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Washington Times
November 30, 2007
Pg. 15

U.S. Suspects Pakistan Nukes Ended In Syria

By Nicholas Kravev and Andrew Salmon, Washington Times

The United States is concerned that centrifuges sold to North Korea by Pakistan in the 1990s may have been passed on to Syria or another country, current and former U.S. officials said yesterday.

Pakistan has acknowledged that renegade scientist Abdul Qadeer Khan sold North Korea the centrifuges, which the United States suspects were intended for use to enrich uranium for a clandestine nuclear-weapons program.

But Pyongyang, which has never admitted to having a uranium-based program, has told U.S. officials that it does not possess the centrifuges, raising doubts whether North Korea will be truthful when it declares its nuclear programs, probably in the next few days.

Christopher Hill, the chief U.S. negotiator with the North, suggested yesterday that the centrifuges may have been transferred elsewhere. Speaking in Seoul about the uranium program, he referred to "past programs" and the "disposition of equipment."

"We need a complete understanding of [highly enriched uranium], of their program — or if it is not an active program, we need a complete understanding of its past programs," Mr. Hill said. "We need an acknowledgement of what went on, an explanation of how it went on, and the disposition of equipment."

Officials in Washington said that in examining where the centrifuges might have gone, they are considering exports to a third country, particularly Syria.

The administration has been silent about a suspected nuclear-related facility in Syria that was bombed by Israel in September. It has rebuffed numerous questions about it, both from Congress and the press.

There are differing opinions within the Bush administration over how to interpret intelligence received in 2002 involving the purchases from Pakistan.

Mr. Hill and some others think that the North Koreans were pursuing a uranium-enrichment program when they were confronted by the United States but that it never got off the ground. Other officials suspect the program was up and running.

North Korea has acknowledged acquiring some materials such as aluminum tubes that could have been used in a uranium-enrichment program but says they were wanted for other purposes.

Mr. Hill, who travels to Pyongyang on Monday, is expected to tell the North Koreans that their declaration will not be credible if it does not account for the centrifuges.

Any attempt to cheat on the declaration would stall the hard-won six-nation deal providing energy and other aid to North Korea in exchange for the dismantling of its nuclear programs.

"If we have a problem, there may be a tendency for people to pull back," Mr. Hill said yesterday. "It behooves us to have the courage to move forward."

China is expected to reconvene the six-party talks next week, and Mr. Hill said the North Koreans are already sharing a draft text of their declaration with the Chinese.

"We are continuing to discuss the matter of uranium enrichment, and based on the progress in those discussions, I believe that by the end of the year, we can come to a mutual satisfaction," Mr. Hill said.

He said he would discuss the declaration in Pyongyang, "and I hope that in the course of that discussion, we will know what's coming in a draft."

Mr. Hill will also visit the North's main nuclear complex in Yongbyon, whose main facilities are being disabled as part of the Oct. 3 agreement.

Andrew Salmon reported from Seoul.

<http://www.washingtontimes.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20071130/FOREIGN/111300064/1003>

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New York Times
November 30, 2007
Pg. 10

On Nuclear Seesaw, The Balance Seems To Shift To Iran

By Elaine Sciolino

PARIS, Nov. 29 — Iran's president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, is known for overheated, boastful pronouncements. So it was hardly a surprise earlier this month when he declared that despite demands from the United States and other countries that Iran stop enriching uranium, Tehran was pressing ahead and negotiations were out of the question.

"From our point of view," he said, "this subject is closed."

But in this case, Iran's intransigence is not only real; it also appears to be defeating attempts by the rest of the world to curtail Tehran's nuclear ambitions, at least for the moment.

Nine months after the United Nations Security Council unanimously imposed new sanctions on Iran to press it to stop enrichment, and threatened more if it refused, Iran has steadily increased its enrichment of uranium, which can be used to produce electricity or fuel bombs. At the same time, the nations that joined together behind the sanctions are divided.

The foreign ministers from the six nations that backed the sanctions are now facing another decision on Iran, having agreed to pass a new Security Council resolution if there were no signs of progress in negotiations with Tehran by Friday.

But nothing seems to be bending the will of Iran, which is flush with oil revenues. The incentive strategy, led by Javier Solana, the European Union's foreign policy adviser, has failed to entice Iran to stop enrichment in exchange for economic, political and technological rewards. So has the punishment approach, as Russia and China hold firm to the view that further pressure will only intensify the standoff.

In May, desperate to engage Iran, the six nations offered a brief freeze in further sanctions if Iran freezes its enrichment program at the current level, effectively dropping their demand that Iran stop enrichment altogether. But that "double freeze" proposal barely got Tehran's attention.

"The chosen strategy of pressure and engagement is not working," said one senior European official involved in the diplomacy. "As a result, you have a lot of people desperately banging on the door of the Iranians. All of them are coming back empty-handed."

Last week Mohamed ElBaradei, the director general of the International Atomic Energy Agency, reported that while Iran was answering questions about past nuclear activities, it had crossed the threshold of putting into operation 3,000 centrifuges, which enrich uranium. He added that restrictions on inspectors precluded his agency from determining whether Iran's program was intended to generate power or make weapons.

On Friday, Mr. Solana is to meet in London with Iran's new nuclear negotiator, Saeed Jalili, before reporting to officials from the six countries. But Mr. Jalili has repeatedly stated that enrichment is not negotiable, and Iran's official government spokesman says it will not be on the agenda.

Representatives of the six nations — the United States, Britain, Russia, China, France and Germany — will meet Saturday in Paris to discuss a new Council resolution. In interviews, officials from those countries expressed a growing consensus that the momentum in their diplomacy had evaporated and that any new resolution would be weak.

"As far as new ideas, I don't have any new ideas to offer," Mr. Solana told reporters on Wednesday. Privately, he has told governments that the most they can ever hope for is a cap on Iran's enrichment program in the future, according to officials involved in the conversations.

The Security Council twice has imposed limited economic and political sanctions aimed at freezing Iranian assets linked to its nuclear and ballistic missile programs. Although there is considerable debate in Iran on the wisdom of a policy that isolates the country, the sanctions have hardly budged Iran.

Kim Howells, a senior official in the British Foreign Office, told a Parliament committee on Wednesday that the current sanctions were "pretty weak," adding, "I don't think the U.N. is going out of its way to cripple Iran in any way."

Behind the scenes, the impasse has encouraged independent initiatives, complicating the joint diplomacy of the six powers.

Switzerland floated a plan, criticized by the six countries, that would allow Iran to expand its enrichment program but would set limits on how fast.

Russia has recently tried but failed to sway Iran to compromise. During a recent visit to Tehran, President Vladimir V. Putin was granted a rare audience with Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. Mr. Putin made no threats, but focused on the benefits that would flow to Iran, including the delivery of sophisticated nuclear technology, if it made some gesture on enrichment, according to officials familiar with the visit.

Iranian officials described the meeting as very friendly, but when Mr. Putin sent his foreign minister, Sergey V. Lavrov, to Tehran, Mr. Lavrov received a frosty reception, and returned home frustrated, Russian, Iranian and European officials said.

Still, Russia prefers to make the next priority not more sanctions but winning Iran's cooperation on allowing wider inspections of its nuclear sites by the United Nations agency, Russian and Western European officials said.

China, whose trade with Iran is soaring, has taken what might be characterized as a passive-aggressive diplomatic approach.

It did not send a representative to a key meeting of the six powers in Brussels on Monday, causing the meeting to be canceled. The Chinese delegation also refused to attend the previous scheduled meeting of the group, to protest both a meeting Germany's chancellor, Angela Merkel, held with the Dalai Lama, the exiled Tibetan leader, and the decision by the United States Congress to honor him. The Chinese are expected at Saturday's meeting.

The only negotiation with Iran that seems to be progressing is the limited one aimed at resolving the United Nations agency's questions about Tehran's past nuclear activity. Under a formal agreement last summer with the agency, Iran has begun to turn over documents and make various officials and former officials available for interviews.

As long as Iran is making progress on this front, the United States and its European allies are likely to have a difficult time persuading Russia and China to agree to further sanctions.

Instead, the United States, Britain, France and Germany are working to persuade their own companies and banks to limit investments and dealings in Iran. Other countries, including Italy and Spain, have resisted a French proposal to impose new European Union sanctions.

Meanwhile, Dr. ElBaradei, whom Iranian officials have described as a friend, has been criticized in some official quarters in Iran for his recent report, which called on Tehran to abide by Security Council resolutions and faulted it for a "confidence deficit" about the nature of its nuclear program.

Earlier this month, Dr. ElBaradei planned a trip to Iran to expand his inspectors' access and restart negotiations. Although President Ahmadinejad and other officials agreed to see him, Ayatollah Khamenei, Iran's top decision-maker, did not, and Dr. ElBaradei called off the trip.

The Iranians argue that once questions about their past are resolved, they cannot be penalized for enriching uranium, because Iran is a signatory of the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty.

"Enrichment is a right of all countries," Mohammad Saeidi, the deputy director of Iran's Atomic Energy Organization, said in an interview one week ago. "Once the past ambiguities are resolved, we have every right to do it."

Perhaps the biggest setback in the recent attempts to negotiate with Iran was the failure of the "double freeze" proposal. Early last May in Brussels, the six powers first presented a visiting Iranian delegation with what they considered the generous offer to temporarily "freeze" all further punitive action in the Security Council if Iran put a temporary "freeze" on expansion of its enrichment program.

Until then, the six countries had taken the position that negotiations could start only if Iran halted enrichment entirely. The proposal, titled "The Way Forward to Negotiations," included agreement by the six countries to discuss with Iran the timing and methods for uranium enrichment in the future and binding assurances for the supply of nuclear fuel, officials said.

But the Iranians at the table did not even bother to read the document, nor was there ever an official response from Tehran.

Mr. Solana repeated the offer last month during a meeting with Iranian nuclear negotiators in Rome, but it was rejected, officials involved in the talks said.

Even so, the apparent softening of the six powers' demand on uranium enrichment — however brief — may have helped convince Iran that its policy of defiance was paying off.

"Of course the proposal could be seen as moving our red line," said one senior official involved in the diplomacy.

"But we are diplomats. We have to find a formula for negotiations with Iran."

http://www.nytimes.com/2007/11/30/world/middleeast/30iran.html?_r=1&oref=slogin

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Miami Herald

November 30, 2007

Pg. 1

Iran's Missile Capabilities Still Unclear

Experts have yet to separate fact from propaganda in the debate over what weapons Iran possesses.

By Hannah Allam, McClatchy News Service

Yes, Iran has medium-range ballistic missiles that could reach American air and naval bases in the Persian Gulf and possibly hit Israel or southern Europe.

No, there's no proof Iran is developing -- or has -- nuclear warheads for its missiles.

The Iranians may have some longer-range missiles. Or maybe their arsenal contains little more than faulty North Korean, Russian and Chinese knockoffs, some of which are descendants of Germany's World War II V-2.

The yes, no and maybes are about all international defense analysts can offer when it comes to separating proven capabilities from propaganda in the debate over Iran's ballistic missiles -- weapons with ranges from a few miles to thousands that travel into space before falling back to earth to strike a target.

President Bush repeatedly has pointed to an Iranian ballistic missile threat as the main reason for building a billion-dollar missile-defense system in Eastern Europe to protect Europe and the United States.

Orchestrated shows

As international concern spreads over the American-Iranian game of brinkmanship, it remains difficult to say with any certainty what weapons Iran possesses or how well they'd perform. The only time such arms are seen in public is during Tehran's carefully orchestrated military reviews, where they sit on trucks.

"It's all based on conjecture and news stories and leaks from the intelligence community, and quite a bit of that might be right," said Philip Coyle, a former director of the Pentagon's weapons-testing office and now a consultant

to the Center for Defense Information. "But I don't think that means what the administration says it means, namely that Iran is preparing to attack the United States or Europe."

Nevertheless, the president has warned that Iran could create better and longer-range missiles within the next decade that could reach most any Western target. That threat is compounded by fears that Iran is secretly developing nuclear warheads for the missiles.

"Our intelligence community assesses that, with continued foreign assistance, Iran could develop an intercontinental ballistic missile capable of reaching the United States and all of Europe before 2015," Bush said last month in a speech at the National Defense University in Washington.

A recent publication by the Congressional Research Service, which provides nonpartisan reports on political issues to members of Congress, however, suggests that Bush is overstating what U.S. officials know.

The CRS report, dated Nov. 8, said there's no international consensus on the range, number or effectiveness of Iran's ballistic missiles. It underscored the paucity of real, or at least unclassified, intelligence on Iran's missile program. "Some observers argue that although the U.S. position may be based upon a realistic assessment, it is also a worst-case analysis of the potential threat from Iran. They argue that 'with rare exception, this level of threat has rarely turned out to be the historical reality,'" the report said.

For example, the report notes, on the issue of short-range ballistic missiles -- those that travel 600 miles or less -- there's wide disagreement on how many missiles Iran has, what their capabilities are and even what they're called. Similar disputes also surround Iran's medium-range missile, the Shahab-3, a derivative of a North Korean missile, the No-Dong 1. A medium-range missile travels between 600 and 1,500 miles.

Few experts think that Iran now has long-range or intercontinental ballistic missiles capable of striking most of Europe or the United States, and U.S. analysts disagree over how long it might take Iran to develop such a capability, the CRS reported. "Some argue that an Iranian ICBM test is likely before 2010 and very likely before 2015," the report said. "Other U.S. officials believe, however, that there is 'less than an even chance' for such a test before 2015."

Shield critics

Critics of the U.S. proposal to build a ballistic missile shield in Poland and the Czech Republic describe the project as, in Coyle's words, "a system that doesn't work for a threat that doesn't exist." They say the shield would stop only an "unsophisticated threat," meaning one or two missiles that were launched without decoys.

"Do you think Iran would attack Europe or the United States with just one missile and sit back and see what happens?" Coyle said.

Making matters more confusing, analysts say, are Iranian officials' statements that they've developed missile systems that could strike U.S. facilities in Iraq, Afghanistan and throughout the Gulf region. Military analysts think many of Iran's claims are exaggerated and that much of Tehran's hardware is unreliable and ineffective.

This week, the Iranian defense minister announced the creation of a ballistic missile with a range of 1,200 miles, according to Iranian news reports. No photos of the weapon were made available, however.

"The Iranians overstate their current capabilities, but we all know this is done for internal propaganda more than for telling the people outside," said Wael al Assad, the senior disarmament specialist at the Arab League in Cairo. "But, at the same time, this kind of language they are using is being used in turn by the American administration to overblow the necessity of a preemptive strike on the Iranians. It's extremism feeding extremism."

Jonathan S. Landay contributed to this report from Washington.

<http://www.miamiherald.com/news/world/story/326326.html>

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New York Times
November 30, 2007
Pg. 10

In Slovakia, Three Are Held In A Uranium Smuggling Case

By Dan Bilefsky and William J. Broad

BRUSSELS, Nov. 29 — Two Hungarians and a Ukrainian were arrested Wednesday after trying to sell highly enriched uranium, Slovak diplomats and police authorities said Thursday. The quantity, however, was far too small to make a crude warhead.

Zuzana Dutkova, a spokeswoman for the Permanent Representation of the Slovak Republic to the European Union in Brussels, said the three suspects, who were arrested in Slovakia and Hungary, were in possession of just under half a kilogram of uranium in powder form.

Ms. Dutkova, who said she had been briefed on the case by officials from the Ministry of Internal Affairs in Bratislava, said: "We are almost 90 percent sure that the material originated in one of the former Soviet republics. It was possible to use this material for terrorist attacks or to build a dirty bomb."

Western experts, however, cautioned that uranium, even when highly enriched, had too little radioactivity to make a dirty bomb — a weapon that combines highly radioactive material with conventional explosives to disperse over a large area deadly dust that people would inhale.

By contrast, highly enriched uranium can fuel nuclear arms. However, the experts said the amount of material confiscated — about a pound — was far shy of the 60 to 110 pounds a terrorist would need for a crude atomic weapon. They also cast doubt on the level of enrichment the Slovak authorities attributed to the uranium.

Dirty bombs are considered more a psychological armament than a weapon of mass destruction because their radioactive material is potentially much less lethal than a bomb using conventional explosives, experts say.

Consequently, dirty bombs are sometimes called "weapons of mass disruption" whose destructive power rests in the panic they provoke.

Ms. Dutkova said officials from the Ministry of Internal Affairs were still trying to determine who was trying to buy the uranium, which the three suspects were believed to have been planning to sell for \$1 million. She said two of the suspects were arrested in Slovakia, along the Hungarian border, while the other was arrested in Hungary.

She said that a total of 481.4 grams of uranium had been hidden in containers, and that investigators had determined it was enriched to 98.6 percent uranium 235. Uranium is considered highly enriched if it contains 20 percent or more uranium 235, which can split in bursts of atomic energy.

Thomas B. Cochran, director of the nuclear program at the Natural Resources Defense Council, a private group in Washington that monitors atomic arsenals, said he doubted that the 98.6 percent enrichment figure given by the Slovaks was correct.

It was far more likely that "98.6 percent is the confidence in the radiation detector measurement, not the enrichment," Mr. Cochran said.

When Slovakia joined the European Union in May 2004, its eastern border with Ukraine became the union's easternmost frontier. Some European Union officials have been concerned about security at that border, fearful that it could become a hotbed for terrorists and organized criminal gangs seeking to smuggle explosives or banned material into the union. Ms. Dutkova said Slovakia had been making efforts to tighten security at the Ukraine border.

The International Atomic Energy Agency has tracked hundreds of cases of radioactive materials that were stolen, missing, smuggled or in the possession of unauthorized people. But in the past 15 years, only about 18 cases have come to light that involved illicit trade in plutonium or highly enriched uranium, the two fuels of atom bombs.

Dan Bilefsky reported from Brussels, and William J. Broad from New York.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2007/11/30/world/europe/30uranium.html?ref=world>

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Washington Post

December 2, 2007

Pg. 20

Calculating The Risks In Pakistan

U.S. War Games Weigh Options for Securing Nuclear Stockpile

By Thomas E. Ricks, Washington Post Staff Writer

A small group of U.S. military experts and intelligence officials convened in Washington for a classified war game last year, exploring strategies for securing Pakistan's nuclear arsenal if the country's political institutions and military safeguards began to fall apart.

The secret exercise -- conducted without official sponsorship from any government agency, apparently due to the sensitivity of its subject -- was one of several such games the U.S. government has conducted in recent years examining various options and scenarios for Pakistan's nuclear weapons: How many troops might be required for a military intervention in Pakistan? Could Pakistani nuclear bunkers be isolated by saturating the surrounding areas with tens of thousands of high-powered mines, dropped from the air and packed with anti-tank and anti-personnel munitions? Or might such a move only worsen the security of Pakistan's arsenal?

For several years the U.S. government has sought to help Pakistan improve its weapons safeguards, spending tens of millions of dollars since 2001 to boost the security of the country's nuclear bunkers. However, the issue has gained greater urgency in recent weeks as Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf's move to declare a state of emergency and suspend the constitution plunged the country into street clashes and political turmoil. Although U.S. officials express confidence in the current security measures, the more they examine the risks, the more they realize that there are no

good answers, said Robert B. Oakley, a former U.S. ambassador to Pakistan. "Everybody's scrambling on this," Oakley said.

The conclusion of last year's game, said one participant, was that there are no palatable ways to forcibly ensure the security of Pakistan's nuclear weapons -- and that even studying scenarios for intervention could worsen the risks by undermining U.S.-Pakistani cooperation. "It's an unbelievably daunting problem," said this participant, a former Pentagon official who asked not to be identified because of the game's secrecy. The contingency plans that do exist, he added, are at the headquarters of U.S. Central Command in Tampa, and are in "very close hold." Even so, he said, planners really haven't developed answers for how to deal with nuclear weapons stashed in Pakistan's big cities and high mountain ranges.

"The bottom line is, it's the nightmare scenario," said retired Marine Col. Gary Anderson, who participated in an earlier exercise that simulated a breakup of Pakistan. "It has loose nukes, hard to find, potentially in the hands of Islamic extremists, and there aren't a lot of good military options."

Analysts caution that Musharraf's recent moves -- including stepping down as army chief and setting a timeline for restoring constitutional rule -- haven't ended the risks of further instability. "These are very half-hearted gestures," said Anita Weiss, author of "Power and Civil Society in Pakistan" and a professor at the University of Oregon.

"Pakistan is not yet where we can say things have been resolved."

An expert on Pakistani terrorism who did not attend last year's war game but learned about some of its conclusions said that senior U.S. officials "weren't pleased with what the game told them; they were quite shocked." He spoke on the condition of anonymity because, he said, the U.S. efforts related to securing Pakistan's nuclear arsenal involve "really, really black SAPs" -- that is, among the most highly guarded "special access programs."

Even some steps that might appear to offer a short-term solution could backfire in the long run, warned Milton Bearden, a former CIA station chief in the Pakistani capital of Islamabad who now does some work for the Pakistani government on trade issues. "When you talk about U.S. troops going in and taking out Pakistani nukes," he said, "that means we've just invaded another country."

Others maintain that simply holding the games may worsen the situation by antagonizing Pakistanis and by encouraging the Pakistani government to take countermeasures. Retired Pakistani Brigadier Feroz Khan, who until 2001 was the second-ranking officer in the Pakistani army's strategic plans division, which oversees the control of nuclear weapons, said in an interview that he has heard of the studies and war games carried out "in various U.S. government agencies," and thinks they are "very dangerous."

"You might just want to remember Desert One," he added, referring to the botched U.S. mission to rescue American hostages in Iran in 1980.

As a result of U.S. government studies of the nuclear issue, Pakistani officials have come to believe a U.S. intervention "is a real threat now," Khan said. The Pakistani military almost certainly has taken steps to forestall such a raid, he said, such as creating phony bunkers that contain dummy nuclear warheads. He estimated that Pakistan's current arsenal now contains about 80 to 120 genuine warheads, roughly double the figure usually cited by outside experts.

"It may actually make things worse, to attempt that sort of thing," agreed Zia Mian, a Princeton University physicist and expert on nuclear proliferation in South Asia. Among other negative repercussions, he predicted, any U.S. effort to secure Pakistan's nuclear arsenal "would really increase anti-Americanism."

A concern of some proliferation experts is that in an internal breakup, a contending faction might seek to grab some of the nuclear warheads, not necessarily to use them but to wield them as a symbol of authority. "I think there is a lot of concern about this, and the less stable the government and the society become, the greater the concern," said a senior U.S. intelligence officer whose agency wouldn't permit him to speak for attribution. That said, he added in an interview, the sense inside the intelligence community currently is that the threat isn't dire. Also, he said, "The good news is that Pakistan . . . takes this very, very seriously."

But what if the government of Pakistan can't ensure the security of the nukes? "Then I would agree there are no good answers," he said. So far, Pakistan's internal crisis hasn't become widely violent, he noted. "I think if things get violent, if the government loses control, then one considers the risks in a more active way."

The war games conducted by the U.S. government and by other experts offer a recurring conclusion: Retaining the cooperation of the Pakistani government, especially its military, is crucial. "Our best bet to secure Pakistan's nuclear forces would be in a cooperative mode with the Pakistani military, not an adversarial one," said Scott Sagan, a Stanford University expert in counterproliferation.

Sagan argued that mere contemplation of a U.S. intervention might actually increase the chances of terrorists acquiring a nuclear warhead. He said that in a crisis, the Pakistani government might begin to move its nuclear weapons from secure but known sites to more secret but less-secure locations. "If Pakistan fears they may be attacked," he said, then the Pakistani military has an incentive "to take them out of the bunkers and put them out in the countryside."

In such locations, Sagan concluded, the weapons would be more vulnerable to capture by bad actors. "It ironically increases the likelihood of terrorist seizure," said Sagan, who in the past has advised the Pentagon on nuclear strategy. He noted that Pakistan moved some of its arsenal in September 2001, when it feared it might be attacked. But Khan, the retired Pakistani brigadier, said that Sagan's fears are misplaced. The weapons "are in secure bunkers, with multiple levels of security, and active and passive measures" to mask their presence, he said. And while he conceded that the Pakistani government moved some nuclear weapons in 2001, he said the shifts made the arsenal more secure, not less.

The senior U.S. intelligence officer also disagreed with Sagan's view that Pakistani moves might make its arsenal more vulnerable. "I think that implies they haven't thought thoroughly about this," he said. "They've looked at it from all sorts of angles. . . . They think they're doing everything they can."

The bottom line, said Oakley, the veteran diplomat, is that "the only way you can safeguard them is to work very, very closely with the Pakistani army." To attack that army, he said, would erode the one institution that is keeping the weapons under control. "If you want nukes to get loose," he said, "that's the way to do it."

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/12/01/AR2007120101618.html>

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New York Times

December 2, 2007

Pg. 3

Iranian Pushes Nuclear Talks Back To Square 1

By Elaine Sciolino

PARIS, Dec. 1 — In a sign that Iran has hardened its position on its nuclear program, its new nuclear negotiator said in talks in London on Friday that all proposals made in past negotiations were irrelevant and that further discussion of a curb on Iran's uranium enrichment was unnecessary, senior officials briefed on the meeting said.

The Iranian official, Saeed Jalili, also told Javier Solana, who represented the United States, Russia, China, Britain, France and Germany in the five-hour talks, that United Nations Security Council resolutions punishing Iran for not suspending its enriched uranium activities were illegal, the officials said.

Representatives of the six countries met in Paris on Saturday afternoon to discuss further punitive Security Council measures against Iran after the final talks in London failed to produce a breakthrough.

The countries have been divided on new sanctions, and the Paris talks were only preliminary, in part because of the absence of Sergei Kisliak, Russia's top nuclear negotiator, who was blocked in Montreal by snow.

A French official briefing reporters after the Paris meeting said that the six countries had begun work on a new sanctions resolution based on a rough text drafted by Britain, and that he hoped it could be passed soon, perhaps in the next few weeks.

But he stressed that there was no agreement now, and that any resolution would have to be a compromise. "It won't be a dramatic breakthrough," he said.

R. Nicholas Burns, an under secretary of state who represented the United States at the Paris meeting, has been pressing for tougher sanctions as soon as possible, arguing that the goal is to isolate Iran until it stops enriching uranium.

The failure in London could make it easier to pass a new Security Council resolution — even if it is not as strong as the United States, Britain and France would like it to be.

The London meeting was the first time that Mr. Jalili, a close ally of Iran's president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, had led negotiations on the Iranian side. His performance made clear that he brings a very different style and approach from that of his predecessor, Ali Larijani, who had taken a tough line but had shown a willingness to engage substantively on the nuclear issue.

The first hour and a half of the meeting on Friday was described as a monologue, with Mr. Jalili speaking about the will of the Iranian people to support uranium enrichment, theology, God, even his doctoral thesis, according to several officials, who spoke on the condition of anonymity under normal diplomatic rules.

"Jalili said, 'Everything in the past is past, and with me, you start over,'" an official said. "He said, 'None of your proposals has any standing.'"

When Mr. Solana, the European Union's foreign policy chief, said that he was under the assumption that there would be continuity in the talks, Mr. Jalili told him that was wrong.

After the meeting, Mr. Solana abandoned his habitual optimistic stance, telling reporters that he was "disappointed." The French official described the meeting as "a disaster," adding "Jalili essentially said, 'Everything that Larijani has proposed is a dead letter and we have to start from zero.'"

The official also said that Mr. Jalili had declared, "There is no longer an Iranian nuclear problem," and had added that the only interlocutor recognized by Iran from now on would be the International Atomic Energy Agency. The hard-line position from the Iranian side was clear confirmation that Iran would not compromise on this issue, the French official said, adding, "We have in front of us the real Iran." An official involved in the talks put it even more bluntly, saying, "We can't do business with these guys at this point."

Nine months ago, the Security Council unanimously imposed new sanctions on Iran to press it to stop enrichment and threatened more if it refused. But the six nations that united behind the sanctions have been divided over what to do next.

Russia and China have paid lip service to Iran's need to comply with Council resolutions, but also have held firm to the view that further pressure will only intensify the standoff.

The foreign ministers from the six nations agreed in September to pass a new Security Council resolution if both Mr. Solana and the International Atomic Energy Agency, a part of the United Nations, did not certify that there was progress with Tehran by November.

Last week in Vienna, Mohamed ElBaradei, the agency's director, reported that while Iran was cooperating on answering questions about past nuclear activities, it also had crossed the threshold of putting into operation 3,000 centrifuges, the fast-spinning machines that enrich uranium. He added that Iranian restrictions on his inspectors precluded his agency from determining whether Iran's nuclear program was intended to generate power or make weapons.

In the meeting in London, Mr. Jalili contended that the atomic energy agency had sent a letter to Iran saying that the case involving suspicious activities in Iran's program of centrifuges was "closed."

"We have solved all our problems with the agency," an official involved in the negotiations paraphrased Mr. Jalili as saying.

Senior agency officials have told the countries involved in the negotiations that while Iran has provided important information about the centrifuge programs, the case is not closed and that any written communication would have been pro forma.

Back in Tehran on Saturday, Mr. Jalili defended Iran's position and said it was not to blame for the perceived failure of the talks.

"The fact is that we defended the Iranian nation's rights and stressed fulfilling our duties and that the Iranian nation will not accept anything that goes beyond the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty," he told reporters. "If some people have become disappointed because they cannot deprive Iran of its natural rights, then this is another matter."

http://www.nytimes.com/2007/12/02/world/middleeast/02iran.html?_r=1&oref=slogin

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Los Angeles Times

December 2, 2007

Pg. 1

New Anthrax Vaccine Doomed By Lobbying

America's sole supplier faced oblivion if its rival's product was adopted. It was time to call on political connections.

By David Willman, Los Angeles Times Staff Writer

WASHINGTON — Shortly after the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks and the subsequent anthrax mailings, top U.S. science advisors said the country "urgently needed" a new, improved anthrax vaccine.

The existing vaccine often caused swollen arms and muscle and joint pain. Inoculation required six injections over 18 months, followed by yearly booster shots. The estimated shelf life was just three years.

The scientists' report, issued by the Institute of Medicine, called for "an anthrax vaccine free of these drawbacks" -- a vaccine that would require only two or three injections, achieve protection within 30 days, stay potent for a long time and cause fewer adverse reactions.

Yet nearly six years later, the old vaccine is still the only one available -- and the government is buying it in mass quantities for the Strategic National Stockpile.

The manufacturer, Emergent BioSolutions Inc. of Rockville, Md., prevailed in a bitter struggle with a rival company that was preparing what federal health officials expected to be a superior vaccine. The episode illustrates the clout wielded by well-connected lobbyists over billions in spending for the Bush administration's anti-terrorism program. Emergent's rival, VaxGen Inc. of South San Francisco, had spent four years developing a new anthrax vaccine and had won an \$877.5-million federal contract to deliver enough doses for 25 million people. The contract threatened Emergent's very existence. The old vaccine, its only moneymaker, would likely be obsolete if VaxGen succeeded.

Emergent responded by mobilizing more than 50 lobbyists, including former aides to Vice President Dick Cheney, to make the case that relying on the new vaccine was a gamble and that the nation's safety depended on buying more of Emergent's product.

The company and its allies in Congress ridiculed VaxGen and impugned the competence or motives of officials who supported the new vaccine. The lobbying effort damaged VaxGen's credibility with members of Congress and the Bush administration, a Los Angeles Times investigation found.

When VaxGen encountered a stubborn scientific problem and needed more time to deliver its vaccine, the firm found scant support, even among officials who had earlier backed its efforts. The government then imposed tougher testing requirements on the struggling company.

A senior federal scientist who oversaw the project said she sought authority to allow advance payment to VaxGen to help it work through the difficulties. Top administration officials blocked her requests, she said.

Finally, a year ago, officials canceled VaxGen's contract, all but capsizing the company.

Emergent, meanwhile, has won federal contracts worth at least \$642 million for the old vaccine and is in line to win many millions more as the government expands the strategic stockpile.

Kimberly B. Root, a spokeswoman for Emergent (formerly BioPort Corp.), said the company's lobbying ultimately served the national interest.

"Had we just thrown up our hands, what position would we be in now?" Root asked. "Where would the government be? There wouldn't be, potentially, a vaccine in the stockpile."

Bill Hall, a spokesman for the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, said VaxGen's "poor performance" sealed its fate. In canceling the contract, Hall said, officials acted "as effective custodians of government finances." Yet Dr. Philip K. Russell, a vaccinologist and retired Army general who was a senior biodefense official in the Bush administration, described the outcome as "a big, dramatic failure."

"National security took a back seat to politics and the power of lawyers and lobbyists," said Russell, who supported the decision to award VaxGen the contract.

If officials had granted the company a bit more time, Russell said, it would likely have solved its scientific problem and delivered a superior vaccine. He noted that setbacks are common in developing vaccines and said VaxGen appeared capable of overcoming this one.

"It wasn't an insurmountable problem," said Russell, who after leaving the government did not lobby for or advise either of the competing vaccine companies. "It was a solvable problem."

Effort to contain threats

On the Sunday night after Sept. 11, 2001, Health and Human Services Secretary Tommy G. Thompson convened an urgent meeting of health officials and leading scientists.

"Tommy Thompson was really, really concerned that something could happen," recalled Dr. Donald A. "D.A." Henderson, a former World Health Organization physician who led successful efforts to eradicate smallpox. "There was intelligence information coming through and some chatter coming through, suggesting there was going to be a second event, that the second event could very likely be a biologic event.

"And anthrax and smallpox were both raised as possibilities."

The imperative was clear: Find a way to eliminate both threats.

About 10 p.m., as they filed out of HHS headquarters, Henderson and health department lawyer Stewart Simonson acknowledged their fears.

"I told D.A., 'We're going to make this work.' And he said, 'I just hope we're not too late,' " Simonson recalled.

"That's how scared we were."

They and other federal officials later scored a victory over one of the two threats: Working closely with vaccine manufacturers, they assembled 200 million doses of smallpox vaccine.

Countering anthrax quickly proved to be more complicated.

In October 2001, six envelopes containing powdered anthrax were sent through the mail on the East Coast, killing five people and sickening about 20 others. Authorities closed contaminated buildings in Washington and Florida, and treated hundreds of congressional employees with antibiotics. No one has been charged in the attacks.

The anthrax mailings showed that the most reliable way to prevent death is with an antibiotic such as Cipro or doxycycline, administered quickly and for up to 60 days. Inhaled anthrax otherwise can kill up to 90% of those infected. The Strategic National Stockpile now holds enough such antibiotics to treat more than 40 million people.

Dr. Anthony S. Fauci, who directs the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases and has advised President Bush and Congress on U.S. preparedness, said: "We already know that we prevented a serious problem on the Hill by essentially blanket-treating people with [Cipro]. We know that because when we went back and did surveys, we found that many people who had absolutely no symptoms were actually exposed."

The success in limiting deaths from the 2001 mailings brought into focus the lack of expert consensus about the magnitude of the anthrax threat. Some scientists have said that terrorists could disperse anthrax over a wide area, inflicting casualties on the scale of a nuclear weapon.

Skeptics, however, note that although anthrax is relatively easy to obtain and can linger tenaciously on surfaces, it is not contagious and is difficult to deliver lethally outdoors.

Another attack, Fauci said, "would create massive panic in this country. It would create economic and other real, logistical problems. But at the end of the day, you're not going to kill as many people as you would if you blasted off a couple of car bombs in Times Square."

Nevertheless, fear of a panic-inducing anthrax event generated momentum for amassing millions of doses of vaccine as a backstop to the antibiotics that would be the first line of defense.

Bush underscored the threat as he rallied support for the Iraq war. In an October 2002 speech in Cincinnati, the president told a crowd that Saddam Hussein's regime had supplies of anthrax and other biological weapons "capable of killing millions." Such weapons could be easily deployed, Bush added: "All that might be required are a small container and one terrorist or Iraqi intelligence operative to deliver it."

The U.S. already had a military stockpile of anthrax vaccine, filled with Emergent's product. Now, support grew for creating a civilian cache, to allow mass inoculations immediately after an attack.

The idea was that a new vaccine -- faster-working, with fewer doses and fewer side effects -- would protect people who couldn't tolerate antibiotics and would work against anthrax that withstood antibiotic treatment. A vaccine might also help protect people reentering a building that had been contaminated.

In February 2002, the Institute of Medicine released its report, calling the old vaccine "reasonably safe" but "far from optimal" and concluding: "A new vaccine, developed according to more modern principles of vaccinology, is urgently needed."

Officials meeting privately in late 2003 -- including Russell, Simonson, representatives of the vice president's office, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Department of Homeland Security and Fauci's staff -- decided to push for the purchase of 75 million doses of a new, genetically engineered vaccine.

Dr. Kenneth W. Bernard, then a biodefense advisor to Bush, estimated that such a stockpile -- providing three doses for 25 million Americans -- would be enough to respond to simultaneous attacks on New York, Los Angeles and Washington.

Henderson and Russell said the requirement for 75 million doses was based as well on a desire to keep a manufacturer operating continuously, so it could quickly ramp up production in a crisis.

The problem now, both said in recent interviews, is that the nation has not gotten a newer, better vaccine.

Project BioShield contract

In July 2004, President Bush signed legislation called Project BioShield, providing \$5.6 billion for "next generation" vaccines and drugs to counter threats of biological terrorism.

VaxGen had been working for two years on its anthrax vaccine, building on earlier efforts by the Army. VaxGen's early work had impressed Fauci's staff, which oversaw \$100 million in federal research grants to the company. Now VaxGen wanted to win the first BioShield contract. The company had been formed in 1995 by scientists from Genentech Inc., which retained an ownership stake. Lance K. Gordon, inventor of the first vaccine for infant meningitis, became VaxGen's chief executive in 2001.

But by 2003, the company's survival was in doubt. It had seen an experimental AIDS vaccine fail in late-stage testing. And in August 2004, the Nasdaq stock exchange delisted VaxGen for failing to file timely financial results; the company's stock price sank 35%.

VaxGen sought the BioShield contract by proposing to genetically engineer an anthrax vaccine with greater purity, more consistent potency and fewer unwanted side effects than Emergent's old vaccine.

But inside the company's salmon-colored walls facing San Francisco Bay, technicians were seeing disquieting data: Blood samples drawn from study patients showed that the vaccine failed to trigger enough anthrax-fighting antibodies.

VaxGen hired more vaccine experts, including a new chief scientific officer.

The complication did not deter federal health officials. On Nov. 4, 2004, HHS Secretary Thompson announced that VaxGen had been awarded the BioShield contract, worth \$877.5 million. The money would start to flow when the company made its first delivery of vaccine, expected in two years.

"Acquiring a stockpile of this new anthrax vaccine is a key step toward protecting the American public against another anthrax attack," Thompson said.

The announcement was bad news for Emergent, whose vaccine remained the only revenue generator for its BioPort subsidiary.

"We were worried about it," recalled retired Navy Adm. William J. Crowe Jr., a former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff who served on the company's board from 1998 through late 2005. (Crowe was interviewed at a hospital in Virginia in late August, two months before his death at age 82.)

BioPort was founded in 1998 by Ibrahim El-Hibri, a Lebanese financier. Along with Fuad, his U.S.-educated son, El-Hibri formed BioPort by purchasing vaccine-making facilities of the state of Michigan for \$24.75 million. The company's only product was the anthrax vaccine, called BioThrax, which it sold chiefly to the U.S. military. In mid-2004, the company reorganized as Emergent BioSolutions.

To counter the challenge posed by VaxGen, Emergent invested where it could buy immediate impact: lobbying.

"We had 500 employees who were about to lose their jobs, and we went out and became advocates for them," said Allen Shofe, a company vice president who managed its lobbyists.

In 2005, Emergent's yearly spending for lobbying nearly quadrupled, to \$1.41 million. Last year it reached \$2.1 million, federal records show. All told, from 2004 through June 2007, the company used 52 lobbyists at a cost of \$5.29 million, the records show.

During the same period, VaxGen spent \$720,000 on six lobbyists.

Emergent's lobbyists stressed a core message:

- * U.S. civilians were at risk of death without an immediately expanded stockpile of anthrax vaccine;

- * Emergent stood ready to supply the civilian stockpile, whereas VaxGen had yet to prove it could deliver a new product;

- * Emergent might stop making the vaccine if the government chose not to buy its product for the stockpile.

The company enlisted friendly members of Congress and recruited a cadre of former government officials to press its attack. Among them was Jerome M. Hauer, a former acting assistant secretary for emergency preparedness at HHS.

Hauer had been in the thick of decisions to pursue a new anthrax vaccine. While at HHS, he told Emergent in a February 2003 letter that the department had concluded a new vaccine was "a better long-range option than investing in expanding manufacturing capacity" for BioThrax. Hauer wrote that "the scientific basis" for a genetically engineered vaccine was "very sound and will result in an improved product."

But after leaving the Bush administration in late 2003, Hauer did an about-face, delivering Emergent as a client to his new boss, the Fleishman-Hillard public relations and lobbying firm, according to company records and people familiar with the matter.

At a December 2004 biotech-industry conference, Hauer said the government should purchase more of the old vaccine. He also took aim at Simonson, the HHS lawyer, who had succeeded him as assistant secretary. Hauer said that Simonson should be stripped of his authority for his handling of the BioShield contract.

In June 2005, Emergent placed Hauer on its board of directors. In that year and 2006, Emergent paid \$360,000 to Fleishman-Hillard, records show.

In an interview, Hauer said he lobbied members of Congress and advised the company how to "educate" the administration. He said he changed his mind about Emergent's vaccine after concluding that he had relied earlier on "biased information" from his then-colleagues at HHS.

In the spring of 2005, VaxGen became more vulnerable to its rival's onslaught. VaxGen scientists determined that the problem with the new vaccine's potency was not the result of a lapse in refrigeration, as they had first speculated. The difficulty lay with the vaccine's formula. An aluminum additive, expected to increase potency, had the opposite effect.

"Our vaccine had a stability problem," said Dr. Marc J. Gurwith, a scientific executive with VaxGen. "The problem was going to take more testing to figure out what went wrong and how to fix it."

VaxGen needed patience and flexibility from its presumed allies in Washington. But Thompson had resigned as HHS secretary, and Emergent's lobbying had changed the atmosphere. Officials who had backed VaxGen's drive to deliver a better vaccine were no longer responsive.

"We had a very productive partnership with the government until we encountered a problem," said Piers Whitehead, VaxGen's vice president for corporate and business development. "Things deteriorated very rapidly."

In April 2005, Dr. Noreen A. Hynes took over the HHS office that oversaw development of new drugs and vaccines under Project BioShield. Hynes, previously a bioterrorism advisor in the White House, said she was concerned about whether any small company could shoulder the costs of developing a new vaccine.

The Project BioShield law allowed advance payments of up to 10% of the value of a contract. But when she sought permission to grant such payments, Hynes said, she was turned down.

"I was told that the administration had decided there would be none," Hynes said in an interview. Asked who made the decision, Hynes said that she did not know but that it flowed from "the highest level."

Hynes, an infectious-disease specialist now at Johns Hopkins University, added: "It was not surprising, frankly, that this new type of vaccine would have been delayed in development. That's just the way vaccine development is. . . . It's one of the reasons why you would want to have the advance-payment authority."

VaxGen officials said they sought advance payment three times in 2005 and 2006: twice in discussions with HHS and once in writing. Hall, the health department spokesman, said any consideration of such payments "became moot" because of VaxGen's lack of progress.

Emergent executives knew well the problems inherent in developing and manufacturing vaccines. The state facilities they acquired in Lansing, Mich., had been beset with problems. In 1999 and 2000, inspectors from the Food and Drug Administration found deficiencies in the company's vaccine, including problems with stability, potency and purity.

The company pledged to rectify the inadequacies -- and the government stuck with it as the sole supplier of anthrax vaccine to the military.

Now, as Emergent sought to neutralize the competitive threat from VaxGen, it added to its lobbying team John V. Hishta, who had deep ties to the Republican congressional leadership.

Hishta was chief of staff to Rep. Thomas M. Davis III (R-Va.) and has continued to serve him as a campaign advisor. Hishta also directed national efforts to elect Republicans to the House from 2000 through 2002.

In July 2005, he arranged for an Emergent executive to appear before the House Government Oversight and Reform Committee, which was chaired by Davis.

In his opening statement, Davis voiced "concern" that federal officials had "made insufficient efforts to stockpile existing countermeasures while new and improved ones are being developed."

The Emergent executive, Robert G. Kramer, told the committee that health officials were undermining national security by contracting for VaxGen's product instead of buying more of Emergent's.

"HHS has staked the nation's protection against the No. 1 biologic threat on an experimental product," Kramer said. Kramer emphasized that Emergent would reassess whether to keep making the anthrax vaccine. The company, he said, "finds itself at a critical juncture in terms of its ability and willingness to commit resources to a product that lacks a committed customer."

Representatives of VaxGen were not invited to appear.

Asked about his role, Hishta said, "I don't want to comment on my lobbying work."

Davis did not respond to questions submitted through an aide.

Another key lobbyist for Emergent was Todd A. Boulanger, who had served as an aide to Republican members of Congress. Boulanger helped shape a letter by Sen. Charles E. Grassley (R-Iowa) to Thompson's successor as HHS secretary, pressing him to explain why his department had not purchased more anthrax vaccine from Emergent. The selection of VaxGen, Grassley wrote, was "highly suspect." In his letter, dated Jan. 28, 2005, Grassley told the new secretary, Mike Leavitt, about "a number of troubling allegations" regarding the vaccine contract. Grassley suggested that HHS "acted prematurely" in awarding it to VaxGen. "Some have questioned the effectiveness" of VaxGen's product, he wrote, noting that the old vaccine "has been available for use in this country for several decades."

Nine weeks later, Grassley again wrote to Leavitt: "I remain greatly concerned that the department is not prepared to protect the American people from an anthrax attack."

Grassley also questioned the independence of Russell, the vaccine specialist who backed awarding the BioShield contract to VaxGen. Grassley claimed the former general had been involved in developing the vaccine years earlier with the Army.

Russell, who left the health department in late 2004, said he had no financial stake in the vaccine and no role in developing it.

"How do you confront a whisper campaign?" Russell asked. "The lobbyists have to earn their pay."

Boulanger's role in providing material to Grassley -- including language for the senator's January 2005 letter -- was described by people who said they had direct knowledge of his actions. Asked for comment, Boulanger said, "I'm not going to say anything about my private conversations with his [Grassley's] staff."

Emergent paid Boulanger's firm, Cassidy & Associates, \$300,000 from 2004 to 2006.

A spokeswoman for Grassley, Jill Kozeny, said the senator's letters were "based on information from a number of sources."

Grassley's intervention hurt VaxGen on two fronts, company executives said:

Because of his reputation as a fiscal watchdog, his criticism sowed reticence about VaxGen within Congress and the administration. And the prospect of overcoming potent political opposition while trying to solve a tough scientific challenge weakened the resolve of VaxGen's major investors.

Emergent, meanwhile, broadened its connections to the White House by hiring Cesar V. Conda and Ron Christie as lobbyists. Both had been policy aides to Vice President Cheney, who championed Project BioShield.

According to people familiar with the lobbyists' conversations with lawmakers, Conda and Christie raised doubts about Simonson's handling of the vaccine contract, just as Hauer had.

As assistant secretary for emergency preparedness, Simonson could have made the case within the Bush administration for giving VaxGen an advance on its contract. But that prospect was dimmed after the lobbyists' attacks, said Russell.

"Simonson was neutralized," he said.

Simonson, who left the government in mid-2006, declined to comment on Emergent's lobbying effort.

Neither Conda nor Christie responded to messages seeking comment. Emergent paid their firm, DC Navigators, \$340,000 from 2006 through June of this year.

One of Emergent's other lobbying firms, McKenna Long & Aldrich, has taken credit for helping write the Project BioShield law. Seven members of the McKenna firm subsequently registered to lobby for Emergent.

From 2005 through June 2007, Emergent paid the firm \$380,000.

Government changes rules

VaxGen's contract called for delivery of the first 25 million doses of vaccine by November 2006.

In May of that year, government health officials extended the deadline three years.

But they also erected new hurdles: They required VaxGen to complete, at the company's expense, new testing of the vaccine in animals, plus an additional study in humans. The original contract had allowed VaxGen to defer such studies until after the company began receiving payments.

VaxGen fought without success for better terms, notably partial payment before delivering the vaccine. It objected to the new regulatory requirements. It kept at work on the stability problem.

After reviewing VaxGen's progress, the FDA on Nov. 2, 2006, denied approval to begin the new study in humans, citing concern about whether the vaccine was stable enough.

On Dec. 19, 2006, the health department canceled VaxGen's contract. By this fall, VaxGen had laid off 90% of its workforce, which peaked two years ago at 295 employees, a spokesman said. The company plans to merge with another Bay Area biotech firm.

In an October report, the Government Accountability Office said that health officials and VaxGen had been "unrealistic" in believing the company could deliver its vaccine on schedule. The GAO also said VaxGen was hindered by regulatory requirements that "were not known" to the company when the contract was awarded.

VaxGen's Gurwith said in an interview that based on lab results, he was convinced as of July that the company had figured out how to maintain the vaccine's stability. Chief executive James P. Panek said that if the government had stood by VaxGen, it probably would have delivered a better vaccine "well ahead" of any other manufacturer and at far lower cost.

Emergent, meanwhile, has continued to win contracts to deliver more of the old vaccine to the civilian stockpile. In a recent interview, two senior federal health officials, Gerald W. Parker and Carol D. Linden, said they remained determined to buy enough vaccine to inoculate 25 million Americans.

Henderson, the Bush administration advisor and former World Health Organization official, said he was uncertain how much of the old vaccine should be stockpiled for civilians, considering its shortcomings.

"All of us were quite persuaded that once you got the [new] vaccine, you wouldn't be buying the old stuff," he said.

Times researchers Janet Lundblad in Los Angeles and Sunny Kaplan in Washington contributed to this report.

<http://www.latimes.com/news/nationworld/nation/la-na-anthrax2dec02.1.7041424.story>

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Financial Times

December 3, 2007

Atomic List Deadline Looms For North Korea

By Anna Fifield, in Seoul

Talks to convince North Korea to abandon its nuclear weapons will enter a crucial phase this week, as Pyongyang prepares to supply a list of all its atomic programmes and Washington offers lucrative rewards if the task is satisfactorily completed.

Christopher Hill, US assistant secretary of state, will fly to Pyongyang today to discuss the list with his North Korean counterparts before six-party negotiations resume in Beijing on Thursday.

North Korea is due to provide the other parties with a full list of its nuclear facilities, materials and programmes - both plutonium and uranium - and allow its Yongbyon reactor to be disabled by December 31.

If both steps are taken, the US has offered to inform Congress this month of its intention to remove North Korea from its list of state sponsors of terrorism, triggering a 45-day notice period, the FT understands. Congress cannot veto the move.

"This is only an 'if' and it is a big 'if,'" said one official with knowledge of the plan, stressing that the onus was on Pyongyang to disclose all nuclear programmes in full. "It all depends on whether there is a satisfactory declaration, and that is a tall order."

The US has also offered to remove North Korea from the Trading with the Enemy Act, a step that simply entails striking its name from the list, by the end of the year if Pyongyang sticks to its end of the deal.

Removal from the two lists has been a key North Korean demand and diplomats say Washington is committed to an "action for action" approach to denuclearisation.

"The next month is going to be a very important month," Mr Hill said last week at a forum in Seoul, adding that the list would be a key topic of discussion in Pyongyang.

Analysts say the six-party talks on North Korea's nuclear weapons programme have made surprisingly good progress this year, with the Yongbyon reactor first shut down and now in the process of being disabled.

A team of US-led scientists has scraped all the absorbent wood out of the cooling tower in Yongbyon and has cleaned up the contaminated cooling pond for the plutonium rods.

But the declaration is a possible stumbling block to further progress as the US has evidence North Korea has been pursuing some kind of uranium enrichment programme, but Pyongyang has always denied it.

"I will be talking about the declaration they will be providing . . . to make sure that we have a consensus on what should be in it, so that as we move into January and the next phase, there are no surprises," Mr Hill said.

He expected disabling of the reactor to be completed in December and the entire denuclearisation process by the end of 2008. While diplomats involved say they are keen to draw out a "road map" for dismantlement to be undertaken next year, one US official said that this was not likely in this round of talks as the top priority was the declaration.

<http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/cd8b3b1e-a141-11dc-9f34-0000779fd2ac.html>

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

Washington Post

December 4, 2007

Pg. 1

U.S. Finds That Iran Halted Nuclear Arms Bid In 2003

By Dafna Linzer and Joby Warrick, Washington Post Staff Writers

A major U.S. intelligence review has concluded that Iran stopped work on a suspected nuclear weapons program more than four years ago, a stark reversal of previous intelligence assessments that Iran was actively moving toward a bomb.

The new findings, drawn from a consensus National Intelligence Estimate, reflected a surprising shift in the midst of the Bush administration's continuing political and diplomatic campaign to depict Tehran's nuclear development as a grave threat. The report was drafted after an extended internal debate over the reliability of communications intercepts of Iranian conversations this past summer that suggested the program had been suspended.

"Tehran's decision to halt its nuclear weapons program suggests it is less determined to develop nuclear weapons than we have been judging since 2005," a declassified summary of the new National Intelligence Estimate stated. Two years ago, the intelligence community said in contrast it had "high confidence that Iran currently is determined to have nuclear weapons."

The new estimate, prepared by the nation's 16 intelligence agencies, applied the same "high confidence" label to a judgment that suspected Iranian military efforts to build a nuclear weapon were suspended in 2003 and said with "moderate confidence" that it had remained inactive since then.

Even if Iran were to restart its program now, the country probably could not produce enough highly enriched uranium for a single weapon before the middle of the next decade, the assessment stated. It also expressed doubt about whether Iran "currently intends to develop nuclear weapons."

Iran put a stop to weapons-related activities, including efforts to study warhead design and delivery systems, shortly after U.N. inspectors began probing allegations of a clandestine nuclear program. The timing of that decision, according to the intelligence estimate, "indicates Tehran's decisions are guided by a cost-benefit approach rather than a rush to a weapon irrespective of the political, economic, and military costs."

National security adviser Stephen J. Hadley told reporters yesterday that the new conclusions validate the administration's long efforts to pressure Iran, most recently through economic sanctions. Democrats countered that the findings rebutted Bush's portrayal of Iran as an imminent nuclear threat.

Senior officials said the latest conclusions grew out of a stream of information, beginning with a set of Iranian drawings obtained in 2004 and ending with the intercepted calls between Iranian military commanders, that steadily chipped away at the earlier assessment.

In one intercept, a senior Iranian military official was specifically overheard complaining that the nuclear program had been shuttered years earlier, according to a source familiar with the intelligence. The intercept was one of more than 1,000 pieces of information cited in footnotes to the 150-page classified version of the document, an official said.

Several of those involved in preparing the new assessment said that when intelligence officials began briefing senior members of the Bush administration on the intercepts, beginning in July, the policymakers expressed skepticism. Several of the president's top advisers suggested the intercepts were part of a clever Iranian deception campaign, the officials said.

Intelligence officers then spent months examining whether the new information was part of a well-orchestrated ruse. Their effort included "Red Team" exercises in which groups of intelligence officers tried to punch holes in the new evidence, substantially delaying publication of the NIE.

The estimate noted that Iran continues to enrich uranium for a civil nuclear energy program. But the intelligence experts said they did not consider this a weapons program because it is being done at openly declared facilities under international supervision.

If Iran were to proceed with a weapons effort, it would not be carried out at known facilities, the officials said, adding that they do not believe Iran is enriching uranium at an undeclared facility.

Congressional leaders of both parties had been pressing the director of national intelligence, Mike McConnell, for the report for months, and some had worried that the delay was the result of the administration's efforts to influence the final result. Those concerns appeared to dissipate yesterday, when the report contradicted not only the administration's views but also the intelligence community's previous assessments -- evidence, to many observers, of the intelligence agencies' new willingness to question assumptions and assert their independence from policymakers. "The key judgments show that the intelligence community has learned its lessons from the Iraq debacle," said Sen. John D. Rockefeller IV (D-W.Va.), who chairs the Senate intelligence committee. He was referring to long-standing Democratic allegations that intelligence on Iraq was skewed to help promote the administration's desire for war. In this case, Rockefeller said, "it has issued judgments that break sharply with its own previous assessments, and they reflect a real difference from the views espoused by top administration officials."

While concluding that Iran's weapons program is now halted, the NIE presents a mixed view of Tehran's nuclear ambitions. It portrays Iran's ruling clerics as susceptible to international pressure, having abandoned an extensive and costly covert nuclear program in the face of threatened economic sanctions and global censure.

But the report also depicts Iran as cleverly preserving its options, by making steady strides toward a civilian nuclear energy capability that both complies with international law and puts the country on a course that will allow it to easily develop nuclear arms if it so chooses.

The report also states more confidently than in previous assessments that Iran's military had been actively seeking to build a bomb. Iranian armed forces were "working under government direction to develop nuclear weapons" until the fall of 2003, it says.

The assessment, under preparation for more than 18 months, was completed on Tuesday and President Bush and Vice President Cheney were briefed on Wednesday, intelligence officials said. Hadley said Bush first learned in August or September about intelligence indicating Iran had halted its weapons program and was advised it would take time to evaluate.

Several participants said there was strong debate among analysts during the process, but in the end they agreed on nearly every judgment. A majority of the intelligence agencies assessed, with high confidence, that the closure of the military program marks the end of the weapons effort. The Energy Department and the National Intelligence Council said gaps in what they know make them conclude only with "moderate confidence" that efforts remain on hold.

The State Department's bureau of intelligence and research judged Iran to be slightly further away from producing enough weapons-grade uranium for a bomb.

Last year, Congress required that key judgments from the NIE be declassified. McConnell said in November that he had no plans to issue an unclassified version, but officials said the dramatic shift in the assessment convinced him otherwise. "Since our understanding of Iran's nuclear capabilities has changed, we felt it was important to release this information to ensure that an accurate presentation is available," Donald Kerr, principal deputy director of national intelligence, said in a statement.

Staff writers Walter Pincus, Peter Baker and Robin Wright and staff researcher Julie Tate contributed to this report.
<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/12/03/AR2007120300846.html>

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Iran: Nuclear Intentions and Capabilities

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New York Times
December 4, 2007

Pg. 1

News Analysis

An Assessment Jars A Foreign Policy Debate

By Steven Lee Myers

WASHINGTON, Dec. 3 — Rarely, if ever, has a single intelligence report so completely, so suddenly, and so surprisingly altered a foreign policy debate here.

An administration that had cited Iran's pursuit of nuclear weapons as the rationale for an aggressive foreign policy — as an attempt to head off World War III, as President Bush himself put it only weeks ago — now has in its hands a classified document that undercuts much of the foundation for that approach.

The impact of the National Intelligence Estimate's conclusion — that Iran had halted a military program in 2003, though it continues to enrich uranium, ostensibly for peaceful uses — will be felt in endless ways at home and abroad.

It will certainly weaken international support for tougher sanctions against Iran, as a senior administration official grudgingly acknowledged. And it will raise questions, again, about the integrity of America's beleaguered intelligence agencies, including whether what are now acknowledged to have been overstatements about Iran's intentions in a 2005 assessment reflected poor tradecraft or political pressure.

Seldom do those agencies vindicate irascible foreign leaders like President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia, who several weeks ago said there was "no evidence" that Iran was building a nuclear weapon, dismissing the American claims as exaggerated.

The biggest change, though, could be its effect on President Bush's last year in office, as well as on the campaign to replace him. Until Monday, 2008 seemed to be a year destined to be consumed, at least when it comes to foreign policy, by the prospects of confrontation with Iran.

There are still hawks in the administration, Vice President Dick Cheney chief among them, who view Iran with deep suspicion. But for now at least, the main argument for a military conflict with Iran — widely rumored and feared, judging by antiwar protesters that often greet Mr. Bush during his travels — is off the table for the foreseeable future.

As Senator Chuck Hagel, Republican of Nebraska, put it, the intelligence finding removes, "if nothing else, the urgency that we have to attack Iran, or knock out facilities." He added: "I don't think you can overstate the importance of this."

The White House struggled to portray the estimate as a validation of Mr. Bush's strategy, a contention that required swimming against the tide of Mr. Bush's and Mr. Cheney's occasionally apocalyptic language.

The national security adviser, Stephen J. Hadley, said the estimate showed that suspicions about Iran's intentions were warranted, given that it had a weapons program in the first place.

"On balance, the estimate is good news," Mr. Hadley said, appearing at the White House. "On one hand, it confirms that we were right to be worried about Iran seeking to develop nuclear weapons. On the other hand, it tells us that we have made some progress in trying to ensure that that does not happen. But it also tells us that the risk of Iran acquiring a nuclear weapon remains a very serious problem."

Mr. Hadley insisted, as he and others have, that the administration had hoped and still hoped to resolve the outstanding questions about Iran's nuclear programs using diplomacy, not force. But the nuances of his on-this-hand-on-the-other argument will probably make it much harder to persuade American allies to accept the administration's harder line.

One official pointed out that the chief American diplomat on the Iran question, Under Secretary of State R. Nicholas Burns, had just met with counterparts from Europe, Russia and China, and had seemed to make some headway on winning support for a third round of sanctions by the United Nations Security Council. The official said Mr. Burns could not divulge the intelligence findings at that meeting on Friday because Congress had not been briefed.

The immediate task for Mr. Burns and other administration officials is to untangle the confusion caused by its own statements and findings and to persuade skeptics that this time, the United States has it right about what Iran was doing before 2003 and what that means for what it might do in the future.

“The way this will play is that the intelligence community has admitted it was wrong,” said Jon B. Alterman of the Center for Strategic and International Studies. “So why should we believe them now?”

Mr. Hadley said the drastic reversal in the intelligence agencies’ knowledge about Iran’s weapons programs was based “on new intelligence, some of which has been received in the last few months.”

He also said that he and other senior officials, including Mr. Cheney, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and Secretary of Defense Robert M. Gates, had reviewed it and debated it two weeks ago.

With some of the administration’s most prominent hawks having departed and not taking part in the review of findings like these, it is possible that the zeal for another military conflict has diminished. After all, the first two wars on Mr. Bush’s watch remain unresolved at best.

Senator Hagel said he hoped that the administration might in its final year in office show the kind of diplomatic flexibility it did with North Korea over its nuclear weapons or with the conference in Annapolis, Md., last week on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. He has previously called for the United States to open direct and unconditional talks with Iran to end the state of enmity that has existed since 1979.

He said Iran’s halt of weapons activity had created an opening for such talks, indicating, as the assessment does, that Iran’s government may be more rational than the one that Mr. Bush said in August had threatened to put the entire region “under the shadow of a nuclear holocaust.”

“If we’re wise here, if we’re careful, I think we have some opportunities,” Mr. Hagel said.

The findings, though, remain open for interpretation, as they always do, even in documents meant to reflect the consensus of the intelligence community. When it comes to Iran, at odds with the United States on many fronts beyond the nuclear question, hawks remain.

“Those who are suspicious of diplomacy are well dug in in this administration,” said Kurt M. Campbell, chief executive officer of the Center for a New American Security.

John R. Bolton, the former ambassador to the United Nations, who recently left the administration and began to criticize it, sounded very much like Mr. Hadley on Monday, saying the assessment underscored the need for American toughness. He said Iran’s intentions would always remain a concern as long as it continued to enrich uranium.

“The decision to weaponize and at what point is a judgment in the hands of the Iranians,” he said. He added that the finding that Iran halted a weapons program could just mean that it was better hidden now.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2007/12/04/washington/04assess.html?adxnnl=1&adxnnlx=1196892267-EOWkUbh5f11P1D44k2zm/A>

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New York Times
December 4, 2007

Europeans See Murkier Case For Sanctions

By Elaine Sciolino

PARIS, Dec. 3 — The Bush administration’s new intelligence assessment that Iran halted its nuclear weapons program in 2003 is likely to complicate efforts to impose new sanctions on Iran at the United Nations Security Council, European officials said Monday.

The officials, who declined to be identified under normal diplomatic rules, stressed that their governments were formally studying the new assessment of Iran’s nuclear intentions and capabilities by the administration’s intelligence agencies.

But they added that they were struggling to understand why the United States chose to issue the report just two days after the six powers involved in negotiating with Iran — the United States, Russia, China, France, Britain and Germany — had decided to press ahead with a new Security Council resolution.

“Officially, we will study the document carefully; unofficially, our efforts to build up momentum for another resolution are gone,” said one European official involved in the diplomacy.

Another senior European official called the conclusions of the assessment “unfathomable.”

Russia and China have resisted the passage of more punitive sanctions, and Vitaly Churkin, the Russian ambassador to the United Nations, praised the report as vindication of Russia’s position.

“We have always been saying there is no proof they are pursuing nuclear weapons,” Mr. Churkin told reporters. He added, however, that he did not know what impact the report would have on the new initiative for more sanctions.

In Vienna, the American intelligence finding was embraced by the International Atomic Energy Agency as proof that its conclusions about Iran’s nuclear program were correct.

Mohamed ElBaradei, the director general of the Vienna-based nuclear watchdog agency, is seeking to resolve questions about Iran’s suspicious activities in the past, but has been criticized for not pressing Iran hard enough on

curbing its current nuclear program and for conducting diplomacy that seemed at odds with Security Council strategy.

“Despite repeated smear campaigns, the I.A.E.A. has stood its ground and concluded time and again that since 2002 there was no evidence of an undeclared nuclear weapons program in Iran,” a senior agency official said. “It also validates the assessment of the director general that what the I.A.E.A. inspectors have seen in Iran represented no imminent danger.”

As the report was being released in Washington, the American mission to the International Atomic Energy Agency sent nuclear experts to the agency to brief officials on it.

Gregory L. Schulte, the American envoy to the agency, telephoned Dr. ElBaradei, who was traveling in Uruguay, and told him that the American assessment is “close to what you’ve been saying,” the agency official said.

Another official close to the agency said it was striking that the American assessment stated with certainty that Iran had a nuclear weapons program in the past, a conclusion the agency has never formally reached.

Of the three Western European governments involved in diplomacy with Iran — France, Britain and Germany — Germany seemed to cast the American assessment in the most positive light. The finding “contains a number of interesting details,” a spokesman for the foreign minister, Frank-Walter Steinmeier, said. The minister believes that the dual-track approach “to give incentives on the one hand and impose punitive measures at the Security Council was the right approach,” the spokesman added.

The British government was more cautious. “We will discuss the report with U.S. analysts in more detail in the coming days,” said a statement from the British Foreign Office. “But the report’s conclusions justify the action already taken by the international community to get to the bottom of the Iran nuclear program and to increase pressure on the regime to stop enrichment and reprocessing activities.”

The French Foreign Ministry said there would be no comment until Tuesday.

In Tehran, Foreign Ministry officials reached for reaction by telephone declined to comment, but raised the possibility that the government would issue a response on Tuesday.

In Israel, officials said there would be no official response on Monday.

But a senior Israeli official said that “the Israeli government is familiar with the report,” and that Iran was a major topic of Prime Minister Ehud Olmert’s meeting with President Bush last Wednesday, after the Annapolis meeting. The official, who declined to be identified because he was not authorized to speak publicly on the subject, said Israel remained extremely concerned. “We think there is enough information in the report to give a strong factual basis to our very real concerns about the Iranian nuclear program,” the official said.

Steven Erlanger contributed reporting from Jerusalem, and Nazila Fathi from Tehran.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2007/12/04/world/europe/04react.html>

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Washington Times

December 4, 2007

Pg. 16

Nuclear Testing Realities

By Robert R. Monroe

Efforts of North Korea and Iran to develop nuclear weapons have again impelled the supporters of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) to dust off that discredited document and have another go at ratification. In 1999 the Senate, by a wide margin, voted against ratification. The record of that debate shows clearly the strong arguments that carried the day against ratification, and the wisdom of the senators who refused to damage America so gravely.

Now, eight years later, CTBT supporters claim that things have changed, that ratification is necessary. They're right that the world has changed, but they're dead wrong that these changes turn a bad treaty into a good one. One way to illustrate this is to list a few myths and realities about the CTBT.

- Myth No. 1 is that U.S. ratification of the CTBT will aid nonproliferation. It will have no such effect. Does anyone believe North Korea or Iran (or Syria?) will roll back their nuclear ambitions if we sign a paper? Belligerent or irresponsible states acquire nuclear weapons to serve their own ends. Other states may go nuclear to protect themselves from aggressive neighbors. U.S. CTBT nonratification has not been a factor in any case of proliferation, nor will it be in the future.

- Myth No. 2 is that U.S. ratification of the CTBT is a step toward "a world free of nuclear weapons." This noble objective is absolutely unachievable. A world without nuclear weapons in the hands of responsible states would be a world of unimaginable nuclear horror and chaos; we would be at the mercy of every rogue, terrorist, criminal, aggressor or disaffected individual. Also, there is no way that zero can be verified. If the U.S. dismantled its entire

nuclear arsenal, and Russia and China reported the same, we might learn too late that Russia still had 500 nuclear weapons in underground bunkers, and China had 100.

- Myth No. 3 is that the Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT), cornerstone of the world's nonproliferation efforts, obligates the United States to dismantle its nuclear arsenal. Absolutely untrue. The NPT approves the U.S. as a "nuclear weapons state." It places no restrictions at all on our continuing to design, test and produce new-design nuclear weapons.

- Myth No. 4 is that the NPT and the CTBT are mutually reinforcing. No way. The NPT's objective is nonproliferation, an absolutely vital goal of U.S. foreign policy and national security strategy. The CTBT's goal is nuclear disarmament, which is unattainable.

Now a few realities:

- Reality No. 1 is that U.S. ratification of the CTBT would do unbelievably grave damage to U.S. national security. Nuclear weapons exist — tens of thousands of them. More states now have them than ever before, and they're being improved. A whole world of fourth-generation nuclear weapons is just around the corner. More than half the world's population lives in states that have nuclear weapons, and other states and terrorist organizations are striving to acquire them, and use them. The U.S. will continue to face serious nuclear weapon threats for generations to come. Our very lives will depend upon our ability to develop new nuclear weapon strategies and advanced nuclear weapons to deter these threats. Our survival will depend on our nuclear technology being superior to that of anyone else in the world, decade after decade. This will certainly require testing, which the CTBT would deny.

- Reality No. 2 is that we are now 16 years late in starting to transform our nuclear deterrence strategy and our weapons. Our arsenal is still composed of aging Cold War "massive retaliation" weapons, with moderate accuracy, very high yields, and "dirty" radiation outputs. They are virtually irrelevant today for deterring our proliferating adversaries. These rogue states have buried their nuclear weapons facilities deep underground, frequently locating them near deliberately exposed civilian populations. Any U.S. nuclear weapons that do not have high accuracy, very low yields, reduced collateral damage, and reduced residual radiation will not be credible of use, and our attempted deterrence will fail. To be effective deterrents, these new weapons also need tailored outputs (earth penetration, neutralization of chem-bio agents, etc.). All these new capabilities will require nuclear testing.

- Reality No. 3 is that U.S. ratification of the CTBT would increase proliferation. Some 30 states (e.g., Japan, Germany) depend upon the U.S. nuclear umbrella rather than having their own nuclear forces. If we ratify the CTBT, denying ourselves the ability to transform our arsenal, the failure of our once-credible deterrent will force our allies and friends to develop their own nuclear weapons.

- Reality No. 4 is that nonproliferation requires enforcement. Historically, negotiation on major, contentious issues has always required a background threat of force. Today this can be done effectively only by one or more of the NPT-approved nuclear weapon states. U.S. testing of new-design, credible nuclear weapons, to back up our conventional forces in deterring determined proliferators, is the only way to save the world's dying nonproliferation regime.

Surely today's senators have the judgment to discern myth from reality, the courage to value America's security over partisan politics, and the wisdom they (and their predecessors) demonstrated in 1999.

Robert R. Monroe is a retired U.S. Navy vice admiral and former director of the Defense Nuclear Agency.

<http://www.washingtontimes.com/article/20071204/COMMENTARY/112040011/1012/commentary>

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New York Times

December 5, 2007

Pg. 1

Bush Insists Iran Remains A Threat Despite Arms Data

By Steven Lee Myers and Helene Cooper

WASHINGTON, Dec. 4 — President Bush warned on Tuesday that Iran remained a threat despite an intelligence assessment that it had halted a covert program to develop nuclear weapons four years ago, as the administration struggled to save a diplomatic process now in disarray.

Once again facing criticism over the handling — and meaning — of intelligence reports, Mr. Bush said the new assessment underscored the need to intensify international efforts to prevent Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapon. He said Iran could not be entrusted with acquiring even the scientific knowledge to enrich uranium for peaceful civilian use, explicitly declaring for the first time what has been an underlying premise of the administration's policy. He also appeared to rule out any new diplomatic initiative with the president of Iran, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

“Look, Iran was dangerous, Iran is dangerous, and Iran will be dangerous, if they have the knowledge necessary to make a nuclear weapon,” Mr. Bush said during a news conference dominated by questions about the fallout of the assessment, known as a National Intelligence Estimate. “What’s to say they couldn’t start another covert nuclear weapons program?”

The assessment reversed one in 2005 that asserted that Iran was “determined to develop nuclear weapons,” with American intelligence agencies now saying that they do not know whether Iran intends to take that step.

Mr. Bush said the reversal was based on “a great discovery” by American intelligence agencies, but neither he nor other officials would elaborate. Current and former American and foreign officials said the new findings were based on intercepted communications and accounts provided by individuals with access to information about Iran’s nuclear program.

Representative Jane Harman, a Democrat of California, said she read the classified version of the report on Tuesday and described the intelligence agencies’ work as “a sea change” from the 2005 assessment in the quality of its analysis and presentation of facts. Asked about the basis for the new findings, she said: “I think we have some better sourcing. That’s all I can say.”

Mr. Bush’s remarks did little to silence critics, who have accused him of hyping the case for confronting Iran. Nor did it ease concerns of some allies.

Senator Lindsey Graham of South Carolina, a Republican, said he was perplexed by the new assessment and suspicious of the new evidence. “We should all look under the hood of these intelligence reports,” he said.

Mr. Bush and his senior aides spent the day trying to hold together the already fragile coalition of world powers seeking to rein in Iran’s nuclear ambitions. Mr. Bush telephoned President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia, who has voiced skepticism about an aggressive American effort to punish and isolate Iran.

Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice also telephoned her counterparts from the five other countries that have been pursuing United Nations sanctions against Iran to urge that the coalition continue work on a new round of increasingly tighter sanctions.

“This report is not an ‘O.K., everybody needs to relax and quit’ report,” Mr. Bush said. “This is a report that says what has happened in the past could be repeated and that the policies used to cause the regime to halt are effective policies. And let’s keep them up. Let’s continue to work together.”

There were already signs that that effort had been complicated by the new report. R. Nicholas Burns, the under secretary of state for political affairs, held a teleconference call Tuesday morning with his counterparts from France, Germany, China, Britain and Russia.

“We’re all flabbergasted,” one European diplomat said of the report generally. “You get such a surprise, and then you sit together and consider how to move forward. To be on safe ground, we decided to keep moving forward” with the effort to press for further sanctions.

A senior administration official said the intelligence assessment on Iran was a setback in the effort to persuade China to endorse a new round of sanctions at the United Nations Security Council. While there had been indications over the weekend that the Chinese might drop their opposition to such a move, it appeared on Tuesday that they were reconsidering again, the official said.

The new intelligence assessment, the official said, “gives the Chinese an opportunity to get off the hook.”

Mr. Bush opened himself to new criticism over his credibility when he said that the director of national intelligence, Mike McConnell, alerted him about new intelligence about Iran’s weapons program in August but did not explain what it was in detail.

As recently as October, Mr. Bush continued to warn darkly of Iran’s nuclear weapons threat, invoking World War III, despite the new information. He responded to a question about that on Tuesday by saying he had received the final assessment, with its drastically altered findings, only last week.

“That’s not believable,” said Senator Joseph R. Biden Jr. of Delaware, the Democrat who is chairman of the foreign relations committee and a candidate for president. “I refuse to believe that. If that’s true, he has the most incompetent staff in American, modern American history and he’s one of the most incompetent presidents in modern American history.”

While many officials, lawmakers and diplomats focused on the halting of Iran’s weapons program, Mr. Bush emphasized the report’s finding that “a growing amount of intelligence indicates Iran was engaged in covert uranium conversion and uranium enrichment activity” from the late 1980s until the freezing of that effort in 2003. Mr. Bush’s senior aides describe that as the first evidence of what many officials had only suspected.

“And so I view this report as a warning signal that they had the program,” Mr. Bush said. “They halted the program. And the reason why it’s a warning signal is that they could restart it.”

Critics, though, blamed the administration’s hard line and harsh language for compounding Iran’s determination and undermining diplomatic efforts. They called on the administration to make a more concerted diplomatic effort to persuade Iran’s government to abide by its commitments to the International Atomic Energy Agency.

"Their actions have been totally self-defeating," Mr. Biden said of the Bush administration. "Every time they rattle the saber, what happens is the security premium for oil goes up. It raises the price of oil. It puts more money in the pocket of Ahmadinejad and the very people we think are the bad guys."

Mr. Bush maintained that the administration had made offers to Iran as part of the European Union's diplomatic efforts as long ago as 2003, including promising American support for membership in the World Trade Organization and an easing of sanctions to allow the sale of spare airplane parts.

"What changed was the change of leadership in Iran," he said, referring to the elections in Iran in 2005. "We had a diplomatic track going, and Ahmadinejad came along and took a different tone. And the Iranian people must understand that the tone and actions of their government are that which is isolating them."

Flynt Leverett, a Middle East expert at the New America Foundation who served on the National Security Council under Mr. Bush, said the president had consistently ruled out any real entreaty to Iran that could resolve the international deadlock over its nuclear ambitions.

"The really uncomfortable part for the administration, aside from the embarrassment, is the policy implication," Mr. Leverett said of the assessment. "The dirty secret is the administration has never put on the table an offer to negotiate with Iran the issues that would really matter: their own security, the legitimacy of the Islamic republic and Iran's place in the regional order."

<http://www.nytimes.com/2007/12/05/washington/05prexy.html>

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Washington Post

December 5, 2007

Pg. 1

Lessons Of Iraq Aided Intelligence On Iran

Officials Cite New Caution And a Surge in Spying

By Joby Warrick and Walter Pincus, Washington Post Staff Writers

The starkly different view of Iran's nuclear program that emerged from U.S. spy agencies this week was the product of a surge in clandestine intelligence-gathering in Iran as well as radical changes in the way the intelligence community analyzes information.

Drawing lessons from the intelligence debacle over supposed Iraqi weapons of mass destruction, Director of National Intelligence Mike McConnell required agencies to consult more sources and to say to a larger intelligence community audience precisely what they know and how they know it -- and to acknowledge, to a degree previously unheard of, what they do not know.

" 'Do not know' is a new technical term for an NIE," said a senior official who was involved in preparation of the report, known as a National Intelligence Estimate.

While intelligence officials say the new conclusion about the Iranian program proved that the reforms were sound, the wide gap between Monday's report and previous assessments also left the agencies vulnerable to accusations that officials had failed for too long to grasp a fundamental change in course by Iran's leaders.

The new report upended years of previous assessments by asserting that the Islamic republic halted the weapons side of its nuclear program in 2003. The report, while expressing concern about Iran's rapidly growing civilian nuclear energy program, contradicted assertions by top Bush administration officials and previous intelligence assessments that Iran has been bent on acquiring nuclear weapons.

"The new report brings the U.S. intelligence community in line with what the IAEA [International Atomic Energy Agency] and several European governments were saying years ago," said David Albright, a former United Nations weapons inspector and president of the Washington-based Institute for Science and International Security.

In 2005, a National Intelligence Estimate had said Iran was "determined" to acquire nuclear weapons, a view that meshed with the foreign policy of an administration that in 2002 declared Iran to be part of an "axis of evil." But former and current U.S. intelligence officials said the flaws in that report reflected only the extreme difficulty of penetrating Iran's nuclear program.

"It's the hardest damn target out there -- harder than North Korea," said an intelligence official who contributed to the report. "This is a program they tried very hard to hide from us, and it was hard even to fathom who was in charge."

The 2005 report's assertions that Iran was secretly working on nuclear weapons turned out to be accurate, but dated. Ellen Laipson, former vice chairman of the National Intelligence Council, said the earlier judgment was based on credible information that may have been the best available at the time.

"It's not getting it wrong, it's that [the intelligence] collection may have been insufficient," said Laipson, now president of the Henry L. Stimson Center, a defense think tank. "It takes years to know the truth."

A pivotal moment occurred in early summer 2005, when President Bush discussed the new Iran NIE with advisers during a routine intelligence briefing. Why, he asked, was it so hard to get information about Iran's nuclear program?

The exchange, described by a senior U.S. official who witnessed it, helped instigate the intelligence community's most aggressive attempt to penetrate Iran's highly secretive nuclear program. Over the coming months, the CIA established a new Iran Operations Division that brought analysts and clandestine collectors together to search for hard evidence.

Communications intercepts of Iranian nuclear officials and a stolen Iranian laptop containing diagrams related to the development of a nuclear warhead for missiles both yielded valuable evidence about Iran's nuclear past as well as its decision in 2003 to suspend the weapons side of its program.

But there was no "eureka" moment, according to senior officials who helped supervise the collection efforts. The surge in intelligence-gathering helped convince analysts that Iran had made a "course correction" in 2003, halting the weapons work while proceeding with the civilian nuclear energy program.

The result, ironically, was a new National Intelligence Estimate on Iran that reached conclusions far different from what many intelligence officials expected.

"One reason this is actually an intelligence success is that when we got additional information that could lead to a different conclusion, we had an ability to move in that direction," said a senior intelligence official involved in the drafting process.

Former and current intelligence officials say the new NIE reflects new analytical methods ordered by McConnell -- who took the DNI job in January -- and his deputies, including Thomas Fingar, a former head of the State Department's intelligence agency, and Donald M. Kerr, a former director of the Los Alamos National Laboratory and an expert on nuclear weapons technology.

Besides requiring greater transparency about the sources of intelligence, McConnell and his colleagues have compelled analysts working on major estimates to challenge existing assumptions when new information does not fit, according to former and current U.S. officials familiar with the policies.

The report also reflects what several officials described yesterday as a new willingness by the intelligence community to analyze intentions in addition to capabilities. While Iran has the scientific, technical and industrial capacity to make nuclear weapons, including knowledge of how to enrich uranium to a level usable in bombs, the new intelligence collected through intercepted communications raised doubts about Iran's intended use of the technology.

As McConnell said in a Nov. 14 speech, it "inserted some new questions" that made the community go back and review the conventional wisdom about Iran. It also shed light on Iran's susceptibility to international diplomatic pressure -- a large factor in Tehran's decision to cut off research on building a bomb, analysts concluded.

McConnell said his objective in preparing the Iran estimate was "to present the clinical evidence and let it stand on its own merits with its own qualification," meaning that it would contain dissent. "There are always disagreements on every National Intelligence Estimate," he said.

He and other officials jettisoned a requirement that each conclusion in an NIE reflect a consensus view of the intelligence community -- a requirement that in the past yielded "lowest-common-denominator judgments," said one senior intelligence official familiar with the reforms.

"We demolished democracy" by no longer reflecting just a majority opinion, "because we felt we should not be determining the credibility of analytic arguments by a raising of hands," the official said. Some analysts, for example, were not "highly confident" that Iran has not restarted its nuclear program, a result reflected in the classified report. Other analysts said Iran was further away from attaining a nuclear weapons capability than the majority said.

DNI officials also pressed for a broader array of intelligence sources, including news accounts and other "open sources" that traditionally had carried little weight inside intelligence agencies. In the case of Iran, critical information was gleaned from non-clandestine sources, such as news photographs taken in 2005 depicting the inner workings of one of Iran's uranium enrichment plants, an official said.

Those photos helped persuade analysts that the Natanz plant was suited to making low-enriched uranium for nuclear energy but not the highly enriched uranium needed for bombs. "You go to wherever you think the answer might be," the official said, "instead of waiting for it to trickle into your top-secret computer system."

Several top officials said McConnell and others were determined to avoid a repetition of the intelligence community's very public failures in assessing Iraq's weapons programs. Not only were its analytical judgments wrong -- U.S. forces in Iraq never found the chemical or biological weapons that the CIA said they would -- but the agency relied on sources known to be suspect or even discredited.

For instance, U.S. claims that Iraq had built mobile biological weapons laboratories were based on more than 100 reports from a single source, an Iraqi defector code-named "Curveball" whom U.S. officials never interviewed in person. After the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq, investigators concluded that Curveball's stories were fabrications. Then-CIA director George J. Tenet initiated some of the reforms in the wake of the Curveball debacle, but Fingar and McConnell added to them and spread them across the intelligence community, officials said.

Staff writer Robin Wright contributed to this report.

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/12/04/AR2007120402408.html>

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New York Times
December 5, 2007

Israel Insists That Iran Still Seeks A Bomb

By Steven Erlanger and Isabel Kershner

JERUSALEM, Dec. 4 — Israel said Tuesday that it remained convinced that Iran was pursuing nuclear weapons and that it had probably resumed the weapons program the Americans said was stopped in the fall of 2003.

The defense minister, Ehud Barak, rejected the American assessment of "moderate confidence" that Tehran had not restarted its nuclear weapons program by mid-2007 and that the end to the program "represents a halt to Iran's entire nuclear weapons program." He suggested that Israel would not rest in its efforts to stop Iran's activities.

"It is our responsibility to ensure that the right steps are taken against the Iranian regime," Mr. Barak told Israeli Army radio. "As is well known, words don't stop missiles."

He added: "It is apparently true that in 2003 Iran stopped pursuing its military nuclear program for a certain period of time. But in our estimation, since then it is apparently continuing with its program."

In other words, whereas the Americans say Iran has stopped its nuclear weapons program while continuing to enrich uranium as rapidly as it can, Israel contends that Iran has resumed its nuclear weapons program with the clear aim of building a nuclear bomb.

Assessments may differ, Mr. Barak said, "but we cannot allow ourselves to rest just because of an intelligence report from the other side of the Earth, even if it is from our greatest friend."

Mr. Barak also said that what appeared to be the source for the American assessment on the weapons program was no longer functioning. "We are talking about a specific track connected with their weapons building program, to which the American connection, and maybe that of others, was severed," Mr. Barak said cryptically.

It was only on Tuesday, Israeli officials said, that Israel received and began to assess a copy of the classified American report, which is believed to run some 130 pages.

President Bush will visit the Middle East in early January, the White House said Tuesday. It declined to provide details, but Israeli newspapers and broadcast media said Mr. Bush would be making the first visit of his presidency to Israel in January.

Mark Regev, a spokesman for Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, said diplomacy remained the correct path for now to deter Iran from developing a nuclear bomb. But he was explicit about the Israeli conclusion that Iran's intention was military, not civilian.

"We believe that the purpose of the Iranian nuclear program is to achieve nuclear weapons," he said. "There is no other logical explanation for the investment the Iranians have made in their nuclear program."

Mr. Olmert, who was briefed on the new assessment in Washington last week, tried to play down the gap in judgments with the United States. "According to this report, and to the American position, it is vital to continue our efforts, with our American friends, to prevent Iran from obtaining nonconventional weapons," he said.

The American assessment said Iran probably halted the weapons program "primarily in response to international pressure," a judgment Israel embraced as a call for further diplomatic action.

But Israeli experts on Iran said that the American report would make any action against Iran less likely, whether diplomatic or military, and that it would probably kill or dilute American-led efforts to pass another sanctions resolution through the United Nations Security Council.

Efraim Kam, a former Israeli military intelligence official who is now at Tel Aviv University, said the report "makes it very hard for anyone in the United States or Israel who was thinking of going for a military option."

Mr. Kam said the American assessment surprised him. "The report says its assessment is correct for now — but it could change anytime," he said. "Maybe the Iranians assessed that it was better for them to halt the military program and concentrate on enriching uranium," which takes a long time, "and then go back to it."

Efraim Halevy, a former director of Mossad, the Israeli intelligence agency, said Iran was pursuing a nuclear weapon. The American report, he said, "provides no reason to say the threat is gone — it's not." He added, "They can stop on the edge of the project to weaponize and decide to proceed at any time."

As for the role or weight of Israeli intelligence in the American assessments, both in 2005 and now, Mr. Halevy said no country, and especially not the United States, would rely on a foreign assessment without making its own. "No matter how close allies are, you don't as a rule rely solely on the information of others."

<http://www.nytimes.com/2007/12/05/world/middleeast/05israel.html?ref=world>

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New York Times

December 5, 2007

Monitoring Agency Praises U.S. Report, But Keeps Wary Eye On Iran

By Elaine Sciolino

PARIS, Dec. 4 — The International Atomic Energy Agency on Tuesday publicly embraced the new American intelligence assessment stating that Iran had halted its nuclear weapons effort, but in truth the agency is taking a more cautious approach in drawing conclusions about Iran's nuclear program.

"To be frank, we are more skeptical," a senior official close to the agency said. "We don't buy the American analysis 100 percent. We are not that generous with Iran."

The official called the American assertion that Iran had "halted" its weapons program in 2003 "somewhat surprising."

That the nuclear watchdog agency based in Vienna is sounding a somewhat tougher line than the Bush administration is surprising, given that the administration has long criticized it for not pressuring Iran hard enough to curb its nuclear program.

But the American finding has so unsettled governments, agencies and officials dealing with Iran that it has suddenly upended commonly held assumptions.

There is relief, as one senior French official put it, that "the war option is off the table." There is also criticism and even anger in some quarters that the American intelligence assessment may be too soft on Iran.

Israel, for example, on Tuesday took a darker view of Iran's nuclear ambitions than the American assessment, saying that it is convinced that Iran is pursuing nuclear weapons and that it has probably resumed the weapons program the Americans said was stopped in autumn 2003.

The British government said the international community should maintain pressure on Iran over its uranium enrichment efforts. "It confirms we were right to be worried about Iran seeking to develop nuclear weapons," a spokesman for Prime Minister Gordon Brown told reporters. He said the American assessment had also shown that past international pressure on Iran had succeeded "in that they seem to have abandoned the weaponization element." He added, "But it also tells us the intent was there, and that the risk of Iran acquiring nuclear weapons remains a serious problem." That, he said, justified maintaining pressure on the Tehran government to abandon efforts to enrich uranium and to reprocess spent nuclear fuel, processes that could provide fissile material for nuclear weapons.

Iran's foreign minister, Manouchehr Mottaki, told state-run radio that Iran welcomed the change of opinion about its nuclear program. "Some of the same countries which had questions or ambiguities about our nuclear program are changing their views realistically," he said.

A spokesman for the Foreign Ministry, Mohammad Ali Hosseini, said the report showed that American accusations about Iran's secret weapons activities were baseless, reported ISNA, the Iranian student news agency.

"This report can be good news for U.S. allies so that they would change their unreasonable policies," he said, ISNA reported.

The International Atomic Energy Agency's public stance, and the main message of Mohamed ElBaradei, the director general, was to praise the new finding as proof that his agency had been right in its analysis.

The American assessment "tallies with the agency's consistent statements over the last few years that — although Iran still needs to clarify some important aspects of its past and present nuclear activities — the agency has no concrete evidence of an ongoing nuclear weapons program or undeclared nuclear facilities in Iran," Dr. ElBaradei said in a statement.

He said the American intelligence assessment "should help to defuse the current crisis."

But the agency has been frustrated by shrinking access for its inspectors in Iran, and Dr. ElBaradei also called on Iran to "accelerate its cooperation," adding that the new American finding "should prompt Iran to work actively with the I.A.E.A. to clarify specific aspects of its past and present nuclear program." He urged Iran to allow more intrusive inspections of its facilities.

Inside the agency, officials, who spoke on the condition of anonymity under normal diplomatic rules, said that Iran must not assume that the American report relieves it of pressure to work with the agency, and that the country must do more to prove its good will.

“We are still worried about certain aspects of Iran’s nuclear program, and we need answers, particularly about so-called military aspects of the program,” said the senior official close to the agency.

Dr. ElBaradei’s most recent report to his agency’s 35-country board last month is less categorical in its conclusions than the American finding.

The agency acknowledged there were still “outstanding issues” regarding the scope and nature of the nuclear enrichment facility at Natanz and activities that could have military applications, Dr. ElBaradei said.

The American analysis twice describes the Natanz enrichment program as civilian, and omits the administration’s oft-cited analysis that there is no logical application for enriched uranium other than eventual military use. Referring to the finding’s characterization of uranium enrichment, the official allied with the international agency said, “We wouldn’t go that far.”

The official also refused to rule out the possibility that Iran might have programs involving centrifuges — the machines that spin enriched uranium — that it had not disclosed to the agency.

The agency plans to use the new assessment’s revelation that Iran had a nuclear weapons program in the past to pry more information out of it about its suspicious past activities.

“If they had a weapons program, they better tell us now,” the official said. “We need to know where they ended up with their program before they terminated it.”

John F. Burns contributed reporting from London, and Nazila Fathi from Tehran.

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New York Times

December 5, 2007

The Thin Line Between Civilian And Military Nuclear Programs

By William J. Broad

For years, American intelligence agencies contended that Iran had a clandestine nuclear weapons program. But even as Tehran continues to enrich uranium, which could fuel a bomb, the agencies have reversed themselves, saying the Iranians halted their weapons program in 2003.

All of this raises the question: When is a nuclear program a nuclear weapons program?

The open secret of the nuclear age is that the line between civilian and military programs is extraordinarily thin.

That is why the International Atomic Energy Agency in Vienna has teams of inspectors constantly sweeping through nuclear centers around the globe, looking for cheaters.

But thin as it may be, there is a line.

One threshold is enriched uranium. Enriched to low levels, uranium can fuel a reactor that produces electrical power — which is what Tehran says it wants to do. But if uranium is purified in spinning centrifuges long enough, and becomes highly enriched, it can fuel an atom bomb.

Another boundary between civilian and military programs is weapons design. Designing a nuclear weapon involves sophisticated mathematical and engineering work to figure out how to squeeze the bomb fuel in a way that creates the nuclear blast.

The new intelligence assessment released Monday, which is known as a National Intelligence Estimate, drew a distinction between Iran’s “declared civil work” on uranium enrichment and “nuclear weapon design and weaponization work.” The document states “with high confidence” that Iran is now hewing to the civilian side of the line.

The history of the atomic age, however, suggests that for a country with an advanced civil nuclear program, crossing the line into bomb work is relatively easy.

After the United States, the Soviet Union and Britain became the first three countries with atom bombs, all the rest hid their military programs to one extent or another behind the mask of peaceful nuclear power. That includes France, China, Israel, India, South Africa and Pakistan.

Indeed, the most difficult part of building a bomb is not doing the secret military design work but rather the part of the process that is also crucial to civilian nuclear power — producing the fuel.

History illustrates the point. During World War II, scientists working secretly at Los Alamos in the mountains of New Mexico were so sure of the reliability of their simple design that they gave it no explosive test before the bomb was made and dropped on Hiroshima. It worked to devastating effect.

But making the bomb's highly enriched fuel required a vast industrial effort clouded by great uncertainty. In a race, three huge factories were built in the Tennessee wilds, each pursuing a different way of enriching uranium. One had literally millions of miles of pipes.

In the end, no technique worked well enough to be relied upon exclusively. So engineers blended the outputs. "All three methods contributed to Hiroshima," said Robert S. Norris, author of "Racing for the Bomb" (Steerforth, 2002), a biography of the project's military chief.

That history cast light on the question of whether Iran's enrichment work today could represent a future military threat.

The new American intelligence assessment says Iran is "continuing to develop a range of technical capabilities that could be applied to producing nuclear weapons," including "its civilian uranium enrichment program."

And the enrichment effort, the assessment says, could give Iran enough fuel for a weapon sometime between 2010 and 2015 — a timetable essentially unchanged from previous estimates.

The report also disclosed that American agencies have accumulated a "growing amount of intelligence" showing that Iran engaged in covert uranium enrichment, adding that it "probably" was halted after 2003 and "probably" has remained frozen through the middle of this year.

For some, that uncertainty undercuts the assessment's "high confidence" that Iran ended its weapons program in 2003 and will continue to stay on the peaceful side of the line.

"The danger," President Bush said at the White House on Tuesday, "is that they can enrich, play like they got a civilian program — or have a civilian program, or claim it's a civilian program — and pass the knowledge to a covert military program."

A senior federal specialist with long experience in nuclear proliferation said it was quite possible that Iran made so much progress in 18 years of secret work that the halt in 2003 might have little practical effect in restricting it from getting a weapon. That is, if Tehran wants one, and if it can keep working openly to produce fuel.

But the intelligence agencies steered clear of assessing Tehran's intentions, saying, "We do not know whether it currently intends to develop nuclear weapons."

<http://www.nytimes.com/2007/12/05/world/middleeast/05weapons.html>

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Financial Times

December 5, 2007

Missile Defence Remains A Bush Priority

By Daniel Dombey in Washington, Neil Buckley in Moscow and Jan Cienski in Warsaw

The Bush administration said on Tuesday it would persevere with efforts to convince its partners of the merits of placing missile defence bases in Europe – in spite of this week's revelation that the US no longer believes Iran has a nuclear weapons programme.

Washington has said that the proposed European bases – missile interceptors in Poland and radar in the Czech Republic – are needed to guard against a threat from Tehran. But both Polish public opinion and the new Polish government have yet to be convinced hosting a missile defence base would benefit the country, while Russia has suggested that the programme is intended to counteract its own nuclear deterrent – a charge the US denies.

A senior Bush administration official said: "Missile defence is meant to counter Iranian or other potential threats that may develop over the next 20 years.

"The missile defence opponents will seize on their own version of the National Intelligence Estimate [but] missile defence proponents will point out it is realistic to consider emerging threats over the next 25 years and prudent to plan for them."

He drew attention to Iran's claim last week that it had built a new missile with a range of 1,200 miles, adding that "because of development timelines, [we] still need to move on missile defence to be ready when the missile threat is ready . . . Iran still has a nuclear programme that could contribute to a weapons programme later".

However, this week's intelligence estimate is likely to toughen Russian opposition to the planned European sites. Moscow is, if anything, more sceptical of Iran's missile capabilities than of its nuclear intentions. Sergei Ivanov, first deputy prime minister and a possible successor to President Vladimir Putin, said in a Financial Times interview this year: "Iran is definitely not going to have intercontinental ballistic missiles in the foreseeable future . . . Creating ICBMs needs a totally different level of economic and technical development . . ."

Russia's objections to the missile defence system have already greatly complicated the US's attempts to reach an agreement with Poland's new government, which is considerably less enthusiastic about hosting the US base on its territory than was its predecessor.

Warsaw wants the US to provide it with improved local air defences, such as the Patriot missile system, worrying that otherwise hosting the American base could endanger Poland's security in the event of a threat from Russia. The Pentagon has been loath to agree, fearing that Russia would be angered still further by such a development. However, Donald Tusk, Poland's new prime minister, intends to drive a harder bargain with Washington over the missile shield than his predecessors.

"First we have to take a look at the results of negotiations conducted so far," said Radoslaw Sikorski, Poland's foreign minister, in a radio interview.

"The prime minister has said he will consult with Nato and then the Czech Republic, as well as some neighbours. Then we'll be ready to eventually renew negotiations."

<http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/0900a798-a2d6-11dc-81c4-0000779fd2ac.html>

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