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Welcome to the CPC Outreach Journal. As part of USAF Counterproliferation Center's mission to counter weapons of mass destruction through education and research, we're providing our government and civilian community a source for timely counterproliferation information. This information includes articles, papers and other documents addressing issues pertinent to US military response options for dealing with nuclear, biological and chemical threats and attacks. It's our hope this information resource will help enhance your counterproliferation issue awareness.

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News & Observer
Newsobserver.com
December 3, 2007

White House Appoints PRTM Management Consultants' Director to Homeland Security Post

Dr. Robert Kadlec to Serve as Special Assistant to the President for Homeland Security and Senior Director for Biological Defense Policy

WASHINGTON - The White House has appointed Dr. Robert Kadlec, Director, PRTM Management Consultants' Biodefense and Public Health Practice, to serve as Special Assistant to the President for Homeland Security and Senior Director for Biological Defense Policy.

In this role, Dr. Kadlec will serve as the President's principal advisor on issues pertaining to bioterrorism and pandemic influenza preparedness.

"We have appreciated Bob Kadlec's contributions to PRTM's Biodefense and Public Health Practice, and congratulate him on the honor of being recruited to such an important mission for the nation," said Scott Hefter, PRTM's Global Managing Director. "Although Bob is leaving the firm for this White House post, we expect to work in common purpose through PRTM's ongoing work with the Department of Health and Human Services and the Department of Defense in biodefense and public health preparedness."

"I'm grateful for the opportunity to serve our nation and have benefited from my time at PRTM in assisting our government and commercial clients with seeking innovative approaches to the toughest challenges in biodefense," Dr. Kadlec said. "I am thrilled to re-enter public service and believe my experience at PRTM has given me insight into how commercially proven management strategies can address our country's bioterrorism and influenza preparedness requirements."

Dr. Kadlec has served in a wide range of joint military, medical, and inter-agency policy positions concerning counter terrorism, non-proliferation and counter proliferation of biological weapons, and intelligence consulting. After Sept. 11, 2001, he became Special Advisor on biological warfare for the Office of the Secretary of Defense. Following this appointment, Dr. Kadlec served as the staff director for Sen. Richard Burr's (R-NC) Subcommittee on Bioterrorism and Public Health Preparedness. In this capacity, he was instrumental in drafting the Pandemic and All-Hazards Preparedness Act for Senate consideration.

<http://www.newsobserver.com/1566/story/807627.html>

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New York Times

December 6, 2007

Pg. 1

Details In Military Notes Led To Shift On Iran, U.S. Says

By David E. Sanger and Steven Lee Myers

WASHINGTON, Dec. 5 — American intelligence agencies reversed their view about the status of Iran's nuclear weapons program after they obtained notes last summer from the deliberations of Iranian military officials involved in the weapons development program, senior intelligence and government officials said on Wednesday.

The notes included conversations and deliberations in which some of the military officials complained bitterly about what they termed a decision by their superiors in late 2003 to shut down a complex engineering effort to design nuclear weapons, including a warhead that could fit atop Iranian missiles.

The newly obtained notes contradicted public assertions by American intelligence officials that the nuclear weapons design effort was still active. But according to the intelligence and government officials, they give no hint of why Iran's leadership decided to halt the covert effort.

Ultimately, the notes and deliberations were corroborated by other intelligence, the officials said, including intercepted conversations among Iranian officials, collected in recent months. It is not clear if those conversations involved the same officers and others whose deliberations were recounted in the notes, or if they included their superiors.

The American officials who described the highly classified operation, which led to one of the biggest reversals in the history of American nuclear intelligence, declined to describe how the notes were obtained.

But they said that the Central Intelligence Agency and other agencies had organized a "red team" to determine if the new information might have been part of an elaborate disinformation campaign mounted by Iran to derail the effort to impose sanctions against it.

In the end, American intelligence officials rejected that theory, though they were challenged to defend that conclusion in a meeting two weeks ago in the White House situation room, in which the notes and deliberations were described to the most senior members of President Bush's national security team, including Vice President Dick Cheney.

"It was a pretty vivid exchange," said one participant in the conversation.

The officials said they were confident that the notes confirmed the existence, up to 2003, of a weapons programs that American officials first learned about from a laptop computer, belonging to an Iranian engineer, that came into the hands of the C.I.A. in 2004.

Ever since the major findings of the new National Intelligence Estimate on Iran's nuclear program were made public on Monday, the White House has refused to discuss details of what President Bush, in a news conference on Tuesday, termed a "great discovery" that led to the reversal.

Some of Mr. Bush's critics have questioned why he did not adjust his rhetoric about Iran after the intelligence agencies began to question their earlier findings.

In a statement late Wednesday, the White House revised its account of what Mr. Bush was told in August and acknowledged that Mike McConnell, the director of national intelligence, had informed him new information might show that "Iran does in fact have a covert weapons program, but it may be suspended."

Dana Perino, the White House press secretary, said Mr. McConnell had warned the president that "the new information might cause the intelligence community to change its assessment of Iran's covert nuclear program, but the intelligence community was not prepared to draw any conclusions at that point in time, and it wouldn't be right to speculate until they had time to examine and analyze the new data."

A senior intelligence official and a senior White House official said that Mr. McConnell had been cautious in his presentation to Mr. Bush in an attempt to avoid a mistake made in the months leading to the Iraq war, in which raw intelligence was shared with the White House before it had been tested and analyzed.

"There was a big lesson learned in 2002," the senior intelligence official said. "You can make enough mistakes in this business even if you don't rush things."

In fact, some in the intelligence agencies appear to be not fully convinced that the notes of the deliberations indicated that all aspects of the weapons program had been shut down.

The crucial judgments released on Monday said that while "we judge with high confidence that the halt lasted at least several years," it also included the warning that "intelligence gaps discussed elsewhere in this Estimate" led both the Department of Energy and the National Intelligence Council "to assess with only moderate confidence that the halt to those activities represents a halt to Iran's entire nuclear weapons program."

The account is the most detailed explanation provided by American officials about how they came to contradict an assertion, spelled out in a 2005 National Intelligence Estimate and repeated by Mr. Bush, that Iran had an active weapons program.

Several news organizations have reported that the reversal was prompted in part by intercepts of conversations involving Iranian officials. In an article published on Wednesday, The Los Angeles Times said another main ingredient in the reversal was what it called a journal from an Iranian source that documented decisions to shut down the nuclear program.

The senior intelligence and government officials said a more precise description of that intelligence would be exchanges among members of a large group, one responsible for both designing weapons and integrating them into delivery vehicles.

The discovery led officials to revisit intelligence mined in 2004 and 2005 from the laptop obtained from the Iranian engineer. The documents on that laptop described two programs, termed L-101 and L-102 by the Iranians, describing designs and computer simulations that appeared to be related to weapons work.

Information from the laptop became one of the chief pieces of evidence cited in the 2005 intelligence estimate that concluded, "Iran currently is determined to develop nuclear weapons."

The newly obtained notes of the deliberations did not precisely match up with the programs described in the laptop, according to officials who have examined both sets of data, but they said they were closely related.

On Wednesday President Bush repeated his demand that Iran "come clean" and disclose details of the covert weapons program that American intelligence agencies said operated from the 1980s until the fall of 2003.

Iran's government, Mr. Bush said, "has more to explain about its nuclear intentions and past actions, especially the covert nuclear weapons program pursued until the fall of 2003, which the Iranian regime has yet to acknowledge."

Mr. Bush spoke at Eppley Airfield near Omaha, where a visit intended to showcase health care and to raise money for a Senate race was overshadowed by the furor caused by the National Intelligence Estimate and Iran's taunting reaction to it.

He faced calls from across the political spectrum for the United States to make a more concerted effort to negotiate with Iran, offering a package of incentives that could persuade it to suspend its uranium enrichment program and clear up concerns that it is building a civilian energy program to develop the expertise for a covert military program. "Bush has made a big mistake, and he's not responding in a way that gives confidence that he's on top of this," said David Albright, a former weapons inspector for the International Atomic Energy Agency and president of the Institute for Science and International Security. "He isn't able to respond because he's not able to say he's wrong." Mr. Bush, though, made it clear that there would be no immediate change in the United States' approach, saying that the administration had already offered to talk, though on the condition that Iran suspend its current enrichment program first, as called for in two United Nations Security Council resolutions. Administration officials have said that they would continue to advocate tougher sanctions, which seems increasingly unlikely.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2007/12/06/world/middleeast/06intel.html>

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Bush Tells Iran To Disclose Nuclear Activities

President Restates Distrust as Administration Says U.S. Policy Will Not Change

By Michael Abramowitz and Robin Wright, Washington Post Staff Writers

OMAHA, Dec. 5 -- President Bush called on Iran to "come clean" about the scope of its nuclear activities Wednesday, as the White House made it clear there will be no change in its policy toward Tehran despite new intelligence questioning his claims about the country's nuclear ambitions. Traveling here for a political fundraiser, Bush indicated that he still sees Iran as a serious threat. He demanded that its leaders fully disclose details of its nuclear weapons program, which the intelligence community said Monday was shut down in the fall of 2003.

"The Iranians have a strategic choice to make," Bush told reporters. "They can come clean with the international community about the scope of their nuclear activities and fully accept" the U.S. offer to negotiate if they suspend their nuclear enrichment program -- "or they can continue on a path of isolation."

"The choice is up to the Iranian regime," the president said.

Bush and his advisers said they are heartened by continued support from Britain, Germany and France for more pressure on Iran. A draft resolution for new sanctions is circulating among the five veto-wielding members of the U.N. Security Council as a result of negotiations over the weekend in Paris and telephone diplomacy by Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and Undersecretary of State R. Nicholas Burns.

The White House remained anxious to contain the fallout from this week's new intelligence report, which contradicts recent statements by Bush and Vice President Cheney that Iran intends to try to acquire a nuclear weapon. U.S. analysts judged that Iran is continuing to develop technologies that could be used for a bomb, but they believe with "moderate confidence" that, as of the middle of this year, Tehran had not restarted the nuclear weapons program.

The disclosure took U.S. allies by surprise and has complicated the U.S. drive to win a third round of sanctions against Iran. Wednesday's comments from Bush, Rice and other officials appeared aimed at reassuring these allies, as well as providing cover for Republicans who have strongly backed the president's campaign to increase the pressure on Iran -- and may now be exposed politically.

"There's no reason to stop the policy of carrots and sticks. The most striking thing about this week's diplomacy is the unity on [pressing for] another resolution," said one senior official, describing diplomatic deliberations on the condition of anonymity.

Administration officials offered no contrition or apologies for past rhetoric about Iran and said there will be no change in policy, such as relaxing its insistence that Tehran abandon nuclear enrichment as a precondition to negotiations with the United States. While the intelligence analysts said they do not know whether Iran intends to develop nuclear weapons, White House officials are emphasizing that Tehran maintains the know-how and is acquiring the material and missile systems that could create such weapons in the future.

White House spokesman Tony Fratto said aboard Air Force One that "anyone who thinks that the threat from Iran has receded or diminished is naive and is not paying attention to the facts."

The White House also sought to clarify Bush's ambiguous remarks Tuesday about how much he learned when Mike McConnell, the director of national intelligence, first told him in August of new information that might alter the U.S. assessment of Iran's nuclear activities that was being prepared for delivery to Congress.

Press secretary Dana Perino said in a statement that McConnell told Bush "that if the new information turns out to be true, what we thought we knew for sure is right. Iran does in fact have a covert nuclear weapons program, but it may be suspended."

McConnell told Bush that it would take time to validate the new information, but officials said they saw no need to adjust the administration's rhetoric.

In his brief comments, Bush chose to emphasize the part of Monday's National Intelligence Estimate that asserted Iran had a covert nuclear program until 2003. Bush said it is "clear from the latest NIE that the Iranian government has more to explain about its nuclear intentions and past actions, especially the covert nuclear weapons program pursued until the fall of 2003."

Bush said he felt reassured by the conversations his top national security advisers have had recently with counterparts from France, Britain, Russia and Germany. "These countries understand that the Iranian nuclear issue is a problem, and continues to be a problem that must be addressed by the international community," he said.

Leading Democrats, including House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (Calif.) and Senate Majority Leader Harry M. Reid (Nev.), have called on Bush to try more aggressive diplomacy on Iran, and even some allies said the administration should drop its insistence that Iran suspend nuclear enrichment.

Sen. Joseph R. Biden Jr. (D-Del.), chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee and a presidential candidate, said if Bush believes nothing has changed because of the intelligence report, he is in denial.

"If we don't use this moment to end this administration's fixation on regime change and bring the world onboard to a new approach of conduct change, with coordinated pressure and real incentives, the result will be to isolate the United States, not Iran," Biden said.

Outside experts said the White House is struggling to keep its policy on Iran from imploding.

"The American juggernaut, which was having considerable success in lining up the international community behind tougher sanctions and isolating Iran, has been forced to a screeching halt. So now they're trying to get it moving again," said Martin Indyk, who was assistant secretary of state for Near East affairs under President Bill Clinton and now head of the Brookings Institution's Saban Center.

But Gary Schmitt, director of advanced strategic studies at the American Enterprise Institute, which is often supportive of the president on foreign policy, said the new intelligence estimate can be read as supporting the administration's position. "If they don't stick to their position, their credibility with diplomatic allies in Europe and the Gulf who are out on a limb . . . will be shot," Schmitt said in an e-mail exchange.

In Iran, meanwhile, President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad called the new report "a declaration of victory for the Iranian nation" in the diplomatic showdown with world powers over its nuclear issue. In Brazil, Mohamed ElBaradei, head of the U.N. nuclear watchdog agency, said the NIE "somewhat vindicated" Iran, which has emphatically denied it intends to develop a bomb.

U.S. officials dismissed Iran's triumphal rhetoric. Asked about the Iranian president's assertion, Bush grinned broadly and said, "You can mark down I chuckled."

Wright reported from Washington.

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/12/05/AR2007120500897.html>

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USA Today

December 6, 2007

Pg. 8

Ahmadinejad Calls U.S. Nuke Report A Victory In Standoff

By Wire reports

TEHRAN, Iran — President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad on Wednesday called the dramatic U.S. turnaround in a new intelligence review a victory for Iran's nuclear program, suggesting it shows the success of his hard-line stance rejecting compromise.

His more moderate opponents in Iran are hoping the assessment's conclusion that Tehran shelved its efforts to develop atomic weapons will boost a diplomatic resolution of the standoff with the West.

In past months, Ahmadinejad has faced a rising challenge from a camp centered around his top rival, former president Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani. Rafsanjani's allies have increasingly criticized Ahmadinejad for his hard-line positions, saying they are creating enemies for Iran in the West. Ahmadinejad has branded his critics "traitors."

The head of the United Nations atomic watchdog agency said Wednesday that Iran had been "somewhat vindicated" by the review from U.S. intelligence agencies and expressed hopes it would give a push to negotiations.

"I see this report as a window of opportunity," said Mohamed ElBaradei of the International Atomic Energy Agency. "It gives diplomacy a new chance."

Ahmadinejad told a crowd of thousands in the western province of Ilam that the National Intelligence Estimate report was a "declaration of victory for the Iranian nation against the world powers over the nuclear issue."

The report concluded Iran halted a nuclear weapons design program in late 2003 and said there was no evidence it had resumed. That was a dramatic change from a 2005 assessment saying Iran was actively trying to build a nuclear bomb.

On a campaign fundraising trip to Nebraska, President Bush called on Tehran on Wednesday to "come clean" with the international community about the scope of its nuclear activities or face diplomatic isolation. "The Iranians have a strategic choice to make," he said.

Bush demanded that Tehran detail its previous program to develop nuclear weapons "which the Iranian regime has yet to acknowledge."

http://www.usatoday.com/printedition/news/20071206/a_iran06.art.htm?loc=interstitialskip

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Los Angeles Times
December 6, 2007

Iran's Supporters Pleased, Skeptical

Russia and China, which stand to benefit from the U.S. intelligence shift on the nuclear weapons issue, remain wary.

By Megan K. Stack and Mark Magnier, Los Angeles Times Staff Writers

MOSCOW — With a sense of vindication and a touch of suspicion, Iran's embattled defenders absorbed the news this week: U.S. intelligence services no longer believe the Islamic Republic has an active nuclear weapons program. Russia and China have struggled to stave off new United Nations Security Council sanctions against Iran, and both were quick to turn the latest U.S. intelligence report against the Bush administration. Any attempts to impose additional sanctions should be reconsidered in light of the latest findings, the two countries suggested.

Moscow and Beijing have long argued for diplomacy and negotiation instead of sanctions. Both countries also have flouted conventional American wisdom with repeated arguments that, in fact, Iran's nuclear program didn't pose a serious threat.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei V. Lavrov told reporters Wednesday that even this latest U.S. assessment is off the mark: The U.S. assertion that Iranians were pursuing nuclear weapons until 2003 is false, he said.

"The data possessed by our American partners, or at least the data shown to us, give no reason to assume that Iran has ever pursued a military nuclear program," Lavrov said.

At the same time, Lavrov said, Russian President Vladimir V. Putin this week had again entreated Iran to freeze its uranium enrichment program, which Iran says is only for civilian energy purposes.

Western Europe, meanwhile, remains openly leery of Iran's intentions. A defiant Tehran is still ignoring two Security Council orders to halt uranium enrichment, Europeans pointed out, and new sanctions still can't be crossed off the list of possible repercussions.

"Our concerns are still there," German government spokesman Ulrich Wilhelm said Wednesday. "That's why we recommend a certain restraint of German companies in their business with Iran.

"It is still necessary to put Iran under pressure, combined with the offer of cooperation."

The new U.S. intelligence report, made public Monday, marked a fundamental retreat from the Bush administration's repeated accusations that Iran is working to develop nuclear weapons. Hounded by international pressure, the Islamic Republic dropped its weapons ambitions in 2003, the report said, but could resume the program at any time.

News of the report was gladly received in Russia, which stands to win or lose billions of dollars in business depending on whether Iran is further sanctioned.

A Russian firm won the contract to build Iran's first civilian nuclear power plant, and the government was to sell Tehran the needed fuel to operate the plant. But the project has been slowed amid international pressure and squabbles over whether Iran has paid its bills.

Russia and Iran also have a strategic alliance and shared interest in preserving stability in the Central Asian countries of the former Soviet Union.

"Russia feels it has always been right and now it has been confirmed, and it was even confirmed by the opposite side," said Alexander Umnov, senior researcher at Moscow's Institute of World Economy and International Relations. "The pressure of possible and existing sanctions prevented Russian companies from going deeper into cooperation with Iran. Now, because of the report, there is a chance to expand cooperation."

Yet despite Russia's repeated insistence that Iran's nuclear program is civilian in nature, even some officials in Moscow harbor underlying doubts, said analysts familiar with Russia's nuclear discussions.

Like their counterparts in Washington, Russian officials believe the technological groundwork in Iran could be used to quick-start a weapons program if Tehran felt the need, the analysts said.

As long ago as 1993, a Russian intelligence report suggested that Iran was conducting nuclear research that could have military applications.

"The Russian official statement on this issue has been there is no evidence that Iran is creating nuclear weapons," Anton Khlopkov, a nonproliferation expert at the PIR Center for Policy Studies in Moscow, said in a recent interview. "But I would say there is some concern, including in Russia. We don't have evidence, the U.S. doesn't have evidence, the IAEA [International Atomic Energy Agency] doesn't have evidence. But we have concerns." Still, there was a pervasive sense of hope in Russia and China that the report, coming from the U.S. government itself, would slow the rush to sanctions and buy extra time for negotiation.

Wang Guangya, China's U.N. ambassador, told reporters that moves to impose sanctions on Tehran should be reconsidered.

"Things have changed," he said.

Chinese analysts said they expect Beijing to maintain its low-key response until it can better assess Washington's change of heart, and that there's little immediate upside in gloating now that U.S. experts are supporting its long-standing arguments.

China has long viewed tighter sanctions skeptically. In part, this reflects a desire to avoid upsetting Iran, an ally and energy supplier. But self-interest also is at work: China has bridled, as has Russia, at the United States' global policeman role amid concern that it too might become the object of sanctions in some future showdown.

Western Europe may continue to push toward sanctions, but the report does create political discomfort for French President Nicolas Sarkozy, who has pointedly sided with Bush against Iran. The French leader sounded off against Tehran repeatedly as he campaigned for office this year. The U.S. report leaves Sarkozy uncomfortably exposed, French analysts said.

When the French and U.S. presidents met in Maine during August vacations, "certainly President Bush presented a picture of Iran which created much anxiety in Mr. Sarkozy's mind," said Francois Nicoullaud, the French ambassador to Iran from 2001 to 2005. Sarkozy returned to France convinced that Iran would soon have the bomb, and "it would be necessary to strike Iran to avoid such an eventuality," he said.

"Sarkozy's logic may have had less to do with imposing sanctions and more about being an ally of the United States," said Thierry Coville, a research fellow at the Institute for International and Strategic Relations. "Maybe it's good to be an ally, no matter what. But maybe if you go to very extreme, it's difficult to come back."

In Moscow, the prospects of new contracts in Iran are tantalizing the business community and political elite.

When Putin received Iranian Supreme National Security Council secretary Saeed Jalili at his residence this week, the two discussed the construction of Iran's first nuclear power plant. The plant at Bushehr is being built by Russian firm Atomstroyexport. Putin assured the Iranians that the project would be completed on schedule, Iran's semi-official Fars News Agency reported.

"Iran has not been violating any international laws implementing this project. It is clear to all," Atomstroyexport spokeswoman Irina Yesipova said. Still, she said, "any project is much easier to implement when there is clear perceptions and friendly attitudes."

Russia's largest oil company, Lukoil, has been trying to develop Iran's enormous Azar oil field, but found it slow going. The field is expected to yield 2.5 billion barrels of oil, company spokesman Grigory Volchek said, but progress has lapsed amid prolonged negotiations. He declined to say whether the delays were linked to sanctions. "Right now it's in a very passive stage," he said.

But many observers were still struggling to understand what the intelligence assessments portend. Particularly in Moscow and Beijing, analysts were incredulous that the intelligence agencies would take a stance undercutting the president, and theorized that the report might herald a shift in Bush administration strategy.

"We wonder, not only China but the rest of the world: Should we believe this report, why now, what's behind it, is this political maneuvering or some sort of power struggle inside the White House," said Chu Shulong, professor and director of the Institute of Strategic Studies at Beijing's Qinghua University. "A lot of foreign governments are puzzled. The U.S. government is becoming much more inconsistent and less reliable."

Times staff writers Geraldine Baum in Paris, Kim Murphy in London, and Sergei L. Loiko in Moscow, and special correspondent Christian Retzlaff in Berlin contributed to this report.

<http://www.latimes.com/news/nationworld/world/la-fg-worldreax6dec06.1.6956384.story>

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Los Angeles Times

December 6, 2007

Report On Iran Fuels Arab Fears

Some analysts say Tehran may feel free to interfere in the Mideast, but a few are relieved that chances of a U.S. attack have dimmed.

By Jeffrey Fleishman, Los Angeles Times Staff Writer

CAIRO —The dwindling possibility of a U.S. attack on Iran is changing the dynamics of Middle East politics and raising Arab concern that Tehran may now feel emboldened to strengthen its military, increase its support for Islamic radicals and exert more influence in the region's troubled countries.

Saudi Arabia and other Arab nations opposed military action against Iran's nuclear program. But, analysts said, those governments were privately relieved that U.S. threats helped to further preoccupy Tehran, which had irritated much of the Arab world with its deep involvement in the politics of Iraq and Lebanon and support for the radical Palestinian group Hamas.

The U.S. intelligence report released Monday, which says Iran does not have an active nuclear weapons program, has eased international pressure for sanctions and invigorated the Islamic Republic's hard-liners. This comes as the Arab world has been trying to counter Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's rhetoric and his government's influence over the presidential turmoil in Lebanon, the politics in Syria and the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. The report did not allay Arab fears over Iran's nuclear intentions and its program to enrich uranium.

The same day the intelligence assessment was made public, Ahmadinejad became the first Iranian president to attend a summit of the Gulf Cooperation Council. The meeting in Doha, Qatar, was hailed by many as a symbolic milestone to defuse decades of tensions between Shiite-dominated Iran and other oil-producing, mostly Sunni nations of the region. The Iranian leader, however, said little at the meeting to calm nerves about his country's regional ambitions.

Suspicion that Iran seeks to dominate the Persian Gulf region has prompted some Middle Eastern states -- including Saudi Arabia, which the U.S. regards as the leading Arab voice -- to increase military spending.

"There's no trust on the Arab side about Iran's intentions," said Christian Koch, research director for international studies at the Gulf Research Center in Dubai, United Arab Emirates. "There are concerns of Iran's nuclear program for military purposes. There are concerns about Iran's influence in Iraq, over the unsettled political situation in Lebanon and over the dispute regarding" three gulf islands in Iran's control that are claimed by the United Arab Emirates.

Some in the region believe, however, that the U.S. report may soften the mistrust between Iran and its neighbors and lead to a degree of rapprochement. Nabil Abdel Fattah, an analyst with Al Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies in Cairo, said the report may help Tehran "widen the rift" between Washington and its Arab allies, who had feared that if the U.S. attacked Iran, Tehran might retaliate against them.

"The report sends assurances to the gulf countries and particularly to the Saudi kingdom," Fattah said. "The gulf countries know that if the U.S. strikes Iran, they will turn into Iranian hostages."

The view across much of the Middle East is that Iran's refusal to give in to the Bush administration was clever policy that was, at least for now, vindicated by U.S. intelligence. It is likely to further enhance the image of Ahmadinejad, whose popularity in the Arab street is rooted in his defiance toward the West, a quality many Arabs wish their own leaders would show more often.

In Iran on Wednesday, Ahmadinejad was quoted by the state news agency as saying the U.S. intelligence report was a "final blow" to Iran's critics and was a clear message "that the Iranian people were on the right course. Today, Iran has turned to a nuclear country and all world countries have accepted this fact."

Many Middle East analysts believe the report signals that the U.S. is shifting its approach away from its combative approach toward Tehran, which has bedeviled Washington's diplomatic and democracy-building efforts across the region. This situation has turned more precarious because of Iran's brinkmanship and Arab nations' dismay at U.S. policy failures and what they perceive as Washington's weakness. Arab capitals blame the Bush administration for the continued bloodshed in Iraq and waiting for nearly seven years before aggressively committing to trying to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

"This report is a face-saving device for the U.S. It gives the U.S. administration a subtle way to backtrack on their stance regarding the Iranian nuclear issues," said Amal Saad-Ghorayeb, a visiting scholar at the Carnegie Endowment Middle East Center in Beirut. "What we are seeing is not a change in the U.S. strategy of reshaping the Middle East, but rather a change of tactics."

Writing in the Jordanian daily Al-Rai, analyst Mohammed Kharroub noted that the U.S. intelligence report "opens the door wide to numerous 'compromises' between Washington and Tehran in light of stalemates over explosive files (Iraq, Lebanon and Palestine) that have exhausted Washington. This stalemate has left Washington exposed and naked politically, diplomatically but especially militarily."

In Lebanon, for example, Iran's backing of the Shiite militant group Hezbollah has hampered U.S. and Saudi efforts to strengthen the beleaguered pro-Western prime minister, Fouad Siniora. The nation's political parties have been unable to agree on a president for months, leading to increased fears of factional violence. The problem is further agitated by Iran's ally Syria, which wants to maintain its influence by undermining pro-Western candidates.

"There is no doubt that following this report, Iran will feel more at ease," said Habib Fayyad, a Beirut-based political analyst and expert on Iran. "First, it will drive Moscow and Beijing to disregard calls for sanctions against Iran. There will be more division within the EU regarding Iran's nuclear program, and it will fortify Iran's negotiating posture in Iraq. In Lebanon, Iran's allies will be more confident in asking for a bigger political role." Oussama Safa, director of the Lebanese Center for Policy Studies, said Tehran had outflanked Washington on Lebanese politics even before the assessment.

"The U.S. intelligence report might give Iran more credibility and legitimacy regarding its policy in Lebanon. But Iran already holds all the cards in Lebanon and needs to keep these cards very close to its chest for more geopolitical gains," Safa said. "Iran already plays the role of a spoiler in Lebanon and will continue doing so."

On Wednesday, Arab newspapers and TV ran angry editorials and commentary attacking President Bush's credibility for warning as recently as October that Iran's nuclear prowess could ignite World War III, a prospect that the intelligence assessment appears to contradict.

"Dr. Strangelove needs a new script," Tom Clifford, deputy managing editor of Dubai-based Gulf News, wrote in Wednesday's paper, referring to Bush and the intelligence report. "Even Bush must realize he is in such a mess in Iraq that to attack Iran would be a supreme act of folly, arrogance and sheer stupidity."

Times staff writer Borzou Daragahi in Dubai and special correspondents Raed Rafei in Beirut and Noha El-Hennawy in Cairo contributed to this report.

<http://www.latimes.com/news/nationworld/world/la-fg-arabs6dec06,1,5941118.story>

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Washington Times

December 6, 2007

Pg. 9

Pentagon Eyes China Nuke Talks

Beijing asks Congress to lift curbs on military exchanges

By Bill Gertz, Washington Times

The Pentagon this week proposed holding a strategic nuclear "dialogue" with China, as Chinese military officials asked that Congress lift its guidelines banning military exchanges with Beijing on nuclear operations.

Defense officials said yesterday that the Chinese military's request to end the 1999 "Smith guidelines" was made during the two days of meetings between U.S. and Chinese defense and military officials that ended Tuesday.

Officials familiar with the talks said they also included a discussion of China's refusal to permit the U.S. aircraft carrier Kitty Hawk from docking in Hong Kong for a long-planned Thanksgiving port call.

Pentagon spokesman Bryan Whitman said the Kitty Hawk incident, and the denial of two other warship visits to Hong Kong, "only came up in the context of an overall discussion about the importance of improving our military-to-military relations."

Last week, senior Navy leaders expressed concern that China stopped the carrier visit Nov. 22, disrupting holiday visits between crew members and hundreds of relatives who had traveled to Hong Kong. The Pentagon also issued a formal protest over the incident and the earlier refusal to permit two Navy minesweepers into Hong Kong.

On the strategic nuclear proposal, Maj. Stuart Upton, another Pentagon spokesman, said Eric Edelman, undersecretary of defense for policy who hosted the talks, offered "a proposed dialogue on nuclear policy, strategy and programs."

The proposal to lift the congressional ban on sensitive military exchanges, including those involving nuclear operations, was made by Lt. Gen. Ma Xiaotian, deputy chief of general staff for foreign affairs and leader of China's delegation.

Pentagon spokesman declined to say how Mr. Edelman responded and would not say what other issues were raised by the Chinese. Other officials said China repeated standard criticism of U.S. arms sales to Taiwan.

The nuclear dialogue proposal at this year's annual talks, called Defense Consultative Talks, led to the inclusion of officials from the U.S. Strategic Command, and China's Second Artillery Corps, which oversee their respective nation's nuclear forces. The inclusion "led to a worthwhile discussion of a future dialogue on nuclear policy, strategy and programs," Maj. Upton said.

Maj. Upton said later that Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates favors holding the nuclear dialogue as "important for both countries, to help reduce uncertainty and the risk of miscalculation."

"There is nothing in [1999 law] that precludes us from engaging in this dialogue," he said, without saying whether the Pentagon favors modifying the restrictions.

Pentagon officials in the past have said they favor keeping the restrictions in place.

Officials confirmed the Chinese request to lift restrictions on military exchanges after Beijing's state-run Xinhua news agency first reported it yesterday.

The strategic nuclear talks proposal comes as China currently is building up its nuclear forces with several new types of long-range mobile missiles and a new ballistic missile submarine class. China's military, however, refuses to explain details of the nuclear buildup, and statements by Chinese military officials have cast doubt on Beijing's assertion that it would only use nuclear weapons in retaliatory strikes against nuclear-armed states.

<http://www.washingtontimes.com/article/20071206/NATION/112060070/1002>

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Washington Times
December 6, 2007
Pg. 12

Nuke Disclosure Still Incomplete

U.S. envoy calls visit 'useful'

By Nicholas Kralev, Washington Times

North Korea is still balking at disclosing all of its nuclear materials and capabilities in a declaration expected by year's end, the chief U.S. negotiator with the reclusive state said yesterday.

The envoy, Christopher Hill, said after completing a three-day visit that the North Koreans were "pretty close to providing a declaration," and "we have had a very useful exchange on the subject."

But problems remain even after Mr. Hill discussed the list of nuclear activities in a rare meeting with Foreign Minister Pak Ui-chun on Tuesday.

"There are definitely some differences," Mr. Hill told reporters after his return to Beijing. "As we discussed the declaration, as we discussed materials, installations and programs, we found that items in each of these three lists were not there that, in our view, should be there."

The Washington Times reported last week that the North Koreans were refusing to account for centrifuges the United States says they purchased from Pakistan in the 1990s, presumably for use in a uranium-enrichment program. U.S. officials are concerned that the centrifuges may have ended up in a third country, possibly Syria, where Israel bombed what it described as a nuclear-related facility in September.

Mr. Hill said last week that, even if the North does not have the centrifuges any longer, it must explain what happened to them.

"Our concern is, we don't want a declaration that arrives and that immediately people see what is missing," he said yesterday, according to a transcript released by the State Department.

"What we want to do is make sure that the draft we get is as complete and correct as possible, because we know there are a lot of people — cheering on from the sidelines or not cheering on from the sidelines — who would perhaps leap at the opportunity to look at a draft that is not complete and not correct," he said.

Some in the Bush administration's conservative base, including former national security officials, have criticized the current policy on North Korea championed by Mr. Hill and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, warning that the North cannot be trusted.

Mr. Hill is working hard to avoid hearing "I told you so," which is why the declaration is so important to him, U.S. officials said.

Asked whether the differences he described had been narrowed during his visit to Pyongyang, Mr. Hill deflected the question but said, "I don't want to suggest that we are at some impasse."

The declaration is required under an Oct. 3 agreement among the six countries negotiating the end of the North's nuclear program — the United States, China, Japan, Russia, and South and North Korea.

The North also has to disable its main reactor at Yongbyon by Dec. 31 in order to start getting energy and other economic assistance, as well as to begin normalizing relations with the United States and Japan.

"The disabling has gone very well," Mr. Hill said, having witnessed the work of North Korean and U.S. experts at Yongbyon during his visit.

He said that, even if the process is not completed by midnight on Dec. 31, it will be finished soon after that. A small delay could occur because the Americans "instigated" a slowdown of the fuel discharge for safety reasons.

"We are not looking for some sort of cliffhanger — five minutes of 12. What we want to see is that this is going on as quickly as possible and as safely as possible, and we are very much convinced that that is the case," he said.

<http://www.washingtontimes.com/article/20071206/FOREIGN/112060042/1003/foreign>

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Washington Post
December 6, 2007
Pg. 26

Russia Alleges U.S. 'Rollback' On Anti-Missile Plan

By Peter Finn, Washington Post Foreign Service

MOSCOW, Dec. 5 -- The United States has backed away from proposals it made orally in October to allay Russian fears about the deployment of a missile defense system in Eastern Europe, Russia's foreign minister, Sergei Lavrov, alleged Wednesday.

Lavrov said an oral proposal to permanently station Russian officers at sites in Poland and the Czech Republic to ensure that the system's radar would not be used to peer into Russian airspace was withdrawn when the United States submitted its proposals to Moscow in writing last month.

"We received the document, and unfortunately a serious rollback from what we agreed upon was evident," Lavrov said at a news conference Wednesday in his first detailed comments on the U.S. written proposals. "The issue no longer concerns the permanent presence of Russian officers at possible facilities . . . in the Czech Republic and Poland."

Responding to Lavrov's statement, State Department spokesman Tom Casey said in an e-mail: "There is no change in our view that I'm aware of. What we gave to the Russian Government was a serious proposal that was based on earlier discussions of this issue. We will continue to discuss this issue with Russian officials."

The United States says it needs the missile defense system to protect against a potential missile threat from Iran. Russia not only doubts the likelihood of a serious threat from Iran, but contends that the system would, in fact, be used against Russia.

The planned system is one of the most divisive of the issues creating growing strain between Washington and Moscow.

The United States made its proposals when Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates met with their Russian counterparts in Moscow in October. U.S. diplomats characterized the proposals as a major effort to ease Russia's concerns and told reporters, without providing details, that Russia would be able to monitor use of the system.

After the Moscow meetings, reports that the United States was willing to allow Russian officers on-site caused some controversy in the Czech Republic, where memories of Soviet troops, notably those who suppressed the so-called Prague Spring liberalization movement of 1968, remain fresh. Czech President Vaclav Klaus said the idea that Russian troops could be stationed permanently on the country's soil was "fabricated by the media."

Klaus said last month that in discussions with the United States there was "a minor, very technical debate on certain occasional, random monitoring. . . . There was no talk of any deployment of [Russian] troops on Czech soil."

Lavrov's comments Wednesday suggest that Moscow had a different understanding. Now, he said, "we are asked to agree to sporadic visits, provided the Czech and Polish authorities give their consent."

Lavrov said the United States had also pulled back from a plan not to activate any system until after a joint evaluation of potential threats.

It is clear from the written proposal, he said, that the decision on when to activate the missile defense site will be made "by the United States at its sole discretion."

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/12/05/AR2007120502759.html>

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New York Times
December 6, 2007

In Iran We Trust?

By Valerie Lincy and Gary Milhollin

Washington -- ON Monday the United States intelligence community issued what everyone agrees was blockbuster news: a report stating that in the autumn of 2003, Iran halted its nuclear weapons program. The National Intelligence Estimate has been heralded as a courageous act of independence by the intelligence agencies, and praised by both parties for showing a higher quality of spy work than earlier assessments.

In fact, the report contains the same sorts of flaws that we have learned to expect from our intelligence agency offerings. It, like the report in 2002 that set up the invasion of Iraq, is both misleading and dangerous.

During the past year, a period when Iran's weapons program was supposedly halted, the government has been busy installing some 3,000 gas centrifuges at its plant at Natanz. These machines could, if operated continuously for about a year, create enough enriched uranium to provide fuel for a bomb. In addition, they have no plausible purpose in Iran's civilian nuclear effort. All of Iran's needs for enriched uranium for its energy programs are covered by a contract with Russia.

Iran is also building a heavy water reactor at its research center at Arak. This reactor is ideal for producing plutonium for nuclear bombs, but is of little use in an energy program like Iran's, which does not use plutonium for reactor fuel. India, Israel and Pakistan have all built similar reactors — all with the purpose of fueling nuclear weapons. And why, by the way, does Iran even want a nuclear energy program, when it is sitting on an enormous pool of oil that is now skyrocketing in value? And why is Iran developing long-range Shahab missiles, which make no military sense without nuclear warheads to put on them?

For years these expensive projects have been viewed as evidence of Iran's commitment to nuclear weapons. Why aren't they still? The answer is that the new report defines "nuclear weapons program" in a ludicrously narrow way: it confines it to enriching uranium at secret sites or working on a nuclear weapon design. But the halting of its secret enrichment and weapon design efforts in 2003 proves only that Iran made a tactical move. It suspended work that, if discovered, would unambiguously reveal intent to build a weapon. It has continued other work, crucial to the ability to make a bomb, that it can pass off as having civilian applications.

That work includes the centrifuges at Natanz, which bring Iran closer to a nuclear weapon every day — two to seven years away. To assert, as the report does, that these centrifuges are "civilian," and not part of Iran's weapons threat, is grossly misleading.

The new report has also upended our sanctions policy, which was just beginning to produce results. Banks and energy companies were pulling back from Iran. The United Nations Security Council had frozen the assets of dozens of Iranian companies. That policy now seems dead. If Iran is not going for the bomb, why punish it?

No company or bank will agree to lose money unless a nuclear threat is clear. Likewise, is it fair for the United Nations to continue to freeze the assets of people like Seyed Jaber Safdari, the manager of the Natanz plant, or companies like Mesbah Energy, the supplier of the reactor at Arak, because of links to a program that American intelligence believes is benign? One European official admitted to us that he and his colleagues were flummoxed. "We have to have a new policy now for going forward," he said, "but we haven't been able to figure out what it is." This situation is made all the more absurd by the report's suggestion that international pressure offers the only hope of containing Iran. The report has now made such pressure nearly impossible to obtain. It is hardly surprising that China, which last week seemed ready to approve the next round of economic sanctions against Tehran, has now had a change of heart: its ambassador to the United Nations said yesterday that "we all start from the presumption that now things have changed."

We should be suspicious of any document that suddenly gives the Bush administration a pass on a big national security problem it won't solve during its remaining year in office. Is the administration just washing its hands of the intractable Iranian nuclear issue by saying, "If we can't fix it, it ain't broke"?

In any case, the report is an undoubted victory for Iran. Even if it opens the way for direct talks, which would be a benefit, it validates Iran's claim that efforts to shut down Natanz are illegitimate. Thus Iran will be free to operate and add to its centrifuges at Natanz, accumulate a stockpile of low-enriched uranium customary for civilian use, and then have the ability to convert that uranium in a matter of months to weapons grade. This "breakout potential" would create a nuclear threat that we and Iran's neighbors will have to live with for years to come.

Valerie Lincy is the editor of Iranwatch.org. Gary Milhollin is the director of the Wisconsin Project on Nuclear Arms Control.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2007/12/06/opinion/06milhollin.html>

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Washington Times

December 7, 2007

Pg. 6

Inside The Ring

By Bill Gertz

New Iran missile

A U.S. intelligence official confirmed that Iran has developed a new long-range missile that can hit targets between 1,250 miles and 1,550 miles away. The solid-fuel missile is called Ashura and is increasing fears among defense and intelligence officials about Iran's supposedly halted nuclear program.

The official confirmed the missile after a report on it appeared in Jane's Defense Weekly report, which said the Ashura will be tested soon.

President Bush said this week, in highlighting the threat posed by Iran, that "Iran is a nation that is testing ballistic missiles." A White House official said he was referring to comments by Iran's defense minister reported Nov. 27 who said the new Ashura missile is in production and is being tested.

The new missile is said to be capable of carrying a nuclear warhead, which Iran is thought to be secretly developing, despite denials by Iranian leaders that its nuclear program is for electrical-power generation.

It is the third in a family of nuclear-capable ballistic missiles in the Iranian arsenal. The others are the liquid-fueled Shahab and the BM-25, a missile of North Korean origin reverse-engineered from the Russian SS-N-6 submarine-launched ballistic missile.

<http://www.washingtontimes.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20071207/NATION04/112070088/1008>

Washington Post
December 7, 2007
Pg. 9

Review Of Iran Intelligence To Be Sought

As Conservatives Reject New NIE, Republican Senators to Urge Congressional Panel

By Robin Wright and Glenn Kessler, Washington Post Staff Writers

Senate Republicans are planning to call for a congressional commission to investigate the conclusions of the new National Intelligence Estimate on Iran as well as the specific intelligence that went into it, according to congressional sources.

The move is the first official challenge, but it comes amid growing backlash from conservatives and neoconservatives unhappy about the assessment that Iran halted a clandestine nuclear weapons program four years ago. It reflects how quickly the NIE has become politicized, with critics even going after the analysts who wrote it, and shows a split among Republicans.

Sen. John Ensign (R-Nev.) said he plans to introduce legislation next week to establish a commission modeled on a congressionally mandated group that probed a disputed 1995 intelligence estimate on the emerging missile threat to the United States over the next 15 years.

"Iran is one of the greatest threats in the world today. Getting the intelligence right is absolutely critical, not only on Iran's capability but its intent. So now there is a huge question raised, and instead of politicizing that report, let's have a fresh set of eyes -- objective, yes -- look at it," he said in an interview.

Ensign's proposal calls for Senate leaders to put an equal number of Republicans and Democrats on a panel to study the NIE and report back in six months. "There are a lot of people out there who do question [the NIE]. There is a huge difference between the 2005 and 2007 estimates," he said. The 2005 intelligence estimate reported that Iran was still working on a clandestine military program, and the new assessment basically says the previous judgment was wrong on a key point.

"If it's inaccurate, it could result in very serious damage to legitimate American policy," said Sen. Jeff Sessions (R-Ala.). As recently as July, he noted, intelligence officials said in congressional testimony that they had a high degree of confidence that Iran was intent on developing the world's deadliest weapon. "We need to update our conclusions, but this is a substantial change," he said in an interview.

While other NIEs have been the subject of intense criticism -- most recently the 2002 assessment on Iraq's program to develop weapons of mass destruction -- critics of the new assessment are modeling their response after the clash over a 1995 NIE on ballistic missile threats. That document concluded that no country other than the major declared nuclear powers "would develop or otherwise acquire a ballistic missile over the next 15 years that will threaten the contiguous 48 states or Canada."

President Bill Clinton used the NIE to veto a fiscal 1996 defense authorization bill that would have required deployment by 2003 of a missile defense system capable of defending all 50 states, a project costing tens of billions of dollars.

But a congressionally mandated commission, headed by Donald H. Rumsfeld, who would become President Bush's defense secretary, concluded in 1998 that the United States "might have little or no warning before operational deployment of a ballistic missile by a hostile Third World country." Its conclusions formed the basis for the Bush administration's push for a missile defense system.

Although administration officials say they are very comfortable with the intelligence that produced the new NIE, conservative commentators challenge its veracity. Norman Podhoretz, a commentator who has advocated air strikes on Iranian sites, said he does not think the NIE is "very credible because it is a 180-degree turn in two years based on new discoveries. I don't see any strong reason why in two years they won't reverse themselves."

Podhoretz especially faulted the estimate for guessing at Iranian intentions about a weapon while not significantly changing the estimate for when Tehran could acquire a weapon: "The summary strikes me as more of a political document as distinguished from an intelligence document." He said a review of the intelligence by a special commission is "a very good idea" because it is "entirely possible" that others would come to different conclusions. Critics of the NIE have seized on the fact that career government officials who had battled with conservatives earlier in the administration on policy issues have now migrated to the Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI), which coordinated the writing of the estimate.

"The problem is not the nature of the intelligence, it's the nature of the presentation. This NIE was presented with a clear intention to deceive and to redirect foreign policy," wrote Danielle Pletka, vice president for foreign and defense policy at the American Enterprise Institute, in an e-mail. "I have no doubt that these people believe they are

protecting the nation from the President, but our constitution doesn't contemplate the non-proliferation center at the ODNI governing U.S. national security policy."

Meanwhile, the White House sought to tamp down accusations that Bush misled the public about when and how much he knew about the new intelligence. During his news conference this week, Bush said he was told in August by the director of national intelligence that there was new information about Iran, but not what the new information was.

Press secretary Dana Perino said yesterday that Bush meant he was told the gist of the new intelligence -- that Iran had had a covert nuclear weapons program but had suspended it -- but he was not given details, pending a deeper assessment of the data. "The president could have been more precise in that language," she said, "but the president was being truthful."

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/12/06/AR2007120602457.html>

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New York Times

December 7, 2007

Despite Report, France And Germany Keep Pressure On Iran

By Katrin Bennhold

PARIS, Dec. 6 — The leaders of France and Germany said Thursday that Iran remained a danger and that other nations needed to keep up the pressure over its nuclear program despite a United States intelligence report's conclusion that Tehran was no longer building a bomb.

Speaking at a joint news conference at the Élysée Palace, President Nicolas Sarkozy and Chancellor Angela Merkel said they had not changed their minds despite the findings of the American intelligence estimate released Monday, which some believed would have eroded support for tougher new sanctions.

Their remarks came as Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice won the backing of NATO foreign ministers on Thursday for new United Nations sanctions against Iran over its nuclear program.

"The threat exists," said Mr. Sarkozy, one of the staunchest defenders of the new sanctions. "Notwithstanding the latest elements, everyone is fully conscious of the fact that there is a will among the Iranian leaders to obtain nuclear weapons."

"I don't see why we should renounce sanctions," he added. "What made Iran budge so far has been sanctions and firmness."

Mrs. Merkel stopped short of explicitly mentioning sanctions, but also appeared determined to support current negotiations in the Security Council on the issue. "I think that we are in a process, and that Iran continues to pose a danger," she said.

The National Intelligence Estimate made public on Monday said that Tehran had frozen its nuclear weapons program in 2003. But it also said that the country was continuing to build up a technical ability that could be used both for civilian and military purposes.

Both leaders urged the continuation of a strategy that combined pressure with dialogue.

In comments apparently directed at Russia and China, two members of the Security Council that have been reluctant to endorse new sanctions, Mr. Sarkozy urged that there be a coherent position, a view Mrs. Merkel said she shared.

At a working dinner with Ms. Rice at NATO headquarters in Brussels, the NATO foreign ministers accepted the Bush administration's argument that Iran remains a threat, the Belgian foreign minister, Karel De Gucht, told reporters.

"On Iran, everybody around the table agreed we should not change our position," he said. Ms. Rice will see the Israeli foreign minister, Tzipi Livni, on Friday. Israeli officials say their intelligence indicates that Iran is still working aggressively to build nuclear arms.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2007/12/07/world/middleeast/07iran.html?ref=world>

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Christian Science Monitor

December 7, 2007

Iran's Nuclear Know-How Unimpeded

As its atomic power research proceeds, Tehran can still gain the expertise needed for a bomb.

By Peter Grier, Staff writer of The Christian Science Monitor

WASHINGTON -- At a remote site 200 miles south of Tehran, Iranian scientists are learning more about the basic means to build a nuclear weapon every day.

The facility – named Natanz, after the nearest town – is where Iran has begun the process of producing fissile material. Thousands of thin, vertical tubes spin at outrageous speeds, atom by atom enriching raw uranium gas into more useful material.

Iranian officials say Natanz will make low-enriched uranium to use in civil power plants. And the just-released assessment by US intelligence agencies concludes that Iran has indeed put its covert weapons program on hold. But developing the technology to enrich uranium is perhaps the most difficult step in a nuclear weapons – or civilian power – program. According to administration officials and outside experts, it is possible that Tehran has simply decided it does not need to proceed with actual bomb work, at least for now.

"Iranian leaders appear to have recognized that by staying within the rules they can acquire capabilities sufficient to impress their own people and intimidate their neighbors, without inviting tough international sanctions or military attack," concludes George Perkovich, director of the nonproliferation program at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, in an assessment of the US National Intelligence Estimate's (NIE) revelations.

As of now the US intelligence has high confidence that Iran has not produced enough highly enriched fissile material for a nuclear weapon. The earliest it would be able to do so is probably within the 2010 to 2015 time frame, according to the new NIE.

And if Iran does decide to develop nuclear weapons, scientists would most likely use centrifuge technology, which they are currently working on at Natanz.

"Iranian entities are continuing to develop a range of technical capabilities that could be applied to producing nuclear weapons," says the NIE.

Iran has long claimed that its enrichment program is intended for civilian purposes. Iranian officials say they only want to learn how to produce fissionable fuel for power plants, as they are allowed to do under terms of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

But in the past, Iranian officials have engaged in what UN weapons inspectors consider to be suspicious behavior in regard to their enrichment effort. For instance, Tehran has built and secretly operated centrifuges, the spinning tubes which are the heart of the enrichment technology Iran has chosen.

For this and other reasons the International Atomic Energy Agency in 2003 declared Iran in violation of its UN nuclear safeguards agreement.

The Bush administration has vowed to continue to press for further UN sanctions designed to pressure Iran into abandoning enrichment altogether.

"Iran's uranium and plutonium programs are still a concern for US security and are still operating in violation of binding UN Security Council resolutions," write Jon Wolfsthal and Jon Alterman, senior fellows at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in an analysis published in December.

As the US intelligence assessment makes clear, Iran has made progress in its enrichment efforts, but it must still surmount daunting technical problems before it can operate Natanz's machinery on full throttle.

The gaseous diffusion-enrichment process Iran uses appears to be modeled after one perfected by the European enrichment consortium Urenco. It uses centrifuge tubes which spin at 1,500 revolutions per second or higher.

At that speed the uranium hexafluoride gas within the tube begins to separate into isotopes of different atomic weight. The lighter and more fissionable U-235 remains near the center, while the heavier U-238 – which makes up 99 percent of the natural feedstock – is thrown to the outside.

By collecting the gas in the center, then pumping it into another tube, and another, and so on, it is gradually enriched to a usable level. Low-enriched uranium, suitable for power plants, is about 20 percent U-235. The high-enriched uranium needed for bombs has a U-235 concentration of 80 percent or higher.

Today Iran has about 3,000 centrifuges installed in buildings at the Natanz complex. That's up from only 300 a year ago.

But running centrifuge cascades is a difficult sort of high technology ballet. The tiniest wobble can destroy a tube spinning at such high speeds. Data on Iran's usage of hexafluoride gas shows its enrichment plant is running at a fraction of capacity.

As of mid-August 2007, Iran had produced only about 70 kilograms of low-enriched uranium, according to David Albright, a physicist and president of the Institute for Science and International Security. At full speed, 3,000 centrifuges should be able to produce 90 kilograms of LEU in a month.

Once Iran accumulates 700 to 800 kilograms of low-enriched material, it would have a breakout capability, concludes Albright in an assessment in the current issue of the journal Arms Control Today. It could take that material and put it back into the centrifuges and keep upping its concentration, producing enough HEU for a bomb within a few months.

Yet given the tenaciousness with which Iran has proceeded with enrichment, insisting on its abandonment might not work, according to Matthew Bunn, a senior research associate at Harvard University's Managing the Atom Project. "It is time to begin thinking about the least bad non-zero [centrifuge] options might look like," concluded Bunn in a presentation made to government nuclear scientists in November. "They may offer the lowest risks to US security of the many bad options now available."

<http://www.csmonitor.com/2007/1207/p02s01-usgn.html>

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Washington Times

December 7, 2007

NIE Authors Accused Of Partisan Politics

By Jon Ward, Washington Times

Several current and former high-level government officials familiar with the authors of the National Intelligence Estimate on Iran described the report as a politically motivated document written by anti-Bush former State Department officials, who opposed sanctioning foreign governments and businesses.

A Republican senator plans to introduce a bill next week that would create a commission of policy experts to examine whether the new report on Iran is accurate, a spokesman said today.

"Let's make sure this new report is right," said Tory Mazzola, spokesman for Sen. John Ensign, Arizona Republican. Mr. Ensign's proposal will be joined by "a small group of bipartisan senators" and is motivated by a belief that intelligence reports such as the NIE are "becoming very politicized."

The bill would create a commission of three Democrats and three Republicans, who would then bring in policy experts to examine the NIE and the broader scope of U.S. intelligence on Iran's nuclear program.

The report released this week said Iran once had a covert nuclear weapons program, but shut it down in 2003.

The authors' aim is to undercut the White House effort to increase pressure for sanctions on Iran and to argue that Iran dropped its nuclear-weapons program in 2003 because of diplomatic efforts in which the authors had participated, the officials said.

"One has to look at the agendas of the primary movers of this report, to judge how much it can really be banked on," said David Wurmser, a former Middle East adviser to Vice President Dick Cheney, who has worked with the report authors.

Several of the current and former government officials interviewed say that if Iran suspended its covert program in 2003, it did so because the U.S. and its allies had invaded and taken control of neighboring Iraq.

The argument this week over how to confront Iran is a continuation, carried out by many of the same players, of the battles during Mr. Bush's first term between Secretary of State Colin L. Powell and Undersecretary of State for Arms Control John R. Bolton.

The three former State officials primarily responsible for the National Intelligence Estimate clashed regularly from 2001 to 2004 with a team of hard-line conservatives led by Mr. Bolton, who later served as U.S. ambassador to the United Nations.

All three are now at the Office of the Director of National Intelligence: C. Thomas Fingar, deputy director of national intelligence for analysis; Vann H. Van Diepen, national intelligence officer for weapons of mass destruction and proliferation; and Kenneth C. Brill, director of the national counterproliferation center.

One U.S. official who has worked with the three men in the past said the NIE is "a political exercise to torpedo the threat that this administration would pose to their desired policy outcomes on Iran, which is some kind of accommodation with an Iranian nuclear program."

Officials interviewed say that during the Bush administration, the State officials blocked sanctions against foreign countries involved in shipping weapons to Iran, sabotaged threats of sanctions to foreign governments and undercut U.S. efforts to impose international pressure on Iran.

They were brought to the director's office by the first director of national intelligence, John D. Negroponte, who is considered a strong Powell ally.

Mr. Van Diepen — who was described by a director of national intelligence spokesman as one of two primary contributors, along with Mr. Fingar, to the National Intelligence Estimate — was most harshly criticized by the officials, who spoke on the condition that their names not be used.

For 14 years, Mr. Van Diepen oversaw the State Department office tasked with stopping proliferation of chemical and biological weapons.

When Mr. Bolton came to the State Department in 2001, he hired several people to help him take a tougher stance on companies shipping weapons to countries that might use them to deliver nuclear warheads or chemical and biological agents.

Mr. Van Diepen quickly became one of the Bolton team's chief adversaries.

"There was never a sanction that Van Diepen liked, never," said one official. "It was a point of religion for him. He thought anything we did outside of tea-cup diplomacy was counterproductive and wrong."

Mr. Van Diepen, who declined to be interviewed for this article, often argued against the need for sanctions by saying that the burden of proof to determine proliferation activities should be as high as in an average U.S. courtroom.

But one official who worked against Mr. Van Diepen scoffed at that standard.

"We were using intelligence information. It's 'intel,' so you never have absolutely locked down," said one senior official.

Another official said that if a representative of NORINCO, China's chief military builder, was meeting with Iranian officials, "it's a fair guess they're not there to discuss teddy bears."

Mr. Bolton's staff brought in Stephen A. Elliott, a U.S. Navy lawyer, to counter Mr. Van Diepen's legal arguments.

"That was his job: to fight Van Diepen," one official said.

Mr. Van Diepen also tried to sabotage Mr. Bolton's communications, these officials said. Mr. Van Diepen changed the wording of a 2002 cable that was sent to a foreign embassy warning of sanctions for proliferation activities.

"It was a substantial change," an official said. "It's just one of the many incidents where this guy was running around conducting his own foreign policy."

But during Mr. Bush's first term, Mr. Bolton's team raised the number of sanctions from Mr. Van Diepen's average of eight per year to 37 per year, and Mr. Van Diepen asked to be transferred.

Mr. Fingar, meanwhile, was described as a "smooth operator" as the deputy in charge of intelligence and research.

Mr. Fingar was just as averse as Mr. Van Diepen was in pursuing a tough line on proliferation, officials said, but he avoided intra-agency confrontation.

When one of his analysts in 2002 changed an intelligence finding about Cuba, Mr. Fingar wrote Mr. Bolton an e-mail saying the analyst had "acted inappropriately."

But Mr. Fingar, who also declined to be interviewed, later reversed himself during the 2005 hearing on Mr. Bolton's nomination to the U.N. post, telling Senate staffers that he was "trying to get the incident closed."

Mr. Brill, the U.S. ambassador to the International Atomic Energy Agency from 2001 to 2004, was described by one official as "extremely close" to the head of the IAEA, Mohamed ElBaradei, who is viewed by many in the U.S. government as an apologist for Iran.

Mr. Bolton wrote in his recent memoir that Mr. Brill repeatedly undermined efforts to get the IAEA to refer Iran to the U.N. Security Council in 2003.

Another official said that Mr. Brill was "known not just for resisting his instruction cables but also for making political comments criticizing officials at State and Bush policy to his staff. He was quite nasty."

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Los Angeles Times

December 7, 2007

Doves Find Fault With Iran Report Too

Some experts fear the intelligence estimate will sap international pressure to prevent Tehran from getting nuclear weapons.

By Paul Richter, Los Angeles Times Staff Writer

WASHINGTON — The new U.S. intelligence report that says Iran halted its nuclear weapons program in 2003 is suddenly raising concerns among the political center and left, as well as conservatives who have long called for a hard line against the Islamic Republic.

Moderate and liberal foreign policy experts said that U.S. intelligence agencies, possibly eager to demonstrate independence from White House political pressure, may have produced a National Intelligence Estimate that is more reassuring than it should be on the potential risks of the Iranian nuclear program.

The report, made public Monday, contradicted the Bush administration's assertion that Iran has been secretly working to build nuclear weapons. It also found that Tehran, which says it is enriching uranium solely for civilian energy purposes, appears to have a pragmatic view and has responded to outside pressure and economic sanctions, in contrast to characterizations by administration hawks.

For years, President Bush's anti-Tehran vitriol has drowned out the more circumspect voices in the U.S. foreign policy establishment who nonetheless agree Iran poses a concern. But with this week's report, many experts worried that the pressure they believe is needed to counter Tehran now may dissipate.

Iran expert Ray Takeyh, a former professor at the National War College and National Defense University, said that although his own politics are left of the president's, he agrees with Bush that Iran's nuclear program is a continuing threat.

"The position I take is that President Bush is right on this," said Takeyh, now at the Council on Foreign Relations. Takeyh, who has long argued for engaging Iran in diplomacy, said the intelligence report was too easy on Tehran by not objecting to the uranium enrichment program, which many Western governments have alleged is meant to build the knowledge base to eventually develop nuclear weapons. The American intelligence agencies, in effect, accepted Iran's contention that the enrichment is for peaceful purposes, Takeyh said.

After the report's release, Bush pledged to maintain pressure on Iran and lobbied for international support. On Thursday, French and German leaders meeting in Paris said they favored continued pressure, although German Chancellor Angela Merkel did not commit herself to backing harsher United Nations sanctions sought by the United States.

The new U.S. intelligence estimate has made any new economic sanctions unlikely, most analysts agree, since it has given nations such as Russia and China a reason to give the benefit of the doubt to Iran, their ally and business partner. As a result, experts of varying political affiliations in Washington believe that efforts to successfully apply pressure on Iran have been hurt by the report.

At the same time, they say, it is questionable whether the Islamic Republic has been responsive to international pressure, as the report suggests.

Sharon Squassoni, a former government nuclear safeguards expert now with the generally liberal Carnegie Endowment for International Peace in Washington, noted that the intelligence report said Iran suspended its enrichment program in 2003 and later signed an agreement allowing U.N. inspections.

But, she said, the portion of the report made public was silent on the fact that the Iranians reversed both actions in 2006.

The ability to develop fissile materials is the most important element of a nuclear weapons program, she told reporters.

Gary Samore, who was a top arms control official in the Clinton White House, agreed that the National Intelligence Estimate did not adequately emphasize Iran's continuing efforts to enrich uranium and build missiles.

"The halting of the weaponization program in 2003 is less important from a proliferation standpoint than resumption of the enrichment program in 2006," said Samore, director of studies at the Council on Foreign Relations.

Samore said the report undermined Bush's warnings about Iranian efforts to develop nuclear weapons and left Tehran in a strong position, allowing it to develop its enrichment capacity without a substantial challenge from the United States and its allies. The secret weaponization program is "on ice," he said, but Iran preserves the option to resume that when it wishes.

Though American intelligence officials believe Iran has been enriching uranium at a concentration that could only be used for civilian energy purposes, analysts fear that the same basic technology could eventually be used to kick-start a weapons program.

Anthony Lake, who was a national security advisor to President Clinton, found no fault with the intelligence report. But he said a key message was the importance of taking action.

"While we've got more time, we've got to use the time, because the enrichment activities are continuing," Lake said in an interview.

The new report repeats a number of the same cautions and conclusions in its last major assessment, in 2005, when the agencies reached the vastly different conclusion that Iran was determined to develop nuclear weapons. But the new report stresses the more recent findings that cast doubt on Tehran's determination to build a bomb.

As a result, conservatives have denounced the report.

John R. Bolton, the hawkish former U.S. ambassador to the U.N., has called for a congressional investigation of the report, which he said is flawed.

In a Washington Post op-ed column Thursday, Bolton alleged that many of the officials involved were "not intelligence professionals but refugees from the State Department" brought in by J. Michael McConnell, the director of national intelligence.

Norman Podhoretz, the right-wing commentator who has advocated a U.S. military strike on Iran and who is a foreign policy advisor to Republican Rudolph W. Giuliani's presidential campaign, accused the intelligence community of purposefully "leaking material calculated to undermine George W. Bush."

<http://www.latimes.com/news/nationworld/world/la-fg-usiran7dec07.0.2720689.story?coll=la-home-center>

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Iran Report Won't Hit Missile-Defense Plan, U.S. Says

By Desmond Butler, Associated Press

The United States says it will not alter plans to build a missile-defense system in Europe, despite findings by U.S. intelligence agencies that Iran does not have an active nuclear weapons program.

Because U.S. officials have said the threat from Iran was the main reason for building the defense shield, however, the Americans may have a harder time convincing European allies that it still is necessary.

Already, a Czech official responsible for explaining the need for the missile-defense system to the public in his country says his job has become more difficult after Monday's release of the National Intelligence Estimate on Iran. The report, reflecting analyses of all 16 U.S. intelligence agencies, concluded that Iran suspended its nuclear weapons program in 2003.

"Czech newspapers are full of headlines saying there is no longer a need for missile defense," said Tomas Klvana, the Czech government's coordinator for missile-defense communication, who is in Washington for talks with administration officials and lawmakers. "It is hard for complex arguments to win against simple headlines." The proposed system would include radar installations in the Czech Republic and interceptors based in Poland. Mr. Klvana says the potential threat from ballistic missiles aimed at Europe remains, whether Iran is pursuing nuclear weapons or not.

That view is shared by the Bush administration.

"The missile threat from Iran continues to progress and to cause us to be very concerned," said John Rood, lead U.S. negotiator on European missile-defense issues. "Missile defense would be useful regardless of what kind of payload, whether that be conventional, chemical, biological or nuclear."

Mr. Rood said the United States still hopes to build the system and have it online by 2013.

The United States has said the sites in Eastern Europe were chosen to counter a threat from Iran, but Russia has objected, arguing that the system could undermine the deterrence of its nuclear arsenal.

On Tuesday, Mr. Rood reiterated the U.S. position in talks with Russian Army Chief of Staff Gen. Yuri Baluyevsky, who is in Washington at the invitation of his U.S. counterpart, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Adm. Michael Mullen.

Mr. Rood has pointed to Iran's announcement this month that it has manufactured new missiles with a range of 1,200 miles. That distance would put parts of southeastern Europe in targeting range. U.S. officials have said they recently provided Russia with intelligence on the developments in Iran's missile program.

Rep. Ellen O. Tauscher, the California Democrat who heads a congressional subcommittee that has steered money bills for U.S. missile-defense programs, also says the National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) will not affect funding considerations for the project.

"The NIE does not play into our consideration," she said. "Nothing has changed."
<http://www.washingtontimes.com/article/20071207/FOREIGN/112070062/1003>

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A New Bush Tack on North Korea

By Helene Cooper

WASHINGTON, Dec. 6 — President Bush, directly engaging the man he publicly called a "tyrant," wrote a letter to North Korea's leader, Kim Jong-il, in which he held out the prospect of normalized relations with the United States if North Korea fully disclosed its nuclear programs and dismantled its nuclear reactor, administration officials said Thursday.

The high-level personal missive from Mr. Bush to the leader of the country he placed in his "axis of evil" in 2002 was sent as American negotiators struggle to get the secretive North Korean government to fully explain and disclose the extent, use and spread of its nuclear material and technology. At the same time, the United States is also urging other nations to maintain pressure on Iran in the wake of a new assessment that Tehran halted nuclear weapons work in 2003.

Mr. Bush addressed the letter "Dear Mr. Chairman," and urged the enigmatic North Korean leader to disclose all of his country's past and present nuclear work. "I want to emphasize that the declaration must be complete and accurate if we are to continue our progress," the letter said, according to a senior administration official.

The letter closed, "Sincerely, George W. Bush." It was signed by hand, administration officials said.

While administration officials described the letter as straightforward, its very existence underscores just how much the White House wants to ensure that one of the administration's scarce, tangible diplomatic accomplishments does not slip away.

North Korea agreed in October to dismantle all of its nuclear facilities and to disclose all of its past and present nuclear programs by the end of the year in return for about a million tons of fuel oil or its equivalent in economic aid. That agreement has come under fierce criticism from national security hawks, but many foreign policy experts point to it as a rare diplomatic success in a period that has been dominated by frustration in Iran, the Middle East and Pakistan.

The White House declined to provide copies of the letter and sought to minimize its significance by pointing out that Mr. Bush had written letters to the leaders of all the other countries in the so-called six-party group that had been working to end North Korea's nuclear program.

"In these letters, the president reiterated our commitment to the six-party talks and stressed the need for North Korea to come forward with a full and complete declaration of their nuclear programs, as called for in the September 2005 six-party agreement," said Gordon D. Johndroe, a White House spokesman.

But Mr. Bush talks to the leaders of the other countries — China, Russia, Japan and South Korea — on a regular basis. And the letters were not identical, administration officials said. "The letter to Kim Jong-il speaks of the six-party process and its historical mission, and lays out a vision of normalization and complete denuclearization," a senior administration official said, speaking on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to comment on the letters publicly. "They are all different."

Another administration official said the letter emphasized the need to resolve three sticking points: the number of warheads North Korea built, the amount of weapons-grade nuclear material it produced and the need for North Korea to disclose what nuclear material and knowledge it has received from other countries and what nuclear material and knowledge it has passed on to other countries.

The proliferation issue has taken on new importance since an Israeli strike in Syria in September, which administration and Israeli officials say was conducted against a nuclear plant near the Euphrates River that was supplied with material from North Korea. Administration officials want North Korea to disclose what help it may have given Syria, although they also acknowledge that any such assistance occurred before North Korea agreed to dismantle its nuclear reactor and disclose its nuclear programs.

Christopher R. Hill, the assistant secretary of state for East Asian and Pacific affairs, and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice indicated on Thursday that Dec. 31 was not a hard and fast deadline for the disclosure, and that it could slip a few days or even weeks.

The letter to Mr. Kim is dated Dec. 1, administration officials said. Mr. Hill delivered it to his North Korean counterpart in Beijing on Wednesday. Within hours, North Korea announced that Mr. Kim had received the letter. The White House letter is a huge reversal from the veritable cold war that has existed between Mr. Bush and Mr. Kim for most of the Bush administration. In 2002, Mr. Bush referred to Mr. Kim as a "pygmy" and compared him to a "spoiled child at a dinner table" during a meeting with Republican senators, according to news reports at the time. In his State of the Union address that same year, Mr. Bush called Mr. Kim's government "a regime arming with missiles and weapons of mass destruction, while starving its citizens." During a news conference in 2005, Mr. Bush called Mr. Kim a "tyrant" and said he maintained "concentration camps."

The letter struck a more cordial tone. "I would describe it as a presidential letter to another leader of a country," said Dana Perino, the White House press secretary.

Mr. Hill, who was recently in North Korea's capital, Pyongyang, and was in Beijing on Wednesday for meetings with some of his counterparts in the talks, has advised the North to make a full disclosure of its nuclear programs, as it agreed to in October. North Korea seemed to be on the verge of making a limited disclosure, perhaps as a negotiating ploy before Dec. 31, the tentative deadline, administration officials said.

Administration officials are walking something of a tightrope between pressing hard for the declaration and compromising with North Korean negotiators to get one and declare victory. Several senior officials said they were mindful of criticism from national security hawks in Washington, who do not want to see a deal go through because they do not believe that North Korea will abide by it.

"This is like Lucy and Charlie Brown and the football," said John R. Bolton, the former United States ambassador to the United Nations. "How many times are we going to go through this with them?"

Steven Lee Myers and David E. Sanger contributed reporting.

http://www.nytimes.com/2007/12/07/world/asia/07korea.html?_r=1&ref=washington&oref=slogin

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