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New York Times

January 5, 2008

Pg. 5

North Korea Says Earlier Disclosure Was Enough

By Choe Sang-hun and Steven Lee Myers

SEOUL, South Korea — North Korea said Friday that it had already explained enough about its nuclear programs to meet a deadline for declaring its nuclear activities, saying the information was in a nuclear declaration it prepared in November and gave to the United States.

The statement from the North Korean Foreign Ministry on Friday was carried by the Korean Central News Agency, North Korea's voice to the outside world. It was the country's first official pronouncement after it missed a Dec. 31 deadline to disable its main nuclear complex at Yongbyon, north of Pyongyang, and, according to other nations

involved in six-nation talks, failed to provide a full list of its nuclear activities, including weapons, facilities and fissile material.

The statement said that North Korea had already conducted “enough discussions” with the United States officials after they demanded more negotiations on its November draft declaration. Using the abbreviation of the North’s official name, the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, the Foreign Ministry said, “As far as the nuclear declaration on which wrong opinion is being built up by some quarters is concerned, the D.P.R.K. has done what it should do.”

In Washington, officials disputed North Korea’s claims, saying the government in Pyongyang had not yet provided a declaration. They muted their criticism, however, and said that issue had not reached an impasse.

“The North Koreans know what’s expected of them and what the rest of the parties are looking for, and that is a full and complete and accurate declaration of their nuclear activity,” said Tony Fratto, a White House spokesman. “They know that.”

The chief American negotiator, Assistant Secretary of State Christopher R. Hill, left Washington on Friday en route to China, where the status of North Korea’s adherence to its commitments to dismantle its nuclear weapons program will be the focus of a new round of negotiations. An administration official, speaking on condition of anonymity because of the delicacy of the situation, played down the North Korean statement, saying it followed a pattern of public posturing in advance of new talks.

Since the passing of the deadline, agreed on in October, the United States, South Korea and Japan have criticized the North and called for details on how much plutonium it had produced at Yongbyon, whether it had provided nuclear assistance to Syria and what it had done with tons of aluminum tubes it had bought from Russia, the type that could be used to build centrifuges to enrich uranium.

The State Department’s spokesman, Sean McCormack, said that the United States and the other countries involved in the talks had not reacted more strongly to the missed deadline because foreign nuclear experts were continuing their work to dismantle the Yongbyon plant, hoping through that work to learn more about aspects of North Korea’s nuclear program.

“We’re breaking new ground here,” Mr. McCormack said. “This hasn’t been done before.”

Earlier in the day, North Korea also renewed its threat to bolster its “war deterrent,” a phrase it uses for its nuclear arsenal. The North, with one of the world’s largest standing armies, usually threatens to bolster its deterrent when it feels international pressure in crucial negotiations.

North Korea has acknowledged building bombs with plutonium, but has denied pursuing an alternative weapons program using enriched uranium.

In the October deal that North Korea struck with the United States, South Korea, Japan, China and Russia, it promised to disable its nuclear facilities and give a full list of its nuclear programs in exchange for one million tons of heavy fuel oil, or its economic equivalent, and diplomatic concessions.

It has so far received 150,000 tons of oil and 5,010 tons of steel products to renovate its aging power plants.

On Friday, North Korea accused the United States and other countries of delaying the fulfillment of their commitments to provide the aid and remove the North from American terrorism and trade blacklists.

“We still hold hope that the Oct. 3 agreement will be implemented smoothly if all countries participating in the six-party talks make sincere efforts based on the principle of action for action,” the statement said.

North Korea said the disablement work at Yongbyon was “completed within the technologically possible scope as of Dec. 31.”

But since the aid delivery “has not been done even 50 percent,” the North had to “adjust the speed of the nuclear disablement process,” it said. The work of unloading spent fuel rods from the North’s nuclear reactor at Yongbyon, a crucial part of the disablement, will take an additional 100 days, it said.

Choe Sang-hun reported from Seoul, and Steven Lee Myers from Washington.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2008/01/05/world/asia/05korea.html>

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London Sunday Telegraph

January 6, 2008

Israel Warns Of Iranian Missile Peril For Europe

By Carolynne Wheeler, in Jerusalem

Iran is developing nuclear missiles capable of reaching beyond its enemies in the Middle East to Europe, President George Bush will be warned when he visits Israel and the Palestinian territories for the first time since entering the White House.

A senior Israeli cabinet minister has told The Sunday Telegraph that his government is convinced Iran is intent on becoming the first Muslim superpower, with weapons capable of striking not only at Israel but also Egypt, Libya, Saudi Arabia as well as Greece and other parts of south-eastern Europe.

Avi Dichter, the Israeli minister of public security, will warn President George Bush about Iran's nuclear capabilities. The Israeli government is furious about the recent US intelligence assessment which concluded that Iran had suspended its nuclear weapons programme in 2003, and hopes to convince the American leader that work is continuing on a bomb that poses a widespread threat.

In an exclusive interview, Avi Dichter, the Israeli minister of public security, warned that Iran was developing missiles with a range of more than 1,250 miles.

"Iran is a big, strong rich country, and that competition in leading the Muslim world is well-known to all Arab and Muslim countries," he said.

"Once you can reach with your missile double the distance between Iran and Israel, it means there is some farther target. Is it Egypt? Libya? Saudi Arabia? A European country?"

The Israeli intelligence community insists there is no proof that Iran has abandoned its weapons programme indefinitely.

Mr Dichter said it was working to develop missiles with a range that suggested ambitions beyond threatening Israel. He said Israeli officials would warn Mr Bush that failing to take action would have serious consequences beyond the Middle East, where Iran was funding groups, including Hezbollah in Lebanon and Hamas in Gaza.

The Sunday Telegraph revealed last year how Gulf countries, including Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, were spending billions of pounds on upgrading their armed forces to contain the growing threat from Iran.

Mr Bush, who is due to arrive on Wednesday, hopes to make progress on the Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations launched at the Annapolis summit in Maryland in late November.

But talks have made little or no progress since, with Israeli officials accusing the Palestinians of not doing enough to dismantle militant groups.

Instead, Israel has prepared a long list of concerns for Mr Bush, including those over the US intelligence estimate and the need for peace talks with Syria.

Mr Dichter said Israel wanted to bring Syria out of the Iranian "axis" of influence towards a peace treaty, which would mirror Israel's 1979 peace agreement with Egypt.

Peace with Syria would reduce Hezbollah's influence, force Hamas's leader-in-exile Khaled Meshaal, who now lives in Damascus, to relocate, and improve Israel's image and standing in the Arab world.

Mr Bush is expected to spend two to three days meeting separately with Mahmoud Abbas, the Palestinian authority president, and Ehud Olmert, the Israeli prime minister, before going to Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states.

Mr Dichter said, however, that there was almost no hope of an Israeli-Palestinian peace accord this year, and that a major operation against Hamas and other Islamist groups in Gaza would eventually be needed.

He added that the Palestinian authority's loss of Gaza to Hamas in June showed it was not ready to take full control of security in an eventual state, and that Gaza must be brought back under control before a Palestinian state is created.

The Palestinian authority has deployed hundreds of extra troops in Nablus and Bethlehem as the start of a crackdown on militant groups, and Mr Dichter's Palestinian counterpart, the interior minister Abdel-Razek al-Yahya, said last week it had dismantled the al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigade, a violent Fatah offshoot.

Palestinians also argue, however, that their efforts to crack down on militant groups are hampered by Israel's refusal to permit them to be properly equipped.

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/main.jhtml;jsessionid=STP0HDZYRWK3ZQFIQMGCFFGAVCBQUIV0?xml=/news/2008/01/06/wisrael106.xml>

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Washington Post

January 6, 2008

Pg. 15

Poland

Government Undecided On U.S. Missile Shield

Poland is in no rush to decide on hosting a U.S. anti-missile base before U.S. elections, because the next White House administration could scuttle the project, Poland's foreign minister said Saturday.

Warsaw has been in talks with Washington on plans to host ground-based interceptor missiles in Poland, part of a project to protect Europe against attacks from what the Bush administration calls "rogue states," such as Iran and North Korea.

But negotiations have stalled since Donald Tusk took over as Poland's prime minister in November.

"The worst-case scenario would be one in which Poland agrees to the shield, shoulders the political costs and then the base isn't built because the government in the U.S. has changed," Foreign Minister Radoslaw Sikorski said in a newspaper interview.

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/01/05/AR2008010502491.html>

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Los Angeles Times

January 6, 2008

Pg. 1

How The U.S. Seeks To Avert Nuclear Terror

Scientists scan cities. Response teams are ready. And if there were a lethal device, experts would work on tracing the source.

By Ralph Vartabedian, Los Angeles Times Staff Writer

About every three days, unknown to most Americans, an elite team of federal scientists hits the streets in the fight against nuclear terrorism.

The deployments are part of an effort since 2001 to ratchet up the nation's defenses. More than two dozen specialized teams have been positioned across the nation to respond to threats of nuclear terrorism, and as many 2,000 scientists and bomb experts participate in the effort. Spending on the program has more than doubled since it was launched.

And an evolving national policy aims to create a system of nuclear forensics, in which scientific analysis could quickly identify the source of a nuclear attack or attempted attack. A key report on nuclear forensics is due next month.

The counter-terrorism efforts are becoming routine. Scientists in specially equipped helicopters and airplanes use radiation detectors to scan cities for signs of weapons. They blend into crowds at major sporting events, wearing backpacks containing instruments that can identify plutonium or highly enriched uranium.

So far, they have not encountered a terrorist. Near the Las Vegas Strip, they investigated a homeless person who somehow had picked up a piece of radioactive material. On the streets of Manhattan, a hot-dog vendor fresh from a medical test triggered a policeman's radioactivity sensor.

But the teams have not become complacent. If the many layers of federal defense against nuclear smuggling break down, these unarmed weapons designers and physicists, along with experts from the FBI, could be the last hope of staving off a catastrophic attack.

They are supposed to rush up to a ticking nuclear explosive (or a "dirty" bomb, which would disperse radioactive material) and defuse it before it's too late -- a situation often depicted by Hollywood that seems less fictional every year.

"After everything else fails, we come in," said Deborah A. Wilber, the scientist who directs the Office of Emergency Response at the Energy Department's National Nuclear Security Administration. "I don't believe it is a question of if it will happen. It is a question of when."

Since the attacks of 2001, the office has created 26 rapid-response units around the nation.

If a device were located, two other specialized teams would rush to the scene, one from a base in Albuquerque, where a fueled jetliner is on 24-hour alert. Another FBI team would depart from rural Virginia.

The teams would first attempt to disable a bomb's electrical firing system and then quickly transfer the weapon to the Nevada desert. There, the bomb would be lowered into the G Tunnel, a 5,000-foot-deep shaft, where a crew of scientists and FBI agents would attempt to disassemble the device behind steel blast doors, logging any evidence.

About 1,000 nuclear weapons scientists and 500 to 1,000 more FBI professionals participate in the nation's emergency response effort, though not full time. Increased investment in the project reflects an acknowledgment that the nation remains vulnerable to nuclear terrorism.

But the effort is also reaching for something greater than defense: a Cold War style of deterrence.

The scientists are also experts in the rapidly evolving field of nuclear forensics, which aims to track nuclear materials to their country of origin. Even if a bomb detonates, fallout can be analyzed to identify the terrorists and their state sponsors. A retaliatory strike could be the response.

The idea is to force other nations to take better care of their own nuclear fuels or else find themselves in the cross hairs of the U.S. nuclear arsenal.

A major technical and policy analysis of this approach -- the report that is due next month -- is being conducted by some of the nation's top nuclear weapons experts, sponsored by the American Assn. for the Advancement of Science and led by Stanford University physicist Michael M. May.

In the meantime, the United States is retrieving and locking down nuclear fuels abroad, has created a line of radiation detectors at foreign and domestic ports, and has increased intelligence efforts.

If those and other measures fail, the emergency response teams are a last hope, but one nobody should rely on, said Charles B. Curtis, president of the Nuclear Threat Initiative, which pushes for stronger efforts to prevent nuclear terrorism.

Intercepting a device "is a very, very, very difficult problem, but not impossible," said Curtis, a former Energy Department deputy secretary.

Vahid Majidi, a nuclear weapons chemist and head of the FBI Weapons of Mass Destruction Directorate, seemed more confident. Asked how good his chances would be to find a nuclear bomb in Manhattan with 24 hours' warning, he said, "Quite reasonable."

He continued: "When you think of issues only as a technical problem, you only think of technical capability. I am not sitting on my hands waiting for some detector to go off. We will use every asset at our disposal. Technology is a very small portion of what we do."

The full capability of the teams is classified. Bruce Goodwin, nuclear weapons chief at Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory, said the teams now had "some really remarkable tools that can prevent nuclear function," suggesting a device that can foil the arming system or perhaps even neutralize its basic operation.

It is assumed that any terrorist bomb would have booby traps and anti-tampering devices, perhaps designed by scientists who studied at the same universities that trained U.S. weapons scientists. Emergency response scientists run exercises in which one team designs a booby-trapped bomb and another team tries to disarm it.

A weapon stolen from a national stockpile might pose fewer problems than a makeshift terrorist device.

"We know a lot about other people's weapons," said Curtis. "They will tolerate a greater intrusive disarming strategy than an improvised nuclear device."

History has some unfortunate lessons. In 1980, Energy Department experts were sent to help disarm a 1,000-pound conventional bomb placed by an extortionist at Harvey's Resort Hotel in Stateline, Nev. The bomb had extraordinary anti-tampering devices that prevented the teams from disassembling, disarming or even moving it.

So the bomb experts decided to fire a shaped charge into the arming mechanism, hoping to sever it from the rest of the bomb before it could detonate. After the hotel was evacuated, the team triggered the charge from a safe distance. The strategy failed and the bomb badly damaged the hotel.

But today's level of expertise would easily have solved the problem, said Joseph J. Krol Jr., a retired Navy rear admiral who heads the National Nuclear Security Administration's Office of Emergency Operations, to which Wilber's emergency response office belongs.

"We are very much better prepared," Krol said. "How we operated then and how we operate now is like night and day."

Indeed, Philip E. Coyle, a former deputy director at Lawrence Livermore, recalled that when he served on the emergency teams in the 1970s and 1980s, he carried a card in his wallet to present at an airport in an emergency so he could order airlines to take him where he needed to go.

"It sounded good, but I always wondered whether it would work," he said. Now the teams travel by government aircraft and other federal vehicles.

A successful terrorist nuclear attack would trigger the so-called national response plan.

Many federal agencies would swing into action, including the Environmental Protection Agency, the Defense Department, the Department of Homeland Security and the Department of Justice, as would myriad obscure offices unknown to the vast majority of Americans. For example, the National Atmospheric Release Advisory Center, based at the Livermore lab, would run advanced computation models of fallout patterns to provide evacuation plans for potentially millions of people.

Whether so many federal agencies could work together in the chaos of a nuclear attack, all while coordinating with state and local officials, is a matter of grave concern in Congress. But Majidi and Krol say extensive planning and exercises have clarified the lines of authority.

Communications would be a major undertaking.

"If you tell 100 million people to go east, 25 million will go west because they don't trust the government," said Jay C. Davis, a retired weapons scientist who is working on the forensics study.

The forensics study is trying to assess how authoritative the U.S. could be in attributing a nuclear device to a particular source and in making its case to the American public and the rest of the world.

Davis said it was hoped that nuclear forensics could determine the size of a detonation within one hour; the sophistication of the bomb design within six hours; how the fuel was enriched within 72 hours; and the peculiar details of national design -- "Does this look like a Russian, a Chinese or a Pakistani device, or something we have never seen before?" -- within a week.

What next? That part of the strategy is still evolving. Retaliation is one option that counter-terrorism officials have suggested in congressional testimony. Rep. Adam Schiff (D-Pasadena), who has sponsored legislation to increase funding for nuclear forensics, suggested that any policy had to be flexible.

"It would be left to the administration in office to determine what the repercussions would be," he said.

Deterrence might depend simply on the perception that the U.S. could respond with a counterstrike. But if nuclear fuel were traced back to Russia, would the U.S. start a nuclear exchange? And what if the nuclear materials came from the U.S.?

Of course, those on the front lines hope such a quandary never has to be confronted.

The scientists and engineers -- who say anonymity is their only defense -- talk about their jobs with marked calm.

"I told my wife that I have a job that might require me to leave home in the middle of the night and I won't be able to say where I'm going," said Jerry, one team member. "Well, that didn't set too well with her. But she works in the Pentagon, and was right next to the corridor that took the hit in the 9/11 attack. So we share what this service means."

<http://www.latimes.com/news/science/la-na-nuke6jan06.1.4601320.story?track=rss>

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London Sunday Times

January 6, 2008

For Sale: West's Deadly Nuclear Secrets

A WHISTLEBLOWER has made a series of extraordinary claims about how corrupt government officials allowed Pakistan and other states to steal nuclear weapons secrets.

Sibel Edmonds, a 37-year-old former Turkish language translator for the FBI, listened into hundreds of sensitive intercepted conversations while based at the agency's Washington field office.

She approached The Sunday Times last month after reading about an Al-Qaeda terrorist who had revealed his role in training some of the 9/11 hijackers while he was in Turkey.

Edmonds described how foreign intelligence agents had enlisted the support of US officials to acquire a network of moles in sensitive military and nuclear institutions.

Among the hours of covert tape recordings, she says she heard evidence that one well-known senior official in the US State Department was being paid by Turkish agents in Washington who were selling the information on to black market buyers, including Pakistan.

The name of the official -- who has held a series of top government posts -- is known to The Sunday Times. He strongly denies the claims.

However, Edmonds said: "He was aiding foreign operatives against US interests by passing them highly classified information, not only from the State Department but also from the Pentagon, in exchange for money, position and political objectives."

She claims that the FBI was also gathering evidence against senior Pentagon officials -- including household names -- who were aiding foreign agents.

"If you made public all the information that the FBI have on this case, you will see very high-level people going through criminal trials," she said.

Her story shows just how much the West was infiltrated by foreign states seeking nuclear secrets. It illustrates how western government officials turned a blind eye to, or were even helping, countries such as Pakistan acquire bomb technology.

The wider nuclear network has been monitored for many years by a joint Anglo-American intelligence effort. But rather than shut it down, investigations by law enforcement bodies such as the FBI and Britain's Revenue & Customs have been aborted to preserve diplomatic relations.

Edmonds, a fluent speaker of Turkish and Farsi, was recruited by the FBI in the aftermath of the September 11 attacks. Her previous claims about incompetence inside the FBI have been well documented in America.

She has given evidence to closed sessions of Congress and the 9/11 commission, but many of the key points of her testimony have remained secret. She has now decided to divulge some of that information after becoming disillusioned with the US authorities' failure to act.

One of Edmonds's main roles in the FBI was to translate thousands of hours of conversations by Turkish diplomatic and political targets that had been covertly recorded by the agency.

A backlog of tapes had built up, dating back to 1997, which were needed for an FBI investigation into links between the Turks and Pakistani, Israeli and US targets. Before she left the FBI in 2002 she heard evidence that pointed to money laundering, drug imports and attempts to acquire nuclear and conventional weapons technology.

“What I found was damning,” she said. “While the FBI was investigating, several arms of the government were shielding what was going on.”

The Turks and Israelis had planted “moles” in military and academic institutions which handled nuclear technology. Edmonds says there were several transactions of nuclear material every month, with the Pakistanis being among the eventual buyers. “The network appeared to be obtaining information from every nuclear agency in the United States,” she said.

They were helped, she says, by the high-ranking State Department official who provided some of their moles – mainly PhD students – with security clearance to work in sensitive nuclear research facilities. These included the Los Alamos nuclear laboratory in New Mexico, which is responsible for the security of the US nuclear deterrent. In one conversation Edmonds heard the official arranging to pick up a \$15,000 cash bribe. The package was to be dropped off at an agreed location by someone in the Turkish diplomatic community who was working for the network.

The Turks, she says, often acted as a conduit for the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), Pakistan’s spy agency, because they were less likely to attract suspicion. Venues such as the American Turkish Council in Washington were used to drop off the cash, which was picked up by the official.

Edmonds said: “I heard at least three transactions like this over a period of 2½ years. There are almost certainly more.”

The Pakistani operation was led by General Mahmoud Ahmad, then the ISI chief.

Intercepted communications showed Ahmad and his colleagues stationed in Washington were in constant contact with attachés in the Turkish embassy.

Intelligence analysts say that members of the ISI were close to Al-Qaeda before and after 9/11. Indeed, Ahmad was accused of sanctioning a \$100,000 wire payment to Mohammed Atta, one of the 9/11 hijackers, immediately before the attacks.

The results of the espionage were almost certainly passed to Abdul Qadeer Khan, the Pakistani nuclear scientist. Khan was close to Ahmad and the ISI. While running Pakistan’s nuclear programme, he became a millionaire by selling atomic secrets to Libya, Iran and North Korea. He also used a network of companies in America and Britain to obtain components for a nuclear programme.

Khan caused an alert among western intelligence agencies when his aides met Osama Bin Laden. “We were aware of contact between A Q Khan’s people and Al-Qaeda,” a former CIA officer said last week. “There was absolute panic when we initially discovered this, but it kind of panned out in the end.”

It is likely that the nuclear secrets stolen from the United States would have been sold to a number of rogue states by Khan.

Edmonds was later to see the scope of the Pakistani connections when it was revealed that one of her fellow translators at the FBI was the daughter of a Pakistani embassy official who worked for Ahmad. The translator was given top secret clearance despite protests from FBI investigators.

Edmonds says packages containing nuclear secrets were delivered by Turkish operatives, using their cover as members of the diplomatic and military community, to contacts at the Pakistani embassy in Washington.

Following 9/11, a number of the foreign operatives were taken in for questioning by the FBI on suspicion that they knew about or somehow aided the attacks.

Edmonds said the State Department official once again proved useful. “A primary target would call the official and point to names on the list and say, ‘We need to get them out of the US because we can’t afford for them to spill the beans’,” she said. “The official said that he would ‘take care of it’.”

The four suspects on the list were released from interrogation and extradited.

Edmonds also claims that a number of senior officials in the Pentagon had helped Israeli and Turkish agents.

“The people provided lists of potential moles from Pentagon-related institutions who had access to databases concerning this information,” she said.

“The handlers, who were part of the diplomatic community, would then try to recruit those people to become moles for the network. The lists contained all their ‘hooking points’, which could be financial or sexual pressure points, their exact job in the Pentagon and what stuff they had access to.”

One of the Pentagon figures under investigation was Lawrence Franklin, a former Pentagon analyst, who was jailed in 2006 for passing US defence information to lobbyists and sharing classified information with an Israeli diplomat. “He was one of the top people providing information and packages during 2000 and 2001,” she said.

Once acquired, the nuclear secrets could have gone anywhere. The FBI monitored Turkish diplomats who were selling copies of the information to the highest bidder.

Edmonds said: “Certain greedy Turkish operators would make copies of the material and look around for buyers. They had agents who would find potential buyers.”

In summer 2000, Edmonds says the FBI monitored one of the agents as he met two Saudi Arabian businessmen in Detroit to sell nuclear information that had been stolen from an air force base in Alabama. She overheard the agent saying: "We have a package and we're going to sell it for \$250,000."

Edmonds's employment with the FBI lasted for just six months. In March 2002 she was dismissed after accusing a colleague of covering up illicit activity involving Turkish nationals.

She has always claimed that she was victimised for being outspoken and was vindicated by an Office of the Inspector General review of her case three years later. It found that one of the contributory reasons for her sacking was that she had made valid complaints.

The US attorney-general has imposed a state secrets privilege order on her, which prevents her revealing more details of the FBI's methods and current investigations.

Her allegations were heard in a closed session of Congress, but no action has been taken and she continues to campaign for a public hearing.

She was able to discuss the case with The Sunday Times because, by the end of January 2002, the justice department had shut down the programme.

The senior official in the State Department no longer works there. Last week he denied all of Edmonds's allegations: "If you are calling me to say somebody said that I took money, that's outrageous . . . I do not have anything to say about such stupid ridiculous things as this."

In researching this article, The Sunday Times has talked to two FBI officers (one serving, one former) and two former CIA sources who worked on nuclear proliferation. While none was aware of specific allegations against officials she names, they did provide overlapping corroboration of Edmonds's story.

One of the CIA sources confirmed that the Turks had acquired nuclear secrets from the United States and shared the information with Pakistan and Israel. "We have no indication that Turkey has its own nuclear ambitions. But the Turks are traders. To my knowledge they became big players in the late 1990s," the source said.

http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/middle_east/article3137695.ece

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Washington Post

January 6, 2008

Pg. B7

Nuclear Credulity

By Carolyn Leddy

Paying off terrorists doesn't work; it only encourages more terrorism. The same is true with nuclear proliferators. They tend to take the bribe and hide the program, and the next thing you know, they're testing nuclear weapons. That was why so many nonproliferation experts welcomed the Bush administration's repudiation of the 1994 "agreed framework" with North Korea. It is also why, after nearly five years of working on nonproliferation issues in the Bush administration, I chose to leave government.

Dec. 31 was the deadline for North Korea to disable its Yongbyon nuclear facility and to provide a full declaration of all its nuclear programs and facilities. A muted news release from the State Department lamented the missed deadline as "unfortunate." White House statements were similarly tepid.

It's well known that most of the administration's nonproliferation experts were unhappy with the agreement reached with North Korea last February. Nonproliferation analysts and experts throughout the administration have been marginalized on national security issues for years. The nuclear agreement with India was negotiated largely absent senior participation from our ranks; the dialogue with allies regarding Iran's nuclear program has been conducted almost exclusively on a political level.

Given that history, few were surprised that the North Korea deal was reached so easily by political and regional officials. But we were assured that President Bush had a personal desire to seek, through the six-party process, an end to North Korea's nuclear weapons program.

To support the president, we labored to define nebulous terminology -- "nuclear programs," say, and "disablement" - - crafted by the negotiators. Nonproliferation experts and verification specialists endured accusations of disloyalty to the administration and of political and international naivete. Our expertise was faulted. Yet we continued to try to strengthen the hand dealt to the president by the State Department and to close the glaring loopholes in the agreement.

Ultimately, it became clear that honest assessments of intelligence on North Korea's nuclear program were not of interest to the administration's "regional specialists." They wanted a deal. They continue to keep the deal afloat even as North Korean intransigence continues.

Last fall the chief U.S. negotiator to the six-party talks, Assistant Secretary of State Christopher Hill, testified to Congress that disablement measures underway at the Yongbyon facility would "effectively end" North Korea's plutonium production capability by year's end and that its uranium enrichment program would cease to exist as well. Yet media reports indicate that disablement activities at Yongbyon have slowed to a crawl. In a statement Friday, North Korea professed to have already disclosed all nuclear programs.

Were this merely a matter of a missed deadline, it would hardly be cause for concern. And the deadline reportedly became part of the deal only at President Bush's insistence -- reiterated in his groundbreaking letter to dictator Kim Jong Il last month.

Yet, perhaps anticipating the lapse, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said last month that she wasn't "too concerned about whether [the deadline] is December 31 or not."

This view is misguided. As with all things regarding North Korea, the devil is in the details. Deadlines matter. I took part in a U.S. delegation's trip to survey the Yongbyon nuclear facility in September. Afterward, it was clear that North Korean officials view all elements of the six-party agreement as negotiable. If the deadline can be overlooked, so can the "disablement" and the "disclosure." This is how the Clinton administration's agreed framework unraveled. Declarations are key to arms control and nonproliferation. They are invaluable when judging the sincerity of the state in adhering to its commitments. Any credible declaration from a "nuclear weapons state" should include a thorough accounting of all its plutonium, uranium and weaponization programs. For each of these programs North Korea should be asked to include the specific amounts of nuclear materials; all associated equipment, facilities and components; the organizations and personnel involved; and records (hours of operation, periods of maintenance, etc.) from all associated facilities.

The rubber meets the road here not only for North Korea but also for President Bush's legacy on one of the most pressing threats of our time. The president has already achieved several landmark nonproliferation successes, including the Proliferation Security Initiative and the disarmament of Libya. Ideally, his administration will attain the complete, irreversible and verifiable dismantlement of all aspects of North Korea's nuclear weapons program. At this point, though, I have my doubts.

The writer covered North Korea's nuclear program as director for counterproliferation strategy on the National Security Council staff from July 2006 to November 2007.

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/01/04/AR2008010403565.html>

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New York Times

January 7, 2008

Pg. 6

Poland Signals Doubts About Planned U.S. Missile-Defense Bases On Its Territory

By Judy Dempsey

BERLIN — Signaling a tougher position in negotiations with the United States on a European antiballistic-missile shield system, Poland's foreign minister says his country's new government is not prepared to accept American plans to deploy missile-defense bases in Poland until all costs and risks are considered.

"This is an American, not a Polish project," Foreign Minister Radek Sikorski said in an interview published in the weekend edition of the newspaper *Gazeta Wyborcza*.

The previous Polish government had consented in principle to accept missile-interceptor bases as part of a larger system that would include a radar station in the Czech Republic, but no formal agreement has been signed. Now Mr. Sikorski is saying that the terms under which the shield would be deployed were unclear and that the new government wants the risks to be explained, the financial costs to be set out and clarification on how Poland's interests would be defended if the bases were put on its territory.

"We feel no threat from Iran," he said, challenging Bush administration assertions that some of the biggest threats facing the security of Europe and the United States are from "rogue states" in the Middle East.

Still, Mr. Sikorski said, "if an important ally such as the United States has a request of such an important nature, we take it very seriously."

He added: "It is not only the benefits but the risks of the system that have to be discussed fully. It cannot be that we alone carry the costs."

There was no official response from the United States. Bogdan Klich, Poland's new defense minister, is expected to make his first official visit to Washington this month to explain his government's position.

NATO said Sunday that the missile defense issue was essentially a discussion for Poland, the United States and Russia. "NATO is happy to be a forum for discussion, and it is a useful one," said James Appathurai, a spokesman for the alliance. "But it does not substitute for the bilateral track."

Mr. Sikorski also said he was worried that the United States might abandon the project after the American presidential election in November. In that case, Poland would nevertheless have to bear political costs, like the deterioration of relations with Russia, if it signed on to the shield prematurely.

The deployment of the missile defense system has become such a contentious issue between the United States and Russia — and also between Poland and Russia — that President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia has warned of a new arms race if Washington proceeds with the plan in Poland and the Czech Republic.

Having accused Washington of threatening Russia's national security interests, Mr. Putin last month suspended his nation's participation in the Conventional Forces in Europe Treaty.

Under that treaty, one of the last major arms pacts between the former cold war foes, countries stretching from Canada across Europe to the eastern parts of the former Soviet Union cut their conventional forces and agreed to on-site inspections and an elaborate system of verification and notifications. It took effect in 1992.

The Kremlin did not say how long it would suspend its participation. But Russian diplomats said it depended on not only what kind of concessions the United States was prepared to make concerning changes to the treaty, but also on whether Poland and the Czech Republic would deploy components of the American antimissile system.

The approach on missile defense taken by Poland's new center-right coalition government, under Prime Minister Donald Tusk, reflects a different negotiating strategy from that of the previous nationalist-conservative government led by Jaroslaw Kaczynski.

Mr. Kaczynski, who was much more pro-American, agreed in principle to deploy several interceptors on Polish territory without going into detail over the costs, the maintenance and the risks to Poland's security, according to Polish officials.

The former prime minister did little to allay Russia's fears about deploying the missile shield in Poland, or to drum up support in other European Union member states. He left it up to the United States to explain the issue to the Kremlin and to European governments.

In contrast, Mr. Tusk and Mr. Sikorski, while certainly aware of Mr. Putin's growing assertiveness in international affairs, have repeatedly said they want to improve relations with Russia.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2008/01/07/world/europe/07shield.html?ref=world>

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New York Times

January 8, 2008

Pg. 4

Chief Of U.N. Nuclear Agency To Meet With Iran's Leaders

VIENNA (AP) — Mohamed ElBaradei, the chief of the International Atomic Energy Agency, the United Nations nuclear monitoring agency, will visit Iran this week, his spokeswoman announced Monday.

Diplomats, meanwhile, said Iran had begun sharing information about past programs that the United States says were attempts to make weapons.

Dr. ElBaradei will be in Tehran on Friday and Saturday "with a view of resolving all remaining outstanding issues and enabling the agency to provide assurance about Iran's past and present activities," said Melissa Fleming, his spokeswoman.

She said Dr. ElBaradei would meet with top officials, but gave no details. But a diplomat familiar with Dr. ElBaradei's itinerary said he was expected to meet with Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, and President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. The diplomat spoke on condition of anonymity because the information was confidential.

The trip comes at a time of renewed efforts by the United States to keep the pressure on Iran on the nuclear issue. A recent United States intelligence assessment that Iran had a clandestine weapons program but that it stopped working on it four years ago has hurt American efforts to have the United Nations Security Council impose a third set of sanctions on Iran for failing to halt enrichment.

Iran says its nuclear program is for peaceful purposes. The United States and its allies say Iran could use its enriched uranium to make nuclear payloads for missiles.

An Israeli Defense Ministry official said Monday that Israel would urge President Bush, who is to visit the Middle East this week, to reassess the American conclusion that Iran stopped nuclear arms development in 2003.

The defense minister, Ehud Barak, is expected to tell Mr. Bush that Israeli intelligence analysts have concluded that Iran is still trying to produce nuclear arms, the official said, speaking on condition of anonymity because he was barred from publicly commenting on the talks in advance.

Part of past evidence presented by the United States to close allies and the I.A.E.A. to back its accusations was material on a computer reportedly smuggled out of Iran. In 2005, United States intelligence assessed that information as indicating that Iran had been working on details of nuclear weapons.

Iran has long dismissed such claims as propaganda and refused to talk about them. But on Monday, diplomats familiar with the Iran file said Iran had begun substantial discussions with I.A.E.A. experts on some issues linked to “weaponization,” as part of the agency’s investigation of Iran’s nuclear activities.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2008/01/08/world/middleeast/08nuke.html?ref=world>

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Air Force Times

Nuke handlers not ready for inspection

By Michael Hoffman - Staff writer

Posted : Monday Jan 7, 2008 6:27:55 EST

The new 5th Bomb Wing commander at Minot Air Force Base, N.D., isn’t mincing words.

Col. Joel Westa described his wing’s looming nuclear surety inspection as “the most scrutinized inspection in the history of time.” He understands his airmen have something to prove to the rest of the Air Force and the nation. So it’s not surprising that a recently announced delay of the inspection, which had been planned for Jan. 23, has many observers wondering what’s going on.

It’s been a little more than four months since airmen at Minot made the unprecedented mistake of unknowingly loading a B-52 with six nuclear warheads and flying them from North Dakota to Barksdale Air Force Base, La. After a six-week investigation into the incident, Maj. Gen. Richard “Dick” Newton, deputy chief of staff for operations, plans and requirements, said an “erosion of adherence to weapons-handling standards” led to five major procedural errors at Minot. Air Force Secretary Michael Wynne called it an “unacceptable mistake.”

The “Bent Spear” incident resulted in the firing of Westa’s predecessor, Col. Bruce Emig. Two group commanders and a squadron commander also got sacked, and 65 airmen were decertified from working with nuclear weapons, basically unable to do their jobs until they were recertified.

Still, with all that pressure and all that time, the 5th Bomb Wing isn’t ready to get back to work.

When Air Combat Command inspectors visited Minot on Dec. 16 for its initial nuclear surety inspection — held before the NSI can start — they decided to push back the scheduled Jan. 23 inspection, consequently delaying the process to recertify the wing to handle nuclear weapons.

Since the ACC commander decertified the 5th Bomb Wing from its wartime mission — maintaining part of the nation’s nuclear stockpile — shortly after the incident, the Air Force has relied on airmen from Barksdale’s 2nd Bomb Wing to continue operations at Minot.

Meanwhile, the 5th Bomb Wing’s airmen are sitting on the sideline, training until the wing is recertified. To do that, it must pass its NSI, Westa said.

It took two months before Westa was given authority by ACC to train and recertify the airmen who had lost their certification under the Personnel Reliability Program, which the U.S. uses to monitor those who handle nuclear weapons.

To date, he said about 95 percent of those who lost their certification to handle nukes are now recertified under the commander’s guidance. Westa recertified most of the airmen not involved in the incident, but he said there are still some who will never get it back.

Westa pointed to the lack of senior enlisted leadership and the short amount of time he and other Minot officials had to train the airmen on new procedures as the cause of the delay of the inspection.

“The key piece that is driving all this is the flow of information was slow to come after the investigation and caused us some time that we were unable to train, and there were some key billets that weren’t changed,” he said.

Along with the high-ranking officers, four senior NCOs with the 5th Munitions Squadron were fired, pushing back the squadron’s ability to train the recertified airmen, Westa said.

“We lost four really critical SNCOs, and then there were some other unfilled positions,” he said. “It took awhile to get [their replacements] identified.”

Westa said he expects to bring aboard the necessary senior enlisted leaders this month and, once they get settled, to get back on track toward restarting the inspection process following about a 60-day training period.

“There was about a two-month period until we could go back to just training, and it’s a significant skill set,” he said.

“It’s something that requires constant honing. The weapons we are talking about have extremely tight tolerances.”

He did confirm that the disciplinary actions over the incident have ceased, and the ACC investigation led by Lt. Gen. Norman Seip, which looked into potential criminal charges under the Uniform Code of Military Justice, is closed without anyone being charged.

The 5th Bomb Wing commander could not go into detail over how his wing has amended its procedures to prevent a Bent Spear incident from occurring again, but he said he could “guarantee beyond a shadow of a doubt that there is not a weapon moved that [he] does not absolutely know about.”

The changes to procedure he could describe dealt with the lengths to which airmen go to verify they are moving the correct weapon. Every move is backed up by five or six personal checks and five or six database checks, Westa said. Every time a nuclear weapon is moved, it can't occur without Westa's voice approval. This is not new, but Westa said only one or two checks used to be made. Now, he is intimately involved with each and every movement from storage to its final destination.

Also, the status of each nuclear weapon is now briefed to Westa, much like the status of each aircraft owned by the wing.

Although Westa said he was initially disappointed over the delayed NSI, he said this was an inspection that the wing needed to be 100 percent sure it would pass.

The last time the 5th Bomb Wing was inspected, in 2006, it received the highest rating — satisfactory.

“No one wants to see us fail,” he said. “It's not one of those things where you can just scrape through an NSI.” So far, the date of the next inspection has not been set.

http://www.airforcetimes.com/news/2008/01/airforce_minot_inspection_080105w/

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Philadelphia Inquirer

January 8, 2008

Arabs Share Bush's Concerns Over Growing Power Of Iran

By Salah Nasrawi, Associated Press

CAIRO, Egypt - Iran is the one issue where President Bush and Arab leaders have shared concerns. Ahead of the president's Mideast trip, Arab nations are eager to contain growing Iranian power, though they are wary of doing so militarily.

Arab countries, particularly those in the Persian Gulf region, are worried that the long standoff between Iran and the United States could escalate into military action and that they could get caught in the cross fire, with their vital oil exports disrupted.

Arab nations also worry about Iran's increasing influence in the region, particularly in Iraq and Lebanon.

Sunni Muslim countries such as Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and the Gulf states fear that Iran will dominate Iraq in coming years through its influence on the country's Shiite politicians, particularly if U.S. troops withdraw from Iraq. So they want to ensure the position of Iraq's Sunni Arab minority.

Even before Bush begins his Mideast tour, Arab allies were pushing an effort to isolate Iran. Their focus is Lebanon, where they fear Iran - through its allies Syria and Hezbollah - can strengthen its foothold on a sensitive border with Israel.

Bush, who will visit several Gulf states, Saudi Arabia and Egypt after his first stop in Israel tomorrow, has said he will work with Mideast allies to develop a security plan to counter Iran. But while they may welcome U.S. support against Iran, Gulf nations are wary of signing a military or security pact with Washington, at least publicly, since they don't want to look like collaborators in a U.S. push against a Muslim country.

Iran already has threatened to hit U.S. bases in the Gulf and disrupt oil shipping if the United States launches military action, and Gulf states do not want to make themselves a direct target.

Instead, Arab countries are focusing on diplomatic moves, keeping up communications with Iran while trying to blunt its forays into the region.

Egypt last month rebuffed an Iranian attempt to restore full diplomatic ties, cut off since the 1979 Islamic revolution. Ali Larijani, a top envoy of Iran's supreme leader, was in Egypt for two weeks trying to negotiate a resolution, even offering generous incentives such as helping build nuclear reactors for Egypt and providing it with low-priced wheat.

But Egypt refused, apparently unable to ensure Iranian cooperation on a host of issues, including Iraq and Lebanon. "To have sustainable relations [with Iran], we should have a consensus" on regional issues, Egyptian Foreign Minister Ahmed About Gheit said.

On Lebanon, Arab allies of the United States are worried that if the Syrian-backed opposition, particularly the Shiite extremist group Hezbollah, gains more power there, it will mean giving Iran an even stronger foothold in the

country. That, and Iran's influence with the Palestinian extremist group Hamas, would give Tehran greater ability to disrupt the peace process between the Arabs and Israel.

At an Arab League meeting in Cairo on Saturday, Egypt and Saudi Arabia pushed Syria into accepting a formula for resolving the crisis over Lebanon's presidency. Syria signed on to a deal that backed naming Lebanese military chief Michel Suleiman as president and putting off the question of the shape of the next government, in which the opposition is demanding more power.

Arabs feel that Syria may only be ducking pressure it expects will mount during Bush's tour, while holding off until after an Arab summit in Damascus in March.

While Arab countries may see eye to eye with Bush on concerns over Iran, they are deeply skeptical over the other goal of his Mideast visit: pushing the Arab-Israeli peace process.

After a November conference in Annapolis, Md., Bush said he hoped Israel and the Palestinians could reach a peace accord before the end of his term in January 2009. But many in the Arab world see Washington's new push on peace as too little, too late, and doubt the United States will pressure Israel to make the concessions they demand.

"We will be waiting to see what the U.S. offers during the upcoming visit of President Bush, who bears the responsibility of moving the process forward," Arab League chief Amr Moussa said.

http://www.philly.com/inquirer/world_us/20080108_Arabs_share_Bushs_concerns_over_growing_power_of_Iran.html

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New York Times

January 8, 2008

Pg. 6

North Korea Given Time To Send Data

TOKYO (Reuters) — North Korea's failure to meet a deadline to declare its nuclear activities should be confronted with patience and perseverance, a senior American envoy said here on Monday.

North Korea said Friday that it had already accounted for its nuclear arms program as required under a multilateral disarmament deal, but the assertion was rejected by the United States.

"They were prepared to give a declaration which wasn't going to be complete and correct," said Washington's top envoy to nuclear talks with North Korea, Christopher R. Hill, "and we felt that it was better for them to give us a complete one even if it's going to be a late one.

"So I think we have to have a little sense of patience and perseverance," he told reporters in Tokyo after arriving for talks with Japanese officials.

The United States and several allies have said North Korea missed a Dec. 31 deadline to submit a full inventory of its nuclear arms programs, as promised in six-party negotiations last year, and to disable its main nuclear complex at Yongbyon.

At the talks — involving the two Koreas, the United States, China, Japan and Russia — the North agreed to abandon its nuclear program for aid and a better international standing.

"No one likes being late, but being late is probably preferable than being wrong or giving us something that we can't work with," said Mr. Hill, who will go to Seoul on Tuesday.

"Some of the programs are ones that they would rather not discuss publicly," Mr. Hill said when asked why, according to the United States, the North had not made a full declaration. "And I must say this is a society and a government whose first instinct is not to be transparent."

<http://www.nytimes.com/2008/01/08/world/asia/08korea.html?ref=world>

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International Herald Tribune

Ahmadinejad loses favor with Khamenei, Iran's top leader

By Nazila Fathi

Monday, January 7, 2008

TEHRAN: A rift is emerging between President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and Iran's supreme religious leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, suggesting that the president no longer enjoys the full backing of Khamenei, as he did in the years after his election in 2005.

In the past, when Ahmadinejad was attacked by political opponents, the criticisms were usually silenced by Khamenei, who has the final word on state matters and who regularly endorsed the president in public speeches. But that public support has been conspicuously absent in recent months.

There are numerous possible reasons for Ahmadinejad's loss of support, but analysts here all point to one overriding factor: the U.S. National Intelligence Report last month, which said that Iran suspended its nuclear weapons program in 2003 in response to international pressure. The report sharply decreased the threat of a military strike against Iran, allowing the authorities to focus on domestic issues, with important parliamentary elections looming in March.

"Now that Iran is not under the threat of a military attack, all contradictions within the establishment are surfacing," said Saeed Leylaz, an economic and political analyst. "The biggest mistake that Americans have constantly made toward Iran was adopting radical approaches, which provided the ground for radicals in the country to take control." Iran had been under increasing international pressure for its refusal to suspend its uranium enrichment program, which could be pursued for either peaceful or military purposes. In separate speeches last year, American and French officials did not rule out military attack against Iran if it continued its defiance. Those threats have stopped since the National Intelligence Report was released.

While the pressure was on, the leadership was reluctant to let any internal disagreements show. Senior officials, including Khamenei, constantly called for unity and warned that the enemy, a common reference to the United States, could take advantage of such differences.

The Iranian presidency is a largely ceremonial post. But Ahmadinejad used the office as a bully pulpit, espousing an economic populism that built a strong following among the middle and lower classes and made him a political force to be reckoned with. That popularity won him the strong backing of the supreme leader.

But the relationship began to sour even before the National Intelligence Report was released. A source close to Khamenei, who spoke on condition of anonymity for fear of retribution, said Khamenei had been especially disappointed by Ahmadinejad's economic performance, which had led to steep inflation in basic necessities, from food to property values.

"Mr. Khamenei supported Mr. Ahmadinejad because he believed in his slogans of helping the poor," the source said. "But his economic performance has been disastrous. Their honeymoon is certainly over."

Economists have long criticized Ahmadinejad's economic policies, warning that his reliance on oil revenues to finance loans to the poor and to buy cheap imports would lead to inflation and cripple local industries. Inflation has risen from 12 percent in October 2006 to 19 percent this year, according to figures released by the Iranian Central Bank.

Khamenei said Thursday in a speech in the central city of Yazd that "the government has certain unique characteristics, but like any other government there are mistakes and shortcomings."

He added that continuous criticism could undermine the government, but he refrained from praising it as he had in the past.

Recently, the supreme leader appointed a hard-line military leader, Mohammad Zolghadr, as deputy head of the armed forces for Basij, which is a volunteer militia force.

Ahmadinejad dismissed Zolghadr last month as deputy interior minister for security affairs. Ahmadinejad appeared angered last week by interference from Iran's former chief nuclear negotiator, Ali Larijani, who visited Egypt as Khamenei's representative at the Supreme National Security Council. Ahmadinejad said Wednesday that his government had a Foreign Ministry that determined the country's foreign policy, and a ministry spokesman said that Larijani's trip had been personal.

Larijani's trip was important because Tehran cut ties with Egypt, a major Sunni country, when Cairo signed a peace agreement with Israel in 1979 and provided asylum for the deposed Shah of Iran. Larijani, who is a close aide to Khamenei, announced that his talks with the Egyptian authorities had gone well.

In the face of rising criticism, Ahmadinejad has for the first time acknowledged that Iran was suffering from rising prices. Previously, he had called inflation a fiction invented by his political enemies.

But he blamed previous governments, Parliament and what he called a 36-percent increase in the prices of goods in international markets.

Mohammad Reza Katouzian, a conservative and onetime supporter of Ahmadinejad, said the president "should offer solutions instead of explaining past mistakes," the semi-official Mehr news agency reported.

Hassan Rassouli, head of Baran, a nongovernment organization created by the previous president, Mohammad Khatami after Khatami left office, said that Ahmadinejad tried only to justify inflation, not do anything about it.

"Either the president has no idea how inflation has affected people's lives or he prefers to talk unprofessionally, without referring to figures," he said, according to the Mehr press agency.

Alireza Mahjoub, a member of Parliament and the leader of a workers union, dismissed the government's claim that it had lowered the unemployment rate to 9.9 percent and said the real figure should be more than 16 percent, the Fars news agency reported.

"There are 4 million jobless in the country but a 9.9 percent unemployment rate suggests the figure is 2.2 million, out of the 21 million active population," he added. "The figure has only decreased on paper." The coming parliamentary elections will provide a stark test for Ahmadinejad and his popularity among the poor. The conservative politicians who supported him in 2005 have, in many cases, turned into his fiercest critics and are now worried chiefly that they will be disqualified as candidates before the vote, a power that the government has exercised in the past.

<http://www.iht.com/articles/2008/01/07/africa/tehran.php>

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(Editor's Note: Hyperlink for referenced report follows article.)

Yahoo.com

January 8, 2008

China Planning To Secure North Korea's Nuclear Arsenal: Report

By P. Parameswaran, Agence France-Presse

WASHINGTON (AFP) - China has contingency plans to dispatch troops into North Korea and secure nuclear weapons in the event of instability in the hardline communist state, according to US experts who have talked to Chinese military researchers.

Any intervention by Beijing would be done as far as possible after consultations with the United Nations, but unilateral action was not ruled out, the experts said in a report published on the websites of two US think tanks.

"If deemed necessary, PLA troops would be dispatched into North Korea," the report said, referring to the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA).

"China's strong preference is to receive formal authorization and coordinate closely with the UN in such an endeavor," it said.

"However, if the international community did not react in a timely manner as the internal order in North Korea deteriorated rapidly, China would seek to take the initiative in restoring stability."

The report was compiled by experts from the Center for Strategic and International Studies and the US Institute of Peace -- which published the report -- and Asia Foundation following their visit to China in June last year.

A spokeswoman for China's foreign ministry on Tuesday said she was unaware of any Chinese strategy to send troops into North Korea to secure nuclear weapons, but did not outright deny that such a plan existed.

"I have never heard of nor seen the so-called plan mentioned in the report," spokeswoman Jiang Yu told reporters in Beijing, without commenting further.

North Korea, which reportedly has up to 10 nuclear bombs, is involved in a de-nuclearization program in return for energy aid and diplomatic and security guarantees under a six-party mechanism involving also the United States, China, Russia, South Korea and Japan.

The program hit a snag recently after Washington accused Pyongyang of not meeting a December 31 deadline for a full declaration of its nuclear programs.

"According to PLA researchers, contingency plans are in place for the PLA to perform three possible missions" in North Korea -- humanitarian and peacekeeping missions and "environmental control" measures, the report said.

The measures are intended "to clean up nuclear contamination resulting from a strike on North Korean nuclear facilities" near the Sino-North Korean border and "to secure nuclear weapons and fissile materials."

The report -- entitled "Keeping An Eye On An Unruly Neighbor: Chinese views of economic reform and stability in North Korea" -- said that in the event of instability in North Korea, China's main priority would be to prevent a flood of refugees.

This would be done by assuring supplies of food and strengthening border controls, it said.

"PLA officers maintain that they would attempt to close the border, but admit a lack of confidence that they could do so successfully, since the border extends 866 miles (1,394 kilometers) and can be easily penetrated," the report said.

US experts took pains to emphasize that nuclear concern was only one part of the US-China dialogue on North Korea issues among the think tank community.

"The range of issues discussed is comprehensive," Korea expert John Park of the US Institute of Peace told AFP.

"Discussion of hypothetical scenarios enables various parties to achieve a better understanding of nuanced views."

China's overall concerns about instability in North Korea, including on the nuclear issue, are not new as they share a long border, said China expert Bonnie Glaser of the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

"Just as the US is concerned about the possibility of instability in terms of nuclear weapons in Pakistan, the Chinese not surprisingly have concerns about control and security of nuclear facilities and nuclear weapons in the event of instability in North Korea," she said.

The US experts also discussed with Chinese specialists trends in North Korea's economy and prospects for reform, current trends in Sino-North Korean economic relations and China's policy toward North Korea in the wake of Pyongyang's October 2006 nuclear weapons test.

"I think the most important thing that has come out of it has really been increased understanding between experts on both sides about how we look at North Korea," Glaser said.

http://news.yahoo.com/s/afp/20080108/wl_asia_afp/usnkoreachinapoliticsnuclear_080108082321

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Keeping an Eye on an Unruly Neighbor

Chinese Views of Economic Reform and Stability in North Korea

UNITED STATES INSTITUTE OF PEACE – WORKING PAPER

Keeping an Eye on an Unruly Neighbor

INTRODUCTION

This report is based on discussions with Chinese specialists on the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) during a visit to Beijing, Changchun, and Yanji, June 25-30, 2007.¹ Discussions followed on a similar round of interviews conducted in April 2006. Several of our interlocutors recently returned from extended stays in Pyongyang and many others regularly visit the DPRK, commonly referred to as North Korea. Topics discussed included trends in North Korea's economy and prospects for reform; current trends in Sino-DPRK economic relations; China's policy toward North Korea in the wake of the nuclear test; Chinese debates on North Korea; Chinese assessments of North Korea's political stability; and potential Chinese responses to instability.

In analyzing North Korea, Chinese experts primarily rely on the following sources of information: 1) South Korean economic data; 2) personal visits to North Korea; 3) contacts with visiting North Korean delegations and North Korean students studying in China; and 4) interviews with North Korean refugees in China. . .

(For complete report, please click on link below.)

http://www.usip.org/pubs/working_papers/wp6_china_northkorea.pdf

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USA Today

January 9, 2008

Pg. 9

Fear And The Nuclear Terror Threat

The mushroom cloud scenario has become a political fixture, as myths seem to be driving the debate.

By Michael Levi

Politicians love to scare the wits out of people, and nothing suits that purpose better than talking about nuclear terrorism. From President Bush warning in 2002 that the "smoking gun" might be a mushroom cloud, to John Kerry in 2004 conjuring "shadowy figures" with a "finger on a nuclear button" and Mitt Romney invoking the specter of "radical, nuclear jihad" last spring, the pattern is impossible to miss. Indeed the three-part political strategy is simple. Describe the havoc an attack would wreak. Suggest that without big changes to American strategy, a successful strike is pretty much inevitable. And now that you have people's attention, deliver the closer: You have a foolproof plan for eliminating the threat.

With every week seeming to bring another nuclear bombshell, the candidates have plenty of fodder. The assassination of former Pakistani prime minister Benazir Bhutto in late December has refocused attention on that fragile nuclear-armed nation. In November, a uranium smuggling operation was busted in Slovakia; barely a week later, a new intelligence report revealed that Iran had shuttered part of its nuclear program, but Tehran continued to push forward with its dangerous efforts to produce nuclear fuel. No wonder people are worried.

Here's the reality. The nuclear threat is real and deserves our utmost attention. An atomic bomb detonated in the heart of a major American city could kill hundreds of thousands. But it would be tougher for terrorists to pull off a nuclear attack than many people assume. (A dirty bomb would be easier to make and deliver, but its impact would be far less severe.) Many intelligence professionals know that, but our political culture doesn't do moderation. The first step to getting smart about defense, then, is to bust some popular myths about nuclear terrorism.

Start at the beginning: To pull off a plot, a terrorist group needs to get its hands on a bomb or on the materials it needs to make one. It would probably target a nuclear facility directly, maybe a military base in the former Soviet Union or a civilian reactor in an obscure corner of the world. That's a big reason why we need to do a much better job of securing those sites. Our imagination, though, tends to focus just as much on a shadowy black market where

nuclear materials from the former Soviet Union are bought and sold so long as the price is right. That fear is fueled by regular reports of intercepted nuclear materials and by the success of Pakistani engineer A.Q. Khan in building a genuine worldwide black market in nuclear technology — but not in nuclear materials like uranium and plutonium. Indeed when it comes to loose nukes, the black market image is misleading, since underground deals are hard for terrorists to engineer. Buyers and sellers need to worry about being turned in — many illicit transactions have actually been stings. Terrorists should also be nervous about getting ripped off. When drug smugglers work with people they don't already know and trust, they tend to keep deals small, about \$10,000 or less. A nuclear weapon or the materials for it would be worth millions.

If a group got its hands on nuclear materials, it would still need to build a bomb. To the Internet! The place is littered with tutorials on how to build nuclear weapons, and while a lot of what's out there is nonsense, there are places that get the basics right. (Suggestion for policymakers: Hire students who failed physics to make as many instructional websites as they can.) The problem for terrorists is that, as anyone who has ever tried programming a VCR can tell you, instructions are the easy part.

When it comes to nukes, it's the engineering and the dirty work — machining, metalworking, electronics — that's tough, something that the Ph.D. physicists who think about terrorism often forget. Let's not kid ourselves: With the right team, a terrorist group might pull the job off. But we have a lot more leverage here than a lot of people think. A group that made it this far would also need to get its bomb into the USA. Here the doom and gloom is a bit more justified. The United States has long, porous borders, and right now it only inspects a fraction of the cargo that comes in through its ports. Still, not everything is as bad as it looks.

In 2006, U.S. government agents tried to smuggle weapons-grade uranium across the Canadian border. They made it through on three of four tries. Border security must be pretty useless, right? Not necessarily. Those odds of failing seem terrible from where we sit. But put yourself in the shoes of a terrorist leader contemplating a nuclear strike, add up all the other ways you might fail, and you might easily come to a different conclusion — and perhaps not even start a plot in the first place.

Given the consequence of a successful attack, we'd be fools to convert from nuclear zealots who think the sky is falling to nuclear atheists who reject the existence of a real threat. But like a cop who leaves his Kevlar vest at home because he assumes that all bad guys have armor-piercing bullets, we'll miss opportunities to confront the threat if we exaggerate it. Better to be pragmatic agnostics: We should be skeptical if we're told that pulling off a nuclear attack is easy, but we should be smart about making it even harder.

Michael Levi, a fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations, is author of the new book On Nuclear Terrorism.

<http://blogs.usatoday.com/oped/2008/01/fear-and-the-nu.html>

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