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The Register

## **The American way of bioterror - an A-Z of ricin crackpots**

By George Smith, Dick Destiny

Published Tuesday 22nd April 2008 13:09 GMT

It takes a special kind of American to be fascinated by ricin, and last week the latest, Roger Von Bergendorff, was indicted in the District Court of Nevada. Bergendorff possibly qualifies for an award in failed Darwinism, being the only person in recent times to have seemingly accidentally poisoned himself with the protein toxin, but not quite effectively enough for the FBI to have nothing to do except attend his funeral.

The US government's complaint against Bergendorff, filed on April 15 paints a common picture: loser dude on the fringes of society, indigent but with still enough money to have two unregistered guns with silencers, castor seeds, a standard collection of anarchist poisons literature and castor powder - or "crude" ricin as the FBI puts it.

Bergendorff told the FBI his production of ricin was an "exotic idea." He'd been puttering away at powdering castor seeds as something of a hobby since 2005 while living in poverty in Utah and Nevada. He'd pounded them in the

basement of a cousin (who has also been charged in connection with the case) and, most recently, possibly in an Extended Stay America hotel room in Las Vegas. He professed to love animals, but his beloved dog had to be euthanized due to irreversible neglect when Bergendorff apparently poisoned himself, was hospitalized, lapsed into a coma and his hotel room searched.

Bergendorff had "researched" the Internet for his ricin recipe, downloading the *Anarchist's Cookbook*. He babbled his method to the FBI, which duly reported he had conducted "a series of 'mashings' of the castor seeds with acetone and drying out the mash to remove the oil." While Bergendorff admitted to doing this, he professed to not always remember precisely where he'd done the work or if he'd performed it on castor seeds bought from a garden shop, the receipt for which the FBI recovered in its searches. "Bergendorff admitted [that there had been people] who made him mad over the years and he had thoughts about causing them harm to the point of making some plans but he maintained he had never acted on those thoughts or plans," reads the indictment.

Readers may notice a trend.

*Not your average psychotic killer*

The ricin perps of the past few years are not the Hollywood picture of evil. There is no Anton Chigurh - the psychopathic assassin who storms through Texas in the movie "No Country for Old Men" armed with a sniper rifle and a pneumatic hand-held piston for smashing skulls - among them. They're a gallery of weirdoes, some of them dangerous in an inept manner, but generally more hazardous to themselves. Not to put too fine a point on it, they're damaged goods, and one can say from experience that, contrary to Bergendorff's hazy assertion, making ricin from castor seeds is not an "exotic idea" but a tiresome one. It's common and banal, attractive only to lonely nuts, obsessed self-styled outdoorsmen, stupid as well as crazy gun collectors and incompetent criminals. Since 9/11, every complaint involving ricin has received national recognition, averaging a couple incidents a year. No fatalities have resulted.

If one reviews recent cases, the American perp list backs up the low-rent, often unintentionally comical, character of what can be dubbed a bona fide collection of distinctly American ricin crackpots.

*Crackpot bean-pounders*

Since 2004, US criminals implicated in ricin cases:

**Robert Alberg**, from Kirkland, Washington, a man suffering from Asperger's and in need of institutional care.

Alberg allegedly produced ricin in his apartment after purchasing five pounds of castor seeds from a nursery, which reported him to the FBI.

**Michael Crooker**, a Massachusetts man now serving time as a convicted felon, was arrested by the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms in 2004 for sale of an air rifle equipped with a silencer. Castor seeds and rosary peas - which contain ricin's cousin, abrin, were found in his apartment. He is famously known for suing Microsoft and Hewlett-Packard, the latter for furnishing a cryptological program which apparently did not properly work for him, exposing him to embarrassment. As of January, Crooker faces a host of charges stemming from evidence collected in 2004. The charges include possession of toxins for use as weapons, threatening to transfer the toxins to another in order to launch an attack on a federal building, threatening to use a WMD, possession of a toxin by a restricted person and possession of toxin of a type not justified by research or any other peaceful purpose. If convicted, Crooker faces various outcomes which include life imprisonment if convicted on threatening to use a WMD and ten years for possession of biological toxins.

**Ken Olsen** of Spokane, Washington, researched ricin purification on the net and was sent to prison for fourteen years after being fired from Agilent Technologies for doing it from a company computer and storing the resulting castor powder at his desk.

**Casey Cutler**, from Mesa, AZ, was a drug addict who tried to make ricin from castor oil to defend himself from suppliers who had beaten him. While one cannot get ricin from castor oil, he was still convicted for taking what the court deemed a substantial step toward making a biological weapon. Lesson: In the US, it's illegal to use castor oil for anything other than its recommended purpose as an intestinal cleanser.

**Stephen Ekberg**, of Marion County, Florida, was an unsuccessful twentysomething living at home with his mother and, like Bergendorff, a castor seeds putterer. He showed someone a box of his poisons, was reported to the FBI and given 22 months for possession of ricin.

Survivalist **Denys Ray Hughes** lived between Phoenix, Arizona and a cabin in Wisconsin. After a traffic stop in Kansas, the ATF investigated his properties finding castor plants, castor seeds, plans on how to build a bunker, assorted guns and silencers, gunpowder, fuses and ricin recipes. Hughes was sent over for seven years on counts of attempted production of a biological toxin, possession of an unregistered destructive device and possession of an unregistered silencer.

Lesbians **Astrid Tepatti** and **Ebony Woods** of Imperial County, California, engaged in a plot to kill the former's husband. They hired a hit man for \$10,000 to stab him to death. The attempt failed. Tepatti also attempted to shoot her ex-husband while he slept on the sofa with a gun equipped with homemade silencer made from a potato. She

missed. Both drugged him with Valium and tranquilizers. He was made sleepy. And they were found with a recipe for ricin, downloaded from a white supremacist site, and a bag of powder which was allegedly the toxin. They lodged a plea agreement of guilty to attempted murder in 2004 but were not charged on possession of ricin. In September of 2006, **Steven** and **Kimberly Edwards** of Jackson, Mississippi, were indicted on charges of attempting to make ricin from castor seeds in a plot to kill the parents of the latter for inheritance money. Although Kimberly Edwards was said to have a Ph.D. in chemistry, the two still downloaded an Internet ricin recipe. In jail since 2006, sentencing is pending.

*Shunned by terrorists, loved by crackpots*

American ricin crackpots are a breed distinct from Islamic terrorists. Jihadis and al Qaeda appear to have moved away from attempting to purify ricin in the years past 9/11 in favor of more practical bomb making using unsecured ammunition in Iraq, and TATP. In 2004, the Iraq Survey Group reported that a group called the Al Abud network had dabbled in making castor cake for the purpose of purifying ricin further. The network was broken up by US forces and the CIA deemed it incapable of producing a mass casualty, attack although it might have eventually produced enough ricin to produce "a few isolated casualties." Desultory chemical bomb attacks by al Qaeda in Iraq using chlorine since then were largely fruitless.

The problem, as it exists in the US, is one that hinges upon the perception of ricin as an easy to use weapon. However, in order to pose a greater threat than has been seen in criminal cases, ricin must be purified to a greater extent than can be done using common ricin recipes. Since it is a protein which can be degraded in gross mixtures containing it and standard criminal procedure does nothing but change the condition of the castor seed to a dried mash, this state of affairs is not likely to change for the future. But it cannot be ruled out that an exceptional person, someone with sophisticated experience in protein chemistry and modest but just right material resources, might turn renegade and try their hand at it for the purpose of assassination.

The mainstream media is not good at communicating the fine points, focusing instead on how easy it is to get castor seeds and grind them into powder. It is too often assumed that this is all that is necessary to have a WMD. Reporters and many experts simply rely on the small but repetitively published quantity of ricin thought needed to cause death (theoretically 500 micrograms, perfectly administered with no loss). This a figure for a pure dose, and samples of which have never existed in American criminal cases.

So in America there is an odd position, one in which castor plants in the garden and on the stoop are entirely legitimate while the collection and mashing of the seeds of them immediately exposes the typical ricin putterer to a substantial criminal charge. In Bergendorff's case, the ricin crackpot can also bring down family members. It's a crime to know of and not report the production of ricin when the government comes inquiring. It charged Bergendorff's cousin, Thomas Tholen, for not informing authorities what he properly knew of Bergendorff powdering castor in the basement.

A long time ago castor seed agriculture was a noticeable renewable resource in the US. Castor pomace was an organic fertilizer, one used quite a bit until pushed aside by more modern sources of nitrogen from the chemical industry. And in 2008, some have seriously suggested enhancing the cultivation of castor plants for the production of biodiesel.

But the common modern view is one in which castor, outside of intestinal purgative, has no perceived purpose in the United States except as justification for the inspiration of bioterror fear and funding for the development of ricin vaccines nobody thought were necessary prior to 9/11. Paradoxically, poison tinkering Roger Von Bergendorff is the only person in the country who could have benefited from a ricin immunization.

A self-defeating and nihilistic interest exists in the poison, as if every red-blooded, disappointed and frustrated American kook has a defiant right to possess a recipe on their hard disk and a packet of castor seeds nearby, perhaps next to an unregistered handgun equipped with a silencer made out of a vegetable. This ensures a constant trickle of criminal apprehensions and prosecutions, a process the government handles efficiently, depositing ricin crackpots where they belong. Bergendorff, like everyone else before him, is headed for prison for an indefinite period, a just sentence when considering that, unintentionally or not, the ricin crackpot's major contribution is to frighten the locals when the gendarmes and hazmat teams descend on the neighborhood. ®

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[http://www.theregister.co.uk/2008/04/22/ricin\\_losers\\_roundup/](http://www.theregister.co.uk/2008/04/22/ricin_losers_roundup/)

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New York Times  
April 25, 2008

## Government Releases Images of Syrian Reactor

By David E. Sanger

WASHINGTON — The Bush administration released detailed photographic images on Thursday to support its assertion that the building in Syria that Israel destroyed in an airstrike last year was a nuclear reactor constructed with years of help from North Korea.

The administration said it withheld the pictures for seven months out of fear that Syria could retaliate against Israel and start a broader war in the Middle East.

The photographs taken inside the reactor before it was destroyed in an air raid on Sept. 6 clearly show the rods that control the heat in a nuclear reactor, one of many close engineering similarities to a reactor halfway around the world where North Korea produced the fuel for its nuclear arsenal.

While the photographs were not dated, some taken on the ground seemed to go back to before 2002.

But after a full day of briefing members of Congress, two senior intelligence officials acknowledged that the evidence had left them with no more than “low confidence” that Syria was preparing to build a nuclear weapon. They said that there was no sign that Syria had built an operation to convert the spent fuel from the plant into weapons-grade plutonium, but that they had told President Bush last year that they could think of no other explanation for the reactor.

Among the photographs shown to members of Congress and reporters on Thursday was one of the manager of North Korea’s Yongbyon nuclear plant with the director of Syria’s nuclear agency. A car in the background has Syrian license plates.

When asked about North Korea’s motivation for the project, one of the senior intelligence officials said simply, “Cash.” He refused to say how much.

The revelation of the plant’s existence is not new; The New York Times reported in mid-October that Israel had brought the United States evidence that the Syrian building was a partly constructed reactor. But no more than a handful of lawmakers had ever been briefed on the attack.

A senior administration official, briefing reporters with the help of the two senior intelligence officials, said for the first time that the White House had extensive discussions with Israel before the airstrike in September. The official said the White House had raised the possibility of confronting Syria with a demand that it dismantle the reactor or face the possibility of an attack.

But that idea apparently never gained traction with the Israelis or some in the administration, and in the end, the official said, Israel cited satellite evidence to declare that the Syrian reactor constituted “an existential threat” to Israel because it might soon be ready for operation. The senior administration official, who was a central player in Mr. Bush’s deliberations, added that Israel’s attack proceeded “without a green light from us.”

“None was asked for, none was given,” the official added.

While one of the senior intelligence officials said that the United States agreed that Syria was “good to go” in turning on the reactor, it would have been years before it could have produced weapons fuel.

It is unclear how the Syrians planned to get the uranium they needed. Once they got it, the reactor would have had to run for roughly 18 months before the fuel was “cooked.” And then to turn it into weapons-grade plutonium, it would require reprocessing, presumably outside the country unless Syria found a way to build its own plant.

The announcement on Thursday closes one chapter of a secretive intelligence and military operation and opens several others that will play out over the remainder of the Bush presidency.

The crucial question now is how the North Koreans will react. Some officials said that they hoped the announcement would embarrass the North into admitting to nuclear proliferation activities, while others said it could prompt the North to walk away from the negotiating table — and collapse the deal Mr. Bush was hoping to reach by the end of his presidency. In return for North Korea’s declaration of all its nuclear activities, the United States would lift sanctions and begin to negotiate the North Koreans’ reward for turning over their fuel and weapons.

The announcement also raises the possibility of new tensions with Syria, as the White House on Thursday accused the Syrian government of a “cover-up” consistent with a government that “supports terrorism, takes action that destabilizes Lebanon” and allows militants to enter Iraq.

Last year, Mr. Bush ordered that knowledge of the Syrian project be limited to a few crucial officials, and he put the C.I.A. in charge of marshaling the assets of other intelligence agencies.

Still, the Americans were somewhat blindsided. By their own account, they suspected that North Korea and Syria were at work together in Syria, but only identified the plant at Al Kibar, named for the nearest town, after they received photos of the interior of the plant last spring from Israel, American and Israeli officials said last year.

Only selected pictures were released by the intelligence agencies on Thursday, including a video that combined still photos and drawings, and had a voice-over that gave the presentation the feel of a cold-war-era newsreel about the

Korean War. In fact, it was intended in part, officials said, to try to draw that war — in which the United States and North Korea never signed a peace treaty — to a close.

But inside the administration, the battle over whether to try to strike a deal with North Korea or keep it under sanctions in hopes of setting off the collapse of its government continues into the last months of Mr. Bush's term. Representative Peter Hoekstra, a Republican from Michigan, expressed annoyance on Thursday that the administration waited seven months to brief Congress.

"I think many people believe that we were used today by the administration," he said.

At the C.I.A., Gen. Michael V. Hayden, the agency's director, told employees on Thursday that they should "take heart because our team effort on the Al Kibar reactor is a case study in rigorous analytic tradecraft, skillful human and technical collection, and close collaboration."

But even this victory, some experts note, raises questions about the agency's focus. The reactor was built within 100 miles of the Iraqi border yet never identified even though the administration was searching for any form of such arms programs in Iraq.

Moreover, even some senior officials of the administration acknowledge that they are likely to leave Mr. Bush's successor with a North Korea with roughly 10 nuclear weapons or fuel for weapons, up from the one or two weapons it had when Mr. Bush took office in 2001.

"I'd say the score is Kim Jong-il eight, and Bush zero," said Graham Allison, a Harvard professor and author of "Nuclear Terrorism," who was in Washington on Thursday to testify about Iran's nuclear program. "And if you can build a reactor in Syria without being detected for eight years, how hard can it be to sell a little plutonium to Osama bin Laden?"

<http://www.nytimes.com/2008/04/25/world/middleeast/25korea.html?scp=1&sq=Bush%20Administration%20Releases%20Images%20To%20Bolster%20Its%20Claims%20About%20Syrian%20Reactor&st=cse>

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Los Angeles Times

April 25, 2008

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## **U.S. Offers Evidence Of North Korea-Syria Nuclear Plant**

*The disclosure to Congress, aimed at pressuring those countries as well as Iran, is greeted with skepticism by some experts and foreign officials.*

By Greg Miller and Paul Richter, Los Angeles Times Staff Writers

WASHINGTON — The Bush administration went public Thursday with sensitive intelligence meant to show that North Korea spent years helping Syria build a covert facility for nuclear weapons before the plant was destroyed in an Israeli airstrike last year.

The disclosures offered a rare look at evidence gathered by U.S. and allied intelligence agencies and were part of a choreographed campaign by the administration to put pressure not only on North Korea and Syria, but also on other adversaries accused of pursuing nuclear weapons, including Iran.

The previously classified information included satellite images of the Syrian facility, photos of a man identified as a North Korean nuclear expert in Syria, as well as pictures taken by someone with access to the structure as it was being built.

The photos were presented in a glossy dossier that called attention to similarities between the Syrian plant, at a desert site called Al Kibar, and North Korea's nuclear reactor at Yongbyon.

The evidence left several questions unanswered, such as how Damascus would fuel the plant or manufacture bombs, and was greeted with skepticism by some nuclear experts and foreign officials.

U.S. intelligence officials acknowledged that they had not obtained evidence indicating Syria was working on nuclear weapons designs and had not identified a source of nuclear material for the facility.

In detailing the alleged North Korean-Syrian cooperation and the destruction of the plant, the Bush administration broke a long silence. U.S. officials confirmed the Israeli attack on the site and indicated that they had cooperated intensively with the Israelis on intelligence and policy issues. They denied any U.S. involvement in planning or executing the Sept. 6 strike.

To highlight the importance of the revelations, the administration sent three top officials to Capitol Hill to conduct closed-door briefings for several congressional committees. The officials included Director of National Intelligence J. Michael McConnell, CIA Director Michael V. Hayden and White House national security advisor Stephen Hadley.

As the briefings concluded, the White House issued a statement condemning North Korea and Syria and warning Iran that it should relinquish any nuclear weapons aspirations.

Syria responded by denouncing the charges as "false allegations." There was no immediate reaction from North Korea.

A senior Bush administration official said the timing of the intelligence disclosure was driven by a desire to strengthen the U.S. position in talks aimed at pressuring North Korea to provide a full accounting of its nuclear and proliferation activities.

Intelligence officials said North Korea appeared to have been helping Syria up until the facility was destroyed, and afterward helped it carry out damage assessments. If true, North Korea would be accused of continuing proliferation activities even as the United States was moving toward granting concessions, including removing North Korea from a list of nations that sponsor terrorism, as rewards for responsible behavior.

#### **Few calls to end talks**

Some have questioned whether the release was part of an effort by foreign policy hawks to undermine the talks. But there were few calls for ending them.

Administration officials vowed to push ahead in negotiations, and Sen. John McCain of Arizona, the presumed Republican presidential nominee, said the government should seek "an agreement that advances America's national interests in the full denuclearization of North Korea."

The White House hopes to pressure Syria not just over the alleged nuclear plant but also because of what the administration considers its destabilizing involvement in Lebanon, its support for terrorism, its role as a transit point for foreign fighters in Iraq and its political repression.

"If Syria wants better relations with the international community, it should put an end to these activities," the White House said.

The administration has been pressuring Iran over its nuclear program, which Iran denies is intended to produce nuclear weapons.

In a briefing with reporters, a senior U.S. intelligence official said that American spy agencies had been monitoring suspicious activity between North Korea and Syria for nearly a decade but that the information had been inconclusive until the CIA obtained dozens of photos taken by a hand-held camera.

The images include shots taken inside what appears to be a reactor -- with a grid of cylinders for control rods and refueling ports that are arrayed almost identically to those found at Yongbyon. Photos from outside the facility show a structure with similar roof lines, rows of windows and boxlike buildings matching the layout at Yongbyon.

The dossier distributed by the administration describes the facility as a gas-cooled, graphite-moderated reactor that was not configured to produce electricity and was ill-suited for research.

"Only North Korea has built this type of reactor in the past 35 years," the document says. Officials would not say how they obtained the images.

U.S. officials said Syria worked during the last year to enclose the entire compound inside a warehouse-like shell, apparently to guard against overhead surveillance. The officials described the intelligence on condition of anonymity.

American analysts became alarmed last year when the Syrians completed a pipeline that enabled them to get water from the nearby Euphrates River for an underground cooling tank, officials said.

"This was good to go," a senior U.S. intelligence official said. "We had to assume they could throw the switch at any time."

Even so, the U.S. case concerning the compound is likely to continue to face skepticism, in part because of lingering credibility problems U.S. intelligence agencies face after their erroneous prewar assessments on Iraq.

#### **Doubts voiced**

In addition, there are questions left unanswered by the evidence disclosed.

Such a reactor requires a large volume of nuclear fuel, said David Albright, a physicist and former weapons inspector who is president of the Institute for Science and International Security in Washington. The Americans' inability to identify any source of fuel "raises questions about when the reactor could have operated, despite evidence that it was nearing completion at the time of the attack."

He also said the United States and Israel weren't able to identify any Syrian facilities to separate plutonium from reactor fuel, a step necessary to build nuclear weapons. The lack of a processing plant "gives little confidence that the reactor was part of an active nuclear weapons program."

A diplomat in Vienna close to the International Atomic Energy Agency, the U.N. watchdog group, quoted Director-General Mohamed ElBaradei's comment in October that countries claiming to have evidence of illicit nuclear activity "should bring it forward, not bomb first and ask questions later."

The White House said Thursday that it would present its evidence to IAEA officials.

A senior European diplomat said Western intelligence services compared notes months ago and concluded that the site was a nuclear facility built with North Korean help.

#### **'We were used today'**

Rep. Peter Hoekstra of Michigan, the ranking Republican on the House Intelligence Committee, said after a briefing Thursday that many lawmakers "believe that we were used today by the administration" and that the White House had belatedly informed Congress "because they had other agendas in mind."

Hoekstra had pressed the administration for several months to brief lawmakers on the intelligence behind the strike at Al Kibar.

In a briefing with reporters, a senior administration official acknowledged that the United States and Israel had shared intelligence on activities at the facility and that the White House had been considering diplomatic and military options when Israel struck.

"Israel made its own decision to take action," said the official, who spoke on condition of anonymity. "It did so without any green light from us. None was asked for. None was given."

The official said that release of the intelligence, as well as the official acknowledgment that Israel had carried out the strike, had been delayed largely out of concern that Syria would be embarrassed and be compelled to retaliate.

"Our assessment is that risk has receded," the official said.

As administration officials wrapped up the series of briefings, the White House issued its statement scolding Syria, North Korea and Iran.

"The Syrian regime must come clean before the world regarding its illicit nuclear activities," the statement said. The released information also "underscores that the international community is right to be very concerned about the nuclear activities of Iran and the risks those activities post to the stability of the Middle East."

*Times staff writer Maggie Farley at the United Nations contributed to this report.*

<http://www.latimes.com/news/nationworld/world/la-fg-ussyria25apr25.0.3789997.story>

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Washington Times

April 25, 2008

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## **Intelligence On Syria Delayed To Avoid Fight**

*Lawmakers hit U.S. 'veil of secrecy'*

By Bill Gertz and Sara A. Carter, The Washington Times

The U.S. delayed disclosing its intelligence on Syria's nuclear program for months after an Israeli raid in order to give Damascus breathing room and avoid goading it into military retaliation, senior U.S. intelligence officials said yesterday.

The secret intelligence had remained under wraps for seven months, a gap that led top congressmen to criticize the Bush administration yesterday for its "veil of secrecy" and lack of trust in Congress regarding North Korea's proliferation activities.

"Our first concern was to prevent conflict and broader confrontation in the Middle East," said one of the top senior intelligence officials, who held a briefing with reporters late yesterday afternoon.

The official said if information regarding the details behind Israel's strike on Syria's Al Kibar facility on Sept. 6 had been released to the public earlier, "Syria would feel great pressure to retaliate" against Israel but added that "as time has passed, that assessment has receded."

Intelligence officials also said that mounting evidence collected over the past 10 years revealed that North Korea and Syria had begun nuclear cooperation as early as 1997, during the prior Syrian administration led by Syrian President Hafez al-Assad.

But the officials emphasized that while evidence of a mature Syrian nuclear-weapons program existed, it was "in short supply."

One official compared the strength of evidence to the difference between a clinical diagnosis and "a powerful chain of logic," particularly emphasizing that the Syrian facility had no means of generating civilian electricity, but only "had a single purpose: to produce plutonium."

The officials denied, however, that Washington had neither any direct involvement in the Israeli strike nor an approval veto over it.

"Israel made its own decision to take action without a green light from us," said another top intelligence official.

A video made by U.S. intelligence officials, which included photographs of the nuclear reactor before and after it was destroyed, as well as photographic evidence of a top North Korean nuclear official visiting with Syria's top nuclear expert, was given to reporters invited to the briefing.

The video was also shown to 22 top congressional representatives who were briefed yesterday.

The photo shows Chon Chibu, who oversees North Korea's Yongbyon reactor-fuel plant and has participated in the six-party talks on North Korea's nuclear program, meeting in Syria with Ibrahim Othman, the head of Syria's Atomic Energy Commission.

Officials said the disclosure of the intelligence is designed to force Syria to admit to the secret nuclear-arms program, which was evading International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) controls. The disclosure also seeks to pressure North Korea to abide by the six-nation talks on nuclear disarmament under which Pyongyang agreed to disclose all details of its nuclear activities, including its assistance to other nations, U.S. officials said.

Administration officials told The Washington Times on Wednesday that the plant in northern Syria, which would have produced plutonium, was nearly complete when it was bombed by Israeli warplanes.

A top U.S. intelligence official elaborated yesterday that while the facility was "nearing completion," it had not been loaded with uranium fuel.

Syria undertook extensive efforts to hide from spy satellites the nuclear reactor and then also tried to hide the bombed facility after it was destroyed by the Israelis, U.S. officials said yesterday.

"We are convinced, based on a variety of information that North Korea assisted Syria's covert nuclear activities, both before and after the reactor was destroyed," U.S. intelligence officials said.

The Syrian reactor was identical in design to a reactor built by North Korea at its Yongbyon facility, which North Korea is dismantling as part of the six-nation nuclear talks. That reactor was fueled by natural uranium to produce the plutonium now contained in North Korea's nuclear bombs.

The efforts after the Israeli raid included removing all material and equipment from the site that would reveal it was a nuclear plant and then burying the reactor debris, U.S. officials said on the condition of anonymity.

The Syrian nuclear reactor was built without the knowledge of the IAEA and was so secret that it escaped detection by U.S. intelligence agencies during its construction.

CIA Director Michael V. Hayden and other intelligence officials briefed several congressional committees in closed-door sessions yesterday, breaking the administration's silence on the issue, a point that led to harsh criticism from several of the top lawmakers on intelligence issues.

"It's bad management and terrible public policy to go for eight months knowing this was out there and then drop this in our laps six hours before they go to the public," said Rep. Peter Hoekstra of Michigan, the ranking Republican on the intelligence committee.

Rep. Silvestre Reyes, Texas Democrat and panel chairman, echoed those comments.

"The challenge that we are having, particularly with the administration today, is that there's a veil of secrecy that gets in the way [of] our committee feeling comfortable that we are getting the kind of information that we are supposed to have in order to carry out oversight responsibilities," he said.

Mr. Hoekstra warned that the administration's delay in informing lawmakers amounts to a lack of trust that could make it harder for Congress to approve any future nuclear agreement with North Korea.

The delay has "really damaged the relationship between Congress and the administration," Mr. Hoekstra said. "And that's a big disappointment, but I think that's something that we heard consistently from all of our [committee] members today." But other congressmen focused on the revelations, saying that they prove that the U.S. needs to maintain its tough stance against North Korea.

"Unless we are able to confirm that North Korea is no longer in the nuclear-proliferation business, the United States should not lift sanctions on the North," said Sen. Joseph R. Biden Jr., Delaware Democrat and chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, who also said the six-party talks should continue and that U.S. goals must remain "both shutting down Pyongyang's nuclear programs and ensuring that North Korea does not transfer" nuclear material to others.

White House press secretary Dana Perino called on Syria to disclose the nuclear program.

"The Syrian regime must come clean before the world regarding its illicit nuclear activities," Mrs. Perino said.

Imad Moustapha, Syria's ambassador to the U.S., dismissed the claims as ridiculous, telling CNN that he had been called yesterday into the State Department, where officials "told me a ridiculous story about an alleged Syria nuclear project."

Syria's ambassador to Britain, Sami al-Khiyami, told reporters that the U.S. and other nations "just want to exert more pressure on North Korea. This is why they are coming up with this story."

*Sean Lenggell contributed to this report.*

<http://www.washingtontimes.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20080425/NATION/115452706/1002>

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Washington Times  
April 25, 2008  
Pg. 6

## **Inside The Ring**

By Bill Gertz

### **Nuclear disclosure**

The decision to break the seven-month silence on North Korean nuclear cooperation with Syria this week was due to a combination of pressure from Congress and mounting tensions in the Middle East, according to Bush administration officials.

Congressional aides, however, said disclosing the intelligence appeared designed to "inoculate" North Korea and the six-nation nuclear talks from critics who say the nuclear proliferation data ultimately will distract attention from doubts about the questionable format of Pyongyang's required declaration of its nuclear programs.

The intelligence on the Syrian plutonium reactor that was bombed Sept. 6 in a daring covert raid by Israeli warplanes in northern Syria was blocked from disclosure since the fall by the Israelis, who technically owned the information that was shared with the CIA.

The Israelis were concerned that disclosing the information last year might trigger Syrian retaliation but now are more worried about signs of growing tensions in the region and the threat of a new outbreak of conflict between Israel and Lebanese-based Hezbollah terrorists.

The CIA, the National Security Council staff and the State Department's Near East Affairs office worked to release the once-classified intelligence, which is likely to set back the six-party talks and prompt harsh denunciation from North Korea.

North Korea, as part of a recent concession, is being allowed to separate from its formal declaration of nuclear programs, the uranium enrichment activities and the Syrian proliferation element.

The intelligence on the nuclear plant being built in Syria with North Korean help was disclosed yesterday to reporters and members of Congress after a seven-month delay.

It revealed that the plutonium reactor that was bombed was identical to North Korea's Yongbyon facility and that both Syria and North Korea sought to cover up evidence of the secret reactor facility after the Sept. 6 Israeli raid destroyed it.

Critics in Congress say Syria-North Korea nuclear links will undermine support for the recent declaration deal.

"The nuclear cooperation shows extremely bad faith on the part of the North Koreans," one congressional aide said about the communist regime that supplied the reactor to Syria, and at the same time it was negotiating with the United States, China, Russia, South Korea and Japan on dismantling its nuclear weapons programs.

<http://www.washingtontimes.com/article/20080425/NATION04/443231768>

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Washington Times  
April 25, 2008  
Pg. 1

## **White House Revises N. Korea Nuke Deal**

### ***Congress seeks verification measures***

By Nicholas Kralev, The Washington Times

The Bush administration is renegotiating a tentative deal with North Korea on a declaration of its nuclear activities to include better verification provisions, after the agreement upset some on Capitol Hill and even in the administration, officials said yesterday.

After insisting for months that Pyongyang disclose any nuclear exports, as well as a secret uranium-enrichment program from the 1990s, the administration agreed two weeks ago to write what it knows about those activities and have the North "acknowledge" the U.S. concerns.

"That was a major change, and many people were caught by surprise," one congressional official said.

In an attempt to address concerns about the shift on the declaration, the administration now emphasizes the importance of verification of the North's secret activities.

Congressional support for any deal with Pyongyang is crucial because it is likely to require legislative approval, and U.S. taxpayers' money will be needed to dismantle the North's nuclear programs.

In a letter to President Bush on Wednesday, 14 Republican senators expressed "concern about the present course of action on North Korea's nuclear program being pursued" by the administration.

Although they did not mention the April 7 Singapore talks between chief U.S. negotiator Christopher Hill and his North Korean counterpart, Kim Kye-gwan, the senators said that the current state of negotiations sends the wrong message to Iran and other "rogue regimes."

The administration told Congress in intelligence briefings yesterday that a nuclear facility in Syria flattened by an Israeli air strike in September was built with Pyongyang's help.

"From all appearances, Kim Jong-il believes that the United States will take whatever deal we can get, allowing him to dictate the time, place, manner and content of the fulfillment of his promises," the senators said.

The letter, a copy of which was obtained by The Washington Times, was signed by Sens. John Ensign of Nevada and Jon Kyl of Arizona, among others.

Because Congress has not yet been briefed on the Singapore agreement, officials declined to discuss it publicly. But in their private remarks, some said that, even though it seems peculiar, it is worth considering.

"What's important is to achieve removal of North Korea's plutonium program," a congressional source said. "That might require some sacrifices."

The Bush administration says that, even though Washington will write the document, it is seeking full access to any sites that might be linked to those activities, so it can verify the North Korean claim that they are not ongoing.

Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice took pains last week in a briefing to reporters to stress that, if the United States discovered that it had been "misled" by the North, any benefits it has received in the meantime would be taken away.

Miss Rice suggested that one of those benefits — removal from the U.S. blacklist of state-sponsors of terrorism — would not have to wait until all verification is completed.

She sent the director of the State Department's Korea desk, Sung Kim, to Pyongyang this week to fine-tune the Singapore agreement and make sure that the final result of the declaration does not suffer from the fact that the United States will write the part on proliferation and uranium-enrichment.

North Korea has promised to produce the main part of the declaration dealing with its plutonium program. The main facility of that program at Yongbyon has been almost disabled by U.S. experts.

In the next phase of the North's denuclearization, Yongbyon must be dismantled, again with a large U.S. role in the process. The administration, however, is barred from using taxpayers' money by a 1994 law known as the Glenn amendment, sponsored by then-Sen. John Glenn.

"Congress should swiftly enact legislation allowing the president to waive the Glenn amendment restrictions that will otherwise prevent the United States from carrying out future nuclear dismantlement operations in North Korea or verifying North Korean compliance," Sen. Joseph R. Biden Jr., Delaware Democrat and chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, said yesterday.

<http://www.washingtontimes.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20080425/FOREIGN/908354905/1003>

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Washington Post

April 26, 2008

Pg. 12

## **Accusing N. Korea May Stall Nuclear Pact**

*Both Nations Cite Progress, but Allegations About Aid to Syria Chill Lawmakers*

By Glenn Kessler and Robin Wright, Washington Post Staff Writers

The Bush administration gambled this week that its detailed accounting of North Korean assistance to a Syrian nuclear program would help pave the way for a nuclear disarmament agreement with Pyongyang, but the allegations so angered Republican lawmakers that support for a deal may be seriously weakened.

To signal displeasure, Sen. Sam Brownback (R-Kan.) placed a hold on an ambassadorial nomination of a former aide to the chief U.S. negotiator with North Korea, Christopher R. Hill. "People are very mad, very angry" about the prospect of an agreement with "a regime that has repeatedly demonstrated that its word is indistinguishable from a lie," said an aide to a key Republican lawmaker.

Despite the fresh accusations of North Korean wrongdoing, U.S. and North Korean officials said this week they were making progress on key aspects of the disarmament deal, which requires North Korea to declare how much plutonium it has made for its nuclear arsenal and to turn over thousands of documents concerning the inner workings of the Yongbyon nuclear facility.

A U.S. negotiator returned yesterday from three days of talks in North Korea aimed at meeting goals set by President Bush, national security adviser Stephen J. Hadley and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, officials said. Hill told reporters yesterday that the discussions were "lengthy" and "productive," echoing a statement by North Korea that "the negotiations proceeded in a sincere and constructive manner, and progress was made there."

But criticism of the administration's handling of the matter did not come only from Capitol Hill. Mohamed ElBaradei, director general of the International Atomic Energy Agency, yesterday said the United States should not have waited so long before disclosing what it suspected about North Korea's assistance to Syria.

ElBaradei also reiterated his criticism of Israel for its "unilateral use of force" in a Sept. 6 bombing raid that destroyed the nuclear reactor Syria was allegedly building with North Korea's help, saying it prevented the agency from verifying whether undeclared nuclear activity had been taking place at the site.

Administration officials said yesterday that before the Israeli bombing, Rice and a majority of other senior officials had supported using information about the two countries' secret collaboration to squeeze Damascus diplomatically, with the aim of stopping its interference in Lebanon and halting the passage of insurgents through Syria into Iraq. U.S. officials told Israel that it would benefit if Washington were able to get Syria to stop all its "nefarious activity," one official said. But Israel decided that Syria's Al Kibar facility was "an existential threat" and needed to be destroyed before reactor fuel could be loaded or processed, the official said.

Another official said the Israelis, having seen the long, inconclusive negotiations with Iran over its nuclear programs, had little interest in a solution involving the United Nations and the atomic energy agency. An Israeli official declined to comment on the U.S.-Israeli discussions.

"We looked at the possibility of talking to [the Syrians] on the diplomatic track," a senior administration official said yesterday, "using this to say, 'You need to comply with your international obligations, stop aiding foreign fighters going into Iraq, stop disrupting the situation in Lebanon, stop supporting Hezbollah and Hamas, stop repressing your own people, and stop this nuclear activity.' And telling them we would look at military options but we wanted to take the diplomatic track first. But all of our political discussions became moot when Israel acted."

Officials said they received their strongest evidence of a North Korean-Syrian connection a year ago, primarily from Israel, at about the time the North Koreans had inked a deal with the United States and its negotiating partners to proceed with dismantlement. Since then, U.S. negotiators had demanded and received North Korea's promise to acknowledge U.S. information about collaboration with Syria.

Key lawmakers nonetheless made it clear that unless the intelligence about Syria was described to them in detail, they would block funding for the deal and oppose a key waiver of a law preventing U.S. aid to a country that detonates a nuclear weapon.

Officials said the timing of the administration's disclosure was also influenced by a provision of the U.S. law governing state sponsors of terrorism, a list that has long included North Korea. Under the proposed nuclear disarmament deal, Washington has agreed to remove North Korea from the list, but the law requires that it first demonstrate that North Korea has not assisted another country on the list for at least six months. The intelligence presented this week indicated that North Korea helped Syria in removing equipment from the site through early October, meaning the six-month window only recently closed.

IAEA officials are not optimistic about the prospects for their own investigation into the Syrian facility. "It'll be very difficult to get to the truth," said a diplomat close to the U.N. nuclear watchdog agency. "If you give the IAEA information in a timely manner, as soon as you have it, and the verification body can credibly go in there and investigate on the ground, then you may someday know the truth. The way this was done, we have only their word and photographs."

North Korea, in its negotiations with U.S. officials, was told about key aspects of the U.S. intelligence on the Syrian site and had been warned that a public presentation would be forthcoming. But the State Department did not brief Syrian Ambassador Imad Moustapha until Thursday, in a session described as "cold and correct but not angry" by a senior State Department official.

At a news conference yesterday, Moustapha said the U.S. claims have no credibility at home or abroad. "This administration has a proven record of falsifying and fabricating stories about WMDs. They have done this before, they have done this yesterday, and they will continue to do this in the future," he said.

The facility was an vacant military building at the time of the Israeli airstrike and was not a secret from anyone, he said. "Every commercial satellite service available on Earth was able to provide photos of this so-called secret Syrian site for the past five, six years. I think something is very absurd and preposterous in the whole story."

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/04/25/AR2008042500825.html>

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Financial Times  
April 26, 2008

## **Doubts Raised Over Strength Of US Intelligence**

By Demetri Sevastopulo and Daniel Dombey

When the Central Intelligence Agency on Thursday rolled out evidence to support allegations that North Korea had helped Syria build a nuclear reactor, officials said they had “low” confidence that Syria was developing the reactor to produce nuclear weapons.

Some critics say that admission raises questions about the quality of the intelligence and the timing of the Israeli decision to attack the Syrian facility under the cloud of darkness in September.

Nuclear experts who have reviewed the CIA presentation – which comprised of real and computer-generated images of the reactor and a photograph of a North Korea nuclear scientist with his Syrian counterpart – included some compelling evidence to support some allegations, and other information that raised more questions than it answered. “I don’t buy everything in the video,” said Jon Wolfsthal, a nuclear expert at the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

Mr Wolfsthal, who has spent time monitoring the North Korean reactor at Yongbyon on which the Al-Kibar facility was allegedly modelled, said the evidence appeared to support the allegations that Syria was constructing a plutonium reactor.

Mr Wolfsthal said the evidence pointing to substantial North Korean involvement was compelling. He said the photograph of Chon Chibu, the North Korean nuclear scientist, did not prove there was extensive co-operation between the countries. The CIA on Thursday said the Syrian reactor was closely modelled on Yongbyon. But Mr Wolfsthal said Yongbyon was closely modelled on an old British design that has been easily obtainable for years. David Albright, president of the Institute for Science and International Security, agreed that the evidence support the assertions that Syria was building a nuclear reactor. He praised the CIA for admitting that the evidence about a nuclear weapons programme was “low” despite what he described as White House efforts to distort the intelligence. Mr Albright disagreed that Syria could have obtained the designs for the reactor openly. He said that although the original design was based on the British reactor, the facility at Al Kibar was sufficiently similar to Yongbyon, which had seen significant modifications from the British design. But Mr Albright agreed that CIA video did not show the extent of North Korean involvement in the Al Kibar project.

Mr Albright also raised questions about the timing of the Israeli air strike, saying there appeared to be no evidence that Syria had obtained the uranium fuel necessary to feed the reactor.

Martin Indyk, a former top official on the middle east during the Clinton administration, said since there was no fuel, Syria “didn’t have a nuclear weapon on the horizon, but it’s very clear that they were acquiring the means to produce fissile material, since the reactor had no other purpose and it was done clandestinely”.

Anthony Cordesman, a defence expert at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, criticised the CIA presentation, saying it created “far more speculation about the meaning and credibility of US reporting than should have been the case”.

“Once again, the US intelligence community has created an unnecessary mess by rushing out a half-complete product, and failing to put the information in releases in proper context,” he added.

The US intelligence community came under heavy criticism following the failure to find weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. Some critics have pointed to the presentation of Colin Powell, the-then secretary of state, gave to the United Nations as evidence of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq that turned out not to exist.

<http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/d4b01ea8-1308-11dd-8d91-0000779fd2ac.html>

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New York Times

April 26, 2008

Pg. 12

## **U.N. Nuclear Agency To Study Claims Of Secret Syrian Reactor**

VIENNA (Reuters) — The United Nations nuclear watchdog pledged Friday to investigate whether Syria had secretly built an atomic reactor with North Korean help, but the agency also criticized the United States for delaying the release of intelligence.

The United States disclosed its intelligence material on Thursday, saying the Syrian reactor was “nearing operational capability” a month before Israeli warplanes bombed it on Sept. 6.

Mohamed ElBaradei, director of the International Atomic Energy Agency, criticized Israel on Friday for the airstrike, saying his inspectors should have been able to inspect the site before the bombing.

Dr. ElBaradei said “the unilateral use of force by Israel” undermined “the due process of verification that is at the heart of the nonproliferation regime.” He also said the American allegations against Syria would be investigated with due vigor.

Syria denied the charges and accused Washington of involvement in the Israeli attack.

Dr. ElBaradei, alluding to the United States, denounced a failure to share intelligence information "in a timely manner" about the project, which Washington said was initiated in 2001. He confirmed that Washington disclosed information this week and said that a Syrian facility destroyed by an Israeli airstrike in September was an unfinished reactor.

Analysts said the American disclosure did not amount to proof of an illicit nuclear arms program, because there was no sign of a reprocessing plant needed to convert spent fuel from the plant into bomb-grade plutonium.

"The absence of such facilities gives little confidence that the reactor was part of an active nuclear weapons program," David Albright and Paul Brannan of the Institute for Science and International Security said in an e-mail commentary.

"The United States does not have any indication of how Syria would fuel this reactor," they said. "This type of reactor requires a large supply of uranium fuel," they added, saying that it "raises questions about when this reactor could have operated."

Analysts said the Bush administration had delayed releasing the intelligence because of the risk that it might prompt Syria to retaliate against Israel.

Syria pledged to cooperate with the International Atomic Energy Agency investigation. "Syria has nothing to hide," its United Nations envoy, Bashar Jaafari, told reporters on Friday in New York.

"It is essential that Syria shed full light on its nuclear activities, past and present, in accordance with its international obligations," a French Foreign Ministry spokeswoman, Pascale Andréani, told reporters in Paris.

Syria has belonged to the 144-nation atomic energy agency since 1963, and it has one declared small research reactor subject to United Nations inspection.

The White House said it was convinced that North Korea had helped Syria to construct a clandestine nuclear reactor. North Korea tested a nuclear device in October 2006.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2008/04/26/world/26iaea.html?scp=1&sq=U.N.%20Nuclear%20Agency%20To%20Study%20Claims%20Of%20Secret%20Syrian%20Reactor&st=cse>

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Washington Times

April 26, 2008

Pg. 11

## **When 'Inevitable' Isn't Inevitable**

By James M. Loy

Inevitability is a thorny concept. Last week, Cham Dallas, director of the Institute for Health Management and Mass Destruction Defense at the University of Georgia, testified before a Senate panel that a nuclear attack on Washington, D.C., in the next 20 years is "inevitable."

We have heard that before. Fifty years ago, many of our nation's defense experts said a nuclear exchange with the Soviet Union was inevitable.

Much has changed since the Cold War. The nature of nuclear threats is much more complex. State-based proliferation menaces still abound, notably from Iran and North Korea. We must also confront the grave danger of terrorist groups obtaining and detonating a nuclear device on American soil, as Mr. Dallas argues, and the possibility of nonstate actors executing a "dirty bomb" strike (detonating radioactive material with a conventional explosive).

If that weren't enough, nuclear deterrence is only one leg of the weapons-of-mass-destruction triangle.

Chemical and biological agents are more easily manufactured and transported than nuclear material. Even this broader view neglects the threat of cyberterrorism. A compromise of our information networks ranks a close second to WMDs in gravity of consequence and is perhaps more difficult to prevent.

If a nuclear attack is inevitable, common sense would demand we cashier prevention efforts and concentrate exclusively on response and recovery. Today, as during the Cold War, no sensible policymaker would resign America to holocaust and simply concentrate on how to pick up the pieces. Such a course would constitute dereliction of duty.

Instead, we must concurrently pursue two tracks of emergency preparedness. The first is prevention, which means human intelligence.

Much is made of the ways our military is refurbishing Cold War schemas and structures to meet today's more nuanced threats. Our intelligence community must do likewise, and its challenges are more complex than those facing our armed services.

The Cold War enemy was a bureaucratic organism. Human intelligence was possible because we could find the enemy on a map, infiltrate its various scientific, economic, diplomatic and military institutions by exploiting weaknesses that come with large organizations.

Today's enemy maintains small networks founded on personal, often decades-old relationships. They are consequently much more difficult to creep into. We have compounded our own problems by under-resourcing and misusing the opportunities open to us.

America's human intelligence in the Middle East thus remains woefully weak. Any disaster prevention must begin with more and better human intelligence.

The second track we must pursue is response and recovery, as Mr. Dallas suggests. His presentation to Congress focused on the immediate casualties, infrastructure damage, and fallout effects of a nuclear strike in the capital. Such studies are important but they do not prepare us unless they inform how we coordinate disaster response and train our responders. The middle of a crisis is not the time to exchange business cards.

Federal, state, local and tribal officials must be fully prepared to help coordinate and manage the effort by public and private institutions to prevent loss of lives, restore services and rebuild communities. Information sharing is as critical to disaster response as it is to disaster prevention.

The Department of Homeland Security's stated aim is to lead just such a unified national effort. DHS Secretary Michael Chertoff released the National Response Framework in January, outlining strategy, principles and structures for response and recovery at an array of government levels. Now DHS must work with state and local governments to make sure appropriate authorities have the resources necessary to implement a cohesive, coordinated response plan.

After coordination, training is the most critical element in disaster response. Great plans mean nothing if executed improperly. That is why training our first responders and reconstruction teams should remain a high priority.

Our bottom-line challenge remains homeland security. That begins with designing and implementing the best information-gathering and analytical capability possible. We can then systematically prevent and protect while preparing to respond and recover if necessary.

Such a concerted effort can ensure the only true inevitabilities remain death and taxes.

*James M. Loy is a senior counselor to the Cohen Group. He is the former commandant of the Coast Guard and the former deputy secretary of the Department of Homeland Security.*

<http://www.washingtontimes.com/article/20080426/COMMENTARY/42460449/1012/commentary>

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London Sunday Times

April 27, 2008

## **Kim Jong-Il Builds 'Thunderbirds' Runway For War In North Korea**

*An airbase inside a mountain is the latest sign that North Korea, whose links to Syria's nuclear programme came to light last week, is cranking up its military machine*

By Michael Sheridan and Uzi Mahnaimiin

North Korean military engineers are completing an underground runway beneath a mountain that can protect fighter aircraft from attack until they take off at high speed through the mouth of a tunnel.

The 6,000ft runway is a few minutes' flying time from the tense front line where the Korean People's Army faces soldiers from the United States and South Korea.

The project was identified by an air force defector from North Korea and captured on a satellite image by Google Earth, according to reports in the South Korean press last week.

It is one of three underground fighter bases among an elaborate subterranean military infrastructure built to withstand a "shock and awe" assault in the first moments of a war, the defector said.

The runway, reminiscent of the Thunderbirds television series, highlights the strange and secretive nature of the regime that provided the expertise for a partially built nuclear reactor in Syria, film of which was released by the CIA last week.

The reactor was destroyed by Israeli aircraft last September in an operation that may have killed or injured North Koreans at the site in the remote deserts of eastern Syria.

The airstrike appears to have convinced North Korea to harden its own defences and to spend more on its military, even as it struggles to cope with a new food shortage that could see millions of its citizens go hungry. In recent days North Korea has ordered its people to be vigilant against "warmongers".

"The prevailing situation requires the whole party and army and all the people to get fully prepared to go into action," North Korea's state media said on Friday.

Although the media unleashed a volley of abuse against the United States and Lee Myungbak, South Korea's conservative new president, it also said "sincere and constructive" negotiations on nuclear disarmament were in progress, an apparent effort to play off hawks against doves in Washington.

Some diplomats, who are sceptical of the process, say that behind the rhetoric, Kim Jong-il, the North Korean leader, may sense that he is a hair's breadth away from a deal that would leave him with up to 10 nuclear weapons and a security guarantee for his regime.

In Washington, nuclear experts were puzzled by the timing and quality of the evidence released by the Bush administration. Democrats suggested hardliners around Dick Cheney, the vice-president, had forced the issue to try to wreck the talks with Kim.

However, there is a more persuasive argument. Analysts in Seoul see the American disclosures as a sly way to keep the negotiations alive. Kim had refused to make a "full declaration" of his nuclear programme by a December 31 deadline; now, in effect, the CIA has done it for him. "The revelation was a highly orchestrated one," commented The Korea Herald, adding that it "enabled" Pyongyang to "make its declaration without losing face".

One indication is that Christopher Hill, the US State Department negotiator, flew to Singapore for an unusual session with his North Korean counterparts shortly before the United States went public. "There must have been some sort of secret agreement or deal," said Taewoo Kim, of the Korea Institute for Defence Analyses in Seoul. Last year Hill persuaded the White House that the talks offered a realistic chance to accomplish a peace treaty formally ending the 1950-3 Korean war, in which more than 50,000 Americans died. His critics, such as John Bolton, the former United Nations ambassador, say North Korea has a long recidivist history of selling missiles and unconventional weapons to unstable Middle Eastern regimes such as Syria, Iran and Libya.

Whatever the truth, even by the standards of North Korean politics the atomic intrigue half a world away – with its multinational cast of spies, scientists, diplomats and airmen – makes an exotic story.

The alliance between the two clan dictatorships in Damascus and Pyongyang is more than 35 years old. In another tunnel, this one under Mount Myohang, the North Koreans have kept as a museum piece the Kalashnikov assault rifle and pistols sent as gifts from President Hafez al-Assad of Syria to Kim Il-sung in the early years of their friendship.

Today North Korea and Syria are ruled by the sons of their 20th-century dictators – Bashar al-Assad succeeded his father in 2000 and Kim Jong-il took over in 1994. They inherited a hatred of America and a fondness for authoritarian family rule.

Syria possesses the biggest missile arsenal and the largest stockpile of chemical weapons in the Middle East, built up over the past two decades with arms bought from North Korea.

North Korea, which detonated a nuclear device in October 2006, has become pivotal to Syria's plans to enhance and upgrade its weapons.

Syria's liquid-fuelled Scud-C missiles depend on "essential foreign aid and assistance, primarily from North Korean entities", said the CIA in a report to the US Congress in 2004.

Diplomats based in Pyongyang have said they now believe reports that about a dozen Syrian technicians were killed in an explosion and train crash at Ryongchon, North Korea, on April 22, 2004. North Korea blamed a technical mishap, but there were rumours of an assassination attempt on Kim, whose special train had passed through the station en route to China some hours earlier.

No independently verified cause of the disaster was made known. However, teams of military personnel wearing protective suits were seen removing debris from the section of the train in which the Syrians were travelling, according to a detailed report quoting military sources which appeared on May 7, 2004, in the Sankei Shimbun, a Japanese newspaper.

The technicians were said to be from Syria's Centre D'Etudes et de Recherche Scientifique, a body known to be engaged in military technology.

Their bodies were flown home by a Syrian military cargo aircraft which was spotted on May 1, 2004 at Pyongyang. There was speculation among military attachés that the Syrians were transporting unconventional weapons, the paper said at the time. Diplomats said the Sankei Shimbun report was now believed to be accurate.

Last year Jane's Defence Weekly reported that dozens of Iranian engineers and Syrians were killed on July 23 attempting to load a chemical warhead containing the nerve gases VX and sarin onto a Scud missile at a plant in Syria.

The Scuds and warheads are of North Korean design and possibly manufacture. Some analysts think North Korean scientists were helping the Syrians to attach air-burst chemical warheads to the missiles.

Syria possesses more than 100 Scud-C and ScudD missiles which it bought from North Korea in the past 15 years. In the 1990s it added cluster warheads to the Scud-Cs that experts believe are intended for chemical weapons. Like North Korea, Syria has an extensive chemical weapons programme including sarin, VX and mustard gas, according to researchers at the Center for Nonproliferation Studies at the Monterey Institute in California.

The Scud-C is strategically worrying to Israel because Syria has deployed it with one launcher for every two missiles. The normal ratio is one to 10. The conclusion: Syria's missiles are set up for a devastating first strike. Since 2004 there have been a series of leaks designed to suggest that Syria has renewed its interest in atomic weapons, a claim denied by Damascus.

In December 2006 the Kuwaiti newspaper, Al-Siyasa, quoted European intelligence sources in Brussels as saying that Syria was engaged in an advanced nuclear programme in its northeastern Hasakah province.

It also quoted British security sources as identifying the man heading the programme as Major Maher Assad, brother of the president and commander of the Republican Guard.

Early last year foreign diplomats had noticed an increase in political and military visits between Syria and North Korea. They received reports of Syrian passengers on flights from Beijing to Pyongyang, almost the only air route into the country. They also spotted Middle Eastern businessmen using trains between North Korea and the industrial cities of northeast China.

Then there were clues in the official media. On August 14 Rim Kyongman, the North Korean minister of foreign trade, was in Syria to sign a protocol on "cooperation in trade and science and technology". His delegation held the fifth meeting of a "joint economic committee" with its Syrian counterpart. No details were disclosed.

Initially, the conclusion of diplomats was that the deal involved North Korean ballistic missiles, maintenance for the existing Syrian arsenal and engineering expertise for building silos and bunkers against air attack. Now it is known that Israeli intelligence interpreted the meeting as the last piece in a nuclear jigsaw; a conclusion that Israel shared with President George W Bush.

For years the United States and Israel saw North Korean weapons sales to the Middle East as purely a source of revenue – apart from seafood, minerals and timber, North Korea is impoverished and has little else to sell. The nuclear threat in Syria was also believed to be dormant, as Damascus appeared to rely on a chemical first-strike as an unconventional deterrent.

In a period of detente, the United States and its allies concurred when China sold a 30kw nuclear reactor to Syria in 1998 under international controls.

Then, in 2003, American intelligence officials believe that Syria recruited Iraqi scientists who had fled after the fall of Saddam Hussein. Like other countries in the region, Syria renewed its pursuit of nuclear research.

The calculus changed for good after North Korea tested a nuclear bomb in 2006 and admitted to a plutonium stockpile sufficient for 10 more.

The danger to Israel is multiplied by the triangular relationship between North Korea, Syria and Iran. Syria has served as a conduit for the transport to Iran of an estimated £50m of missile components and technology sent by sea from North Korea to the Syrian port of Tartous, diplomats said.

They say Damascus and Tehran have set up a £125m joint venture to build missiles in Syria with North Korean and Chinese technical help. North Korean military engineers have worked on hardened silos and tunnels for the project near the cities of Hama and Aleppo.

Israel also noted reports from Pyongyang that Syrian and Iranian observers were present at missile test firings by the North Korean military last summer and were given valuable experimental data. Israeli sources said last week that Iran was informed "in every detail" about the nuclear reactor and had sent technicians to the site.

Such was the background against which Israel took its decision to strike. Two signals from the North Koreans in the aftermath showed that the bombs hit home.

On September 10, four days after the raid, Kim sent a personal message of congratulations to Assad on the Syrian dictator's 42nd birthday.

"The excellent friendly and cooperative relations between the two countries are steadily growing stronger even under the complicated international situation," Kim said.

The next day, in a message that went largely unnoticed, the North Koreans condemned the Israeli action as "illegal" and "a very dangerous provocation".

Just days later a top Syrian official, Saeed Elias Daoud, director of the ruling Syrian Arab Ba'ath party, boarded a Russian-made vintage jet belonging to the North Korean airline, Air Koryo, for the short flight from Beijing. Daoud brought counsel and sympathy from Assad, whose father Hafez was famed as a strategic gambler with a talent for brinkmanship.

Now Kim is waiting to see if his own gamble has paid off.

*Additional reporting: Sarah Baxter in Washington*

<http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/asia/article3822538.ece>

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Houston Chronicle  
April 29, 2008

## **CIA Chief: Syria Could Have Produced Fuel For 2 Nukes**

By Pamela Hess, Associated Press

WASHINGTON — CIA Director Michael Hayden said Monday that the alleged Syrian nuclear reactor destroyed by an Israeli airstrike in September would have produced enough plutonium for one or two bombs within a year of becoming operational.

U.S. intelligence and administration officials publicly disclosed last week their assessment that Syria was building a covert nuclear reactor with North Korean assistance. They said it was modeled on the shuttered North Korean reactor at Yongbyon, which produced a small amount of plutonium. The Syrian site, they said, was within weeks or months of being operational.

"In the course of a year after they got full up they would have produced enough plutonium for one or two weapons," Hayden told reporters after a speech at Georgetown University.

Almost all reactors produce plutonium, even those dedicated to peaceful purposes, according to David Albright, president of the nonprofit Institute for Science and International Security. Albright analyzed commercial satellite imagery of the bombed facility last fall and surmised then it was a nuclear reactor.

Neither the United States nor Israel told the International Atomic Energy Agency about the Syrian site until last week, about a year after they obtained what they considered to be decisive intelligence: dozens of photographs from a handheld camera that showed both the interior and exterior of the mysterious compound in Syria's eastern desert. From the CIA's perspective, that intelligence was not the United States' to share with the U.N. nuclear watchdog, Hayden said.

"We've made it clear we did not have complete control over the totality of the information because obviously it was the result of a team effort," he said. "One has to respect the origin of the information in terms of how it is used."

The head of the U.N. nuclear watchdog agency chastised the United States on Friday for withholding information on the alleged Syrian reactor. One of the IAEA's missions is to try to prevent nuclear proliferation, and it depends on member states for information.

A senior administration official told reporters last week that the United States kept the information secret after the Israeli strike because it feared revealing it might provoke Syria to strike back at Israel.

<http://www.chron.com/disp/story.mpl/world/5737463.html>

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New York Times  
April 29, 2008

## **A Tantalizing Look At Iran's Nuclear Program**

By William J. Broad

Barbed wire and antiaircraft guns ring a maze of buildings in the Iranian desert that lie at the heart of the West's five-year standoff with Tehran over its program to enrich uranium.

It is a place of secrets that Iran loves to boast about, clouding the effort's real status and making Western analysts all the more eager for solid details and clues. Tehran insists that its plans are peaceful. But Washington and its allies see a looming threat.

The sprawling site, known as Natanz, made headlines recently because Iran is testing a new generation of centrifuges there that spin faster and, in theory, can more rapidly turn natural uranium into fuel for reactors or nuclear arms. The new machines are also meant to be more reliable than their forerunners, which often failed catastrophically.

On April 8, President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad visited the desert site, and Iran released 48 photographs of the tour, providing the first significant look inside the atomic riddle.

"They're remarkable," Jeffrey G. Lewis, an arms control specialist at the New America Foundation, a nonprofit research group in Washington, said of the photographs. "We're learning things."

Most important, the pictures give the first public glimpse of the new centrifuge, known as the IR-2, for Iranian second generation. There were no captions with the photographs, so nuclear analysts around the globe are scrutinizing the visual evidence to size up the new machine, its probable efficiency and its readiness for the tough job of uranium enrichment. They see the photos as an intelligence boon.

"This is intel to die for," Andreas Persbo, an analyst in London at the Verification Research, Training and Information Center, a private group that promotes arms control, said in a comment on the blog site Arms Control Wonk.

One surprise of the tour was the presence of Iran's defense minister, Mostafa Mohammad Najjar. His attendance struck some analysts as odd given Iran's claim that the desert labors are entirely peaceful in nature. In one picture, Mr. Najjar, smiling widely, appears to lead the presidential retinue.

Nuclear analysts say the tour opened a window into a hidden world previously known only to the Iranians and a few international inspectors.

"I don't see anything to suggest this is propaganda," Houston G. Wood III, a centrifuge expert at the University of Virginia, said in an interview. "They seem to be working on an advanced machine."

Such judgments rest not only on the photographic clues, but also on the Iranian record of successful, if limited, enrichment, as well as the reports of international inspectors, who have tracked Iran's effort to develop the new centrifuges.

Engineers use centrifuges for many applications other than enriching uranium. In general, the devices spin fast to separate all kinds of objects of differing mass and density — for instance, milk from cream and impurities from wine. To that end, centrifuges exploit simple laws of physics, doing so in ways that echo common experience. A car that veers around a corner throws its passengers to one side. So, too, a centrifuge throws its contents off what would normally be a forward course. But it does so relentlessly.

Why do the contents separate? As Newton explained in his second law of motion, the more massive the object, the greater the tug. In the lurching car, an adult feels the force more than a child. In the centrifuge, heavy objects feel it more than light ones and, if possible, they move more vigorously toward the outer wall.

Nuclear centrifuges apply the same principle to uranium mined from the earth's inner recesses, spinning it into constituent parts.

Iran is separating U-235 from U-238. Rare in nature, U-235 easily splits in two to produce bursts of atomic energy. It also has three fewer neutrons than its cousin, making it slightly lighter and thus a candidate for centrifuge separation.

First, engineers turn the natural mix of uranium (0.7 and 99.3 percent, respectively) into a gas. Then, the centrifuge throws the heavier U-238 atoms toward the wall, letting the rare U-235 ones accumulate near the center. The results get scooped up continually. Rows of centrifuges repeat the process to slowly raise the rare isotope's concentration. It seems easy. But the centrifuges spin at about the speed of sound, must work day and night for months or years on end and can easily lose their balance, tearing themselves apart.

"Our machines broke down frequently" in the program's early days, Gholamreza Aghazadeh, the chief of the Iranian Atomic Energy Organization, recalled in a 2006 interview on state television. He said a study had traced the failures to centrifuge assembly when technicians with bare hands inadvertently left behind clusters of microbes.

"This little amount of germs," Mr. Aghazadeh said, was enough to throw the whirling devices off balance, leaving them in ruins. "When we say a machine is destroyed," he added, "we mean that it turns into powder."

In great secrecy, Iran began its centrifuge program in 1985, according to inspectors of the International Atomic Energy Agency. It copied a Pakistani design, known as the P-1. Today, the Iranian version stands more than six feet tall. Inside, a hollow rotor of aluminum spins the uranium gas to blinding speeds. Iran has installed 3,000 of the temperamental machines at Natanz, and recently began expanding that setup to 9,000.

In recent years, Iran has tried to move ahead in sophistication with a newer centrifuge design based on Pakistan's second-generation model, known as the P-2. Its rotor is made of superhard steel that can spin faster, speeding the pace of enrichment while lowering the risk of breakdown.

But Iran had great difficulty building the machines and obtaining the special steel. Mostly in secret, it instead developed its own version, the IR-2. It is partly indigenous, signaling that the Iranians have achieved new levels of technical skill. If perfected, the IR-2 could accelerate Iran's production of fuel for reactors or bombs.

Western experts say demonstration models of the IR-2 stand about three feet high — half the height of the P-1. But they spin twice as fast.

"That's a lot," said David Albright, president of the Institute for Science and International Security, a private group in Washington that tracks nuclear proliferation. "It would produce about four times the enrichment."

The secret is carbon fibers, say international inspectors. The IR-2's rotor is made not of steel or aluminum but black carbon that forms an incredibly strong tube for its weight. Experts say it is also cheaper to make than steel tubes.

Of the 48 photographs Iran released, Western analysts gave special scrutiny to one showing Mr. Ahmadinejad and his entourage viewing a disassembled IR-2, its guts arrayed on a table. Clearly visible are its casing, inner rotor, motor and several other critical parts.

Arms Control Wonk, which Dr. Lewis of the New America Foundation runs, led a discussion of the photo. Most comments focused on parts. But Geoffrey E. Forden, an arms expert at M.I.T., noted that the table also held an Iranian flag.

"Indigenous manufacturing of sophisticated components is something to be very proud of," he wrote. "And showing them with an Iranian flag is a very good way of graphically proclaiming it."

Several photos gave glimpses of what Western analysts consider the part of a nuclear centrifuge usually kept most secret — its bottom bearing. That sounds prosaic. But the bearing is critical to battling the bane of relentless spinning: friction, which can slow, cripple or destroy machines meant to work flawlessly for years.

Iran's centrifuges, as is standard practice, have no physical support at the top. In an effort to eliminate friction, they have a magnetic bearing that holds the upper end of the rotor steady with invisible fields.

The rotor's entire weight rests on the bottom bearing, which consists of a single, thin, needlelike projection, its rounded head etched with spiral grooves to promote the quick flow of lubricating fluid.

One picture showed a young woman with a black Islamic shawl showing a bottom bearing to Mr. Ahmadinejad, who wore a lab coat and what seemed like a pleased expression. Another bearing sat on the table between them.

Dr. Lewis said the presence of the tiny part appeared noteworthy, since Iran once abandoned trying to build advanced centrifuges because of problems in making the bottom bearing.

Other photos showed rows of P-1 centrifuges as well as the new IR-2 model, apparently ready for testing.

A European centrifuge expert who closely follows the Iranian program, including the evaluations of international inspectors, said difficult work remained on the IR-2. "They obviously have months, if not a year, of test work to do before they can consider proceeding with mass production," the expert said, who spoke on the condition of anonymity because of the issue's sensitivity.

More generally, analysts say, Iran is slowly but steadily gaining the industrial experience needed to make reactor fuel, or, with the same equipment and a little more effort, bomb fuel — the hardest part of the weapons equation.

Uranium enriched to about 4 percent uranium 235 can fuel most reactors; to 90 percent, atom bombs.

Mr. Albright of the Institute for Science and International Security said that in one year 3,000 flawlessly running P-1 centrifuges could produce enough weapon-grade uranium for one nuclear weapon. Or, he added, the same could be achieved with 1,200 IR-2 machines.

American intelligence agencies say the earliest Iran could make a nuclear weapon is 2009, but consider 2010 to 2015 a more likely time frame. Iran insists it wants to make only reactor fuel for producing electricity.

Given the high stakes and international jitters, why did Iran release the photos? Analysts cite everything from a spirit of cooperation to blasts of disdain.

"Maybe it's an invitation for engagement, or maybe it's just to show off their achievement," said R. Scott Kemp, a centrifuge expert at Princeton.

Dr. Wood of the University of Virginia said the episode smelled of hubris. "It was amazing to me that they put the pictures out there," he said. "It's sort of a cocky thing. I would think they had more to gain by keeping their cards close to their chests."

By this analysis, the move trumpets Iran's defiance of the West and the United Nations Security Council, which has imposed three rounds of sanctions on Tehran for its refusal to halt the uranium enrichment.

Some analysts see the centrifuges, despite the disclosures of the presidential tour, as a continuing enigma.

Ultimately, Tehran could use them for good or ill, for lighting cities or destroying them. Only time, they say, is likely to reveal Iran's true intentions.

[http://www.nytimes.com/2008/04/29/science/29nuke.html?\\_r=1&ref=todayspaper&oref=slogin](http://www.nytimes.com/2008/04/29/science/29nuke.html?_r=1&ref=todayspaper&oref=slogin)

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