of the two parties, the two countries and the two peoples.

In the spirit of carrying forward the tradition, facing to the future, developing the good-neighborly relations and strengthening cooperation, China is ready to consolidate and develop the relationship between the two countries, he added.

He said it has been China's consistent goal to realize the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula and to safeguard and promote peace, stability and development of Northeast Asia.

Hu added that China is ready to spare no effort to work with the DPRK to realize those goals.

Kim responded to Hu's letter by saying that the people in the DPRK are proud of China's success in the past 60 years.

He indicated that he hoped the Chinese people would enjoy even greater achievements in the future.

The DPRK will continue to support China in its efforts to safeguard state sovereignty and security, he added.

The friendship between the two nations that was initiated and fostered by previous generations of leaders from both countries, is indissoluble, Kim said.

On the subject of DPRK's stand on the Korean Peninsula situation and the nuclear issue, Kim said that the DPRK insists on denuclearization and tries to maintain peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula.

The DPRK is willing to solve problems through bilateral or multilateral talks, he added.

Since April, Pyongyang had insisted on one-on-one talks with the United States over nuclear issues.

□

That stance followed the DPRK's withdrawal from six-nation negotiations that had involved both Koreas as well as the US, China, Russia and Japan.

Peng Guangqian, a Beijing military strategist, said Pyongyang's decision to return to "bilateral and multilateral" talks was a "step forward".

"It is also the only practical option left for the DPRK," Peng said, adding that Pyongyang must have realized that taking a hard-line on the nuclear issue, through nuclear testing or missile launches, would not serve the long-term interests of the country.

The DPRK has said that it cannot give up its nuclear arsenal as long as the United States continues with what it says is a "hostile policy" toward it.

Seoul had no immediate comment following Kim's remarks.

Xinhua-AP-Reuters; Huang Xiangyang contributed to this report

http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/world/2009-09/19/content_8711316.htm

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

Korea Herald – South Korea

September 19, 2009

Location of N. Korea's Nuke Facility Confirmed

Defense Minister nominee Kim Tae-young said yesterday that the ministry has confirmed where North Korea possesses its nuclear weapons.

In a parliamentary confirmation hearing, he also expressed confidence that the South will be able to strike the facility before the North uses the nukes in cooperation with the United States.

"If North Korea attempts to threaten us with nukes at the time of war, we will use various channels to obtain the information and the South Korea-U.S. supreme commanders will make the final decision (for the attack)," Kim said, adding that both nations are ready to carry out this joint act.

He also said that North Korea's Hwanggang Dam was holding an unexpectedly high volume of water at the time of release.

"We used all methods to figure out what exactly the North was up to. However, we were not able to find clear evidence that North Korea's goal was to flood the area," Kim said.

In response to criticism that the military failed to report the rise in water level, he said the person on duty had made a mistake and he is being charged following a military investigation.

"The Korea Water Resources Corporation is primarily responsible for activating the alert system in the case of water level increase in the Imjin River," Kim said. "However, I apologize to the public considering that the military could have used a back-up system to make the report."

On Sept. 6, some 40 million tons of water from the Hwanggang Dam flooded the Imjin River that runs across the inter-Korean border, sweeping away six South Koreans fishing and camping along the riverbanks. The victims were all found dead.

Kim also said the military will look after the Seoul National Cemetery, which is where a number of former presidents are buried.

There have been reports that some 150 people tried to damage the grave of former President Kim Dae-jung who was recently buried there.

"I express my regrets that such an event has occurred," Kim said. "The National Cemetery is being managed by the army and I will put my efforts to prevent such a misfortunate event from happening again."

In a separate confirmation hearing, Gender Equality Minister nominee Paik Hee-young claimed her oldest son did not receive any benefits when being given the type of military service he will serve.

The military granted him an easier type of service as he has a mental illness.

"I can't understand how a son with mental disease could obtain a degree from abroad," said Rep. Park Sun-young from the Liberty Forward Party.

Paik said she was not able to take appropriate measures because she was unaware of her son's exact health status at the time.

http://www.koreaherald.co.kr/NEWKHSITE/data/html_dir/2009/09/19/200909190033.asp

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

Xinhua News – China
22 September 2009

ROK President Proposes "Grand Bargain" for DPRK

SEOUL, Sept. 22 (Xinhua) -- South Korean President Lee Myung-bak on Monday proposed a "grand bargain" between the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) and other five partners engaged in six-party talks, South Korea's media reported Tuesday.

The proposal calls on the DPRK to abandon its nuclear program and complete irreversible denuclearization in exchange for a security guarantee and economic aid granted by the international community.

Lee made the proposal while addressing a meeting hosted by the U.S. Council on Foreign Relations, the Korea Society and the Asia Society in New York.

Lee arrived the city on Sunday on a six-day U.S. trip, during which he will attend General Assembly of the United Nations (UN) in New York and the Group of 20 (G20) financial summit in Pittsburgh.

Lee urged the DPRK to immediately return to the international nuclear disarmament negotiations, saying that to the DPRK, "this is not a crisis but an opportunity," it "must not miss this precious opportunity that may well be its last."

Lee called on Pyongyang not to consider the denuclearization process as a threat to its regime, but understand it can establish a new relationship with the countries of the world.

The DPRK announced to withdraw from the six-party talks aiming at ending its nuclear program in the wake of international sanctions imposed by the United Nations (UN) after it tested long-range rockets in April and a nuclear bomb in May.

On the other hand, the other five partners, the United States, China, South Korea, Japan and Russia, need "fundamental solutions" to resolve the DPRK's nuclear issue in a peaceful way, Lee said.

Pyongyang always sought economic interests through threatening the world by carrying out nuclear and missile tests over the past decade, the international community must deal with this problem, the president said.

"It is important for the five nations to strengthen policy coordination over the nuclear issue," he said.

Lee also called on the five partners to discuss his new proposal.

http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2009-09/22/content_12098042.htm

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

Press Trust of India
September 22, 2009

China says Never Engaged In Nuclear Proliferation

Staff Writer

Beijing, Sept 22 (PTI) China, one of the five recognised nuclear powers, today said it has never engaged in proliferation, days after Pakistan's disgraced scientist A Q Khan claimed his country had helped it in enrichment technology in return for atomic bomb blue-prints.

China is firmly opposed to the proliferation of nuclear weapons in whatever forms, Foreign Ministry spokesperson Jiang Yu said here when asked to comment on Khan's latest revelation that Pakistan supplied nuclear know-how to its "all weather" ally.

"As a member of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, China has always strictly abided by its international obligation on the non-proliferation issue," she was quoted as saying by the official Xinhua news agency.

74-year-old Khan, considered father of Pakistan's nuclear bomb, had revealed that his country helped China in enrichment technology in return for bomb blue-prints.

http://www.ptinews.com/news/294660_China-says-never-engaged-in-nuclear-proliferation

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

London Sunday Times
September 20, 2009

Investigation: Nuclear Scandal - Dr Abdul Qadeer Khan

It could be a scene from a film. On a winter's evening, around 8pm, in a quiet suburban street in Amsterdam, a group of cars draw up. Agents of the Dutch intelligence service, the AIVD, accompanied by uniformed police, ring the bell and knock on the door of one of the houses. The occupants, an elderly couple and their unmarried daughter, are slow to come to the door. The bell-ringing becomes more insistent, the knocks sharper. When the door opens, the agents request entry but are clearly not going to take no for an answer.

The year was 2004. The raid went unreported but was part of the worldwide sweep against associates of Dr Abdul Qadeer Khan, the Pakistani scientist and "father of the Islamic bomb", who had just been accused of selling nuclear secrets to Libya, Iran and North Korea. The house belonged to one of his brothers, a retired Pakistani International Airlines manager, who lived there with his wife and daughter. The two secret agents asked the daughter for a letter she had recently received from abroad. Upstairs in her bedroom, she pulled it from a drawer. It was unopened. The agents grabbed it and told her to put on a coat and come with them.

The daughter, Kausar Khan, was taken to the local police station, although, contrary to usual practice, she was neither signed in nor signed out. The Dutch agents wanted to know why she had not opened the letter and whether she knew what was in it. She didn't; she had merely been asked to look after it. Inside the envelope was a copy of a letter that Pakistan did not want to reach the West. The feared Pakistani Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) had found the letter when they searched Dr AQ Khan's home in Islamabad. He had also passed a copy on to his daughter Dina to take to her home in London, as rumours of Khan's "proliferation" — jargon for the dissemination of nuclear secrets — swept the world. The Pakistani ISI were furious. "Now you have got your daughter involved," they reportedly said. "So far we have left your family alone, but don't expect any leniency now."

Dr Khan collapsed in sobs. Under pressure, he agreed to telephone Dina in London and ordered her to destroy the documents. He used three languages: Urdu, English and Dutch. It was code for her to obey his instructions. Dina dutifully destroyed the letter. That left the copy that was confiscated by the Dutch intelligence service in Amsterdam. I know there is at least one other copy: mine.

Just four pages long, it is an extraordinary letter, the contents of which have never been revealed before. Dated December 10, 2003, and addressed to Henny, Khan's Dutch wife, it is handwritten, in apparent haste. It starts

simply: “Darling, if the government plays any mischief with me take a tough stand.” In numbered paragraphs, it outlines Pakistan’s nuclear co-operation with China, Iran and North Korea, and also mentions Libya. It ends: “They might try to get rid of me to cover up all the things they got done by me.”

When I acquired my copy of the secret letter in 2007, I was shocked. On the third page, Khan had written: “Get in touch with Simon Henderson... and give him all the details.” He had also listed my then London address, my telephone number, fax number, mobile-phone number and the e-mail address I used at the time. It has been my luck, or fate, call it what you will, to develop a relationship with AQ Khan.

Khan became an idolised figure in Pakistan from the 1980s onwards because of his success in building a uranium-enrichment plant at Kahuta, near Islamabad. In February 2004, three years after his retirement, he was accused of proliferating nuclear secrets to Iran, Libya and North Korea, and made a televised confession.

General Pervez Musharraf, at the time the ruler of Pakistan, pardoned Khan for his “crimes” but kept him under house arrest and largely incommunicado in Islamabad until February this year, when a court ordered his release. He was declared a “free man”, but in practice nothing changed.

His freedom lasted a day or so before international protests, mainly from the United States, locked him back up again. A few months ago, he was refused permission to attend his granddaughter’s high-school graduation. “I continue to be a prisoner,” Khan complained. In Washington, a State Department spokesman said that Khan remained a “proliferation risk” but, after being shut away for five years, that seemed hard to imagine. So why was he silenced? Was it because of what he did, or because of what he knows about Pakistan’s active role in spreading nuclear technology to some of the world’s worst regimes?

Any relationship with a source is fraught with potential difficulties. One doesn’t want to be blind to the chance of being used. Government officials and politicians in any country are seldom interested in the simple truth. They all have their particular story to tell. In this context, I am frankly amazed that Khan has chosen me to be his interlocutor with the world.

I have been writing about Pakistan ever since I arrived there in June 1977, sent by the BBC to be a stringer because the local man was considered to be under the thumb of the then prime minister, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto (the father of the assassinated Benazir), who had held disputed elections and was facing widespread street protests.

At the time I had never heard of AQ Khan, although, it turns out, he and his family had also lived months earlier at the same small hotel in Rawalpindi where I had lodged for a while. Pakistan was already vying to be a nuclear power and America was pressuring France to stop the sale of a reprocessing plant which would have enabled Pakistan to acquire plutonium, a nuclear explosive.

I returned to London in 1978 to join the Financial Times, and was replaced by a journalist who latched on to a bigger story: that Pakistan was building a centrifuge enrichment plant to make highly enriched uranium, the alternative route to an atomic bomb. A Dutch-trained previously unknown Pakistani scientist, Dr AQ Khan, was leading the project. My intrepid replacement went to visit Khan’s nuclear construction site at Kahuta. He also found out where Khan was living and went to his home. Khan’s security guards beat him up before he reached the front door.

The FT sent me back to Pakistan to help broker a deal whereby my replacement could leave without being prosecuted. At that point, I began my own investigations of Khan, which led to a frontpage story about his purchasing network in Britain. I doubt that either Khan or the Pakistan government was happy to see the exposé.

Even so, the first time I contacted Khan, he was civil to me. It was 1986 and he had just won, on a technicality, an appeal against a Netherlands court judgment that he had attempted to steal centrifuge secrets. Although my story was not a whitewash, it did quote him accurately, and Khan wrote to me with some more information about his case. I replied, and he reciprocated. It started a “penfriendship” that has continued for 23 years and has included two visits.

At the time, I thought Khan might make a good subject for a book. I amassed material, but never thought I had enough, and was not even sure if he was interesting enough for a biography. For his part, Khan was cautious. “When I write my autobiography, Mr Henderson, I shall ask you for your help.” It wasn’t the answer I wanted.

Frankly, in news terms, there wasn’t a great deal of interest in him, even in 1998, when Pakistan first tested its 1,500-kilometre-range Gauri missile, a Khan-directed copy of the North Korean Nodong rocket, and went on to test two nuclear weapons. In 2001, when he turned 65, he retired. We kept in touch, but it was mostly Christmas cards.

Then, in late 2003, he became the story again. I was in London, on a bicycle ride by the River Thames, when my mobile phone rang. A voice said: "I am a friend of your friend in Pakistan." I knew my "friend" must be Khan. The voice on the line said he had been asked to call.

My "friend's" associates were being arrested — former colleagues at KRL, the Dr AQ Khan Research Laboratories, as the Kahuta centrifuge plant was known. I asked why. The voice said "Iran" — which was attempting to go nuclear. I asked what my friend wanted me to do with the information. The voice said I should try to publish it. It might help. I explained that I was happy to listen to what I was being told, but I needed some corroboration. I told him that my friend should call or e-mail me; he didn't have to go through the details again. As far as I was concerned, he could just say "Merry Christmas". I cycled home quickly and took a shower. Thirty minutes later, Khan rang from Pakistan and wished me merry Christmas.

The next few weeks were turbulent. A week or so after Khan's call to me, Libya announced that it would abandon weapons of mass destruction. Shortly afterwards, in December 2003, The Wall Street Journal revealed that a German cargo ship called BBC China had been intercepted on its way to Libya with thousands of centrifuge components, and diverted to Italy. There was a Khan link there as well, but Khan declined my request for an interview. His "friend" called to say the time was not right and Khan was exhausted after long bouts of interrogation.

Khan was placed under house arrest on February 1, 2004, and since then he has rarely been able to leave his house. What do you do when under house arrest in Islamabad? You watch the BBC on satellite television. I knew he would. So, in 2006, when Panorama came to me saying they were making a film about Khan's role in nuclear proliferation and would I be interviewed, the answer was simple: "Yes". I told them that, from my knowledge of Pakistan and Khan, he could not have acted without the permission and collaboration of the government.

Khan watched the programme. After that, one thing quickly led to another. I came to know of the existence of the letter, and also learnt that its contents were known to Dutch intelligence, and also to anyone they might have passed details on to — including, in all likelihood, the British and Americans. Why were Dutch intelligence agents so keen to seize it? On the face of it, the letter's contents are a damning indictment of a generation of Pakistan's political and military leadership, who used Khan's nuclear and missile skills to enhance Pakistan's diplomacy.

It was not rocket science to work out a plausible explanation for the Dutch seizure. Bloggers will probably err on the side of more imaginative conspiracy theories, but the truth is probably simpler. After the September 11 attacks, the West in general, and the United States in particular, had to work with Pakistan to counter Osama Bin Laden and Al-Qaeda in neighbouring Afghanistan. That meant that they had to work with President Musharraf, even though he was no democrat. As part of the bargain, Pakistan's nuclear sins also needed to be placed to one side.

As sins go, they were big: Pakistan had been spreading nuclear technology for years. The first customer for one of its enrichment plants was China — which itself had supplied Pakistan with enough highly enriched uranium for two nuclear bombs in the summer of 1982.

There it was in the letter: "We put up a centrifuge plant at Hanzhong (250km southwest of Xian)." It went on: "The Chinese gave us drawings of the nuclear weapon, gave us 50kg of enriched uranium, gave us 10 tons of UF₆ (natural) and 5 tons of UF₆ (3%)." (UF₆ is uranium hexafluoride, the gaseous feedstock for an enrichment plant.)

On Iran, the letter says: "Probably with the blessings of BB [Benazir Bhutto, who became prime minister in 1988] and [a now-retired general]... General Imtiaz [Benazir's defence adviser, now dead] asked... me to give a set of drawings and some components to the Iranians... The names and addresses of suppliers were also given to the Iranians."

On North Korea: "[A now-retired general] took \$3million through me from the N. Koreans and asked me to give some drawings and machines."

In late 2003, with Al-Qaeda far from vanquished in Afghanistan and Pakistan-linked centrifuge components heading towards Libya, President Musharraf was under tremendous pressure from Washington. In all likelihood, he was offered a way out: "Work with us and we will support you. Blame all the nuclear nonsense on AQ Khan." Although Musharraf had lavished praise on Khan at a banquet in 2001, he didn't like him personally. So the choice was simple. Khan was made a scapegoat.

Years earlier, Khan had been warned about the Pakistan army by Li Chew, the senior minister who ran China's nuclear-weapons programme. Visiting Kahuta, Chew had said: "As long as they need the bomb, they will lick your balls. As soon as you have delivered the bomb, they will kick your balls." In the letter to his wife, Khan rephrased things: "The bastards first used us and are now playing dirty games with us."

George Tenet, the director of the CIA at the time of 9/11, has described Khan as “the merchant of death” and “as bad as Osama Bin Laden”. Khan has been accused of unauthorised nuclear proliferation, motivated by personal greed. On top of this, he has been depicted as overstating his contribution to Pakistan’s success in making nuclear weapons and missiles with which to threaten the whole of India.

These themes, which were repeated endlessly across the world, are now accepted as universal truths. But Khan was a government official and an adviser with ministerial status even after he retired in 2001. If his dissemination of nuclear secrets was authorised by the government, it could not be illegal and he would enjoy sovereign immunity for his actions. Pakistan is also not a signatory of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), so its nuclear trades, however reprehensible, were not against international law.

Khan is adamant that he never sold nuclear secrets for personal gain. So what about the millions of dollars he reportedly made? Nothing was confiscated from him and no reported investigation turned up hidden accounts. Having planted rumours about Khan’s greed, Pakistani officials were curiously indifferent to following them through. General Musharraf told a British newspaper at the time of Khan’s arrest in 2004 that “He can keep his money”. In another interview a few months later, he said: “We don’t know where his funds are.”

But was there any money? Much was made of a “hotel”, named after Khan’s wife, Henny, built by a local tour guide with the help of money from Khan and a group of friends in Timbuktu, west Africa. It is a modest structure at best, more of a guesthouse. A weekend home at Bani Gala, outside Islamabad, where Khan went to relax, is hardly the palace that some reports have made it.

In fact, there seemed to be no money. By summer 2007, Khan was finding it difficult to make ends meet on his pension of 12,200 rupees per month (at the time about \$200). After pleading with General Khalid Kidwai, the officer supervising both Pakistan’s nuclear weapons and Dr Khan, the pension was increased to \$2,500 per month and there was a one-off lump-sum payment of the equivalent of \$50,000. I have copies of the agreement and cheques.

As for his role in the development of Pakistan’s nuclear and missile forces, I have little doubt that Khan won the race between his KRL organisation and the official Pakistan Atomic Energy Commission to develop both a nuclear bomb and a missile system, a rivalry deliberately constructed by the dictator General Zia ul-Haq in the 1980s and sustained by later governments.

But there is a simple way to clarify matters. Pakistan’s system of national civilian honours is topped by the Nishan-i-Imtiaz (Order of Excellence), abbreviated as NI. A second tier of honour is the Hilal-i-Imtiaz (Crescent of Excellence), or HI. Khan was awarded the NI twice, a distinction never achieved before or since. He was also earlier awarded the HI. It is stretching one’s imagination to think that Khan could hijack the country’s honour system and the judgment of successive presidents.

Although the West continues to condemn Khan, Pakistan’s own energy to do so is fading, particularly since the departure of Musharraf in 2008. Frustrated by his house arrest and legal limbo, Khan has repeatedly this year pressed for remedy by the courts.

Khan was supposedly freed from house arrest in February, but the terms of that freedom were detailed in a secret “annexure A” of the court judgment, the final version of which Khan only saw later. One of the lines in the original draft that he was asked to sign was: “That in case Mr Simon Henderson or anyone else proceeds with the publication of any information or material anywhere in the world, I affirm that it would not be based on any input from me and I disown it.”

That line was eventually deleted and replaced with a more general prohibition about unnamed “specific media personnel”. Despite the court judgment specifying that the contents of the annexure “shall not be issued to the press or made public in any manner”, a copy reached me in the West.

Khan went back to court last month to challenge the terms of the annexure that he never accepted. Justice Ejaz Ahmed, the presiding judge at the Lahore high court, lifted all the curbs on his movement. “Dr Khan can come and go anywhere he pleases and no one should prevent him from doing this,” he ruled. “There should be no limitations.” Two days later another Pakistani court reimposed the ban.

America is pressing hard for Khan’s continued confinement. Deprived by Pakistan of the opportunity to interrogate Khan, the US is concerned that he may revive his old networks. Echoing the official view, The New York Times called this month for restrictions to remain on Khan for his “heinous role as maestro of the world’s largest nuclear black market”.

If Khan is free to travel and speak openly, there is a danger that he will give his own account of events, opening up a can of worms and complicating relations with Washington. Now his letter has been revealed, he hopes his story will be told differently.

<http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/asia/article6839044.ece>

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

Associated Press (AP)
News Hosted by Google
September 19, 2009

Global Network Detects Sign of Atomic Bomb Testing

By EDITH M. LEDERER (AP)

UNITED NATIONS — Iran, Israel and the five nuclear powers that are permanent Security Council members are part of a global network to detect signs of testing of a new atomic bomb, a positive sign of cooperation in the bid to halt the spread of such weapons, the head of the Nuclear Test Ban Treaty organization said Friday.

The monitoring network has not been widely reported nor have its participants, including Iran, which the West believes is pursuing nuclear weapons, and Israel, which is widely believed to possess a nuclear arsenal but won't say as much.

Tibor Toth said at a news conference that a system to detect and verify atomic blasts that was started in 2000 now has 270 monitoring facilities and expects to increase the number to 340.

The stations rely on four technologies: seismic, sensing the shock waves of an underground blast; hydroacoustic, listening for underwater explosions; infrasound, picking up the low-frequency sound of an atmospheric test; and radionuclide detection, sampling the air for a test's radioactive byproducts.

The data is transmitted to the Vienna headquarters of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty Organization and relayed to its signatory nations, including the U.S., which signed the pact in 1996, only for the Senate to reject it three years later.

Toth called the verification system an important step to address concerns of nuclear and non-nuclear states, and noted that it monitored North Korea's nuclear tests in 2006 and 2009 "very well."

Toth spoke to reporters ahead of a high-level meeting on Sept. 24-25 on the sidelines of the U.N. General Assembly's annual ministerial meeting to press North Korea, India and Pakistan to first sign and then ratify the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, and to press the other six countries who have signed it to ratify it.

Major nuclear powers, including the United States, have observed moratoriums on testing since the 1990s, but India, Pakistan and North Korea all have tested bombs since the treaty was negotiated and opened for signatures in 1996.

The treaty has been signed by 181 countries and ratified by 149, but it cannot take effect until it is ratified by nine key holdouts — the U.S., China, North Korea, Iran, Israel, India, Pakistan, Indonesia and Egypt.

"I am very much optimistic because during the last 2-2 1/2 years we see a momentum building," he said. "We need action, action, action and leadership, leadership, leadership."

Toth praised President Barack Obama's April 5 speech in Prague in which he vowed to "immediately and aggressively" pursue treaty ratification by the Senate and to work with allies and other countries needed for ratification.

He said he was also encouraged that Indonesia's foreign minister indicated the country would ratify the treaty and China's foreign minister said the government was "working on the entry into force of the treaty."

"The ratification by the U.S. will play a leadership role and that leadership role is important," Toth said.

"I would like to emphasize, if you set aside the United States, the other outstanding ratifications are missing from Asia and the Middle East," he said. "It's an important reminder that the security of these regions can be enhanced, in my judgment, by this treaty, which is capping any potential arms races ... through taking the oxygen from the development of new weapons."

Toth said the five confirmed nuclear powers on the Security Council — Russia, France, China, Britain and the United States — are providing one-third of the monitoring stations and for the first time "they are undertaking legally binding obligations to be exposed to verification."

The U.S. is expected to put in place 42 stations, and during the last 8 years has already started operating 39 of them, he added.

"Iran is contributing with monitoring stations which are installed," Toth said, adding that his organization was working with Iran on getting the stations operational.

Annika Thunborg, spokeswoman for the test ban treaty organization, said Iran has "three or four" monitoring stations.

Toth said "ratification of the treaty is a clear indication that countries have no intention to use nuclear energy in any other way than the peaceful use of nuclear energy ... so from that point of view it's important that Iran ratifies the treaty."

He said Israel "did not say no" to ratifying the treaty and is "positively contributing with monitoring stations to our work and scientific and technical involvement in our work."

"It would be an extremely important step_ and the right step in the right direction in my judgment — if Israel ratified the treaty," Toth said.

India, Pakistan and North Korea have not even signed the treaty and Toth urged them to consider whether the test ban was in their national interests.

He welcomed the "positive soul-searching" in India and stressed that even if a country ratifies the treaty before the United States, "it is not risking any strategic security interest" because the test ban doesn't come into force until all nine key holdout countries sign it.

http://www.google.com/hostednews/ap/article/ALeqM5hGEa5e_fQbqd78In1-kT2aooCuvQD9AQ5V9O2

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

Washington Times

OPINION

September 20, 2009

Looking To Fool Us Twice

By James G. Zumwalt

In a 1962 episode of "The Twilight Zone," aliens land on Earth, promising peace. Willing humans go back to their planet, where the aliens claim they seek to serve man. At the United Nations, they leave a copy of a book - titled "To Serve Man" - which a linguist undertakes to translate. Successfully doing so, she rushes off to stop the next group of humans waiting to board the spaceship, warning them not to go. "To Serve Man," she shouts, is a cook book! The alien world is a fool's paradise.

The moral of the story is clear: Oftentimes people hear in a message what they want, failing to listen to what is really being said.

With this caveat, we need reflect on Iran's recent proposal for discussions with the West to establish peace and stability in the region. On Sept. 9, Tehran issued a five-page plan - one silent about ending its uranium enrichment program but claiming a "readiness to embark on comprehensive, all-encompassing and constructive negotiations aiming at acquiring a clear framework for cooperative relationships."

I hope that in reviewing the proposal, President Obama heard the resounding words, "Fool me once, shame on you; fool me twice, shame on me!" He cannot ignore Tehran's bravado in the aftermath of an earlier feint of willingness to negotiate a halt to its nuclear program - a feint used only to buy time to expand it. In examining Iran's march to develop nuclear weapons, one can see that it moves along a road of diplomatic deception.

The Persian word for deception is "taqiya" - saying one thing but meaning another. It originated centuries earlier in an Arab world dominated by Sunni Muslims; minority Shi'ites used it in their struggle for survival, achieving by deception objectives that otherwise were unobtainable. In a 21st-century world, taqiya results in conflicting assessments by Westerners as to what Iran's Shi'ite leaders actually are negotiating.

Oftentimes in police work, a crime is identified only because a perpetrator's ego rises above his concern for remaining silent about his accomplishment. The same is true of Iran's top nuclear negotiator, Hassan Rowhani. Leaving office in 2005, he boasted how, during his two-year tour, he had deceived the Western powers. In his recent book "The Rise of Nuclear Iran," author Dore Gold details how Mr. Rowhani bragged, "When we were negotiating with the Europeans in Tehran, we were installing equipment in parts of the facility in Isfahan." (Isfahan is where the fuel conversion for Iran's nuclear weapons program took place.) The Isfahan project had not yet begun when talks with the Europeans had, but it was completed while those talks continued.

Mr. Gold explains Mr. Rowhani's diplomatic deception: "Thus, while Rowhani sat at the negotiating table, participating in the first trial run of the West's engagement with it over the nuclear question, Iran quietly moved from having no uranium conversion capability whatsoever to actually completing its clandestine conversion plant."

As further evidence of Iran's deceit, Mr. Rowhani's success was achieved not under current Islamic extremist President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad but under purportedly moderate President Mohammad Khatami, who supposedly was seeking better relations with the West at that time. He wasn't - Iran made us believe otherwise, artfully employing diplomatic deception to play us for fools.

With Tehran most likely less than a year away from the finish line in its race to achieve nuclear weapons capability, why would it choose to negotiate now - as it enters the home stretch - to stop its program? It hasn't - Iran again only seeks to buy what little remaining time it needs to make its nuclear weapons program a fait accompli.

There will be two developments from this proposal. First, of the six nations receiving it - Britain, China, France, Germany, Russia and the United States - China and Russia will continue to block any additional U.N. sanctions. Second, Iran will continue its march to achieve a nuclear weapons capability through diplomatic deception.

While Washington will engage Tehran in talks, only a fool enters them optimistically. Those talks will fail, leaving the United States to decide if Iran's final run to the nuclear weapons finish line will be an unencumbered one.

<http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2009/sep/20/looking-to-fool-us-twice/>

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

RIA Novosti

OPINION

22 September 2009

Can Medvedev Help Obama?

MOSCOW. (RIA Novosti political commentator Andrei Fedyashin) - U.S. President Barack Obama is facing "a perfect storm of a week amid foreign policy challenges," which includes a meeting with Russian President Dmitry Medvedev on September 23 and chairing a special UN Security Council session on non-proliferation and disarmament.

Its goal is to exchange more radical disarmament by nuclear powers in return for wider global efforts to prevent further proliferation.

It is logical that the Russian and the American presidents will meet ahead of the General Assembly session on nuclear weapons to discuss progress in the drafting of a new bilateral strategic arms reduction treaty. The previous treaty will expire on December 5, 2009.

If Moscow and Washington agree to cut their nuclear weapons to 1,500-1,675 charges and 500 delivery vehicles, as Russia has proposed, it will set a very good example for other nuclear and threshold countries.

Their ability to agree on this sensitive issue may influence the attitudes of India, Pakistan, Iran, South Korea and Israel to the 1968 Non-Proliferation Treaty. It may also discourage Israel from delivering a preemptive strike at Iran, and Arab countries from acquiring nuclear weapons.

In short, it is a complex foreign policy formula with a large number of variables.

To put it bluntly, the next week will determine the world's choice between making progress and marking time (or worse still, rolling back) in the sphere of non-proliferation and disarmament. It will definitely determine the future of Russian-American relations, which may become healthier during Obama's presidency than they have been in the past 20 years.

President Medvedev, whose disarmament policy has no opposition in parliament or the country, may help Obama in this undertaking.

I don't mean that he should accept Obama's latest initiatives, in particular the decision to abandon a missile defense scheme in Eastern Europe, unconditionally. These initiatives should be scrutinized, and Russia's Defense Ministry has already done so and expressed its first criticism. However, this is a trifle compared to solid opposition to Obama's initiatives in the United States.

If Medvedev accepts Obama's initiatives as a basis for further talks and supports some of his non-proliferation proposals, he will ensure advantages for Russia, which does not want to have nuclear countries on its southern and eastern borders.

And it would be absolutely inadvisable to reject Obama's proposals with regard to the European ABM, even though they are incomplete.

Obama will have a difficult week, especially since all foreign policy issues on his agenda (nuclear arms cuts, the non-proliferation regime, and normalization of relations with Russia) were declared during his election campaign a year ago as the fundamental elements of his foreign policy strategy.

The number of opponents of that strategy is growing. In particular, the Pentagon is resisting his plans to reduce nuclear weapons. According to the press, Obama has rejected the Pentagon's first draft of the Nuclear Posture Review as being too timid, and has called for a range of more far-reaching options consistent with his goal of eventually abolishing nuclear weapons altogether.

The United States currently has 2,600 strategic nuclear warheads on combat duty, another 2,500 in reserve, and 4,000 more waiting to be dismantled.

Also, the Non-Proliferation Treaty is coming up for a regular five-year review next May. The number of nuclear powers has grown to nine from five at the time of its signing in 1968. The treaty has nevertheless slowed down proliferation, but if it fails to be reviewed again in 2010 it may not live to see the year 2015, even though it is of an unlimited duration.

The consequences of this potential failure would be unpredictable, especially in the Middle East.

In other words, Obama badly needs Medvedev's help.

The opinions expressed in this article are the author's and do not necessarily represent those of RIA Novosti.

<http://en.rian.ru/analysis/20090922/156215469.html>

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