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Global Security Newswire

Advisory Panel Says Warhead Life-Extension Could Suffice For Decades

Friday, Nov. 20, 2009

By Elaine M. Grossman

Global Security Newswire

WASHINGTON -- A top-level independent advisory panel has told the Obama administration that the aging U.S. nuclear arsenal could remain viable for years to come using standard warhead life-extension approaches (see *GSN*, Nov. 9).

If embraced by Washington, the finding would suggest that the United States could avoid building an expensive new generation of nuclear warheads to replace those currently fielded.

"Lifetimes of today's nuclear warheads could be extended for decades, with no anticipated loss of confidence, by using approaches similar to those employed" in maintaining the stockpile to date, according to JASON, a panel of senior scientific and technical experts frequently consulted by the U.S. government.

The findings are already proving controversial, though more than a year has passed since Congress twice denied Bush administration funding requests for developing a new series of weapons -- called the Reliable Replacement Warhead -- aimed at modernizing U.S. nuclear arms (see *GSN*, Nov. 7, 2008).

President Barack Obama's national security team remains split over how best to keep the stockpile functioning, even as the White House embarks on an ambitious agenda aimed at eventually eliminating nuclear weapons (see *GSN*, Aug. 18).

Defense Secretary Robert Gates and some of his top generals have insisted that at least one or two vintage warheads would have to be replaced with more modern designs if the nuclear arsenal is to remain functional (see *GSN*, Sept. 24).

Arguing last year that replacement approaches should be developed, Gen. Kevin Chilton described warheads as "actually little chemistry experiments that are cooking away." In the absence of explosive nuclear testing to gauge their gradual degradation, "I sense there's a cliff out there someplace, and I don't know how close I am to the edge of that cliff," said the general, the military's top combatant commander for nuclear weapons (see *GSN*, Sept. 12, 2008).

Since the early 1990s, the United States has maintained a moratorium on underground nuclear tests. Whether the Senate will formalize that policy by ratifying the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty -- a top Obama administration objective -- has yet to be seen.

Vice President Joseph Biden has led a contingent arguing behind closed doors that new U.S. warheads are unwarranted and could undercut international support for Washington's nonproliferation and disarmament goals. It might be difficult to convince other nations to condemn suspected nuclear-weapon development programs in places like Iran or North Korea if the United States is seen as expanding its own arsenal of atomic warhead designs, according to this line of thinking.

Global Security Newswire last week broke the story that the JASONS' secret report had found that the existing stockpile could remain safe, secure and reliable without the introduction of more modern warhead designs.

A House committee last year commissioned the assessment of warhead life-extension programs. The panel's final document was submitted in October to the National Nuclear Security Administration, a semiautonomous arm of the Energy Department.

An unclassified "executive summary" of the JASON report -- now widely circulating after it was obtained by the New America Foundation's Jeffrey Lewis and posted yesterday to his blog -- appears to offer Biden's camp a boost.

"JASON finds no evidence that accumulation of changes incurred from aging and [life-extension programs] have increased risk to certification of today's deployed nuclear warheads," the document states.

"This should drive a stake through the heart of the RRW and warhead 'replacement' in general," stated Lewis, who supports the vice president's position on the matter.

Warheads in today's U.S. arsenal are decades old in their designs but are periodically refurbished as they cycle through life-extension programs.

The W-76 warhead used on the Navy Trident D-5 missile is currently undergoing life extension, and the Energy Department is studying how it might update the warhead used on Air Force B-61 gravity bombs. In the past, such life-extension initiatives have typically overhauled or replaced corroded metal parts and other aging weapons components.

The JASON validation of life-extension approaches "means that the current nuclear arsenal -- which is safe, reliable and effective -- can be maintained without resorting to untested new designs," said Stephen Young, a senior analyst at the Union of Concerned Scientists' Global Security Program. "There is no need to develop a new warhead to sustain our existing arsenal. This report should end the debate on this question."

That appears unlikely.

"I would advise against reading more into this finding than may be warranted by suggesting that past success guarantees future success," David Trachtenberg, a former Defense Department policy official who served under President George W. Bush, told *GSN*. "I would be hesitant to conclude that the future certifiability of the stockpile is assured because we have found 'no evidence' to suggest otherwise."

After the document was leaked yesterday afternoon, the National Nuclear Security Administration released a statement offering mixed praise for the report's conclusions.

"While we endorse the recommendations and consider them well aligned with NNSA's long-term stockpile management strategy, certain findings in the unclassified executive summary convey a different perspective on key findings when viewed without the context of the full classified report," said Damien LaVera, a spokesman for NNSA Administrator Thomas D'Agostino.

"The full report addresses them comprehensively and validates our basic scientific approach to warhead life extension programs, specifically our commitment to evaluating each weapon system on a case-by-case basis and applying the best technological approach from a spectrum of options," LaVera said.

"Obviously one size will not fit all for every weapon type," said one House staffer.

The House Armed Services Committee, which originally requested the JASON review, recently received the classified report and planned to share it with its Senate counterpart and appropriations committees in both chambers, according to Capitol Hill sources.

Representatives James Langevin (D-R.I.) and Michael Turner (R-Ohio) -- the top Democrat and Republican on the House Armed Services Strategic Forces Subcommittee -- yesterday released a joint statement saying the JASON "recommendations provide a sound technical basis to inform subsequent U.S. nuclear weapons policy and program decisions."

The JASON report summary also calls attention to what the panel sees as degradation in the government's ability to monitor the nuclear weapon stockpile and assess whether it remains viable.

"The surveillance program is becoming inadequate," the document states without much elaboration. The science panel recommended that the government ensure that its effort to watch over warhead status is being fully implemented.

Another JASON "concern" is that the government should maintain "expertise and capabilities in science, technology, engineering and production unique to the nuclear weapons program," according to the executive summary.

"This will be the case regardless of whether future [life-extension programs] utilize refurbishment, reuse or replacement," the panel continued. "The study team is concerned that this expertise is threatened by lack of program stability, perceived lack of mission importance, and degradation of the work environment."

The House staffer, speaking on condition of anonymity, said that supporting a robust nuclear-weapon research capability and modern facilities is almost as important as maintaining the warheads themselves.

When a Pentagon-led Nuclear Posture Review is released in January, "we would expect to see a modernization plan which would include measures to enhance long-term safety, security and reliability of the stockpile, as well as modernization of the nuclear weapons infrastructure and human capital," the aide said. "You can't do one without the other."

For his part, Lewis saw in the JASON finding a subtle criticism of the toll that a focus on warhead replacement might be taking on U.S. nuclear-weapon engineers and scientists.

The JASON concern "is a very polite way of saying the push for new warheads like ... RRW, far from being a panacea, has endangered the stockpile by politicizing what ought to be a technical question, creating program instability and low morale," he wrote on his blog, ArmsControlWonk.com.

http://www.globalsecuritynewswire.org/gsn/nw_20091120_7482.php

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Air Force Times

StratCom Commander: New Nukes Needed

By Erik Holmes - Staff writer

Sunday, November 22, 2009

LOS ANGELES — The military's top officer in charge of nuclear weapons issued a warning Thursday about the state of the nation's nuclear programs, saying that new nuclear weapons need to be developed and lamenting the declining numbers of nuclear experts and scientists.

Calling the nuclear arsenal the foundation of the nation's strategic deterrence capability, Gen. Kevin Chilton, commander of U.S. Strategic Command, said the military must invest more in the nuclear enterprise.

"First we need to fix the infrastructure that supports our nuclear stockpile," said Chilton, speaking at an Air Force Association conference in Los Angeles. But "we can't just continue to sustain [Cold War weapons] in our inventory. ... It's a new world in the 21st century, and we need weapons that were designed for and support the needs of the 21st century."

Of particular concern, Chilton said, is the deterioration of the nation's nuclear laboratories, which he called "decrepit." These laboratories must be modernized in order to attract and retain the scientists needed to sustain a weapons program, he said.

He also said that since the U.S. no longer tests nuclear weapons, the nation must continue to invest in an aggressive stockpile management program to ensure that existing weapons remain reliable and safe.

Chilton warned that the community of nuclear experts has become dangerously small and the military has failed to replenish the talent pool since the 1980s and 1990s.

"We have skipped a generation," he said. "We've got to do something about that."

Chilton credited the 2007 incident at Minot Air Force Base, N.D., in which the Air Force lost track of nuclear-tipped cruise missiles, for returning the military's focus to the nuclear business.

"We had a wakeup call a couple of years ago in the nuclear business ... and thank goodness for it," he said.

The reverberations of that incident are still being felt: Two wing commanders at Minot were fired in October because of their failure to bring about sufficient improvement in their units.

http://www.airforcetimes.com/news/2009/11/airforce_chilton_111909w/

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New York Times

November 23, 2009

Shortage Slows A Program To Detect Nuclear Bombs

By Matthew L. Wald

WASHINGTON — The Department of Homeland Security has spent \$230 million to develop better technology for detecting smuggled nuclear bombs but has had to stop deploying the new machines because the United States has run out of a crucial raw material, experts say.

The ingredient is helium 3, an unusual form of the element that is formed when tritium, an ingredient of hydrogen bombs, decays. But the government mostly stopped making tritium in 1989.

"I have not heard any explanation of why this was not entirely foreseeable," said Representative Brad Miller, Democrat of North Carolina, who is the chairman of a House subcommittee that is investigating the problem.

An official from the Homeland Security Department testified last week before Mr. Miller's panel, the Investigations and Oversight Subcommittee of the House Science Committee, that demand for helium 3 appeared to be 10 times the supply.

Some government agencies, Mr. Miller said, did anticipate a crisis, but the Homeland Security Department appears not to have gotten the message.

The department had planned a worldwide network using the new detectors, which were supposed to detect plutonium or uranium in shipping containers. The government wanted 1,300 to 1,400 machines, which cost \$800,000 each, for use in ports around the world to thwart terrorists who might try to deliver a nuclear bomb to a big city by stashing it in one of the millions of containers that enter the United States every year.

At the White House, Steve Fetter, an assistant director of the Office of Science and Technology Policy, said the helium 3 problem was short-term because other technologies would be developed. But, he said, while the government had a large surplus of helium 3 at the end of the cold war, "people should have been aware that this was a one-time windfall and was not sustainable."

Helium 3 is not hazardous or even chemically reactive, and it is not the only material that can be used for neutron detection. The Homeland Security Department has older equipment that can look for radioactivity, but it does not differentiate well between bomb fuel and innocuous materials that naturally emit radiation — like cat litter, ceramic tiles and bananas — and sounds false alarms more often.

Earlier this year, the Pacific Northwest National Laboratory, part of the Energy Department, said in a report, "No other currently available detection technology offers the stability, sensitivity and gamma/neutron discrimination" of detectors using helium 3.

Helium 3 is used to detect neutrons, the subatomic particles that sustain the chain reaction in a bomb or a reactor. Plutonium, the favorite bomb-making material of most governments with nuclear weapons, intermittently gives off neutrons, which are harder for a smuggler to hide than other forms of radiation. (Detecting the alternative bomb fuel, enriched uranium, is a separate, difficult problem, experts say.)

Helium 3 is rare in nature, but the Energy Department accumulated a substantial stockpile as a byproduct of maintaining nuclear weapons. Those weapons use tritium, which is the form of hydrogen used in the H-bomb, but the hydrogen decays into helium 3 at the rate of 5.5 percent a year. For that reason the tritium in each bomb has to be removed, purified and replenished every few years. It is purified by removing the helium 3.

The declining supply is also needed for physics research and medical diagnostics.

The Energy Department used to make tritium in reactors at its Savannah River Site, near Aiken, S.C., but those were shut after many operational problems. It enlisted the Tennessee Valley Authority to make some tritium in a power reactor, using the same method it had used at Savannah River, breaking up another material, a form of lithium, with neutrons. One of the fragments is tritium. But that project has run into technical problems as well.

Mr. Miller estimated that demand for helium 3 was about 65,000 liters per year through 2013 and that total production by the only two countries that produce it in usable form, the United States and Russia, was only about 20,000 liters. In a letter to President Obama, he called the shortage "a national crisis" and said the price had jumped to \$2,000 a liter from \$100 in the last few years, which threatens scientific research.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2009/11/23/us/23helium.html>

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Tehran Times
November 21, 2009

Nuclear Fuel Exchange Can Be Done In Iran: Mottaki

Tehran Times Political Desk

TEHRAN - Iranian Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki says that Iran is prepared to exchange its nuclear fuel inside Iran.

Iran has proposed a new framework for negotiations on the exchange of fuel, whereby the enriched uranium would be exchanged inside Iran, he said at a press conference in Manila on Friday before departing for Iran.

Mottaki added, "We have three ways to obtain the 20 percent (enriched) fuel: increasing the enrichment from 3.5 percent to 20 percent in Iran; buying the 20 percent fuel from other countries; or (through) the proposal made by the (International Atomic Energy) Agency and other countries, and Iran is ready for talks under the proposed framework."

He also stated that it is not logical to ask Iran to ship its 3.5 percent enriched uranium out of the country and to receive the 20 percent enriched fuel later.

The Iranian foreign minister suggested that a simultaneous exchange of nuclear fuel should not be a problem.

The nuclear fuel talks between Iran, Russia, the United States, and France concluded on October 21 in Vienna without a final agreement, but IAEA Director General Mohamed ElBaradei then presented a proposal for the four countries to study.

Under the draft deal, a large consignment of Iran's enriched uranium would be shipped out of the country for processing into fuel rods with a purity of 20 percent, which would be used by a research reactor in Tehran that manufactures medical radioisotopes.

On October 23, diplomats from Russia, France, and the United States submitted their formal approvals of the deal to process Iran's nuclear fuel abroad.

However, several senior Iranian officials, including Majlis Speaker Ali Larijani, have strongly criticized the deal, saying it is neither logical nor legal.

Majlis National Security and Foreign Policy Committee rapporteur Kazem Jalali had said earlier that the proposed exchange of uranium should be done in Iran

http://www.tehrantimes.com/Index_view.asp?code=208365

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Washington Post

Iran To Hold War Games To Protect Nuclear Facilities

By Fredrik Dahl and Hashem Kalantari

Reuters

Saturday, November 21, 2009

TEHRAN (Reuters) - Iran's military said it will begin large-scale air defense drills on Sunday, and a cleric in the Revolutionary Guards warned that the Islamic Republic would fire missiles at "the heart of Tel Aviv" if attacked.

The war games, due to last five days, are intended to help protect Iran's nuclear facilities, Iranian media reported, citing Brigadier General Ahmad Mighani.

The statements came a day after senior officials from six world powers said they were disappointed Iran had not accepted proposals intended to delay its potential to make nuclear weapons, and urged Tehran to reconsider.

The United States, Russia, China, Germany, Britain and France met after U.S. President Barack Obama warned there could be a package of sanctions against Iran within weeks.

The United States and Israel have not ruled out military action if diplomacy fails to resolve the row over Iranian nuclear work that the West suspects is aimed at making bombs.

Iran, which says its nuclear program is solely to generate electricity, has threatened to hit back at Israel and U.S. bases in the Gulf if it is attacked.

"If the enemy should want to test its bad luck in Iran, before the dust from its missiles settles in this country, Iran's ballistic missiles would land in the heart of Tel Aviv," said cleric Mojtaba Zolnour, IRNA news agency reported.

Zolnour is a deputy of Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei's representative in the Revolutionary Guards, who will be staging the defense drills together with the regular armed forces.

"This week's air defense maneuvers will be held with the intention of protecting the country's nuclear facilities," Mighani said, Fars News Agency reported. He is the head of the armed forces' air defense headquarters.

"ZIONISTS' PRESSURE"

Iran often holds defense exercises and announces advances in military equipment in order to show its readiness to counter any threats over its disputed nuclear program.

IRNA, Iran's official news agency, said the maneuvers would take place in western Iran and that they would be "huge."

Mighani also suggested Iran could itself produce an advanced missile defense system which Russia has so far failed to deliver to the Islamic state and which Washington and Israel do not want Tehran to have.

Iran believes Russia's delay in supplying high-grade S-300 missiles is due to pressure by Israel, not technical problems as cited by Moscow, Mighani said.

Moscow, which is under Western pressure to distance itself from Iran over the nuclear dispute, has not followed through on proposals to ship the missiles to the Middle East country.

Iranian officials have over the last few weeks voiced growing frustration at Russia's failure to deliver the S-300.

"They have declared technical problems as the underlying reason for this delay, but we think it has been due to the Zionists' pressure," Mighani said, Fars reported. "We are hopeful the Russians will ignore the pressure of the Zionist lobby."

Iran, which does not recognize the Jewish state, refers to Israel as the "Zionist regime."

"In various maneuvers, new and modern missile networks will be used and evaluated, including the advanced S-300 missiles, for which the production capability exists in Iran," IRNA quoted Mighani as saying, without elaborating.

A senior lawmaker, Alaeddin Boroujerdi, earlier this month also said Iran would be able to produce the S-300 system itself, appearing to refer to missiles with similar capabilities.

U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton praised Russia last month for not providing the missiles to Iran.

The truck-mounted S-300PMU1, known in the West as the SA-20, can shoot down cruise missiles and aircraft. It can fire at targets up to 150 km (90 miles) away.

(Additional reporting by Hossein Jaseb; Editing by Dominic Evans)

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/11/21/AR2009112100833.html>

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Tehran Times – Iran

November 21, 2009

Iran Has 'Every Reason To Be Distrustful' Of The West: ElBaradei

BERLIN (Agencies) - The director general of the International Atomic Energy Agency said on Friday that Iran has "every reason to be distrustful."

The remarks by Mohamed ElBaradei came after Iran said that the West's past behavior shows that there is no guarantee that if Iran sends its low-enriched uranium (LEU) abroad it will receive the 20 percent enriched uranium for the Tehran research reactor.

According to a deal drafted by the International Atomic Energy Agency, Iran would exchange some of its low-enriched uranium for 20 percent enriched uranium for the Tehran reactor, which produces radioisotopes for medical treatment.

Iranian lawmakers and other officials have said the first priority is to buy fuel for the reactor. They have also said Iran will only exchange its low-enriched uranium after it receives the 20 percent enriched uranium promised in the latest nuclear deal.

ElBaradei says Iran's answer not final

On Wednesday Iran rejected the proposal to send the fuel abroad.

However, the IAEA chief said it was not a written response and he did not think it was Iran's final position, Reuters reported.

He went on to say that he remains in touch with Iranian officials.

"I do not consider that I have received a final answer," ElBaradei told a press conference in Berlin. "What I got is an oral response, basically saying we need to keep all the material in Iran until we get the fuel. That to me is an extreme case of distrust."

Both the Western powers and Iran have let each other down in the past and Iran has "every reason to be distrustful," ElBaradei said.

The IAEA director general said he is opposed to the imposition of more punitive sanctions if Tehran did finally reject the proposal.

"Are sanctions going to resolve the issue? I don't think so. In my view sanctions are going to make things much worse," he stated, adding that such a move would probably make Iran "more hawkish."

"I would hate to see that we are moving back to sanctions. Sanctions at the end of the day, in most cases, hurt the vulnerable and the innocent," AFP quoted the IAEA chief as saying.

ElBaradei said the plan, according to which Iran would send low-enriched uranium to Russia and France for conversion into fuel for the Tehran reactor, provides a rare opportunity to defuse tension between the West and Iran.

He urged Iran to accept the proposal to process its enriched uranium abroad before the end of 2009 and advised the Western powers not to impose further sanctions on Tehran.

"I would hope definitely that we'll get an agreement before the end of the year," he noted. "I believe frankly the ball is very much in the Iranian court. I hope they will not miss this unique but fleeting opportunity."

ElBaradei, who retires on November 30 after 12 tough years in office, praised the role played by U.S. President Barack Obama in talks with Iran, saying he had initiated a "complete change of policy."

Noting that under Obama the United States had taken a "creative and pragmatic" approach to resolving the impasse over Iran's nuclear program, ElBaradei used the press conference to send a message directly to the Iranian leadership.

"You need to engage in creative diplomacy, you need to understand that this is the first time that you will have a genuine commitment from an American president to engage you fully, on the basis of respect, with no conditions.

"Don't lose that opportunity," he told Iran.

http://www.tehrantimes.com/index_View.asp?code=208353

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Ha'aretz Daily – Israel

22 November 2009

Iran Launches 'Huge' War Games Amid Threats To Strike Tel Aviv

By News Agencies

Iran began large-scale drills on Sunday to help protect its nuclear facilities, state TV said, after a senior Iranian cleric warned on Saturday that the Islamic Republic strike Tel Aviv if attacked.

"If the enemy should want to test its bad luck in Iran, before the dust from its missiles settles in this country, Iran's ballistic missiles would land in the heart of Tel Aviv," said cleric Mojtaba Zolnour, the IRNA news agency reported.

Zalnour is a deputy of Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei's representative in the Revolutionary Guards, which will be staging the defence drills together with the regular armed forces.

The official IRNA news agency said on Saturday that the war games would take place in western Iran and that they would be "huge." The exercises are due to last five days, Iranian media quoted Brigadier General Ahmad Mighani as saying.

"It is the biggest war game, which takes place over an area 600,000 sq km (230,000 sq miles). The aim of this war game is to promote military power of the armed forces against any attack," the television quoted Mighani as saying.

"The aim of the drill is to display Iran's combat readiness and military potentials," Mighani said.

"Defense policies, psychological operations and innovations during the war game are among the objectives of the drill."

The United States and Israel have not ruled out military action if diplomacy fails to resolve the row over Iranian nuclear work that the West suspects is aimed at making bombs.

Iran, which insists its nuclear program is solely to generate electricity, has also threatened in the past to hit back with a "crushing" response at Israel and U.S. bases in the Gulf if it is attacked.

<http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/1129845.html>

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Washington Post
November 23, 2009

Iran Stages War Games, Sits On West's Nuclear Offer

Military issues warning to Israel, tries to show defensive capacity

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By Thomas Erdbrink

TEHRAN -- Iran's army and Revolutionary Guard staged large-scale air defense war games on Sunday in an effort to show off the country's deterrence capabilities amid rising pressure from the West over its nuclear program, state television reported.

Images broadcast Sunday included warplanes dropping bombs on targets in the desert, rockets being launched and paratroopers boarding Chinook troop helicopters. Iranian leaders had earlier warned that any attempt by Israel to destroy Iranian nuclear facilities would be met with a military response. "If the enemy tries its luck and fires a missile into Iran, our ballistic missiles would zero in on Tel Aviv before the dust settles on the attack," said Mojtaba Zolnour, Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei's representative in the Revolutionary Guard Corps, told the government-run Islamic Republic News Agency (IRNA) on Saturday.

The display of military muscle Sunday came as Iran's envoy to the International Atomic Energy Agency, Ali Asghar Soltanieh, insisted Iran needs guarantees it will receive nuclear fuel on time for its research reactor if it is to agree to a swap of uranium proposed by the West, reported semi-official Iranian Students' News Agency (ISNA).

The United States, Russia and France have said they are running out of patience with Iran, which has not given a formal answer on a proposal for trading a large part of Iran's stockpile of low-enriched uranium for the higher-enriched uranium that the country needs for medical uses, such as cancer treatments.

"The main issue is how to get a guarantee for the timely supply of fuel which Iran needs," Soltanieh said. "We are ready to have negotiations with a positive approach, but because of a lack of confidence with the West, we need to have those guarantees."

Previous statements by Iranian leaders have suggested that the nation was unlikely to agree to a deal.

As President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad on Sunday started a five-day trip to Africa and South America, a former vice president was sentenced to six years in prison in connection with protests over June's presidential election. Mohammad Ali Abtahi, a cleric and prominent blogger within Iran's reformist movement, was temporarily released on \$700,000 bail, the state news agency IRNA quoted Tehran prosecutor Abbas Jafari Dowlatabadi as saying on Sunday.

Abtahi, a strong critic of Ahmadinejad's government, made televised confessions after his arrest in June. He also updated his popular blog from prison. In one posting while being held in state custody, he called his interrogator "his friend" and he repudiated his involvement in the protest movement following the election, which officially ended in an Ahmadinejad landslide but which the opposition claims was rigged.

Abtahi's wife, Fahimeh Mousavinejad, said in an interview on Sunday that her husband has told her that parts of his confessions were made under duress. She was still waiting for him to be brought home from prison. "They have placed fear in our hearts, I can only hope he will really come home today," she said.

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/11/22/AR2009112200439.html>

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Daily Star – Bangladesh
Monday, November 23, 2009

Iran Insists On Guarantees For Nuclear Fuel Supply

Agence France-Presse (AFP), Tehran

A top Iranian official reiterated yesterday Tehran wanted a guaranteed supply of atomic fuel for its research reactor, as world powers expressed disappointment over its continued nuclear defiance.

Iran's envoy to the UN atomic watchdog, Ali Asghar Soltanieh, also repeated that Tehran was ready to hold more negotiations over the supply of fuel for the internationally-supervised reactor located in the Iranian capital.

"The main issue is how to get a guarantee for the timely supply of fuel which Iran needs," Soltanieh was quoted as saying by ISNA news agency.

"We are ready to have negotiations with a positive approach, but because of lack of confidence with the West, we need to have those guarantees."

His comments come days after Iran rejected a deal brokered by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) which proposed Tehran sending most of its stock of low-enriched uranium (LEU) to Russia and France for converting into fuel for the research reactor.

Iran dismissed the deal but said it was ready for a simultaneous exchange inside borders of the Islamic republic of its LEU for nuclear fuel supplied by the West.

Western powers are strongly backing the IAEA-drafted deal as they fear Iran could enrich its LEU further to higher levels and use it in making atomic weapons, a charge vociferously denied by the Islamic republic.

Enrichment of uranium lies at the heart of the controversy over Iran's nuclear programme as the material can be used to power reactors as well as to make the fissile core of an atom bomb.

Soltanieh also said that as per rules of the IAEA, the member countries can enrich uranium to any levels.

"There is no limit to enrichment for members of the IAEA. There is no ceiling," he said.

"The member countries are however required to declare to the agency their enrichment levels and the agency has to verify it."

Soltanieh clarified that Iran's main enrichment plant in the central city of Natanz was enriching uranium up to five percent purity level.

Iran is building a second uranium enrichment plant near the Shiite holy city of Qom and its disclosure in September triggered outrage in the West, after which world powers threatened Tehran could face fresh sanctions if it did not come clean on its nuclear programme.

The Islamic republic is already under three sets of UN sanctions for defiantly enriching uranium at Natanz.

The six world powers -- Britain, Russia, China, Germany, France and the United States -- expressed disappointment at a meeting in Brussels on Friday over Tehran's continued defiance.

"Iran has not responded positively to the IAEA (International Atomic Energy Agency) proposed agreement for the provision of nuclear fuel for its Tehran research reactor," they said after a meeting on Friday.

But the United States said it hopes Iran will still accept the IAEA-drafted fuel deal.

US State Department deputy spokesman Robert Wood said that the United States and the other five powers were not yet "at the point" of closing the window on dialogue.

Speaking to reporters in Washington on Friday, Wood said that the six powers would hold another meeting to discuss "next steps" but added that no date for a meeting had yet been determined.

<http://www.thedailystar.net/newDesign/news-details.php?nid=115153>

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Washington Post

Iran Says Needs Guarantees To Ship Nuclear Fuel

By Parisa Hafezi
Reuters
Tuesday, November 24, 2009

TEHRAN (Reuters) - Iran could consider sending its low-enriched uranium abroad, the Foreign Ministry said on Tuesday, signaling a possible softening of its opposition to a plan aimed at easing Western concern over its nuclear ambitions.

Last week Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki rejected a U.N.-drafted deal that would see Iran ship low-enriched uranium (LEU) abroad for reprocessing.

But Foreign Ministry spokesman Ramin Mehmanparast said on Tuesday that Iran was not opposed to sending LEU abroad as long as it had "100 percent guarantees" of receiving refined fuel in return, for use in a medical research reactor.

"Regarding the guarantees we are not going to suggest anything, but one ... could be exchanging it on Iranian soil, Mehmanparast told a news conference.

Any fuel swap in Iran, however, would likely be a non-starter for Western powers which are seeking a delay in Tehran's potential to make a nuclear bomb by reducing its LEU stockpile. Iran says its nuclear program is peaceful.

Iran's top nuclear official said it was up to world powers to find a guarantee that would satisfy Iran.

"The only way is that the West should give us a 100 percent guarantee to make this deal doable. The guarantee should be agreed by Iran," Ali Akbar Salehi, head of Iran's Atomic Energy Organization, told Reuters when asked whether Iran's condition was to swap the fuel in its territory.

Major powers urged Tehran on Friday to accept the proposal brokered by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). U.S. President Barack Obama has warned of more sanctions on Iran, the world's fifth-largest oil producer.

Some analysts say hardline President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad favors the fuel deal as a way to shore up his legitimacy after his disputed re-election in June, but that domestic rivals are trying to undermine him by criticizing the proposal.

Western officials also suspect that Iran is trying to buy time and avert the threat of more punitive measures by offering to hold further talks on the plan while pressing ahead with its nuclear enrichment work.

"COMMERCIAL ISSUE"

"Nobody in Iran ever said that we are against sending 3.5 percent-enriched uranium abroad. We talked about the process of dispatching fuel," Mehmanparast said.

"If we say we are looking for 100 percent guarantees, it means that we want 3.5 percent enriched uranium to be sent out under such circumstances that we make sure that we will receive the 20 percent fuel."

Iran's top nuclear negotiator Saeed Jalili said, according to Iran's Arabic-language al Alam television: "The Islamic Republic of Iran needs objective guarantees for exchanging fuel for its Tehran reactor."

Western powers agree that Iran has the right to develop a civilian nuclear program, but want restrictions to prevent it from developing a nuclear weapon.

Iran says its nuclear work is aimed at generating electricity and has ruled out suspending its uranium enrichment. Refined uranium can have both civilian and military uses.

The draft deal calls on Iran to send some 75 percent of its LEU to Russia and France, where it would be turned into fuel for the Tehran reactor.

Mottaki said last week: "Surely we will not send our 3.5 percent fuel abroad but can review swapping it simultaneously with nuclear fuel inside Iran."

The United States has rejected Iranian calls for amendments and further talks on the deal. Obama has said time was running out for diplomacy to resolve the long-running nuclear standoff.

Jalili said supply of fuel for the Tehran reactor was not a political issue and it was not related to Iran's talks with six world powers -- the United States, France, Britain, Germany, China and Russia.

"It is a commercial issue. Iran has asked the agency to provide it for Iran," Jalili said. "If they can't provide fuel in time and based on Iran's request, then ... we have other options to get fuel."

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/11/24/AR2009112400291.html>

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RIA Novosti – Russian Information Agency

Russia Again Postpones New Bulava Tests

24 November 2009

A new test launch of Russia's troubled Bulava submarine-launched ballistic missile (SLBM) will be carried out by the end of 2009, a defense industry source said on Tuesday.

The launch was tentatively scheduled for November 24 but has been postponed for the second time since the latest failure in July.

"The Defense Ministry and the manufacturer still have a number of issues, including technical, to resolve before the Bulava can be tested again sometime by year's end," the source said.

The Bulava's development has been dogged by a series of setbacks and has officially suffered six failures in 11 tests so far.

The latest Bulava failure during the launch from the Dmitry Donskoy nuclear submarine in the North Sea was caused by a defective steering system in its first stage, according to military officials.

The future development of the Bulava has been questioned by some lawmakers and defense industry experts, who have suggested that all efforts should be focused on the existing Sineva SLBM.

But the Russian military has insisted that there is no alternative to the Bulava and pledged to continue testing the missile until it is ready to be put in service with the Navy.

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

The Bulava, along with Topol-M land-based ballistic missiles, is expected to become the core of Russia's nuclear triad.

MOSCOW, November 24 (RIA Novosti)

http://en.rian.ru/military_news/20091124/156971805.html

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Newsweek

November 30, 2009

The New Red Army

How Medvedev plans to reform the military—and why Obama should not be worried.

By Owen Matthews and Anna Nemtsova

On a chilly day earlier this fall in a forest near the Lithuanian border, Dmitry Medvedev strode out to inspect one of Russia's latest tactical missiles as it was trundled into launch position. The president wore a green officer's jacket with commander-in-chief decals and used a pair of outsize binoculars to watch the rocket soar toward its target.

Not long ago, such atmospheric would have been left to Vladimir Putin, Medvedev's old boss. But Russia's young, reformist president has become very invested in the country's military, and not just, like his predecessor, to bulwark a tough-guy image. While Putin quadrupled defense spending without making much headway on reform, Medvedev has embarked on a bold campaign to transform the Red Army, trying to turn a creaking Cold War-era institution plagued with a corrupt officer corps, outdated equipment, endemic bullying, suicide, and alcoholism into a modern fighting force able to effectively project power abroad for the first time in a generation. In his state-of-the-empire speech on Nov. 12, Medvedev told the Duma that Russia's "old economic model doesn't work anymore" and said that "our nation's survival will depend on modernization." The same goes for the military. It's an enormous project: to succeed, Medvedev will have to make the Russian Army smaller, better equipped, and more professional. This

will mean painful cuts and dismantling deep vested interests that have thrived on the rotting, subsidy-soaked body of Russia's military-industrial complex.

If it works, however, the payoff could be just as great: a military that might actually live up to the Kremlin's ambitions. Those don't include threatening the West. Medvedev wants to stop preparing for the conventional European war the old Soviet Army was designed to fight and to focus instead on the kind of regional missions Russia may actually face in the years ahead. This will take rapid-reaction forces capable of fighting brushfire wars and clobbering smaller neighbors. Russia's not getting out of the great-power game entirely: Medvedev is also investing heavily in the country's still-gigantic strategic nuclear arsenal in order to preserve Moscow's place at the top table of nations. But even as he builds next-generation nukes, he has made a point of reassuring Washington by agreeing to cutbacks in Russia's aging nuclear stockpile.

Medvedev embarked on his reform campaign last year, shortly after Russia's dismal performance in the August war against Georgia, according to Pavel Zolotarev of Russia's Academy of Sciences. It was the first time Russia's Army had been tested against a foreign enemy since the invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, and the results weren't pretty. The campaign exposed what independent military analyst Pavel Felgenhauer calls "embarrassing failings" in Russia's fighting ability. At least 11 Russian aircraft and several drones were shot down, and there were reports of extensive burning and looting of abandoned Georgian villages by undisciplined troops. Many Russian soldiers were spotted going to battle in running shoes and polyester sweatpants instead of boots and camouflage uniforms, and one junior officer even asked NEWSWEEK reporters to lend him a Georgian SIM card to call his superiors after radios failed. A line of broken-down Russian armored personnel carriers was also seen on the main road from Tskhinvali to Gori. The ultimate end to the conflict was never in doubt—Georgia has 4.6 million citizens versus Russia's 140 million—but the tiny nation's spiffy U.S.-supplied military vehicles and uniforms made the Russians look as if they'd just stepped out of a World War II documentary.

Medvedev started to clean house in the days that followed. Nikolai Makarov, a top general he'd appointed just before the Georgia campaign, commissioned a root-and-branch review of the state of the military. It turned out that the troops deployed in Georgia were actually better than average. The review found, among other things, that only 17 percent of Russia's military units had a full complement of men and equipment. "All the other units either had faulty ammunition and weapons or did not have enough people," says Zolotarev. The Army was also seriously top-heavy, with more than 900 generals (the U.S. Army has about 300) and one officer for every 2.5 men, compared with the 1–15 ratio favored by Western armies. Meanwhile, up to a third of conscripts were "mentally un-fit, drug addicts, or imbeciles," according to a public statement last year by Col. Gen. Vladimir Mikhailov, the Air Force commander in chief. As for the Army's practices, these weren't stuck in the Cold War—they were downright medieval, with NGOs reporting hair-raising tales of officers hiring out their own men as slave laborers and male prostitutes.

With these exposés came a recognition that, while Russia may have managed to roll over Georgia, it won't always be so lucky. "If, God forgive us, we start a war with a highly technological nation like the United States, we have no chance of survival," says Alexander Golts, a Moscow-based military analyst. "Now, finally, the Russian government has accepted the gravity of the problem."

Medvedev's hatchet man is Defense Minister Anatoly Serdyukov, appointed by Putin in 2007 and, like Putin and Medvedev, a graduate in law from St. Petersburg State University. The reform plan he helped draft, which was finalized in the fall of 2008, is impressively ambitious. Nearly 200,000 officers—more than a third of the total—are to be fired, while some of those remaining will get pay raises (up to a total of \$5,000 a month, more than five times the current level) in order to improve quality. Compulsory service has been cut from two years to less than one, and the Army is to be organized into modern fast-reacting brigades of 2,000 rather than the old lumbering divisions of 5,000 and more. The overall size of the armed forces is to be cut by a quarter, largely by getting rid of many nonfighting units. And if Serdyukov has his way, resources will be concentrated on elite fighting battalions that will form the core of a new rapid-reaction force.

Of course, grand plans for reforming the Army have been coming out of the Kremlin for centuries, and most have foundered on institutional resistance and corruption. But there are good reasons to think Medvedev may succeed. The most promising sign is the way he's taken on some very sacred cows. One is procurement. The very idea of buying defense systems abroad would have been considered treason in the Soviet era. In September, however, Deputy Defense Minister Vladimir Popovkin told the bosses of Russia's weapons industries that he would not hesitate to source matériel from overseas if they couldn't provide it. Sure enough, that month Moscow announced it would buy \$50 million in unmanned drones from Israel rather than go with a clunky, overbudget Russian-made drone that had failed to perform in Georgia. This year Russia also bought sniper rifles from the U.K. and pistols

from Austria for its elite units. "Acknowledging that Russia cannot produce everything is the first step toward modernizing the system," says Golts.

Perhaps, but updating the military-industrial complex will be as hard as modernizing the rest of Russia's moribund technology sector. Thanks to injections of cash—Russia's military budget hit \$50 billion in 2008, and Putin recently pledged to raise it to \$125 billion by 2011—old giants like the aircraft makers MiG and Sukhoi are now cranking out new planes. But the latest generation of Russian hardware—the Su-34 and Su-35 fighter-bombers, the MiG-35 fighter, the S-400 air-defense system, and the Iskander short-range missile—is in fact little more than upgraded versions of projects designed 30 years ago. "As soon as these design bureaus got money, they just dusted off their old projects that were a generation old," says Felgenhauer. Medvedev seems to recognize this problem, and during a visit last month to the Mashinostroyeniya factory in Reutov, he blasted the industry and called for a "fundamental modernization."

In other areas, there are small signs of progress. New units—effectively, a new Army within the old one—have been set up and shown off by Medvedev to the presidents of neighboring countries as part of a new 5,000-man, post-Soviet regional rapid-reaction force that Russia will lead. The new units will be "just as good as NATO forces," Medvedev promised earlier this year, and will have kit standard in Western armies (but previously unheard of in Russia): individual radios and night-vision equipment for every man and vehicle, for instance, and uniforms and boots made of breathable modern materials rather than wool and leather. The units' brief will be "to repulse military aggression, conduct antiterrorist operations, fight transnational crime and drug trafficking, and disaster relief." The force will be permanently based in Russia, but special units will be manned by members of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), which also includes Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan.

Russia has also done a good job upgrading what is perhaps the key element of its strategic military power—its nuclear arsenal. In October, the new *Dmitry Donskoi* missile submarine successfully test-fired the Bulava, Russia's newest sea-launched ballistic missile, after failing on its first eight attempts. The Bulava is a 30-ton Death Star capable of circling the earth and launching 10 targeted nuclear warheads from orbit. Two more submarine missile cruisers, which will pack 16 Bulavas each, are also under construction. Such weapons are more suited to the Cold War than to a modern, agile, tactical army—but even the reforming Medvedev knows that an outsize nuclear capability is one of the keys to keeping Russia's place among the great powers. He also knows that big impressive rockets are crowd pleasers—which is why he ordered Topol-M intercontinental ballistic missiles paraded in Red Square on Victory Day last year for the first time since Soviet days.

Such displays and the new spending are being enthusiastically cheered in some parts of the country, especially the archipelago of closed military cities. "Our hearts filled up with joy when we saw the rockets we test here on the Red Square," says Alexander Likh, mayor of Znamensk, a closed city in central Russia where missiles are designed and tested. "Finally, after almost a decade of degradation and poverty, our range is important again."

But not everyone is so enthusiastic, especially Russia's neighbors. Last week Poland's Defense Minister Radek Sikorski sounded the alarm in a letter to NATO, complaining about maneuvers involving 12,000 Russian and Belarussian troops in the Russian enclave of Kaliningrad. "This disturbs us," he told Polish state radio. "We demand that NATO take this into account." Sikorski and others were also upset last month when Medvedev made the quick deployment of Russian forces abroad easier by signing a new law allowing them to be dispatched outside the country "to repel an attack on Russian military units or prevent an armed attack on another state asking Russia for military assistance, [or] to defend Russian citizens abroad from an armed attack." That sounds a lot like a mandate for Moscow to "defend" Russian minorities in former Soviet neighbors such as Ukraine and Kazakhstan, should it perceive the need—or want the pretext.

Medvedev's reform campaign may also create other dangers at home. Earlier this year, the Kremlin slowed its planned troop reductions and officer firings, apparently nervous that disgruntled soldiers might cause trouble if they were discharged without proper accommodation and benefits. Still, Medvedev has made his determination to remake Russia's Army clear, refusing to cut budgets even as the rest of the country tightens its belt in the wake of economic crisis. That doesn't necessarily mean that his ambitions are aggressive (though Washington is worried enough about its regional allies that it has offered to build up Georgia's defensive capabilities). But it certainly shows that the Kremlin is serious about establishing its military as a credible deterrent to further NATO expansion—as well as a powerful incentive for neighbors to accept Russia's leadership in the region.

<http://www.newsweek.com/id/223698>

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Bangkok Post – Thailand

US Experts To Visit Pyongyang Before Envoy: Yonhap

21 November 2009

A group of US experts on Korean affairs will visit Pyongyang Saturday for talks with policy makers regarding North Korea's nuclear weapons programme, a news report said.

The trip comes as Stephen Bosworth, US special representative for North Korean policy, is scheduled to visit the communist state on December 8 in order to persuade it to return to six-party nuclear disarmament talks.

Korea Economic Institute (KEI) president Jack Pritchard, director of KEI research and academic affairs Nicole Finneman, and Scott Snyder, director of the Center for US-Korea Policy at the Asia Foundation, will stay in Pyongyang until Tuesday, Yonhap news agency said, quoting diplomatic sources.

"Their trip to North Korea is being made after consultations with the US government," the source told Yonhap.

"They are likely to meet with key North Korean officials concerned with the US and the country's nuclear weapons programme," the source said, adding they will brief the US government on the result.

North Korea quit the six-party talks in April, a month before it tested a second atomic weapon. Its leader Kim Jong-Il said last month he was ready to return to the talks, but only if bilateral discussions with the United States are satisfactory.

The six-nation talks, which began more than six years ago, group the two Koreas, the United States, China, Russia and Japan.

<http://www.bangkokpost.com/news/asia/160659/us-experts-to-visit-pyongyang-before-envoy-yonhap>

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Xinhua News - China

22 November 2009

Japan-U.S. Secret Nuke Pact No More A Secret

TOKYO, Nov. 22 (Xinhua) -- Japan's Foreign Ministry will admit that a secret pact between Japan and the United States, which allows nuclear-laden U.S. military vessels and aircraft to stopover in Japanese territory, does exist according to a statement made by the ministry on Saturday.

Following increasing allegations and mounting evidence that such a pact was in existence, Vice Foreign Minister Mitoji Yabunaka set up a task force in September to conduct a "full and comprehensive" investigation into the allegations.

The task force now headed by Foreign Minister Katsuya Okada and consisting of around fifteen ministry officials, has looked into some 3,200 in-house documents and 3,700 documents from the Japanese Embassy in Washington since Sept. 25. During Okada's in-house probe, documents have been found that corroborate the existence of the secret nuclear agreement, according to sources close to the matter.

Coupled with this finding, a former vice foreign minister recently came forward attesting to the Japan-U.S. clandestine understanding, saying that he was privy to the minutes of the meeting in which the secret pact was made in 1960.

"I saw them. I remember we looked into them after something happened," the former top official, who served in key Foreign Ministry posts in the 1980s and 1990s, said on condition of anonymity.

The ex-official added he does not remember the exact incident that led him to view the minutes.

The minutes in question are currently being kept by the U.S. government, according to declassified U.S. documents.

"The probe is now in the final stage, and we will announce the outcome in January," Okada said Saturday, in a brief statement devoid of any details and negating Vice Foreign Minister Mitoji Yabunaka's pledge to issue a detailed report on his findings in November.

OUSTED LDP IN "CYCLE OF DENIAL"

Under the 1960 bilateral security treaty between the two nations, Washington is required to consult with Tokyo before any nuclear weapons are brought into Japan, however Japan's Foreign Ministry has now indicated that its recent probe into the documents has revealed that stopovers of U.S. military vessels or aircraft with nuclear weapons are not subject to prior consultation.

According to former Japanese ministers and top bureaucrats at the Foreign Ministry involved with handling the deal, in revising the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty in 1960 the two allies also made a secret agreement under which Tokyo would give tacit approval to Washington on the stopover of U.S. military aircraft or vessels carrying nuclear weapons in Japanese territory.

Thus, Washington construed that any prior consultation with Tokyo would only need to be made in the case of the deployment of nuclear weapons on land or in the air and that stopovers of aircraft and vessels with such weapons were not bound by prior consultation.

According to former top ministry officials of the administration of then Prime Minister Nobusuke Kishi, who inked the revised security pact, the Prime Minister accepted the U.S. interpretation of the new deal.

Hence it's could be deemed reasonable to assume that in light of the loophole in the 1960 treaty and amid mounting testimony from former high-level Japanese ministers, that such stopovers could have frequently been made by U.S. military vessels, with nuclear payloads, over the past half-century.

Although the secret deal itself has already become known to the public by declassification of U.S. diplomatic documents in the late 1990s, the former Japanese government led by the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), has consistently denied the existence of such a secret deal between the two countries, saying, "As we have never faced demands for prior consultations, we have no other choice than determining that nuclear (weapons) have not been brought into Japan."

Suffice to say if Washington has been acting under the assumption that stopovers were exempt from needing prior clearance, then it's of no wonder the ruling LDP government(s) at the time claimed that nuclear weapons were not being brought into Japanese territory by U.S. military vessels -- but the facts, including recent testimony, suggest Japan's previous administrations have, for a long time, known otherwise.

Four former top Japanese ministry officials who have all served as vice foreign minister (the most senior bureaucratic post at the ministry) have all recently acknowledged that a secret pact has been in existence for decades, although perhaps the most compelling testimony comes from a former Foreign Ministry administrative vice minister, Ryohei Murata in a well-publicized interview with a Japanese national newspaper.

Ryohei Murata, a former Foreign Ministry administrative vice minister, told the Mainichi newspaper that Japanese and U.S. governments have had a secret accord whereby Japan would tacitly approve port calls and passage through Japanese territorial waters by U.S. warships carrying nuclear weapons.

Murata, who served in the position from July 1987 to August 1989, said the accord was reached in 1960, when the two countries renewed the bilateral security treaty.

Murata's testimony, that flies in the face of repeated LDP refutation of the matter, marks the first time a former administrative vice foreign minister has gone on record as saying such a deal has existed.

"My predecessor told me to convey the contents of the secret accord to the minister, in my capacity as the administrative vice minister."

Murata said that he did discuss the contents of the pact with the foreign minister at the time.

TREADING ON EGGSHELLS

Following the Foreign Ministry's admission Saturday, the ruling Democratic Party of Japan now has the delicate task of dealing with the Japanese public who, for decades, were led to believe, through such acts as the LDP's continued "cycle of denial," that their country's three non-nuclear principles were being upheld by their government.

From the time of the decimation of both Hiroshima and Nagasaki prefectures at the end of WWII, to the present day, Japanese public sentiment has become increasingly opposed to the presence of nuclear weapons on Japanese soil, in its waters and its skies and indeed the Japanese people are, generally speaking, staunch supporters of nuclear non-proliferation globally.

The three principles of not possessing, manufacturing or permitting nuclear weapons into Japanese territory, were first outlined by Prime Minister Eisaku Sato in a speech to the House of Representatives in 1967, amid negotiations over the return of Okinawa from the U.S. The Diet formally adopted the principles in 1971.

Since then every prime minister of Japan has publicly reaffirmed the "Three Non-Nuclear Principles" as outlined by Sato and now Prime Minister Yukio Hatoyama and the ruling DPJ must tread a very thin line between holding former administrations accountable for deceiving generations of anti-nuclear citizens and not further straining ties with an already testy Washington.

If the DPJ fail to address and amend the 1960 security treaty between Japan and the U.S. in an open and transparent manner, then the newly-elected party who has vowed to chart a more "politically independent" course that is less reliant on military and economic ties with the U.S., will be seen as toothless -- as has been the case with previous LDP administrations, whose leaders have been caricatured as Washington's puppets in the political columns of respected broadsheets.

Analysts have commented that Washington is having a tough time adjusting to Japan's new political ideologies after half a century of almost unbroken LDP rule, which put the Japan-U.S. alliance at the core of its diplomacy.

Further adding to the strain on the DPJ's embryonic relationship with Washington and despite President Obama's recent goodwill visit to Japan, during which he reaffirmed the importance of the U.S.-Japan alliance, is the DPJ's re-examination of the 2006 U.S.-Japan Roadmap for Realignment and Implementation.

This plan outlines a wholesale strategic repositioning of U.S. forces in Okinawa. The Japanese government are seeking to relocate a key air facility outside of Okinawa, or even outside Japan to lessen base-hosting burdens on the local population -- a proposal cited by U.S. officials as potentially "testing ties with Japan's new government."

Added to this the fact that Japan's Defense Minister Toshimi Kitazawa has recently stated his intentions to terminate the Japanese Maritime Self-Defense Force's refueling missions in the Indian Ocean, in support of U.S.-led antiterrorism operations in and around Afghanistan, and will pull out its two naval ships when their current mandate expires in January, and the potential for increased diplomatic tension in the near future between Japan and the U.S. is more than tenable, according to analysts.

The U.S. is adamant that its role as a nuclear deterrent in the Asia-Pacific region is paramount to its own national security and those of the region it purports to protect and thus has called for bilateral security relations between the two nations to not be damaged or compromised in any way.

In October, the U.S. Secretary of Defense and Pentagon's top-official Robert Gates resolutely warned Japan during a visit to Tokyo that it should not let its ongoing probe into an alleged secret Japan-U.S. nuclear pact, damage bilateral relations or undermine the U.S. nuclear deterrence in the area.

The U.S. defense ministry has stated that the secret pact issue is Japan's "domestic matter," however if the DPJ's recent maneuvers away from U.S. military mandates are anything to go by, it would be reasonable to surmise that the secret pact issue, far from being a simple domestic matter, may call for the U.S. to respond to resolute diplomatic action from the DPJ, itself now under immense public scrutiny and pressure to ratify Japan's original commitment to its three non-nuclear principles, as outlined in 1967 -- a commitment that has united a nation and inspired a myriad of denuclearization initiatives across the globe.

http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2009-11/22/content_12520430.htm

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Times of India (New Delhi)

November 23, 2009

Night Launch For N-capable Agni-II Today

By Rajat Pandit, Times News Network

New Delhi -- India is all set to test its 2,000-km-plus Agni-II missile from the Wheeler Island off Orissa coast again on Monday. Significantly, the nuclear-capable missile will be launched for the first time during night in a major step towards making it fully operational in the Strategic Forces Command (SFC).

Defence officials said AgniII's 'user training trial' was likely to be conducted around 8pm on Monday to give the necessary confidence to the armed forces that the twostage, solid-fuelled missile can be fired whenever required.

Incidentally, DRDO is also working on MIRV (multiple independently targetable re-entry vehicles) technology for the Agni series of ballistic missiles. An 'MIRVed' missile can carry a bunch of nuclear warheads in a single payload, each of which can hit different targets along separate trajectories.

Such missiles can conceivably overwhelm even robust ballistic missile defences of an enemy. MIRV technology is considered important for a country like India, which has a clear no first-use nuclear doctrine but warns that nuclear retaliation to an enemy first-strike will be 'massive and designed to inflict unacceptable damage'.

Pakistan, with the active help of China and North Korea, has surged ahead of India in the missile arena. Some US nuclear experts recently estimated that Pakistan has more nuclear warheads than India. As per their estimates, it has 70-90 warheads compared to 60-80 of India.

China is in a different league altogether, brandishing as it does ICBMs (intercontinental ballistic missiles) like Dong Feng-31A (11,200-km range) and SLBMs (submarinelaunched ballistic missiles) like JL-2 (7,200-km range).

But coming back to the Agni-II test, it will take place only if all the pre-launch final checks go smoothly as planned on Monday. The missile, which is around 20-metre tall and weighs 17 tonnes, was earlier to be tested on November 6 but it was called off at the last moment due to some glitches.

Even Agni-II's last test on May 19 was not fully successful. Consequently, the only ballistic missiles which can be said to be "100% operational" at present are the short-range Prithvi missile (150-350 km) and, to a certain extent, the 700km-range Agni-I. The fourth test of 3,500-km Agni-III, which will give India the strategic capability to hit targets deep inside China once it becomes fully operational by around 2012, will take place early next year.

India's most ambitious strategic missile Agni-V will be ready for its first test only in end-2010 or early-2011. With a proposed range of 5,000-km, Agni-V will have near ICBM capabilities (strike range in excess of 5,500-km) and give India's "dissuasive deterrence posture" against China some much-needed muscle.

<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Night-launch-for-N-capable-Agni-II-today-/articleshow/5258841.cms>

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Hindustan Times – India

N-weapons Falling In Wrong Hands An Area Of Concern: Antony

Press Trust Of India

New Delhi, November 23, 2009

With increasing terror attacks in Pakistan raising concerns over the safety of its nuclear arsenal, Defence Minister A K Antony on Monday said the threat of these weapons falling in wrong hands was an "area of serious concern" and its consequences would be "unimaginable".

Noting that there was scarcely any country which was not affected by terrorism, Antony said the recent terror-related incidents in Pakistan and Afghanistan have "thrust South Asia into a sub-conventional conflict and instability."

"Threat of nuclear weapons falling in wrong hands remains an area of serious concern and consequences of such a situation are unimaginable," he said while addressing a seminar 'Changing Nature of Conflict: Trends and Responses'.

Speaking on the occasion, Army Chief General Deepak Kapoor said South Asia along with West Asia has emerged as "one of the epicentres of conflict and instability."

The Army Chief warned that the situation would "further worsen since there was neither any political or diplomatic unity nor any common ground to build a consensus to fight this new war."

"Territorial disputes, provocation by proxy wars, religious fundamentalism, radical extremism, ethnic tensions and socio-economic disparities are the hallmarks of South Asia," he added.

<http://www.hindustantimes.com/News-Feed/india/N-weapons-falling-in-wrong-hands-an-area-of-concern-Antony/Article1-479267.aspx>

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Economic Times – India

Agni-II Missile Fails To Clear Night Trial

24 November 2009, Times News Network

BALASORE: India's nuclear-capable intermediate range Agni-II missile, test-fired for the first time after sunset on Monday, reportedly failed to get the desired results.

The Army test-fired the surface-to-surface Intermediate Range Ballistic Missile (IRBM) from the Integrated Test Range (ITR) from Wheeler's Island, Bhadrak district, around 7.50pm. "The liftoff and the first stage separation was smooth. But it faltered just before the second stage separation and behaved erratically, deviating from its coordinated path. Further analysis is on to ascertain the cause," said a source.

The entire trajectory of Monday's trial was tracked by a battery of sophisticated radars, telemetry observation stations, electro-optic instruments and a naval ship.

The launch, originally scheduled in the first week of this month, was deferred due to some technical snags in its pneumatic system. Though the snags were rectified, another glitch surfaced during Monday's test, leading to the fiasco, the source claimed.

The nuclear capable 2,000-km-plus range missile has a length of 20 meters, a diameter of one meter, weighs 17 tonnes and can carry a payload of around 1,000 kg. It was first tested on April 11, 1999.

The test launch was significant from India's strategic point of view because for the first time since the beginning of DRDO's missile development programme, a missile was put under trial during night. The user trial was conducted by Army officials while scientists from DRDO were present to provide necessary logistical support.

<http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/Agni-II-missile-fails-to-clear-night-trial/articleshow/5263148.cms>

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New York Daily News

EDITORIAL

Played For Fools Again: U.S. Keeps Falling For Iran's Nuclear Three-card Monte Game

Sunday, November 22nd, 2009

Surprise, surprise. The cheater is cheating.

The regime that has been obsessed with obtaining nuclear weapons is obsessed with obtaining nuclear weapons.

The nation that has spent years deceiving the United Nations about its intentions and capabilities is deceiving the UN about its intentions and capabilities.

This dog-bites-man story is news. Very dangerous news.

The latest installment comes courtesy of Iran's foreign minister, who made it official last week that the Ahmadinejad-Khamenei government is refusing the international community's perfectly sane request that Iran send its partially enriched uranium abroad.

The purpose of the request was to ensure that Iran's professed aim of generating civilian nuclear power is satisfied, while its officially disavowed goal of getting nuclear weapons is scuttled.

A request that Iran has summarily spat on.

Add to this the recent report from the International Atomic Energy Agency, the UN's nuclear watchdog, which last month had a first look at Iran's previously secret uranium processing site - the one tunneled into the side of a mountain near the town of Qom.

After its inspection, the IAEA "still had questions about the purpose for which the facility had been intended and how it fit into Iran's nuclear program."

Meaning: Iran's insistence that this was just part of a civilian nuclear apparatus simply does not pass muster.

There's more. Based on the facility's design - on what's there and what's missing, and an understanding of the science - the IAEA had strong reason to believe that Iran has additional secret nuclear sites. It has pressed Iran to disclose them.

When? In that favorite word of UN types: "soon." All this begs the question: When do you stop listening to a pathological liar? When does talk of "consequences" turn into consequences?

Well, President Obama, when does it?

http://www.nydailynews.com/opinions/2009/11/22/2009-11-22_played_for_fools_again_us_keeps_falling_for_irans_nuclear_threecard_monte_game.html

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The Arizona Republic
OPINION

Bioweapons Pose As Much Danger As Nuclear Arms

November 22, 2009

In the final days of his Asian tour, President Barack Obama worked hard on his most consistent international issue, nuclear-arms control, this time with tough-minded South Korean President Lee Myung-bak by his side.

Earlier, Obama had attempted to shore up support in Tokyo and Beijing for pressuring North Korea into backing off its nuclear program.

We'll see what fruit that effort bears. Regardless, the Asian experience underscores Obama's overarching interest in the threat of nuclear weapons, a concern every rational person shares.

But there is another threat out there - one that is more immediately threatening than nukes - that the administration does not appear to be giving anywhere near the weight it deserves.

Considering the horrific threat that biological-terror weapons may pose to this country, the president would do well to begin citing bioweapons as a threat at least equal to that of nukes. Perhaps Existential Threat A and A1. Bioterror does not appear to be on the main presidential menu now.

The very first commission report, issued to then-President-elect Obama, arrived two months before he took office, on Dec. 2, 2008. In it, the Commission on the Prevention of Weapons of Mass Destruction Proliferation and Terrorism gave co-equal status to the potential horror that both nuclear and biological weapons could wreak in the hands of terrorists.

The "WMD commission," as it is known, famously predicted that unless the world acts soon and decisively, "it is more likely than not that a weapon of mass destruction will be used in a terrorist attack somewhere in the world by the end of 2013."

It is also the commission whose members learned about the murderous terror bombing of the Islamabad Marriott Hotel in Pakistan . . . while en route to that hotel. They know up close about their subject.

And here was the commission's conclusion regarding biological-terror weapons:

"The commission . . . believes that terrorists are *more likely* (our emphasis) to be able to obtain and use a biological weapon than a nuclear weapon. The commission believes that the U.S. government needs to move more aggressively to limit the proliferation of biological weapons and reduce the prospect of a bioterror attack."

In a progress report released Oct. 21, the commission warned that actions taken thus far "have not kept pace" with the increasing capabilities and agility of those who would do us harm.

The commission cited studies showing an attack dispersing just a kilogram or two of anthrax from a crop duster "could kill more Americans than died in World War II" and cost nearly \$2 trillion to clean up. "Yet the nation's level of preparedness for dealing with the threat of bioterrorism remains far lower than that of the nuclear threat."

President Obama has affirmed the dangers of nuclear proliferation again and again.

He has done so with his "reset button" diplomacy with Russia, with efforts to engage Iran and, now, with his nascent Asian strategy directed against North Korea. He needs to raise containment of bioterrorism to a similar plane.

Obama's efforts to reduce or forestall the nuclear arsenals of nation-states is laudable, certainly. And it has an anti-terror component - terrorists, after all, can steal or buy nukes from reckless or careless countries.

But it is not the only threat we face as a nation.

As the WMD commission contends, it may not even be the most imminent threat on the near horizon.

<http://www.azcentral.com/arizonarepublic/opinions/articles/2009/11/22/20091122sun1-22.html>

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