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Washington Post
September 28, 2007
Pg. 2

Errors Behind Nuclear Flight Unfolding

Nuclear and Nonnuclear Missiles Were Stored in Same Bunker, Lawmaker Says

By Walter Pincus, Washington Post Staff Writer

An Air Force decision to store nuclear-armed cruise missiles in the same North Dakota bunker as missiles containing dummy warheads played a key role in the unrecognized transport of six nuclear devices from North Dakota to Louisiana last month, according to the head of a congressional oversight committee.

Rep. Ellen O. Tauscher (D-Calif.), chairman of the House Armed Services subcommittee on strategic weapons, said the decision "created a mistake waiting to happen."

Tauscher said she has been briefed on the interim conclusions of two Air Force investigations into the troubled Aug. 30 flight of a B-52 bomber over the country with six nuclear-armed, air-launched AGM-129 cruise missiles under its wing. "We still don't know exactly what happened," she added.

It was the first known flight by a nuclear-armed bomber over U.S. airspace without special authorization in nearly 40 years. As previously reported in The Washington Post, the six nuclear warheads, each with the explosive power of more than 10 Hiroshima atomic bombs, were unnoticed -- and without safeguards -- for 36 hours.

Tauscher said her subcommittee will hold hearings in the next two weeks to examine the results of two Air Force investigations now underway. "We are going to be looking into inventory controls of the weapons," she said. She referred to the elaborate nuclear safeguards, requiring multiple orders and checklists supervised by trained personnel, that have governed any nuclear weapon's movements.

Summing up the briefings to date, Tauscher described as the "antecedent problem" the dismantling of some AGM-129s whose nuclear warheads were replaced with metal dummies of the same size and weight.

"You can't leave them in the same facility [as missiles with nuclear warheads] and expect people to tell the difference, . . . not from five feet away," she said.

One focus of her inquiry will be when and why the Air Force dropped a policy of keeping nuclear weapons separate from nonnuclear ones. Another will be how related security protections "fell apart at two different bases," Tauscher added. "We are going to check the checkers," she said.

She said the committee also plans to look at the process of decommissioning nuclear weapons. In the past, retired nuclear weapons were sent to the Pantex facility in Texas, where the Energy Department's National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) oversees the assembly and the disassembly of warheads.

In this case, the W80 warheads being removed from AGM-129s were stored by the Air Force before they were turned over to the NNSA.

"I want to see NNSA involved in this process," Tauscher said. In addition, she plans to look at why the Air Force turned the delivery of the missiles into a training flight.

The B-52 crew that flew from Barksdale Air Force Base in Louisiana to Minot Air Force Base in North Dakota to pick up the missiles did not include personnel trained in the handling of nuclear weapons. Tauscher confirmed that one of the crew members performed an inadequate check of the missiles after they were loaded onto the plane, looking only at those without the warheads and skipping the nuclear-armed missiles on the other side.

The most important person in the flight crew, she said, was the one assigned to look through a 5/8th -inch hole in each missile to determine whether the warhead inside was a dummy or a nuclear one.

Referring to the series of errors, Tauscher said: "We are lucky it didn't happen before."

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/09/27/AR2007092702216.html>

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Omaha World-Herald
September 28, 2007

Nominee: StratCom Needs Bigger Role

By Tim Elfrink, World-Herald Bureau

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Strategic Command should be more active in overseeing the nation's nuclear arsenal after the Air Force mistakenly carried six nuclear warheads on a flight across the country, the general nominated to be StratCom's new chief said Thursday.

A breakdown in numerous safety procedures led an Air Force crew at Minot Air Force Base in North Dakota to load six armed nuclear warheads onto a B-52 bomber before its flight to Louisiana's Barksdale Air Force Base on Aug. 29.

Testifying at a Senate Armed Services Committee hearing on his nomination, Gen. Kevin Chilton said he is awaiting results of an investigation into that incident.

But he also said StratCom needs to take a more direct role in ensuring the safety of U.S. nuclear weapons.

"I'd make sure the service components that support StratCom through our charter to maintain the security and safety of our weapons are doing their job," Chilton said.

"I would recommend that we participate in the regular inspections of those facilities and that we maintain appropriate oversight so that we can do our job," he said.

Chilton, a former astronaut, currently heads the Air Force Space Command. He has been nominated to succeed Marine Gen. James Cartwright at Offutt Air Force Base's StratCom. Cartwright was confirmed this summer as vice chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

While StratCom heads the U.S. nuclear arsenal, the Air Force is in charge of maintaining and securing the weapons involved in the August incident.

Sen. John Warner, R-Va., said he expects Chilton to push the Air Force to overhaul its system of checks and balances to prevent such an accident from occurring again.

"Clearly, human error entered into this equation," Warner said. "You'll have to go back and review that system to determine where that human error entered and how it could be prevented."

The Armed Services Committee did not vote on Chilton's nomination Thursday.

A vote to send his nomination to the full Senate for consideration likely will be scheduled in the next several weeks, said Julie Edwards, spokeswoman for Sen. Ben Nelson, D-Neb., who serves on the committee.

Nelson, who led the hearing in place of Sen. Carl Levin, D-Mich., praised Chilton's credentials and asked what his priorities would be as StratCom commander.

Protecting American assets in space likely will become a greater focus for StratCom in the coming years, Chilton said, as will protecting U.S. computer networks.

U.S. forces worldwide depend on military satellites for communications, weapons targeting, global positioning systems and weather services.

"We need to be extra focused on making certain we have the right command and control, the right information, and the right relationships in place to provide the support that all our forces around the world have become dependent on: our space capabilities," Chilton said.

http://www.omaha.com/index.php?u_page=2798&u_sid=10143690

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Philadelphia Inquirer

September 28, 2007

Nuclear Talks Open In China

BEIJING - Talks on dismantling North Korea's nuclear program opened on an optimistic note yesterday, with the United States and North Korea in general accord on most of the disablement measures. However, there was still no sign of the exact conditions under which the United States would lift its designation of North Korea as a state sponsor of terrorism.

U.S. envoy Christopher Hill said he expected to sign a declaration laying out the terms of disabling the North's program before the six-party talks - which also include South Korea, China, Japan and Russia - wrap up Sunday.

Also on the table is a "road map" to reward North Korea with a series of economic and political incentives if it disables its nuclear facilities by the end of the year.

--AP

http://www.philly.com/inquirer/world_us/10100967.html

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Pacific Stars and Stripes

September 30, 2007

Specialized Teams To Train For Possible WMD Attacks

By Jeff Schogol, Stars and Stripes

ARLINGTON, Va. — The Defense Department will train and equip more than 15,000 troops to form special teams to respond to any terrorist attack on the homeland using weapons of mass destruction, the Pentagon's top homeland security official said.

The exact number is classified, but about 70 percent of the troops are expected to come from the National Guard and the rest are expected to be active-duty troops and activated reservists, said Paul McHale, assistant defense secretary for homeland defense.

"The units would be trained to specific CBRN [Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear] missions. They would be rapidly deployable and they would be available to assist civilian authorities in responding to a terrorist attack," McHale said.

The teams are expected to become fully operational over the next two to three years and fall under the purview of U.S. Northern Command, McHale said.

"The forces, as individual units, are trained and equipped today," McHale said. "Additional training will be required and undoubtedly some new equipment will be necessary. So I want to make clear, we have this capability today, but

with additional training and equipment and better organization than we currently have, our ability to respond will be much improved.”

The Defense Department is in the process of identifying the units that will be assigned to the teams, McHale said. He declined to say which active-duty units would be part of these teams, but he said units will be assigned to the teams on a rotational basis.

“The forces that are assigned to a CCMRF [CBRN Consequence Management Response Force] will in many cases reflect unique skill-sets associated with a CBRN-contaminated environment,” he said.

The mission would include decontamination, evacuating civilian casualties, and establishing logistics and communications, he said.

The CCMRFs would likely not be tasked with law enforcement, McHale said.

If troops were required to restore order, they would likely be National Guardsmen who are not part of the CCMRF teams, McHale said.

National Guardsmen who are mobilized by the state are exempt from the Posse Comitatus act, which prevents federal troops from enforcing civilian law on U.S. soil.

If for some reason the National Guard was not sufficient to restore order, additional active-duty troops could be used for law enforcement under a law commonly known as the Insurrection Act, McHale said.

However, the president would have to make a decision to use active-duty troops in such a capacity after receiving a recommendation from the attorney general, he said.

In any event, U.S. troops will always adhere to the law, a Defense Department spokesman said.

“The United States military will always act within the laws that govern use of force under the Constitution and laws of our nation,” the spokesman said.

<http://stripes.com/article.asp?section=104&article=56685&archive=true>

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New York Times
September 29, 2007
Pg. 10

Missile Test Is Lauded As A Success

By Thom Shanker

WASHINGTON, Sept. 28 — An important test of the system to defend against long-range ballistic missiles was rated a success on Friday when an interceptor collided with a mock warhead high over the Pacific, Pentagon officials said.

A target missile was launched from Kodiak Island, Alaska, and tracked by radar at Beale Air Force Base, near Sacramento. The interceptor missile was fired from Vandenberg Air Force Base, north of Santa Barbara, Calif., striking the target warhead about eight minutes later, officials said.

“This was a very operationally realistic test,” said Rick Lehner, a spokesman for the Missile Defense Agency.

The \$85 million test was a replay of one from late May that was not completed because the target rocket fell short of the designated interceptor range in the Pacific. Because the attacking rocket and its mock warhead never reached the area to be defended, the interceptor missile was not launched in that test.

The previous major missile test was held a year ago. It was deemed a success.

The Bush administration proposes a missile defense system of 40 interceptors at Fort Greely, Alaska, along with 4 at Vandenberg and 10 to be located in Poland. The ground-based interceptors would be guided by a series of radar sites, including one proposed for the Czech Republic.

But efforts to place elements of an American missile defense system at the two Central European sites have angered Russian officials, and the proposed sites face possible budget cuts from skeptical Democrats in Congress.

The administration argues that the system is a limited defense against a small attack from nations like North Korea or Iran and that the small number of interceptors is no threat to the large Russian missile arsenal.

American missile officers have rejected a Russian proposal to cancel the Czech radar plan and instead use a Soviet-era early warning system in Azerbaijan. Even so, the Americans have invited Moscow to link its radar in Azerbaijan to the American system in Central Europe.

http://www.nytimes.com/2007/09/29/us/29missile.html?_r=1&oref=slogin

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Washington Times
September 29, 2007
Pg. 6

North Korea

U.S. To Provide \$25 Million For Fuel

The United States yesterday announced it would spend up to \$25 million to pay for 50,000 tons of heavy fuel oil for North Korea — part of an agreement the communist regime made with the United States and other nations pushing it to dismantle its nuclear program.

Under a February agreement, participants in the six-party negotiations with Pyongyang agreed to provide North Korea with one million tons of heavy fuel oil, or the monetary equivalent in other aid and assistance.

In return, North Korea agreed to shut down its main nuclear reactor, which it did in July, and then declare and ultimately dismantle all its nuclear programs.

The order, which President Bush signed after consultations with Congress last week, comes a day after the six-party talks on disabling North Korea's nuclear program resumed in Beijing.

<http://www.washingtontimes.com/article/20070929/FOREIGN/109290037/1003/foreign>

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

Washington Times
September 29, 2007
Pg. 7

Pakistan

Report Says Nukes Vulnerable To Theft

VIENNA — A new study said Russia and Pakistan were particularly vulnerable to nuclear theft and more could and should be done worldwide to prevent nuclear weapons and materials from falling into terrorist hands.

The report, commissioned by the U.S.-run Nuclear Threat Initiative and published Wednesday, found that "the threat of nuclear theft and terrorism remains high in many parts of the world."

But "it appears that the highest risks of nuclear theft today are in Russia, Pakistan and at HEU-fueled (highly-enriched uranium) research reactors," wrote the report's author, Matthew Bunn.

<http://www.washingtontimes.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20070929/FOREIGN01/109290034/1003/foreign&template=nextpage>

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Securing the Bomb 2007

Commissioned by the Nuclear Threat Initiative, finds a dangerous gap in efforts to thwart nuclear terrorism and calls for urgent global campaign to reduce the risk.

The report provides a comprehensive assessment of efforts to secure and remove vulnerable nuclear stockpiles around the world and a detailed action plan for keeping nuclear weapons and their essential ingredients out of terrorist hands.

For more information and full report please see link below.

http://www.nti.org/e_research/cnwm/overview/cnwm_home.asp

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Washington Post
September 30, 2007
Pg. 23

Israel Submits Nuclear Trade Plan

Move May Complicate Efforts to Win Exemption for India

By Glenn Kessler, Washington Post Staff Writer

Israel has pushed a key group of nations engaged in nuclear trade to adopt new guidelines allowing the international transfer of nuclear technology to states that have not signed on to nonproliferation rules, and the move may complicate the Bush administration's efforts to win an exemption for India to engage in such trade.

Documents outlining Israel's proposal were distributed to the 45-member Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) in March and have circulated on Capitol Hill in recent days, just as the administration is pushing to clear the final hurdles blocking a groundbreaking agreement with India.

Countries such as India, Israel and Pakistan that have not signed the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty are prohibited from participating in international nuclear trade, including buying reactors, uranium fuel or yellowcake.

Israel, which has a small nuclear program, has not confirmed that it has nuclear weapons, saying only that it would not be the first country to introduce nuclear weapons into the Middle East. Estimates of its stockpile range from 75 to 400 weapons.

The Israeli presentation, made in a "nonpaper" that allows for official deniability, was offered in the context of the NSG's debate over India's bid for an exemption, according to a March 17 letter by the NSG's chairman. Among the nations that have not signed the treaty, only India and Israel would qualify for admission to the NSG under the Israeli proposal.

David Siegel, spokesman for the Israeli Embassy, said it would be "grossly inaccurate" to suggest that Israel is demanding an exemption or linking its efforts to any other issue, such as the India debate.

"Israel has never asked the NSG for any exemption to its nuclear supply guidelines, nor has Israel made any Israeli-specific request of the NSG," Siegel said. "Israel, recognized to be a full-fledged adherent to the NSG guidelines, has urged the NSG to consider adopting a generic, multi-tiered, criteria-based approach towards nuclear technology transfers." He noted that some NSG countries previously have suggested such an approach.

"Modification of the NSG guidelines, were it to take place along the lines proposed by Israel, would considerably enhance the nuclear nonproliferation regime," Siegel said.

The Israeli plan offers 12 criteria for allowing nuclear trade with non-treaty states, including one that hints at Israel's status as an undeclared nuclear weapons state: A state should be allowed to engage in nuclear trade if it applies "stringent physical protection, control and accountancy measures to all nuclear weapons, nuclear facilities, source material and special nuclear material in its territory."

Daryl G. Kimball, executive director of the Arms Control Association in Washington, said the Israeli document could affect the debate over India.

"The dynamics at the NSG are that no country wants to stand in the way of the largest country, India, and the most powerful country, the United States," he said. But Kimball said that when the NSG meets in November, consensus on India will be hard to reach. "Israel's proposal gives some countries a reason to suggest" an alternative approach to a specific exemption, he said. Kimball said Israel has a record as good or better than India's in following international nuclear rules.

Delays in winning approval for India would be troubling for President Bush and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, who view the pact as an important part of their foreign policy legacy. The deal is stirring controversy in India while Congress must still give approval, making delay until an election year potentially fatal.

Reflecting that concern, the Bush administration is rejecting the Israeli proposal. "We view the India deal as unique and don't see it as a precedent for any other country, including Israel," State Department spokesman Tom Casey said.

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/09/29/AR2007092901530.html>

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Boston Globe
September 30, 2007

N. Korea Nuclear Talks Progressing, Envoy Says

A disarmament road map in works

By Chris Buckley, Reuters

BEIJING - No big differences divide negotiators seeking to end North Korea's nuclear weapons ambitions, the US envoy said yesterday, adding that there was a real prospect the talks could produce a statement on new disarmament steps.

Christopher Hill said negotiators at the six-nation talks still had to work out how much detail will be spelled out in a proposed statement that might be issued when the current session winds up today.

"We really don't have any substantive disagreements. . . . We know what we're trying to accomplish by the end of the year," Hill told reporters, referring to steps to have North Korea disable key nuclear facilities and disclose its atomic activities.

North Korea, which tested a nuclear device last year, shut down and sealed its Yongbyon nuclear plant and allowed UN monitors back to the site in July.

Now the envoys from North Korea, South Korea, the United States, China, Japan, and Russia are trying to agree on a "road map" for the next disarmament steps. As part of the breakthrough deal reached in February, North Korea has been receiving heavy fuel oil.

President Bush on Friday authorized \$25 million in aid for the North, which would provide up to 50,000 tons of heavy fuel oil, as a reward for Pyongyang's commitment to disable its nuclear facilities by the end of the year.

But the North must now disable atomic facilities and make a declaration of all of its nuclear programs, in return for a huge injection of fuel aid and an end to diplomatic isolation.

China and South Korea have delivered initial fuel shipments and Russia is expected to do so too, but Japan has indicated it will not participate unless North Korea addresses the issue of Japanese citizens the North abducted in the 1970s and '80s.

Russian negotiator Alexander Losyukov said he expects a draft joint statement to be released today.

Hill emphasized that the definition of "disabling" the nuclear facilities, a step toward complete dismantling, had to ensure that it would be a costly process for Pyongyang to restart its reactors.

http://www.boston.com/news/world/asia/articles/2007/09/30/n_korea_nuclear_talks_progressing_envoy_says/

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Washington Post
September 30, 2007
Pg. 17

Nuclear Warhead Design Hits Snag

By Walter Pincus, Washington Post Staff Writer

An independent scientific advisory group, tasked by the federal government at the direction of Congress to review the administration's plan for a new generation of nuclear warheads, has questioned whether it can go ahead without further laboratory work.

The study, performed by the "Jasons," a group of scientists who regularly advise the government on nuclear defense matters, concluded that the first design of a Reliable Replacement Warhead (RRW1) "needs further development" before it can be certified as reliable enough to go into the U.S. weapons stockpile without underground nuclear testing.

In a declassified executive summary of the Jason report, the group recommended that, for the RRW1 design to be certified, "additional experiments and analyses are needed" to explore possible failures of the nuclear warhead and the new manufacturing processes contemplated for building it.

The design was created by the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory and based on an earlier nuclear device that was subjected to an underground nuclear test. The Jason study found that additional investigation and laboratory simulations are needed to ensure a connection between the RRW1 design and the nuclear explosive test data from the earlier device.

In addition, it concluded that "substantial work" remains to be done on the security mechanisms planned to prevent the warhead's use should it fall into terrorist hands. As the summary notes, such security mechanisms are a "high priority of the RRW program."

The Jason finding will reinforce steps already taken by the Democratic-led Congress to reduce fiscal 2008 funding for the program and thus prevent the Bush administration's plan to seek a vote next year to move on production of the new warheads.

The report did not say that RRW1 would never meet the tests that the Jason group set; it said only that, absent underground testing, "a continued non-nuclear experimental basis will be required for certification of any new design."

To that end, the Jason panel suggested that the National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) recommend a new peer review program to replace the annual report that certifies whether a nuclear stockpile is still reliable. The group is proposing independent individuals, not heads of nuclear laboratories or weapons designers, be involved in the process.

Chairman Peter J. Visclosky (D-Ind.) and Rep. David L. Hobson (R-Ohio), the two senior members of the House Appropriations subcommittee that controls funding for the U.S. nuclear weapons complex, said the Jason report has "raised serious questions that must be addressed before proceeding with the RRW." Only when NNSA "has completed the work recommended by the Jason report can the nation appropriately consider what role an RRW might play as a 21st-century nuclear deterrent."

Ironically, the NNSA administrator, Thomas P. D'Agostino, who is the prime supporter of the RRW program, looked at the Jason report differently. He said he was "pleased that the Jason panel feels that we are on the right track" and added that he would "embrace the ideas of continued study and peer review."

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/09/29/AR2007092901569.html>

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Miami Herald
September 30, 2007

Beware Iran In Latin America

By Andres Oppenheimer

Iran's President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad must love the tropics. He has spent more time in Latin America than President Bush over the past 12 months, and is promising billions in economic aid to his friends in the region. Last week's visit by Ahmadinejad to Venezuela and Bolivia marked his third trip to the region since September 2006. By comparison, Bush has only made one visit to the region over the same period.

Ahmadinejad -- whose reported support of terrorist groups and vows to "annihilate" Israel have raised U.S. and European concerns over Iran's nuclear program -- could hardly be signing cooperation agreements with Venezuela, Bolivia, Ecuador and Nicaragua at a faster pace.

Last week, hours after German Chancellor Angela Merkel compared Ahmadinejad to Adolph Hitler in her speech at the United Nations, the Iranian president got a hero's welcome in La Paz from Bolivia's leftist President Evo Morales and pledged \$1.1 billion in "industrial cooperation" aid to that country over the next five years.

Later, in Venezuela, Ahmadinejad confirmed a recent pledge to create a \$2 billion joint investment fund.

Iran has already become the second largest investor in Venezuela, after the United States, and recently inaugurated a weekly Iran Air flight between Tehran and Caracas. Flights are packed with government officials and government-friendly business people, according to Venezuelan press reports.

In addition to opening an embassy in Bolivia, Iran is expanding its diplomatic missions across the region. After attending the inauguration of Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega and receiving two state medals from him in January, Ahmadinejad has stationed about 20 Iranian officials at his embassy there, which has by now become one of the largest in that country, Western diplomats say.

Earlier this year, the Iranian foreign ministry held its First International Seminar on Latin America in Tehran.

Iran's goals

What is Ahmadinejad looking for in Latin America?

First, he is seeking Latin American support to counter U.S. and European pressures to stop Iran from developing nuclear capabilities. Venezuela and Cuba were, alongside Syria, the only three countries that supported Iran's nuclear program in a February 2006 vote at the United Nations' International Atomic Energy Agency.

Second, Ahmadinejad wants to strike back at the United States in its own hemisphere. Iran may want to be able to finance anti-American groups and possibly destabilize U.S.-friendly governments in order to negotiate with Washington from a position of greater strength. Following the U.S. invasion of Iraq, Iran seems to be saying: "You got into my neighborhood; now I'm getting into yours."

Third, Ahmadinejad's popularity at home is falling, and he may want to show his people that he is being welcomed as a hero abroad.

Not isolated

Thomas Shannon, the top State Department official in charge of Latin American affairs, told me in a recent interview that Iran "wants to show to its own citizens that it is not diplomatically isolated."

Is Washington worried? I asked Shannon. He responded that the United States worries about Iran's ties to Hezbollah terrorists, who among other things are believed to have carried out the 1994 attack on the Jewish Community Center in Argentina that left 85 dead and 300 wounded.

"What worries us is Iran's history of activities in the region and especially its links to Hezbollah and the terrorist attack that took place in Buenos Aires," Shannon said. "Past is prologue."

Not a good idea

My opinion: If Ahmadinejad were cooperating with Argentina in the investigation of the 1994 bombing in Buenos Aires or abstained from calling for the "annihilation" of other countries, there would be nothing wrong with Latin nations welcoming aid from a new oil-rich partner, regardless of its Islamic fundamentalist-fascist ideology.

But the growing presence of obscure Iranian "diplomatic personnel" in Venezuela, Nicaragua and other countries in the region raises questions over whether Iranian agents will soon start slipping into other countries to support terrorist or totalitarian groups.

Importing the Middle Eastern conflict or bringing the Iran-U.S. conflict into Latin American territory is clearly in the interest of Iran, but it's a dangerous game for Latin America. Barring evidence that Iran was not tied to the 1994 bombing in Argentina, Latin American nations should keep Iran as far away as possible, before it's too late.
http://www.miamiherald.com/news/columnists/andres_oppenheimer/story/255466.html

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New York Times
October 1, 2007
Pg. 3

Plan To Disarm North Korea Is Evaluated As Talks Recess

By David Lague

BEIJING, Sept. 30 — Talks on dismantling North Korea's nuclear program broke Sunday for a two-day recess so delegates could consult their governments on a draft plan and timetable to disable the North's nuclear facilities. The draft agreed to after four days of six-nation talks here was expected to be made public after the recess, negotiators said without revealing further details.

"Assuming we go forward with this, it really lays out an entire road map through the end of the year," the chief American negotiator to the talks, Christopher R. Hill, assistant secretary of state for East Asian and Pacific affairs, said before leaving for Washington, according to Reuters. "Frankly, of all the six-party meetings, this was the least stressful in terms of coming up with common positions." He added that the talks were "really into the nuts and bolts now of implementing denuclearization."

The prospect of progress in the disarmament talks comes as the leaders of North and South Korea prepare for a three-day summit meeting beginning Tuesday in Pyongyang, the North's capital, only the second such meeting between the states since the Korean Peninsula was divided in 1945.

The six-nation talks bring North Korea, China, the United States, Japan, South Korea and Russia together with the aim of eliminating the threat from nuclear weapons on the Korean Peninsula. North Korea tested a nuclear weapon last October.

Under an agreement reached in February after four years of talks, the North pledged to shut its plutonium producing reactor at Yongbyon and allow international inspectors to verify the shutdown in return for 50,000 metric tons of fuel oil. The reactor was shut in July, and the North has begun to receive fuel shipments.

The talks now under way in Beijing are aimed at carrying out the second part of the February deal that calls for the North to disclose all its nuclear programs and disable all facilities in return for a further 950,000 metric tons of fuel oil or its equivalent in economic aid.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2007/10/01/world/asia/01korea.html?ref=world>

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USA Today
October 1, 2007
Pg. 10

Work To Dismantle Nuclear Warheads Ahead Of Schedule

Effort Part Of 2002 Treaty With Russia To Reduce Stockpile

By Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The United States is dismantling unneeded nuclear warheads at a faster pace than forecast as it substantially reduces its atomic arsenal under terms of an arms-control treaty with Russia, government officials said Sunday.

The Bush administration planned to announce today that it has taken apart three times as many reserve warheads in the budget year than it had projected and expects the rapid pace to continue.

The National Nuclear Security Administration, part of the Energy Department, reports a 146% increase in dismantled nuclear warheads during the 2007 budget year, which ended Sunday. That is triple the agency's original goal.

Plutonium, uranium and non-nuclear high-explosive components are taken out of the warheads when they are dismantled. The agency did not say how many warheads it had taken apart, nor how many remain to be worked on because the numbers are classified.

The government also will not provide any numbers on the overall size of the nuclear stockpile. Under the 2002 treaty with Russia, the United States is committed to reducing the number of deployed warheads to between 1,700 and 2,200 by 2012.

The progress "sends a clear message to the world that this administration remains committed to reducing the number of nuclear weapons in the U.S. nuclear stockpile," said the agency's administrator, Thomas D'Agostino.

At the same time, a report by an independent science advisory group has concluded that "substantial work remains" before a new generation of warheads will be fit for certification without underground nuclear testing. The administration views development of the replacement warhead as essential for keeping a secure and more easily maintained nuclear stockpile as warheads age.

The group of scientists who regularly advise the federal government on nuclear weapons matters has told Congress that the proposed replacement warhead will require further development and experiments to ensure against failure, absent underground testing.

In May, the agency chose a research effort at Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory in California for the replacement warhead. The administration seeks to develop a clearer timetable and cost estimate for the project in the next year, but some members of Congress have been skeptical about the program.

The House stripped away money for the replacement warhead program from the Energy Department's upcoming budget, while the Senate agreed to only partially fund the program. A final budget has yet to be approved in Congress.

http://www.usatoday.com/printedition/news/20071001/a_nuke01.art.htm

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Los Angeles Times
October 2, 2007

New Nukes Need More Work, Panel Says

U.S. weapons project needs to resolve technical issues and predict how the bomb would perform, outside experts tell Congress.

By Ralph Vartabedian, Los Angeles Times Staff Writer

An independent group of nuclear weapons experts said Monday that substantial work remained to be done on a new generation of warheads in order to show, short of underground testing, that the bombs would be reliable.

The National Nuclear Security Administration, a part of the Energy Department, is backing an effort by the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory in Northern California to develop a hydrogen bomb that would replace parts of the existing Cold War-era stockpile.

The project has moved further than any U.S. nuclear weapons program in two decades. But in a recent report to Congress, the panel of outside experts said technical uncertainties in the manufacturing process and predictions about how the warhead would perform when detonated must be resolved before the bomb could be certified.

"Certification is not yet assured," said an unclassified summary of the JASON report, which also raised concerns about a plan to use new technology to make a stolen bomb useless should terrorists steal it. The report asked for an "improved physical understanding" of how the new system would work.

The push to develop a new weapon, known as the reliable replacement warhead, also has run into unexpected opposition in Congress. The Bush administration had requested \$89 million for the project in fiscal 2008, up from \$36 million a year ago. But a key House committee, followed by the full chamber, voted in June to eliminate all funding, saying the U.S. needs to reassess its nuclear weapons strategy.

Rep. Peter J. Visclosky (D-Ind.), chairman of the House appropriations subcommittee on energy and water development, said Monday that only after the agency had completed the panel's recommendations could Congress consider going ahead with the new weapon.

But Energy Department officials said the report actually confirmed that their technical approach to the new bomb was correct. "I am pleased that the JASON panel feels that we are on the right track," said Thomas D'Agostino, administrator of the nuclear security agency.

Separately, the government announced Monday that it dismantled three times as many old nuclear weapons as planned in fiscal 2007. President Bush in 2004 directed that the overall U.S. stockpile of nuclear weapons -- a classified number, but believed to be about 6,000 bombs -- be reduced 50% by 2012.

<http://www.latimes.com/news/nationworld/nation/la-na-nuke2oct02.1.3572651.story?coll=la-headlines-nation>

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London Guardian

Israeli airstrike hit military site, Syria confirms

Julian Borger

Tuesday October 2, 2007

The Guardian

Syria's president, Bashar al-Assad, yesterday claimed the target hit by an Israeli airstrike last month was a military building under construction, but denied it had anything to do with a nuclear programme.

President Assad said he could not understand the motives for the mysterious September 6 airstrike on Syria, which the Israeli government has refused to discuss. There has been speculation, in Israel and Washington, that the target was nuclear technology from North Korea.

"We found the building construction was related to the military but it's not used," he said, according to a BBC transcript. "It's under construction so there's no people in it, there's no army, there's nothing in it and we do not know the reason, it wasn't clear."

Asked about the rumours of a nuclear project set up with North Korea, he replied: "We have a relation with North Korea and this is not something in secret ... We are not interested in any nuclear activity."

He said the targeted building site did not have "any protection, any air defence" and that after the attack "there's no radiations, no emergency plans". However, Mr Assad did not say what the building was intended for, nor was he directly asked.

He played down, but did not exclude, the possibility of a military response. "Retaliation doesn't mean missile for missile and bomb for bomb. We have our means to retaliate, maybe politically, maybe in other ways," he said.

President Assad also said Syria would not attend a Middle East peace conference planned by the US next month, unless it explicitly dealt with the fate of territory captured by Israel from Syria in 1967.

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/international/story/0,,2181459,00.html>

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New York Times

October 3, 2007

Missile Defense System Is Up And Running, Military Says

By Thom Shanker

WASHINGTON, Oct. 2 — After a successful test last week, the tracking radars and interceptor rockets of a new American missile defense system can be turned on at any time to respond to an emerging crisis in Asia, senior military officers said Tuesday.

Gen. Victor E. Renuart Jr., the senior commander for defense of United States territory, said that the antimissile system could guard against the risk of ballistic missile attack from North Korea even while development continues on a series of radars in California and the Pacific Ocean and on interceptor missiles in Alaska and California.

While the new system is limited, it is the most extensive anti-ballistic missile system the Pentagon has fielded since the Safeguard ABM system near Grand Forks Air Force Base in North Dakota was briefly operated, starting in 1975. Congress immediately voted to shut it down, and it operated for only a few months.

"We can bring missiles up or take them down as need be so that they can continue doing the testing," said General Renuart, commander of the military's Northern Command, based in Colorado Springs. But, he added, "I'm fully confident that we have all of the pieces in place that, if the nation needed to, we could respond."

He said the system showed an initial capability in July 2006, when American missile defense went on alert as North Korea staged missile tests. Because the array of interceptors and radars remains under development, it has never received the military's official status of being an operational weapons system.

General Renuart spoke during a Pentagon news briefing on Tuesday that offered a recap of a missile defense test held on Friday that was deemed a success.

Lt. Gen. Henry A. Obering III, director of the Missile Defense Agency, said the target missile was launched from Kodiak Island, Alaska, and tracked by radar at Beale Air Force Base, near Sacramento. The interceptor missile was fired from Vandenberg Air Force Base, north of Santa Barbara, Calif., scoring a direct hit on the dummy warhead.

"Does the system work? The answer is yes to that," General Obering said. "Is it going to work against more complex threats in the future? We believe it will."

General Obering acknowledged that no decoys were flown in the path of the interceptor on Friday as might be expected in a real missile attack. Skeptics have challenged the Missile Defense Agency to conduct more realistic tests that would include even primitive technologies designed to fool the interceptor. These include balloons and chunks of metal that separate from the missile along with the warhead.

The general said the next test, which is expected in the first half of 2008, would include countermeasures to gauge the interceptor's ability to differentiate between the real warhead and decoys. Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice are scheduled to meet up in Moscow later this month for joint talks with their counterparts on Russia's objections to American proposals for missile defense in Central Europe. American plans call for 10 missile interceptors in Poland and a radar in the Czech Republic to defend against a possible missile attack from Iran.

General Obering said Friday's successful test would help make the Bush administration's case with allies.

"I think it helps us in a very real way, because, as I have had conversations with our European partners and allies and NATO partners in the past, one of the questions I do get asked is, well, this system is not proven," General Obering said. And this, he added, goes a long way "to answering that question."

http://www.nytimes.com/2007/10/03/washington/03missile.html?_r=1&ref=washington&oref=slogin

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Washington Post

October 3, 2007

Pg. 14

N. Korea Nuclear Accord Reached

Side Deal With U.S. Involves Terror List

By Glenn Kessler, Washington Post Staff Writer

North Korea will begin disabling key nuclear facilities within weeks and start disclosing details of its nuclear programs under a six-nation agreement to be announced this week, U.S. and Asian diplomats said yesterday.

Success on the deal appears to have been aided by a "side understanding" between Washington and Pyongyang that could accelerate the removal of North Korea from a U.S. list of state sponsors of terrorism.

The United States also appears willing to accept, initially, more limited action to disable three key nuclear facilities at Yongbyon than it originally sought, with the understanding that additional work to incapacitate the facilities would occur later. In exchange, North Korea is expected to disclose the extent of its weapons-grade plutonium, including how much was used in a nuclear test last year.

North Korea also will allow nuclear experts from Russia, China and the United States to examine aluminum tubes procured from Russia that could have been used in a uranium-enrichment program, diplomats said.

But diplomats said it is unclear whether North Korea will admit to acquiring centrifuges for use in such a program, as the United States has charged. The Bush administration in 2002 accused North Korea of having a clandestine uranium-enrichment program, and the accusation led to the collapse of a 1994 deal that had frozen the facilities at Yongbyon.

The flurry of diplomatic activity, coming nearly a year after North Korea shocked Asia by conducting its first nuclear test, demonstrates both increasing flexibility by the Bush administration in its waning months and increased willingness by North Korea to close parts of its nuclear program for potential economic benefits.

The Bush administration had once insisted on "complete, verifiable, irreversible dismantlement" before North Korea could receive benefits, but it has significantly moderated its stance since the North Korean nuclear test.

China plans to release the text of the agreement as early as today, after President Bush formally gave his approval yesterday during a breakfast meeting with Assistant Secretary of State Christopher R. Hill, the chief negotiator; Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice; Vice President Cheney; and three other top officials. Hill flew back from Beijing, the site of talks that included South Korea, Japan and Russia, to brief Bush on the details.

Removing North Korea from the terrorism list would be a largely symbolic move, but it is highly prized by the North Korean government. It is problematic for Japan, which wants North Korea to first settle questions concerning the abductions of Japanese citizens by North Korean agents. North Korea has pressed for an exact date, but diplomats said no date appears in the final text.

Pyongyang also wants to be free of financial sanctions imposed by the U.S. Trading With the Enemy Act, a 1917 law that allows for a near-total economic boycott of countries at war with the United States.

Hill said that the terrorism list is a "delicate issue" and that being "too explicit about when it might happen is not helpful in terms of Japanese-North Korean relations. We are trying to handle it with sensitivity."

Still, he acknowledged that Pyongyang and Washington have a series of side understandings that amplify and clarify language in the six-party text. He indicated that one of those understandings encourages North Korea to be more forthcoming with the Japanese about the abductions.

"If they want a future in the region, they need to deal with Japan," Hill said.

North Korean negotiator Kim Gye Gwan told reporters in Beijing that "the timing is specified" for exiting the list, but South Korean envoy Chun Yung Woo said there is no clear-cut schedule. He said there are references in the text

to events taking place by the end of the year. "It's laid out so that it looks that way to North Korean eyes," he told reporters in Seoul.

A senior Japanese diplomat said that Japan has made clear its concern about a quick removal from the terrorism list, even though U.S. officials believe the abduction issue is not directly relevant to the criteria for inclusion on the list. "They would not sacrifice the U.S.-Japan relationship for the U.S.-North Korea relationship," the Japanese diplomat said.

Hill said North Korea is expected to make an initial declaration about its nuclear programs by the end of this month, though he predicted it would be incomplete. He said the various parties would negotiate over the text, with the aim that North Korea would make full disclosure by the end of the year.

He confirmed that North Korea is expected to reveal the extent of its plutonium production, including efforts in 2003 and 2005 that gave it enough fissile material for as many as 10 weapons. He declined to discuss the North Korean willingness to allow experts to examine the aluminum tubes.

Hill said that North Korea would begin disabling three facilities at Yongbyon -- the nuclear reactor, a fuel fabrication facility and a plutonium reprocessing unit. He said initial steps could be as basic as removing spent fuel rods from the reactor, but that North Korea would later do more to exceed the requirements of the 1994 agreement. Hill said that when the 1994 deal collapsed, North Korea was able to restart the reactor in two months. "We want something more than two months but less than five years," the time needed to build a new reactor, Hill said. Other diplomats said the steps envisioned in the agreement would amount to a delay of about a year before North Korea could restart its nuclear programs.

"Our understanding is that disablement does not have to be 100 percent irreversible," the Japanese diplomat said. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/10/02/AR2007100202223.html>

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USA Today
October 3, 2007

Latest terror drill set to start despite lack of '05 drill data

WASHINGTON (AP) — The nation is preparing for its biggest terrorism exercise ever later this month when three fictional "dirty bombs" go off and cripple transportation arteries in two major U.S. cities and Guam, according to a document obtained by The Associated Press.

Yet even as this drill begins, details from the previous national exercise held in 2005 have yet to be publicly released — information that's supposed to help officials prepare for the next real attack.

House lawmakers demanded answers Wednesday, including why the "after-action" report from 2005 hasn't been made public. Congress has required the exercise since 2000, but has done little in the way of oversight beyond attending the actual events.

Rep. Bennie Thompson, the committee chairman, did not get a direct answer to why it has taken the department two years to finish the after action report.

"I'm just wondering how much of that information you gleaned is actually current enough to move forward with," Thompson, D-Miss said. Rep. Norm Dicks, D-Wash., asked if the department was not releasing the report because it's hiding something.

"Is it so sensitive because there was a lot of failures in this exercise," Dicks asked. "You know Katrina wasn't exactly a home run."

The fourth Top Officials exercise — dubbed TOPOFF — takes place during the week starting Oct. 15. The program costs about \$25 million a year and involves the federal government's highest officials, such as top people from the Defense and Homeland Security departments.

"The challenge with TOPOFF is not the exercise itself. It's to move as quickly as possible to remedy what perceives to be the problems that are uncovered," former Homeland Security Secretary Tom Ridge said in an interview with AP this week.

Ridge, who launched his own security consulting company on Monday, said he's a big fan of the TOPOFF exercises. But he said "it's not acceptable" that the review from the 2005 exercise is still not released publicly.

The House Homeland Security emergency communications, preparedness and response subcommittee was holding a hearing Wednesday on the terrorism exercise program.

This year's TOPOFF will build on lessons learned from previous exercises, according to the Homeland Security Department, which runs the program. The agency said the Oct. 15-19 exercise would be "the largest and most comprehensive" to date.

According to an internal department briefing of the coming exercise obtained by AP, a dirty bomb will go off at a Cabras power plant in Guam; another dirty bomb will explode on the Steel Bridge in Portland, Ore., impacting

major transportation systems, and a third dirty bomb will explode at the intersection of busy routes 101 and 202 near Phoenix.

Local hospitals and law enforcement agencies will be involved in the "attacks" by the dirty bombs, which are conventional explosives that include some radioactive material that would cause contamination over a limited area but not create actual nuclear explosions.

"Lessons learned from the exercise will provide valuable insights to guide future planning for securing the nation against terrorist attacks, disasters and other emergencies," according to the department's website.

The after action report from TOPOFF 3, which deals with issues that came up in the 2005 exercise, is supposed to identify areas for improvement. That report is still going through internal reviews.

According to a brief summary of the 2005 exercise — marked For Official Use Only, but obtained by AP — problems arose when officials realized the federal government's law for providing assistance does not cover biological incidents.

The exercise involved a mustard gas attack from an improvised explosive device in Connecticut and the release of the pneumonic plague in New Jersey. This caused certain federal disaster programs to be unavailable to some residents suffering from the attack, according to the summary.

A 2005 Homeland Security inspector general report suggested the department start tracking the lessons learned from these exercises.

And a 2006 White House report on Hurricane Katrina criticized the department for not having a system to address and fix the problems discovered in the TOPOFF exercises.

"The most recent Top Officials (TOPOFF) exercise in April 2005 revealed the federal government's lack of progress in addressing a number of preparedness deficiencies, many of which had been identified in previous exercises," according to the White House.

Previously, a more detailed version of lessons-learned from TOPOFF 2, held in 2003 was not released to states for security reasons.

http://www.usatoday.com/news/nation/2007-10-03-terror-exercise_N.htm?loc=interstitialskip

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