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Danger Room (Wired.com)

October 6, 2009

Danger Room: What's Next In National Security

Gates Hints At More Secret Nuke Sites In Iran

By Adam Rawsley

WASHINGTON, DC — Does Bob Gates know about more secret Iranian nuclear sites? It certainly sounds like it.

Speaking alongside Secretary of State Hillary Clinton last night at a CNN/George Washington University forum, Gates addressed a wide variety of topics, the Secretary of Defense dropped what seemed to be a big hint that the United States knows much more about the Iranian nuclear program than the Iranians might think.

Asked about his faith in potential verification protocols for Iran's nuclear program, Gates commented that the administration's attitudes towards Iran in the negotiations process would hinge on "what nuclear sites might they be prepared to be transparent about that have not been declared at this point."

Sure sounds like he's talking about more secret nuclear sites in Iran. It certainly goes beyond the more guarded comments Gates gave on the subject to ABC ten days back.

Spies and analysts have speculated for years that Tehran has a slew of clandestine nuclear facilities. Last month, President Obama publicly confirmed those guesses, revealing that Iran's hidden nuclear enrichment plant near the holy city of Qom. Some experts have argued that the Qom facility only makes sense as part of a larger network of hidden nuclear facilities. ArmsControlWonk's Joshua Pollack provides a helpful roundup of the various analyses on the prospect, but wisely cautions that other explanations are possible.

It's also worth noting yet another interpretation: Gates might be bluffing and there might not be more undeclared sites. Maybe we'll learn more, as talks with Iran progress — and more international atomic inspectors are allowed to sniff around Iran's nuclear sites.

<http://www.wired.com/dangerroom/2009/10/gates-hints-at-more-secret-nuke-sites-in-iran/>

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TIME

October 07, 2009

CIA Knew About Iran's Secret Nuclear Plant Long Before Disclosure

By Bobby Ghosh / Washington

This summer, as the Obama Administration prepared to confront Iran with proof of its undisclosed uranium-enrichment plant in Qom, CIA Director Leon Panetta ordered his staff to work with European intelligence agencies

to compile a comprehensive presentation about the facility. Although the Iranians had taken great pains to keep the facility a secret, building it into a mountain 100 miles southwest from Tehran, the CIA had known about it for three years.

Panetta was told about Qum during the White House transition period in January. "This was presented at that time as something nobody knew about, a secret facility," he told TIME in an exclusive interview. "It was built into a mountain; obviously that raised question marks." Panetta said that after he was confirmed as the agency's director, "we spent the next months trying to get better intel about what was going on there ... and conducting covert operations into that area."

As part of that effort, the CIA worked with British and French intelligence, which had also been on the lookout for the secret plant. They knew there had to be one; once Iran's primary enrichment plan in Natanz was revealed, in 2002, it was assumed that the Iranians would build a second one somewhere.

The Qum site first attracted the attention of Western intelligence agencies in 2006, when the CIA noted unusual activity at the mountain: the Iranians moved an anti-aircraft battery to the site, a clear sign that something important was being built there.

Exactly what, however, was hard to know. "We didn't jump to any conclusions and considered a number of alternatives," says a U.S. counterterrorism official. Iran is suspected of having a number of secret research labs and manufacturing facilities linked to its nuclear program. Roland Jacquard, an independent security and terrorism consultant in Paris, says there was some debate among analysts about the Qum site. While some said it had to be a nuclear facility, "others warned it could also easily be a decoy the Iranians wanted to fix Western attention to as [it] continued clandestine work on another facility elsewhere," he says. Jacquard says doubts gradually vanished as European and U.S. intelligence agencies shared information, "and the Americans could use that alongside what was being learned through the infiltration of Iranian computers."

Panetta won't say what kind of covert operations were carried out or how the agency was able to conclude that the Qum facility was nuclear. The counterterrorism officials says only that "our body of knowledge, based on multiple sources, grew to the point that allowed us earlier this year to reach the high-confidence conclusion that this was a covert nuclear facility."

By the spring, there was little doubt left about what exactly was being constructed in the mountain (Iran has declared that the plant is not yet operational, and U.S. officials have agreed with that assessment). That, a senior Administration official told reporters this week, was when the White House decided that knowledge of the Qum facility would be a useful card to put on the table when Iran finally agreed to talk to the six major powers (the U.S., China, Russia, U.K., France and Germany). If the Iranians failed to come to the talks, Obama would reveal the secret facility in his speech to the U.N. General Assembly in September.

In an interesting reversal of roles from the Bush era, the Europeans were pushing for the plant to be outed at once, while the U.S. was more cautious. "The Americans seem to have become more patient as their dossier on Iran has gotten fuller, while the Europeans are getting more anxious about taking care of this matter as they've learned more," says Jacquard.

From then on, the challenge was to keep the information secret. Panetta said he ordered the presentation to be readied "in the event that that information leaked out or that [the Obama Administration] wanted to present it to the International Atomic Energy Agency." British, French and Israeli intelligence agencies were involved in creating the presentation, he added.

U.S. officials believe that it was only when Iran found out that its cover had been blown that it chose to own up to the plant's existence — although how it might have learned of Washington's discovery remains unclear. On the eve of the U.N. General Assembly last month, the Iranians sent the IAEA a terse note, acknowledging the presence of the Qum facility. The next day, Panetta dispatched a team to the IAEA's headquarters in Vienna to make the presentation.

<http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1929088,00.html>

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The Australian
October 09, 2009

Iran says US Took Nuclear Scientist Shahram Amiri

By Catherine Philp

IRAN has accused the US of involvement in the disappearance of one of its nuclear scientists, amid speculation about his possible role in unmasking Tehran's nuclear plant near Qom.

Shahram Amiri disappeared in Saudi Arabia in May during a pilgrimage to Mecca, prompting speculation he had defected to the West. His family have not heard from him since.

Iran's Foreign Minister, Manouchehr Mottaki, said yesterday Tehran had proof of Washington's involvement in Dr Amiri's disappearance.

"We have found documents that prove US interference with the Iranian pilgrim Shahram Amiri in Saudi Arabia," Mr Mottaki said.

"We hold Saudi Arabia responsible and consider the US to be involved in his arrest."

Dr Amiri is the second person involved in Iran's nuclear program to have disappeared while abroad in the past two years. The first was Ali Reza Asghari, a deputy defence minister and leader of the Revolutionary Guards, who vanished in Turkey two years ago.

Saudi Arabia and Turkey are two of the US's strongest allies in the region and the most outspoken on a possible Iranian military nuclear program.

Mr Mottaki lodged a complaint with the UN Secretary-General last month about four missing Iranians he claimed were being held in US custody. Dr Amiri and Mr Asghari were among them.

Speculation surrounding Dr Amiri's disappearance has heightened since Iran's public disclosure last month of a previously secret uranium enrichment plant near the holy city of Qom, with questions being asked about the nature of his nuclear work.

Dr Amiri worked as a nuclear physics researcher at Malek-e-Ashtar University, a research institute associated with the Iranian military. His family have said he researched the medical uses of nuclear technology, a project that links him to the research reactor for which Tehran is seeking a foreign supply of enriched uranium.

The Iranian Student News Agency yesterday reported rumours that Dr Amiri worked for Iran's Atomic Energy Organisation, while Jahan News, a conservative Iranian news website, reported Saudi officials as claiming he had sought political asylum there.

Others have pointed to the timing of the disappearance and subsequent revelations about Qom. When US President Barack Obama announced the discovery of the Qom site last month, he referred to the emergence of fresh information in the first half of the year.

"Earlier this year, we developed information that gave us confidence the facility was a uranium enrichment plant," Mr Obama said. The Iranians had declared the plant to the International Atomic Energy Agency days before, he said, after realising its cover had been blown.

US and British officials have attributed their knowledge of the Qom plant to technical data, satellite surveillance and intelligence operations.

<http://www.theaustralian.news.com.au/story/0,25197,26184127-2703,00.html>

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YAHOO News.com

9 October 2009

Iran Warns Against Attack

by Farhad Pouladi

Agence France-Press (AFP)

TEHRAN (AFP) – Iran issued another warning on Friday against any attack on the Islamic republic, while claiming its talks with world powers over its controversial nuclear programme were "a success and a victory."

Supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei's deputy representative to the elite Revolutionary Guards, Mojtaba Zolnour, said Tehran will "blow up the heart" of Israel if attacked by the Jewish state or the United States.

"Even if one American or Zionist missile hits our land, before the dust is settled, Iranian missiles will blow up the heart of Israel," state news agency IRNA quoted Zolnour as saying.

Iranian officials have repeatedly said Tehran would carry out severe reprisals if Israel or the United States attacked the country.

The United States and its regional ally Israel have never ruled out a military option to stop Tehran's nuclear drive, which the West says is aimed at making nuclear weapons while Iran says it is solely for peaceful ends.

After the 1979 Islamic revolution, Tehran withdrew its recognition of Israel.

The Jewish state considers the Islamic republic to be its arch-enemy after repeated statements by President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad that the Holocaust was a "myth" and that Israel is doomed to be "wiped off the map."

Another Khamenei appointee and one of Tehran's Friday prayer leaders, Ahmad Khatami, also issued a stern warning to Iran's enemies, without naming any.

"As our leader has said, our enemies are pursuing an Iranophobia scenario against us, and they are saying Iran is against world peace. But the world has understood that what they say is a lie," Khatami told worshippers in a sermon broadcast live on state-run radio.

"The enemy should know that if they want to hurt Iran they will receive such a slap that they will not be able to stand up," he added amid the habitual chants of "death to American and death to Israel."

Last month, Iran disclosed that it was building a second uranium enrichment plant, angering world powers and drawing an accusation from UN atomic watchdog chief Mohamed ElBaradei that having kept the work secret was on the "wrong side of the law."

Tensions increased only days later, and just days before crucial talks in Geneva with world powers over Tehran's controversial nuclear programme, when Tehran tested several short- and medium-range missiles.

Khatami labelled those talks a "success and victory."

"The Geneva talks were a success and a victory for the Islamic republic system (since) even the Zionist and world arrogances' media confirmed this," he said.

"We owe this success to the wise guidance of the supreme leader and the ninth and tenth governments following his guidance," he added in reference to Ahmadinejad's previous and current administrations.

Iranian officials have maintained that they had the upper hand in the negotiations, with Ahmadinejad on Wednesday calling them a "step forward."

Western governments have been seeking reassurances that Iran's nuclear programme is entirely peaceful, and Iran agreed to open the newly disclosed enrichment plant to UN inspection.

Soon after the talks, ElBaradei visited Tehran to work out the modalities of the inspection, which is due to take place on October 25.

Iran also offered to send low-enriched uranium abroad so that it could be enriched to higher levels by a third party, and is to meet with France, Russia and the United States in Vienna on October 19 to work out the modalities.

Uranium enrichment lies at the heart of Western concerns about the Iranian nuclear programme. The sensitive process can produce fuel for civilian nuclear reactors or, in highly extended form, the fissile core of an atomic bomb.

http://news.yahoo.com/s/afp/20091009/wl_mideast_afp/iranpolitics_20091009122637

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Global Security Newswire
Oct. 6, 2009

U.S. Still Eyeing Russian Radars for Missile Defense

The United States has not dismissed an offer to use two Russian radars for missile defense, a senior Defense Department official said in a recent interview with Interfax (see *GSN*, Nov. 5, 2007).

Then-Russian President Vladimir Putin in 2007 suggested using radars in southern Russia and Azerbaijan in hopes of persuading the Bush administration to give up plans to deploy missile interceptors in Poland and a radar installation in the Czech Republic. Washington did not bite at the time, arguing that its allies' sites were needed to counter Iran's growing long-range missile capabilities.

The Obama administration, though, has eliminated its predecessor's initiative (see *GSN*, Oct. 2). It intends instead to deploy elements aimed primarily at defending U.S. allies and forces in Europe against short- and medium-range missile threats.

U.S. Defense Secretary Robert Gates "and other senior defense officials have already pointed to the possibility of some form of link between Russian radars ... to provide additional data and early warning information that could benefit both of us in defending against ballistic missile threats," said Assistant Defense Secretary Alexander Vershbow. "Exactly how these links would be established and how it would work technically is of course for the experts. But I think that the basic idea of sharing this kind of information against a common threat makes sense. And of course it could be just the beginning of a program of cooperation between NATO and Russia or between the United States and Russia on missile defense."

The change in the U.S. missile defense plan for Europe was not made in order to garner Moscow's support for Washington's stand in the continuing nuclear standoff with Iran, Vershbow said. Russia had vehemently opposed the shield as a threat to its strategic security, and has generally opposed ramping up penalties over Tehran's refusal to suspend uranium enrichment operations (see related *GSN* story, today).

The new approach which we have decided upon for missile defense was based on an analysis of the threats and of the available technologies, and was not presented as something on which we expected any quid pro quo," Vershbow said.

He added, however, that possible export of Russian S-300 air defenses to Iran "is a very critical issue in its own right, and we have said to Russia many times that we believe that that system could be very destabilizing in the region, and therefore have urged Russia to exercise restraint. So this is not something which we are negotiating on but simply something that we believe that Russia should see as in its own interest."

Some observers have said that Iran could use the S-300 to defend its nuclear facilities against airstrikes (Interfax I, Oct. 4).

U.S. Ambassador to Russia John Beyrle also expressed hope for establishing U.S.-Russian cooperation on missile defense, Interfax reported Friday.

The two nations should follow through on the pledge by U.S. President Barack Obama and Russian President Dmitry Medvedev to conduct a combined review of missile dangers, and to establish the means for sharing data on missile tests, Beyrle said in a prepared statement (Interfax II, Oct. 2).

The Russian Foreign Ministry said last week the door is open for the two former Cold War rivals to work together against missile threats, Interfax reported.

"The review by U.S. President Obama of the plan initiated by the Bush administration to deploy elements of the missile defense system in Poland and the Czech Republic is an internal decision by the U.S. government, which was dictated solely by the U.S. national interest," spokesman Andrei Nesterenko told reporters on Thursday. "We generally see this decision as a step in the right direction. Partly it reflects our own views on how the missile defense system should be built in Europe and worldwide."

"Good conditions are being created for further practical implementation of a joint statement on missile defense adopted by the Russian and U.S. presidents in July this year," he added.

"Thorough expert analysis and consultations are required to clarify and study in detail the new structure of a missile shield in Europe proposed by the U.S. On our part, we are ready for a detailed discussion of the U.S. proposals and Russian initiatives on missile defense cooperation with a view to reach mutually acceptable arrangements," Nesterenko said (Interfax III, Oct. 2).

http://www.globalsecuritynewswire.org/gsn/nw_20091006_1430.php

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New U.S. Missile Defense Plans Pose No Threat to Russia - Lavrov

KHARKOV (Ukraine), October 7 (RIA Novosti) - The new U.S. missile shield plans present no risks for Russia, and favorable conditions are now emerging for bilateral dialogue, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said on Wednesday.

U.S. President Barack Obama in September scrapped plans to deploy a radar in the Czech Republic and interceptor missiles in Poland, due to a re-assessment of the threat from Iran. Moscow fiercely opposed the plans as a national security threat.

"The new plan put forward by the Obama administration to replace the project to deploy the Third Missile Defense Site offers good conditions for dialogue, and according to our assessments, does not pose the risks that were generated by the Third Missile Defense Site project," Lavrov said.

He added that the two countries would soon hold talks on missile defense.

According to the Obama administration's new plan, land-based missile-defense shields will not be implemented before 2015. Sea-based defenses will be operating in the Mediterranean up to 2015.

Moscow, which has consistently objected to the shield as a threat to its national security, welcomed the move. Russian President Dmitry Medvedev said later that Moscow would scrap plans to deploy Iskander-M missiles in Russia's Kaliningrad Region, near Poland.

Medvedev said last November that Russia would deploy the missiles in Kaliningrad, which borders NATO members Poland and Lithuania, if the shield was put into operation.

<http://en.rian.ru/russia/20091007/156382046.html>

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Washington Post

October 8, 2009

New Missile Plan Would Link Allies' Radar, Other Systems

By Walter Pincus, Washington Post Staff Writer

A breakthrough that enables the early targeting of ballistic missiles by linking radars and other sensors from different parts of the world is key to the Obama administration's new missile defense plans, according to senior administration officials.

The administration announced last month that it would scrap a Bush-era plan to protect European countries and American troops stationed there from any potential Iranian missile attack. Instead of putting 10 interceptors in Poland and radar in the Czech Republic to counter intercontinental missiles, officials said, they would focus on containing Iran's ability to fire short- and medium-range ballistic missiles.

Lt. Gen. Patrick O'Reilly, director of the Pentagon's Missile Defense Agency, defended that decision Wednesday, saying that the linking of U.S. and allied radar systems with satellites and other sensors would allow officials to follow the path of launched missiles throughout their flight.

"This capability did not exist five years ago," O'Reilly said at a symposium sponsored by the Atlantic Council, a nonpartisan think tank.

He said the first elements of the system would be operational aboard some warships by 2011. By 2015, he added, the goal is to base additional SM-3 interceptor missiles on land.

The undersecretary of state for arms control and international security, Ellen Tauscher, appearing at the same event, said discussions are already underway with Poland to base missiles there, and talks have begun with the Czech Republic about making it the headquarters for command and control elements associated with the system.

Tauscher said European allies, who were initially troubled by the hasty announcement canceling the George W. Bush-era system, have come to support the Obama administration's plan, which would permit earlier deployment and provide wider coverage than the earlier one.

"Remember, this is a NATO-wide European missile defense system as opposed to a bilateral missile defense system," she said. Tauscher also said there would be additional opportunities for allied countries to participate in

missile defense. Another land-based radar system, which was also part of the Bush plan, for example, will need to be located in southeastern Europe.

O'Reilly said the new missile defense plan would be less costly and would allow for many more defensive missiles to be deployed. Under the tentative plan, 30 SM-3 interceptor missiles would be located in Poland at a cost of \$10 million each; under the earlier plan, there would have been 10 interceptor missiles there at a cost of \$70 million each.

O'Reilly added that preparation of a Polish missile defense site, which was to have taken five years to complete, could now be finished in less than a year and be staffed with fewer than 100 U.S. personnel, instead of the 400 who would have been needed under the Bush-era plan.

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/10/07/AR2009100703889.html>

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Reuters

October 09, 2009

Russia Mulls U.S. Remark on Radars in Ukraine

CHISINAU (Reuters) - Russia said Friday it was seeking clarification of "unexpected" remarks by a senior U.S. defense official that the United States was considering Ukraine as a place for stationing early warning radar systems.

Alexander Vershbow, a U.S. assistant secretary of defense, was quoted in the magazine Defense News as saying Washington had added Ukraine to the list of possible early warning sites as part of its refashioning of a European missile defense system.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, who was attending a summit of the Commonwealth of Independent States in the Moldovan capital, said: "The statement by Alexander Vershbow was rather unexpected. In principle, he is a person who is prone to extravagancies.

"We would like to receive full clarification," Lavrov told journalists.

Lavrov meets U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton in Moscow on October 13 and it seemed certain that he would bring up Vershbow's comments then.

He earlier told journalists that European missile defenses was one of the issues he wanted to discuss with Clinton as well as progress between the two former superpowers on strategic nuclear weapons cuts.

U.S. President Barack Obama's administration last month dumped Bush-era plans for a missile shield in eastern Europe to the delight of Moscow which had seen the project as a threat to Russian national security.

That plan had foreseen stationing of parts of the anti-missile shield in Poland and the Czech Republic.

A redrafted U.S. anti-missile plan that would target small and medium-range missiles from other countries has won a cautious welcome from Russia though Moscow awaits real detail on the project.

It was not immediately clear how Moscow would feel about early warning radars being placed in Ukraine, a former Soviet republic which has in the past four years slipped further away from Russia's sphere of influence.

Russia fiercely opposes the pro-Western policies of Ukrainian President Viktor Yushchenko, particularly his ambition to take Ukraine into the U.S.-led NATO alliance in the future.

Stationing of U.S. anti-missile systems there could be seen in Moscow as a deepening of Ukraine's integration into NATO structures.

In Kiev, newly appointed Ukrainian Foreign Minister Petro Poroshenko, asked about the report that the United States sought to station missile systems in Ukraine, replied: "I think this is not constitutional."

<http://www.reuters.com/article/vcCandidateFeed1/idUSTRE59825720091009>

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Hindustan Times – India
Agencies

Moscow, October 08, 2009

Russia Seeks New Arms Reduction Deal with US

Russia believes that a new strategic arms reduction deal with the US should be signed before cuts in tactical nuclear weapons are discussed, the foreign ministry said on Thursday.

"As to tactical nuclear weapons, we share the view expressed by (US Assistant Secretary of Defence for International Security Affairs) Alexander Vershbow that the discussion of this issue is premature," ministry spokesman Andrei Nesterenko said.

"It would be more logical to finish work on a new agreement to replace the START treaty first," he said.

The next round of arms reduction talks between Russia and the US is due later this month when Secretary of State Hillary Clinton visits Russia.

President Dmitry Medvedev earlier said a strategic arms reduction treaty should be ready by December.

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

It said the US had 5,576 warheads and 1,198 delivery vehicles.

The Strategic Arms Reductions Treaty (START 1), signed in 1991, makes it incumbent on Russia and the US to reduce nuclear warheads to 6,000 and their delivery vehicles to 1,600 each. The treaty expires Dec 5.

<http://www.hindustantimes.com/Russia-seeks-new-arms-reduction-deal-with-US/H1-Article1-462814.aspx>

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Barents Observer – Norway

9 October 2009

Nobel Peace Prize: -No Tactical Nuke Talks

Barack Obama got the prize for his initiative to reduce the world's stockpile of nuclear weapons. But, the tactical nuclear weapons Russia is believed to have in storage on the Kola Peninsula will not be an issue when U.S. Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, goes to Moscow next week to discuss nuclear arms reduction.

President Obama won the Nobel Peace Prize for his initiative to reduce the world's stockpile of nuclear weapons and working for world peace.

Russia is believed to have hundreds of tactical nuclear warheads in storage at the Kola Peninsula, but none of these are accounted for in any international arms control treaties.

-The discussion of the issue is premature, says Russian Foreign Ministry spokesman Andrei Nesterenko.

-It would be more logical to finish work on a new agreement to replace the START treaty first, Nesterenko said Thursday interviewed by RIA Novosti.

The Strategic Arms Reductions Treaty (START 1), signed in 1991, expires on December 5 this year.

U.S. Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, confirmed on Thursday that she will go to Moscow next week to have talks about new arms control pact to replace the START 1 treaty, reports Zeenews.

Clinton will meet Russia's Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov on October 12 to 14. Directly after the talks, Lavrov will travel to Murmansk for the Barents Council meeting with the Foreign Ministers of Norway, Sweden and Finland. The Barents Council meeting will be next Thursday morning in Murmansk, as reported by BarentsObserver.

Russia is said to have deployed nearly 4,000 nuclear weapons. In the north, strategic nuclear weapons are sailing onboard the six Delta-IV class submarines, with home base at the Kola Peninsula. When not at their homeport, just west of Murmansk, the Delta-IV submarines are sailing around in the eastern part of the Barents Sea or in the Arctic Oceans.

In July this year, U.S. President Barack Obama agreed with Russian President Dmitry Medvedev to replace the START 1 treaty, which expires in December.

With the additional cuts in the stocks of strategic nuclear weapons stipulated to be someplace between 1,500 and 1,675 operational weapons, Russia will likely continue to keep its current amount of warheads placed onboard its strategic submarines (SSBN) in the northern waters, near the border to Norway.

In its announcement for the prize to Barack Obama, the Norwegian Nobel Committee writes that "The Committee has attached special importance to Obama's vision of and work for a world without nuclear weapons.

No-one outside the Russian armed forces knows the exact numbers of tactical nuclear warheads deployed or on storage in Russia. Tactical nuclear weapons were officially removed from all of the Northern fleet's multi-purpose submarines in 1992. An agreement between President Mikhail Gorbachev and George Bush (the older) from October 1991 stipulated such removal.

But in March this year BarentsObserver reported that such warheads again could be placed onboard the Russian Northern fleets multi-purpose submarines.

- Probably, tactical nuclear weapons will play a key role in the future, the Russian Navy's deputy chief of staff, Vice Admiral Oleg Burtsev, said in the interview.

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

<http://www.barentsobserver.com/no-tactical-nuke-talks.4641334-58932.html>

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RIA Novosti – Russia
08 October 2009

Russia may Revise Use of Nuclear Weapons in New Military Doctrine

NOVOSIBIRSK, October 8 (RIA Novosti) - Russia's new military doctrine will contain some changes to the situations that could trigger the use of nuclear weapons or preventive strikes against potential foes, the secretary of Russia's Security Council said on Thursday.

Russia will soon adopt a new military doctrine that aims to transform the Armed Forces into a more effective and mobile military force. Their structures will be "optimized" through the use of combined arms units performing similar tasks.

"In respect to the possibility of preventive or nuclear strikes we will formulate some provisions that will be somewhat different from those contained in the current doctrine," Nikolai Patrushev said.

The draft doctrine, called "The new face of the Russian Armed Forces until 2030," is still being developed by the General Staff and will be given, according to Patrushev, to Russian President Dmitry Medvedev for consideration by the end of 2009.

The current military doctrine was adopted in 2000. It outlines the role of the Russian military in ensuring the defense of the country and, if necessary, preparing for and waging war, although it stresses that the Russian military doctrine is strictly defensive.

The doctrine lists factors that the Russian Federation perceives as potential threats, both internal and external and declares support for a multipolar world, in preference to a unipolar world dominated by a single superpower that is quick to resort to military force.

The current document also emphasizes Russia's commitment to military reform, with continued use of conscription, but a gradual shift towards a professional army.

But the Security Council believes that since 2000, drastic changes have occurred in the geopolitical and military situation in the world and in the nature of threats against national security, which makes it necessary to revise the specific tasks facing the Russian Armed Forces and related security agencies.

"We would like to make this new military doctrine transparent so that people in the country and abroad will know what we have developed and how we want to work. We will set goals and lay out how to achieve them," Patrushev said.

President Dmitry Medvedev announced last year that Russia would make the modernization of its nuclear deterrent and Armed Forces a priority in the decade up to 2020.

http://en.rian.ru/military_news/20091008/156393316.html

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Straits Times – Singapore
October 8, 2009

Russia Plans Doctrine Shift

MOSCOW - RUSSIA will shift its policy on the 'preventive' use of nuclear arms in the next version of its main military strategy document, a top Russian security official was quoted as saying on Thursday.

'Changes in the positions on the option of carrying out preventive nuclear strikes will go into the new military doctrine,' said Nikolai Patrushev, the secretary of the national security council, Russian news agencies reported.

It was not immediately clear whether Mr Patrushev's comments meant that Russia would expand the number of situations in which it would consider the first use of nuclear weapons.

Under its current military doctrine, Russia says it would only carry out a nuclear strike if it were attacked with weapons of mass destruction or if it were the victim of 'large-scale aggression' using conventional arms. In the latter years of the Cold War, the Soviet Union said it would not use nuclear weapons unless it were hit first with an atomic attack.

Since the 1991 Soviet collapse, however, Russian military planners have relied more on the country's huge nuclear deterrent as the size of Russia's army and the capabilities of its conventional forces have dwindled. In recent years officials have been preparing a new version of Russia's official military doctrine.

'Our new military doctrine will be open, so that everyone, both at home and abroad, knows how we develop our positions on security,' Mr Patrushev told reporters in the Siberian city of Novosibirsk. -- AFP

http://www.straitstimes.com/Breaking%2BNews/World/Story/STIStory_439699.html

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RIA Novosti – Russia
08 October 2009

Final Trials of Russia's Nerpa Sub Threatened by Lack of Funds

KHABAROVSK, October 8 (RIA Novosti) - Preparations for the final trials of Russia's Nerpa nuclear attack submarine before it is commissioned with the Navy could be hit by financial problems, the head of the Amur shipyard said on Thursday.

The Nerpa, which was damaged in a fatal accident during tests in November last year, has been docked at the Amur shipyard's Vostok repair facility in the town of Bolshoy Kamen in Primorye Territory since the end of new sea trials following repairs.

"The sea trials under the shipyard's supervision have been completed on time. The submarine returned to its current base for preparation for final tests, but we have run into some problems," said Nikolai Povzyk, the Amur shipyard general director.

"We have not yet received payments for work that has been already done, and today the electricity supply to the Vostok facility was cut [by a local electricity supplier] because we have not been able to pay our debts," the official said.

The shipyard was promised an estimated 1.9 billion rubles (\$60 million) in government funds in the beginning of October to cover the cost of the repairs.

On November 8, 2008, while the Nerpa was undergoing sea trials, its onboard fire extinguishing system went off, releasing a deadly gas into the sleeping quarters. Three crewmembers and 17 shipyard workers were killed. There were 208 people, 81 of them submariners, aboard the vessel at the time.

After induction into the Russian Navy, the Nerpa is expected to be leased to the Indian Navy by the end of 2009 under the name INS Chakra.

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

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

http://en.rian.ru/military_news/20091008/156391993.html

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RIA Novosti – Russia
08 October 2009

Russia's Strategic Missile Forces to Hold Drills Oct. 9-14

MOSCOW, October 8 (RIA Novosti) - Russia's Strategic Missile Forces will conduct a series of exercises on October 9-17 in the Ivanovo Region, the forces' press service said on Thursday.

At least six warplanes and helicopters will participate in the exercises, to be held near the town of Teikovo, located about 250 km east of Moscow.

The statement did not specify the nature of the exercises, but said 36 pilots would participate.

Teikovo is the base of 54th Strategic Missile Division, where the first two battalions were equipped with six road-mobile Topol-M (SS-27 Stalin) intercontinental ballistic missile systems.

Topol-M missile, with a range of about 7,000 miles (11,000 km), is the mainstay of the ground-based component of Russia's nuclear triad. As of the start of 2009, the SMF operated 50 silo-based and six road-mobile Topol-M missile systems.

<http://en.rian.ru/russia/20091008/156399317.html>

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RIA Novosti –Russia
09 October 2009

Russian Subs Successfully Test Ballistic Missiles in Pacific

MOSCOW, October 9 (RIA Novosti) - Two Russian nuclear-powered strategic submarines have test-launched intercontinental ballistic missiles, the Defense Ministry said on Friday.

The RSM-50 (NATO codename: SS-N-18 Stingray) missiles were launched on October 6 and 7 from the Sv Georgii pobedonosets [St. George the Triumphant] and the Ryazan in the Pacific Ocean, hitting their designated targets in the north of Russia.

The RSM-50 is a two-stage, liquid propellant, submarine-launched ballistic missile (SLBM) developed for Project 667BDR/Delta III-class strategic submarines. Each carries up to 16 RSM-50 missiles.

The RSM-50 has a range of up to 8,000 km and the capacity to carry from one to seven nuclear warheads.

<http://en.rian.ru/russia/20091009/156410038.html>

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Bloomberg
October 6, 2009

North Korea Says Dismantling Its Nuclear Weapons 'Unthinkable'

By Bill Varner

Oct. 6 (Bloomberg) -- North Korea said dismantling the regime's nuclear weapons is "unthinkable even in a dream," while signaling a readiness to return to disarmament talks with the U.S., China, Russia, South Korea and Japan.

The government in Pyongyang won't give up its nuclear weapons unless the U.S. completely disarms, according to a statement by the Foreign Ministry sent in a letter to the United Nations Security Council by North Korean Ambassador Sin Son Ho. The statement describes as "unimaginable" any reversal of North Korea's 2003 withdrawal from the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons.

The letter, dated Oct. 1, was released amid a report by the Korean Central News Agency that North Korean leader Kim Jong Il yesterday told Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao that his nation was conditionally prepared to return to the six-party talks.

North Korea said in April that it was abandoning the talks for good after the UN Security Council condemned the country for launching a missile over Japan. The country also tested a nuclear weapon. The U.S. said last month it would consent to direct discussions with Kim's regime as part of the larger disarmament talks.

The North Korean statement also "totally rejects" the U.S.-drafted resolution on nuclear nonproliferation and disarmament adopted on Sept. 24 with President Barack Obama presiding over a special session of the Security Council. Obama won unanimous adoption of a measure to curb the spread and testing of nuclear arms and move toward total disarmament.

The resolution is "peppered with the hegemonic ambitions of nuclear powers," the statement said.

<http://www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=20601080&sid=aJS46gmAKirs>

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Reuters of India

October 8, 2009

North Korea not Near Restoring Nuclear Plant - South

By Jack Kim

SEOUL (Reuters) - South Korea's foreign minister said on Thursday there were no signs that the North was in the final stages of restoring an ageing nuclear plant, knocking down a report that operations could soon resume at the facility.

South Korea's Yonhap news agency on Tuesday quoted a government source as saying Pyongyang was in the final stages of restoring the Yongbyon complex, which when fully operational, can produce enough material for one nuclear bomb a year.

"What we know is that they are not yet at that kind of stage," Yu Myung-hwan said when asked whether the North was about to restore the five-megawatt nuclear reactor at Yongbyon, which is the secretive state's primary source of weapons-grade plutonium.

In 2007, North Korea began taking apart the Soviet-era facility that includes the reactor, a fuel fabrication plant and a plutonium separation facility under a six-way deal in return for aid and better global standing.

It said earlier this year it had resumed the part of the plant used to separate plutonium from spent nuclear fuel in anger at being punished by the United Nations for a long-range rocket launch widely seen as a disguised missile test.

On Tuesday, Pyongyang signalled it could return to the dormant disarmament-for-aid talks among the two Koreas, China, Japan, Russia and the United States that Pyongyang had declared dead six months ago.

Yu said that Pyongyang would still be subject to U.N. Security Council sanctions imposed after its nuclear test in May even if it returns to the nuclear disarmament talks.

"It is the position of not only South Korea and the United States but also Japan, Russia and China that sanctions cannot be lifted or suspended just because the North returns to dialogue," Yu said.

North Korea's leader Kim Jong-il told Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao on a visit to Pyongyang he first wanted talks with Washington. The North sees such talks as key to ending its status as a global pariah that it argues gives it no choice but to have a nuclear arsenal.

Kim's comment came as Wen unveiled a massive package of aid and development projects for the North.

Yu said he did not believe the economic package from China, the North's biggest benefactor, was in violation of the Security Council resolutions.

<http://in.reuters.com/article/topNews/idINIndia-42997720091008?sp=true>

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Washington Post
October 8, 2009

N. Korea Visit Stirs Optimism

By Blaine Harden
Washington Post Foreign Service

TOKYO, Oct. 7 -- During three days of talks in Pyongyang that ended Tuesday, North Korea's leader and China's prime minister raised expectations that the North might return to nuclear disarmament talks that it abandoned in the spring.

Kim Jong Il told Wen Jiabao that North Korea is ready to rejoin the multilateral talks but that it first needs to talk one-on-one with the United States so that "hostile relations" can "be converted into peaceful ties."

North Korea rattled the world this spring with missile launches, a nuclear test and threats of war. Since August, though, its tone has changed, as symbolized by this week's tarmac hug between Kim and the Chinese premier. The North has also released detained foreigners and resumed reunions among families separated by the Korean War.

It is not clear, however, whether the United States will accept North Korea's condition for returning to disarmament talks, which Kim's government condemned in April as a forum for regime change. And there are new signals that North Korea has no intention of giving up its nuclear program.

The State Department says it needs to confer with Chinese officials who visited Pyongyang this week to gather more precise information about what North Korea is willing to do.

The Obama administration has repeatedly said it will talk with North Korea, but only if Pyongyang agrees to participate again in the six-party denuclearization talks, which began in 2003 and involve the two Koreas, the United States, China, Russia and Japan.

Those Beijing-based talks produced major results through 2007 and 2008, as North Korea -- in return for aid and diplomatic concessions -- disabled a plutonium factory and demolished a cooling tower at its main nuclear power plant.

State Department spokesman Ian Kelly said the United States encourages "any kind of dialogue that would help us lead to our ultimate goal," which is "the complete and verifiable denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula."

But even as the Chinese prime minister was being feted by Kim this week, new doubts emerged about the North's interest in getting rid of its nuclear weapons.

A report by Yonhap, a South Korean news agency, said South Korean and U.S. intelligence experts have concluded that North Korea is on the brink of restoring nuclear equipment that it disabled last year.

In addition, North Korea said in a letter to the U.N. Security Council that dismantling its nuclear weapons is "unthinkable even in a dream," according to a Bloomberg News report. The Oct. 1 letter said Pyongyang would not give up its nuclear weapons unless the United States completely disarms.

North Korea announced last month that it was in the "final stage" of enriching uranium, a process that, if completed, would give it a second means of making a nuclear bomb. The country has twice tested nuclear devices that use plutonium.

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/10/07/AR2009100700583.html>

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Yonhap News – South Korea
9 October 2009

Lee, Hatoyama Call for One-step Denuclearization of N. Korea

SEOUL, Oct. 9 (Yonhap) -- South Korean President Lee Myung-bak and Japanese Prime Minister Yukio Hatoyama agreed Friday to seek a "comprehensive" solution to ending North Korea's nuclear development through a package deal.

"We agreed on the need for a fundamental and comprehensive solution to the North Korean nuclear issue that will not lead to the negotiation tactics of the past, and we agreed to work closely together on a way to resolve the issue in a single step," Lee said in a joint press conference after his summit with the Japanese prime minister.

The idea of a single-step solution was proposed last month by the South Korean president, who urged an end to North Korea's "salami tactic" of dividing its denuclearization process into a multitude of bargaining chips and demanding incentives for each of them.

Hatoyama said Lee's proposal for a "grand bargain" was a "completely correct" approach to denuclearizing the North.

"We must find out North Korea's true intentions by pursuing a complete and comprehensive solution to North Korea's nuclear, as well as its ballistic missile programs. Unless North Korea shows willingness to give them up, we must not provide economic assistance," the Japanese premier told the press conference.

<http://english.yonhapnews.co.kr/northkorea/2009/10/09/11/0401000000AEN20091009004700315F.HTML>

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Global Security Newswire
Oct. 8, 2009

Biological Weapons Convention Must be Fixed, Experts Say

By Martin Matishak
Global Security Newswire

WASHINGTON -- The Biological Weapons Convention must become stronger or risk falling into irrelevancy, experts said this week (see *GSN*, Aug. 24).

While the treaty embodies the "necessary" norm against the use of disease as a weapon of warfare "it's not sufficient" and suffers from shortcomings that need to be tackled by member nations, according to Jonathan Tucker, a senior fellow with the James Martin Center for Nonproliferation Studies.

Among the inadequacies that hinder implementation are the "relatively limited" number of states that adhere to the compact and the nonbinding results that stem from the annual meetings of member nations, Tucker said.

The treaty also has no provisions for verification of its rules, which led to the document being "blatantly disregarded" in the past by countries such as Iraq and South Africa, said Gigi Kwik Gronvall, a senior associate at the University of Pittsburgh's Center for Biosecurity.

Both offered their comments Tuesday during a panel discussion at a biodefense conference organized here by the center.

The Biological Weapons Convention entered into force in 1975 and today has 162 member nations. It prohibits the development, production, stockpiling and use of weaponized disease agents -- such as anthrax, smallpox or plague -- as well as equipment and delivery systems intended for hostile use.

The pact has not been as widely accepted as other nonproliferation agreements, so it has not established a similar international norm against a banned weapon, Tucker said. He compared it to the Chemical Weapons Convention, which entered into force in 1997 -- more than 20 years after its biological weapons counterpart -- and boasts 188 states parties.

A key reason for the divergence in the number of signatories is the existence of an implementing body, the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, that has "actively recruited or pressured countries to join" the Chemical Weapons Convention, Tucker said. The biological convention, meanwhile, has an "institutional deficit," he told the audience.

Today, the treaty's Implementation Support Unit, which helps coordinate activities related to the agreement, is composed of three people at the U.N. Office at Geneva, according to Tucker. He said that a congressionally mandated panel on weapons of mass destruction recently urged the United States to support an "appropriate increase" in the "size and stature" of that office.

The U.S. Commission on the Prevention of Weapons of Mass Destruction Proliferation and Terrorism also recommended that Washington propose a new "action plan" for achieving universal adherence to the treaty for adoption at the 2011 BWC review conference. The sessions are held every five years to review the workings of the treaty.

Another problem dates back to the 2001 collapse of negotiations that would have stood up a BWC verification regime, leaving the compact "without a clear direction for future efforts," Tucker said. That year the Bush administration moved to abandon eight years of negotiations toward an inspections protocol (see *GSN*, Nov. 15, 2006).

The "political vacuum" left over about how to strengthen the compact has only been partially filled by the intercessional conferences, separate annual meetings of experts and states parties that have focused on implementation of the treaty, Tucker said.

Those conferences have been useful in focusing the international community's attention on biosecurity issues, but they are reaching a point of "diminishing returns" because they do not have a direct impact on implementation of the convention, he told the audience.

Those sessions address a different each issue year. This year's topic was disease surveillance and next year participants will address investigations of the alleged use of biological weapons.

The convention is also in danger of being overtaken by technology, Kenneth Luongo, president of the Partnership for Global Security, said during the panel discussion.

"We have to figure out how to deal with that because the BWC in a sense was dealing with governments that were producing biological materials for warfare," he said. Today "we're dealing with a primarily private sector owned industry that's producing biological agents for profit and not for warfare."

He added that most private sector biological research is devoted to pharmaceuticals and medical countermeasures.

The arms control model that was applied to the nuclear sector, focused on state production of fissile material, might not be applicable to biological agents, where a far greater number of private institutions are producing materials that might be of concern, Luongo told the audience. "I think we have a lot of different stakeholders here. That's going to be a challenge."

He referred to a report that examined the global biotechnology sector in 2008. More than 4,700 companies were found to have spent about \$30 billion on research that year, while the U.S. National Institute of Health spent slightly more than \$5 billion.

While U.S. President Barack Obama's statements on nuclear proliferation have been "well-informed" and backed by years of consensus within the scientific community, there is not the same kind of agreement on biological dangers, according to Luongo. He did not elaborate.

The White House in August convened a summit with roughly 40 biological scientists and research analysts to inform the administration's strategy on bioterrorism, including how it should approach the treaty and its 2011 review conference (see *GSN*, Aug. 28).

Possible Solutions

Luongo said that in the future BWC member states should work on confidence-building measures instead of standing up a verification regime, which would be a "difficult concept" for some states and focused on a "small percentage of the research that we're worried about."

"The idea is to have a framework where we agree on the dangers and a range of solutions, but not mandate behavior," he said.

Another option to strengthen the treaty would be for the United States to prepare a U.N. Security Council resolution similar to one passed last month, according to Luongo. That document, numbered 1887, was aimed at promoting nuclear nonproliferation and disarmament (see *GSN*, Sept. 24).

"I'm wondering whether or not we need an 1887-B on the bio side," Luongo said during the panel discussion.

He did not say what specifically such a resolution would involve, only that it should outline a range of activities countries could take to adhere to the compact and allow for future negotiations about implementation.

Tucker said that existing confidence-building declarations -- annual reports issued by countries to detail their biodefense activities or disease outbreaks on their soil -- could be made mandatory to enhance transparency.

Fewer than half of the state parties issue the report today and the documents often are printed in a nation's native language and not translated, he said. In addition, the reports are not made public or given to nongovernment organizations that could play a useful "watchdog" role.

Thought is being given now as to how to make confidence-building statements "more relevant," according to Tucker. He added that the 2011 review conference could take up the matter.

http://www.globalsecuritynewswire.org/gsn/nw_20091008_3610.php

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Times of India
8 OCTOBER 2009

US 'Bunker Buster' Bomb to be Ready Soon: Pentagon

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE (AFP)

WASHINGTON: The Pentagon said on Wednesday a giant "bunker buster" bomb will be ready within months, adding a powerful weapon to the US arsenal amid tensions over Iran's nuclear program.

The 30,000-pound massive ordnance penetrator (MOP) is designed to knock out fortified sites buried deep underground, like those used by Iran and North Korea to protect its nuclear work.

"It is under development right now and should be deployable in the coming months," press secretary Geoff Morrell told reporters.

The defense department had said in August it wanted to speed up production plans for the super bomb, asking Congress to shift funds to the project.

Congress approved the request and the Pentagon announced on Friday it awarded McDonnell Douglas Corporation a 51.9-million-dollar contract to enable B-2 aircraft to carry the enormous MOP.

The bomb, which holds 5,300 pounds of explosives, is designed "to defeat hardened facilities used by hostile states to protect weapons of mass destruction," Morrell said.

But he declined to comment whether the weapon's development was in response to Iran's disputed nuclear program.

"I don't think anybody can divine potential targets or anything of that nature. This is just a capability that we think is necessary given the world we live in these days," he said.

"The reality is that the world we live in is one in which there are people who seek to build weapons of mass destruction and they seek to do so in a clandestine fashion."

The United States has refused to rule out military action against Iran if diplomacy fails though President Barack Obama's administration has played down the possibility.

Defense secretary Robert Gates said last month that a military strike against Iran would only "buy time" and delay a nuclear weapons program by about one to three years.

The earth-penetrating MOP is often cited as a potential weapon to take out Iran's underground centrifuge facilities in Natanz.

Iran admitted last month it had been building a new uranium enrichment plant near the holy city of Qom, sparking international outrage. In subsequent talks with world powers, Tehran has adopted a more conciliatory stance and agreed to UN inspections of the new plant.

In an earlier request to Congress, the Pentagon comptroller had cited an "urgent operational need" to develop a weapon against buried targets in "high threat environments," ABC television news reported.

The request for the MOP was backed by US Pacific Command, which oversees an area that includes North Korea, and Central Command, which covers the Middle East, including Iran, it said.

Aerospace giant Boeing manufactures the MOP, which could become the biggest conventional bomb ever used by the US military.

<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/world/us/US-bunker-buster-bomb-to-be-ready-soon-Pentagon/articleshow/5100156.cms>

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London Guardian

OPINION

7 October 2009

It's Not Just About Iran

Hans Blix

The possibility that Iran is seeking to develop a nuclear weapon and the reality that it is building a capability for enriching uranium continue to raise tensions in the Middle East and could push other countries in the region to move in the same direction. In my view the issue of nuclear weapons is not really of great importance for today's negotiations. After all, even if there were no such ambition now, Iran could change its mind next year and would then have come closer to a weapon by the progress made in the enrichment programme.

The conclusion is that it remains desirable to persuade Iran to abandon enrichment. But we do not know if this would be possible under any circumstances. Only direct talks will show this, and it is sad that such talks did not begin much earlier. Several years were wasted by making suspension of enrichment a precondition for talks. We should give President Obama the credit for the start of talks – without any guarantee, of course, that a deal will be reached.

In order to justify harsh punitive measures some may wish to show that Iran is lying and actually trying to develop a weapon. However, efforts to shame Iran will not improve the chances of persuading it to abandon its advanced enrichment programme – the most important objective.

What can be done? To persuade Iran to abandon enrichment, both incentives and disincentives have been offered. Economic sanctions and military measures could have dire consequences. They might also rally a majority of Iranians to support a government they otherwise oppose. Earlier European messages to Iran have pointed to possible rewards if the country were to abandon its enrichment programme. But the quid pro quo has evidently not been enough. This does not mean that "diplomacy is exhausted". Further incentives could be tried in the direct talks that are now on the agenda. Looking at the negotiations on a nuclear-free North Korea we find two interesting offers that appear not to have had parallels in the contacts with Iran. One is an assurance against attack and subversion; the other is US and Japanese readiness for diplomatic relations. After 30 years of no diplomatic relations with the US and more recent recurrent reminders by the US government that all military options are open to it to stop Iranian enrichment, perhaps offers of this kind could carry some weight in the negotiations with Iran.

A broadening of the agenda for discussions with Iran has sometimes been suggested as offering greater possibilities of balancing interests. It is interesting to note that while Iran said it was unwilling to discuss its enrichment programme in the recent direct Geneva talks, it was ready to take up the broader subjects of non-proliferation and disarmament. Discussions of these items could be used for delay, but they might also offer new openings. It could perhaps be of interest even to broach the deep-frozen subject of a Middle East zone free of weapons of mass destruction, and add to it the idea of making the area free of enrichment of uranium and production of plutonium.

Iran and Egypt were the first, many years ago, to take the initiative of a nuclear weapon free zone in the Middle East. All countries in the region – including Israel – have supported the concept, but for Israel, as the only nuclear-weapon country in the region, it has always been a remote scheme. Today, with Iran and perhaps other states in the Middle East moving into more advanced nuclear activities, the idea might appear in a new light to all concerned. For Iran, abandoning its enrichment programme within the framework of a zone could be a contribution to a broader global and regional disarmament and non-proliferation.

Israel may look at its nuclear weapons capability as a kind of life insurance against a possible future existential threat. However, this perception would change drastically if one or more states in the region were to develop nuclear weapons or move close to weapons capability by programmes for the production of enriched uranium or plutonium. To avoid having to face such a situation perhaps Israel would contemplate a zonal agreement under which all countries in the region – including Israel itself – renounced and eliminated nuclear weapons as well as nuclear fuel cycle installations.

This Israeli government may be far from this wavelength, but would it foresee continuing the line of action that began with the bombing of Iraq's Osirak reactor in 1981, and continued with the 2007 attack on Syrian installations claimed to be a North Korean designed research reactor, and the threatened bombing of Iranian nuclear installations?

I do not underestimate the problems of a zonal agreement – for instance those of verification, or outside assurances about security and the supply of uranium fuel. Yet the Obama administration, with the support of many governments, is seeking nuclear disarmament for all – including the original sinners – and both non-proliferation and disarmament are now on the agenda of the UN security council. The Middle East looks like a region in need of a bold broad approach.

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/cifamerica/2009/oct/07/iran-nuclear-weapons-wmd-enrichment>

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