



USAF COUNTERPROLIFERATION CENTER
CPC OUTREACH JOURNAL
Maxwell AFB, Alabama

Issue No. 552, 30 January 2007

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U.S. News & World Report

January 29, 2007

Taking Iran Down A Notch

The Bush administration says Tehran is getting too cocky, but the broad U.S. pushback carries big risks

By Thomas Omestad

The battlefield, so far, remains confined to Iraq. But the war, in some sense, is growing wider—and more dangerously unpredictable.

The Bush administration's military campaign in Iraq—and its broader approach to the Middle East—are morphing into a head-on struggle against Iran's growing influence. The shift portends either peril or promise. Critics fear President Bush has made another dangerous gamble that is more likely to expand the conflict than to bring Iran to heel. The clarifying focus on Iran, officials counter, offers an opportunity to block the region's leading provocateur from fomenting extremism and pursuing nuclear weapons.

Call the revised strategy "pushback," if you like. The aim is to raise the price for Iranian actions on a range of fronts—from its bank—rolling of militants in Lebanon and the Palestinian territories to its alleged supplying of weapons to anti-U.S. Shiite militias in Iraq to its defiant nuclear programs. "We are clearly upping the ante and

sending a powerful message to Iran," Nicholas Burns, the under secretary of state for political affairs, said in an interview last week. "They have to understand that there are consequences for their actions. This is a concerted strategy, no doubt about it."

Seek and destroy. One piece of that strategy, U.S. News has learned, is the creation of a military special operations task force to move against Iranian agents in Iraq. Task Force 16, as it is known, demonstrates the high priority assigned to the administration's new anti-Iranian drive. Its structure is modeled after the units set up to hunt for Saddam Hussein and kill Iraqi al Qaeda chief Abu Musab Zarqawi. The special ops effort is part of President Bush's newly announced pledge to "seek out and destroy the networks providing advanced weaponry and training to our enemies in Iraq." In recent weeks, U.S. forces have conducted at least two raids that captured Iranians said to be officers of the Revolutionary Guard Corps' al-Quds Brigades. Five Iranians are still being detained despite Iran's claim that they are diplomats with legal protection and have been "kidnapped."

A consensus within the administration sees Iran as emboldened by its surging oil revenues, the insurgent and sectarian violence bogging down U.S. forces in Iraq, the tenacity of its ally Hezbollah in surviving Israeli attacks in Lebanon, and the rising power of the radical Palestinian Hamas movement. "The threat that Iran represents is growing; it's multidimensional," Vice President Dick Cheney said on Fox News. U.S. intelligence czar John Negroponte says Iran now casts a "shadow" across the region. Adds Defense Secretary Robert Gates, "The Iranians clearly believe that we are tied down in Iraq ... that they are in a position to press us in many ways."

The U.S. get-tougher approach on Iran starts with Iraq, but it extends far more broadly. The administration has moved quietly on some fronts—perhaps to avoid alarming countries like Russia and China that oppose a more confrontational approach. But taken together, the various pieces point to an integrated strategy to counter Iran. "It's a shift in U.S. policy to rolling back Iranian influence," says Vali Nasr, an Iran expert at the Council on Foreign Relations. "The administration sees dealing with Iran as key to these other issues." Adds Michael Rubin, an American Enterprise Institute analyst who dealt with Iran issues at the Pentagon in Bush's first term, "a critical mass of information" about Iranian activities in Iraq and beyond forced the administration's hand. "It's a moment a long time in coming," he says.

U.S. officials call Iran complicit in the killing of American soldiers by providing weapons and training to Shiite militias. Military officers cite Iran as the source of a powerful form of roadside bomb: the "explosively formed projectiles" that penetrate even armored humvees. Iran denies arming militias. One U.S. hope is that taking out Iranian operatives and intercepting supplies will create leverage with Tehran—bargaining chips if the White House opts for talks with Iran about Iraq. "So we need to do things they want us to stop," explains a senior U.S. official, who says the aim is "to reset the relationship with Iran."

There are also military moves outside of Iraq. Bush has approved the dispatch of a second aircraft carrier, the USS John Stennis, and its battle group to the Persian Gulf, as well as the deployment of more Patriot antimissile batteries to allied Arab states across the gulf from Iran. That will boost U.S. firepower in the region and, officials say, reassure friends anxious over Iran's attempts to extend its influence.

Elsewhere, the administration has been supporting both the rearming of Lebanon's Army as a bulwark against Hezbollah and weapons shipments to the Palestinian Fatah movement loyal to moderate President Mahmoud Abbas, who is locked in a sporadically violent political confrontation with Iranian-backed Hamas. U.S. officials plan to fund democratic reformers in Syria opposed to President Bashar Assad, an Iranian ally. In Afghanistan, the United States has stepped up monitoring of Iranian moves to gain sway with tribal leaders.

In diplomacy, Washington is promoting what amounts to an anti-Iranian grouping of the Gulf Cooperation Council nations, Jordan, and Egypt. The group met last week in Kuwait as Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice barnstormed across the region. Rice is talking up a "new alignment" in the Mideast: pro-U.S. reformers and moderates pitted against Iranian-backed militants bent on destabilizing the former.

On the nuclear front, Washington is attempting to keep the heat on Iran for its refusal to stop nuclear fuel-making activities, as demanded in a hard-won but limited United Nations Security Council sanctions resolution adopted just before Christmas. Burns tells U.S. News that Iran is expected to proceed "full bore," accelerating uranium enrichment work at its Natanz facility within the next 30 days. American officials already assume that harsher penalties will be needed, despite opposition in the Security Council.

Washington is also attempting to build economic pressure on Iran well beyond the U.N. sanctions. The Treasury Department has slapped U.S. sanctions on Bank Sepah, an Iranian institution said to handle financing for Iran's missile trade. More broadly, officials have been traveling the world, urging European and Asian banks, as well as oil and gas companies, to cut their ties with Iran. Last week, Burns lobbied senior officials visiting Washington from four major European countries to consider suspending export credits to Iran and to come out against Russia's arms sales to Iran.

The more aggressive administration strategy could alienate some of the countries that have, with varying degrees of reluctance, supported the first, modest set of penalties on Iran. Some of the European allies want to focus on

implementing those sanctions before embracing other pressure steps. And Russia, in particular, is inclined to view the U.S. squeeze as unjustified. The administration, says a senior Russian official, "sees [the resolution] as a good pretext to raise pressure." He adds, "There is no good faith."

Dissent. Intriguingly, there are signs in Iran of growing reformist opposition to President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, whose rhetoric against the West is seen as worsening Iran's economic condition. In recent weeks, Ahmadinejad has been heckled by university students, and the normally cowed media have given the protests significant coverage.

Pro-Ahmadinejad conservatives fared badly in local elections, including in Tehran, and in the selection of the Assembly of Experts, a group that chooses Iran's supreme spiritual leader. Anger over raging inflation, unemployment, and unmet economic promises has prompted dozens of lawmakers to challenge Ahmadinejad's program in parliament. "Our strategy might be beginning to work," says a European diplomat.

Perhaps, but some experts worry that Washington may overplay its hand and strengthen Iran's hard-liners by stoking fears of American intervention. "This muscular approach will help them," argues Abbas Milani, director of Iranian studies at Stanford University. And the U.S. moves raise the real possibility that some part of Iran's opaque power structure will miscalculate or lash out against American interests, drawing U.S. military retaliation. Some skeptics believe that is the point. "It looks to me more like an attempt to provoke the Iranians to respond," says Trita Parsi, an Iran specialist and president of the National Iranian American Council. He is not alone. Some U.S. Navy officers in the Persian Gulf, U.S. News has learned, are comparing the rising tensions with Iran to the events in the Gulf of Tonkin that spurred America's fateful plunge into the Vietnam War. Their question: Could it happen again?

<http://www.usnews.com/usnews/news/articles/070121/29iran.htm>

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New York Times

January 22, 2007

Pg. 10

U.S. Envoy Upbeat About New Korea Talks

By New York Times

BEIJING, Monday, Jan. 22 — The chief American envoy to talks on North Korea's nuclear weapons program said Monday morning that he hoped a new round of six-nation negotiations would get under way shortly, and he expressed cautious optimism about prospects for reaching a settlement.

The envoy, Christopher R. Hill, an assistant secretary of state, told reporters after consultations with the Chinese in Beijing that he felt there was a new "basis for making progress." He said China, the host of the talks, may announce the start date for a new session shortly.

His relatively upbeat assessment came after he had a rare bilateral meeting with his North Korean counterpart in Berlin last week.

The last round of talks in December began with a burst of optimism, but ended in stalemate.

A South Korean newspaper, the Chosun Ilbo, reported Monday that North Korea had offered to halt the operation of the five-megawatt reactor at its main nuclear complex while allowing monitoring by the international weapons inspectors.

It said that in return, the United States agreed to provide the North with economic and energy aid and show "sincerity" in efforts to resolve a dispute over Washington's imposition of financial restrictions.

<http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9E06EFDC1F30F931A15752C0A9619C8B63>

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New York Times

January 23, 2007

Pg. 7

Iran Bars Inspectors; Cleric Criticizes President

By Nazila Fathi

TEHRAN, Jan. 22 — Iran is barring 38 nuclear agency inspectors from entering the country in retaliation for a United Nations resolution aiming to curb Iran's nuclear program, a senior Iranian lawmaker said Monday.

The announcement came only days after Grand Ayatollah Hossein Ali Montazeri, Iran's most senior dissident cleric, criticized President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's defiant stance against the West on the nuclear issue in a speech on Friday, calling it provocative. His comments were the first direct public attack on the president's nuclear policy by such a senior cleric.

The two developments suggest an increasingly open debate within Iran over how forcefully to confront the West over Iran's nuclear ambitions, even as its government continues to defend them.

Two hard-line newspapers, including one owned by the supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, have already called for the president to stay out of all nuclear matters. Ayatollah Montazeri said Iran has the right to nuclear technology but questioned the way Mr. Ahmadinejad has confronted the West.

"One has to deal with the enemy with wisdom," he said. "We should not provoke the enemy, otherwise the country will be faced with problems.

"We should get our right in a way that it does not create problems or excuses for others," he said.

"Besides, is this our only irrefutable right and we have no other rights?" he asked, referring to rising inflation since Mr. Ahmadinejad took office over a year ago.

Ayatollah Montazeri was once in line to become Iran's supreme religious leader, until he was banished and put under house arrest for his criticisms. His comments reflect the growing concern in Iran over additional economic sanctions if Iran continues to defy the international demand to halt its uranium enrichment program.

The United Nations Security Council passed a resolution on Dec. 23 and imposed sanctions banning the trade of goods related to Iran's nuclear program. It also gave Iran a deadline of two months to halt its uranium enrichment program or face tougher sanctions.

In response, Parliament passed a bill last month calling for the government to limit its cooperation with the International Atomic Energy Agency.

"The committee has decided to bar 38 inspectors from coming to Iran and we have announced the new limitation to the agency," said Alaedin Boroujerdi, the head of Parliament's committee for foreign policy and national security, the ISNA news agency reported.

The nuclear agency's inspectors visit Iran's nuclear facilities regularly. But last summer Iran said that it had decided not to let some of the inspectors return.

Still, Mr. Boroujerdi said that Iran planned to continue its cooperation with the agency, and that Iran would remain a party to the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty.

An I.A.E.A. spokeswoman, Melissa Flemming, said that the agency was confident that it could continue to monitor Iran's nuclear program.

"There are a sufficient number of inspectors designated for Iran, and the I.A.E.A. is able to perform its inspection activities in accordance with Iran's Comprehensive Safeguard Agreement," she said in an agency statement.

For his part, Mr. Ahmadinejad vowed again on Sunday that Iran would continue with its nuclear program, and brushed off the United Nations resolution as insignificant.

In Brussels on Monday, European Union foreign ministers called for all countries to enforce the sanctions against Iran. The British foreign secretary, Margaret Beckett, said a collective application of the sanctions was essential "to keep pressure on Iran to accept the offer of the international community to come back to the negotiating table."

European Union officials said they would apply the measures next month, including a ban on selling materials and technology that could be used in Iran's nuclear and missile programs and the freezing of the assets of 10 Iranian companies and individuals.

Germany's foreign minister, Frank-Walter Steinmeier, said it was time to take a tough and united stance on Iran but kept the option of diplomacy open. "There is a need to send a clear signal, and we need to show resolve," he said.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2007/01/23/world/middleeast/23iran.html>

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Washington Times

January 23, 2007

Pg. 13

Nuke Talks Unencumbered

N. Korea 'on a different track' from China missile

By Edward Lanfranco, Washington Times

BEIJING -- Christopher R. Hill, the top American envoy for eliminating North Korea's nuclear weapons program, said yesterday that the resumption of six-party talks in Beijing should not be affected by U.S. concerns over China's test of an anti-satellite missile.

"My government's position on that is pretty clear," Mr. Hill, the assistant secretary of state for East Asian and Pacific affairs, told reporters. "We've certainly conveyed [concern] to the Chinese, but I would say the six-party talks are on a different track."

Mr. Hill acknowledged having "private discussions" Sunday night with his Chinese counterpart, Vice Foreign Minister Wu Dawei, about the Jan. 11 test in which China shot down an obsolete satellite with a ballistic missile. He

referred further questions to other State Department officials and the Pentagon, saying, "I don't want to be the spokesman on it today."

The American diplomat was in Beijing to inform the Chinese of progress made in Berlin last week during three days of discussions with Kim Kye-gwan, the head of the North Korean delegation to the six-party talks. He already had briefed counterparts in Seoul and Tokyo.

Mr. Kim appears to have shown greater willingness to treat U.S. financial sanctions and North Korean nuclear disarmament as separate issues, clearing the way for a resumption of nuclear negotiations that broke down at the end of December.

Mr. Hill said no venue had been set for discussion of the financial issue, "although that will not be a problem." The State Department will have to "fine-tune the date for the talks" with the Treasury Department, but he predicted they would take place "very soon, probably at the same time or even before the six-party talks."

"We are down to a question of logistics now," he said, adding that his latest talks had been held in Berlin only because of a "coincidence of schedules."

Mr. Hill offered few details about what he called "lengthy discussions" with Mr. Wu, but said the two had agreed on the need to restart the six-party process at an early date.

"We felt we should have done more in the December round, and we want to get going on implementing the September Statement," he said. "We have some ideas for doing that and have had some good discussions all around about how to do it."

In September 2005, negotiators struck a deal in which North Korea would abandon its nuclear weapons program in exchange for security guarantees and economic aid. Subsequent six-party talks stalled after the Treasury Department moved to have a North Korean bank account frozen in Macau and were further complicated when Pyongyang detonated a nuclear device in October.

"I don't want to go into the specifics, but I do believe we have a basis for making progress in the six-party talks," Mr. Hill said. "People ask if I'm optimistic. I'd rather not make a bet on the game I'm playing in, but I think based on all the consultations we've had in the last week we have a basis for getting together as soon as possible."

<http://www.washtimes.com/world/20070122-103605-1163r.htm>

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Los Angeles Times

January 23, 2007

New Nuke Plans Are Up In The Air

A joint effort by two nuclear labs to design the new warhead has yet to advance.

By Ralph Vartabedian, Times Staff Writer

An effort to design the nation's first new nuclear bomb in two decades has run into delays, as top experts question whether a bureaucratic compromise could hamper the new weapon's effectiveness.

The Bush administration was expected to select a winning design from two proposals in late November, but officials put off a decision and began considering whether competing teams at two national laboratories could collaborate in a joint effort.

Since then, senior officials of the labs in New Mexico and California have met but not reached an agreement, according to lab officials and a senior official at the U.S. Strategic Command, the defense agency that operates the nation's strategic forces.

Over the last year, Lawrence Livermore and Los Alamos national labs have developed designs for the new bomb, known as the reliable replacement warhead. As its name implies, the weapon is supposed to be so reliable that it will not require any underground testing.

A winner was to have been chosen by defense and energy officials in the Nuclear Weapons Council, but by November the selection process had grown complicated and conflicted. The Strategic Command official said defense officials had judged both designs as meeting military requirements.

But as Energy Department officials examined the two proposals, they grew increasingly concerned about the political effect of a decision.

Both labs, Los Alamos in New Mexico and Livermore in Northern California, have always had strong backing by their states' delegations in Congress. What's more, the power shift in Congress put Bay Area Democrats in the leadership on nuclear weapons issues in January.

Livermore had submitted a conservative design that the council judged highly attractive. It was based on an 1980s-era warhead that was tested but then removed from further development. But the new warhead is intended for Navy missiles, and Livermore has not worked with the Navy.

The Los Alamos design also had proponents. But if the award went to New Mexico, Livermore would be left with little on its plate. The Energy Department might have difficulty justifying the expense of two major nuclear laboratories.

To solve those political and organizational problems, the Energy Department, through its National Nuclear Security Administration, sought to explore whether the labs could produce a joint design, Strategic Command officials said. A letter to the directors of Los Alamos and Livermore asked them to explore a collaborative approach.

No formal decision has been made, however.

"It is still in the works," said Sidney Drell, a Stanford University scientist who has long advised the Energy Department on weapons issues. "People haven't converged on anything."

Meanwhile, other outside advisors, including a scientific board known as the JASON group that consists of top academics from across the nation, are worried about a joint design. The group met earlier this month in La Jolla, but decided it did not have enough technical information to endorse a collaborative approach, according to a member of the group.

Scientists are concerned that a design that mixes and matches pieces of different weapons will undermine the confidence of national leaders in the reliability of the weapon.

"I have heard concerns in the technical community that this is risky, but others say it will work," the Strategic Command official said. "It is a mixed opinion."

<http://www.latimes.com/news/printedition/asection/la-na-nuke23jan23,1,4353266.story>

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New York Times

January 25, 2007

Pg. 1

Smuggler's Plot Highlights Fear Over Uranium

By Lawrence Scott Sheets and William J. Broad

TBILISI, Georgia, Jan. 24 — Last January, a Russian man with sunken cheeks and a wispy mustache crossed into Georgia and traveled to Tbilisi by car along a high mountain road. In two plastic bags in his leather jacket, Georgian authorities say, he carried 100 grams of uranium so refined that it could help fuel an atom bomb.

The Russian, Oleg Khinsagov, had come to meet a buyer who he believed would pay him \$1 million and deliver the material to a Muslim man from "a serious organization," the authorities say.

The uranium was a sample, just under four ounces, and the deal a test: If all went smoothly, he boasted, he would sell a far larger cache stored in his apartment back in Vladikavkaz, two to three kilograms of the rare material, four and a half to six and a half pounds, which in expert hands is enough to make a small bomb.

The buyer, it turned out, was a Georgian agent. Alerted to Mr. Khinsagov's ambitions by spies in South Ossetia, Georgian officials arrested him and confiscated his merchandise. After a secret trial, the smuggler was sentenced to eight and a half years in prison.

The case has alarmed officials because they had thought that new security precautions had tamped down the nuclear black market that developed in the 1990s, after the Soviet Union collapsed.

Until now, all but the vague outlines of the case have remained secret. But an examination of the episode, and a similar one in 2003, suggests that the region's political instability and culture of rampant corruption continue to provide a fertile breeding ground for illicit commerce in atomic materials.

Interviews with Georgian and American officials, along with a review of confidential government documents, provide a glimpse into a world of smugglers who slip across poorly policed borders and the agents who try to stop them.

The illicit trade — not just in atomic goods but also in everything from stolen cars to furs to counterfeit \$100 bills — thrives especially in Georgia, where tiny separatist regions have broken away to become lawless criminal havens. This latest uranium seizure, said the American ambassador here, John F. Tefft, "highlights how smuggling and loose border control, associated with Georgia's separatist conflicts," pose a threat "not just to Georgia but to all the international community."

What is most worrisome about the two most recent case, nuclear experts say, is the material itself: in large enough quantities, it could provide a terrorist with an instant solution to the biggest challenge in making a nuclear weapon, obtaining the fuel.

The uranium seized in both 2003 and 2006 had been enriched to nearly 90 percent U-235, according to Russian and American government analyses obtained by The New York Times. Though the quantities were too small to make a bomb, that level of purity is ideal for doing so.

Both cases appear to fit a broader profile: virtually all of the nuclear materials seized since the Soviet breakup are believed to be Russian in origin, according to American government reports.

In these two episodes, the individuals arrested testified that they had obtained the uranium through a web of Russian contacts and middlemen of various nationalities.

An American government laboratory's analysis of the 2006 material — which, among other things, disclosed traces of two rare forms of uranium, U-234 and U-236 — provides “a strong case” that it indeed came from Russia, said Thomas B. Cochran, director of the nuclear program at the Natural Resources Defense Council, a private group that monitors atomic arsenals.

However, a confidential memorandum from the Russian intelligence service, the F.S.B., to the Georgian government said a detailed analysis had been unable to pinpoint the material's origins, though it did not rule out Russian provenance. It also estimated that the uranium had been processed more than a decade ago.

Officials in Georgia, locked in a cold war with Moscow, say the cases underscore their concerns over borders, security and the fate of the breakaway regions.

Georgia's chief nuclear investigator, Archil Pavlenishvili, said that while Russia cooperated in the early stages of the 2003 investigation, in 2006 it had hardly helped at all, beyond taking a sample of the seized material for analysis. He said the Georgians had informed the Russian Embassy here in Tbilisi of Mr. Khinsagov's detention, and had offered to let diplomats speak to him. But the Russians, he said, never responded.

The Georgian interior minister, Ivane Merabishvili, said the cases illustrated the grave risk posed by nuclear trafficking, especially in an age of terrorism. The biggest danger, he said, were the people “in Russia and Georgia and everywhere else, even in America, who will sell this radioactive material” for millions of dollars.

The Russian Interior Ministry and the intelligence service did not respond to requests for comment.

Murat Dzhoyev, the foreign minister of South Ossetia, one of the separatist regions in Georgia, denied that any nuclear smuggling had taken place in his region.

“As concerns their claims that contraband, or moreover, the laughable claim that nuclear materials are going through South Ossetia, that's just funny,” he said in an interview. “I hope not a single serious person in the world takes this seriously.”

On Friday the United Nations International Atomic Energy Agency in Vienna is expected to make the first official announcement with details about the 2006 case.

The old Soviet empire had a vast network of nuclear facilities. After its breakup, as managers abandoned plants and security fell apart, the West grew alarmed as many cases of atomic smuggling came to light.

In 1994 alone, two seizures involved more than five kilos — 11 pounds — of highly enriched uranium. The I.A.E.A. listed more than a dozen cases of illicit trade in highly enriched uranium, along with dozens of seizures of highly radioactive material.

Since 2000, however, the amounts and purity of the seized material has declined as former Soviet republics set up new security precautions, often financed by the United States.

For instance, Washington provided thousands of hand-held devices meant to detect radiation, and planned to spend a total of \$570 million to install small and large radiation detectors, according to recent government reports. In short, the threat seemed to recede.

“People said, ‘Hey, the situation's improved,’ ” said William C. Potter, a leading authority on nuclear smuggling at the Monterey Institute of International Studies in California. The seizures in Georgia, he said, suggest something else: that the trade may simply “have gone under the radar.”

The smuggler in the first case, an Armenian named Garik Dadayan, was arrested on June 26, 2003, at Sadakhlo, a muddy village where Georgia meets Armenia and Azerbaijan. With Armenia and Azerbaijan at war over territory, the village had become neutral ground for the trading of tea and cognac, illicit caviar, cheap light bulbs and smuggled gasoline.

When apprehended, Mr. Dadayan, who described himself simply as a businessman, was carrying a tea box that held 170 grams, about seven ounces, of highly enriched uranium. According to the Georgian officials, he said the uranium had come from Novosibirsk, in Siberia, the site of a major Russian nuclear complex that processes vast quantities of highly enriched uranium.

Mr. Pavlenishvili, the Georgian investigator, said the Russian intelligence agency confirmed that before his trip into Georgia, Mr. Dadayan had twice traveled by railroad from Moscow to Novosibirsk.

The smuggler told the authorities that he intended to sell the material to a Turkish middleman named Teimur Sadik; its ultimate destination, he said Mr. Sadik had told him, was “a Muslim man.”

Mr. Dadayan was handed over to the Armenian government, tried and sentenced to two and a half years in prison.

Mr. Sadik, Georgian authorities say, is now in custody of the Turkish secret services.

Since that episode, the United States has spent millions of dollars to help the Georgians strengthen nuclear security, especially along the borders.

Two years later, Georgian authorities learned that highly enriched uranium was again being offered for sale, this time in South Ossetia, a rugged and beautiful land no bigger than Long Island, with few border controls on either the Russian or Georgian side. People and contraband move freely through its fields and along its mountain roads. The United States says it has discovered counterfeit \$100 bills traceable to South Ossetia circulating in at least four American cities.

The man trying to sell the uranium, Georgian officials say, was Oleg Khinsagov, a shabbily dressed 50-year-old trader who specialized in fish and sausages.

Eventually he came into contact with four Georgians who were already under government surveillance. The four men went to North Ossetia, a neighboring region within Russia, and arranged to smuggle the uranium into Georgia. It was at that point that the Georgian authorities set their trap.

They arranged for a Georgian operative who speaks fluent Turkish to meet with the middlemen and tell them he represented a Muslim man from "a serious organization." Mr. Khinsagov and several of his cohort entered Georgia in late January 2006, and on Feb. 1 they were arrested in a two-room apartment on the eighth floor of a crumbling Soviet-style building in a lower-class district of Tbilisi.

"We got that 100 grams and put it into a box and were very afraid," said Mr. Merabishvili, the interior minister.

Where the smuggler got the uranium and whether he actually had more remains unclear.

The Georgians called for help from American diplomats, who sent in experts from the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the Department of Energy, American officials say. Mr. Merabishvili said the Americans shocked them by taking the uranium and simply putting it "in their pocket." Uranium in that form emits little radiation and presents little or no danger to its handlers.

When it was analyzed at the Energy Department's laboratory in the Pacific Northwest, it was found to have a U-235 purity of 89.451 percent, "suitable for certain types of research reactors, as a source material for medical isotope production, and for military purposes including nuclear weapons."

Lawrence Scott Sheets reported from Tbilisi, and William J. Broad from New York.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2007/01/25/world/europe/25nuke.html?n=Top%2fReference%2fTimes%20Topics%2fPeople%2fB%2fBroad%2c%20William%20J%2e>

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Philadelphia Inquirer

January 25, 2007

Iran Says It Now Has Russian Missiles

Moscow had previously said it would sell 29 mobile surface-to-air missiles to Tehran.

By Nasser Karimi, Associated Press

TEHRAN - Iranian officials said yesterday that they had taken delivery of advanced Russian air-defense missile systems - weapons intended, according to a Russian news agency, to defend Iran's major nuclear facilities.

Announcement of the delivery of the Tor-M1 mobile missile launchers came as Iran began three days of military maneuvers, its first since the U.N. Security Council approved sanctions against the country Dec. 23.

"We have had constructive defense transactions with Russia, and we purchased Tor-M1 missiles that were recently delivered to us," the official Web site of Iranian state television quoted Defense Minister Mostafa Mohammad Najjar as saying.

Najjar did not say how many missiles had been delivered or when they arrived. Previously, Russia had said it would supply 29 of the mobile surface-to-air missile systems to Iran under a \$700 million contract signed in December 2005, Russian media have reported.

According to Russia's ITAR-Tass news agency, the weapons were expected to be used to protect major government and military installations such the nuclear facilities at Isfahan, Bushehr and Tehran and in eastern Iran.

ITAR-Tass on Tuesday quoted Sergei Chemezov, the head of the country's state-run weapons exporter, as saying that the Tor-M1 missiles were delivered before the end of December.

It is not clear whether the sale was completed before the Security Council vote. Russian officials repeatedly have said the sale would not violate international obligations.

The United States called last year for a halt to international arms exports to Iran and for an end to nuclear cooperation with Iran, to pressure it to stop uranium enrichment. Israel also has criticized arms deals with Iran.

Iran denies U.S. accusations that it is using its nuclear-power program as a cover to develop atomic weapons. On Monday, Iran conducted missile tests and said it had barred 38 U.N. nuclear inspectors from entering the country.

<http://www.philly.com/mld/philly/news/nation/16538778.htm>

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Washington Times
January 26, 2007
Pg. 3

Pentagon Eyes Missile Defenses In Eastern Europe

By Bill Gertz, Washington Times

The Pentagon is moving rapidly to build new missile defenses in Poland and the Czech Republic to counter the threat posed by Iranian long-range missiles, the head of the Missile Defense Agency said yesterday.

"The immediate threat in terms of emerging threats that we see is obviously the Iranians, and they're putting a lot of energy into that [long-range missile] program," said Air Force Lt. Gen. Henry "Trey" Obering, the agency's director. The three-star general said plans call for deploying 10 long-range anti-missile interceptors in Poland along with a tracking radar in the nearby Czech Republic by 2011 or 2012.

"We want to have this in place by the 2011, 2012 time frame because we think the Iranians, for example, shortly thereafter will be able to have a long-range capability," he said.

The Iranian long-range missile threat is emerging, and as a result "it's prudent for us to be thinking about that now and to begin to build toward that so we're in a position that we can do something about it in that time frame," Gen. Obering said.

The Eastern European missile defense site will cost about \$3.5 billion and is part of a global integrated missile defense designed to counter "rogue" nations' missiles, including those from Iran and North Korea, he said.

The Polish interceptor base will be the third global long-range missile interceptor base and will be similar to the current base at Fort Greeley, Alaska, where 14 interceptors are deployed. A second U.S. missile defense base at California's Vandenberg Air Force Base now has two interceptors. Both sites will have 24 or 25 by the end of the year.

Gen. Obering sought to calm Russian fears that the European-based interceptors will be capable of shooting down Russian long-range missiles. He said the interceptors pose no threat to Russian intercontinental ballistic missiles because they cannot intercept either the large numbers of Russian ICBMs, nor will they be capable of chasing them successfully from the Polish location.

Russia is opposing the Polish and Czech sites, and Moscow officials have threatened to take unspecified action to counter the interceptors.

Iran has no long-range missiles, but its Shahab-3 medium-range missiles, with ranges of 620 miles, are thought capable of reaching some parts of Europe.

Iran is working on Shahab-4, Shahab-5 and Shahab-6 missiles that have ranges from 1,240 miles to 4,154 miles, which also could be used as nonmilitary space launchers.

"We see what's happening right now in Iran, we know that they have a very aggressive test program that they have demonstrated in public, and they have avowed themselves that they are going to obtain a space launch capability," Gen. Obering said.

The magazine Aviation Week & Space Technology reported on its Web site last night that Iran was poised to take that very step: launching a satellite into space.

A recently assembled 30-ton ballistic missile turned space launcher "will liftoff soon" with an Iranian satellite, the magazine quoted Alaoddin Boroujerdi, chairman of the Iranian parliament's National Security and Foreign Policy Commission, as saying during a speech to religious students and clerics in Qom.

Gen. Obering said that once Iran succeeds in building a space launch vehicle, "you have demonstrated all the basic building blocks for a long-range ICBM capability, in terms of staging, controlling a vehicle through the staging and burns."

"All indications are they are working to be able to achieve that," he said.

On China's recent anti-satellite weapons test, Gen. Obering said it does not pose an immediate threat to the space-based elements of the U.S. missile defense system. But in the long term it could pose a threat, he said.

<http://www.washtimes.com/national/20070126-121342-7034r.htm>

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New York Times
January 27, 2007

U.N. Atomic Chief Cites Iran Enrichment Plan

By Mark Landler and David E. Sanger

DAVOS, Switzerland, Jan. 26 — The head of the United Nations nuclear inspection agency said Friday that Iranian officials had told him that they planned to begin installing equipment next month in an industrial-scale plant to enrich uranium.

Such a move would intensify Iran's confrontation with the Security Council, which has demanded a full suspension of the production of nuclear material, and has authorized mild sanctions.

The announcement by the official, Mohamed ElBaradei, director general of the International Atomic Energy Agency, was coupled with a plea to both Tehran and Western nations for all sides to take a "timeout" to head off a larger confrontation.

"Enough flexing muscles, enough calling names," Dr. ElBaradei said in a conversation with reporters here at the World Economic Forum conference. "It's time to engage."

He proposed a suspension of the sanctions against Iran, while the Iranians simultaneously suspend enrichment of uranium. That process can produce fuel for nuclear weapons, though the Iranians deny that is their goal.

Nuclear experts and American officials say Iran's announcement may be a bluff. Tehran has run into significant difficulties in assembling centrifuges to enrich uranium. A year ago it promised to have 3,000 centrifuges running by now; instead, it is just beginning to install that equipment, at Natanz.

But Dr. ElBaradei seemed clearly concerned that once enrichment began, it would be difficult to halt, and that Iranian officials would be loath to dismantle any plant once construction had begun.

He is also concerned that such a plant could become a military target for the United States or Israel. Such a strike would be "absolutely bonkers," he said, noting that it would not deprive Iran of the technological expertise to pursue any nuclear ambitions.

"It would only strengthen the hand of hard-liners," he said. "They would simply go underground."

Dr. ElBaradei said he worried that further sanctions against Iran, which the United Nations has threatened to impose next month, "is only going to lead to an escalation."

Given what inspectors know about Iran's current capabilities, Dr. ElBaradei said, the Iranians are three to eight years away from being able to manufacture a nuclear device. That is roughly in line with estimates made by American intelligence officials.

The United States said it would stick to its insistence that Iran stop enrichment before negotiations begin. The State Department spokesman, Sean McCormack, said the reports that Iran planned to install 3,000 centrifuges showed its continued defiance.

"We'll see what Dr. ElBaradei has to say," Mr. McCormack said Friday at a briefing in Washington. "More importantly, we'll see what the Iranians do; they continue in provocative behavior."

He said the preliminary sanctions, which ban the import and export of material used in uranium enrichment, reprocessing and ballistic missiles, appeared to be having some effect in Iran.

There is evidence of an internal split in Tehran. Two hard-line newspapers that reflect the views of Iran's supreme religious leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, recently demanded that President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad stay away from nuclear issues because his comments were deepening Iran's isolation.

Iran's relations with the international nuclear monitoring agency have deteriorated since the sanctions were approved. Iran has demanded the agency remove the official who oversees inspections of Iranian facilities, and it has barred more than 30 inspectors, all from countries that supported sanctions.

It is not clear how much influence Dr. ElBaradei can exercise, now that the confrontation has moved to the Security Council. But he appears to believe there is support for his proposal.

A diplomat at the agency, speaking on condition of anonymity, said he had found such support in Germany and France. Those nations, along with Britain, have led the talks with Iran over its nuclear program.

Dr. ElBaradei has also consulted with Russia, which favors a more conciliatory approach. But he did not discuss the idea with American officials before making it public here, the diplomat said.

The United States has said that if Iran suspended uranium enrichment, Washington would join the Europeans in direct talks with Tehran, and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice has indicated that she would take part.

Dr. ElBaradei also suggested the United States show more flexibility in its standoff with North Korea, which detonated a crude nuclear device in October. The North Koreans have demanded that the United States drop financial sanctions as a condition for reviving talks over their nuclear program.

American and North Korean officials met this month in Berlin, a meeting meant to lay the groundwork for a revival of multiparty talks in Beijing. State Department officials say they are hopeful of some kind of deal, perhaps involving a temporary freeze on plutonium production in the North.

Mark Landler reported from Davos, and David E. Sanger from Washington.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2007/01/27/world/middleeast/27iran.html>

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Washington Times
January 27, 2007
Pg. 7

Georgia

Russia Raps Jailing In Uranium Case

MOSCOW -- Georgia's imprisonment of a Russian citizen for attempting to sell 3.5 ounces of weapons-grade uranium was a "provocation," Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov charged yesterday.

"We would have preferred for this issue to be resolved by experts," Mr. Lavrov told the RIA Novosti news agency. "Despite what Georgia says, experts from our FSB and Rosatom met this man, who could say nothing coherent." FSB, the successor to the KGB, is Russia's security service, and Rosatom refers to Russia's nuclear energy agency. Georgia's security services arrested Oleg Khintsagov as he tried to sell the enriched uranium in the sting operation last year, Georgia officials said earlier this week.

Mr. Khintsagov, who comes from the province of North Ossetia in southern Russia, was sentenced to eight years prison in June and three Georgian nationals were also arrested in the operation, he added.

<http://www.washtimes.com/world/20070126-113918-8422r.htm>

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Washington Post
January 27, 2007
Pg. 19

What North Korea Really Wants

By Robert Carlin and John W. Lewis

Those who think that dealing with North Korea is impossible are wrong. Unfortunately, those who think that it is, in fact, possible to deal with North Korea often are not much closer to the truth. The basic problem is that people of both views simply haven't figured out what it is that the North really wants.

We tend to confuse North Korea's short-term tactical goals with its broader strategic focus. We draw up list after list of things we think might appeal to Pyongyang on the assumption that these will constitute a "leveraged buyout," finally achieving what we want: the total, irreversible denuclearization of North Korea.

But this list of "carrots" (energy, food, the lifting of sanctions) does not include what the North thinks it must have. It can, of course, help keep the process on track and moving ahead, and it could help cement a final deal and hold it together through the inevitable political storms. But these things are not the ends that North Korea seeks.

North Korea feeds our misperceptions by bargaining so hard over details and raising its initial demands so high. For our part, we tend to be taken in by Western journalists' repetition of stock phrases about it being "one of the poorest nations," "one of the most isolated," "living on handouts." Accurate or not, these factors are irrelevant to Pyongyang's strategic calculations.

Those who realize that North Korea does not have visions of grand rewards sometimes move the focus to political steps that many see as "key" to a solution. These include replacing the armistice with a peace treaty, giving the North security guarantees, discussing plans for an exchange of diplomats. But these, like the economic carrots, are only shimmering, imperfect reflections of what Pyongyang is after.

What is it, then, that North Korea wants? Above all, it wants, and has pursued steadily since 1991, a long-term, strategic relationship with the United States. This has nothing to do with ideology or political philosophy. It is a cold, hard calculation based on history and the realities of geopolitics as perceived in Pyongyang. The North Koreans believe in their gut that they must buffer the heavy influence their neighbors already have, or could soon gain, over their small, weak country.

This is hard for Americans to understand, having read or heard nothing from North Korea except its propaganda, which for years seems to have called for weakening, not maintaining, the U.S. presence on the Korean Peninsula. But in fact an American departure is the last thing the North wants. Because of their pride and fear of appearing weak, however, explicitly requesting that the United States stay is one of the most difficult things for the North Koreans to do.

If the United States has leverage, it is not in its ability to supply fuel oil or grain or paper promises of nonhostility. The leverage rests in Washington's ability to convince Pyongyang of its commitment to coexist with the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, accept its system and leadership, and make room for the DPRK in an American vision of the future of Northeast Asia. Quite simply, the North Koreans believe they could be useful to the United States in a longer, larger balance-of-power game against China and Japan. The Chinese know this and say so in private.

The fundamental problem for North Korea is that the six-party talks in which it has been engaged -- and which may reconvene soon -- are a microcosm of the strategic world it most fears. Three strategic foes -- China, Japan and Russia -- sit in judgment, apply pressure and (to Pyongyang's mind) insist on the North's permanent weakness. Denuclearization, if still achievable, can come only when North Korea sees its strategic problem solved, and that, in its view, can happen only when relations with the United States improve. For Pyongyang, that is the essence of the joint statement out of the six-party talks on Sept. 19, 2005, which included this sentence: "The DPRK and the United States undertook to respect each other's sovereignty, exist peacefully together, and take steps to normalize their relations subject to their respective bilateral policies."

And that is why the North so doggedly seeks bilateral talks with Washington. It desires not "drive-by" encounters, not a meeting here and there, but serious, sustained talks in which ideas can be explored and solutions, at last, patiently developed.

Robert Carlin, a former State Department analyst, participated in most of the U.S.-North Korea negotiations between 1993 and 2000. John Lewis, professor emeritus at Stanford University, directs projects on Asia at the university's Center for International Security and Cooperation. Both have visited North Korea many times, most recently in November.

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/01/26/AR2007012601363.html>

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Washington Times

January 30, 2007

Pg. 1

How The 'Axis' Seeks The Killer Missile

Pentagon cites Pyongyang test, Tehran's search for ICBM to hit U.S.

By Bill Gertz, Washington Times

North Korea and Iran are cooperating in developing long-range missiles, the deputy director of the Pentagon's Missile Defense Agency said yesterday.

Army Brig. Gen. Patrick O'Reilly said during a speech that North Korea test fired a long-range Taepodong missile in July, and Iran is working on a space launcher that would help develop an intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) that could hit the U.S.

"Not only North Korea, but Iran has shown some significant developments in their [own] missile systems," Gen. O'Reilly said in a speech to the George C. Marshall Institute.

"They are working in concert with the North Koreans," he said. "They have made a claim that they are working towards developing a space launch capability, which also would give them an ICBM capability."

The Pentagon believes Iran has a "new intermediate-range ballistic missile or space launch vehicle [SLV] in development," a Missile Defense Agency briefing slide stated.

The Iranians are "likely to develop an ICBM/SLV [and] could have an ICBM capable of reaching the U.S. before 2015," according to the briefing chart.

One of the new missiles would be solid-fueled, making it capable of being launched rapidly, and have a range of 1,240 miles, enough to hit targets throughout Europe from Iran.

The speech marked the first time the Pentagon publicly disclosed the missile cooperation between Pyongyang and Tehran.

The North Koreans test fired a Taepodong-2 on July 4 but the missile failed 40 seconds after launch, Gen. O'Reilly said. The two-stage version has a range of 6,200 miles and the three-stage version can travel 9,300 miles.

"But the indications are clear that they are continuing to strive to expand their ballistic missile capability," he said. The U.S. missile defense system was made operational before the North Korean tests and the forces involved "performed very well," Gen. O'Reilly said. Another briefing chart used during the speech stated that if the Taepodong-2 had threatened the United States, "we are confident the ballistic missile defense system would have operated as designed."

Another briefing chart revealed for the first time that North Korea is developing a new intermediate-range missile with a range of about 2,000 miles that was described as "a qualitative improvement in performance" from earlier missile systems. North Korea's July tests -- seven missiles were fired -- included two 806-mile range Nodong missiles, he said.

Gen. O'Reilly said the U.S. missile defense system, which includes a network of long-, medium- and short-range interceptors and sensors, is designed to counter missiles from "rogue states" targeted at the U.S., its allies and forces overseas.

The system can defend against short-range Iranian missile attacks against Saudi Arabia and North Korean strikes on Japan, as well as an Iranian missile strike on London or North Korean missile attacks on the United States, an MDA briefing slide stated.

North Korea uses its missiles as "geopolitical leverage" over the United States and its allies and also to raise money by selling them abroad, Gen. O'Reilly said. Iran is building missiles for "both asymmetric threats and conventional threats" to U.S. and allied forces, he noted.

Gen. O'Reilly also stated that Hezbollah's short-range rockets and missiles, used in last year's fighting in Lebanon, were a threat to Israeli forces and that more than 4,500 were fired.

"They had small ball bearings, about 300, in their warhead, and they were very effective at shutting down a lot of the maneuvering capability of the Israeli army and also shutting down over 70 percent of the commerce in northern Israel during that period of time," he said. "And that was significant from both non-state actors and other countries that have committed to using rockets as terror weapons."

Asked whether the Pentagon can counter China's anti-satellite weapon, which was tested recently, Gen. O'Reilly said countering space weapons currently is not a mission for the Missile Defense Agency but could be done.

"We have tremendous kinematic capability with our missiles; we have the sensors and the battle management, so that work would be straightforward if we were ... given that guidance and mandate to do," he said.

The Pentagon also is developing a "multiple kill vehicle" that will greatly boost the power of current interceptors by adding more non-explosive warheads that can hit 10 or more enemy warheads from a single booster, he said.

The current missile interceptors deployed at Fort Greely in Alaska and Vandenberg Air Force Base in California can protect the United States from North Korean missiles and afford "partial protection" from Middle Eastern missiles. Upgraded defenses will provide full defense from both North Korean and Middle Eastern missiles, Gen. O'Reilly said.

By 2011, the Pentagon plans to have up to 44 interceptors deployed in the United States and the first 10 interceptors in Europe; a large radar in Europe; 18 Aegis missile defense ships; 48 ground-based THAAD interceptors; two new surveillance and tracking satellites; and a battle management and integrated global fire system for the Middle East and Southwest Asian missile threats.

<http://www.washtimes.com/national/20070130-122437-6559r.htm>

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Washington Post

January 30, 2007

Pg. 4

Nuclear Agency: Air Defenses Impractical

By Steven Mufson, Washington Post Staff Writer

Federal regulators plunged into an energy and national security controversy yesterday by ruling that the nation's 103 nuclear power plants do not need to protect themselves from potential attacks by terrorists using airplanes.

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission's 5-to-0 ruling was in response to a 2004 petition by the Committee to Bridge the Gap, a Los Angeles nonprofit group, that said nuclear plants should build shields made of steel I-beams and cabling or take other steps to prevent a release of radiation in case of an air attack. Eight state attorneys general backed the petition.

The group cited the 9/11 Commission, which said in its report that the al-Qaeda plot to hit the World Trade Center towers and the Pentagon in 2001 had originally contemplated hijacking 10 planes and striking one or more nuclear power plants.

"Nuclear power plants are pre-emplaced nuclear weapons near major cities," said Daniel Hirsch, president of the Committee to Bridge the Gap. "They can't blow up like a nuclear bomb, but they can release a thousand times the radiation of the Hiroshima bomb. They are the most attractive target for a terrorist to hit in our country."

But NRC Chairman Dale Klein said, "Nuclear power plants are inherently robust structures that our studies show provide adequate protection in a hypothetical attack by an airplane."

The commission might impose stricter requirements on new plants, which some nuclear foes hope will add costs or delay licenses for industry expansion.

For now, however, the NRC said that guarding against airborne attacks was the job of the military and other agencies. It added that nuclear plant operators were already required to be prepared to respond to fires or explosions, whatever the cause. The commission said that it was toughening requirements for reactor operators to repel "multiple, coordinated groups of attackers, suicide attacks and cyber threats."

Some members of Congress said that the NRC's steps fell short of what was needed.

"I am disappointed," said Rep. Edward J. Markey (D-Mass.). The NRC decision "reflects an inadequate, industry-influenced approach that sacrifices security in favor of corporate profits."

On Friday, Sen. Barbara Boxer (D-Calif.), who chairs the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee, had written to the agency that "the communities that surround existing plants need to be confident that the NRC, as the regulator charged with nuclear safety, did all it could to ensure that plants defend against current security threats" -- including, she added, "large attacking forces and commercial aircraft."

Yesterday, Boxer said that her "initial reaction" was that the NRC "did not follow the direction of Congress to ensure that our nuclear power plants are protected from air- or land-based terrorist threats."

The 9/11 Commission called nuclear plants "vital facilities" and pointed to evidence that the plants had attracted al-Qaeda's attention. The commission's report said that senior al-Qaeda planner Khalid Sheik Mohammed told interrogators after his capture that nuclear plants were on his original target list. And the commission said that during a meeting in Spain in July 2001, Mohamed Atta, thought to be the lead hijacker on Sept. 11, had considered targeting a nuclear facility he had seen during familiarization flights near New York -- a target he and his conspirators referred to as "electrical engineering." In the end, Atta did not have a chance to discuss the idea with senior al-Qaeda leaders.

Timothy J. Roemer, a member of the 9/11 Commission, said that "there should be agencies in our government that make this as high a priority as al-Qaeda makes it." He also said that as the nuclear industry expands, "they should also shoulder some of the burden of our environment and our defense."

The question of whether nuclear facilities should be required to protect themselves against air attacks is frequently mentioned as a cost issue by electric power companies interested in building nuclear plants. There has not been a new order placed for a nuclear reactor in the United States since the 1979 Three Mile Island accident in Pennsylvania. Tax incentives in the Energy Policy Act of 2005 have sparked preliminary planning on about 19 nuclear power projects, and several companies are expected to seek NRC approval later this year.

Many of the industry's critics have seized on national security as a reason to block new plants or to raise the costs of construction. Hirsch said, however, that building an I-beam and cabling shield would add only about 1 percent to the cost of a plant.

"Where are the resources best put to use to protect our population?" said Steven Kerekes, a spokesman for the Nuclear Energy Institute. "There will be far more value in putting those resources toward other parts of the infrastructure that aren't nearly as well protected as nuclear power plants." He cited a 2002 computer modeling study that said a jetliner crash at a nuclear site would not lead to a radiation leak.

The Supreme Court this month decided not to hear an appeal of a 9th Circuit Court of Appeals ruling that said the NRC had violated the National Environmental Policy Act when it failed to include a terrorist attack in an environmental impact report for an application to create dry-cask storage at the Diablo Canyon Power Plant near San Luis Obispo, Calif. Pacific Gas and Electric, which owns Diablo Canyon, was granted the license, but the NRC must now reconsider the application.

One NRC commissioner, Gregory B. Jaczko, dissented on the Diablo Canyon license. "I strongly believe . . . that any new nuclear power plants built in this country should be designed to withstand commercial aircraft crashes." Baltimore-based Constellation Energy, which operates five nuclear units at three locations, is weighing a new plant. It has chosen a design by Areva that is supposed to protect against airplane crashes by doubling the thickness of the containment vessel and redesigning other facilities. One such plant is under construction in Finland; another is planned for France, said Areva spokesman Penny Phelps. A Constellation spokesman said the plant was appealing because it was designed for "a spectrum of events."

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/01/29/AR2007012900572.html>

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New York Times
January 30, 2007

To Ban The Bomb, Sign The Peace

By Paul B. Stares

Washington -- Of all the crises facing the new United Nations secretary general, Ban Ki-moon, the fraying nuclear nonproliferation system is arguably the most consequential. Mohamed ElBaradei, head of the International Atomic Energy Agency, has warned of 30 "virtual new weapons states" on the horizon. Obviously, the more countries that possess the bomb, the higher the risk of a nuclear accident, the theft of a weapon, sales of technology and hardware, and a serious miscalculation leading to nuclear war.

So where should Mr. Ban start? With North Korea having declared after its test last October that it now possesses a nuclear deterrent, the understandable temptation will be to focus on Iran. This would be a mistake. North Korea is

still some way off from having a reliable nuclear weapon, and to accept its having this capacity as a *fait accompli* would not only play into its game plan but also convince Iran and other countries that the international community lacks the will to prevent them from developing the bomb. A new approach is required.

The logical place to look is to examine the lessons of “nuclear reversal” — that is, what has made states in the past give up the nuclear option. At first glance, the historical record doesn’t look encouraging: South Africa is the only country that has developed nuclear weapons and then destroyed them. Yet other nations have abandoned advanced research programs — including Australia, Argentina, Brazil, South Korea, Sweden and Taiwan — or, like Belarus, Kazakhstan and Ukraine, given up the nuclear arsenals they inherited from the Soviet Union. One big reason for these countries’ decisions, not surprisingly, was the efforts of major powers to reassure them about their long-term security, so that nuclear weapons offered no appreciable benefit.

How would this approach be applied to North Korea? The answer is not unilateral assurances from the United States. American officials have vowed many times that they harbor no hostile intent; repeating that mantra will not make it any more credible to Pyongyang. Similar guarantees from all five of the permanent members of the Security Council, however, could be more persuasive. Enter Mr. Ban.

The diplomatic vehicle for such security assurances would be a United Nations-sponsored initiative to formally end the Korean War and dismantle the present armistice arrangements. As part of a peace treaty, the principal signatories — the United States, China and the two Koreas — would commit themselves to establishing normal diplomatic relations, recognizing the territorial integrity of both Koreas and, most important, ensuring a nuclear-free peninsula. To sweeten the deal, the Security Council’s permanent five would extend security guarantees, similar to those given Ukraine, to both Koreas. These would remain in effect as long as each side fulfilled its nonproliferation commitment. If one or the other reneged, all bets would be off.

Complementary agreements involving conventional arms control, economic assistance, access to international financial institutions and humanitarian aid could also be discussed, but not as prerequisites for replacing the Korean armistice with a permanent peace settlement.

The United States has already signaled its willingness to sign a peace treaty — but only after North Korea verifiably dismantled its nuclear weapons. Reversing the order, however, with upfront but still conditional security guarantees, would provide North Korea with immediate incentives to take the first step.

For Mr. Ban, such an agreement would be not only a gift to his native Korea but a much-needed boost to his organization’s stature. Above all else, he might just save the nonproliferation system by using the same approach elsewhere, not least with Iran.

Paul B. Stares is vice president for conflict analysis and prevention at the United States Institute of Peace.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2007/01/30/opinion/30stares.html? r=1&oref=slogin>

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REUTERS

Canada

China sets date for North Korea nuclear talks

Tue Jan 30, 2007 6:21 AM EST

By Chris Buckley

BEIJING (Reuters) - The United States demanded on Tuesday that North Korea take practical steps to nuclear disarmament at six-country negotiations, which China announced would resume on February 8.

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Jiang Yu said the new talks needed to forge initial steps to implement a September 2005 joint statement that committed the communist state to dismantling its nuclear arms in return for economic and security assurances.

"We hope that all sides will continue to display a positive attitude, strengthen dialogue, enhance trust and as early as possible fully implement the joint statement and realize the goal of denuclearising the Korean peninsula," Jiang told reporters.

After China's announcement, the United States' ambassador to South Korea, Alexander Vershbow, said progress would depend on North Korea moving to dismantle its nuclear arsenal.

"We have made clear to North Korea that we seek a full implementation by all parties of the September 19, 2005, joint statement," Vershbow told a forum in Seoul.

"North Korea has to live up to its commitments in the joint statement and take concrete steps to denuclearise."

In return, he said, the impoverished, reclusive state would receive energy and economic aid and normalized diplomatic ties.

The six-party talks group the two Koreas, the United States, Japan, Russia and host China. The last round, which was held in December -- two months after Pyongyang raised the stakes by holding a nuclear test -- yielded no breakthrough.

After China's announcement, a Japanese official also suggested North Korea needed to offer concessions this time. "Our government will closely coordinate with countries concerned, including the United States and China, and strongly urge North Korea to take concrete action toward abandoning its nuclear programs," Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary Seiji Suzuki told reporters in Tokyo.

The announcement of a new round followed talks in Berlin between U.S. negotiator Christopher Hill and his North Korean counterpart, Kim Kye-gwan, raising hopes for progress this time.

Hill told Reuters on Monday that North Korea's commitment to give up its nuclear weapons was "strong" and Washington would not allow other issues, including a dispute over U.N. Development Programme money, to undercut a nuclear deal.

Hill declined to reveal details of what might emerge from the Beijing talks but said "we have the basis of a good six-party meeting." He leaves this weekend for talks in Seoul and Tokyo.

The last session of six-party talks bogged down over Pyongyang's complaints about a U.S. financial crackdown that led to Macau freezing \$24 million in North Korean accounts and many other banks curtailing business with the North.

The U.S. Treasury said in September 2005 that Macau's Banco Delta Asia had helped Pyongyang to launder earnings from counterfeit U.S. dollars and illicit drugs.

On Tuesday, U.S. Deputy Assistant Treasury Secretary Daniel Glaser resumed talks with North Korean officials in Beijing about defusing the financial dispute. The previous financial talks were in December.

Russian negotiator Alexander Losyukov told RIA Novosti news agency that he would go to Beijing with "cautious optimism."

"The agreement to hold a new round shows some of the participants have changed their position in a positive way," he said.

(Additional reporting by Jon Herskovitz in Seoul, Teruaki Ueno in Tokyo, Maria Golovnina in Moscow)

http://ca.today.reuters.com/news/newsArticle.aspx?type=topNews&storyID=2007-01-30T112110Z_01_BJA000113_RTRIDST_0_NEWS-KOREA-NORTH-TALKS-COL.XML

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