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Washington Post
February 6, 2007
Pg. 12

N. Korea Aims To Improve On Clinton-Era Nuclear Deal

By Glenn Kessler, Washington Post Staff Writer

North Korea has set tough terms for a freeze of one of its nuclear facilities, demanding that the United States exceed commitments made under a Clinton-era deal that the Bush administration previously derided as inadequate.

North Korea's top nuclear negotiator, Kim Gye Gwan, and other officials outlined Pyongyang's position in meetings last week with two American nuclear experts, saying they would be presented when six-nation disarmament talks resume in Beijing on Thursday. In exchange for a freeze of the Yongbyon facility and a return of international inspectors, Pyongyang wants a substantial supply of heavy fuel oil, an end to a Treasury Department action that froze North Korean accounts at a Macau bank, an international commitment to build civilian nuclear reactors in North Korea and, most important, normalization of relations with Washington.

David Albright, president of the Institute for Science and International Security in Washington and one of the experts, said yesterday that the North Koreans appeared interested in a solution that would calm international concerns about Pyongyang's nuclear programs, provided it was tied to an improving relationship with the United States. But North Korea appeared initially willing to take only partial or temporary steps to keep the option of restarting its programs if the process fell apart. North Korea would also retain its stockpile of plutonium, which could fuel as many as 10 nuclear weapons.

"They are willing to take the first step," Albright said. "This may be the only step."

U.S. and Asian officials have said that in recent weeks North Korea has indicated a renewed interest in striking at least an initial agreement. But the North Korean demands are likely to complicate the diplomacy this week because the Bush administration does not want any agreement it strikes to compare unfavorably with that of the Clinton era. State Department spokesman Sean McCormack, saying he did not want to discuss details of the U.S. position, said: "We believe we need to get on with the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. Ultimately, that means the dismantlement of the North Korean nuclear weapons programs."

The North Koreans are demanding more than they received under the Clinton deal, known as the Agreed Framework, because they want compensation for the fact that, in their view, the Bush administration terminated it without cause in 2002, Albright said.

Under the 1994 Agreed Framework -- in which North Korea pledged to freeze and "eventually dismantle" its plutonium-producing nuclear facilities -- the United States was to provide 500,000 tons of heavy fuel oil every year while a consortium, largely funded by Japan and South Korea, built light-water reactors. At the time, North Korea was believed to have only a small supply of plutonium, for perhaps one or two weapons.

In 2002, the Bush administration accused North Korea of secretly building a highly enriched uranium facility in violation of the accord and terminated the deliveries of fuel oil. Pyongyang responded by evicting international inspectors and restarting the Yongbyon facility, allowing it to rapidly build up a stockpile of plutonium. It detonated its first nuclear device in October, adding to the international urgency in reaching a settlement.

U.S. intelligence analysts have closely tracked suspect purchases by North Korea that they believed were intended for use in a uranium facility, but the United States has never pinpointed its location. North Korea has adamantly denied it has a uranium program. In June 2004, U.S. negotiators presented the North Koreans with a lengthy list of items that U.S. intelligence believed North Korea had acquired overseas for the suspected uranium program. North Korea responded that U.S. intelligence was wrong -- a stance that officials maintained in conversations last week with Albright and Joel Wit, a former State Department official. "The intelligence has not held up from their point of view," Albright said.

North Korea is now demanding that the United States supply fuel oil in excess of 500,000 tons as part of any freeze deal, because that was the level set in the 1994 agreement. "That's the benchmark," Albright said. "They want more than that."

The freeze would only cover the increasingly decrepit Yongbyon facility, not other North Korean nuclear sites.

The North Korean officials also maintained that no freeze will take place until the U.S. side resolves the Treasury action against Banco Delta Asia, a Macau bank that allegedly served as a conduit for counterfeit U.S. currency. The case has resulted in the freezing of about \$24 million in North Korean accounts and led other banks around the world to curtail dealings with North Korea. In recent talks with Treasury, North Korea identified a portion of the accounts that could be deemed legitimate in an effort to resolve the case.

"BDA is the tip of the iceberg," said Michael J. Green, a former White House official in charge of Asia policy and now at Georgetown University and the Center for Strategic and International Studies. He said ending the case would unleash tens of millions of dollars in commercial transactions that had been curtailed since Treasury moved against the bank.

Green said the North Koreans were asking for "basically the Agreed Framework," which he said would be a "hard sell back in Washington." Bush for four years has called for a "complete, verifiable, irreversible dismantlement," so U.S. negotiators have sought to disable the Yongbyon facility in such a way that it could not be quickly restarted. But Kim indicated to the visiting Americans that, in the initial phase, North Korea at most would accept a "temporary disablement that would be probably reversible pretty quickly," Albright said.

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/02/05/AR2007020501588.html>

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Los Angeles Times

February 7, 2007

Pg. 1

Israel Sounds Alarm On Iran's Nuclear Efforts

The Jewish state warns of a second Holocaust if nations fail to prevent Tehran from acquiring the bomb.

By Richard Boudreaux, Times Staff Writer

JERUSALEM — Israeli leaders rarely invoke the Holocaust in the face of enemies. The Jewish homeland founded after Adolf Hitler's genocide has, for the last generation, felt secure enough to fight its many battles with little or no help.

But the specter of a nuclear-armed Iran has rattled Israel's self-confidence. Its politicians and generals warn of a "second Holocaust" if, as in the 1930s, the world stands by while a heavily armed nation declares war against the Jews.

Spelling out that scenario, Israeli officials have begun an unusually open campaign to muster international political and economic pressures against Iran. They warn that time is growing short and hint that they will resort to force if those pressures fail to prevent Iran's development of an atomic weapon.

Israeli leaders fear that an Iranian bomb would undermine their nation's security even if Tehran never detonated it. That Israel has its own nuclear arsenal would not counteract the psychological and strategic blow, they believe.

Israel began secretly preparing in the early 1990s for a possible air raid on Iran's then-nascent nuclear facilities and has been making oblique public statements about such planning for three years.

What is new is Israel's abandonment of quiet diplomacy to rally others to its side. Until a few months ago, Israeli leaders worried that high-profile lobbying would backfire and provoke accusations that they were trying to drag the United States and its allies into a war.

Israel's new activism coincides with a recent drumbeat of U.S. threats against Iran, including President Bush's vow to "seek out and destroy" Iranian and Syrian networks he said were arming and training anti-American forces in Iraq, and his dispatch of a second aircraft carrier group to the Persian Gulf.

Several factors have contributed to Israel's more assertive campaign, Israeli officials and defense analysts said.

Israel's war against Iranian-backed Hezbollah guerrillas in Lebanon last summer brought Tehran's hostility alarmingly close to home. At the same time, the war made relatively moderate Sunni-dominated Arab nations more wary of Shiite Iran, easing Israel's isolation and creating a de facto anti-Iran coalition.

Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad has repeatedly called for Israel's destruction. And while denying any plan to build an atomic weapon, Iran has continued to enrich uranium and acquire long-range missiles.

And Israeli leaders worry that the window is closing on any hope for decisive action by Bush, their most powerful supporter. The head of Mossad, Israel's foreign intelligence agency, told parliament late last year that Iran would be able to produce a nuclear weapon as early as 2009, the year Bush is to leave office. Other analysts have predicted a longer timetable.

Since last summer, Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert has sounded an alarm against Iran in public and in meetings with the leaders of Britain, France, Germany, Italy, Russia, China, Egypt and Jordan. He has also met twice with Bush.

"The Jewish people, on whom the scars of the Holocaust are deeply etched, cannot allow itself to again face a threat against its very existence," Olmert said last month in a speech reviewing the diplomatic campaign. "In the past, the world remained silent and the results are known. Our role is to prevent the world from repeating this mistake."

Israel strongly prefers that the world keep Iran from developing nuclear weapons through crippling, dissuasive economic sanctions, Olmert said. But he added: "We have the right to full freedom of action in defense of our vital interests. We will not hesitate to use it."

'Force them to reconsider'

Olmert on Tuesday reiterated that economic pressure might be enough to halt Iran.

"I think there is a way to stop the Iranians from moving forward on their nuclear program without violent actions," the prime minister said in a speech to visiting American Jewish leaders.

If wide-ranging sanctions can "cause such damage to the Iranian economy — and we see some signs already — it will force them to reconsider," he said.

Israel's new stance was evident in December as its lobbying contributed to a United Nations Security Council decision to ban the sale to Iran of materials used in uranium enrichment, reprocessing and building ballistic missiles. Enriched uranium can be used to produce electricity or a nuclear bomb.

Despite misgivings about the risk of a backlash, Israel is helping the United States push broader voluntary sanctions to cut Iran's trade credits, oil investments and ties to foreign banks. In that effort, it is helping the U.S. Treasury Department monitor the activities of Iranian banks abroad.

"It might be bad for Israel and bad for American Jews for Israel to be seen as pushing for action on Iran," said Yossi Klein Halevi, a senior fellow at the Shalem Center, a research institute in Jerusalem. "But we don't have the luxury of time anymore."

Iran says it is seeking nuclear technology for civilian purposes. But because it kept its program secret for 18 years and has failed to comply with U.N. nuclear inspections, Iran is presumed by Israel and Western countries to be trying to acquire the technology to make a bomb.

If Iran achieves that threshold, it will radically alter the region, Israeli officials and analysts said.

Emboldened by the bomb, they said, Iran could provide Islamic militant movements Hezbollah and Hamas with longer-range and deadlier rockets to fire at Israel than the current stock of Katyushas and Kassams. It could also veto any Palestinian or other Arab effort to make peace with the Jewish state.

No longer a deterrent

Israel's possession of nuclear weapons since the late 1960s, though rarely acknowledged by its leaders, has worked as a deterrent until now.

"For decades, the Arab countries ... knew they couldn't beat Israel, so there was no coalition forming against us," said Maj. Gen. Amos Gilad, director of the Defense Ministry's Political-Military Bureau.

But soon, he said, "the Iranians could create a belief that they can beat us, and under their umbrella create an axis that will destabilize the Middle East."

Also, Sunni Arab countries — Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Algeria, Jordan and Libya — could strive to build atomic weapons to compete with Shiite Iran, making any regional conflict a potential nuclear tinderbox, he said.

In such an environment, many Israelis might flee. A December poll in the newspaper Maariv found that 27% of Israelis would leave or consider leaving if Iran acquired nuclear weapons. Two-thirds of those surveyed said they believed Iran would drop a nuclear weapon on Israel.

Apocalyptic scenarios involving Iran dominated last month's annual Herzliya conference, Israel's premier gathering of foreign policy, defense and security specialists. Participants pressed several U.S. presidential hopefuls on how they planned to thwart Iran's nuclear ambitions.

"I see a syndrome of America acting late," Sami Friedrich, an Israeli management consultant, lectured Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.), who joined the conference by video hookup from Washington. "America came in late in the Second World War. Now America accepts the diagnosis that it failed to imagine the worst with Al Qaeda. America has this worrying pattern."

Despite the anxiety, Israeli officials at the conference said they were hopeful that sanctions would force Iran to suspend its enrichment program.

They were encouraged by Ahmadinejad's setback in recent local elections, rising unemployment and inflation in Iran, and reports that domestic criticism of the president was escalating.

Vice Premier Shimon Peres told students in Qatar last week that Israel's problem was with Ahmadinejad, not the Iranian people, and it did not "intend to use military action."

If Ahmadinejad were to fall, "someone else would come to power, someone less hostile, and the question of whether they have nuclear capability will be less important," said Uri Lubrani, a former Israeli ambassador to Iran who advises the Defense Ministry and opposes military action.

That, however, appears to be a minority view in the government and defense establishment. Other officials and analysts argue that voluntary sanctions are unlikely to win full support from European countries and in any case would be undermined by Russia, China and India. They say time is too short and the stakes too high to bet solely on a change in government.

"We cannot sit back and wait for a revolution," said Isaac Ben-Israel, a reserve air force major general who heads Tel Aviv University's Security Studies Program.

Ben-Israel helped plan the 1981 Israeli air raid that destroyed Iraq's Osirak nuclear reactor. He said Israel had the capacity to set back Iran's atomic program by striking a few key targets, such as its uranium conversion facility at Esfahan, its enrichment facility at Natanz and its heavy-water reactor at Arak.

'A new front in Iran'

But Israel lacks the capability for a sustained offensive that might be needed to strike the bulk of Iran's facilities.

Because of that, Ben-Israel and other officials say, Israel would prefer to join in an American-led attack on Iran — a scenario Bush has refused to rule out. But they worry that Bush has been so weakened at home by the Iraq war that "opening a new front in Iran may not be feasible for him," Ben-Israel said.

Israelis have been hinting strongly that they are prepared to act on their own. In an article in last week's issue of the New Republic, Halevi and Michael Oren, also a senior fellow at the Shalem Center, wrote that if Israel decided to strike, it would probably do so within 18 months.

Israel would wait long enough to give sanctions a chance to work, the authors predicted, but not so long that Iran's facilities would become radioactive, making the consequences of bombing them far more lethal.

Robert J. Einhorn, the assistant secretary of State for nonproliferation in the Clinton administration, said Israel's threats, coupled with the possibility of U.S. military action, could help bolster the push for sanctions.

"It's important that not only the Iranians believe the military option is credible," said Einhorn, who is a senior advisor at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, a Washington think tank. "The more the Europeans believe the use of military force is thinkable in Iran, the more they will be prepared to use economic leverage to avoid that possibility.

"Israel is sounding the alarm with lots of countries, urging them to do all sorts of things," he said. But if those efforts fail, "they are going to have to decide whether to act unilaterally and militarily. That will be a very hard decision."

http://www.latimes.com/news/nationworld/world/la-fg-israel7feb07_0,6793106.story?coll=la-home-world

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Washington Post

February 7, 2007

Pg. 6

Nuclear Officials Seek Approval For Warhead

Design Would Require No Live Testing

By Walter Pincus, Washington Post Staff Writer

Officials of the National Nuclear Security Administration, which runs the nuclear weapons complex, said yesterday that they hope to receive administration and congressional authorization by the end of 2008 for the development and production of a warhead that could be deployed on submarine-launched intercontinental ballistic missiles.

The NNSA requested \$88 million in the fiscal 2008 Energy Department budget -- up from \$27 million this year -- to complete detailed planning with the Navy based on a design produced in December by the nation's two nuclear weapons laboratories. The new funds would support design concept testing and could lead to production of the warhead for the Navy's D5 missile, 24 of which are carried on each U.S. Trident submarine.

A key aspect of the Reliable Replacement Warhead program is that the warhead could be certified to enter the U.S. nuclear stockpile without testing, acting NNSA Administrator Thomas D'Agostino and other officials said during a session with reporters.

U.S. moves to develop a new warhead come as the Bush administration is attempting to stop Iran and North Korea from developing nuclear weapons and trying to keep other countries, such as India and Pakistan, from expanding their stockpiles.

Last month, former secretaries of state Henry A. Kissinger and George P. Shultz, former defense secretary William Perry and former senator Sam Nunn (D-Ga.) called for the Bush administration to take the leadership in reversing reliance on nuclear weapons as a step toward preventing proliferation. In a Jan. 6 op-ed in the Wall Street Journal, the four called for ratification of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, taking nuclear weapons off alert, further reducing the number of nuclear forces and halting production of fissile materials.

Hans M. Kristensen, director of the Federation of American Scientists' nuclear information project, said yesterday that as a result of the op-ed piece, "There are a lot of new groups in Washington looking at what really low numbers [of U.S. warheads] would look like."

Rep. Ellen O. Tauscher (D-Calif.), chairman of the House Armed Services strategic forces subcommittee, said yesterday that she would hold a hearing next month on the RRW program to review the new design and to determine if it meets military needs and whether it would lead to a smaller and more reliable stockpile with no testing, a smaller nuclear production complex and increased dismantling of older warheads.

"There are significant questions in Congress about how all this holds together," Tauscher said.

The NNSA officials said that in the past, the nuclear weapons labs held underground nuclear tests at this stage in the development of a new warhead. But they said the new designs, by the Los Alamos and Lawrence Livermore national laboratories, could be certified without testing. Meanwhile, there needs to be detailed planning with the Navy before the NNSA could proceed to the engineering phase.

The warhead is being built to fit into the Mark V reentry vehicle used on the D5, which is commonly known as the Trident II missile. The joint decision last year by the Energy and Defense departments was to try to come up with a warhead that could be used on Navy and Air Force missiles.

NNSA officials said yesterday that production of the new warhead would allow for the Bush administration's plan to reduce the number of deployed nuclear warheads from about 6,000 today to between 1,700 and 2,200 by 2012, and also to lower the number in ready reserve. Critics of the Bush plan, which was set out in the 2001 Nuclear Posture Review, have claimed that far fewer numbers of nuclear warheads will be needed in the future because of the accuracy of precision-guided conventional weapons.

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/02/06/AR2007020601607.html>

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Expectations low for North Korea nuclear talks

But experts see favorable conditions in the six-nation negotiations if Pyongyang finally decides to deal.

By Mark Magnier, Times Staff Writer

February 7, 2007

BEIJING — Talks beginning Thursday on halting North Korea's atomic weapons program are bedeviled by a fundamental question: Is the newest self-proclaimed member of the nuclear club willing to give up its membership? Successive rounds of negotiations over the last four years involving the two Koreas, the United States, China, Japan and Russia have ended in disappointment, limiting expectations and calling into question North Korea's motives. Still, most at the bargaining table agree that disappointing talks are better than no talks, given what a cornered, desperate and extremely proud North Korea might do if left to its own devices. For decades, it has kept its citizens in near-permanent readiness for war, and in October tested a nuclear weapon during a 15-month lapse in negotiations. A debate among experts is centered on whether the regime in Pyongyang, the North Korean capital, sees nuclear weapons as an end in themselves or a commodity to be bargained away for aid and trade.

North Korea has limited leverage and few bargaining chips beyond the threat of armed conflict, analysts say, which helps explain why it has repeatedly balked at anything approaching a deal.

"Real negotiations will be very basic, if they are held at all," said Chen Fengjun, research director of the Korean Peninsula Center at Beijing University. "Despite huge pressure from the international community, North Koreans see nuclear weapons as their lifeline and only card, not to be given up easily."

Yet despite generally low expectations for the latest talks, which will be held in Beijing, experts see favorable conditions if North Korea decides to deal.

Japan's Asahi Shimbun newspaper reported this week that Pyongyang would consider halting work on its nuclear reactors in return for at least 500,000 tons of heavy-fuel oil annually, an end to U.S. economic sanctions and an agreement to remove North Korea from the U.S. list of states that sponsor terrorism.

North Korea has a history of inflated bargaining positions on the eve of negotiations.

"I have not discussed this [deal] at all in my consultations with [North Korea], though I think it is quite possible that it will come up in our talks this weekend," chief U.S. negotiator Christopher Hill told reporters in Tokyo on Tuesday.

The Asahi Shimbun article, based on an interview with think tank analyst David Albright and former State Department official Joel Wit after their recent trip to North Korea, also said Pyongyang would be willing to resume International Atomic Energy Agency inspections after a four-year hiatus and reactivate monitoring cameras. But North Korea reportedly said it would not agree to inspections of reactors where spent nuclear rods are reprocessed. More broadly, analysts say, the United States is showing greater flexibility than before November's midterm election, when some Washington hardliners opposed any negotiations with North Korea. Analysts point in particular to a U.S. willingness to ease some financial sanctions related to \$24 million in North Korean assets held in a Macau bank over charges of money laundering and counterfeiting.

North Korea has an interest in relieving some of its economic pressure because of fear that food shortages could spur dissent and erode the ruling party's power. It's also aware that walking away from negotiations or taking the more drastic step of testing a second atomic device could bring harsh sanctions from China, a key source of fuel and food, and from the rest of the world in the form of United Nations sanctions.

Succession concerns also may be weighing on the North Korean leadership. Kim Jong Il, 65, reportedly has three sons and two daughters by three women, although details of the ruling family's affairs are a closely kept secret. Kim's oldest son, 35-year-old Kim Jong Nam, was photographed last week coming out of the luxury Mandarin Oriental hotel in Macau. It spurred reports that he frequented casinos and saunas and favored late-night sessions of drinking whiskey and cognac.

Kim Jong Nam reportedly fell out of favor in 2001 after he embarrassed the leadership by trying to sneak into Japan on a false passport, supposedly to see Tokyo Disneyland.

Some reports suggest Kim's second son, Kim Jong Chol, 25, is also out of favor with his father. One report said he was considered "too girly," although other accounts say his image has been seen on lapel pins. Other reports peg Kim's third son, Kim Jong Un, 23, as heir apparent.

At best, analysts say, this week's talks could see the United States agree to ease some economic sanctions in return for North Korea agreeing to halt some nuclear testing, building on a Sept. 19, 2005, joint statement.

"As long as some progress is made, it's a good thing," said Shi Yinong, a professor of international relations at

People's University in Beijing. "But given that North Korea already has nuclear weapons, and sanctions imposed by the international community remain relatively mild, it's hard to have too much faith."

<http://www.latimes.com/news/nationworld/world/la-fg-norkor7feb07,1,1670990.story?coll=la-headlines-world>

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Wichita Eagle
Kansas.com

Posted on Wed, Feb. 07, 2007

New mobile trailer identifies biological agents

Associated Press

WICHITA, Kan. - The U.S. Air Force has unveiled its latest weapon in the fight against terrorism: a mobile trailer that uses "Star Wars" technology to more effectively identify biological agents such as anthrax.

About 50 people attended a ceremony Tuesday at McConnell Air Force Base, where the first Laboratory Response Team Trailer was displayed. The Air Force plans to use at least six more of the trailers, which contain about \$100,000 in equipment.

Medical personnel will be able to use the technology in the trailer to identify 14 biological agents such as anthrax or the plague, Air Force officials said. The equipment allows the medical personnel to break down an unknown biological agent to the DNA level and compare it to a known sample.

In the past, any unknown sample would have to be taken to a laboratory in Topeka.

"It is Star Wars technology," said Col. Kerry Dexter, commander of the 22nd Medical Group.

The mobile medical lab is another way for the Air Force to be proactive against potential terrorist threats, said 1st Lt. James Clark, chief of laboratory services for McConnell's 22nd Medical Group.

"We can meet the needs. We could isolate or really limit the affected regions. If we could get our crew in there, get testing as fast as possible, we could possibly limit any outbreak," he said.

The trailers are being made by Derby Trailer Technologies in nearby Derby.

In an ideal world, the technology wouldn't be needed, Air Force officials said.

"But we're in a different environment today in the world," said Brig. Gen. Byron C. Hepburn, command surgeon of Headquarters Air Mobility Command, Scott Air Force Base, Ill. "We have an ... adversary that is not reluctant at all to use threats like anthrax."

<http://www.kansas.com/mld/kansas/news/state/16644122.htm>

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New York Times
February 8, 2007

Nuclear Talks On North Korea Set To Resume In Beijing

By Jim Yardley

BEIJING, Feb. 7 — Negotiators on Thursday will resume the long-stalled talks aimed at North Korean nuclear disarmament amid tentative signs of a possible breakthrough in a diplomatic process that seemed shattered four months ago when North Korea tested a nuclear device.

Christopher R. Hill, the chief American envoy, arrived in Beijing on Wednesday and held separate meetings with Chinese and Russian diplomats. Mr. Hill has been shuttling around the world, meeting with envoys from North Korea and other countries, in an effort to restart and advance the talks that North Korea abandoned more than a year ago.

"We all share ambitions for this round," Mr. Hill told reporters as he arrived at his hotel on Wednesday evening.

"We want to make a good start, a good step forward."

Mr. Hill is essentially trying to return the process to September 2005, when North Korea agreed in a broad draft accord to end its nuclear arms program in return for security, economic and energy benefits. Even then, analysts said the differences between the United States and North Korea made a final agreement far from certain. Subsequent talks on carrying out the provisions broke down, and North Korea then defied international warnings by testing a nuclear device last October.

In a brief appearance earlier Wednesday at the Beijing airport, Mr. Hill was careful not to set expectations too high for this week. "I want to emphasize that the real success is when we complete the September '05 agreement," he said. "Not just when we start the '05 agreement, but when we finish it. So we're not going to finish that this week." "We'll just maybe take a good first step," he said.

The talks — which involve China, Russia, Japan, South Korea, the United States and North Korea — began more than three years ago and have brought scarce tangible progress after various rounds in Beijing. Formal talks will resume Thursday afternoon in a government guesthouse in Beijing and are likely to continue into the weekend. Recently, North Korea has seemed to signal more of a willingness to bargain and to specify its demands. Last weekend, two American envoys returning from Pyongyang, the North Korean capital, said the nation was prepared to disable its main nuclear reactor in Yongbyon in exchange for an energy package of electricity and oil from its neighbors. North Korea also told the envoys that it wanted the United States to lift financial sanctions and remove it from a list of states that sponsored terrorism.

The two envoys, Joel S. Wit, a Clinton administration official involved in North Korea issues, and David Albright, a nuclear specialist, first described the North Korean position to the Japanese newspaper Asahi Shimbun, while passing through the Beijing airport last Saturday.

Mr. Hill, assistant secretary of state for East Asian and Pacific affairs, has spent much of 2007 traveling to build a consensus on a deal. Last month, he and the top North Korean envoy, Kim Kye-gwan, met in Berlin, the first such meetings between the United States and North Korea outside Beijing. Mr. Hill described those talks as “substantive” and has expressed guarded optimism throughout his travels.

A potential sticking point for North Korea is how much ground the United States will give on financial sanctions. In 2005, the United States accused Banco Delta Asia in Macao, a Chinese territory, of laundering counterfeit dollars that it said North Korea was using to finance drug trafficking and other illegal activities. The United States froze \$24 million in North Korean assets, largely shutting North Korea out of the international financial system.

North Korea has demanded the release of the \$24 million. Last week, a United States Treasury official met with North Korean diplomats on the issue.

Brian Bridges, a professor of politics at Lingnan University in Hong Kong, said no breakthrough was apparent but that there had been speculation that the United States might agree to declare part of the frozen Banco Delta Asia money “clean” in a compromise. Mr. Bridges predicted that negotiations this week, at best, might form working groups to discuss particular issues like denuclearization and the sanctions. But he said any larger, significant progress was unlikely. “I’m not too optimistic,” he said. “I don’t think there is going to be a major breakthrough.”

http://www.nytimes.com/2007/02/08/world/asia/08korea.html?_r=1&ref=world&oref=slogin

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Washington Times

February 8, 2007

Pg. 13

Weapons Plan Strives To Beat Soviet Readiness

By Vladimir Isachenkov, Associated Press

MOSCOW -- Russia's defense minister yesterday laid out an ambitious plan for building new intercontinental ballistic missiles, nuclear submarines and possibly aircraft carriers, and set the goal of exceeding the Soviet army in combat readiness.

Sergei Ivanov's statements appeared aimed at raising his profile at home ahead of the 2008 election in which he is widely seen as a potential contender to succeed President Vladimir Putin. But they also seemed to reflect a growing chill in Russia-U.S. relations and the Kremlin's concern about U.S. missile-defense plans.

Mr. Ivanov told parliament the military would get 17 new ballistic missiles this year -- a drastic increase over the average of four deployed annually in recent years. The purchases are part of a weapons-modernization program for 2007-2015 worth about \$190 billion.

The plan envisages the deployment of 34 new silo-based Topol-M missiles and control units, as well as an additional 50 such missiles mounted on mobile launchers by 2015; Russia so far has deployed more than 40 silo-based Topol-M weapons.

Mr. Putin and other officials have described the Topol-M as a bulwark of Russia's nuclear might for years to come, and said it can penetrate any prospective missile defenses. Last week, Mr. Putin dismissed U.S. claims that missile-defense sites Washington hopes to establish in Poland and the Czech Republic were intended to counter threats from Iran, and said Russia would respond by developing more-efficient weapons systems.

In 2002, Mr. Putin and President Bush signed a treaty obliging both sides to cut their strategic nuclear weapons by about two-thirds by 2012, down to between 1,700 and 2,200 missiles. But Russia-U.S. ties have since worsened steadily over disagreements on Iraq and other global crises, and U.S. concerns about an increasingly authoritarian streak in Russia's domestic policy.

A rising tide of oil revenue has enabled Russia to boost defense spending after a squeeze on the military in the 1990s.

"The question now is whether the industries are capable of producing what the military needs," Mr. Ivanov said. Analysts warn that building any sizable numbers of new weapons would pose a daunting challenge to the defense plants that received virtually no government orders for a decade following the 1991 Soviet collapse. Russia's defense budget, which stood at \$8.1 billion in 2001, nearly quadrupled to \$31 billion this year, Mr. Ivanov said. While this year's military spending is Russia's largest since the Soviet collapse, it is still about 20 times less than the U.S. defense budget.

Mr. Ivanov said the military now has enough money to intensify combat training.

"Combat readiness of the army and the navy is currently the highest in the post-Soviet history," he said, adding the task now is to "exceed Soviet-era levels."

Mr. Ivanov said the military now has about 1.13 million servicemen, compared with 1.34 million in 2001.

<http://www.washtimes.com/world/20070207-104140-3775r.htm>

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Los Angeles Times

February 8, 2007

Pg. 1

Dissent Grows In Iran

Critics of President Ahmadinejad's defiance of the U.S. and U.N. become bolder.

By Kim Murphy, Times Staff Writer

TEHRAN — Iran's leadership is facing mounting public unease and the seeds of mutiny in parliament over the combative nature of its nuclear diplomacy.

For the first time since Iran resumed its uranium enrichment program, there is broad, open criticism of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's defiance of the Bush administration and United Nations Security Council, and warnings have emerged that the public may not be prepared to support the Islamic regime through a war.

The criticism and public wariness come at a time when the Bush administration has moved additional ships to the Persian Gulf and Washington and Israel have refused to rule out a preemptive strike against Iran's nuclear facilities.

The mounting dissent does not appear to have chipped away at Iran's determination to maintain an active nuclear program, say politicians, diplomats and political analysts here. But they say it opens the door to a face-saving compromise and signals that a broad range of Iranians hope to avoid an all-out confrontation.

"If [Ahmadinejad] wants to start a new war, from where does he think he's going to produce the army?" asked Mohammed Atrianfar, a well-known political commentator allied with former Iranian President Hashemi Rafsanjani, who has been working behind the scenes in recent weeks to ease the tension.

"We are not agreeing with his radical, extreme policies," Atrianfar said. "It is because of the propagandist speech of Ahmadinejad all over the world that we're in the situation we're in."

The U.N. Security Council voted Dec. 23 to ban the sale to Iran of materials that can be used in uranium enrichment, nuclear material reprocessing and production of ballistic missiles. Ahmadinejad has declared the resolution "a torn paper."

Some experts in Iran think the U.N. sanctions, with the backing of China and Russia, took the country's leadership by surprise.

"They were counting on it not getting that far or that it wouldn't be unanimous," said a Western diplomat based in Tehran. "Many advisors weren't telling [supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei] it would get this far. The fact that it was unanimous and they couldn't count on Russia and China was a bit of a shock. Hence this debate on where they're going to go next."

Parliament responded by calling in Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki to discuss whether Iran's defiance was giving Washington ammunition to argue for escalating the sanctions once a 60-day deadline to halt enrichment expires this month. The combative exchange was broadcast on state radio.

Ahmadinejad is "making some adventures in foreign relationships that don't benefit our country," Akbar Alami, a reformist lawmaker who led the charge in parliament, said in an interview. "The nuclear issue and the right of Iran to have nuclear power is a matter of national pride. But we cannot limit this issue to one person like Mr. Ahmadinejad."

Although Ahmadinejad attracts attention in the West, his power as Iran's president has limits. The ultimate authority is held by the top Islamic clerics, led by Khamenei, who control the armed forces.

Analysts here say it is significant that Khamenei, who has been a strong supporter of the nuclear program, has not silenced Ahmadinejad's critics.

Indeed, Jamhuri Eslami, a newspaper once owned by Khamenei that often reflects his views, has voiced its own criticism of the president.

"Turning the nuclear issue into a propaganda slogan gives the impression that you, for the sake of covering up flaws in the government, are exaggerating its importance. This is harmful for you and your government," the paper said in an editorial last month.

It remains unknown whether Khamenei will try to rein in public dissent.

Many in Iran are aghast at the idea that a nation that spent eight years at war with neighboring Iraq could be in for another conflict.

"I'm 100% worried that there will be another war," said Zari, a 26-year-old theater director who declined to give her last name. "But it's not in our control. Both Bush and Ahmadinejad are powerful enough to do something, and we can't do anything to stop them."

Abbas Maleki, a political analyst who recently returned from Harvard University, said many Iranians feared speaking out.

"People cannot show their concern because of the need for solidarity. But they really are concerned now, and this is the discussion deep in all of the families," Maleki said.

"Iranians want to have a better situation. They are working and they are trying to have better education for their sons and daughters, and all of these issues will be destroyed with one strike."

The dissent does not mean Iranians are entirely rejecting the country's nuclear program.

Even politicians who have criticized Ahmadinejad seem to share the view that Iran is entitled to peaceful nuclear power and the uranium enrichment technology that goes with it.

Although blessed with one of the world's largest reservoirs of oil and natural gas, Iran spends billions of dollars a year importing gasoline.

Many analysts think the nation faces the prospect of reduced oil exports if it does not find a solution to its domestic energy problem.

Hampered by sanctions and forced to develop much of the technology on its own, Iran has made slow progress in setting up an industrial-scale uranium enrichment operation, international nuclear experts say.

The London-based International Institute for Strategic Studies reported this month that Iran probably would meet its goal of building 3,000 uranium enrichment centrifuges by March, but it would be another year before engineers could get them linked and running.

Even the test centrifuge cascades being built at the Natanz nuclear facility are not running smoothly, the institute said.

The report estimated that Iran was at least two or three years from being able to produce enough material for a nuclear bomb, should it attempt to do so. Tehran strongly denies that it is seeking to build nuclear weapons.

In the debate over how fast and how far to push the nuclear program, Ahmadinejad and his allies are convinced, analysts say, that the United States has been weakened by the war in Iraq, economic constraints at home and a population wary of more global conflicts.

"The first approach taken by some here in Iran is that the United States is commencing its disintegration as an imperialist state and will be defeated in one or two years," Maleki said. "Therefore Iran can enjoy the fruits of this confrontation: The United States will collapse and Iran will be in power."

He said Ahmadinejad and his allies appeared certain that this would be the case.

"The second approach says, 'Yes, there are several signals and signs that the United States is becoming weakened. But it is not 100% sure that this year or next year it will be collapse. Maybe it needs 100 years.' And this approach says that the best way for Iran is to refrain from any issues with the United States, to avoid any confrontation on any level. Experience shows that the second approach now is dominant in Iran."

The dissenting voices remained muted until the Dec. 15 elections for municipal councils and the clerical Assembly of Experts.

Candidates from Ahmadinejad's camp were trounced, and Rafsanjani, running for the assembly, had 500,000 more votes than his nearest opponent.

"There's definitely been a big internal debate going since the municipality elections went badly for Ahmadinejad," the Western diplomat said. "Then the gloves sort of came off for the critics. The reformists have stuck their heads above the parapet, saying, 'Is this really the direction we want the country to go in?' It was almost as if they'd been given the green light."

The reformists' momentum could provide ammunition for Iran's chief nuclear negotiator, Ali Larijani, to find common ground with Western leaders during scheduled talks in Germany this weekend. Analysts said it was conceivable Iran could agree to suspend uranium enrichment temporarily, possibly in exchange for a halt to U.N. sanctions and a security guarantee from the United States.

But this is far from guaranteed. A peaceful nuclear program has widespread support in Iran, and conservative lawmakers are not likely to be swayed by the threat of new sanctions or military action.

"We are not worried about a military attack, and we are completely ready to defend our country. If they want, we can make the Persian Gulf the tomb of the United States of America," said Hamidreza Taraghi, political director of the conservative Islamic Coalition Party.

"But the United States doesn't want to do this because they cannot right now. They are weak," he said. "They don't have enough power to start another war. Lots of American politicians are against starting another war, and everybody knows this."

http://www.latimes.com/news/nationworld/world/la-fg-iran8feb08_0,4989084.story?coll=la-home-world

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Washington Post
February 8, 2007
Pg. 21

The Iran Option That Isn't On The Table

By Vali Nasr and Ray Takeyh

As Iran crosses successive nuclear demarcations and mischievously intervenes in Iraq, the question of how to address the Islamic republic is once more preoccupying Washington. Economic sanctions, international ostracism, military strikes and even support for hopeless exiles are all contemplated with vigor and seriousness. One option, however, is rarely assessed: engagement as a means of achieving a more pluralistic and responsible government in Tehran.

The all-encompassing nuclear debate comes as Iran's political landscape is changing once again. As America became reconciled to a monolithic Iran, represented by President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and his brand of rambunctious politics, the results from December's local elections suggest Iranians were doing otherwise. Ahmadinejad's defiant rhetoric and populist posturing did not impress the Iranians who turned out in large numbers to elect city councils and members of the Assembly of Experts. Voters favored pragmatic conservatives and reformers who oppose their president's policies abroad and his economic programs at home. Despite this show of dissent, though, it would be a mistake to assume that Iran's regime is about to fall or that a democratic spring is looming.

Iran has long appeared ready for democracy. It has a literate, youthful population that is immersed in world culture, is at home on the Internet, is keen to engage the West and is above the anti-American anger that dominates the Arab street. No other Middle Eastern country has as much civic activism or a population that has voted as often in elections at various levels. But positive social and cultural indices have so far not translated into a political opening. Iranian society may be ready to embrace democracy, but Iranian politics is not ready to accommodate it.

Iran does not have an organized pro-democracy movement. The reformers who were swept to power in 1997 never coalesced around a coherent platform, nor did they produce a political party. Their movement inspired activism and student protests, and it changed the style and language of politics, but its lack of organization ultimately cost it the presidency in 2005. Reformism was popular but politically ineffective.

The clerical regime has also proved to be enterprising in facing demands for reform, particularly by using elections to manage opposition within the bounds of the Islamic republic. Economic isolation, supported by international sanctions, has kept the private sector weak, which has in turn denied supporters of change levers they could use to pry open the regime. The public sector accounts for more than 80 percent of the Iranian economy, and the constitution gives the clerical leadership most of the power. The problem facing democracy is not so much the state's theocratic nature as it is the enormous domination it enjoys over the economy, society and politics. For democracy to succeed, the state's domination of the economy and society must be reduced.

For too long, Washington has thought that a policy of coercion and sanctions applied to Iran would eventually yield a responsible and representative regime. Events in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe suggest that containment eventually generates sufficient pressure to force autocratic elites to accommodate both international mandates and the aspirations of their restless constituents. Ironically, though, U.S. policy has buttressed the Iranian regime, which has justified its monopoly of power as a means of fending off external enemies and managing an economy under international duress.

More than sanctions or threats of military retribution, Iran's integration into the global economy would impose standards and discipline on the recalcitrant theocracy. International investors and institutions such as the World Trade Organization are far more subversive, as they would demand the prerequisites of a democratic society -- transparency, the rule of law and decentralization -- as a price for their commerce.

Paradoxically, to liberalize the theocratic state, the United States would do better to shelve its containment strategy and embark on a policy of unconditional dialogue and sanctions relief. A reduced American threat would deprive the hard-liners of the conflict they need to justify their concentration of power. In the meantime, as Iran became

assimilated into the global economy, the regime's influence would inevitably yield to the private sector, with its demands for accountability and reform.

It is important to appreciate that Iran has a political system without precedent or parallel in modern history. The struggle there is not just between reactionaries and reformers, conservatives and liberals, but fundamentally between the state and society. A subtle means of diminishing the state and empowering the society is, in the end, the best manner of promoting not only democracy but also nuclear disarmament.

Vali Nasr is a professor at the Naval Postgraduate School and the author of "The Shia Revival: How Conflicts Within Islam Will Shape the Future." Ray Takeyh is a senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations and the author of "Hidden Iran: Paradox and Power in the Islamic Republic."

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/02/07/AR2007020702136.html>

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New York Times

February 9, 2007

Iran's Leader Warns The U.S. About Carrying Out Any Attack

By Nazila Fathi

TEHRAN, Feb. 8 — Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, warned the United States on Thursday that Iran would retaliate against American interests worldwide if it was attacked. It was the latest volley in an escalating war of rhetoric between the countries.

Speaking to a group of air force commanders about rumors of an imminent American military strike, Ayatollah Khamenei said, "Iranian people should not get scared of such issues," the Iranian Student News Agency reported. "Our enemies know very well that any aggression will have a response from all sides by Iranian people on their interests all over the world."

He added, "No one would commit such a blunder and jeopardize the interests of his country and people."

Iran's Revolutionary Guards also said Thursday that as part of a war games exercise, they had successfully test-fired a land-to-sea missile capable of sinking large warships.

"These missiles, with a maximum range of 220 miles, can hit different kinds of big warships throughout the Persian Gulf, the Sea of Oman and the northern Indian Ocean," Ali Fadavi, a senior Revolutionary Guards naval commander, said on state television.

The speech by Ayatollah Khamenei was his first major public appearance since the United Nations Security Council approved limited sanctions on Dec. 23 because of Iran's refusal to halt efforts to enrich uranium. The United States and some European countries accuse Iran of having a secret weapons program, but Iran contends that its nuclear development is for peaceful purposes only.

Ayatollah Khamenei did not mention Iran's nuclear program, but he brushed off the sanctions as insignificant. "The United States and some other countries have imposed sanctions on Iran for many years now," he said. "But we achieved great scientific and technological progress under such circumstances. So they cannot scare this great nation with sanctions."

Ayatollah Khamenei also dismissed rumors that he was suffering from a serious illness, saying they were aimed at weakening the resolve of the Iranian people.

The war games by Iran, the second it has staged this year, seemed to be a response to the naval buildup by the United States in the Persian Gulf. President Bush has dispatched two aircraft carriers to the region and provided antimissile batteries to some Persian Gulf states.

In Seville, Spain, where Robert M. Gates, the American defense secretary, met Thursday with NATO defense ministers, he seemed to play down the significance of the strong language from Iran.

"My impression is that they make threats like this from time to time," Mr. Gates said. "We have no intention of attacking Iran."

He noted that, "obviously, when it comes to things like these tests, we watch them closely." But he concluded, "Other than that, I think, it's just another day in the Persian Gulf."

A special envoy for the ayatollah met in Moscow on Thursday with President Vladimir V. Putin and his national security adviser, Igor S. Ivanov. The envoy, Ali Akbar Velayati, a former foreign minister, was expected to deliver a formal response to a message from Mr. Putin that Mr. Ivanov brought to Tehran in January. The substance of the letters was not divulged.

Thom Shanker contributed reporting from Seville, Spain.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2007/02/09/world/middleeast/09iran.html>

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N. Korea Talks Resume With 'Fresh' Hope

New Attitude by Pyongyang Toward Nuclear Issues Cited

By Edward Cody, Washington Post Foreign Service

BEIJING, Feb. 8 -- Six-nation talks on dismantling North Korea's nuclear weapons program resumed Thursday, buoyed by signs that North Korea is ready to return to serious negotiations.

The Chinese chief negotiator and host, Vice Foreign Minister Wu Dawei, suggested there were hopes of breaking a long stalemate that has led to questions about the future of the talks, which have been grinding away, off and on, since August 2003. At a formal opening session, he qualified the new round as a "fresh start" made possible by agreements reached last month in separate discussions in Berlin between U.S. and North Korean diplomats.

"These results provide a more solid basis for this session," Wu said.

The last round of the Chinese-sponsored talks broke up in failure Dec. 22 after North Korea's top nuclear negotiator, Kim Gye Gwan, refused to engage in formal discussions about his country's nuclear weapons. He said nothing could be done on the nuclear front until resolution of a U.S.-North Korean financial dispute centering on a Macau bank accused of laundering illicit money from North Korea.

U.S. and North Korean banking officials have held two sessions of separate negotiations on the banking standoff. Although there has been no announcement indicating that the issue has been resolved, North Korean leaders apparently have decided that the exchanges show enough promise that they can resume discussing the nuclear problem.

The chief U.S. delegate, Assistant Secretary of State Christopher R. Hill, said Thursday evening that the North Korean attitude appeared different from the balk in December. During Thursday's talks, Hill said, Kim displayed a willingness to negotiate that augured well for chances of making progress at least on some preliminary steps. Kim said on his arrival that he came prepared to discuss the first steps in what the Bush administration hopes will be a gradual but irreversible program to eliminate North Korea's nuclear weapons and dismantle the facilities that produce fuel for the bombs. But he also made clear that agreement remains a distant goal.

In remarks to reporters, Kim said his willingness to negotiate depends on what the United States is willing to concede in return. Without citing specifics, he said the Bush administration must abandon its "hostile policy" and embrace "peaceful coexistence." The United States knows North Korea's requirements for reaching a first-step agreement, he added.

According to two U.S. nuclear experts who spoke with Kim last week in Pyongyang, North Korea's capital, the requirements include supplies of heavy fuel oil, resolution of the banking dispute, help in building civilian nuclear reactors and normalization of relations with the United States. In exchange, the experts said they were told, North Korea would be ready to freeze its Yongbyon reactor and allow the return of international nuclear inspectors to some North Korean facilities.

In an agreement in principle reached in September 2005, North Korea pledged to dismantle its entire nuclear program in return for economic aid and normalization of relations with the United States. That accord was hailed as a major step forward. The negotiations have stalled since then, however, on what steps should be carried out, and in what sequence, to put that pledge into practice.

In a measure of the difficulty, when the talks began more than three years ago they were designed to prevent North Korea from developing nuclear weapons, and that was the context in which the September 2005 accord was reached. Since North Korea set off a nuclear test explosion last October and declared itself a nuclear power, the emphasis has shifted to persuading the Pyongyang government to get rid of nuclear weapons it says it already has and to stop producing material to make more.

U.S. officials have said their intelligence indicates that North Korea has accumulated enough plutonium to fuel as many as 10 nuclear weapons and that its main facility, at Yongbyon, is producing more. In addition, U.S. officials have said North Korea has a separate uranium enrichment program to produce more weapons material, which Pyongyang denies.

In addition to North Korea, China and the United States, the talks involve South Korea, Russia and Japan.

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/02/08/AR2007020800154.html>

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New York to Test Ways to Guard Against Nuclear Terror

By ERIC LIPTON

Published: February 9, 2007

WASHINGTON, Feb. 8 — New York City is about to become a laboratory to test ways of strengthening the nation's defenses against a terror attack by a nuclear device or a radioactive "dirty bomb."

Starting this spring, the Bush administration will assess new detection machines at a Staten Island port terminal that are designed to screen cargo and automatically distinguish between naturally occurring radiation and critical bomb-building ingredients.

And later this year, the federal government plans to begin setting up an elaborate network of radiation alarms at some bridges, tunnels, roadways and waterways into New York, creating a 50-mile circle around the city.

The effort, which could be expanded to other cities if proven successful, is a major shift of focus for the Department of Homeland Security. As it finishes installing the first generation of radiation scanners at the nation's ports and land border crossings, the department is trying to find ways to stop a plot that would use a weapon built within the United States.

"How do you create deterrence against terrorism?" said Vayl S. Oxford, director of the Domestic Nuclear Detection Office, the Homeland Security agency coordinating the work. "You complicate the ability for the terrorist to do what they want."

But even as the new campaign begins, some members of Congress and antiterrorism experts are raising concerns that the initiative, like previous Homeland Security programs, could prove extraordinarily costly and provide few security gains.

"This is just total baloney," said Tara O'Toole, a former assistant secretary at the Department of Energy during the Clinton administration, where she oversaw nuclear weapons safety efforts. "They are forgetting that no matter what type of engineering solution they try in good faith to come up with, this is a thinking enemy and they will look for a way around it."

While Homeland Security officials repeatedly declined to estimate the costs of a nationwide detection system, agency documents show they might spend more than a billion dollars on the cargo-screening equipment alone. Local officials in New York are sparring with Homeland Security over a plan to immediately transfer to local and state authorities the burden of maintaining and operating the network of detection machines when it is completed within several years.

"We are concerned they will put money forward for a piece of hardware and then move to another project," said [Raymond W. Kelly](#), New York City's police commissioner. He added that while the city supports the plan, he is not convinced that the proposed detection network makes sense. "Whether or not it works, whether or not it causes too many false alarms, which causes a whole other set of problems, all of these things are still to be determined," he said.

Mr. Oxford said he is aware of the concerns about costs, which is still the subject of negotiations, and the performance of the new detection machines. But with a threat like a nuclear attack, the country cannot afford to wait until all the details are worked out, he said.

"Our philosophy is not to wait for perfection, because perfection never comes," he said.

The Domestic Nuclear Detection Office, among the newest agencies at Homeland Security, was established in April 2005, in response to criticism that efforts to combat nuclear terrorism were too disorganized.

The office focuses on blocking two types of plots: a nuclear weapon or a dirty bomb. A nuclear attack by terrorists is considered unlikely, because of the difficulty of obtaining the required radioactive materials, such as highly enriched uranium.

The detonation of a dirty bomb is considered much more feasible. It only requires dynamite or another conventional explosive to detonate a widely available radioactive source — like the cesium or cobalt in certain medical devices. The blast might cause injuries or deaths, but the radioactive residue would cover a two- to three-block area and not pose an immediate health threat. Possible panic and economic disruption could be among the most serious consequences, experts say.

The Securing the Cities detection network, as the New York experiment is called, is intended to stop a nuclear or radiological threat as far away from a city as possible. "Detecting it in the core of Manhattan is too late," Mr. Oxford said.

The network would most likely include truck inspection stations along highways approaching New York, which would be equipped with radiation detection devices, agency budget documents say. Devices might also be installed at highway tollbooths and at spots where rail, boat and subway traffic could be monitored.

The detection equipment, some of which would be mobile, would be electronically connected and monitored so if a suspicious vehicle passed one spot without being stopped, it might be intercepted after passing another detector.

Some New York agencies already have a limited supply of radiation detection equipment, but the new system would be much more extensive and go much further outside the city.

Mr. Kelly said that the city would, at least initially, use any new detection equipment to screen vehicles heading into Lower Manhattan. The project would complement a city program to install cameras, license plate readers and devices that can block vehicle traffic, creating a "ring of steel" around the financial district.

The actual design of the Homeland Security system and the protocols for how responses to alarms will be handled, are still being negotiated by federal officials and authorities in New York City, New Jersey, Connecticut and New York state.

Benn H. Tannenbaum, a physicist and nuclear terrorism expert at the American Association for the Advancement of Science in Washington, said the system would never create anything close to an impenetrable barrier, particularly for a nuclear bomb, since the required ingredients have low levels of radioactivity and can easily be shielded. But the project still might be worthwhile, he said. "If nothing else, it makes the terrorist think twice before they do something like this," he said.

Ms. O'Toole, the former Department of Energy official, pointed to Homeland Security's BioWatch program, set up in about 30 cities in 2003 to monitor the air for a possible biological attack.

The equipment was installed quickly, but there was no detailed plan in place for how to respond to positive alarms, which meant three weeks of confusion among Houston authorities in October 2003, after tularemia, a naturally occurring pathogen, was discovered. "There is this disconnect between these grand schemes for technology and reality," Ms. O'Toole said.

Laura S. H. Holgate, vice president at the Nuclear Threat Initiative, a Washington-based research group, said the government should put far more energy into a global effort to prevent nuclear materials from getting into the hands of terrorists.

The testing planned on Staten Island at the New York Container Terminal is intended to police concerns about false alarms.

Three sets of new types of detection machines have been installed there. For the first time, such machines sound an alarm when something radioactive passes through, and simultaneously identify the radioactive isotope. That allows officials to distinguish between innocuous items that can emit low levels of radiation, such as granite or kitty litter, and real threats.

Officials at the Government Accountability Office and some members of Congress are concerned that Homeland Security is moving too quickly to buy the new machines. Initial tests have shown them to be not much more effective than existing machines that are a fraction of the cost.

"We know this system is going to be expensive," said Senator Joseph I. Lieberman, an independent from Connecticut and chairman of the Senate Homeland Security Committee. "We need to be sure it will perform as promised."

<http://www.nytimes.com/2007/02/09/nyregion/09nuke.html>

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