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Washington Post

Air Force investigates missing launch devices

By JAMES MacPHERSON

The Associated Press

Thursday, August 28, 2008; 3:09 PM

BISMARCK, N.D. -- The Air Force announced Thursday that two officers who worked at a missile base in North Dakota have been taken off the job while the military investigates allegations that they took home classified components used in underground launch control centers.

The officers were supposed to have destroyed the two devices and had signed documents stating that they had, said Maj. Laurie A. Arellano, an Air Force spokeswoman. The Band-Aid-size devices, now obsolete, were used on equipment inside the launch center to detect equipment tampering.

"The material that was supposed to be destroyed was already superseded and had been replaced," she said. "There is no risk to the security of the weapon system, and no possibility of an inadvertent launch as a result of this being taken from the weapon facility."

The officers worked at the time at Minot Air Force Base's 91st Space Wing, now known as the 91st Missile Wing. They were among the crew members who work 90 feet underground behind huge blast doors, prepared to launch nuclear missiles.

The Air Force said one of the officers notified the military in May that he and the other officer had lied about destroying the components in July 2005. He turned one device over to the government but the other remains missing, Arellano said. She had no information on why the officers took the devices.

The officers, whose names have not been released, no longer are stationed at Minot. "They are not, obviously, working missile alert duties until the investigation is complete," Arellano said.

In a separate case, the Air Force said it is investigating alleged "aggravated sexual contact" against a woman officer at a launch facility at Malmstrom Air Force Base in Montana. The officer told Air Force investigators in March that she had been sexually assaulted by a male officer in December while the two were on duty in a launch control facility.

"The male has been temporarily reassigned while it's being investigated," Arellano said.

The Air Force also announced Thursday that three ballistic missile crew members from the Minot Air Force Base who fell asleep while holding classified launch code devices have been sanctioned and "decertified from missile operations."

The crew members, two lieutenants and a captain from the 91st Missile Wing, were in a missile alert facility about 70 miles from Minot when they fell asleep in a crew rest area on July 12, the Air Force said.

Arellano said the officers received written reprimands and will forfeit a portion of their pay for two months under Article 15 reviews, which allow punishments without a court proceeding or public record. Six other officers, including two squadron commanders, also received disciplinary letters in their military files, Arellano said.

Another unit based at Minot, the 5th Bomb Wing, has been under scrutiny for the past year after nuclear missiles were mistakenly flown to Barksdale Air Force Base in Louisiana. About 65 of the 3,700 airmen at the bomber wing were sanctioned as a result of that incident. The Air Force said an inspection at the bomb wing earlier this month found that it is operating safely.

The Minot base, home to about 4,530 active duty military personnel, is the command center for 150 Minuteman III missiles, sunk in hardened silos, and is one of two B-52 bomber bases in the country.

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/08/28/AR2008082802107.html>

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USA Today

August 29, 2008

Pg. 13

Report Says China Offered Widespread Help On Nukes

Some experts challenge claims as 'unlikely'

By Dan Vergano, USA Today

China gave Pakistan the blueprint for an atomic bomb, testing the finished product in 1990, and unveiled a sophisticated nuclear weapons complex to visiting U.S. scientists in the last decade, report former weapons lab officials.

Former Air Force secretary Thomas Reed, a former weapons lab scientist, paints a portrait of China as a reckless distributor of nuclear weapons know-how in a report released Thursday in *Physics Today* magazine. He charges the Chinese with giving extensive weapons support to Pakistan in detail far beyond a 2001 Defense Department report that acknowledged such links.

"The Chinese nuclear weapons program is incredibly sophisticated," Reed says. "The scary part is how much Pakistan has learned from them." The Chinese and Pakistani embassies in Washington did not reply to requests for comment on the report.

Reed is the co-author with Danny Stillman, former Los Alamos (N.M.) National Laboratory technical intelligence director, of a book coming out in January on the Chinese nuclear weapons program.

Stillman sued the Central Intelligence Agency, Defense Intelligence Agency and Department of Defense after they classified 23 of the book's pages, preventing their publication. U.S. District Judge Emmet Sullivan upheld the classification last year.

By interviewing Stillman on his 1990 trips to China and doing his own reporting, Reed says *Physics Today* avoided a similar classification review. Among his points:

*China detonated a neutron bomb on December 19, 1984.

*China gave Pakistan blueprints for a simple uranium atomic bomb in 1982 and later tested a Pakistani version of the weapon in China on May 26, 1990.

*France conducted underground nuclear weapons experiments, though not full-scale explosions, with China at the Lop Nur testing ground. Stephane Charreau, a press officer at the French Embassy in Washington, called the suggestion "very strange," and denied it.

Some experts expressed similar skepticism. "I simply don't believe the French need the Chinese to do non-explosive testing. They have a very strong program and I can't see them exposing it to the prying eyes of the Chinese," says Peter Zimmerman, former chief scientist of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

"I think it is extremely unlikely that China tested a Pakistani bomb," he added.

Harold Agnew, a former director of Los Alamos, confirmed that he and lab officials, including Stillman, had visited Chinese weapons facilities as early as 1981. "I believed they just wanted to show that they were competent. They were very open to me," he says in an e-mail.

A spokesman for Los Alamos, Kevin Roark, called Stillman's 28-year role at the lab "minor."

The report "is old news since it largely pertains to historical developments," says Stephen Aftergood of the Federation of American Scientists. "On the other hand, it has important implications for our current understanding of China's nuclear program."

http://www.usatoday.com/news/world/2008-08-28-china_N.htm

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Washington Post

Iran Corroborates U.N. Nuclear Monitor's Estimate of Centrifuges in Operation

By Thomas Erdbrink

Washington Post Foreign Service

Saturday, August 30, 2008; Page A15

TEHRAN, Aug. 29 -- [Iran](#) is using 4,000 centrifuges to enrich uranium and plans to install an additional 3,000 of the devices, Deputy Foreign Minister Ali Reza Sheikh Attar said Thursday in an interview on Iranian state television. Sheikh Attar did not say when the new machines would begin operating, but his statement corroborates the International Atomic Energy Agency's estimate of the number of centrifuges that Iran is currently using. The country says it plans to build a total of 54,000 centrifuges to enrich uranium, which can be used to fuel nuclear power plants or to build nuclear weapons.

President [Mahmoud Ahmadinejad](#) said in July that the country already had 5,000 centrifuges. The IAEA, the [United Nations'](#) nuclear monitoring agency, which routinely inspects Iran's main enrichment facility at Natanz in central Iran through visits and permanent video surveillance, said that Ahmadinejad had overstated the amount of centrifuges by a thousand. A report by the IAEA in May said Iran may have 6,000 of the machines ready by September.

Iran says the Non-Proliferation Treaty, of which it is a signatory, gives it the right to enrich uranium for peaceful purposes. The country says it needs nuclear energy to provide for a growing energy demand.

The United States and other countries suspect Iran of trying to make a nuclear weapon. The [U.N. Security Council](#) has imposed three sets of sanctions against Iran, mainly aimed at its defense and financial industries, intended to dissuade the country from pursuing nuclear weapons.

Negotiations between Iran and world powers over the nuclear program have stalled over the summer, with Iran ignoring an ultimatum to answer a proposal from the United States, [Russia](#), [China](#), [France](#), [Britain](#) and [Germany](#), which demand that Iran suspend enrichment activities as a precondition for talks.

Iran argues that it suspended enrichment from 2003 until 2005 at the request of European countries, which it says then failed to reach an agreement with Iran. Iranian officials have often stated their willingness to negotiate but only if there are no preconditions.

No new economic sanctions against Iran have come into effect since the issuance of the ultimatum on Aug. 5, mainly because of differences between Russia and China, on one hand, and the Western powers on the other. Russia, China and the [European Union](#) are Iran's most important trade partners. Russia is building Iran's first nuclear power plant in the town of Bushehr on the [Persian Gulf](#).

Western nations will have to resolve the standoff over Iran's nuclear ambitions without Russia's help if they refuse to cooperate with Moscow, Russian Prime Minister [Vladimir Putin](#) said in an interview with [CNN](#) on Thursday.

Asked if the conflict with Georgia could hurt U.S.-Russian cooperation on Iran, Putin said: "If nobody wants to talk with us on these issues and cooperation with Russia is not needed, then for God's sake, do it yourself."

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/08/29/AR2008082903055.html>

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London Sunday Telegraph
August 31, 2008

Russia Threatens To Supply Iran With Top New Missile System As 'Cold War' Escalates

By Philip Sherwell and William Lowther

Russia is deploying the threat to sell a "game changing" air defence system to Iran as a high stakes bargaining chip in its new "cold war" with America, The Sunday Telegraph has learned.

US intelligence fears the Kremlin will supply the sophisticated S-300 system to Tehran if Washington pushes through Nato membership for its pro-Western neighbours Georgia and Ukraine.

The proposed deal is causing huge alarm in the US and Israel as the S-300 can track 100 targets at once and fire on planes up to 75 miles away.

That would make it a "game-changer", greatly improving Iranian defences against any air strike on its nuclear sites, according to Pentagon adviser Dan Gouré. "This is a system that scares every Western air force," he said.

Senior US intelligence operatives believe that Russia is planning to use a stand-off over the S-300 to create a foreign policy showdown that would test the mettle of a new US president.

Republican candidate John McCain has taken a strongly anti-Kremlin line on a series of international issues and backed Georgia's desire to join Nato. His Democratic rival Barack Obama has also indicated he supports Nato membership for Georgia.

"The message from Moscow is very clear," said George Friedman, director of Stratfor, a leading US private intelligence agency. "They are saying if you don't stop meddling in our sphere of influence, this is what we are going to do."

"Back Georgia and Ukraine for Nato membership and you'll see the S-300 to Iran. It is a very powerful bargaining chip and a major deterrent to US actions in the region. Moscow is playing very strategically on America's obsession with Iran."

Moscow has been infuriated by the steady encroachment of Nato into the former Soviet bloc and the recent granting of independence to the ex-Serbian province of Kosovo against its wishes.

After American condemnation of Russia's foray into Georgia, Moscow invited Syria's dictator Bashar al-Assad, a long-time US foe, to discuss military deals in a deliberate signal of how it could cause trouble for Washington.

A senior US intelligence operative who recently returned from the Middle East said Russia is believed to have struck a tentative deal to sell the S-300 to the Islamic regime. There are reports that Russia has already moved some basic components for the system to its close ally Belarus, ready for possible transfer to Iran.

"Moscow cannot simply threaten to strike the deal," the official told *The Sunday Telegraph*. "Iran certainly thinks it has a deal. And the Israelis believe that a deal has been reached but that they can still block it."

The outgoing Israeli prime minister Ehud Olmert is expected to pass that message on to his counterpart Vladimir Putin and President Dmitri Medvedev when he visits Moscow next month. Israel has already ended military assistance to Georgia in an effort to placate Russia.

Russia has denied previous assertions by senior Iranians that a deal has already been finalised on the S-300.

Dan Gouré, a long-time Pentagon adviser, said: "If Tehran obtained the S-300, it would be a game-changer in military thinking for tackling Iran. That could be a catalyst for Israeli air attacks before it's operational."

Dr Friedman said that if it became operational, it would effectively rule out Israeli air raids and seriously complicate any US aerial bombardment.

The system would take up to a year to become operational. In the meantime, Israel would come under heavy domestic pressure to launch an attack on Iranian nuclear plants, which the West believes are part of a secret atomic weapons programme but which Tehran claims are for civilian energy.

A senior Iranian military commander warned yesterday that any attack on Iran would start a major conflict. "Any aggression against Iran will start a world war," deputy chief of staff for defence publicity, Brigadier General Masoud Jazayeri, said in a statement. "The unrestrained greed of the US leadership and global Zionism... is gradually leading the world to the edge of a precipice."

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/russia/2651516/Russia-threatens-to-supply-Iran-with-top-new-missile-system-as-cold-war-escalates.html>

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Washington Post
September 3, 2008
Pg. 10

In Secret Letter, Tough U.S. Line On India Nuclear Deal

By Glenn Kessler, Washington Post Staff Writer

The United States will not sell sensitive nuclear technologies to India and would immediately terminate nuclear trade if New Delhi conducted a nuclear test, the Bush administration told Congress in correspondence that has remained secret for nine months.

The correspondence, which also appears to contradict statements by Indian officials, was made public yesterday by Rep. Howard L. Berman (D-Calif.), chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, just days before the 45-nation Nuclear Suppliers Group meets again in Vienna to consider exempting India from restrictions on nuclear trade as part of a landmark U.S.-India civil nuclear deal.

The NSG, which governs trade in reactors and uranium, poses a key hurdle for the U.S.-India pact. The group operates by consensus, allowing even small nations to block or significantly amend any agreement. The United States has pressed the NSG to impose few conditions on India, even though it has tested nuclear weapons and has not signed the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

A significant group of nations balked at the proposal when the NSG first discussed it two weeks ago. Berman's release of the correspondence could make approval even more difficult because it demonstrates that U.S. conditions for nuclear trade with India are tougher than what the United States is requesting from the NSG on India's behalf. About 20 nations offered more than 50 amendments to the U.S.-proposed draft text, focusing on terminating trade if India resumes testing and bans on the transfer of sensitive technologies.

The correspondence released by Berman is "going to reinforce the views of many states," said Daryl G. Kimball, executive director of the Arms Control Association, which opposes the U.S.-India agreement. "There is no reason why this should not be an NSG-wide policy."

The correspondence concerned 45 highly technical questions that members of Congress posed about the deal. In 2006, Congress passed a law, known as the Hyde Act, to provisionally accept the agreement. But some lawmakers raised concerns about whether a separate implementing agreement negotiated by the administration papered over critical details to assuage Indian concerns. The questions were addressed in a 26-page letter sent to Berman's predecessor, the late Rep. Tom Lantos (D-Calif.), on Jan. 16.

The answers were considered so sensitive, particularly because debate over the agreement in India could have toppled the government of Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, that the State Department requested they remain secret even though they were not classified.

Lynne Weil, a spokeswoman for Berman, said he made the answers public yesterday because, if NSG approval is granted, the U.S.-India deal soon would be submitted to Congress for final approval and "he wants to assure that Congress has the relevant information."

In India, Singh and his aides have insisted that the deal would not constrain the country's right to nuclear tests and would provide an uninterrupted supply of fuel to India's nuclear reactors. In August 2007, Singh told Parliament, "The agreement does not in any way affect India's right to undertake future nuclear tests, if it is necessary."

The State Department's letter to Lantos gives a different story. It says the United States would help India deal only with "disruptions in supply to India that may result through no fault of its own," such as a trade war or market disruptions. "The fuel supply assurances are not, however, meant to insulate India against the consequences of a nuclear explosive test or a violation of nonproliferation commitments," the letter said.

The letter makes clear that terminating cooperation could be immediate and was within U.S. discretion, and that the supply assurances made by the United States are not legally binding but simply a commitment made by President Bush.

The letter also stated that the "U.S. government will not assist India in the design, construction or operation of sensitive nuclear technologies," even though the Hyde Act allowed transfers of such technology under certain circumstances. The U.S. government had no plans to seek to amend the deal to allow sensitive transfers, the letter said.

The administration is eager for NSG approval this week because there is a narrow window for final congressional action before lawmakers adjourn this month, although many of them say the prospects for quick action remain dim. Reflecting the importance of the U.S.-India deal to Bush's foreign policy legacy, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice is dispatching two top officials -- William J. Burns, undersecretary of state for political affairs, and John Rood, acting undersecretary of state for arms control and international security -- to the NSG session.

Concerns about the deal have been raised by a group of mostly smaller states, led by Ireland and New Zealand. But this week China also publicly urged caution, saying in a foreign ministry statement that the NSG must "strike a balance between nuclear nonproliferation and peaceful use of energy."

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/09/02/AR2008090202733.html>

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Washington Times
September 4, 2008
Pg. B1

Inside the Ring

By Bill Gertz

China nuclear talks

China continues to resist disclosing details of its strategic nuclear weapons programs despite exchanges and discussions with the United States during the past two years, defense officials say.

"For more than two years, the Chinese have stalled [on nuclear talks]," said one defense official frustrated by what he called excessive secrecy and lack of dialogue. He asked not to be named because of the sensitivity of the topic. One indicator of the problems has been that Gen. Jing Zhiyan, commander of China's nuclear forces, has not visited the U.S. Strategic Command or the United States despite a promise in 2006 from Chinese President Hu Jintao to President Bush that the general would lead a delegation for talks.

Pentagon press secretary Geoff Morrell said, however, that though the nuclear discussions are going slowly, they are making progress.

"At the suggestion of Defense Secretary [Robert M.] Gates during his trip to Beijing last fall, the U.S. and Chinese militaries have agreed to expand our exchanges and deepen our dialogues, including regarding nuclear policy and strategy," he said. "Those discussions are helping us better understand each other and reduce the risk of miscalculation. Of course, they are in their early stages, and this process is going to take considerable time, but so far at least it is going better than we had anticipated."

The talks to date are held under the auspices of Eric S. Edelman, undersecretary of defense for policy, and not the Strategic Command (Stratcom), which is in charge of U.S. nuclear forces.

U.S. officials familiar with the talks said the Chinese have refused to visit Stratcom and that discussions so far have been tightly scripted. The officials said they think China fears that revealing even very basic data would provide intelligence that could be used to counter Chinese nuclear forces.

For example, the Chinese military will not disclose details of its formal nuclear weapons doctrine, apart from stating that China will not be the first to use nuclear weapons in a conflict.

Statements and military writings by Chinese military strategists during the past several years have called into question the no-first-use doctrine, increasing concerns among U.S. strategic planners.

Some U.S. officials think China does not have a prepared nuclear strategy for its relatively small but growing nuclear arsenal. Additionally, China's strategic policy on stockpiling missiles remains unknown.

"We don't know their refire policy," one official said of the term for extra missiles that are stored in addition to those ready to launch on mobile launchers or silos.

The Pentagon also does not know whether China has multiple warhead missiles or whether it is adding warheads to single-warhead missiles.

In the 1990s, China obtained U.S. space technology that the Air Force thinks can be used to develop multiple-warhead missiles, according to a 1998 Air Force report.

The Pentagon's latest annual report on China's military states that Beijing is increasing both the number and the quality of its nuclear forces. It estimates that the current force includes about 60 long- and medium-range nuclear missiles.

China's military, for its part, views the dialogue with the Pentagon as a way to try to limit the number of U.S. missile defense interceptors, both on land and at sea, so that China's missiles will not be countered by a future expanded U.S. missile defense system, U.S. officials said.

A Chinese embassy spokesman said the issue of U.S.-China nuclear talks is "very sensitive" and declined to comment.

Military voting problems

Thirty-five members of Congress have written to Attorney General Michael B. Mukasey asking the Justice Department to investigate voting problems among military service members and their families.

The Aug. 1 letter, signed by 13 Senate and 22 House members, expresses "our serious concerns regarding the potential disenfranchisement of American's military services members during the coming November elections."

"We ask for your help in protecting the very rights they fight to safeguard for their fellow Americans," the lawmakers said. "For too long in this country we have failed to adequately protect the right of our troops to participate in the democratic process."

The letter, drafted by Sen. John Cornyn, Texas Republican, asked the department to take steps to "correct the unacceptable and well documented deficiencies in the military voting system."

Specifically, the letter from the Republican signers calls for the Justice Department to investigate whether the Federal Voting Assistance Program (FVAP) is fulfilling its legal obligation to provide troops and their families with needed information and help to register to vote, obtain absentee ballots and vote.

The letter states that FVAP efforts to help troops vote "have been wholly inadequate." It notes very low voter turnout by military and overseas voters in the November 2006 election, with just 16.5 percent of the 6 million eligible overseas voters requesting a ballot and just 5.5 percent actually voting.

Additionally, a Pentagon inspector general survey on 2006 voting found that just 40 percent received voting information.

A Justice Department spokesman confirmed that the letter had been received, but he declined to comment further. <http://www.washtimes.com/news/2008/sep/04/inside-the-ring-9017890/>

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New York Times

September 4, 2008

Pg. 8

U.S. Doubts Reports Of Work On North Korea Nuclear Site

By Choe Sang-Hun

SEOUL, South Korea — North Korea has begun reassembling its main nuclear complex, its only known source of bomb-making plutonium, the South Korean government said Wednesday, but the United States cast doubt on the seriousness of the North's efforts.

The North announced last week that it had stopped disabling its nuclear facilities at the complex, known as Yongbyon, and threatened to rebuild them because it was angry that it had not yet been removed from the United States' list of state sponsors of terrorism. The United States maintains that the North has not fulfilled the requirements for being removed from the list.

On Wednesday, Japan's public broadcaster, NHK, and the Kyodo News agency reported that North Korea started reassembling its nuclear facilities on Tuesday. The reports cited unidentified officials related to the disarmament talks.

In a statement from South Korea's Foreign Ministry confirming that the North had begun rebuilding, a spokesman, Moon Tae-young, said: "Our government expresses serious concern because this goes against the movement toward denuclearizing North Korea and damages the six-nation process. We urge the North not to aggravate the situation any further."

But in Washington, the State Department spokesman, Sean McCormack, said that the North Koreans seemed simply to be taking equipment out of storage and moving it around. "To my knowledge, based on what we know from the folks on the ground," he said, "you don't have an effort to reconstruct, re-integrate this equipment back into the Yongbyon facility."

Still, the Bush administration said it was dispatching Christopher R. Hill, assistant secretary of state for East Asia, to Beijing for talks on the issue.

The North has often delayed and backtracked on commitments as a negotiating tactic, but if it begins rebuilding in earnest, it would throw into doubt President Bush's hopes of cementing major gains in North Korean nuclear disarmament.

Still, North Korea has not threatened to expel American and international nuclear experts from the Yongbyon complex.

Last year experts from the United States and the United Nations nuclear watchdog, the International Atomic Energy Agency, together with North Korean engineers, began work to disable major facilities at the complex to at least temporarily shut down the North's plutonium-based nuclear weapons program. North Korea is suspected of running a separate, clandestine weapons program using enriched uranium.

The team focused on Yongbyon's nuclear reactor, a factory that produces fuel for the reactor and a laboratory that can extract plutonium from spent fuel rods. Eight of 11 disabling tasks had been completed.

The tasks remaining when the North halted the work were unloading spent fuel rods from the reactor, removing the reactor's core and disposing of unused fuel rods.

North Korea said it was beginning to rebuild the facility because Washington failed to keep a promise to remove the North from the terrorism blacklist once it made a declaration of its nuclear programs, which it did in June.

In response, Washington repeated its demand that North Korea first agree to a comprehensive method of checking whether the nuclear account it submitted was complete. The United States seeks intrusive inspections to determine how many nuclear weapons the North has produced and whether it keeps any hidden uranium enrichment program.

On Wednesday Mr. McCormack reiterated the United States' position. "North Korea understands very clearly what its obligations are, and needs to live up to them," he said. "Part of those obligations are that it needs to complete work on a verification regime."

Helene Cooper contributed reporting from Washington.

http://www.nytimes.com/2008/09/04/world/asia/04korea.html?_r=1&scp=1&sq=U.S.%20Doubts%20Reports%20f%20Work%20On%20North%20Korea%20Nuclear%20Site&st=cse&oref=slogin

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Washington Post

Radiation Detector Plan Falls Short, Audit Shows

Concerns About Cost and Effectiveness Could Curtail Program

By Robert O'Harrow Jr.

Washington Post Staff Writer

Thursday, September 4, 2008; Page D01

An ambitious Bush administration program to use new technology to stop radioactive materials from being smuggled into the country has fallen far short of its aims and will likely be sharply curtailed, according to an audit report obtained by The Washington Post.

The project, involving three contractors, has been embroiled in allegations that the department's Domestic Nuclear Detection Office misled Congress about the testing, cost and effectiveness of the machines. Budget documents this year showed the cost to put the monitors at borders and ports would be far higher than the detection office originally estimated.

An audit report by the federal Government Accountability Office shows that officials in the detection office plan to deploy the machines, known as advanced spectroscopic portal monitors or ASPs, on a far more limited basis than originally planned. The new plan will focus on using the machines to monitor cargo containers, the report said. The detection office is not sure what method it will use to screen "rail cars, privately owned vehicles, airport cargo and cargo at seaport terminals" in the near future, the report said.

The report said "senior DNDO officials acknowledge a deployment program that is dramatically different in scope than the one presented to and approved by Congress. Program officials now state the program includes only the standard cargo ASP -- a significant reduction in planned ASP equipment."

The report is the latest blow to one of the Bush administration's most prominent homeland security initiatives. In announcing the \$1.2 billion program two years ago, Department of Homeland Security officials said the costly monitors were vital to national security, would dramatically improve the detection of nuclear materials and reduce false alarms experienced by current equipment.

The program has been delayed repeatedly after investigators turned up evidence that the detection office provided misleading cost estimates and inflated detection capabilities in a cost-benefit report to Congress in 2006. Congress later required Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff to certify the effectiveness of the machines before they could be widely deployed.

Last fall, Chertoff put off deployment after the GAO alleged that detection officials fudged testing of the machines and after customs officials complained that they did not work well in field tests.

The government continues to rely on existing, less expensive equipment. The current machines are effective at detecting the presence of radiation but often cannot distinguish benign sources, such as cat litter, from materials that can be used in weapons.

The GAO audit is part of an ongoing review of the detection office's cost estimates. The review found that the cost to install and operate the machines in U.S. ports of entry -- based on the detection office's 2006 plan -- could be as high as \$3.8 billion over a decade, about 81 percent higher than detection office estimates. The likely cost would be about \$3.1 billion, the report said, about 48 percent higher than the office's estimates. The GAO concluded the detection office estimates were unreliable in part because they omitted major costs.

The review found that contracts for the development of the machines "have already experienced unfavorable cost and schedule variances" since the contracts to three firms were awarded in July 2006. Contractors include [Raytheon](#), Thermo Eberline and Canberra.

One contract is 25 percent over budget and 23 percent behind schedule, the report said, without providing details about the contractor. "These unfavorable variances are not likely to improve, but quite likely will worsen, over the course of the ASP contracts," the report said.

Auditors said they struggled to develop those figures because the detection office has declined to provide sufficient details about the program. The detection office also "instructed its ASP contractors to refuse GAO requests for interviews and data," the report said.

A Homeland Security spokeswoman declined to discuss the report, saying the department had not had an opportunity to formally respond to it.

"We will not proceed to full-rate production on advanced spectroscopic portal systems until the secretary certifies that they have a significant increase in operational effectiveness over current systems," spokeswoman Laura C. Keehner said. "The department has been following a prudent path leading to certification."

The Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee plans a hearing about the report and related matters Sept. 25. Chairman Joseph I. Lieberman (I-Conn.), whose staff has been conducting a parallel investigation, said the program was "a mission where failure is not an option."

"GAO has done both the Congress and the department a great service, by doing a realistic, tough-minded evaluation of the costs of this important program," Lieberman said.

A GAO official involved in the review declined to comment.

"In our view, the frequent changes in deployment plans, and the lack of available cost documentation, raises concerns about the overall management of the radiation portal monitor project, and whether it is guided by a sound and stable strategy," the report said.

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/09/03/AR2008090303326.html?hpid=topnews>

Financial Times

FT.com

Sarkozy warns Iran it risks attack by Israel

By Andrew England in Damascus

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Nicolas Sarkozy, the French president, warned Iran on Thursday that it was taking a big risk by seeking to obtain a military nuclear capability, saying that one day it could find Israel had decided to attack.

In one of the most explicit warnings to Tehran by a western leader, Mr Sarkozy said: "One day, whatever the Israeli government, we could find one morning that Israel has struck.

"The question is not whether it would be legitimate, whether it would be intelligent. What will we do at that moment? It would be a catastrophe. We must avoid that catastrophe."

Iran insists it is pursuing a civilian programme, but western powers suspect it is seeking to develop nuclear weapons. Israel has not ruled out military action against Iran if the crisis over its nuclear programme is not resolved, and in June tension increased with further military exercises by the Jewish state seen by some as a warning to Tehran. Israel is the only Middle Eastern state thought to possess a military nuclear capability, although it does not publicly acknowledge the fact.

Mr Sarkozy was speaking at a summit in Damascus with Bashar al-Assad, his Syrian counterpart, and the leaders of Turkey and Qatar. Syria is an ally of Iran and Mr Sarkozy has asked Mr Assad to help to resolve the stand-off between Iran and the west.

"The United States knows the role Syria can play," Mr Sarkozy said. "Syria can play a major role on this issue."

The summit marked a coup for Mr Assad as Syria is gradually welcomed back into the international fold, but Washington still treats the Arab state as a pariah. Observers also doubt the extent of influence Syria has with Iran, and relations between Damascus and Tehran have suffered as the result of Syria's decision to enter indirect peace talks with Israel, diplomats say.

Mr Assad said Damascus had submitted proposals to Turkish mediators that could form the basis for Syria's first direct negotiations with Israel for eight years.

A fifth round of indirect talks between the two nations had been postponed, he said, following the resignation of an Israeli negotiator in the wake of the decision by Ehud Olmert, the Israeli prime minister, to step down later this month amid corruption charges.

Turkey said those talks would resume this month. But any direct negotiations would not take place until after US elections and once Mr Olmert's successor had been chosen.

The last direct talks between the two collapsed in 2000 after they failed to agree how far Israel should withdraw from the Golan Heights, territory occupied in the 1967 Middle East war.

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