



USAF COUNTERPROLIFERATION CENTER
CPC OUTREACH JOURNAL
Maxwell AFB, Alabama

Issue No. 557, 27 February 2007

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New York Times
February 24, 2007
Pg. 7

News Analysis

Leaving The Options Open With Iran

By David E. Sanger

WASHINGTON, Feb. 23 — As the Bush administration tries to rally allies to tighten sanctions on Iran yet again, it is sending mixed messages to Tehran about its commitment to a diplomatic solution, trying to create new openings for negotiations even while holding open, ever so vaguely, the possibility that the United States might some day resort to force.

In Australia on Friday, Vice President Dick Cheney, one of the strongest advocates of pressing for a “regime change” in Iran, reiterated his belief that a diplomatic solution was possible. But Mr. Cheney noted that “the

president has also made it clear that we haven't taken any options off the table," a phrase that President Bush frequently uses but has conspicuously avoided in recent weeks while discussing the issue.

At the same time, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice restated her willingness to meet the Iranians anyplace to talk about anything as long as they first agree to stop producing nuclear fuel, even temporarily.

White House officials insist that there is no contradiction.

"The idea that we are ginning up another war — there is no evidence for that," one senior administration official said Friday. The official added that Iran needed to know that it could not let negotiations drag on forever, and that any talk of military options was a signal that Washington would not negotiate endlessly while Tehran used the time to continue its work on uranium enrichment.

But, so far, the White House has declined to say at what point the Iranians will have pushed the United States too far — in other words, how many working centrifuges in Iran would be too many, or at what point it would be impossible to guarantee that Iran could not achieve a "nuclear option," the ability to turn ostensibly civilian nuclear facilities into bomb-making ones.

For now, administration officials say, Mr. Bush is happy to leave the Iranians guessing. He ordered an additional aircraft carrier into waters within striking distance of Iran and its nuclear facilities last month, a step that senior officials say they believe took the Iranian leadership by surprise. He has issued warnings to the Iranians not to meddle in Iraq and has focused on intelligence findings that the most deadly bombs used against Americans in Iraq bear marks of Iranian origins.

But Mr. Bush has denied that he is trying to provoke Iran into a response that would provide a pretext for direct confrontation. "To say it is provoking Iran is just a wrong way to characterize the commander in chief's decision to do what is necessary to protect our soldiers in harm's way," Mr. Bush said at a news conference on Feb. 15, shortly after accusing Iranian forces, but not necessarily the country's leadership, of worsening the violence in Iraq.

In interviews in recent days, three administration officials, all of whom insisted on anonymity because they were speaking about a strategy still being developed, said the carrier movements, the accusations about weapons in Iraq and the use of sanctions against the government were all intended to provide Mr. Bush with some leverage in dealing with Iran.

The officials have made little secret of their desire to fuel dissatisfaction inside Iran with the country's fiery president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, who on Friday vowed anew to continue enriching uranium, saying, "If we show weakness in front of the enemies, they will increase their expectations."

R. Nicholas Burns, the under secretary of state for policy and the lead negotiator on Iran, said Thursday that the multipronged approach was showing an effect. "We've roiled their government, and I think we've shocked them a bit," he said.

Mr. Burns is headed to London for a meeting on Monday with France, Germany, Britain, Russia and China about devising a new, tighter set of sanctions against the Iranian government — one that might include a further crackdown on export credits or conventional arms sales.

Mr. Burns will undoubtedly run into more resistance from the Russians and the Chinese, who told American officials flatly in December that they would not put additional economic pressure on the Iranians. But Mr. Burns said he was not looking for a major escalation of sanctions, and other administration officials say that modest steps would be fine for now.

"The most important thing about the last resolution was that we achieved a consensus, we kept the Russians and Chinese on board," one senior administration official said. "And in the end, that's what has serious impact in Iran."

Administration officials say that the need to hold that consensus together is overriding the differences on Iran that roiled the administration in its first term. Back in 2002 and 2003, when the prospect of a nuclear-capable Iran was more distant, the administration decided not to explore several offers through intermediaries to open discussions.

Mr. Cheney and others argued that the success they anticipated in Iraq would chasten the Iranians, bringing them to the table on more favorable terms.

Mr. Cheney, however, appears increasingly isolated now that many of his protégés have departed the Defense Department, the State Department and other corners of the administration. He was described by several top officials as only a minor player in the president's decision in May to offer incentives to Iran if it agreed to suspend its fuel production.

But the Iranians did not accept last year's offer, and if the administration and the Europeans are unable to find a formula that works for all sides, the talk of military options is bound to persist.

"No one has defined where the red line is that we can't let the Iranians step over," one senior official said. But Mr. Bush, the official said, is determined "not to let them get one lugnut turn away from having a bomb."

Some diplomats who are trying to bridge the differences between Washington and Tehran insist that Mr. Bush is going to have to give some ground. "To focus only on suspension in my view is not the right approach," Mohamed

ElBaradei, the director general of the International Atomic Energy Agency, said early this week to The Financial Times.

In Vienna on Friday, Dr. ElBaradei repeated his idea of a "time out" to allow talks, with Tehran halting uranium enrichment and the United Nations suspending sanctions. And he has consistently preferred to allow a modest amount of face-saving "research and development" in Iran, and focus instead on preventing the country from having an industrial capacity to produce nuclear fuel.

So far, though, Mr. Bush has said that even that much nuclear knowledge cannot be allowed in a country he does not trust.

Nazila Fathi contributed reporting from Tehran.

http://www.nytimes.com/2007/02/24/washington/24policy.html?_r=1&oref=slogin

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Washington Times

February 24, 2007

Pg. 7

Iranian Leaders Decry Critics' 'Bullying' Over Nuke Program

By Nasser Karimi, Associated Press

TEHRAN -- Critics of its nuclear program are "bullying" Iran, its current president and a former president said yesterday in response to a report by the U.N. nuclear watchdog that opens the way for additional sanctions against Iran.

The comments from President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and influential former President Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, in separate speeches, appeared to show that the Iranian ruling establishment is closing ranks ahead of the possible new measures.

The International Atomic Energy Agency report Thursday said Iran has ignored a U.N. Security Council ultimatum to freeze uranium enrichment -- a possible pathway to nuclear arms -- and instead has expanded its program by setting up hundreds of centrifuges.

Hours later, the United States said key countries would meet next week to try to develop a new U.N. resolution on the standoff.

In Washington, Undersecretary of State R. Nicholas Burns said he will travel to London on Monday to meet with the United States' negotiating partners to try to draft a new resolution regarding Iran.

"It is effectively thumbing its nose at the international community," he said of Iran.

Mr. Burns said he hopes the United States and other permanent members of the U.N. Security Council, plus Germany, can quickly draft a resolution to "see Iran repudiated again." He said it was too soon to say what provisions the resolution might contain.

Among the permanent council members, Britain and France are likely to join the United States in a call for harsher sanctions than Russia and China will accept.

Chinese Foreign Minister Li Zhaoxing told his Iranian counterpart that his country hoped "to peacefully resolve" the nuclear issue, the Xinhua news agency reported yesterday. Russian U.N. Ambassador Vitaly Churkin likewise reiterated his country's desire for a negotiated solution.

Divisions had emerged within the Iranian leadership over Mr. Ahmadinejad's handling of the nuclear standoff since the council's adoption of limited economic sanctions against Iran in December.

Some Iranians think Mr. Ahmadinejad has been too antagonistic toward the United States and its allies. Mr. Rafsanjani in recent weeks has emerged as a high-level advocate of a more conciliatory stance toward the West in the nuclear dispute.

But Mr. Rafsanjani told worshippers gathered for Friday prayers in Tehran that Western countries would fail to achieve anything by pressuring Iran about its nuclear activities.

And state television quoted Mr. Ahmadinejad as telling a gathering of thousands in northern Iran: "The Iranian nation has resisted all bullies and corrupt powers, and it will fully defend all its rights.

"If a few states do not believe that Iran's nuclear activities are peaceful, this is of no importance whatsoever," he said at the rally in Fuman.

In a warning to the United States and its Western allies who want Iran to roll back its nuclear program, Mr. Rafsanjani, a high-ranking cleric who holds seats on two of Iran's most important government bodies, said, "If you continue this bullying way, you will definitely make many troubles for yourselves, the world and the region."

But he also reiterated Iran's offer for talks. "We -- all of us, our officials, our leader -- are ready to provide you full assurances." He did not elaborate.

<http://www.washtimes.com/world/20070223-100823-1509r.htm>

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Los Angeles Times

February 24, 2007

Pg. 1

N. Korea Invites U.N. Nuclear Monitor

Pyongyang says it will discuss shutting down its weapons program.

By Bob Drogin, Times Staff Writer

VIENNA — In a fresh sign of easing tensions, North Korean officials Friday invited the chief of the U.N. nuclear watchdog agency to visit Pyongyang next month to develop plans aimed at dismantling the nation's nuclear weapons program, officials said here.

Mohamed ElBaradei, director of the International Atomic Energy Agency, said he hoped to discuss the "shutdown and eventual abandonment" of the plutonium-producing reactor facility at Yongbyon, ending its ability to produce fuel for additional nuclear weapons.

North Korea, which tested its first nuclear device in October, pledged last week to stop, seal and ultimately disable operations at Yongbyon. It also agreed to let IAEA inspectors return to examine its bombs, nuclear fuel stores and other facilities. Inspectors were ordered out in December 2002, just before the reclusive regime withdrew from the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty.

Pyongyang did not promise to relinquish its current arsenal, believed to be up to six bombs or the fissionable material to make them, but agreed to further negotiations.

"I see this as a step toward the denuclearization of the North Korean peninsula," ElBaradei told reporters in a joint briefing with U.N. Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, who is visiting Vienna. A spokeswoman said ElBaradei probably would visit in the second week of March.

The White House, which is eager to see North Korea disarm, applauded the invitation as a sign of progress. "It's a positive sign," said White House spokesman Tony Fratto. "It shows that we're beginning to execute the terms of the agreement."

The breakthrough came a day after ElBaradei reported that Iran had defied a U.N. Security Council order to suspend its nuclear program. The report said Iran instead has steadily expanded low-grade enrichment of uranium, installed further equipment used for enrichment, and continued construction of related facilities. The report cites numerous cases in which Tehran ignored IAEA requests for additional access or information.

In an interview Friday, Ali Asghar Soltanieh, Iran's representative to the IAEA, argued that the report supports Iran because, he said, IAEA experts "found no evidence" of diverted nuclear material that could be used for weapons. "It is a clean bill of health," he said.

The report, however, states that the IAEA "is unable to verify the absence of undeclared nuclear material and activities" unless Tehran provides additional cooperation to solve a series of outstanding concerns.

Inspectors are restricted in their travel and may visit only sites that Iran has formally declared.

Soltanieh said the IAEA report disproves allegations in Washington that Iran is secretly planning to use a civilian nuclear fuel program to build nuclear arms.

"All these allegations have been proved by Mr. ElBaradei to be baseless," he said. "The report proves that all activities of Iran are for peaceful purposes."

Soltanieh repeated Iran's offer to start negotiations if Washington and its allies drop U.N. sanctions and their demands for an immediate freeze of nuclear activities as a precondition to talks. "We are a great nation and preconditions are a humiliation," he said.

Bush administration officials will meet other Security Council members Monday in London to draft further sanctions proposals.

The talks are expected to focus on European export guarantees that help prop up Iran's economy.

Ban, the new U.N. chief, urged Iran to follow North Korea's example and return to talks with the international community.

"I very much hope that the Iranian authorities learn from the case of the North Korean nuclear example," he said. "It should emphasize the better future of the nuclear issue through dialogue."

North Korea agreed Feb. 13 to freeze production of plutonium at its five-megawatt facility at Yongbyon and to allow inspectors to monitor and verify its compliance. In return, the United States, China, South Korea and Russia agreed to provide about \$400 million in food and fuel aid, plus security guarantees.

The United States also agreed to start the process of removing North Korea's designation as a state that sponsors terrorism, and to discuss terms for normalizing relations and ending economic sanctions.

The pact defers several more difficult issues, including denuclearization of the Korean peninsula. Some of President Bush's supporters have sharply criticized the arrangement, saying the White House rewarded Kim Jong-Il's government for testing a bomb.

Vice President Dick Cheney, speaking earlier Friday in Sydney, Australia, called the deal a "first hopeful step" but appeared to question North Korea's commitment to follow through.

"We go into this deal with our eyes open," he said, according to the Associated Press. "In light of North Korea's missile test last July, its nuclear test in October and its record of proliferation and human rights abuses, the regime in Pyongyang has much to prove."

<http://www.latimes.com/news/nationworld/world/la-fg-norkor24feb24,1,3175902.story>

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New York Times
February 24, 2007
Pg. 4

U.S. In Talks With Britain On Installing Missile Defense System

By Alan Cowell

LONDON, Feb. 23 — Britain and the United States said Friday that they were discussing the stationing of an American antiballistic missile defense system on British soil.

The United States previously offered to locate the missile system in the Czech Republic and Poland, drawing furious objections from Russia, though Washington argues that the system is not built to defend against Russia but against Iran, principally, and other potential threats.

Prime Minister Tony Blair's spokeswoman said Friday that Britain had been secretly lobbying for inclusion in the system for some time. "It is our intention that whilst the United States are in the decision-making process, the U.K. should be considered as part of that," the spokeswoman said.

"The prime minister thinks it is a good idea that we are part of the consideration by the United States" she said, speaking on the condition of anonymity, which the British civil service requires. "We believe it is an important step toward providing missile defense coverage for Europe, of which we are part."

The possible step, first mentioned in *The Economist* magazine, seems sure to prove contentious in Britain, and to cloud Mr. Blair's final months in office, along with two other events that surfaced Friday.

In one, relatives of British soldiers slain in Iraq began a peace vigil in blue nylon tents near Mr. Blair's office, and in the other, Mr. Blair pondered a new military deployment in Afghanistan.

Just two days after Mr. Blair announced a withdrawal of 1,600 of the 7,100 British soldiers in southern Iraq, Defense Secretary Des Browne said "some additional forces" — possibly about 1,000 soldiers — would be sent to join the 5,600 Britons who are part of NATO forces confronting an expected spring offensive by the Taliban in Afghanistan. Word of the missile defense negotiations followed remarks in Washington on Thursday by Gen. Henry Obering III, who discussed the deployment of missile defenses in Britain, saying, "We are always looking for new ways to partner with the United Kingdom, whether that be co-development or a hosting, or any of the activities of that nature." He also said that radar systems were already in final testing in Britain.

At first the American Embassy in London made remarks that the British news media seized on as a rebuff of Mr. Blair's interest. David Johnson, the deputy chief of mission at the United States Embassy in London, told a BBC radio interviewer: "I would see as we go forward. There may be opportunities for us to talk to other countries about other needs, but right now we're concentrating on the Czech Republic and on Poland as the primary sites where we would be looking for this."

In a subsequent statement, Mr. Johnson said any suggestion that his remarks "were a rebuff to the British government is nonsense. We have been and will be in discussions with the British government as we develop our missile defense system and be open to opportunities for joint work as we go forward."

The negotiations are most likely to raise political hackles at a time when many in Mr. Blair's Labor Party and in the opposition Conservatives are pressing for Britain to distance itself from the United States after their close and sometimes unpopular alliance in Iraq.

The Conservatives said the government had given no information about its discussions with the United States. "If there is a request to base part of the U.S. National Missile Defense system in the U.K., we would need to see the exact nature of that request before taking a decision," said Liam Fox, the Conservative spokesman on defense. The government, he said, needs "to be more honest with the opposition" to secure bipartisan support for the proposed missile deployment.

Mr. Fox also took issue with the plan to deploy more troops to Afghanistan, saying other European countries, including Germany, France, Italy and Spain, should commit troops in the hazardous Helmand Province of southern Afghanistan, where many British soldiers are based.

"It is clear that the government has failed to get our NATO allies to carry their share of the burden in Afghanistan," he said, complaining that, with deployments in Iraq and Afghanistan, "it is clear now that our army is so overstretched we can't carry two conflicts."

Apart from Iraq and Afghanistan, British troops are deployed in the Balkans and in Northern Ireland.

The political hazards of Mr. Blair's military ventures were underlined by the protest on Whitehall, the broad boulevard running by the gated and closely guarded entrance to Downing Street, where Mr. Blair has his office and residence.

Rose Gentle, whose 19-year-old son Gordon was killed in Basra, Iraq, in 2004, led a small group of protesters who pitched camp and submitted a letter addressed to Mr. Blair calling for a meeting with him.

"This is our sixth such visit, and each time you have not seen fit to give us a few minutes of your time," the letter said. "We have a number of questions that we need answered about the deaths of our sons in Iraq, and we insist that you meet us."

"Please believe us, Mr. Blair, that neither we nor these questions will go away," the letter said.

Thom Shanker contributed reporting from Washington.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2007/02/24/world/europe/24missile.html>

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Boston Globe

February 24, 2007

The Next Generation Of Threats

By Ralph Kaplan and Harvey Silvergate

MUCH INK has been spilt extolling the latest progress made in recognizing the second- and third-most serious threats facing mankind and the planet.

The recent report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has forced even the recalcitrant Bush administration to back down in the face of agreement between the scientific and political communities, prodded by a citizenry frightened by disturbing weather patterns.

Meanwhile, the effort to control the world's current supply of fissile material, and limit the future manufacture of more of it by rogue states, has picked up steam, fueled by scientists' warnings and by public appeals from respected former officials. Again, an engaged public that knows of Hiroshima and Nagasaki endorses this expenditure of resources.

Yet there is an even more urgent danger. Besides chemical and biological weapons, we are now seeing advances in the fields of genetics, nanotechnology, and robotics (so-called GNR technologies) that threaten destruction even more horrific than that of atomic devices or climate change.

These technologies, often self-replicating, don't need the massive industrial infrastructure required to manufacture nuclear devices, and have the potential to kill tens or hundreds of millions of people in relatively short order.

Ray Kurzweil -- a scientist, futurist, and Old Testament prophet of sorts -- has warned of the dangers. An inductee into the Invention Hall of Fame, Kurzweil was the principal developer of the first print-to-speech reading machine for the blind, and the first text-to-speech synthesizer. His warnings have been echoed by Bill Joy, co founder and chief scientist of Sun Microsystems.

Their concern is so acute that they teamed up in October 2005 to criticize as "extremely foolish" the government's release of the reconstructed genome of the 1918 pandemic flu virus. "The genome is essentially the design of a weapon of mass destruction," they warned. "It would be easier to create and release this virus than an atomic bomb, as you don't need rare raw materials. . . . Release of the material would be far worse than an atomic bomb."

Joy as long ago as 2000 warned that nanotechnology could "destroy the biosphere on which all life depends. . . . It is most of all the power of destructive self-replication in genetics, nanotechnology, and robotics that should give us pause. We have had in hand for years clear warnings of the dangers inherent in widespread knowledge of GNR technologies, of the possibility of knowledge alone enabling mass destruction. But these warnings haven't been widely publicized."

Why has so little attention been paid?

The answer is partly resources, partly generational difference in conceptual frameworks, and partly the emotionally destabilizing and unthinkable nature of the threat. Our most credible political figures continue to focus on the old technology, the nuclear bomb (age: about 62).

A recent Wall Street Journal op-ed by George Schultz, William Perry, Henry Kissinger, and Sam Nunn (average age: 80) and endorsed by 17 other major public figures emphasized the primacy of the atomic threat. It was further endorsed a few weeks later by former Soviet president Mikhail Gorbachev in the same paper.

Nunn's Nuclear Threat Initiative, backed up by the Doomsday Clock created in 1947 by the Bulletin of Atomic Scientists, usefully continues to beat this admittedly important drum.

But the drumbeat is inadequate to the task and threat at hand, and is likely partly responsible for the scientific community's inability to focus public opinion -- the driving force behind political action in any democracy -- on the unthinkable dangers lying in the not-too-distant future.

Before our best scientific minds can be heard, they will have to be joined by a new generation of political leaders. Only then can these more potent threats to mankind's existence become the focus of our efforts and resources. None of those resources will be allocated until public opinion becomes as engaged on threats from genetics, nanotechnology, and robotics as on nuclear proliferation and climate change.

The next generation of threats is an unpleasant prospect. But ducking from reality is no answer. We have marshaled the nation's intellectual and other resources to solve many a vexing problem. This is neither the time nor the issue to duck.

Ralph Kaplan is a managing member of Penbrook Management LLC. Harvey Silverglate is a Cambridge lawyer and writer.

http://www.boston.com/news/globe/editorial_opinion/oped/articles/2007/02/24/the_next_generation_of_threats/

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Los Angeles Times

February 25, 2007

Pg. 1

U.N. Calls U.S. Data On Iran's Nuclear Aims Unreliable

Tips about supposed secret weapons sites and documents with missile designs haven't panned out, diplomats say.

By Bob Drogin and Kim Murphy, Times Staff Writers

VIENNA — Although international concern is growing about Iran's nuclear program and its regional ambitions, diplomats here say most U.S. intelligence shared with the U.N. nuclear watchdog agency has proved inaccurate and none has led to significant discoveries inside Iran.

The officials said the CIA and other Western spy services had provided sensitive information to the Vienna-based International Atomic Energy Agency at least since 2002, when Iran's long-secret nuclear program was exposed. But none of the tips about supposed secret weapons sites provided clear evidence that the Islamic Republic was developing illicit weapons.

"Since 2002, pretty much all the intelligence that's come to us has proved to be wrong," a senior diplomat at the IAEA said. Another official here described the agency's intelligence stream as "very cold now" because "so little panned out."

The reliability of U.S. information and assessments on Iran is increasingly at issue as the Bush administration confronts the emerging regional power on several fronts: its expanding nuclear effort, its alleged support for insurgents in Iraq and its backing of Middle East militant groups.

The CIA still faces harsh criticism for its prewar intelligence errors on Iraq. No one here argues that U.S. intelligence officials have fallen this time for crudely forged documents or pushed shoddy analysis. IAEA officials, who openly challenged U.S. assessments that Saddam Hussein was developing a nuclear bomb, say the Americans are much more cautious in assessing Iran.

American officials privately acknowledge that much of their evidence on Iran's nuclear plans and programs remains ambiguous, fragmented and difficult to prove.

The IAEA has its own concerns about Iran's nuclear program, although agency officials say they have found no proof that nuclear material has been diverted to a weapons program.

Iran's Islamist government began enriching uranium in small amounts in August in a program it says will provide fuel only for civilian power stations, not nuclear weapons.

Information withheld

On Thursday, the IAEA released a report declaring that Iran had expanded uranium enrichment and defied a Security Council deadline to suspend nuclear activities. In the meantime, the agency is locked in a dispute with Tehran over additional information and access to determine whether the program is peaceful.

In November 2005, U.N. inspectors leafing through papers in Tehran discovered a 15-page document that showed how to form highly enriched uranium into the configuration needed for the core of a nuclear bomb. Iran said the paper came from Pakistan, but has rebuffed IAEA requests to let inspectors take or copy it for further analysis.

Diplomats here were less convinced by documents recovered by U.S. intelligence from a laptop computer apparently stolen from Iran. American analysts first briefed senior IAEA officials on the contents of the hard drive at the U.S. mission here in mid-2005.

The documents included detailed designs to upgrade ballistic missiles to carry nuclear warheads, drawings for subterranean testing of high explosives, and two pages describing research on uranium tetrafluoride, known as "green salt," which is used during uranium enrichment. IAEA officials remain suspicious of the information in part because most of the papers are in English rather than Persian, the Iranian language.

"We don't know. Are they genuine, are they real?" asked a senior U.N. official here. Another official who was briefed on the documents said he was "very unconvinced."

Iran's representative to the IAEA, Ali Asghar Soltanieh, dismissed the laptop documents as "fabricated information." Iran, he said, has produced 170 tons of "green salt" at a uranium conversion facility in Esfahan that is monitored by the IAEA.

"We are not hiding it," he said in an interview. "We make tons of it. These documents are all nonsense."

Testy relations

The U.S. government is not required to share intelligence with the IAEA, and relations between Washington and the U.N. agency are at times testy. In March 2003, IAEA chief Mohamed ElBaradei embarrassed the White House when he told the U.N. Security Council that documents indicating Hussein's government in Iraq had sought to purchase uranium in Niger were forged. The Bush administration subsequently opposed ElBaradei's reappointment to his post.

While it confronts Iran's nuclear ambitions, the Bush administration also has tried to implicate Iran as a supplier of munitions and training for insurgent groups in neighboring Iraq.

But the quality of its information has limited this effort too.

U.S. officials recently compiled evidence purporting to show that the Iranian Quds Force, an elite unit of the Revolutionary Guard, had supplied Iranian-made weapons to Shiite militias that have attacked U.S. forces in Iraq. After U.S. officials unveiled the evidence to reporters in Baghdad two weeks ago, however, Secretary of Defense Robert M. Gates and other Pentagon officials scrambled to retreat from the incendiary claim that the "highest levels" of the Tehran government were directly involved.

"I don't know if it goes to the highest levels of the government," Army Lt. Gen. Raymond T. Odierno, the officer in charge of daily operations in Iraq, told Pentagon reporters Thursday. "What we do know is that the Quds Force has had involvement with some extremist groups in Iraq."

Washington has sought to pressure Tehran into halting the supply of "explosively formed projectiles" that are able to penetrate heavily armored vehicles. The projectiles represent only a small percentage of roadside bomb attacks in Iraq, but they are far more lethal than ordinary explosives.

Administration officials also cite a growing effort by the militant group Hezbollah, an Iranian protege and ally based in Lebanon, to aid anti-American Shiite forces in Iraq.

U.S. military officials contend that Hezbollah has provided training in Lebanon to hundreds of members of the Al Mahdi militia, which is controlled by radical anti-American cleric Muqtada Sadr. A smaller number of Hezbollah forces reportedly have entered Iraq through Syria to provide such training.

The administration has ordered a second aircraft carrier group into the Persian Gulf, a reminder that President Bush could order an airstrike on Iran's nuclear sites even while U.S. forces are tied down in Iraq. But White House officials have denied that an attack is imminent.

Given the lack of clear evidence, Iran's strategic goals in Iraq are a matter of debate, and concern has spread about its growing influence there. Although Iran is mostly Persian and Iraq is mostly Arab, both have majority Shiite populations that have kept close religious, economic and cultural ties for centuries. Iran's rulers view the U.S. as meddling in their backyard, or at least in their sphere of influence.

Some outside experts think the Islamic Republic seeks to keep the United States tied down indefinitely in Iraq and will actively resist a settlement there for fear that Washington will next turn its guns on Iran.

Ali Ansari, an expert on Iran at St. Andrews University in Scotland and author of "Confronting Iran," counters that Iran and America share some interests.

Iran is "looking for a stable Iraq," he said. "They want an Iraq that is not fragmented. But the difference would be that they don't want an Iraq that is militarily strong. They want an Iraqi government that is elected democratically, which means a Shia Iraq."

But Sunni-dominated governments in Egypt, Jordan and especially Saudi Arabia have pushed the U.S. to expand Sunni representation in Iraq's leadership as a way of countering Tehran. Some experts fear that a nuclear-armed Iran would spark a regional arms race.

John D. Negroponte, former director of national intelligence, told a House committee last month that Iran had extended its "shadow in the region" since the U.S. ousted hostile regimes on its borders: the Taliban in Afghanistan and Hussein's government in Baghdad.

Iran also has increased regional political leverage, he said, because of increased oil revenues, electoral victories by Hamas in the Palestinian territories and Hezbollah's "perceived recent success in fighting Israel" in Lebanon.

Iran and Syria since have resupplied arms to Hezbollah, including stocks of long-range missiles that could reach deep into Israel, U.S. officials contend.

Washington lists both Hamas and Hezbollah as terrorist organizations.

The administration has also become alarmed by Iran's increasing efforts to support Hamas after the group's victory in Palestinian elections in January 2006. That worry lies behind an \$86-million U.S. plan to build up Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas' Presidential Guard and national security forces, rivals to Hamas.

Confrontation exploited

Iran's president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, has successfully exploited the growing confrontation with Washington to gain much needed political support at home. Nationalist sentiments run deep in Iran and the claim that Tehran has the same right to nuclear power as other nations has become a rallying cry that undermines the government's domestic critics.

"None of us can accept the suspension of these activities because people consider this our legal right," said Akbar Alami, an independent lawmaker. "All the political parties agree with this. We cannot stop."

Ahmadinejad's fiery rhetoric and defiance of the West also have burnished his credentials as a populist leader in other Islamic nations. That has raised alarms in Sunni governments around the region that Iran's brand of militant political Islam, potentially backed by the prestige of being a nuclear power, is on the march.

"The Americans are worried about enriched uranium, and the Arabs are worried about enriched Shiism," said Mamoun Fandy, senior fellow for Persian Gulf security at the London-based International Institute for Strategic Studies. Iran's growing power, he said, "threatens every existing political order in the region."

Drogin reported from Vienna and Murphy from London. Times staff writers Paul Richter and Peter Spiegel in Washington contributed to this report.

<http://www.latimes.com/news/nationworld/world/la-fg-usiran25feb25,1,488919.story>

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Washington Times

February 25, 2007

Pg. 1

Iran Urges Talks On Nukes, Not War

By Ali Akbar Dareini, Associated Press

TEHRAN -- The Iranian foreign minister said yesterday the United States was in no position for another war and maintained that negotiations -- not threats -- were the only way to resolve the standoff over its nuclear activities. Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki was responding to Vice President Dick Cheney, who renewed Washington's warning to Iran earlier yesterday that "all options" were on the table if Tehran continues to defy U.N. demands to halt uranium enrichment.

Mr. Mottaki said the U.S. could not afford to settle its differences with Iran by starting a third war after Afghanistan and Iraq.

"We do not see America in a position to impose another crisis on its taxpayers inside America by starting another war in the region," Mr. Mottaki told reporters.

The United States and several of its Western allies fear that Iran is using its nuclear program to produce an atomic weapon -- charges Iran denies, saying its aim is to generate electricity.

The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) reported on Thursday that Iran had ignored a U.N. Security Council ultimatum to freeze its uranium-enrichment program and had expanded the program by setting up hundreds of centrifuges.

Enriched to a low level, uranium is used to produce nuclear fuel, but further enrichment makes it suitable for use in building an atomic bomb.

The IAEA report was released after the deadline Wednesday of a 60-day grace period for Iran to halt uranium enrichment. Iran has repeatedly refused to halt enrichment as a precondition to negotiations about its program.

Mr. Mottaki urged the U.S. and its allies to return to dialogue when they are scheduled to meet in London next week.

"The only way to reach a solution for disputes is negotiations and talks. Therefore, we want the London meeting to make a brave decision and resume talks with Iran," Mr. Mottaki said.

Gov. Bill Richardson, of New Mexico and a Democratic presidential candidate, yesterday also urged the Bush administration to negotiate directly with Iran.

"Saber-rattling is not a good way to get the Iranians to cooperate," Mr. Richardson wrote in an op-ed piece in The Washington Post. "But it is a good way to start a new war."

Iran, Mr. Richardson wrote, "will not end their nuclear program because we threaten them and call them names." Separately, Iran's elite Revolutionary Guards said it killed 17 mercenary fighters on its border with Turkey and accused the United States and its allies of seeking to provoke tensions along the country's frontiers.

In a statement, the Guards said 17 "counterrevolutionary mercenaries" were killed, the official Islamic Republic News Agency (IRNA) reported yesterday.

The Guards chief, Gen. Yahya Rahim Safavi, said the United States, Britain and Israel were seeking to incite tension on Iran's borders to undermine its government, IRNA reported.

"Iran's enemies, through hiring some mercenaries and with their wishful thinking, want to create instability but ... the armed forces will strongly suppress anti-revolutionaries and rebels who are dependent to foreigners," Gen. Safavi was quoted as saying.

<http://www.washtimes.com/world/20070225-125753-9427r.htm>

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Washington Post

February 26, 2007

Pg. 11

No 'Brakes' On Iran Nuclear Effort

President's Remarks Precede Summit on Further Sanctions

By Nasser Karimi, Associated Press

TEHRAN, Feb. 25 -- Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad said Sunday that his country's disputed nuclear program was like a train "without brakes" or a reverse gear, prompting Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice to respond that Iran needs "a stop button."

The comments came as senior officials representing Germany and the five permanent members of the U.N. Security Council -- the United States, Britain, France, China and Russia -- prepared to meet in London on Monday to discuss increasing international pressure on Iran to suspend its uranium enrichment program.

The International Atomic Energy Agency last week reported that Iran had ignored a U.N. Security Council ultimatum to freeze the enrichment program and instead had expanded it by setting up hundreds of centrifuges. Iran has repeatedly refused to halt enrichment as a precondition to negotiations about the program.

"The train of the Iranian nation is without brakes and a rear gear," state radio quoted Ahmadinejad as telling a gathering of Muslim clerics. "We dismantled the rear gear and brakes of the train and threw them away some time ago."

He also repeated his call for further negotiations, saying the time for "bullying" had expired.

Rice responded by saying, "They don't need a reverse gear. They need a stop button." She also told "Fox News Sunday" that Iran needs "to stop enriching and reprocessing, and then we can sit down and talk about whatever is on Iran's mind."

"I've said that I am prepared to meet my counterpart or an Iranian representative at any time if Iran will suspend its enrichment and reprocessing activities. That should be a clear signal," she added.

Enriched to a low level, uranium is used to produce nuclear fuel, but further enrichment makes it suitable for use in building a bomb. The United States and its allies fear that Iran is using its nuclear program in an effort to produce atomic weapons, an allegation Iran denies, saying its aim is solely to generate electricity.

In December, the Security Council imposed limited sanctions on Iran over its refusal to suspend enrichment and gave it 60 days to halt enrichment. The deadline expired Wednesday.

Meanwhile, in Pakistan, seven Muslim nations warned of a "dangerous escalation of tension" over Iran's nuclear program and urged that the standoff be resolved diplomatically rather than by force.

The statement came after ministers from Egypt, Indonesia, Jordan, Malaysia, Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Pakistan met to seek ways to resolve Middle East conflicts, including the Iran issue.

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/02/25/AR2007022501098.html>

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New York Times
February 26, 2007
Pg. 12

Iran Says It Launched Suborbital Rocket Into Space, With Eye Toward Lifting Satellites

By Nazila Fathi

TEHRAN, Feb. 25 — Iran announced Sunday that it had launched a research rocket that attained a suborbital altitude, a test that appeared to move it closer toward its aim of putting its own satellites into space.

Initially, the director of the Aerospace Research Center, Mohsen Bahrani, was quoted by the Iranian Student News Agency on Saturday as saying that the rocket, carrying a research cargo, “was launched successfully into space.” But he did not disclose any information about the altitude the rocket reached or when it was launched. The state television also reported the news on Sunday.

Ali Akbar Golrou, another official at the center, told the Fars News Agency on Sunday that the rocket was a so-called sounding rocket carrying atmosphere-testing equipment that rose 94 miles before falling back to earth by parachute, he said.

“The rocket was launched only for scientific and research purposes,” Mr. Golrou was quoted as saying. “Some of the news agencies have reported that a missile has been launched into space, which is false,” he said, referring to earlier reports that the launching might have been a weapons test.

A test rocket capable of reaching greater altitudes would have had significant meaning not only for Iran’s effort to put satellites into orbit, but also for developing a transcontinental ballistic missile, making it a topic of keen interest to other countries. The United Nations Security Council passed a resolution on Dec. 23 that imposed a ban on trade of goods or technology related to Iran’s nuclear and missile programs. Iran refused to comply with a two-month deadline in the resolution to suspend its uranium enrichment program, and now, the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council are meeting in London on Monday to discuss possible further sanctions.

Mr. Bahrani told the Iranian Students News Agency that the cargo intended for research was produced jointly by the Aerospace Research Center and the Ministry of Defense.

Iran launched its first satellite, known as Sina-1, from a Russian rocket in 2005. But it said that it wanted to improve its Shahab-3 missile, which has a range of 1,250 miles, to launch satellites. Iran says it needs to launch four more satellites by 2010 to increase the number of people with access to telephones or cellphones to 80 million from 22 million, and to increase the number of Internet users to 35 million from 5.5 million.

Defense Minister Mohammad Najar said that “building satellites, launchers, launching the first satellite of Sina with Russia and entering the space club, creating missile test centers and expanding its infrastructure and training personnel are among the ministry’s plans,” the daily Etamad Meli quoted him as saying Sunday.

Science and Technology Minister Mohammad Soleimani said Iran planned to accelerate its space program, the students news agency reported. “Investment in space is very serious and requires time,” he said, “but we are trying to speed it up.”

<http://www.nytimes.com/2007/02/26/world/middleeast/26iran.html>

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Christian Science Monitor
February 26, 2007
Pg. 1

Europe Warms To US Missile Shield

Concerns about Iran have reduced opposition to US plans to extend its 'star wars' defense system.

By Jeffrey White, Contributor to The Christian Science Monitor

PRAGUE, CZECH REPUBLIC -- US plans to extend its "star wars" missile-defense program to Europe, which once dismissed the technology as an unproven cold-war anachronism, are gaining acceptance among governments here.

Despite Russia's mounting opposition, the Czech Republic, Poland, and – as of Friday – Britain have all expressed serious interest in hosting parts of the shield. Other countries traditionally cool to the idea have been notably quiet. The trigger: concern about a nuclear Iran.

"This is all a result of Iran," says Tim Williams, a European security analyst at the Royal United Services Institute for Defence and Security Studies in London. "Governments see that Iranian missiles can hit Europe, and suddenly they are very worried about the threat from ballistic missiles. They have to look at missile defenses."

Sunday, Iranian media reported that the country had launched a rocket into space, raising speculation that Iran was nearing the technological capacity to launch intercontinental missiles. That report, which quoted the head of Iran's aerospace research center, was quickly denied by his deputy, however.

There was no such equivocation from Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, who, ahead of Tuesday's UN Security Council meeting on Iran's disputed nuclear program, compared its nuclear drive to a train that has no brakes.

The US, which says that a European shield would intercept ballistic missiles fired from "rogue states" such as Iran, wants to build a radar station here in the Czech Republic and a corresponding base with 10 interceptor missiles in neighboring Poland. After years of talks, the US last month approached the Czech and Polish governments about hosting the shield.

Since then, developments have come quickly. A week ago, Czech Prime Minister Mirek Topolánek met with Polish Prime Minister Jaroslaw Kaczynski in Warsaw and said they expected to go along with the plan. Then on Friday, Britain confirmed that Prime Minister Tony Blair has been in talks with the US about stationing antiballistic missiles there as part of the shield.

Czech President Václav Klaus travels to Washington next month to discuss the matter with Vice President Dick Cheney. President Bush is weighing a trip to Poland and possibly here this summer.

Currently two bases – one in Alaska, one in California, believed to host 13 and three missiles respectively – make up the US missile defense shield. Detractors say missile defense technology – in which radars and missile silos work in tandem to pinpoint and then intercept enemy missiles – still remains unproven.

But Mr. Bush has made missile defense a priority: He has earmarked \$18.5 billion to be spent by 2009. Czech media reported that the US plans to set aside \$118 million for a base in Central Europe this year.

"The US is eager to move quickly on this because they have spent a lot of money and they want something to show for it," says Mr. Williams.

The plan is to start constructing the base and radar station next year, with the shield coming online by 2012.

Russia fears 'arms race'

Russia, whose Kaliningrad enclave borders Poland, has been the plan's most vocal opponent so far. A Russian general recently threatened Czechs and Poles with a future retaliatory missile strike.

And in Munich earlier this month, Russian President Vladimir Putin said the missile shield would plunge the world into a new arms race, and that the US, Europe, and Russia were on the brink of a new cold war.

"[The proposed shield] is very serious, and it breaks the strategic balance that now exists in Europe," says Alexey Fedotov, Moscow's ambassador to Prague.

Germany chided the US for not informing Russia of its designs on an antiballistic missile base in Poland, but it also appeared to throw some support to the US, calling for a full discussion of the proposal without protests and "anti-American insinuations." France, traditionally Europe's staunchest opponent of missile defense, has been silent on the issue, as have Denmark and Sweden – two countries that have been cool toward past US missile defense plans.

"You don't see the French and Germans kicking up much of a fuss about this," says Williams.

The shift away from opposition to US plans for a missile shield has been subtle and easy to miss, experts say. In a largely unnoticed speech about his country's nuclear strategy, for example, French President Jacques Chirac said last year for the first time that there was room in it for missile defense.

The US plan is moving ahead outside NATO, whose own shield proposal – the Active Load Theater Missile Defense – has dragged on for years in feasibility studies.

But it is NATO, experts say, which sheds some light on Russia's truculent opposition to a US missile base in Europe.

Since the fall of communism, Moscow watched as NATO continued to expand almost to its borders, incorporating most of the countries in the former Eastern Bloc.

"There is a moment when you suddenly remember all the bad things that have been happening for some time. You look at them and you see an array of negative signals, and you cannot ignore them," says Ivan Safranchuk, director of the Moscow branch of the World Security Institute.

But Russia watchers see little likelihood that Moscow will act.

"Russia's response is totally political," says Alexander Golts, who covers security issues for Yezhednyevny Zhurnal, an online newspaper in Russia. "To all serious experts it's obvious that this missile defense cannot threaten Russia's nuclear forces."

Don't look for referendums

The Czech and Polish governments seem poised to move on the US plan without putting it to a public vote, despite a growing call in both countries for a referendum. A Czech poll last week put 60 percent of the country against hosting any part of the shield, and in Britain, antinuclear groups are already criticizing the Blair government for wanting to be involved in the US shield.

"What we're seeing now is the product of near on seven years of diplomatic effort led by the Bush administration to get European governments to leave behind the cold-war version of missile defense," says Tom Karako, director of the Claremont Institute, a conservative think tank in Claremont, Calif.

"Now that the cold war is over, these governments have come to the realization that that version ... won't suffice in the future."

<http://www.csmonitor.com/2007/0226/p01s03-woeu.html>

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Washington Examiner

February 27, 2007

Bush Sticks To Diplomacy On Iran

By Rowan Scarborough, National Security Correspondent

WASHINGTON - The Bush administration is committed at this point to a diplomatic path to force Iran to give up uranium enrichment that could lead to nuclear bomb production.

"We are pursuing a diplomatic track — period," said a senior administration official who deals with military issues. British press reports over the weekend stirred up speculation that President Bush was near a decision to use military force against Iran. The BBC said U.S. Central Command has drawn up a war plan to strike nuclear and military sites. Vice President Dick Cheney added to the debate on a visit to Australia. He said all options for dealing with Tehran were on the table — a subtle threat of military force.

But the administration official said the military option is on the back burner. Bush is now focused on getting the U.N. Security Council to impose tough economic sanctions on Tehran. The process itself will be time-consuming. The president must first win Security Council approval, then give the sanctions time to force Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad to end enrichment.

The senior administration official spoke on the condition of anonymity because he feared reprisal from superiors for talking to a reporter.

The U.N.'s International Atomic Energy Agency last week reported that Iran has increased enrichment activities, rather than ending them as a Security Council resolution had demanded.

U.S. Central Command, which oversees operations in the Persian Gulf, previously has said it has updated its target list for Iran as a routine procedure. Defense Secretary Robert Gates underscored that message Feb. 3 when he told reporters, "We are not planning for a war with Iran. ... The diplomatic process is working and I think that that's where we are relying."

Bush has ordered two Navy aircraft carriers, instead of the normal one, to stay in the region. But the administration official said this action was meant to soothe jittery Persian Gulf allies who fear a missile attack from Iran.

Timing for an attack is also not good. Any strike on Shiite-dominated Iran would likely further inflame the already volatile situation in Iraq at the very moment the Bush administration is trying to reach Sunni-Shiite reconciliation. "The best way to resolve this would be to have Iran come to the table," Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said on Fox News Sunday. "I've said that I am prepared to meet my counterpart or an Iranian representative at any time, if Iran will suspend its enrichment and reprocessing activities."

Gates, at his Senate confirmation hearing, described attacking Iran as an "absolute last resort." He also said, "I think that we have seen in Iraq that once war is unleashed, it becomes unpredictable."

http://www.examiner.com/a-587787~Bush_sticks_to_diplomacy_on_Iran.html

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New York Times

February 27, 2007

Diplomats To Begin Drafting New U.N. Sanctions On Iran

By Helene Cooper

WASHINGTON, Feb. 26 — The coalition of six world powers that has been trying to get Iran to rein in its nuclear program will begin drafting a new United Nations Security Council resolution to ratchet up the pressure again, officials said Monday after a meeting in London.

Top officials from the United States, Britain, China, Russia, Germany and France agreed to begin working on the resolution after the International Atomic Energy Agency reported last week that Iran was expanding its efforts to enrich uranium, in continuing defiance of the United Nations.

The State Department spokesman, Sean McCormack, said the United States was willing to join in talks between the Europeans and Iran over the nuclear program, provided that Iran suspended its uranium enrichment activity. Mr. McCormack added: "Should they choose not to proceed down that pathway, then there will be consequences. And those consequences will be diplomatic isolation from the rest of the world."

Although American and British officials sounded buoyant, the United States discovered last year that there could be a long way between the start of work on a sanctions resolution against Iran and passage by the Security Council. The first sanctions resolution against Iran took about four months to put together, after much disagreement between the United States and Russia in particular.

The resolution that finally passed, two days before Christmas, was much weaker than American officials had wanted. It banned the import and export of materials and technology used in uranium enrichment, reprocessing and ballistic missiles, and froze the assets of 12 Iranians and 10 companies said to be involved in nuclear and ballistic missile programs.

But it did not include a mandatory travel ban on people involved in nuclear activities, as the Bush administration had proposed. To achieve consensus, the Americans dropped their insistence on a travel ban after Russia balked. Moscow also balked over sanctions against a nuclear power plant that Russia is building at Bushehr, in southern Iran.

The resolution gave Iran 60 days from Dec. 23 to suspend uranium enrichment — the first step in making fuel that can be used for civilian power plants or atomic bombs — or face further sanctions.

American and European officials are hoping that this time in the Security Council, things will be different. The United States and Britain would like to see the next round of sanctions include the travel ban, as well as a further freeze on international financial transactions by top Iranian officials.

"We've done a lot of the political negotiation that we didn't do last time," said one European diplomat involved in the negotiations. He characterized the meeting on Monday in London, attended by the American under secretary of state for political affairs, R. Nicholas Burns, and his five counterparts from Europe, Russia and China, as "one of the best meetings that they've had yet."

But, he added, "I'm sure it won't be straightforward."

A second sanctions resolution would be part of the overall increase in oratory and pressure against Iran by the Bush administration, which has also accused the Iranians of meddling in Iraq. Part of the debate on another resolution is bound to reflect concern from Russia over the possibility of American military action against Iran.

Vice President Dick Cheney said last week that "all options are still on the table" for Washington to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons, a comment that has heightened fears that the administration is considering attacking Iran's nuclear sites.

The Russian foreign minister, Sergey V. Lavrov, said Monday, during a conversation with President Vladimir V. Putin that was broadcast on state television, that Moscow was worried about that kind of talk.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2007/02/27/world/middleeast/27diplo.html>

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Christian Science Monitor

February 27, 2007

Iran's pursuit of nuclear power raises alarms

Does access to fuel ease nations toward nuclear weapons? Rising demand has nonproliferation experts unsettled.

By Howard LaFranchi | Staff writer of The Christian Science Monitor

WASHINGTON

Iran's mantralike insistence that its pursuit of nuclear technology is an internationally guaranteed right that it will never curtail has countries as diverse as the United States and China worried it is seeking a nuclear weapon.

But the huge increases in energy demand anticipated across the developing world over the next two decades, coupled with a growing urgency about global warming, have nuclear nonproliferation experts focused on Iran's case for broader and even more unsettling reasons. If a sense of entitlement to nuclear power and the fuel that makes it possible is allowed to take root, they say, the world soon could find itself with dozens of nuclear countries with the means to switch from peaceful energy production to building a nuclear arsenal virtually overnight.

Many of those countries would be in such hot spots as the Middle East and Southeast Asia, where a mounting temptation to keep up with worrisome neighbors could be too much to resist.

"It's not too difficult to foresee a world of dozens of virtual nuclear-weapons states, capable of building a bomb because of the nuclear material and technology they have, and Iran represents the danger of this future scenario," says Daryl Kimball, executive director of the Arms Control Association in Washington. "A country that claims it is

within its rights defies the international community, and gets right up to the edge of producing bomb-grade uranium."

The question of how to control the spread of nuclear technology – which can supply both civilian electrical energy production and horrendous mass destruction – has been on the international agenda since the early 1950s. A key worry has always been how to control the nuclear fuel, uranium or plutonium, that powers a civilian plant but that also is a key building block for military use of nuclear energy.

Concerns receded in recent decades, as interest stalled in nuclear-power generation. But with the US Department of Energy predicting a 50 percent rise in global demand for electricity in little more than a decade – and with rising concerns about the effect of energy sources that produce greenhouse gases – nuclear is again a "hot" energy solution. Enter Iran and its repeated claims to a "right" to nuclear technology and power. The UN Security Council's five permanent members plus Germany met in London Monday to consider a second round of sanctions against Iran, which the UN's nuclear watchdog agency last week said was accelerating its uranium-enrichment program. The meeting, not concluded at press time, was expected to produce ideas for additional turns of screws designed to bring Tehran back to the negotiating table.

Since the 1970 Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT), international law has acknowledged a universal right to peaceful nuclear energy. But Iran is using a "pick-and-choose" approach to the NPT, many experts say. Even before the part of the treaty that speaks of a right to nuclear energy, they point out, the language first lays out a country's responsibilities to forswear military uses and to provide assurances that its uses are peaceful.

"What we're talking about here is a loose interpretation of a right to something that brings you to within days of having a bomb, but when people say there is a right to that they are wrong," says Henry Sokolski, executive director of the Nonproliferation Policy Education Center in Washington and a former Pentagon nonproliferation official. It is "sloppy reading" of rules that include safeguards, Mr. Sokolski says, that has allowed Iran to move forward while citing "rights" but not responsibilities. Some countries and some US officials are pressing for a stricter interpretation, he says, that there is "no per se right to technology" without an equal willingness to prove that its use is solely for peaceful purposes.

A problem, though, stems from past practice of the US and other nuclear powers who have looked away as friendly nations with nuclear-energy programs developed their own programs for producing nuclear fuel. That response has allowed a list of nonnuclear-weapons countries like Japan and Germany to nevertheless possess all the material they need to have a bomb in no time (an alternative Japan has occasionally mulled over as North Korea has gone nuclear).

"We have winked at a list of friendly countries like Japan, Germany, Brazil, and others on the question of whether or not they should be able to make their own nuclear fuel, and the result is the idea that if it was true before it must be true for everybody," Sokolski says. The NPT says no such thing about nuclear fuel, he adds, because the international nuclear-fuel regime was never taken up by the treaty.

A problem for the international community is that many developing countries, no matter what they may think of the Iranian regime, perceive that Iran has a point when it speaks of developed-world favoritism, says the Arms Control Association's Mr. Kimball. Other analysts agree.

"Whether we like it or not, Iran is tapping into this issue of fairness and equality," says Joseph Cirincione, a nonproliferation expert at the Center for America Progress and author of a new book, "Bomb Scare," on the future of nuclear weapons.

Regional fears about Iran's intentions are also a factor. As Iran has asserted a right to nuclear technology, other countries in the oil-rich Middle East have announced plans to develop nuclear energy – something many experts doubt is a coincidence.

"We may still be debating whether Iran's nuclear program is ultimately for peaceful purposes or progressing with the intent of building nuclear weapons, but the countries in the region have made their decision that it is an aggressive program that requires a counter," says Ilan Berman, vice president of the American Foreign Policy Council and an Iran expert.

Noting that at least eight countries in the Middle East have recently declared intentions to develop nuclear technology, he says: "They are looking for some sort of counterweight to the Iranian program, which the Iranians may say is for peaceful purposes but which [these countries] know has the potential of being a nuclear-weapons program as well."

Needed: disincentives to make fuel

Beyond the immediate case of Iran, Mr. Berman says, the NPT poses a problem in that its guarantees of access to nuclear power encourage countries to develop technology "that allows them to come within striking distance of a nuclear-weapons capability."

An urgent need, he adds, is a new international system that creates "disincentives" for countries to move beyond nuclear power to producing nuclear fuel.

Ideas are out there, though no one is jumping at adopting them.

One proposal is to create a privately funded "fuel bank" – a stockpile of low-enriched uranium for use by countries that pledge not to build their own fuel-cycle capabilities. The Nuclear Threat Initiative co-founded by Ted Turner and former US Sen. Sam Nunn has committed \$50 million to creating such a bank through the International Atomic Energy Agency.

Others, such as the proliferation education center's Sokolski, say the incentives for nuclear-power production, including huge subsidies that countries give it, must be accounted for so that nuclear programs make economic sense. That would level the playing field as countries look for energy alternatives, and limit the "excuses" for developing a technology with a military adaptation, he says.

Jitters about nuclear rise again

While jitters about nuclear's potential for destructive uses are not new, they are heightened by the need for clean energy sources and new security threats.

America's first National Intelligence Estimate, issued under the Eisenhower administration, noted that countries would choose how to use nuclear technology "depending on how they think the wind is blowing," notes Mr. Cirincione.

"The challenge we face now is this: If we think nuclear energy is part of a global-warming solution, then we have to solve the nuclear-fuel problem to make the world safe for nuclear-power production."

<http://www.csmonitor.com/2007/0227/p01s01-wogi.html>

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American Farm Bureau

For the week of February 26, 2007

Focus on Agriculture

Agriculture on Alert

By Stewart Truelsen

American farmers are vulnerable to biological warfare attacks by enemy agents or airplanes carrying disease-laden mists and destructive chemicals. This may sound like a message from the Department of Homeland Security, but the warning is more than 50 years old. It came from the Civil Defense Administration in 1954.

"What the Farmer Should Know About Biological Warfare" was the name of a civil defense booklet distributed by Farm Bureau and other organizations. The agency reminded farmers to be alert and report any signs of unusual crop or animal diseases.

Fast forward to today. The enemy has changed but the warning is still valid. Large U.S. cities have an early-warning system known as BioWatch – a program of the Department of Homeland Security, Environmental Protection Agency and U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

BioWatch uses sensors to monitor the air outdoors and indoors where crowds might gather, such as at airports or subways. There may be dozens or even hundreds of these sensors in strategic places. Scientists monitor the data to make sure deadly biological agents are not released into the air.

The American Farm Bureau Federation has called on federal and state governments to strengthen their existing capabilities to prevent and respond to acts of bioterrorism. But as was the case during the Cold War, farmers are still an important part of the defense network in rural areas.

Farmers are cognizant of the fact that the U.S. agricultural industry could be a target for several reasons. For one thing, an attack might not be discovered right away, or it could be misconstrued as a naturally-occurring disease outbreak. This would give perpetrators a good chance to get away. Secondly, a disruption of the nation's food supply would alarm consumers and harm the economy.

In 1942, the British experimented with anthrax bombs on a small island near Scotland. One idea was to put a little bit of anthrax in cattle cakes and drop them over Germany to kill livestock herds. The cakes were manufactured but never used and later destroyed.

Bacteria, viruses and fungi could be used in an intentional attack against crops. This is not alarming news. Farmers have known for years that crops are vulnerable to disease. However, the intentional spreading of a disease to a crop such as wheat, barely, oats or rye could result in losses of up to 90 percent.

Terrorists also could tamper with food items after they leave the farm. In 1979, an extremist group injected liquid mercury into Israeli oranges sold on European markets. A dozen people suffered poisoning, and Israeli orange exports were sharply curtailed.

Numerous biological warfare agents have been identified over the years, but detection methods and countermeasures are rapidly advancing. By early next year, the Department of Homeland Security will announce the site of the

National Bio and Agro-Defense Facility. The name is a good indicator of its work – the facility will address biological and agricultural security risks. Agriculture needs to remain on alert. Guarding the nation’s food supply is a top priority and an important part of national security.

<http://www.fb.org/index.php?fuseaction=newsroom.focusfocus&year=2007&file=fo0226.html>

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