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Denver Post
March 24, 2007

New Leader Takes NORAD Reins

Air Force general also installed as head of Northern Command

By Bruce Finley, Denver Post Staff Writer

Peterson Air Force Base - U.S. military leaders shuffled their Colorado-based homeland-defense command Friday, moving forward with plans to focus more on China and embrace broader missions, from border patrol to missile defense.

"The security of our homeland is in good hands," Defense Secretary Robert Gates said as he led a change-of-command ceremony on this base in Colorado Springs, headquarters for U.S. Northern Command and North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD).

Gates installed Air Force Gen. Victor Renuart as leader of both Northern Command and NORAD, replacing Navy Adm. Timothy Keating.

Renuart most recently was senior military assistant to the secretary of defense, and previously oversaw military planning for the Afghanistan and Iraq conflicts.

He has been asked to guide anti-terrorism defenses and to complete a controversial move of the nation's early-warning operations out of nearby Cheyenne Mountain to a newer early-warning center at Peterson. Congressional investigators are scrutinizing this project, and some lawmakers have questioned it.

A 57-year-old former combat pilot, Renuart also will command the nation's emerging missile-defense system as components are moved into place around the world.

North Korea's missile tests in July show a need "to protect us against those rogue elements," Renuart said in a brief interview. "We will continue to develop that (system) and to test. We have to make sure it is fully tested as we integrate it into our nation's overall defense."

The extent to which more countries develop missiles will be a factor in deciding the long-term future of the Cheyenne Mountain early-warning center, Renuart added. That facility was designed to withstand Soviet nuclear bomb blasts.

"We don't know what the enemy will look like maybe 15 years from now," he said. "We don't want to trade away any capability now that we may need for the future. ... We have to be careful not to minimize the possibility that something of a rogue element could provide that kind of threat."

Keating, the outgoing commander, will head to Hawaii to run U.S. Pacific Command. Keating has announced he'll push for increased military exercises with China.

"We hope to gain a better understanding of their intentions," he told reporters.

China's recent test of new anti-satellite weapons, successfully shooting down a satellite, raised concerns among U.S. military leaders.

"We find that curious behavior for a country that was proposing a peaceful entry into the league of nations," Keating said. He noted "a continued incremental increase" in Chinese military capabilities.

http://www.denverpost.com/search/ci_5510248

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Washington Times

March 25, 2007

Pg. 1

Captured Britons Have 'Confessed,' Iran Says

By Ali Akbar Dareini, Associated Press

TEHRAN -- Iran claimed yesterday that 15 British sailors and marines had confessed to entering its waters in an act of "blatant aggression," an escalation of Tehran's rhetoric over the confrontation.

The British Foreign Office summoned Iran's ambassador for the second time in two days, saying an undersecretary had spent more than an hour in "frank and civil" talks demanding the safe return of the sailors and Royal Marines, and seeking assurances about their welfare and access to British consular officials.

Iran's top military official, Gen. Ali Reza Afshar, said the sailors and marines were moved to Tehran and under interrogation "confessed to illegal entry" and an "aggression into the Islamic republic of Iran's waters." Gen. Afshar did not say what would happen to the sailors and marines.

Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Mohammed Ali Hosseini accused the British of "violating the sovereign boundaries" of Iran, calling the entry a "blatant aggression."

The British government appeared to be avoiding harsh language in its public statements, and it avoided suggesting a link between the prisoners and Iran's nuclear dispute with the U.N. Security Council.

The British servicemen had just searched a merchant ship Friday morning when they and their two inflatable boats were intercepted by Iranian vessels near the disputed Shatt al-Arab waterway, U.S. and British officials said. The Iranians surrounded them and escorted them away at gunpoint.

In June 2004, six British marines and two sailors were captured, then paraded blindfolded on Iranian television.

They admitted they had entered Iranian waters illegally, but were released unharmed after three days.

Iranian hard-liners have already called for the 15 Britons to be held until Iran wins concessions from the West.

Several hard-line student groups urged the Iranian government not to release the Britons until five Iranians detained by U.S. forces in Iraq earlier this year are freed and the U.N.'s new sanctions against Iran are canceled.

Some 500 Iranian students gathered on the shore near where the Britons were captured, shouting "Death to Britain" and "Death to America," the semiofficial Fars news agency reported.

With tensions already running high, the United States has bolstered its naval forces in the Persian Gulf in a show of strength directed at Iran. There is concern that with so much military hardware in the Gulf, a small incident could escalate dangerously.

Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, Iran's supreme leader, warned last week that Western countries "must know that the Iranian nation and authorities will use all their capacities to strike enemies that attack."

The Britons were seized in an area where the boundaries of Iraqi and Iranian waters have long been disputed. A 1975 treaty set the center of the Shatt al-Arab -- the 125-mile-long channel known in Iran as the Arvand River -- as the border.

But then-Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein canceled that treaty five years later and invaded Iran, triggering an eight-year war. Virtually all of Iraq's oil is exported through an oil terminal near the mouth of the channel. Iran and the new Iraqi government have not signed a new treaty on sovereignty over the waterway. The seized sailors and marines, from the British frigate HMS Cornwall, are part of a task force that maintains security in Iraqi waters under authority of the U.N. Security Council.
<http://www.washtimes.com/world/20070325-122317-4075r.htm>

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New York Times
March 26, 2007
Pg. 6

Iran To Limit Cooperation With Nuclear Inspectors

By Thom Shanker and William J. Broad

The government of Iran yesterday denounced as illegal a sanctions package approved unanimously over the weekend by the United Nations Security Council, and in retaliation announced that it would limit cooperation with the United Nations' nuclear oversight agency.

President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad issued a defiant statement that "Iran's enrichment of uranium is a legal issue," maintaining that his nation's nuclear program was intended solely for energy production.

In contrast, he said, the Security Council's vote on Saturday imposing new sanctions on Iranian arms exports, the state-owned Bank Sepah and the Revolutionary Guard Corps "is not legal."

"We are not after an atomic bomb because it is not useful and our religion does not allow us to have it," he said in statements posted on his Web site, www.president.ir/en/

A spokesman for the government, Gholamhossein Elham, said on state television that Iran would restrict its cooperation with the International Atomic Energy Agency in response to the sanctions vote. "After this illegal resolution was passed against Iran last night, it forced the government to act based on Parliament's decision regarding the cooperation level with the agency and suspend parts of its activities with the agency," Mr. Elham said. In the past, Iran has cut back on its cooperation with the inspectors of the International Atomic Energy Agency in retaliation for actions meant to press it into curbing its nuclear efforts. The cutbacks have made it hard to assess the nuclear progress of Iran, including its ability to make fuel for a nuclear bomb.

The cutback Iran announced yesterday means that it would no longer provide early information to the agency about the design of new facilities that are capable of making atomic fuel.

David Albright, a former United Nations weapons inspector and the president of the Institute for Science and International Security, a private group in Washington that tracks nuclear weapons, said the cooperation cutback could make it easier for Iran to build clandestine plants meant to enrich uranium for nuclear arms.

"To me, it's a serious retreat," he said in an interview. "They could build a backup centrifuge facility and not tell the I.A.E.A. It creates a situation where Iran could build a centrifuge facility in secret," in theory keeping it safe from attacks by the United States or Israel.

But a European diplomat who closely follows the I.A.E.A.'s work said, "For now, it's not going to have much of an impact."

"It sounds tough," he added, but in theory it will only make a difference in the future if Iran chooses to push ahead with the construction of clandestine fuel plants.

A number of world leaders called on Iran yesterday to return to talks and consider a package of incentives to end its uranium enrichment program. Javier Solana, the foreign policy chief of the European Union, said in Berlin that he would reach out to Ali Larijani, Iran's nuclear negotiator, "to see whether we can find a route to negotiations."

Ban Ki-moon, the United Nations secretary general, appealed for renewed negotiations, and he urged Iran "to urgently take the necessary steps to restore the international community's trust that its nuclear program is peaceful in nature."

Iran's foreign minister, Manouchehr Mottaki, said in New York that his country would issue an official response to an offer by the United States and five other powers — Britain, China, France, Germany and Russia — to return to talks aimed at ending the stalemate over Iran's nuclear program. But he gave no indication that Iran would suspend its uranium enrichment, a prerequisite set by the other nations involved.

Tensions with Iran also increased yesterday over its seizure of 15 British military personnel in waters off Iraq.

Senior Iranian officials said the government was considering charging them with illegally entering its waters. Prime Minister Tony Blair denied that the navy personnel had been in Iranian waters and said that Iran should be aware that Britain considered the seizure of the sailors and marines a very serious act.

http://www.nytimes.com/2007/03/26/world/middleeast/26iran.html?_r=1&oref=slogin

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Washington Post
March 26, 2007
Pg. 10

Iran Feels Pinch As Major Banks Curtail Business

U.S. Campaign Urges Firms to Cut Ties

By Robin Wright, Washington Post Staff Writer

More than 40 major international banks and financial institutions have either cut off or cut back business with the Iranian government or private sector as a result of a quiet campaign launched by the Treasury and State departments last September, according to Treasury and State officials.

The financial squeeze has seriously crimped Tehran's ability to finance petroleum industry projects and to pay for imports. It has also limited Iran's use of the international financial system to help fund allies and extremist militias in the Middle East, say U.S. officials and economists who track Iran.

The U.S. campaign, developed by Treasury Secretary Henry M. Paulson Jr. and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, emerged in part over U.S. frustration with the small incremental steps the U.N. Security Council was willing to take to contain the Islamic republic's nuclear program and support for extremism, U.S. officials say. The council voted Saturday to impose new sanctions on Tehran, including a ban on Iranian arms sales and a freeze on assets of 28 Iranian individuals and institutions.

"All the banks we've talked to are reducing significantly their exposure to Iranian business," said Stuart Levey, Treasury's undersecretary for terrorism and financial intelligence. "It's been a universal response. They all recognize the risks -- some because of what we've told them and some on their own. You don't have to be Sherlock Holmes to see the dangers."

The new campaign particularly targets financial transactions involving the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps, which is now a major economic force beyond its long-standing role in procuring arms and military materiel. Companies tied to the elite unit and its commanders have been awarded government contracts such as airport management and construction of the Tehran subway. The practice has increased since the 2005 election of Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, U.S. officials say. The Revolutionary Guard -- of which Ahmadinejad is a former member -- is part of the hard-line leader's constituency.

"The Revolutionary Guard's control and influence in the Iranian economy is growing exponentially under the regime of Ahmadinejad," Levey said in a speech in Dubai this month.

The campaign differs from formal international sanctions -- and has proved able to win wider backing -- because it targets Iran's behavior rather than seeking to change its government. "This is not an exercise of power," Levey said in the interview. "People go along with you if it's conduct-based rather than a political gesture."

Iranian importers are particularly feeling the pinch, with many having to pay for commodities in advance when a year ago they could rely on a revolving line of credit, said Patrick Clawson, a former World Bank official now at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy. The scope of Iran's vulnerability has been a surprise to U.S. officials, he added.

The financial institutions cutting back business ties are mainly in Europe and Asia, U.S. officials say. UBS last year said it was cutting off all dealings with Iran. London-based HSBC (which has 5,000 offices in 79 countries) and Standard Chartered (with 1,400 branches in 50 countries) as well as Commerzbank of Germany have indicated they are limiting their exposure to Iranian business, Levey said. The rest have asked the United States not to publicize their names.

Ahmadinejad's rhetoric -- from denying the Holocaust to comparing Iran's stock exchange to gambling -- has helped, experts say. "There is very little foreign investment in Iran not because of sanctions, but because of the atmosphere created by Ahmadinejad's crazy statements," said Jahangir Amuzegar, former Iranian finance minister and executive director of the International Monetary Fund.

Paulson kicked off the effort to warn major financial institutions and government officials about the long-term costs of doing business with Iran during the annual International Monetary Fund and World Bank meetings in Singapore in September. Paulson, Levey and Treasury Deputy Secretary Robert M. Kimmitt have all held dozens of meetings with banks to explain how Iran is using dummy companies and deceptive practices through banks to finance its non-traditional or illicit business activities, U.S. officials say.

Both the Iranian government and the private sector have increasingly tried to persuade financial institutions to keep the name of "Iran" or the originating bank in Iran off transactions so they are not traced to the Islamic republic, U.S. officials say.

In a related effort, the Bush administration has warned "relevant companies and countries" about the risks of investing in Iran's oil and gas sector, R. Nicholas Burns, undersecretary of state for political affairs, said in congressional testimony Wednesday. Washington is generally trying to drive home to Tehran that its policies will lead to serious "financial hardship," he said.

In December, Iranian oil minister Kazem Vaziri Hamaneh acknowledged that Tehran was having trouble financing petroleum development projects. "Currently, overseas banks and financiers have decreased their cooperation," he told the oil ministry news agency Shana.

The Bush administration has taken several other actions in recent months to contain Iran, including deploying two Navy carrier strike groups near the Persian Gulf, arresting operatives of the Revolutionary Guards' al-Quds Force in Iraq and pressing for two U.N. resolutions to punish Iran for not suspending its uranium enrichment program.

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/03/25/AR2007032501084.html>

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Marine Corps Times

Corps outlines who gets anthrax shots

By John Hoellwarth - Staff writer

Posted : Sunday Mar 25, 2007 9:24:58 EDT

There's another needle on the pre-deployment medical checklist for Marines headed to Iraq, Afghanistan or Korea. Everyone heading to the Middle East or Pacific regions is getting the anthrax vaccine, according to a March 19 Corps-wide message.

In February 2006, based on the findings of a Food and Drug Administration analysis of the vaccine, a U.S. Appeals Court dissolved a U.S. District Court injunction that had halted mandatory anthrax vaccinations throughout the military in late 2004. In October, the Defense Department authorized the services to restart immunizations, according to MarAdmin 190/07.

The anthrax vaccine is mandatory for nearly all Marines serving in U.S. Central and Pacific commands for more than 15 days. Pregnant Marines get a deferment, and some other medical conditions require exemption, according to the message.

"Commanders will manage immunization refusals as they would address any refusal to obey a lawful order," the message reads.

The policy allows Marines younger than 18 or older than 64 to opt out of the anthrax vaccination. The Corps is not allowed to make the vaccine mandatory for these Marines because the FDA tests didn't include them in the sample population, according to the message. However, they can volunteer to take it.

For everyone else within the age range, "the vaccine is safe and effective," the message said.

The mandatory immunizations will also apply to stateside members of Marine Corps Forces Special Operations Command and reservists, individual augmentees, and Defense Department civilians deployed or slated to deploy to South Korea or the Middle East, according to the message.

Marines slated to deploy can begin the immunization process up to 60 days before their departure.

Voluntary for some

Certain other categories of people can volunteer for the shots, including active-duty or Reserve Marines who have received at least one dose of the vaccine and aren't subject to the mandatory vaccination.

Adult family members of military and civilian personnel going to the CentCom or PaCom areas for more than 15 consecutive days can also volunteer to take the shots.

The vaccination policy requires medical facilities to institute "quality controls" over the pre-screening of Marines "to prevent errors" such as "mandatory vaccinations of Marines in the voluntary category."

There's a tri-fold handout involved, according to the message. You'll need to read that in the clinic.

A Defense Department Web site also offers PowerPoint presentations about the vaccine for individuals, as well as leaders tasked by the message to implement the vaccination program at their units and "properly identify and educate personnel."

Units are not authorized to begin vaccinations until they register with the Defense Department's Military Vaccination Agency by submitting an agreement that "affirms they have read the program requirements, completed training and will ensure the program requirements are followed," according to the policy.

Monthly vaccination reports must be submitted to the agency, which will also track "unauthorized vaccinations" by requiring units to immediately disclose "a full explanation of the circumstances involved, including the number of personnel," according to the message.

http://www.marinecorpstimes.com/news/2007/03/marine_anthrax_vaccinations_070323/

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GovExec.com
DAILY BRIEFING
March 26, 2007

DHS seeks help investigating nuclear detection gaps

By Jon Fox, Global Security Newswire

The Homeland Security Department plans to enlist experts both inside and outside the government to launch a program probing the vulnerabilities of the nation's nuclear detection network.

The assessment would take place even as the United States continues to develop its radiation detection systems and looks to invest more than \$1 billion in next-generation detectors.

The Domestic Nuclear Detection Office, a division within DHS, is hoping that by employing independent experts it can garner a glimpse of the current nuclear and radiological detection approach from a terrorist's perspective, according to a description of the plan posted to a government Web site last week.

These "Red Teaming Assessments" would be based solely on publicly available information in order to identify vulnerabilities a terrorist group might be able to locate with the same data.

The government's concern, which has grown astronomically since the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, is that a group or individual could smuggle either radiological or nuclear material into the United States for use in a "dirty bomb" or an improvised atomic weapon. The Domestic Nuclear Detection Office, just more than 2 years old, was launched to specifically counter this threat.

"The goal is to identify vulnerabilities in the technology and operational procedures and to identify sensitive open-source information that, while unclassified, would prove useful to anyone attempting to circumvent the global nuclear detection architecture," according to the program description.

DHS is currently scanning 90 percent of inbound sea cargo at U.S. ports for radiation. The department expects that number to reach 98 percent for cargo at major domestic ports by the end of 2007. By 2008, nearly all containers at U.S. ports are set to be scanned for radiation, DHS officials have said. Radiation detectors are also being deployed at major land border crossings into the United States.

Industry, academic and government experts would study existing gaps in nuclear detection and those that could arise as the system develops, according to the detection office's request for input. They would be able to supplement data gleaned from open-source documents with "surveillance, site penetration" and any other information they might be able to independently elicit.

The efforts would result in both annual assessments and shorter-term studies that would gauge potential vulnerabilities and suggest fixes on a quarterly basis.

The nuclear detection office is asking experts over the next month provide suggestions on the structure of such a study group and the technological backgrounds of its members.

The DHS is also asking for input on ways the experts in the group could collect information, conduct surveillance and probe the security at sites legally and safely. Such activities could include simulated smuggling or actual transport of radiological or nuclear material, according to the DHS description of the planned program.

Unofficial tests of the system have shown weaknesses in the past. In 2002 and again in 2003, ABC News packed 15 pounds of depleted uranium into a lead pipe and shipped it via sea container into the United States to test U.S. detection capabilities.

In effect, study group members might be asked to play terrorist, probing for information and physically testing the U.S. detection web. Homeland Security officials are looking for an "accurate emulation of potential threat actors, their likely source materials and courses of action," according to the DHS posting.

Red teaming, or employing government outsiders to play the role of adversaries, is a fairly regular exercise employed by U.S. agencies, said nuclear security expert Charles Ferguson, a fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations.

Several years ago, Ferguson was part of a red team that was called to consider how a terrorist group might launch a dirty bomb attack. During that exercise the government also tapped the imagination of author Brad Meltzer, a writer of popular thrillers set in Washington.

"I think it's a valuable exercise," Ferguson said. "It's a way to bring in outside experts and just poke holes in what the government is trying to do."

Jeffrey Lewis, director of the New America Foundation's Nuclear Strategy and Nonproliferation Initiative, disagrees, suggesting they are likely an ineffective way to predict real adversary responses.

"I just don't see any reason to assume that terrorists laboring under real operational constraints would reach the same conclusions as a predominantly white, male, sixty-something, upper-middle class panel dominated by Ivy League

graduates chatting over pastries and coffee," said Lewis via e-mail. "Many of these individuals are brilliant, but none of them are terrorists."

The Domestic Nuclear Detection Office is testing three versions of a next-generation radiation detector that it hopes would be able to detect radiation and to identify the emitting isotope as harmless and naturally occurring or a material of concern such as highly enriched uranium.

Present detectors do not distinguish between radiation-emitting materials, requiring Customs and Border Protection officials to conduct secondary screenings with a handheld scanner to determine the source of the alert.

Lawmakers have questioned whether the new machines, which carry a total price tag of \$1.2 billion, would serve to better protect the nation's borders. Funding has been put on hold until the detector's increased efficacy can be certified by DHS.

DHS officials say the next-generation technology would still be unable to detect shielded highly enriched uranium, what experts say would likely be the nuclear material of choice for a terror group trying to assemble a simple nuclear device. Highly enriched uranium emits a relatively weak nuclear signature.

http://govexec.com/story_page.cfm?articleid=36456&dcn=todaysnews

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Boston Globe
March 28, 2007

Antiterrorism Agency Taps Boston-Area Brains

Analysts plumb arms networks

By Bryan Bender, Globe Staff

WASHINGTON -- The Pentagon wants a team of Boston-area social scientists and mathematicians to study whether mapping the web of relationships among terrorist organizations, arms scientists, and potential suppliers can help disrupt groups seeking to obtain weapons of mass destruction, according to government officials.

The secretive Defense Threat Reduction Agency has tapped Boston College and Woburn-based Aptima Inc. to see if "social network analysis" -- charting the cultural, political, and financial connections among people, groups, and computers -- can help identify the pipeline of money, material, and technical knowledge most likely to lead to a catastrophe such as terrorists obtaining a nuclear, chemical, or biological weapon.

The three-year project, equal parts sociology, anthropology, and mathematical theory, marks a departure from traditional tools of intelligence gathering, such as spy satellites or eavesdropping on communications.

Officials say the rise of terrorists groups and their use of readily available technology have placed a premium on finding more precise ways to use mounds of data to understand the motivations and anticipate the actions of hidden enemies.

"This is really a new investment area for us," Robert Kehlet, coordinator of basic university research for the Defense Threat Reduction Agency, said in an interview. "We'd like to know how these networks form, how decisions are made, what kind of influence cultural factors have."

The goal, Kehlet said, is to determine "what are the dynamics of a group or network that decides they are going to employ or even build weapons of mass destruction."

The Defense Threat Reduction Agency was created in 1998 with a focus on preventing weapons proliferation after the Cold War. With an annual budget of roughly \$2.7 billion, it "safeguards America and its allies from weapons of mass destruction by providing capabilities to reduce, eliminate, and counter the threat, and mitigate its effects," according to its mission statement.

Much of the agency's attention is on securing nuclear weapons materials that became surplus after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Agency officials also develop new technologies to identify an attack that uses weapons of mass destruction. However, national security officials increasingly believe that the emerging discipline of social network analysis can help ferret out the groups or individuals most likely to pose such a threat.

The military used that type of analysis on a much smaller scale to capture Saddam Hussein, according to specialists. The military intelligence unit searching for him in 2003 developed a program called "Mongo Link" to chart Hussein's personal and tribal relationships based on information from informants, military patrols, and electronic intercepts. One of the 62,500 connections the unit developed led directly to the former dictator's hide-out.

"Instead of having an amorphous foreign population that seems impenetrable, social network analysis provides you a way to visualize the nodes in the network and how things move through that network, such as weapons, pieces of knowledge, or people," said Montgomery McFate, a former Navy analyst who has studied the theory. "Terrorist organizations do not have organizational charts. They have relationships, and if you can understand those relationships you have gained valuable intelligence."

The theory could be especially useful with outlaws involved in the illicit trade of weapons of mass destruction, a black market that requires a diverse set of contacts -- including individuals with the highly technical expertise necessary to obtain, transport, or develop such weapons.

Mapping those links, Kehlet said, will "assist in reducing that threat."

Using a grant of about \$500,000 from the Pentagon, Boston College, and Aptima plan to rely on real-world examples to test the theory, including the well-documented black-market nuclear network that was operated by A.Q. Khan, the father of Pakistan's atomic bomb.

"Once you've mapped out the network you should be able to know who is going to have power and where you need to put your resources to counter that," said Stephen Brogatti, head of BC's Organization Studies Department and the project leader.

"The primary goal is to enhance the body of knowledge," said Kehlet. "We are looking to get a bit of science done but also develop those students into the future workforce."

Meanwhile, engineers at Aptima will try to determine if the theory can be translated into computer software that can synthesize the billions of bits of data a social network under analysis can develop.

"Can we model the data and say 'Hmm, I think there is a pattern here that you might want to take a second look at,'" said Daniel Serfaty, president of Aptima. To do so, he said, could create a tool with the potential to become "an early warning system."

Taken a step further, Serfaty said, such tools could identify which link in the chain of connections poses the biggest threat, and "what is the node that should be disabled or the link that should be cut to disable the network."

Added Brogatti: "You don't just have to throw bombs at the problem. If we put pressure on those people, it will domino through."

http://www.boston.com/news/nation/washington/articles/2007/03/28/antiterrorism_agency_taps_boston_area_brains/

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New York Times

Militants Attack Iraqi, U.S. Forces with Chlorine Bombs

By REUTERS

Published: March 28, 2007

Filed at 8:26 a.m. ET

FALLUJA, Iraq (Reuters) - Insurgents with two chlorine truck bombs attacked a local government building in Falluja in western Iraq on Wednesday, the latest in a string of attacks using the poisonous gas, the U.S. military said. It said 15 Iraqi and U.S. soldiers were wounded in the blasts and many more suffered chlorine poisoning.

"Numerous Iraqi soldiers and policemen are being treated for symptoms such as labored breathing, nausea, skin irritation and vomiting that are synonymous with chlorine inhalation," a U.S. statement said.

It said no Iraqi or U.S. forces were killed in what it called a "complex attack" using mortars and small arms as well as the truck bombs.

Chlorine gas was widely used in World War One but its use in insurgent attacks in Iraq has particular resonance there. Saddam Hussein attacked Kurdish areas with chemical weapons in the 1980s during the Iran-Iraq war.

Earlier Iraqi police said two car bombs exploded near an Iraqi checkpoint outside a U.S. military base in Falluja, killing eight Iraqi soldiers.

U.S. spokesman Lieutenant Shawn Mercer said the U.S. statement referred to the same incident but he could not confirm the deaths of the Iraqi policemen.

"Iraqi police identified the first suicide attacker and fired on the truck, causing it to detonate before reaching the compound," the U.S. statement said.

"Iraqi Army soldiers spotted the second suicide truck approaching the gate and engaged it with small arms fire, causing it to also detonate near the entrance of the compound."

U.S. commanders and the Iraqi government have blamed al Qaeda militants for several recent attacks using chlorine gas in Anbar, a restive mainly Sunni Arab province in western Iraq.

"The extent of the injuries from the inhalation is varied. It was very light to more severe. As far as we know none life-threatening at this point," Mercer said.

On March 17, insurgents deployed three chlorine car bombs on one day near Falluja and Ramadi, the capital of Anbar province.

Chlorine, which is turned from solid or liquid form to a gas by the blast, causes severe burns when inhaled and can cause death.

The U.S. military said it discovered an al Qaeda car bomb factory last month near Falluja with chlorine tanks.

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Washington Post

March 29, 2007

Pg. 13

Czechs Agree To Talks On U.S. Missile Shield

By Craig Whitlock, Washington Post Foreign Service

BERLIN, March 28 -- The Czech government announced Wednesday that it will open formal negotiations with the United States to build part of a missile defense shield, even as opposition to the idea has stiffened elsewhere in Europe.

Prime Minister Mirek Topolaneck told reporters in Prague that his country "recognizes the threats against which the defense shield should be set."

The proposed U.S. defense system, designed to shoot down ballistic missiles launched from countries such as Iran and North Korea, has drawn especially heavy criticism in Germany. Although Chancellor Angela Merkel has remained noncommittal, other members of her coalition government, as well as opposition politicians, have questioned whether Europe should play any role in development of the shield.

Last week, German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier warned that the defense system could divide Europe and antagonize Russia, which has also objected.

The United States wants to construct a radar base in the Czech Republic and base 10 missile interceptors in Poland as the East European cornerstone of its proposed missile shield. The plan remains controversial in both countries -- critics worry that participation would invite retaliation from Russia or others -- but leading lawmakers have said they are leaning toward participation.

On Wednesday, the Czech government took a firm step toward working out a deal, saying it had approved the start of formal negotiations on the radar base.

Russia has said it considers the missile defense system a potential security threat, questioning whether the unarmed missile interceptors could be replaced by warheads in the future. Speaking at a security conference in Munich in February, Russian President Vladimir Putin said the proposed shield "could provoke nothing less than the beginning of a new nuclear era."

U.S. officials have tried to assuage Russia's concerns, as well as those of European allies. After the Czech government's announcement Wednesday, President Bush called Putin in an attempt to persuade him that the missile interceptor was defensive in nature and not aimed at Russia, according to the Kremlin.

The phone call apparently succeeded in cooling the dispute, at least temporarily. "The U.S. president's expression of readiness for detailed discussion on this subject with the Russian side, and for cooperation in the interests of joint security, was received with satisfaction," the Kremlin said in a statement.

Meanwhile, a top Pentagon official visited Berlin to make a similar case to German officials. Eric S. Edelman, the undersecretary of defense for policy, told reporters that the United States needed to do a better job of explaining the defense system's merits.

"There are legitimate questions that people have, and we want to approach this in a very open and transparent manner," he said. "We bear a little bit of the burden here in not coming out of the gate as quickly as we should have with information."

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/03/28/AR2007032802031.html>

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Washington Times

March 30, 2007

Pg. 1

N. Korea Plant To Be Shut Down Dilapidated

Nuke site 'dangerous'

By Richard Halloran, Washington Times

The nuclear power plant that North Korea has agreed to shut down in return for oil and other concessions is in such poor operating condition that Pyongyang may not be unhappy to give it up, according to informants who have been in North Korea or who have access to intelligence reports.

The informants said the plant's thick walls are crumbling, its machinery is rusting, and maintenance of the electric power plant, roads, and warehouses that sustain the nuclear facility has been neglected. North Korea's impoverished economy, they surmised, just cannot support the operation.

Moreover, the North Korean plant's technology is 50 years old and obsolete. It was acquired, possibly by Russian spies, by the Soviet Union from the British in the 1950s, then passed to North Korea in the 1980s.

No U.S. or U.N. official has visited the plant at Yongbyon since International Atomic Energy Agency inspectors were barred from the site 60 miles north of Pyongyang in 2002, although the facility presumably is monitored by spy satellites.

The last Americans known to have visited the site were members of a civilian team that was shown evidence in January 2004 that used nuclear fuel had been removed from a cooling pond -- presumably for reprocessing into weapons-grade plutonium.

Most experts think North Korea has extracted enough fuel from the site to produce up to a dozen nuclear devices, and that the material was used to conduct a partially successful nuclear weapons test in October last year.

"The reactor, storage pond and reprocessing facility were all functional" at that time, Jack Pritchard, a special envoy for negotiations with North Korea until September 2003 and a member of that team, said this week.

"They reminded [Siegfried Hecker, a former director of the Los Alamos National Laboratory and another member of the team] of 1950s Soviet stuff, but still operational."

Mr. Pritchard said a separate 50-megawatt reactor under construction nearby "looked dilapidated, and I have my non-technical doubts about the North Koreans' ability to restart construction."

North Korea agreed in a landmark Feb. 13 agreement with the United States and four other countries to shut down and eventually dismantle the Yongbyon reactor in exchange for deliveries of heavy fuel oil or the equivalent, and other inducements.

The deal, which reproduced some elements of an earlier agreement negotiated by the Clinton administration, angered some past and present members of the Bush administration including former U.N. Ambassador John R. Bolton, who had served earlier as undersecretary of state for arms control and international security.

Some of those U.S. officials, who declined to be identified while criticizing the administration, have cited assessments of the Yongbyon plant's condition to argue that North Korea has given up very little in exchange for substantial benefits, which also include talks on diplomatic normalization with the United States.

A State Department official familiar with the negotiations with North Korea rejected that argument, saying in Washington that the Yongbyon plant remained dangerous regardless of its condition.

"The North Koreans are not rolling in money. It is true that the plant was built some time ago with not very modern technology. It is not pretty, but they do seem to be able to use it to do some very dangerous things," said the official, who asked not to be identified.

The official said the U.S. intelligence community thinks North Korea has reprocessed fuel from the facility into weapons-grade plutonium, which was used in the October weapons test.

"So the idea that this facility doesn't seem to pose a real threat has been implicitly disputed" by those intelligence assessments, the official said.

Nicholas Kralev contributed to this report from Seoul.

<http://www.washtimes.com/world/20070329-111347-4739r.htm>

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Washington Post

March 30, 2007

Pg. 17

15 Britons In A Sea Of Intrigue

By David Ignatius

BERLIN -- We are in a season of skulduggery in the Middle East, with a strange series of events that all involve the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps. The murky saga is a reminder that the real power in Iran may lie with this secretive organization, which spawned Iran's firebrand president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

The Revolutionary Guard orchestrated the seizure of 15 British sailors and marines last week near the mouth of the Shatt al Arab waterway between Iraq and Iran. The British say they have technical data to prove that their people were outside Iran's territorial waters when they were captured, and they have protested vigorously to Iranian diplomats. But the Iranian Foreign Ministry doesn't seem to know anything about the case. Indeed, it may have been one of the indirect targets.

The Revolutionary Guard seized the hostages, if that's the right word, at a time when it is under intense and growing pressure. U.S. troops captured five of its intelligence operatives in January in the Iraqi city of Irbil. Perhaps the Guard's commanders wanted some bargaining chips to get their people back.

There are larger forces at play, too. The Revolutionary Guard was targeted in the U.N. sanctions enacted last weekend against Iran's nuclear program -- which, as it happens, is run by the Revolutionary Guard. The elite military group may have wanted to retaliate by imposing its own brute sanctions against Britain, one of the five permanent members of the Security Council.

European officials note that the provocative move comes as speculation grows about new discussions between the United States and Iran -- a dialogue the Revolutionary Guard may oppose. Representatives of the two nations met in Baghdad this month as part of a regional conference on Iraqi security, and it was expected that Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice would meet her Iranian counterpart at a follow-up meeting in Istanbul in April. That meeting may be in jeopardy if the British sailors and marines aren't returned soon.

The Revolutionary Guard may also have hoped to sabotage diplomatic negotiations over the nuclear issue. U.S. Undersecretary of State Nicholas Burns said several weeks ago that the United States was getting "pinged all over the world" by Iranian intermediaries who wanted a resumption of talks. Iran's chief negotiator, Ali Larijani, hinted at such a message in his recent contacts with the European Union's top diplomat, Javier Solana. But the prospect of nuclear talks may have been blown out of the water, as it were, until the British issue is resolved.

Maybe that was the goal of seizing the sailors and marines. The Revolutionary Guard, after all, can't be happy about curbing the nuclear program that would allow it to project power even more aggressively.

But what's making the Revolutionary Guard so jittery? Why is it behaving as if someone had made off with its family jewels? Maybe that's where the last of the mysterious events comes in.

On Feb. 7, a top Revolutionary Guard officer named Brig. Gen. Ali Reza Asgari vanished in Istanbul. This is no small fish. He is a former deputy defense minister who, during the late 1980s and early 1990s, had been Iran's key operative in Lebanon, helping organize its proxy army, Hezbollah. According to Bob Baer, who was a CIA case officer in Beirut at that time, Asgari was the primary contact for Hezbollah's leader, Hasan Nasrallah, and its most feared terrorist operative, Imad Mughniyah. "Asgari was in the IRGC's chain of command when it was kidnapping and assassinating Westerners in Lebanon in the '80s," Baer wrote in *Time*.

So what happened to Asgari, a man who knows some of the Revolutionary Guard's most precious secrets? Officials in Washington, Paris and Berlin shrug and say, sorry, they just can't be helpful on this one. But a leading Israeli daily, *Yedioth Aharonoth*, reported soon after Asgari's disappearance that Mossad had organized his defection. An Israeli defense source was quoted in the *Sunday Times* of London on March 11 as saying that Asgari "probably was working for Mossad but believed he was working for a European intelligence agency."

The betting among spy buffs is that Asgari was recruited in what's known as a "false flag" operation. His handlers may be Israelis posing as officers of another intelligence service, perhaps even during the debriefing. Such speculation was piqued two weeks ago when the German defense minister, Franz Josef Jung, was asked during a visit to Turkey whether Asgari was in Germany. "I cannot say anything on this issue," he replied.

In the perverse spy story that is the Middle East, we have started a strange new chapter. This one has killers and kidnapers galore, and a plot to die for.

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/03/29/AR2007032901985.html>

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