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Agence France-Presse

Iran will have nuclear weapon in three years: Mossad

1 day ago

JERUSALEM (AFP) — Israel's Mossad spy agency estimates Iran will develop a nuclear weapon within three years and continue to provide rockets to regional armed groups, a newspaper reported on Tuesday.

Mossad director Meir Dagan, in an intelligence assessment presented to Israel's powerful foreign affairs and defence committee on Monday, said the Jewish state would face increased threats on all fronts, Maariv daily said.

Dagan's estimate of Iran's nuclear ambitions differs sharply from an assessment by the US intelligence community late last year that said Iran had mothballed its nuclear weapons programme in 2003.

That report compiled by 16 US intelligence agencies said the Islamic republic would not be able to attain a nuclear weapon until 2015.

Israel has questioned those findings, claiming that although Iran may have temporarily halted its nuclear drive five years ago it has since relaunched it while pressing ahead with a public uranium enrichment programme.

Tehran has always insisted its nuclear programme is for peaceful purposes.

In Monday's report, Dagan also predicted that Tehran would continue to supply more and better rockets and training to Palestinian militant groups in the Gaza Strip.

Dagan added that Iran's allies Syria and the Lebanese Shiite militia Hezbollah were also working to develop an increased rocket ability.

"Syria is improving its surface-to-surface missile system and today the quantity of missiles and rockets is twice as large as two years ago," Dagan said, according to Maariv.

Israel has long perceived Iran as its greatest threat, especially after Iran's President Mahmud Ahmadinejad relaunched its nuclear enrichment programme and repeatedly predicted the demise of the Jewish state.

<http://afp.google.com/article/ALeqM5jQXIC9PbA5rxEyOvCoZTd7Xv-4xg>

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New York Times

February 7, 2008

U.S.-Backed Russian Institutes Help Iran Build Reactor

By Matthew L. Wald

WASHINGTON — The Energy Department is subsidizing two Russian nuclear institutes that are building important parts of a reactor in Iran whose construction the United States spent years trying to stop, according to a House committee.

The institutes, both in Nizhny Novgorod, gave American officials copies of sales presentations that listed the Bushehr reactor, which Russia has agreed to fuel, as one of their projects. One institute is providing control systems, including control room equipment, and the other, hundreds of pumps and ventilation fans.

The Energy Department is subsidizing the institutes under the Initiatives for Proliferation Prevention, a program set up in 1994, after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The program was intended to prevent newly impoverished scientists and their institutions from selling expertise to states or terrorist groups that want nuclear weapons.

The United States supplements the salaries of scientists and pays overhead at those institutes, according to the House Oversight and Investigations subcommittee.

It was not immediately clear whether the Energy Department was contributing to the salaries of the very scientists involved in the Bushehr reactor project. Two Michigan Democrats — Representatives John D. Dingell, chairman of the House Committee on Energy and Commerce, and Bart Stupak, chairman of that committee's Oversight and Investigations subcommittee — asked that question in a letter sent on Wednesday to Energy Secretary Samuel W. Bodman.

"What policy logic justifies D.O.E. funding Russian institutes which are providing nuclear technology to Iran?" the letter asked. "How does this advance our non-proliferation goals?"

Mr. Bodman is supposed to testify on Thursday before the Energy and Commerce Committee in a hastily scheduled hearing to explore the issue.

Mr. Dingell, in a telephone interview, pointed out that the State Department has accused Iran of using the Bushehr reactor as a cover for obtaining nuclear technology useful in a weapons program. And, he said, "We've got a bunch of federal laws that impose sanctions on U.S. companies that develop Iran's oil."

But under the nonproliferation program, he said, "We've got U.S. money providing assistance to help develop a reactor that we're busy denouncing."

Mr. Dingell said the committee would also pursue whether the Energy Department was subsidizing any institutes that worked with North Korea, Syria or other countries that are developing nuclear weapons or may be seeking to do so.

But the Energy Department said in a statement Wednesday evening, "We are confident that none of the projects cited by the House committee, or any of the department's scientist engagement projects with Russia, support nuclear work in Iran."

The statement added, "We take all measures necessary to ensure that neither money nor technology falls into the hands of countries of concern."

Individual projects are cleared by the Defense Department, the State Department and intelligence agencies, according to the Energy Department.

An Energy Department official said, "What we're doing is very important to engage these scientists as part of a nonproliferation goal." The official requested anonymity because his response had not gone through official channels.

The Energy Department has approved projects with the two institutes worth \$4 million, according to the letter sent by the committee chairmen to Mr. Bodman on Wednesday, but the Energy Department official said that sum included a \$1 million project that might have been canceled.

Because of the design of Bushehr, a civilian electric power plant, it would be cumbersome to recover the plutonium that is the byproduct of its operations. In addition, Russia has announced that it will take back the spent fuel from the plant, thus making the plutonium unavailable to Iran.

But the United States has looked with some alarm at Iran acquiring nuclear expertise. Iran wants to build a plant to enrich uranium and make its own reactor fuel, saying it wants to do so for civilian purposes. American officials complain that the enrichment technology could also be used to make warheads.

Mr. Dingell said, "Only this administration would complain about proliferation in Iran, as part of President Bush's axis of evil, and then finance it with American taxpayer dollars."

Mr. Stupak called it "schizophrenic foreign policy."

"We should not be doing business with institutes that help promote Iran's nuclear ambitions," he said.

The United States pays for a variety of projects at numerous "institutes" in Russia and other former Soviet countries. For example, at the Scientific Research Institute of Measuring Systems in Nizhny Novgorod, which is making control room equipment for Bushehr, the United States is paying \$1.15 million for a project for radar mapping of geological structures, which could be used to locate underground mineral deposits.

A study of the American program by the Government Accountability Office released last month found that while the program was intended to provide support for former Soviet weapons scientists, many of those receiving benefits had done no weapons work, and some were not old enough to have worked as scientists during Soviet times.

An Energy Department official testifying before Mr. Stupak acknowledged at a hearing on Jan. 23 that parts of the program may have outlived the original intent.

The Bushehr reactor has had a long, involved history. In 1975 the shah of Iran ordered twin reactors from a German firm, Kraftwerke-Union, but work stopped after he was overthrown in 1979. The two units were bombed by the Iraqis in the Iran-Iraq war that began in 1980.

In 1995, the Iranian government contracted with Russia to finish the first unit, a major challenge because the standard Russian design was substantially different from the German design.

The reactor is supposed to begin producing power this year, Iranian officials said.

http://www.nytimes.com/2008/02/07/washington/07nuke.html?_r=1&ref=world&oref=slogin

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New York Times

February 7, 2008

Iran: Russia Says New Rocket Raises Nuclear 'Suspensions'

By Associated Press

Russian news agencies quoted the deputy foreign minister, Aleksandr Losyukov, as saying that Iran's test of a rocket this week had raised "suspensions" about its nuclear program. Iran fired the rocket Monday from its new space center in the deserts of Semnan Province and said it wanted to launch domestically built satellites for research and telecommunications. The United States said the launch was a "troubling" show of a technology that could be used to fire long-range ballistic missiles. "It adds to general suspicions of Iran regarding its potential desire to build nuclear weapons," said Mr. Losyukov, who is also the top Russian negotiator in the six-nation talks over North Korea's nuclear weapons program. "Long-range missiles are one of the components of such weapons. That causes concern." Iran gave no details about the rocket, but the official Russian news agency RIA Novosti said some experts believed it could be an advanced version of the Shahab-3 ballistic missile, which has a range of 1,200 miles.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2008/02/07/world/worldspecial/07briefs-ROCKET.html?ref=world>

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Washington Times

Article published Feb 7, 2008

Panel told nuke talks at impasse

February 7, 2008

ASSOCIATED PRESS

The chief U.S. envoy at North Korean nuclear talks urged Kim Jong-il's government to hand over a promised list of its nuclear efforts, saying yesterday that nuclear negotiators are working to make sure "Pyongyang lives up to its word."

Christopher R. Hill told lawmakers that six-nation disarmament talks are at a "critical, challenging" point. "There is some sense of urgency," he said at a Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearing.

The United States says the North has balked at providing a "complete and correct" disclosure of nuclear programs to eventually be dismantled. Washington has refused to take the North off a U.S. terrorism blacklist, a coveted goal of Pyongyang, until negotiators have the list.

"Let me be clear," Mr. Hill said. " 'Complete and correct' means complete and correct. This declaration must include all nuclear weapons, programs, materials and facilities, including clarification of any proliferation activities." He made his remarks a day after the director of national intelligence, Michael McConnell, questioned North Korea's commitment to the stalled talks.

Mr. McConnell also said the U.S. intelligence community thinks North Korea continues to work on a secret uranium-enrichment program and to sell its weapons around the world.

North Korea has begun disabling its main nuclear facilities under an agreement with the other countries at the international arms talks — China, Japan, Russia and South Korea, as well as the U.S.

Most of the tasks of disabling those facilities have been completed, Mr. Hill said, with American experts working to ensure the plutonium-making facility would require at least a year to become operational again.

But the talks have faced an impasse since the North missed a Dec. 31 deadline on the declaration.

North Korea claims it gave the U.S. a nuclear list in November. Washington says Pyongyang never produced a complete list.

<http://www.washingtontimes.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20080207/FOREIGN/454532536/1003>

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New York Times

February 8, 2008

Pg. 10

Iran Is Reported To Test New Centrifuges To Make Atomic Fuel

By David E. Sanger and William J. Broad

WASHINGTON — Iran has reportedly begun to deploy a new generation of machinery to produce nuclear fuel, a development bound to intensify a debate in Washington about whether a recent National Intelligence Estimate accurately portrayed Tehran's progress toward the ability to build a nuclear weapon.

The testing of the new machinery, centrifuges known as IR-2s, was disclosed by European diplomats and American officials and was reported over the past two days in Europe. The development is expected to be included in a report this month by the International Atomic Energy Agency about Iran's nuclear progress, and whether it has finally resolved questions about activities that have led inspectors to suspect that it may be pursuing weapons.

Centrifuges spin at enormously high speeds to enrich uranium, which can be used to fuel nuclear reactors or, after more processing, nuclear weapons. The IR-2 is an Iranian improvement on a Pakistani design that President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad boasted in an April 2006 speech would quadruple Iran's enrichment powers.

Reports about the new centrifuges were made just two days after the director of national intelligence, Mike McConnell, told Congress that he had regrets about how the National Intelligence Estimate had been written. He was responding to criticism that the report had left the impression that Iran was no longer seeking a nuclear weapons capability.

The National Intelligence Estimate said that late in 2003 Iran ceased work on a weapons design — but it noted later that Iran was continuing to enrich uranium. Nuclear experts say that building an atomic warhead is less of an engineering challenge than producing the fuel for the weapon.

Mr. McConnell confirmed that in his testimony on Tuesday, saying that weapons design was "probably the least significant part of the program" and that Iran's refusal to halt uranium enrichment meant that it still posed a potential nuclear threat.

"In retrospect," he said, "I would do some things differently."

Iran contends that its nuclear program is for peaceful purposes and that the enrichment will produce fuel for its nuclear plants.

The White House seized on the news about the new centrifuges to argue Thursday that sanctions against Iran should be increased, despite the National Intelligence Estimate's findings. Gordon D. Johndroe, the spokesman for the National Security Council, said that "if the reports are true, Iran is ramping up its enrichment activities, and this is just a demonstration that they continue to ignore the U.N. Security Council."

He added that "the recent N.I.E. indicated that enrichment activity could be used for nuclear weapons purposes, and the international community is united that Iran cannot have a nuclear weapon."

White House officials and outside experts have said that the intelligence estimate took the pressure off Iran. Indeed, the estimate won praise from many experts, who said that previous assessments had overstated the threat from Iran.

But for others the disclosure of the new centrifuges suggested the need to keep up the pressure.

“The key question is whether this would speed up the day when they could have a break out capability — the ability to make a small arsenal,” said Gary Samore, the director of studies and a vice president at the Council on Foreign Relations and an expert on the Iranian program. Mr. Samore said the National Intelligence Estimate had played to the interests of Russia and China, which “didn’t want their core economic and political connections to Iran to be threatened.”

“This gave them the pretext” to water down the sanctions, he said.

The new centrifuges have begun to be installed at Iran’s main enrichment complex at Natanz, the officials said. But European news reports on Thursday said no uranium had been fed into the machines.

Experts said Iran’s design for the IR-2 centrifuge showed considerable technical creativity.

In an interview, a senior European nuclear official who monitors the Iranian program said the IR-2 was “more ingenious” than its predecessor, an unreliable machine called the P-1, with the “P” reflecting its Pakistani origins. The official insisted on anonymity because of the political delicacy of the issue.

A report released Thursday by the Institute for Science and International Security, a private group in Washington that tracks nuclear proliferation, said the Iranian-made machine was designed to be efficient and reliable.

The report said that if Iran could build 1,200 centrifuges of the new design, it could produce enough weapons-grade uranium for a bomb in one year. Iran would need 3,000 of the current generation of machines to get the equivalent output. It has built that many, experts say, but has had difficulty keeping them running.

At the core of the new centrifuge design is a thin, tubelike rotor made of carbon fibers rather than maraging steel, a variety with great strength, the institute’s report said. Iran has had difficulty making or buying strong maraging steel, largely because the West has stopped shipments headed to the country.

But the report suggested that Iran would need to buy other materials from foreign suppliers — which gives the United States and its allies a chance to disrupt the supply chain. It is not clear whether Iran has enough parts to make the new machines in large quantities.

The existence of the IR-2s began to come to light last month after Tehran let senior International Atomic Energy Agency officials visit a complex for the machine’s development.

http://www.nytimes.com/2008/02/08/washington/08nukes.html?_r=1&ref=world&oref=slogin

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Washington Post

February 9, 2008

Pg. 9

Putin, In Speech, Accuses U.S. Of Setting Off 'New Arms Race'

By Peter Finn, Washington Post Foreign Service

MOSCOW, Feb. 8 -- President Vladimir Putin said Friday that "a new arms race has been unleashed in the world" as the United States moves forward with a missile defense system in Eastern Europe. Russia will field new weapons in response, he said, dismissing American assurances that the missile system is not directed against Russia as merely "diplomatic cover."

"It's not our fault. We didn't start it . . . funneling multibillions of dollars into developing weapons systems," Putin declared in what may be his final major address before he leaves the Kremlin after presidential elections March 2 to become prime minister.

"Russia has and always will have a response to these new challenges," Putin declared. "Over the next few years, Russia will start production of new types of arms, with the same or even superior specifications compared to those available to other nations."

He said, however, that military spending should not come at the cost of the country's economic and social development.

Putin was addressing Russia's State Council, a gathering of ministers, regional governors and members of parliaments. Among those watching in the chandeliered St. George's Hall was Dmitry Medvedev, Putin's chosen successor, who is expected to coast to victory in next month's vote. His most vocal opponent, former prime minister Mikhail Kasyanov, has been barred from running.

Medvedev has struck a milder tone than his boss in recent speeches and has avoided rhetorical assaults on the West. He cut some anti-Western flourishes from a recent speech prepared by his staff, according to a report in Newsweek's Russian edition.

But Putin's swan song was in keeping with the president's increasingly harsh tone over the past couple of years as Russia and the West clashed over a host of issues, including the future status of Kosovo and Russia's democratic development.

Friday's uncompromising words sounded the now familiar theme that the West, resentful of Russia's resurgence under Putin's stewardship, is encircling the country by bringing neighbors into the NATO alliance and attempting to subvert it internally by funding opponents of the Kremlin. And although the West speaks of freedom and democracy, Putin said, its real agenda is to gain access to the natural resources that "God has graced us with." "Thus, many conflicts, foreign policy actions and diplomatic protests reek of oil and gas," he said. Among Russia's neighbors, Ukraine and Georgia are seeking membership in NATO. The three Baltic republics that were part of the Soviet Union are already in the alliance, as are many formerly communist countries in Eastern Europe.

"We drew down our bases in Cuba and in Vietnam. What did we get?" Putin said. "New American bases in Romania, Bulgaria. A new third missile defense region in Poland.

"We are categorically being told these actions aren't directed at Russia and therefore our concerns are completely unfounded," he continued. "That's not a constructive response."

Putin said that "irresponsible demagoguery, attempts to split society and to use foreign assistance and interference in the course of political struggle in Russia are not only immoral, but also illegal."

The speech, which was punctuated by frequent applause, also enumerated what Putin saw as his achievements.

"We have returned to the world arena as a state which is taken account of and which can stand up for itself," he said.

Turning to the country's domestic development, he contrasted Russia's current stability and economic growth with what the Kremlin frequently describes as the chaos of the 1990s under President Boris Yeltsin.

"We have managed to rid the country of the vicious practice of government decisions made under pressure from raw materials and financial monopolies, media moguls, foreign political circles and brazen populists that cynically ignored not only national interests but the basic needs of millions of people," Putin said. "First of all, we started restoring the constitutional order, reviving basic social guarantees to individuals and strengthening government institutions."

Putin noted proudly that Russia has joined "the ranks of the seven biggest economies in the world." But he said the country needs to diversify and no longer depend on sales of oil and other natural resources to fuel its growth.

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/02/08/AR2008020801245.html>

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Washington Times

February 9, 2008

Pg. 7

Iran

Second Nuke Plant Started, Envoy Says

MOSCOW — Iran has started building a second atomic power plant in an oil-rich region near the border of Iraq, Iran's ambassador to Russia was quoted as saying yesterday by ITAR-Tass news agency.

Gholamreza Ansari said construction had started at Darkhovin in southwestern Khuzestan province. Iran has said it would construct a 360 megawatt plant at the site.

U.S. Undersecretary of State R. Nicholas Burns told Reuters news agency he saw no reason for a second Iranian plant. He also said at Iran's rocket launch test on Monday and in press reports this week that it has begun testing an advanced centrifuge were "deeply disturbing."

<http://www.washingtontimes.com/article/20080209/FOREIGN/440287499/1003/foreign>

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Los Angeles Times

February 10, 2008

ElBaradei Warns About Extremist Nuclear Threat

By Kim Murphy, Los Angeles Times Staff Writer

MUNICH, GERMANY — The United Nations' chief nuclear watchdog provided a singularly bleak vision of a world "in disarray" Saturday, warning that the most imminent threat is not a new nation joining the nuclear club, but deadly material falling into the hands of extremists.

The specter of nuclear terrorism is not a new theme for International Atomic Energy Agency chief Mohamed ElBaradei, who has been managing the standoff over Iran's nuclear program for six years, but his language was particularly gloomy at a security conference of international leaders here.

"Is the world in disarray? Unfortunately, the answer is yes. The world is in disarray," he said. "The world is going through a period of insecurity and instability; I think we all agree on that. All you have to do is look at what we go through here and at the airport -- it's awful the life we have to go through at times."

ElBaradei, who was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2005 for his work on Iran, drew a picture of a world wrestling with the details of one nation's nuclear quest amid a much larger threat of nuclear catastrophe brought on by poverty, political humiliation and the failure of the world's most powerful countries to move swiftly to nuclear disarmament.

"We still live in a world where we have 2 billion who live on under \$2 a day, one-third of our fellow beings. . . . We have 20,000 people who die every day because they are too poor to live. The sanctity of human life -- are we really serious about the sanctity of human life?" ElBaradei told an audience of presidents, prime ministers, defense ministers and top diplomats from Europe and the United States.

He warned of the danger of nuclear material falling into the hands of extremist groups, nurtured on "anger, humiliation and desperation" in the Middle East or elsewhere.

He said the IAEA each year is handling 150 cases of illicit trafficking of nuclear material. Some material that is reported stolen is never recovered, he said, and conversely, "a lot of the material recovered has never been reported stolen."

"This, to me, is the most danger we are facing today. Because any country, even if they have nuclear weapons, would continue to have a rational approach," he said. "They know if they use a nuclear weapon, they will be pulverized. For an extremist group, there is no concept of deterrence. If they have it, they will use it."

ElBaradei suggested that it is difficult to get up-and-coming nations to take nonproliferation responsibilities seriously when the existing members of the nuclear club, who long ago committed to the principle of gradual nuclear disarmament, not only maintain large stockpiles, but keep them locked and loaded.

In today's world, where nuclear capability means power, he said, "you don't really even need to have a nuclear weapon."

"It's enough to buy yourself an insurance policy by developing the capability, and then sit on it. Let's not kid ourselves -- 90% of it is insurance, a deterrence.

"It's not sustainable," he said. "The nuclear technology is out of the tube, completely out of the tube. We have seen now that any country with an average industrial infrastructure can develop the know-how to develop a nuclear weapon. . . . We have to show the way that we are making good on our commitment to move toward nuclear disarmament."

<http://www.latimes.com/news/nationworld/world/la-fg-iran10feb10,1,1559352.story>

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Washington Post

February 11, 2008

Pg. 1

Iran's Clerical Old Guard Being Pushed Aside

By Thomas Erdbrink, Washington Post Foreign Service

TEHRAN -- After Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini's followers toppled a U.S.-backed autocracy in Iran, he brought to power a coterie of politically engaged clerics who sought to create the world's first Islamic republic. Nearly 30 years later, a new generation of politicians is sweeping aside those clerics, many of whom had become proponents of better relations with the West and gradual steps toward greater democracy.

The newcomers are former military commanders, filmmakers and mayors, many younger than 50 and only a few of them clerics. They are vowing to carry out the promises of the revolution and to place Iran among the world's leading nations. This rising generation has the support of Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, supreme leader in Iran's political system, who backs the government's assertive foreign and nuclear policies.

Last month, local election councils disqualified scores of clerics and their allies -- including Khomeini's grandson, Ali Eshragi -- from seeking election to parliament March 14. Such candidates have been disqualified before, but analysts said the absence of members of the clerical old guard from other institutions of power in Iran means they will find it difficult to mount an electoral comeback.

"These newcomers are pushing the followers of the imam out of power," said cleric and political veteran Rasoul Montajabnia, using an honorific to refer to Khomeini. "We are being dealt with disloyally."

Analysts say the purging of those clerics strengthens President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, the most prominent leader of the new generation, and will result in a smaller political class that is more beholden to the supreme leader and less tolerant of even internal dissent.

"The newcomers don't have the same power base as the old guard," said Mehrdad Serjooie, a political analyst and former journalist. "They have no reputation dating from the time of the revolution, no direct access to oil money and no important supporters.

"The old factions often could operate more independently because they were powerful" in their own right, Serjooie added. "The new generation depends more on the leader."

Khamenei two weeks ago publicly vetoed a decision by Ahmadinejad to ignore certain laws passed by parliament.

"This was a signal to show who is in charge," Serjooie said.

The newcomers say their emergence is part of a generational change. "For the last 30 years we have seen the same names in Iranian politics. It was natural that clerics took control of the country's affairs after they led the revolution, but as time goes by it's natural that younger non-clerics take over," said Saeed Aboutaleb, 37, a member of parliament since 2004.

He said clerics would remain important. "We need them for guidance, just as the late Imam Khomeini wanted. In the end, this is just a change in clothes," he added, referring to the overcoat and turban worn by clerics and the suits worn by younger politicians. "The newcomers are just as religious."

If the clerics have a chance at regaining the political prominence they enjoyed in the years following the 1979 revolution, analysts say, it will be under the leadership of former president Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, an ayatollah and former close aide to Khomeini who lost the presidential election to Ahmadinejad in 2005.

During Rafsanjani's two terms in the 1990s, his faction controlled several important executive and economic institutions in Iran, among them the Oil Ministry. He helped bring cleric Mohammad Khatami to power as his successor in 1997.

Khatami's supporters, known here as reformists, included many onetime revolutionaries, such as former students who came to regret their 1979 takeover of the U.S. Embassy in Tehran, which led to the severing of ties between Iran and the United States. Rafsanjani's political allies teamed with the reformists and together they began arguing that Islamic law is dynamic and adaptable. They also favored reestablishing relations with the United States through compromise and proposed minor democratic reforms. Later, political fights broke out between the two groups.

Although they held executive power, Khatami and his supporters were prevented from carrying out most of their plans by the judiciary and the Guardian Council, a 12-member body that answers to the supreme leader. Both were dominated by opponents of relations with the United States and of political or religious change.

Most of the candidates disqualified last month belong to Khatami's broad reformist coalition, which sought to compete with the newcomers in this year's parliamentary elections. The Guardian Council is considering appeals and will announce its decisions March 5.

Rafsanjani's supporters, whom the newcomers have accused of corruption, a lack of revolutionary zeal and even spying, decided not to stand in the upcoming elections, although they have not given an explanation.

"We believe we should open the atmosphere in the country, give more freedom and practice detente in the international arena. The newcomers are dogmatic and don't believe in the wishes of the people," said Montajabnia, the cleric, who is a member of the National Trust Party and part of the reformist coalition. "This is a power struggle for the political direction of this country."

The struggle began almost four years ago with the surprise election to parliament of a majority representing the newcomers, and it continued with Ahmadinejad's presidential victory and the subsequent replacement of tens of thousands of experienced government managers.

The newcomers, some of whom had spent years in secondary positions in the Iranian system but had no prominent role in the revolution, have taken over important positions traditionally held by clerics. Gholam Ali Haddad Adel, a former student of physics and deputy minister of education, became the first non-cleric to head parliament following the 2004 election.

The top negotiator on nuclear issues, cleric Hassan Rowhani, was replaced by Ali Larijani, a former head of Iranian state television. Larijani was replaced in October by Saeed Jalili, another non-cleric and a close ally of Ahmadinejad.

Among the newcomers are a few clerics, almost all of whom studied at a religious school in the holy city of Qom known for its strict interpretation of Islam.

Ahmadinejad's faction, which calls itself "principalist," consists of newcomers who say they want to act according to the principles of Islam and the revolution. Many members are former commanders in Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps, a force created after 1979 to protect the revolution. Members of another, more technocratic group have similar ideals and backgrounds but are at odds with the government on how to implement those principles. Larijani, who is seeking election to parliament, is emerging as the head of that faction.

"After a purge, the remaining faction divides. The split in the newcomers group will finally result in two main new groups in Iranian politics," said Iraj Jamshidi, political editor at Etemaad newspaper.

The newcomers say the politicians who preceded them haven't realized the goals of the revolution. "There has been a lot of abuse of power," said Aboutaleb.

Jamshidi, whose newspaper is considered reformist, said the "clerics who used to hold high positions are being held responsible for the current problems in Iran."

Still, Rafsanjani holds one last trump card. In September he was chosen as chairman of the Assembly of Experts, an elected council of 86 clerics that selects, supervises and can dismiss the supreme leader.

"We don't know what's happening in the assembly," Serjooie said. "But we can be sure the new generation is now trying to get as many other institutions as possible under their influence, to cement their newly attained power."

Jamshidi said there is little likelihood that the cleric-politicians who gained power after the revolution will rebuild their standing. "They are not a part of the decision-making process anymore," he said. "I don't see any chance of a comeback."

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/02/10/AR2008021002698.html>

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Philadelphia Inquirer

February 11, 2008

Russia Urges Wide Approach To Arms Control

By David Rising, Associated Press

MUNICH, Germany - The United States and Russia should set aside Cold War arms control treaties and replace them with new, multilateral agreements to combat nuclear proliferation, a senior Russian official said yesterday.

Sergei Ivanov, Russia's defense minister until promoted to first deputy prime minister last year, said the time has come "to open this framework for all leading states interested in cooperation in order to ensure overall security."

But "Russia-U.S. ties will certainly retain their significance," he said.

Ivanov also told a gathering of the world's top defense officials that Russia's burgeoning economic power does not represent a threat to other countries, but the West has to get used to Moscow's growing influence in world affairs.

He said Russia expected to be among the world's five biggest economies by 2020, but "we do not aim to buy the entire Old World with our petrodollars."

However, the European Union's foreign policy chief, Javier Solana, criticized Russia's increased assertiveness in world affairs, saying Russia has not been constructive in efforts to secure an international agreement on Kosovo's independence from Serbia.

Kosovo's ethnic Albanian leadership has said it will declare independence from Serbia "in a matter of days."

The United States and most EU nations support statehood for the U.N.-run province where 90 percent of the population of two million is ethnic Albanian.

Ivanov said Russia believes that recognizing an independent Kosovo would set a dangerous precedent.

"We want to stay within the international law framework, and we don't want to create a precedent, and we think if it comes to unilateral recognition of Kosovo that will be a precedent . . . and that will be something close to opening a Pandora's Box," he said.

Solana rejected fears that other breakaway regions would follow Kosovo's example.

"I'm not concerned at all," he told reporters. "No conflict is equal, no history is equal . . . this domino theory is completely wrong."

Though Moscow and Washington have been at odds recently over an American plan to position parts of a missile defense system in Poland and the Czech Republic, Ivanov said Russia and the United States needed to work closely together to combat nuclear proliferation.

He suggested that old bilateral treaties between the United States and Russia on nuclear arms - like the Salt 1 agreement - should be replaced by multilateral agreements.

"It is imperative to ensure that the provisions of such a regime should be legally binding so that, in due course, it would really become possible to shift to the control over nuclear weapons and the process of their gradual reduction on a multilateral basis," he said.

http://www.philly.com/inquirer/world_us/20080211_Russia_urges_wide_approach_to_arms_control.html

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Washington Times

February 11, 2008

Pg. 13

U.S. Braces For Face-Off Over Weapons Treaties

U.N. chief urges long-awaited accord on nuke, space activities

By Nicholas Kraley and John Zarocostas, The Washington Times

The United States is headed for a showdown with Russia and China this week over competing international treaties, one banning the production of nuclear materials and the other trying to prevent an arms race in space.

The squabble is certain to prolong an embarrassing stalemate at the U.N. Conference on Disarmament in Geneva that has received an unusual rebuke from U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, diplomats and analysts said.

U.S. officials said their top priority at the conference is beginning negotiations on the Fissile Material Cutoff Treaty (FMCT), which would ban the production of plutonium and highly enriched uranium for weapons purposes.

"We believe it is in everybody's interests to reduce the availability of fissile materials on the streets — [first] for producing bombs, which is a disarmament measure, and [second] preventing terrorists from getting hold of it, [which is] a nonproliferation measure," said Christina Rocca, the chief U.S. envoy to the conference.

Trying to reach an international agreement on such a ban has been one of the longest-running arms-control exercises since World War II. No agreement was secured during the Cold War, even after the groundbreaking deals between President Reagan and Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev.

The latest attempt to negotiate a treaty began more than a decade ago, but diplomats said getting 65 countries to agree to such a document has been difficult.

Now Russia and China have linked negotiations on the FMCT to a treaty that aims to prevent an arms race in space. They are expected to co-sponsor a draft in Geneva tomorrow.

Foreign diplomats and analysts suggested that Washington's push for the FMCT is an attempt to pre-empt that proposal. State Department officials countered that Moscow and Beijing are trying to upstage Washington with their draft.

"We put our FMCT draft forward in May 2006 and have been pushing it all along, before there was any talk of a treaty on outer space," one official said. "This is just another attempt to block the FMCT."

Another official said the United States opposes the Russian-Chinese proposal because it considers the 1967 Outer Space Treaty sufficient, although Washington is "prepared to look at new transparency and confidence-building measures."

"Given the dual nature of space activities, trying to negotiate something with the idea that you can prohibit the deployment of weapons in outer space but not their development is ludicrous," he said.

Daryl Kimball, executive director of the Arms Control Association in Washington, said the FMCT faces a "complex diplomatic web," because "everyone is saying that the other one is the bad guy."

Four of the five declared nuclear powers — the United States, Britain, France and Russia — have said publicly that they no longer produce fissile material. The fifth, China, has not made such a statement.

China opposes the FMCT, as do India and Pakistan, which still produce highly enriched uranium, analysts say. India also extracts plutonium, and Pakistan is expected to begin doing so in the near future.

India has said it would support the treaty only if it includes a verification mechanism. A verification provision was taken out of the text in the latest U.S. draft, which the Bush administration put on the table after a long review of a series of international treaties and proposals.

The administration said that effective verification was impossible to achieve.

Iran, Syria and Israel also are expected to object to the FMCT text.

The Conference on Disarmament, established in 1979, is desperate to break its long stalemate. Mr. Ban voiced frustration with the body's inability to overcome differences last month at its opening session for this year.

"Even with widespread agreement on the gravity of threats to international peace and security, you still have not been able to find common cause to address them," he told the delegates. "I'm deeply troubled by this impasse over priorities."

John Zarocostas reported from Geneva.

<http://www.washingtontimes.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20080211/FOREIGN/737263646/1003>

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